

Land use planning in New York City, previously covered only on the slowest of news days, has catapulted to the front pages -- and the front of public consciousness -- in the aftermath of September 11th.

Suddenly many, many New Yorkers are debating the merits of small-scale, pedestrian-friendly development versus dramatic skyscraping monuments

We argue about the resurgence of a district catering to the tenants of expensive office buildings versus a mixed-use, mixed-income downtown.

We are contemplating new development and transportation links in the outer boroughs.

We're talking about green architecture, affordable housing and (sometimes) living-wage jobs as components of the city's rebuilding process.

Perhaps most impressively is where and how some of these debates have been taking place. Thousands of us have attended the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation's public hearings and 4,500 people participated in the "Listening To the City" forum convened in July by the 85-member Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York.

Most participants believed that Lower Manhattan, with its nearly 12 percent commercial vacancy rate, doesn't need 11 million more square feet of office space just now, and that any plan for rebuilding downtown should address the city's affordable housing crisis and include more public institutions and cultural amenities.

The public's involvement has had an impact: it is partly responsible for the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation's decision to scrap the six original plans for the World Trade Center site and start fresh. That's great news, and it's worth celebrating. But it's important to remember that it's still unclear how the story will end, where the money will go, and who among us will ultimately "recover" as a result of the post-9/11 rebuilding process. Here are some things to

keep an eye on in the coming months:

THE SWAP

In early August, city officials proposed a land swap in which the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey would turn control of the World Trade Center site over to New York City in exchange for the land underneath Kennedy and LaGuardia airports, which the authority currently rents from the city. Civic advocates and government officials across the ideological spectrum seem to regard this plan warmly, though there have been objections from New Jersey Governor James McGreevey as well as from those who fear that the city would lose out financially on the deal or that the Port Authority would manage the airports to New Jersey's advantage.

Putting Lower Manhattan redevelopment in the city's hands would likely ease the pressure to build up the World Trade Center site with office space. Given the importance of WTC revenues to the Port Authority's finances, it isn't surprising that the authority has pushed for offices, but the city would likely have more leeway to develop the area as a mixed-use district. From the point of view of people who want to see diverse development downtown — and also from the perspective of those of us who want federal recovery money widely distributed to benefit all the communities whose residents suffered from the post-9/11 economic shock — having the city at the controls is probably a good thing. Because a city-guided process may be subject to the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) mandated by the city charter, redevelopment would also likely be more open and participatory under the city's supervision than it would be under the authority's.

THE LEASE

If the city does take the reins of downtown redevelopment, and if it goes for a smaller-scale office plan, the Bloomberg administration will have to decide how to re-negotiate developer Larry Silverstein's 99-year lease on the World Trade Center site. There have been murmurs from Swiss Re, who is Silverstein's insurer, that it would more willingly pay a large settlement if the proceeds went to the people of New York in some form, and this larger insurance payment could be the basis of a deal giving the city more flexibility with rebuilding .

But Silverstein remains an unknown quantity, and it is unclear how a deal with him would affect the city's ability to realize financial returns downtown commensurate with what it would have gotten from its airport leases.

THE GOVERNOR

Even if the Port Authority takes a smaller role, the city's choices about how to rebuild Lower Manhattan will still be constrained, as they so often are, by decisions made in Albany. Governor George Pataki made a majority of the 16 appointments to the Board of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and thus has a great deal of say in how federal recovery funds (such as \$2.7 billion in Community Development Block Grant money) will be spent. Recently, the election-minded Pataki has been saying all the right things about equitable rebuilding in the city, but his actions tell another story. So far, all three of the New York State-sponsored housing construction deals financed for Lower Manhattan by federal recovery money have been dedicated to luxury rentals (five percent of the units have been designated as "affordable" — requiring family incomes of \$70,000 to \$90,000).

This in the face of the city's worst housing crisis in decades. Mayor Bloomberg, along with advocacy groups like Housing First!, are calling for incorporating affordable housing into planning for downtown. Is the governor signaling that he has no interest in including low- and middle-income working families (including the families of many firefighters, police officers and emergency service workers) in a rebuilt downtown community?

THE OLYMPICS

The World Trade Center redevelopment buzz was eclipsed this week by the news that New York City has become a finalist in the competition to play host to the 2012 Olympic Games. Whether or not the city is ultimately chosen, the Olympics, together with Ground Zero planning, is likely to dominate New York's land use agenda for the rest of Mayor Bloomberg's first term. Playing host to the Olympics would present a wonderful opportunity for the city to show its rich, vital culture to visitors from around the world. However, activists from low- and middle-income communities (particularly the waterfront neighborhoods that figure heavily in the Olympic plan) want to see more benefits and protections for their constituents built in from the beginning. The titanic land use changes proposed in the Olympic blueprint, while they promise to improve parklands and stimulate new development, will threaten the homes and jobs of low- and moderate-income residents unless displacement prevention measures like inclusionary zoning

are in place from the start. There is also concern that other important planning initiatives, such as brownfields redevelopment, will get short shrift from the city in the midst of Olympic hubbub.

The constituencies recently energized around WTC redevelopment may soon mobilize around this new land use issue.

THE REST OF THE CITY

There is a strong case to be made that the entire city has suffered devastating consequences as a result of the September 11th attacks. This is most true with respect to job loss. According to the Fiscal Policy Institute, the five occupations in which the greatest number of 9/11-related layoffs have occurred are waiters and waitresses, janitors, retail salespersons, food preparation workers and cashiers. An estimated 60 percent of the 79,000 workers laid off earned less than \$11 an hour. Since it is almost certain that the vast majority of these workers do not live in Lower Manhattan, there is a good argument for spreading redevelopment funds throughout the five boroughs.

The idea of using recovery funds to stimulate commercial revitalization and light manufacturing outside Lower Manhattan is gaining currency. The "multi-centered city" notion recently received a boost from Metropolis Magazine, which imagined cultural, retail and industrial hubs in Staten Island, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx, linked to one another and to Manhattan by rail and ferry.

Though less directly related to physical rebuilding, a proposal by the Labor Community Advocacy Network for a short-term economic stimulus in the form of 75,000 new jobs also deserves consideration.

Thinking about what should happen downtown in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy has given New Yorkers a chance to ruminate on what kind of city we want. We have thought about how to remember the dead and how to address the needs of downtown residents whose neighborhood was turned upside-down last September. We have also reflected on how we want our city to look, how we want it to function for pedestrians, drivers and public transport users, and how we would like its land uses to address the housing and employment needs of its citizens. The results of some of these reflections, widely broadcast last summer, helped change the terms of

the debate on downtown. But it isn't over yet. As the process continues, we must keep letting our elected officials know what kind of New York we want to result, in the long term, from the planning and investment decisions they are making today.

Sites For Beginners:

- [How Zoning Works](#) - An overview of zoning: its definition, purpose and implementation in NYS and NYC. This primer also explains who has authority to make which decisions, with accompanying laws and citations. Excellent.
 - [NYC Department of Planning](#) - The official City site. Not frequently updated, but a good repository for official New York City Land Use documents. Find the complete text of the Zoning Resolution (a hard copy would run you \$400+) and downloadable zoning maps. Find out which zone you live in!
 - [Regional Plan Association](#) - The venerable and still influential pro-planning organization. Particularly good for information on big-item controversies, e.g. Governor's Island. Second Avenue subway, anti-sprawl legislation. Check out their MetroLink proposal and the Gowanus Tunnel Study.
 - [NY Metro APA](#) - A small site for the local chapter of the national professional organization: [American Planning Association](#) .
 - [Municipal Arts Society](#) - A great place for all things regarding New York planning, architecture and design. Most relevant: the just released [Briefing Book of Community-Based Plans](#) available to download, which offers for the first time ever a comprehensive look at the sometimes spotty, sometimes inspired plans for (and from) each neighborhood across the city, complete with maps and community contact information.
 - [NYU's Urban Planning Links Page](#) - This page is chock full of great land use links which focus both on NYC and the USA.
-

Other Recommendations:

- [Air Rights](#) - An old Gotham Gazette Issue of the Week, still relevant and interesting, though a slightly arcane Land Use topic.
- [Tenant Net](#) - A great source for NYC real estate, if slightly biased toward the lessee.
- ["The Cultivator by Martin Filler"](#) - A fascinatingly critical article about Fredrick Law Olmsted and what's wrong with Witold Rybczynski's new biography of him. From The New

by Laura Wolf-Powers

Friday, March 01, 2002 03:56 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, June 06, 2012 10:03 AM

Republic.

- [New York Landmarks Preservation](#) - Packed with information on preservation and restoration of landmarked buildings.
- [New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission](#) - The Official City site for landmarks preservation.
- [Pace Law School Center for Land Use](#) - Excellent introduction to land use issues by a leading academic think tank. Check out the "Land Use for Local Leaders" section.

- [Van Alen Institute](#) - An immense amount of information on current and future NYC land use issues. Start with the well organized, user-friendly contents page and then zero in on your prime concern.