

Italian Designer Defends Plan for Watergate Apartments

By John M. Goshko
Staff Reporter

"It would have been a very easy thing to give you another Potomac Towers — another collection of conventional, rectilinear buildings. But that would have been an insult to the spirit of your city."

The words were spoken last night by a portly Italian architect named Luigi Moretti. He had come to Washington from Rome to defend his design of a controversial Watergate project—a luxury apartment development that would rise 130 feet above the Potomac shore in Foggy Bottom.

Today, Moretti and officials of the Italian real estate firm backing the development, the Societa Generale Immobiliare, will meet informally with members of the Fine Arts Commission. Their aim will be to work out compromises that will give the developers a green light on the 50-million-dollar project.

Moretti's design—a complex of curvilinear buildings set on a lavishly landscaped 10-acre tract — has won the preliminary approval of the National Capital Planning Commission. It has been opposed by members of the Fine Arts Commission and others who fear the proposed height will have an

adverse effect on the city's skyline.

Opponents have cited fears that the huge development would overshadow the Lincoln Memorial, farther down the Potomac, and the proposed National Cultural Center, which is scheduled to be built on a tract adjacent to the Watergate project. There have been reports that President Kennedy has expressed concern about these points.

Last night, Moretti leaned back in a chair at his hotel suite and discussed the objections to his plan.

"An architect," he said, "does no more than try to solve a problem posed by the developer. In this case, the problem was to take 10 acres of land and create upon it a

residential community of high quality and aesthetic attraction."

Moretti said that before sitting down to his drawing boards, he visited Washington to study "both the development tract and the city of which it would be a part."

"Every city," he continued, "has an obvious outer face and an inner spirit that lies beneath this surface. To my mind, Washington seemed a unique blending of three elements."

He listed these elements as "the traditional grid pattern of city planning" upon which most American cities are based, "a love of monumental composition such as is reflected in your Mall and statutory circles" and the "British tradition of joining nature to

architecture through the use of parks, gardens and green space."

This third element, Moretti said, seemed the natural choice to use as a theme for "a development tract located in the city's greenery belt along the Potomac."

The resultant design, Moretti continued, "represents my concept of the project as a large garden, a petrified garden caught in flower and blended to the natural turns of the river."

The curved design of his buildings, he said, will allow passers-by to see open areas of greenery rather than be confronted by solid walls of housing. Large areas of the tract would be left free of construction or used for terraced

villas landscaped in a way to give the illusion of open space.

But, Moretti continued, "in order to have this open green space, the economic considerations of the project demand that the buildings go upward. What we have done is create as much open space as possible consistent with the economic demands of the site."

Moretti insisted that the proposed 130-foot height of the buildings will not overbalance the skyline or dwarf nearby structures. Although District zoning regulations generally confine new buildings to a 90-foot height, the Planning Commission may allow those fronting on wide streets to go as high as 130 feet.

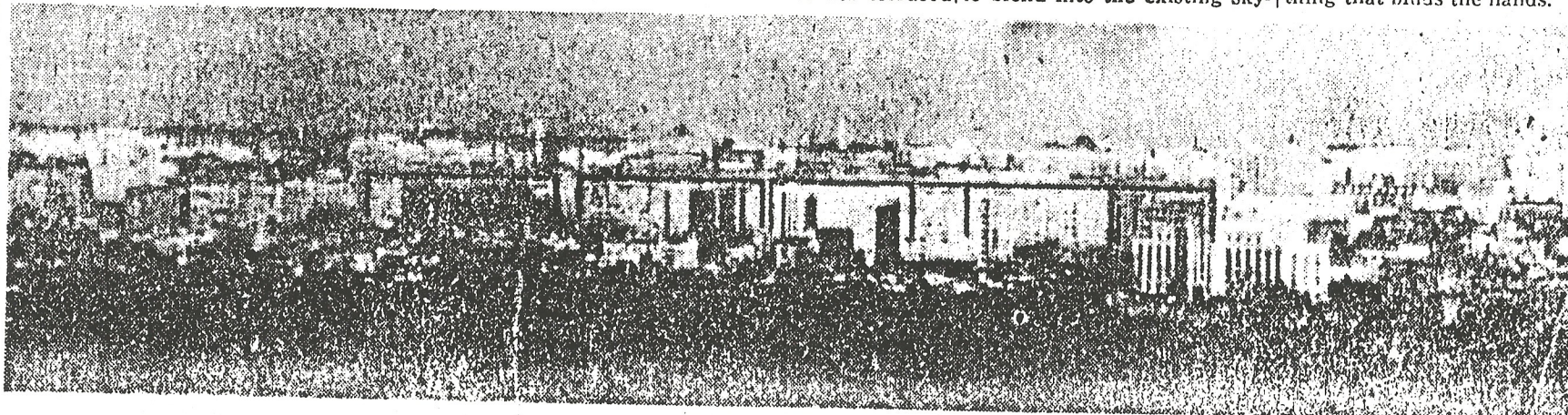
Moretti said the buildings had been carefully calculated to blend into the existing sky-

line. Since current plans for the Cultural Center call for buildings 90 feet high, he said, the Watergate building closest to the Cultural Center tract would have a terrace roof causing it to slope down to 90 feet on that side.

As for the Lincoln Memorial, Moretti said it was too far from the Watergate project to be affected. The Memorial, he pointed out, is more than half a mile distant on a straight line and close to a mile away by road.

The design, Moretti insisted, is in the best tradition of Washington's evolving architectural patterns.

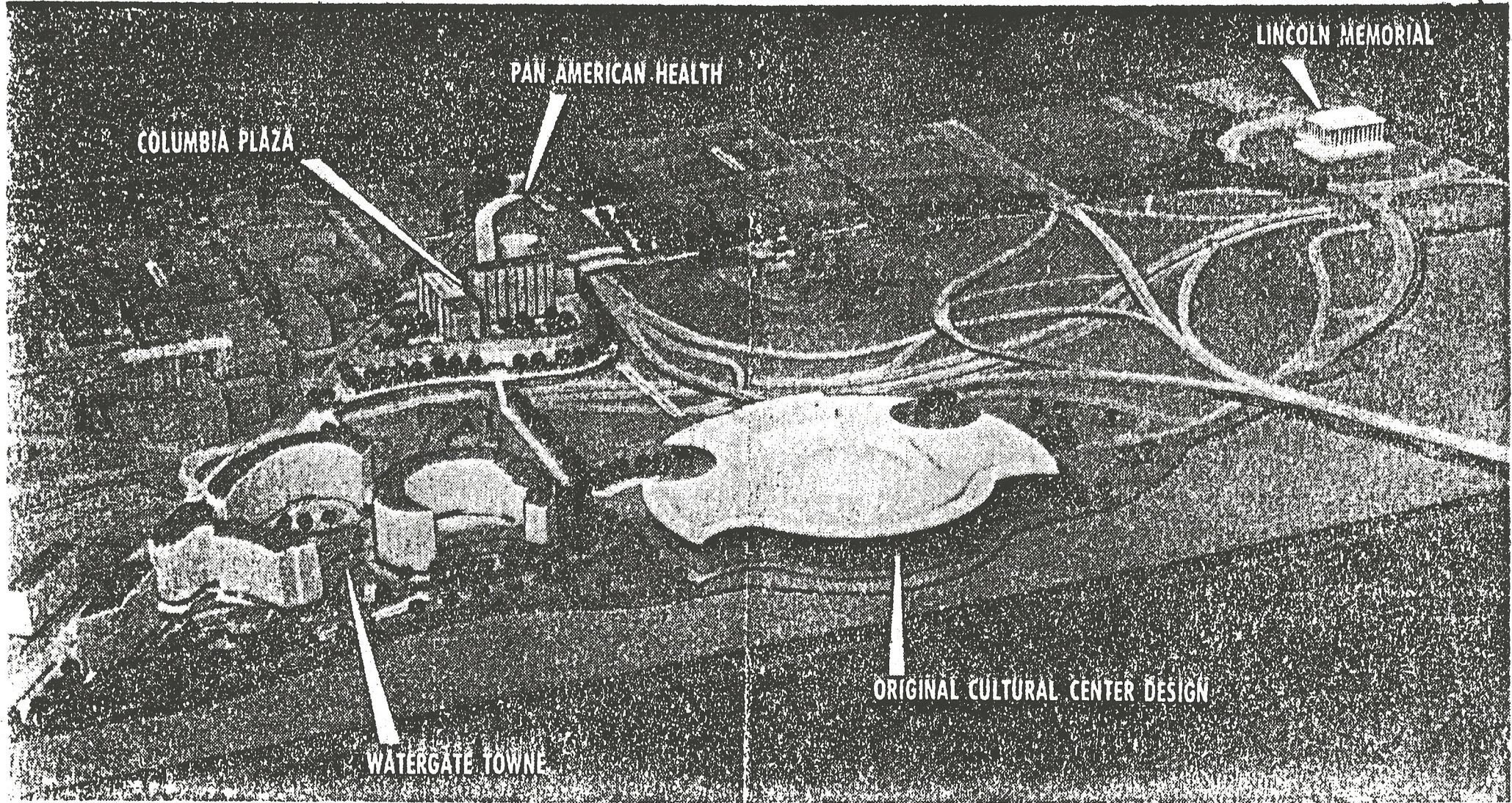
"The strength of tradition is that it serves as a springboard for new ideas," he said. "A good tradition is not something that binds the hands."



Black line drawn by Watergate Towne project sponsors on photo of Washington skyline shows outline of proposed buildings.

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Photograph of scale model shows relationship of the controversial Watergate Towne apartment project to other projects in the area, and the Lincoln Memorial. The design has been approved by the National Capital Planning Commission by a split vote. Objectors do not

like the design, or its proposed height of 130 feet. Also shown on the model are the proposed Columbia Plaza group, of which the central building would be 130 feet high, and the Pan American Health Organization building, which scales at 120 feet. The original Cultural Cen-

ter design, which is being re-worked, called for a height of 160 feet. The Lincoln Memorial is 80 feet high. New Cultural Center plans set complex of buildings 3 feet high. Watergate project building closest to Center would have a roof terraced down to 90 feet on Center side.