

Contact: Jeremy Soffin, RPA, 212/253-2727, ext. 303

Growing Consensus in Lower Manhattan: Remaining Rebuilding Funds Should Support Community Development, Not Airport Link

Housing, Local Economic Development and Civic Amenities Top List of Priorities at Forum; Funds for JFK rail link ranks distant last

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NEW YORK – More than 150 New Yorkers braved a snowstorm last night to voice their opinions on how the remaining \$1.2 billion in federal rebuilding funds for Lower Manhattan should be spent. When the voting was done, the group had added their voices to a growing chorus in Lower Manhattan that supports using these Community Development Block Grant funds for housing, local economic development and civic amenities – and not a new rail link to Kennedy Airport.

Last night's event, hosted by Fiscal Policy Institute (FPI) and Regional Plan Association (RPA) as part of the "Beyond 16 Acres" series, featured a panel discussion followed by audience participation. Audience members each received 12 coins representing \$100 million in remaining federal funds. After hearing a lively discussion of potential uses for the remaining funds, audience members were asked to allocate their "funds" to a combination of five priority areas: arts and culture; community services and facilities; housing; JFK/LIRR tunnel; and local economic development. As a whole, the audience would allocate the \$1.2 billion as follows:

- \$468 million for housing (39%)
- \$276M for local economic development (23%)
- \$204M for community services and facilities (17%)
- \$180M for arts and culture (15%)
- \$72M for JFK/LIRR tunnel (6%)

These results are consistent with two other indicators of public opinion recently released – the findings from the LMDC's hearings held last summer, and the latest Pace University poll. Participants in the LMDC workshops expressed a wide range of priorities, with a focus on local initiatives to improve and connect Lower Manhattan's neighborhoods. Airport access was rarely listed as a priority for these funds. The Pace poll, released this week, showed 51% of Lower Manhattan residents in opposition to a rail link to Kennedy Airport, because its construction would "deplete New York City's Federal cash grants."

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“There is clearly a consensus forming in Lower Manhattan that the remaining rebuilding funds should support neighborhood projects, not a rail link to the airport,” said David Dyssegaard Kallick, Senior Fellow at the Fiscal Policy Institute and a panelist at the event. “Residents and businesses from the Lower East Side and Chinatown are in strong agreement with those in Battery Park City and on the community board – we need this money for housing, local economic development, civic amenities and arts and culture.”

The top priority for participants at last night’s forum was to preserve existing affordable housing and to develop new mixed-income housing. “Without a home as a base of operation, you can’t have a job, you can’t stay in school, you can’t live in NYC,” said Marie Christopher, of the Rebuild with a Spotlight on the Poor Coalition.

Participants chose a rail link to JFK Airport and Long Island as the lowest priority for the community development funds. “The rail link can be a very important project for the city and region if it is done properly and serves a variety of markets,” said Jeffrey M. Zupan, Senior Fellow for Transportation at RPA and a panelist at the event. “What’s becoming clear, though, is that the community development funds may not be an appropriate funding source for this project.”

The panel discussion was moderated by Robert Yaro, President of RPA, and included the following participants:

Marie Christopher, *Rebuild with a Spotlight on the Poor*

Margaret Fung, *Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund*

Jeff Galloway, *Community Board One*

David Dyssegaard Kallick, *Fiscal Policy Institute/Labor Community Advocacy Network*

Jeffrey Zupan, *Regional Plan Association*

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, which controls the remaining \$1.2 billion, is expected to release the results of an airport access study and financing plan in April, which has previously been reported to include most or all of these funds. The LMDC refused to participate in last night’s event.

A pie chart illustrating the results of the evening’s vote is also available.

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