



Regulating the Good You Can't Think Of

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In this paper Kwartler accepts the view of the city articulated by Lynch in *The Image of the City* that ‘Only partial control can be exercised over its growth and form’. He reviews the practices of New York City in terms of its relationship with ‘Regulating the good you can’t think of’, from the zoning ordinance of 1916 to the present day. He uses SoHo as an example of a case where illegal individual action became legalized in a subsequent set of regulations and reviews the satisficing approach to control proposed by Babcock and Weaver in *City Zoning*. He concludes with an examination of the ‘thresholds, performance standards and feedback’ approach which began in New York and California in the 1960’s, the development of which might be called ‘just-in-time planning’.

‘Not only is the city an object which is perceived and perhaps enjoyed by millions of people of widely, diverse class and character, but it is the product of many builders who are constantly modifying the structure for reasons of their own. While it may be stable in general outlines for some time it is ever changing in detail. Only partial control can be exercised over its growth and form. There is no final result, only a continuous succession of phases.’ (Lynch, 1960, p.2)

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Introduction

In this succinct paragraph, Kevin Lynch advances an existential and contingent view of the city, and one which is a more accurate description of the messiness of urban dynamics. As a result, traditional prescriptive zoning regulations are both perceived and experienced as an often irrelevant brake to individual initiative and changing needs.

If the last forty years have taught us anything it is the difficulty of including in as-of-right prescriptive land-use regulations, 'the good you can't think of'. The simple fact that we could not anticipate the loft dwelling, new forms of households, the emerging implications of the electronic revolution on work, or new models of retailing require us to also rethink the nature of land-use regulations, what the public interest is in the use of private property, the degree of intrusiveness of that interest, and the modernist notion of universal 'one-size-fits-all' standards.

Typically perceived as immutable by the public and property owners, dynamic land-use regulations have come to play the conservative role of protecting value and values by creating a level of certainty and predictability. In this mode, land-use regulations are instruments of public policy designed to canonize a singular



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sense of urban order generally to the exclusion of other possible ordering systems. Moreover, it is the concept of exclusion based on a singular and often simplistic view of the city, which contributes to the tension between the messiness of everyday experience and the abstraction and rigidities of land-use regulations and the failure of the regulations to anticipate and be responsive to structural changes in the society, such as have occurred in retailing.

For example, the 1916 New York City zoning ordinance, and its 1961 successor adopted by cities worldwide both pre-regulated the density and location of urban activities as well as the form of the buildings and their relationships to each other. The device of choice was districting, which derived from the nineteenth century factory mode of production, where the production process was atomized into its discrete parts, rationalized, and reassembled into a rationalized process. Predicated on the assumption that cities and the factory production process are similar, cities were similarly dissected into component parts, conflicts rationalized, perceived incompatibilities excluded, and then reorganized into a coherent and efficient whole. The resolution of those conflicts and contradictions in advance for all property in the city was accomplished through a system of pre-regulation. The notion that city building is a bounded and knowable process, is at the conceptual core of traditional zoning practice.

Typically, pre-regulation has taken the form of prescriptive zoning. It is administered 'as-of-right' by a ministerial review for compliance. In New York City, for example, prescriptive zoning has been both under- and over-determined. The 1916 zoning regulations, while prescriptive, were under-determined. Use and height (density) districts were coarsely mapped while building form regulations were based on a loose fitting zoning envelope primarily based on daylighting to the public streets and building interiors. The subsequent (post-war) 1961 zoning regulations were also prescriptive and as-of-right. They were over-determined, reflecting an optimistically high degree of confidence as to the correct spatial distribution of land-uses, density, and the appropriate building topology represented by the modernist vision of rationalized city of high-rise towers and enveloping open spaces.

Both sets of regulations also recognized that the predictability and certainty resulting from prescriptive as-of-right zoning came at a price. For example, the rigidly prescriptive 1961 zoning regulations typically made innovation difficult, if not impossible, because the site plan and building form were not only over-determined but predetermined. In a realistic recognition of the limits of as-of-right prescriptive pre-regulation, the administrative use of discretionary zoning authority, represented by special permits and attendant lengthy public review and discussion has often been the only effective means of dealing with new uses, activities, and with unique conditions on a case by case basis. Frequently, the over-determined prescriptive regulations were replaced by their polar opposites, regulations so general in their evaluation criteria that they had no limiting factor or accountability. The lack of substantive criteria to measure the difference in performance between what would be done as-of-right and what could be achieved



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by the discretionary action undermine any notion of accountability and consistency by the discretionary decision-making body. Finally, the use of discretionary authority and the lengthy public review process, while relaxing the rigidities of traditional prescriptive zoning, also sacrifices predictability and certainty of outcome for a more contingent regulatory approach. At its worst it is fertile ground for abuse, substituting some notion of objective performance with personal taste.

The amendment process has also been used to keep up with a changing world. It is generic as distinct from the project-based discretionary review. Similar to discretionary actions, zoning amendments have also been perceived as undermining the immutability of the original ordinance and are tainted by what appears to be an *ad hoc* and case by case response to changing conditions undermining public confidence in what they thought were immutable regulations. At its best, it is a game of catch-up, exercised when the pressures to accommodate new conditions deemed to be generally desirable require an institutional rather than a case-by-case response.

The current situation is an excellent example of the way in which the inventory of prescriptive land-use regulations, particularly those regarding discretionary use and site planning, are increasingly out of sync with contemporary conditions and experience. The commercial, retail, residential and industrial use categories and mapped districts delineated almost forty years ago, reflect the idealized ordering of the urban environment of its time. Most of those relationships, intrinsic to the industrial city, have evaporated during the last 20 years, as the boundaries between activities and land uses have blurred – brought about, for example, by the changing structure of work. These external forces have resulted in the transformation of formerly industrial areas such as SoHo, Manhattan's now historic cast-iron district, raising serious questions about traditional zoning's ability to allow for the 'good' it could not preconceive.

SoHo: the unanticipated 'good'

Prior to the example of SoHo, a formerly underutilized nineteenth century manufacturing area which has been transformed into a thoroughly mixed-use district, living in nineteenth century industrial buildings in a manufacturing district was prohibited. As described by Lynch at the beginning of the paper, real-world experimentation, undertaken'...[by] builders who are constantly modifying the structure for reasons their own' (1960) and who wished to live and work in the same space, demonstrated that industrial lofts could be converted to residential and live-work activities. Standards, say for light and air, would by necessity, be equivalences reflecting the physical constraints/potentials of the lofts themselves (e.g. 12 ft versus 8 ft ceiling height typical of most contemporary American residential buildings) and their built context (e.g. higher coverage versus lower coverage buildings). The contextualizing of standards and the concept of



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equivalent quality was a clear move away from the illogical modernist 'one-size-fits-all' universal standards to standards that are conceptually performance and place based.

The *ad hoc* conversion of lofts in SoHo by individuals began in the 1960s, illegally and in contravention of both the New York City Zoning Resolution and Multiple Dwelling Law. Subsequently, this *ad hoc* activity was legitimized by revisions to both sets of regulations in 1982 that allowed, for the first time, residential (the live of live-work) uses in an M (Manufacturing/Industrial) use district. While perceived as an exercise in catch-up, the common sense nature of the SoHo experience has much to recommend it when viewed as an experiment in setting standards for mixed-use live-work dwellings, and thresholds and conditions for the displacement of existing industries and the conversion of industrial buildings into mixed-use live-work environments.

The regulations adopted in 1982 could not have been written in 1962. First, because the inertia of public perceptions was limited to a set of values which stipulated that one does not live in an industrial district (the 'good' one can't think of); second, because the architectural models for viable mixed live-work environments did not exist; and third, economic competition for inexpensive industrial space had not yet emerged as an issue of public policy. Richard Schaefer, former chair of the City Planning Commission gingerly summarized the situation, 'Whenever you have a disjunction between what zoning allows and what the market pressures dictate, you have a lot of creativity' (*New York Times*, 1996). Further, in the same article, Joel Miele, former Building Commissioner, engaged the issues of public purpose and interest, 'Nobody is going to go out and look for reasons to aggravate people when there isn't a reason...If somebody wants to live in an industrial area, who's hurt?'

The challenge of change

The limitations placed on the type of activities (whether they be residential, live-work, or "big box" retail) which can be accommodated in manufacturing districts still remain in effect, notwithstanding the fact that two-thirds of the 800,000 manufacturing jobs the city had in the 1970s are now gone. In response, two recent proposals by the Department of City Planning have focused on the city's industrially zoned land, where the department has been actively looking for locations which would be appropriate for the as-of-right development of suburban type, large-scale, "big box" poses problems of scale, size and singularity of use, particularly if as proposed, they are allowed as-of-right in industrial districts, without public site plan review.

It would seem that the issues are both broader and more complex than either simply finding the least offensive location for a Home Depot or providing more land to relieve the current pressures on housing production. The issues are



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threefold. The first concerns the profound changes the city is undergoing as it has moved from a predominantly manufacturing economy to a service economy. Spurred on by the digital revolution and the changing nature and decentralization of work, the city's neighborhoods, districts, residences and apartments are becoming increasingly mixed-use, notwithstanding the Zoning Resolution's fixation with single purpose districts and unenforceable and arbitrary regulations regarding working at home and home occupations. The second is how to create new diverse and viable mixed-use communities and the supporting public infrastructure and facilities in these evolving industrial districts. The third issue focuses on process values and the city's desire to minimize the impact of regulation on market decision-making and individual initiative *a la* Lynch through an as-of-right zoning mechanism.

Traditional zoning approaches have proven to be inadequate to address the issues described above. They are either too prescriptive, rigid, homogenizing to be useful in a mixed-use context or so broadly worded that the use of discretion has neither limiting factors nor accountability expressed in concrete standards to be met. Unlike the unique case of master planned large-scale communities such as Battery Park City, traditional zoning approaches, at best, have a tangential relationship to the sequencing of public infrastructure and facilities investments and become exercises in futility or take on all.

The vastness and diversity of New York City suggests the need to address the issues outlined above coherently by approaching the problem in a different way than is possible under traditional zoning and master planning.

Weaver and Babcock (1979) describe a satisficing approach, rather than the engineering-derived optimization, which would be responsive to the comments made by Schaefer and Miele (*New York Times*, 1996). They suggest that planning for cities be reoriented so that it begins by answering these questions.

What *must* we do today to deal with currently perceived problems?

- What, given our current resources and the present demands on them, can we expect to do tomorrow to deal with the problems and concerns we now foresee?
- If nothing unexpected happens, what might we want to do in the future to avoid problems that a continuation of current trends is likely to produce?
- Given all our answers to all the previous questions, where will the city be in five or ten years, and how acceptable will that be?

In many respects what is being advanced parallels the SoHo experience where implicit public policy was at odds with explicit public policy. This articulates an approach to planning and zoning that recognizes the contingent nature of urban development described by Lynch (1960). It offers a conceptual model for



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contextualizing short-term decisions while recognizing that cumulative decisions ultimately give form to the city and its neighborhoods and districts.

Just-in-time: an experiment in planning and zoning

Current land-use regulations are not immutable, nor is the form and content of zoning forever locked in the static world of traditional zoning practice as sustained by the Supreme Court in 1926. The City of Euclid's static and inflexible zoning regime which was the object of the Court's review, became the model for other municipal zoning ordinances and is often referred to as Euclidean Zoning. In a perverse irony Euclidean Zoning assumed, in both the courts and the public mind, the geometric rigidities and certainties of high school Euclidean geometry. Writing for the majority in the precedent-setting Euclid case, Justice Sutherland argued that changing conditions causes us to rethink the appropriateness and responsiveness of our use of the police power to regulate the use of private property.

'Building zone laws are of modern origin. They began in this country about 25 years ago. Until recent years, urban life was comparatively simple; but with the great increase and concentration of population, problems have developed and constantly are developing. They require, and will continue to require, additional restrictions in respect to the use and occupation of private lands in urban communities. Regulations, the wisdom, necessity and validity of which as applied to existing conditions, are so apparent that they are now uniformly sustained, would a century ago have been rejected as arbitrary and repressive. Such regulations are sustained, under the complex condition of our day, for reasons analogous to those which justify traffic regulations.' (Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co. 272 US 365, 1926).

Unlike the 1920s when Sutherland was writing for the court, the rapid pace of change fuelled by globalization presents a far more complex pattern of relationships. We are only beginning to speculate on the ramifications they may have for the spatial distribution of activities in the city and the forms they will take as information technology encourages a far more complex and virtually unbounded web of relationships. While we may not have the confidence in our ability to predict the future and lock it in as was done in 1916 and 1961, there are aspects of our regulatory past which have/can inform us as we design a more contingent and responsive regulatory system of land-use controls.

It is clear from more than eighty years of legislative history in New York City that an under-determined but clearly articulated set of regulations, has proven to be a far more viable and inclusive (the "good" we can't think of) than the over-determined topological based tower-in-the-park 1961 zoning regulations. We have also learned through the SoHo experience that we may not be able to



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articulate a regulatory response without a period of prior experimentation in which the issues, in this example the transformation of industrial lofts into living environments, are dealt with concretely rather than as abstractions based on generalizations. Further, SoHo has taught us to pay attention to individual actions often carried out from self-interest, which when harnessed can lead to innovations and corresponding perceptual shifts, e.g. a loft is not a factory space but rather a setting for a more complex range of activities. While the use of discretion and zoning authority in lieu of pre-regulation appears to meet the criterion of contingency, discretion in the context of constitutional process values is not just-in-time, but really takes a long time, devaluing its ability to be responsive to accelerating changes in the world around us.

Let us consider, as an alternative to traditional practice, a continuing controlled experiment in land-use planning and regulation which integrates a proven **performance, feedback, and thresholds** technique with the satisficing approach advocated by Weaver and Babcock (1979). Linking growth management thresholds, performance standards and feedback systems began in the 1960s with the innovative programs developed by the cities of Ramapo, New York and Petaluma, California. Subsequently adopted by cities such as Boulder, Colorado, San Francisco, California, communities in Oregon, and Jacksonville, Florida the continual experimentation with performance-based growth management techniques has informed public policy and improved its practical application. In the first instance broad policy statements have been grounded by clearly defining what those policies should accomplish in practice, while in the second, the adoption of concrete standards and criteria have provided a clear means of evaluating project performance and later monitoring of the project impacts.

Performance

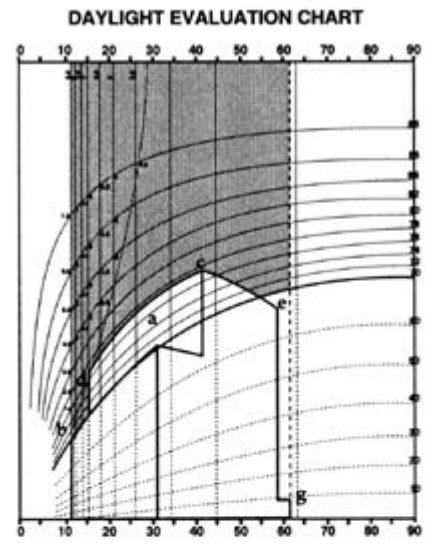
Performance (Figs 1, 2a and b) relates zoning to the actual development and design process, the basis of which is choice. This exercise of choice constitutes the basic mystery, and sometimes poetry, of how places are shaped.

Consequently, performance is a system of trade-offs among real world choices that defines the goal to be achieved, the problem to be solved, and the criteria used to measure or evaluate performance. It is essentially a method for accommodation and balance which incorporates goals rather than minimum standards and typological solutions based on legislating a particular urban form and/or building type. Performance recognizes that goals, by definition, are not necessarily fully achievable and that choices among goals are inevitable.

Therefore the manner in which compliance is achieved not only may vary but should logically vary both from place to place and within a place, giving truth to the common sense idea that there are always multiple "right answers" to any given problem. The author's own performance –based Housing Quality Zoning regulation, and the more recent Midtown Zoning Height and Setback regulations are two New York City examples which have been both effective and as-of-right.



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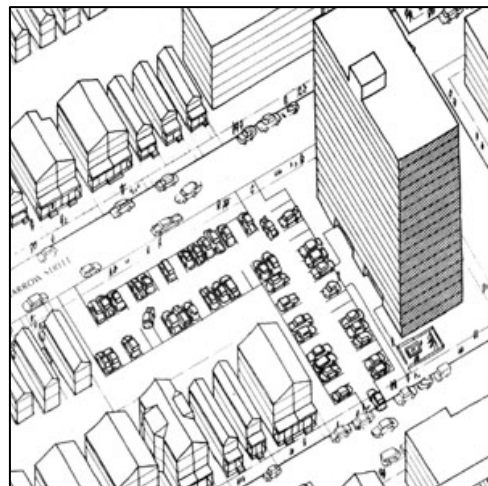
SCORING SUMMARY
(Vantage point one)

SECTION No.		SCORE
81-274 (b)	Squares above 70% blocked	-20.5
81-274 (c)	Squares below 70% open	+ 0.0
81-274 (d)	Profile encroachment penalty	
	.1 x 1.5 = .15	
	.3 x 1 = .45	- 0.45
	Total Blockage	- 20.95
81-274 (e)	Available daylight squares	89.9
81-274 (f)	Remaining daylight	68.95
81-274 (g)	DAYLIGHT SCORE	
	68.95 - 76.70	76.70%
	89.9	

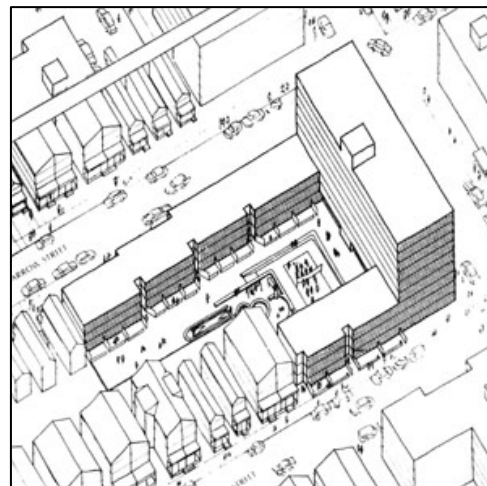
Fig. 1. Midtown zoning: performance-based daylighting regulations employing Waldrum daylighting diagrams modified to correspond to the width of Midtown streets and avenues. The daylight standard of 75% of the Skydome be unobstructed above Midtown's typical streetwall heights is based on a Waldrum analysis of the expectation of daylighting in midtown resulting from 82 years of zoning and contemporary lighting standards.



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Scheme A



Scheme B

	Max. Points	Scheme A	Scheme B		Max. Points	Scheme A	Scheme B
A. Neighborhood Impact				B. Recreation space			
1. Offsite Sunlight	8.0	5.7	6.8	1. Type and Size	9.4	2.4	8.7
2. Street Wall Length	4.0	0.0	4.0	2. Sunlight Onsite	5.5	4.2	3.4
3. Ground floor Activity	4.0	0.0	3.6	3. Parking	4.1	2.8	2.8
4. Street Wall Height	4.0	0.0	3.0	4. Planting	3.1	0.0	4.1
5. Building Height	2.8	0.9	2.7	5. Trees	2.9	2.9	2.4
6. Street Trees	2.2	2.2	2.2				
Total	25.0	8.8	22.3	Total	25.0	12.3	21.4
C. Security and Safety				D. Building Interior			
1. Density of Public Corridor	5.0	5.0	5.0	1. Size of Apartment	4.5	4.5	4.5
2. Visibility: Public Space To Elevator Doors	5.0	5.0	5.0	2. Sunlight in Apartments	3.9	2.0	2.2
3. Visibility: Private Outdoor Space from Lobby	5.0	0.0	5.0	3. Window Size	3.8	3.8	3.0
4. Surveillance from Apartments	4.4	0.9	3.7	4. Visual Privacy-Onsite	2.7	2.7	2.7
5. Entry of Building from Parking Garage or Lot	3.1	0.0	3.1	5. Visual Privacy Offsite	2.7	2.7	2.7
6. Visibility from Elevator to Apartment Door	2.5	2.5	2.5	6. Cross Ventilation	2.6	0.0	0.7
				7. Daylight in Public Corridors	1.8	1.8	1.8
				8. Pram, Bicycle, Bulk Storage	1.6	1.6	1.6
				9. Waste Storage	1.4	1.4	1.4
Total	25.0	13.4	24.3	Total	25.0	20.5	20.6
				Total	100	55.0	88.6

Fig. 2. a and b. Housing Quality Zoning: performance scoring of alternative building forms for the same site, population density, floor area and onsite parking. Note that the higher scoring building (a) is compatible with its context.



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Thresholds

Thresholds or benchmarks are a concept borrowed from growth management techniques and typically refer to the capacities of infrastructure, public facilities and the environment. In practice they function as assessment points in which anticipated development is assessed relative to a community's articulated sense of its future and the capacity of the systems to support it. They are also used as triggers for additional investment in the infrastructure targeted to meet **future anticipated demand** and could be called just-in-time planning.

Feedback

Feedback or information (Fig.3) plays a critical role in the operation of both performance and threshold systems. Within preset boundaries one could imagine adjusting the goal, value and measure of performance based on information derived from the direct application of the performance criteria. If long-term acceptability is the public policy bottom line, then acceptability would be defined by periodically profiling how well a district is performing and which thresholds are being approached. geographic information systems (GIS) would be used to monitor change over time and form the backbone of the system, providing information to all the players regarding the performance of the district.



Fig. 3. Lower Manhattan Three Dimensional Geographic Information System (3D/GIS): developed to analyze policy and planning scenarios for the revitalization of Lower Manhattan. (Environmental Simulation Center)

Just-in-time in context

Going back to the New York City example, the context of the controlled experiment would be defined by the public policy which would recognize that each manufacturing district is a resource for the future, each having strengths and weaknesses, potentials and liabilities. By rejecting the idea that one can adopt a



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simplistic set of predetermined regulations that can effectively guide development in upwards of 14% of New York City's land area, public policy would argue that these industrial areas be designated experimental mixed-use districts. The districts would all share certain commonalities. They would be orientated towards future industries and be responsive to the changing nature of work and the blurring of the boundaries between human activities. The commonalities would also target the rudiments of place making. While the treatment of such factors as street hierarchies, block and lot patterns, waterfront access, significant connectors to upland areas, and topography, would be applicable to all areas the specific responses by definition would vary from place to place. While theoretically performance zoning and threshold planning would allow "anything to go anywhere", the application of the system outlined below would neither have unlimited choices nor unlimited "right" answers but be bounded by pragmatics of place and the individual's or developer's programme. The proposed tri-part system would be administered by the Department of City Planning by certification, a form or ministerial as-of-right review for both small- and large-scale developments in order to ensure the information feedback loop is closed.

The proposed move from static regulation to dynamic management is based on performance-based growth management, links planning to zoning, and is analogous to the more recent just-in-time factory system (fig. 4). While the nineteenth century factory system is rigid, absolute and does not suffer messiness well, just-in-time is flexible, contingent, and embraces messiness. The defining factor which sets the nineteenth

and twentieth century factory systems apart is the ability for the team on the floor, based on agreed goals and objectives, to quickly respond to and act on information provided through feedback and experience within a context, say the production of a car. Decision-making is put in the hands of those who are closest to the problem and better equipped to make the choices. Adjustments or short-

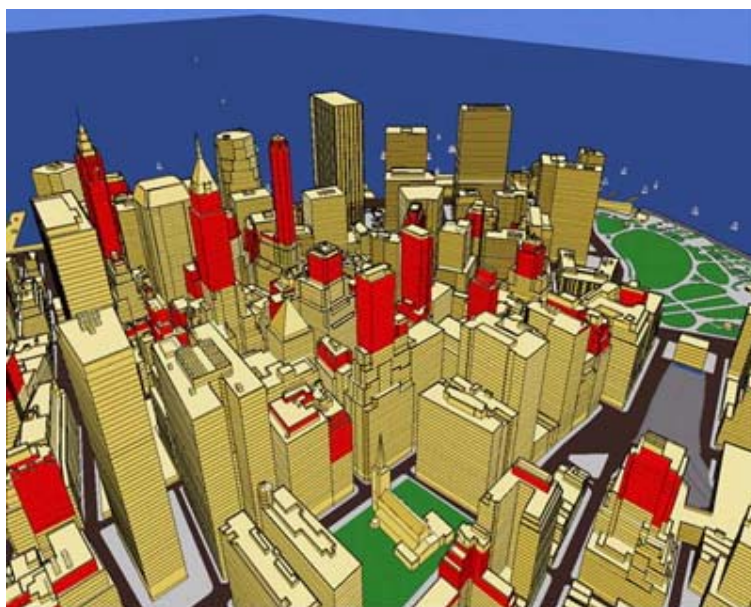


Fig. 4. Lower Manhattan Three Dimensional Geographic Information System (3D/GIS): policy query regarding the potential for adaptive re-use of Lower Manhattan's aging building stock. The query illustrates all floors in buildings that have adequate light and air (>150 feet high), multiple elevator cores, and floor sizes suitable for residential use. (Environmental Simulation Center).



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term decisions are contextualized within the overall goals and objectives as to their acceptability. Thresholds both set policy objectives and points of evaluation and reconsideration while performance standards are continually being applied, tested, and refined on the factory floor. In sum, the proposed regulatory approach represents a shift from the regulation of urban land to the management of urban land made possible by the merging of performance zoning, growth management thresholds, and the coming of age of digital information technology, specifically two- and three-dimensional geographic information systems (2D and 3D/GIS), and scenario builders, (Fig.5) policy, and impact analysis software and their ability to make complex information sets readily accessible and sensible to public decision-makers and the lay public alike.

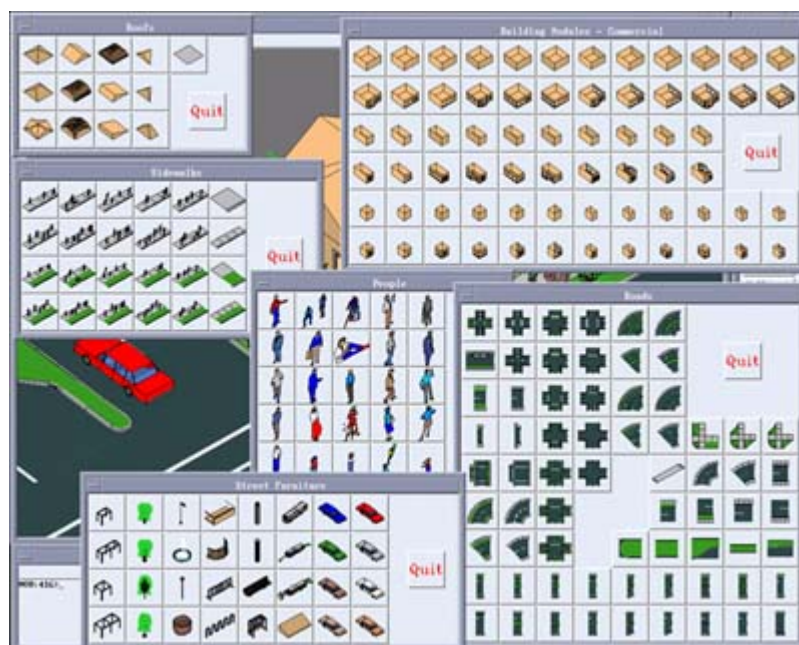


Fig. 5. Digital Scenario Builder: 'smart' planning and urban design kit-of-parts. The generic Lego-like kit elements are the template for the design of a place-specific kit-of-parts, which are then used to construct alternative scenarios in the context of a 3D/GIS of the place. (Environmental Simulation Center)

Conclusions

I have articulated a management-based zoning that recognizes the contingent nature of urban development and offers a method for contextualizing short-term decisions while recognizing that these cumulative decisions ultimately give form to the city. The failure of the rigidities of the Euclidean prescriptive zoning and its crude and simplistic system of pre-regulation lies in its attempt to resolve all design issues in the body of the regulations regardless of the complexity and uniqueness of each situation. The failure of the discretionary approach it is *ad hoc* nature which sacrifices standards and a longer-term policy context. Zoning regulations demand a structure that will incorporate the positive aspects of both approaches in an easily administered generic as-of-right system. Conceptually, such a structure has to recognize that:



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- Zoning is a powerful technique with which to design the form of our cities;
- Standards are relative and not absolute and tend to be culturally based;
- The process of design of a particular building involves contradictions, conflicts and mutual exclusivities that cannot be resolved in advance in the body of regulations (an explicit rejection of the typological approach);
- Good city form is the result of the orchestration of many factors.

Furthermore, recalling Dostoevsky's (1870) *Underground Man* admonition that man's 'most advantageous advantage' is free choice and Milton's definition of reason as 'reason is choice', the structure for zoning must be existential – that is, responsive to the fact that we never really know.

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