

OCT 16, 1975

Jim Stratton Keeping Aloft

Last week this column dealt with the rezoning of Washington Market as proposed by the Office of Lower Manhattan Development (OLMD). Three weeks before the topic had been an unscrupulous landlord who, with great American ingenuity, was attempting to evict a building full of tenants to make way for a drug-and-dance scene. And five weeks ago it was a ragged primary day with enough apparent irregularities to bring about a challenge to the results.

For those of you who enjoyed the Saturday serials, this column will bring you up to date on the latest episodes in these three local cliffhangers. Our Paulines are all still tied to the track, but there is still hope for a derailment.

The OLMD design for rezoning was officially presented last week to the City Planning Commission which will have jurisdiction over it. The plan would split the Washington Market neighborhood into two parts, an "A" zone and a "B" zone, legalizing lofts that have already been converted in both zones but allowing new conversions only in the "A" zone.

The design was met at the CPC with only one open arm. The other was an elbow thrown in the way of any legalization at all in the "B" zone from North Moore to Canal Streets. The CPC liked the "A" zoning but remained firmly in opposition to any form of residency in the "B." This area is dotted with numerous cooperatives and loft conversions that are nearly indistinguishable from those anywhere else.

One source close to the matter said that the commissioners remain somewhat offended that they must once again, as in Soho, find a solution that will give legality to people who knowingly violated the CPC's zoning regulations. The commissioners, therefore, seem reluctant to grant the whole loaf, solve all of the problem. "They're like someone with cuts on both knees who decides to put a bandaid on only one," commented this source.

Their reluctance to permit residency in the "B" zone reflects concern for the area's heavier industry and heavier pollution. Some suspicious souls might interpret the word "pollution" here as a euphemism for the new West Side

Highway and for the huge carbon monoxide vents planned for the neighborhood. Washington Market voices have been loud and anti-highway so far; granting the "B" zone legal residential status would seem to legitimize their future arguments against the encroaching fumes.

The rezoning will be given its first public hearing on November 19 at City Hall, where "B" zone residents hope a heavy turnout will untie their neighborhood from the track.

On to drugs and avarice, the second thriller, in which landlord Raymond Zurawin makes a dramatic attempt to save his heroin (cq) . . . the juice bar at 99 Prince Street run by David Mancuso.

In our last episode, Zurawin had found his small fortune in rent from Mancuso cut off because he could not offer a Certificate of Occupancy on his building that would permit the juicers to open shop with their cabaret license. Zurawin had rented out the upper floors of his building as living lofts, but the building is legally "oversize"—too large to allow residents under the SoHo law. So now he had to get rid of his renters if he was to get legal clearance for Mancuso's discotacky. And on October 2 he took his tenants to court.

The tenants brought along a witness to the fact that Zurawin had claimed to be renting them living lofts. The witness, a contractor,

was observed in animated private conversation outside the courtroom with Mancuso just before disappearing altogether without testifying. It must have been an offer he couldn't refuse.

The tenants won anyway, however, getting a court dismissal because the overeager landlord had failed to follow proper legal procedure in the eviction. Zurawin retaliated back home at 99 Prince Street by turning off upper floor elevator service. He also threatened to turn off electrical and water service as well, sweet man.

The harassment stopped quickly when the tenants obtained a Supreme Court injunction demanding that he cease and desist. That was too juicy even for the juice bar, so the war at 99 Prince has simmered down a bit. Zurawin has had to resort to trying to get his tenants out through proper legal channels.

He doesn't know it yet, but he is likely to have more than a little trouble in doing so. The perilous Pauline may yet be saved.

Our third Pearl White was political. Voting was very light in the September Democratic primary, a factor which invariably benefits an incumbent machine. Lower Manhattan reformers fell prey to voter apathy and the hard-core machine vote: Beverly Cohen lost by some 400 in the judicial contest, while Phil Wachtel missed by 50 or so and Kathryn Freed by 31 in separate district leader battles.

The margins were so small, however, that all three reformers took their contests to court. Cohen and Wachtel lost again. Freed, however, will not know until later this week whether numerous voting irregularities will result in a rerun of the September primary campaign.

The court decision has dragged on so long, however, that the rerun may be as awkward as the original. There would be only one possible voting day before the general election if a decision is handed down this week, and getting out the vote on a few days notice is more than difficult. But if a new primary is held after the general election, most voters will miss it anyway . . . political interest dips after an election, and it is hard enough to get a voter to the polls even once a year, much less once a month.

Both sides face the same apathy, so a rerun would have at least one salutary benefit. It should suggest to election inspectors, those ladies at the table, that they are there as employees of the Board of Elections and not of the local district leader.

There you have it, three local cliffhangers. Will the "B" zone become the "beaten zone" in a bureaucratic brushfire war? Will the winner at 99 Prince be the hero or the heroin? Will appeals bring back Freed elections? Tune in for the next installment. And don't forget the popcorn. ●