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## A Bright New 'Downtown' Is Taking Shape in Queens

By DEIRDRE CARMODY

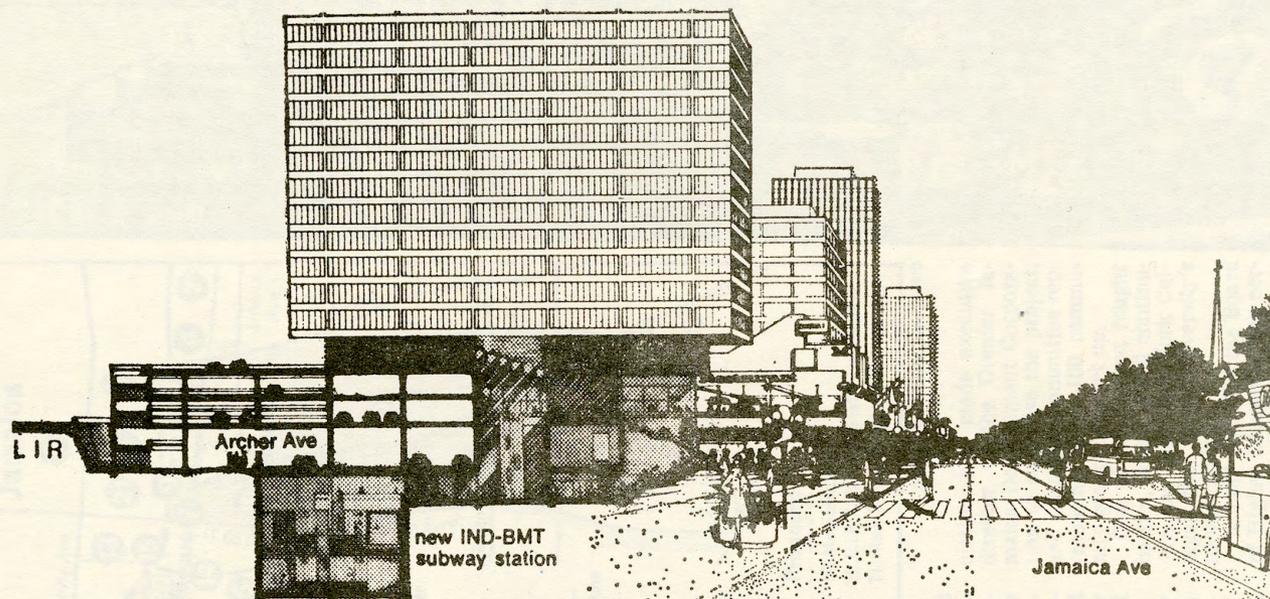
An ambitious plan to change the Jamaica Avenue area of Queens from a shabby shopping street under the elevated tracks into a major metropolitan center is rapidly advancing off the drawing boards into the first flush of reality.

Construction has been completed on seven pieces of the sprawling jigsaw puzzle, which planners hope will become a new downtown for all of Queens. It will include an office building district, parking facilities, educational and medical complexes, shops and a rejuvenated residential area.

The progress of the plan is being watched with interest by urban designers. Not only does it attempt the radical transformation of a particular area; it is also the prototype of the "subcenter" concept of the urban planning that the Regional Plan Association has suggested may be the salvation of the metropolitan area.

### The Subcenter Ideal

A subcenter—as described in the association's projection of what the metropolitan region should be like in the year 2000—is a major "downtown" area in a high-density section such as Queens, Brooklyn or northern New Jersey. The idea is to provide a core for those areas that will help siphon off the concentration of workers and shoppers who now travel long distances daily into Manhattan, straining its services and choking the transportation system.



Proposal for Jamaica Avenue by the Regional Plan Association would remove the elevated tracks and put a subway under modern shops, offices and residential apartments. Drawing looks west from the 160th Street station.

Jamaica was selected as a natural subcenter because two million people live within 20 to 30 minutes of Jamaica Avenue, making it a more populated metropolitan area than Dallas, Minneapolis/St. Paul or Cincinnati.

It is surrounded by highways. There are two subway lines and 38 bus routes. All lines of the Long Island Railroad except one converge there.

The only other major subcenter in the city, which has already been substantially developed, is downtown Brooklyn.

Right now, the Jamaica area is neither depressed enough to qualify for Federal urban-renewal money nor economically vital enough to save itself without some sort of government help.

Jamaica Avenue with its dingy shops cuts through the center of the area, a sociological as well as a physical dividing line, separating a black area, almost a shantytown, to the south from a manicured middle-class area to the north.

With its motto, "Change at Jamaica," borrowed from the shouts of Long Island Railroad conductors, the project is a test of whether an imaginative plan depending on

both private and public funds and the cooperation of a community can reverse a disintegration that otherwise seems almost inevitable.

"What you have got to understand is that Jamaica could be a totally deteriorated community unless this happens," says Andrew McGuire, director of the city's Office of Jamaica Planning and Development. "We have to demonstrate to the rest of the country that you can save a place like this if you catch it at the right time."

The major elements of the over-all plan include:

¶Tearing down of the elevated, which shadows Jamaica Avenue and whose trains shatter the nerves and assault the eardrums.

The structure east of 127th Street would be removed and subway trains would be rerouted and linked to a new Southeast Queens line. Two new subway stations are to be built in the Jamaica Center area; funds have been committed and construction of the new subway is to begin in July.

¶Establishment of a 10-acre office district on Jamaica Avenue between 150th and 160th Streets, which planners hope will eventually produce thousands of jobs.

The city is using its powers of condemnation to acquire the land, on which there now is a row of small businesses, and will lease it to private developers.

One by-product of this system is that the city can put pressure on developers to hire minority contractors and subcontractor. The first lease was signed in March with Helmsley-Spear for construction of a major office building about 20 stories high on 160th Street.

¶Setting up of a 50-acre site for York College, a four-year liberal arts college that is part of the City University. Planners call this the "key bridge" between the black and white communities in central Queens and one of the most essential elements in the over-all plan. The current 2,700 students are temporarily using a city-owned building and construction has started on a science building, scheduled for completion in 1973. The rest is at a standstill, because Governor Rockefeller has held up approval on plans for the \$62.5-million campus.

¶Redevelopment of a 45-acre residential community in South Jamaica. Twelve sites for new housing have been designated that will involve relocation of 252 families. The land, acquired by the city, will be turned over to the Housing Authority or to private developers. Thirteen hundred public-housing units have been approved and 2,100 Mitchell-Lama middle

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income units are in the planning stage. The plan also calls for supplemental services such as day-care centers and schools.

Setting up of a university center with a hospital and a school. This is also still in the planning stage, although the Queens Hospital Center in Jamaica is compiling a master plan and planners hope it will build a new complex in the Jamaica Center.

Building of a Long Island Railroad span on the route to Kennedy International Airport. This is still in the planning stage and has been the subject of a squabble between the Parks Department and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority over planned tunneling through Forest Park.

### Other Projects

Other individual projects are either completed or under construction. These include two new parking facilities, a 10-story New York Telephone Company building; the Gertz-Allied stores complex with a garage, retail shops and office space next to the existing Gertz department store; a privately-sponsored housing project for the elderly; Queens Family Court and Queens Civil Court.

So far \$400-million in public funds has been committed to Jamaica Center, which includes money for subways and removal of the elevated; parking garages, office-site acquisition and York College. About \$100-million in private funds will go toward office development.

As it happens, the lengthy process of assembling the pieces and guiding them through the stages of approval was originally prompted by a prospective tenant who pulled out before the project got under way.

Lufthansa Airlines was looking for office space near the airport in the late nineteen-sixties. Members of the Regional Plan Association (which had issued a detailed study of Jamaica as the ideal spot for a subcenter), several Jamaica business leaders and Ken Patton, the city's Economic Development Administrator and one

of the prime movers behind the project, went to a number of city officials and private developers to push the plan, with Lufthansa representatives in tow. Things began to move and it looked as if Lufthansa had finally kicked off the redevelopment of Jamaica.

"So I took the head of Lufthansa to lunch with George Fowkes [now Commissioner of Commerce and Industry] to celebrate," Mr. Patton recalls. "We went to a fancy French restaurant for a \$75 lunch—you know, paté maison, the works—for which I was paying myself. Then the head of Lufthansa turned to me and said, 'We've decided to move to Nassau County.'"

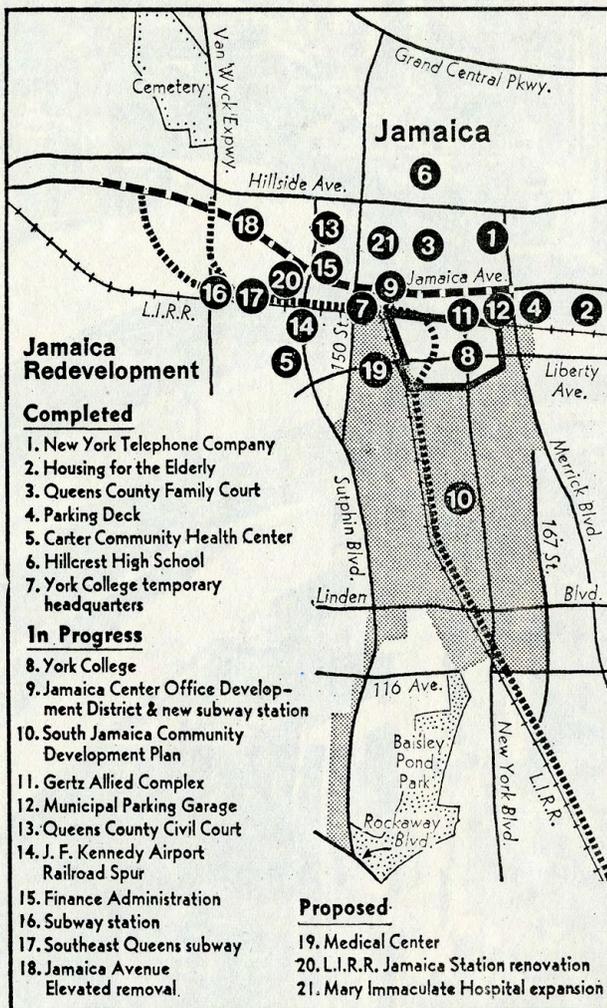
Nonetheless, the project moved forward. In 1969, Mayor Lindsay established an office in Jamaica to expedite redevelopment. F. Carlisle Towery, an architect and urban designer who had prepared the report on Jamaica for the Regional Plan Association,

was made executive director of the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation to supervise the project, and a steering committee representing about 100 community groups was set up.

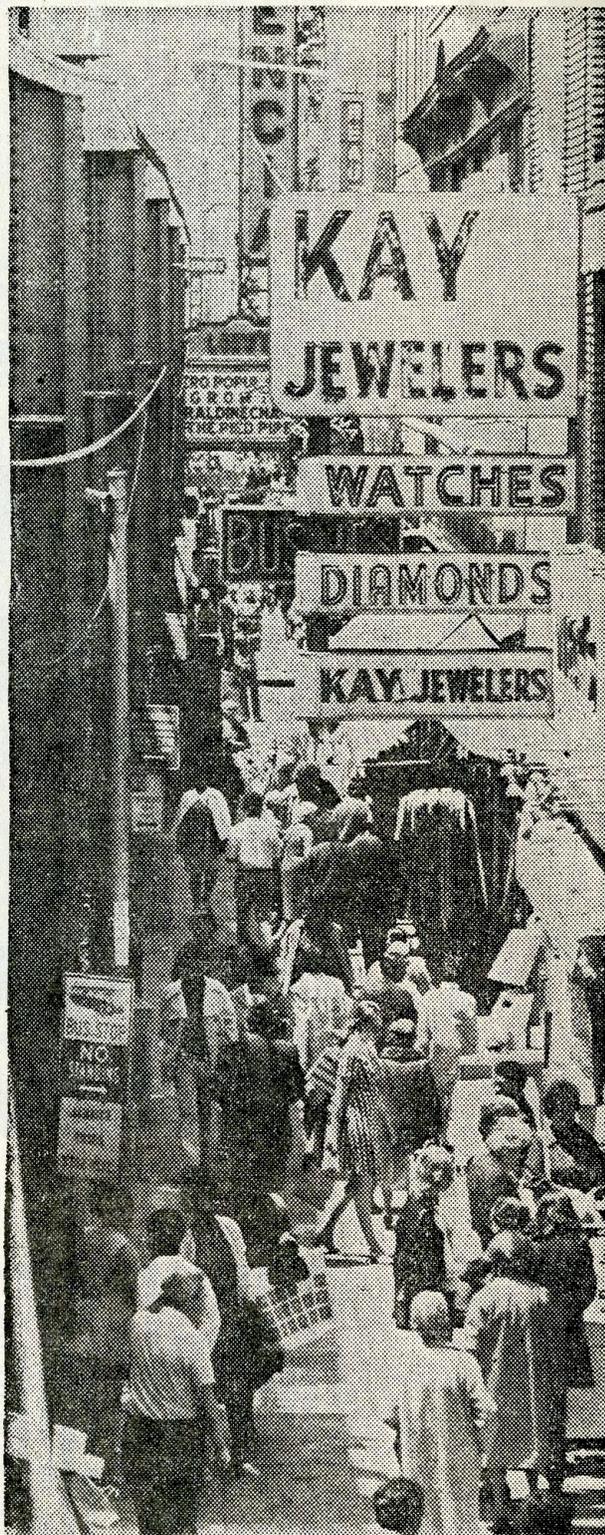
One of the hardest fought battles, which is still continuing, has been over York College, the City University's newest college.

In 1967 and 1968 the Board of Higher Education was persuaded to abandon its choice of Fort Totten—about 150 bucolic acres on a peninsula in Little Neck Bay—for a smaller, more expensive and far less attractive site in South Jamaica, on the ground that an urban college should be where its students were.

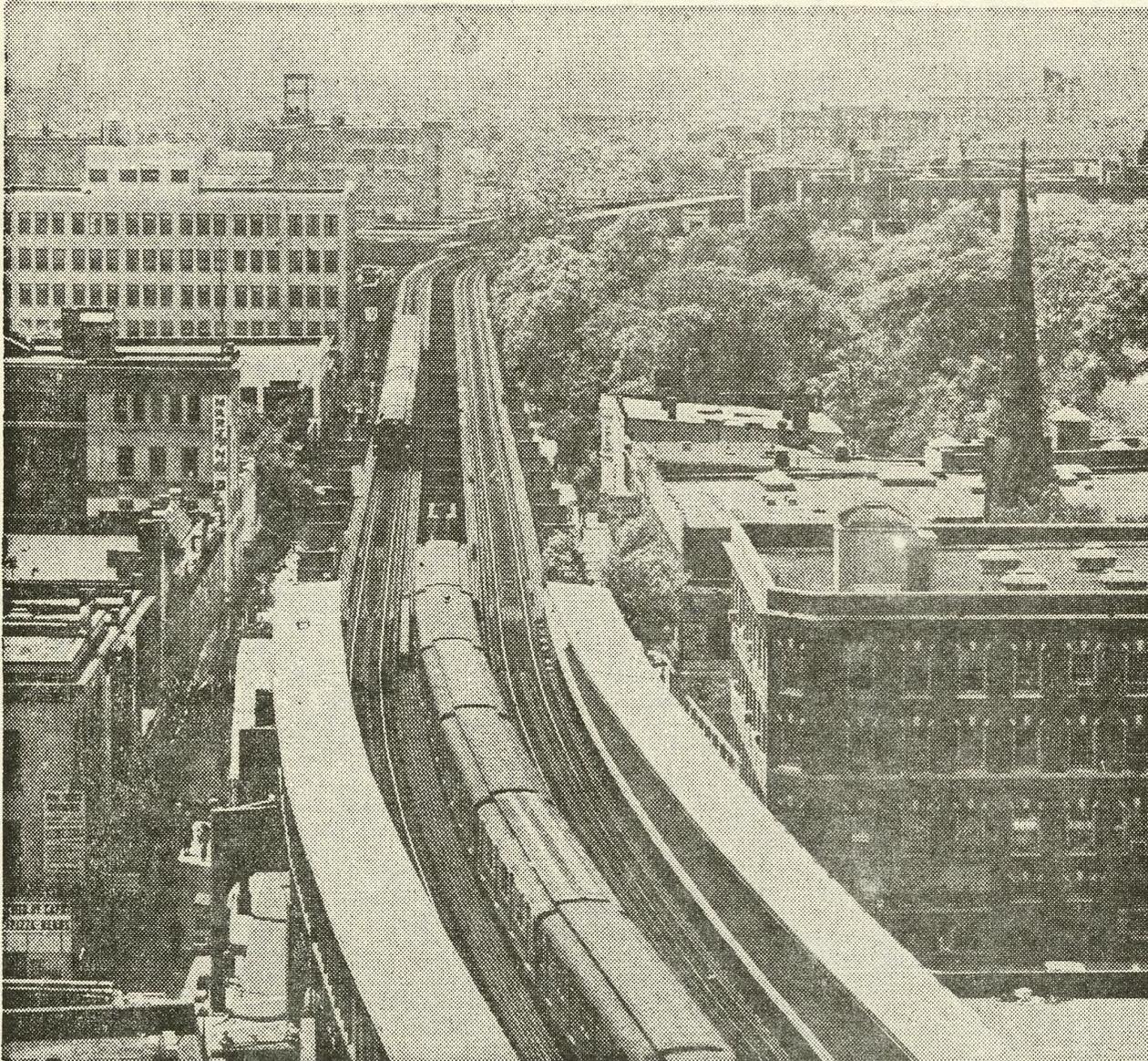
Then, last January, Governor Rockefeller refused to approve plans for the York campus.



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Shoppers crowding busy Jamaica Avenue in Queens. The shopping area is a potential subcenter for two million New Yorkers, thirty minutes away by mass transit.



Photographs for The New York Times by BARTON SILVERMAN

The avenue as it is now, from elevated vantage point at 160th Street. Church steeple and King Park are at right.

The Mayor and Queens Borough President Donald Manes protested. A spokesman for the Governor said that their rebuttals were being studied and there are hints from the Governor's aides that they are being given favorable consideration.

#### Community Aspect

One of the major questions the Jamaica redevelopment raises is whether the community could support it without being torn by the internal hostilities and power struggles that so often surface during such projects.

"You are dealing with a community which is completely ignorant of what development is all about," said Dr. Canute Bernard, a surgeon and former chairman of the South Jamaica Steering Committee. "They think there is a big bonanza waiting to be grabbed for the community leaders working on the project.

"You've got to keep the community informed so that when Helmsley-Spear comes in with a bulldozer, you don't get the community saying, 'Here comes White Man to take over my land.'"

One thing the planners are determined to avert is construction of housing at random instead of as part of the over-all plan.

"But it would be criminal to do anything but go the long route and plan for schooling, day-care centers and sewerage," said Dr. Bernard. "To put up quick housing would just create another high-rise brick ghetto."