

BEYOND 16 ACRES: REBUILDING LOWER MANHATTAN

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With the selection of the Studio Daniel Libeskind plan for the World Trade Center site and the commencement of an international competition to design a lasting memorial to the victims and heroes of 9/11, the process for rebuilding Lower Manhattan is once again at a crossroads. Even as the plans for the 16-acre site and a memorial design move forward and build greater public support and understanding, a chorus of groups is looking to move the discussion beyond the World Trade Center site, to focus on the broader issues of rebuilding all of Lower Manhattan. At the same time, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) is coordinating a series of studies that examine the potential benefits of regional transportation investments, corridor redevelopment strategies, and other district- and region-shaping initiatives.

Yet there are still issues that threaten to impede the rebuilding process. Institutional and financial arrangements among New York City, two states, several agencies, the federal government and various private leaseholders and their insurers still await resolution of obligations and ultimate control. A deep recession has forced businesses to cut back while the City and State face unprecedented budget crises. Local residents and businesses wonder how long they must hold on before they begin to see the fruits of these plans and investments in Lower Manhattan. Despite all of this, much can be done to revitalize the entire district, beginning immediately. Now is the time to bring these voices together and identify the priorities and strategies for rebuilding all of Lower Manhattan.

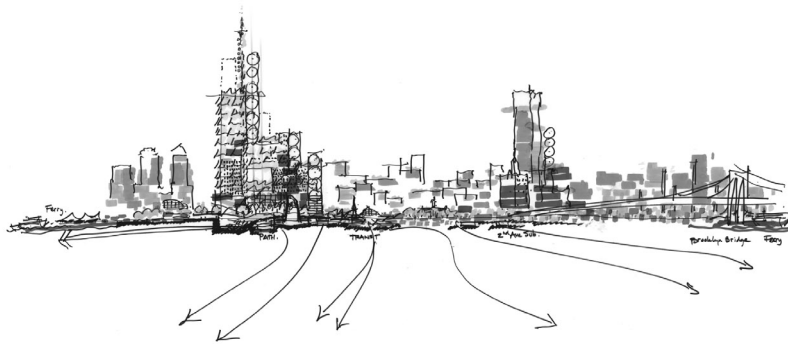
Perhaps the strongest voices for a broader view of Lower Manhattan have come from the residential communities themselves, and community-based groups such as community boards 1, 2 and 3, Asian Americans for Equality, and Rebuild Downtown Our Town (R-Dot), among many others. These approach the planning issues with a greater sense of urgency than many of the other civic and advocacy organizations involved in the discussions. They have focused the discussion on improving the public realm of Lower Manhattan: recognizing that planning should begin with an understanding of the kinds of activities we want to create, and moving from there to creating a physical plan.

In late 2002, Mayor Michael Bloomberg introduced a provocative vision anticipating the continued evolution and rebirth of Lower Manhattan. The Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York re-affirmed these principles through a planning and design workshop held just one week later, which echoed many of the major themes in the Mayor's vision. The workshop created three interdisciplinary teams of urban designers, planners, academics and others to model, in specific economic and physical terms, three future scenarios for Lower Manhattan: a global office center, creative hubs, and livable neighborhoods. Importantly, the results of the planning workshop endorsed the vision and major components of

the Mayor's Lower Manhattan plan, including:

- **VISION:** Both projected an optimistic future for Lower Manhattan as a diverse global hub of culture and commerce with a robust mix of live-work-visit-play activities.
- **PRIORITIES:** The foundations of the Mayor's vision—public investments in transportation, neighborhoods and public places—reflected the underlying assumptions of the charge to the planning teams.
- **TRANSPORTATION:** Transformative transportation investments—including rail access to the airports and greatly expanded ferry service—are central to both the Mayor's vision and the goal of a World's Downtown that emerged from the workshop.
- **NEIGHBORHOODS:** The two new residential neighborhoods in the Mayor's plan—Greenwich Square and along Fulton Street—and the need to provide new community services, public space and affordable housing, are also major components of the workshop vision.

- **PUBLIC SPACES AND CORRIDORS:** Most of the streetscapes and public spaces of the new Downtown envisioned by the City—a major east-west corridor along Fulton Street with retail and culture, a green boulevard along Water Street, and a loop of parks and pathways—were incorporated into the designs of the planning



teams.

The workshops also went beyond the Mayor's plan. For example:

- **NEW DESIGN AND BUILDING PROTOTYPES:** The workshop provided a more fine-grained texture to the broad strokes of the Mayor's vision. New building prototypes encourage more functional diversity. One team proposed a "green invasion" of Lower Manhattan that would encompass every roof, every terrace, and every open space.
- **MOBILITY:** All of the planning teams incorporated the Second Avenue Subway as a catalytic investment, and gave greater emphasis to implementing a street management plan and connections to the waterfront, which becomes a transit hub through the increased use of ferries and connecting activities.
- **HOUSING:** The workshop developed more specific housing and community facility targets for neighborhoods below Chambers as well as Chinatown, the Lower East Side, Tribeca and SoHo. It also recommended more expansive and specific affordable housing goals, including 5,500 new units in Chinatown and the Lower East Side.
- **DOWNTOWN NETWORK:** The planning workshop projected an expansive "physical armature" that extends the network of neighborhoods, corridors and public spaces. This included extending the Water Street boulevard and developing a diagonal corridor along Park Row and East Broadway to create pedestrian-friendly connections to Chinatown and the Lower East Side. New office nodes on Canal and Delancey were

also suggested to create a “Pacific Rim East” office district.

- **SIGNATURE SPACES AND INSTITUTIONS:** All of the planning teams recommended an emphasis on cultural, educational and other civic uses on the WTC site, particularly on the periphery as a transition to a memorial space. A Memorial University was also proposed west of City Hall.

- **ECONOMIC INCENTIVES:** The workshops developed an expanded list of policy tools including code variances and tax incentives to upgrade Class B buildings, Green Building incentives, a percent for the arts program, and cross-subsidization of developments to support affordable housing.

- **REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS:** The workshops discussed building on the transportation investments with airport-related development in Jamaica and Newark, developing complementary uses in Downtown Brooklyn and Jersey City, and developing manufacturing and waterfront strategies for the Brooklyn and Queens waterfronts that anticipate pressures created by a revitalized Downtown.

Inspired by the work of planners, the process to implement these plans envisioned by one of the teams in the workshop was called “Radically Organic Incremental Change.” This approach fundamentally challenges the view of Lower Manhattan as a single city center. It also amplifies the dispersed, mixed-use character of Lower Manhattan by merging zoning uses to permit multiple functions within a single building type. There is a focus on “soft buildings,” which supports phasing rather than large redevelopment projects, to utilize the existing vacant space. This is one proposal for the next steps; surely there are many other approaches that should be considered as well.

The question now is: How can the energy and inspiration that has been dedicated to the World Trade Center site be translated and magnified to encompass all of Lower Manhattan, without losing the focus and purpose that have been so important to the accomplishments of the past year and a half? What roles do the public officials, communities, civic activists and private entrepreneurs have to play in deciding the future of Lower Manhattan?