

## Nine Months After Sept. 11, Top Players in Rebuilding Look Ahead

by {ga=epearson}

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New York architect Mark Ginsberg lives six blocks from the World Trade Center. He and his family moved home about a week after Sept. 11, but soon found that what may seem like a small inconvenience changed their lives. The sand in their local playground was removed because it had been contaminated by asbestos, and not replaced until March. "For those of us with small children, the park and playground were the center of our community. For the period that there was no sand, the center was gone," said Ginsberg.

Then he paused. "Today I have the honor of moderating a panel of four people who are putting the sand back into a much bigger hole, in the neighborhood, the city and the country." He was speaking at "Turning 9/11 Around," a June 11 symposium held by the American Institute of Architecture's New York Chapter.

Ginsberg moderated the symposium's first panel, full of top players in the rebuilding efforts from New York's public sector. "Something amazing is going on," said Alexander Garvin, lead planner for the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation. "It has been going on for nine months. I go to places and there are people from all over the city who want to do something. There are organizations that have never sat at a table with one another that are ready to work together." He said that strongest example of this is the fact that his organization and the Port Authority are moving ahead in planning the rebuilding efforts together.

Robert Davidson, chief architect for the Port Authority, showed computer animations of work done so far to rebuild the PATH station destroyed in the attacks, the designs for a new ferry terminal at World Financial Center, and plans for a transparent viewing platform at Ground Zero, to be up during the site's construction. "People want to see what is happening on the site," he said. He showed animation of a completely transparent steel fence on the sidewalks, with so called "viewing portals" at key locations. The fence, lit at night, would also have boards where visitors could leave tributes. The full boards would then be collected and replaced. "We are in the process of determining the ways that we will archive these boards so that they can be preserved," he said.

Stephanie Gelb, who oversees the planning and design of Battery Park City, discussed the ways that Battery Park City's response to the disaster and cleanup can help direct rebuilding efforts for the entire site. "Battery Park City cannot be a real New York City neighborhood until it is integrated into the city. Planning for Lower Manhattan must address the issue of West Street," she said. West Street cuts the neighborhood off from the rest of Lower Manhattan. The community suffered during the six months that the street was closed from traffic. "The

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community was marooned, and effectively split in half," Gelb said. "Residents in the north could not go to restaurants in the south. Residents in the south could not go to school in the north." Gelb said that she also learned that Battery Park City is not a suburb. Before Sept. 11, the neighborhood's parks and schools attracted families that might have otherwise moved to the suburbs. But after Sept. 11, occupancy fell 60 per cent by the end of the year. The number of residents is almost back to what it was, after lowering and subsidizing rents. The new residents are largely younger and single.

Patricia Lancaster, commissioner of New York City's Department of Buildings, detailed her department's role after the Sept. 11 attacks, and talked about how the department will regulate tall building's safety in the future.

The panel then answered questions from architects, planners and journalists. An edited transcript follows:

Q: In your opinion, what is the most successful new building in New York?

Alexander Garvin: The most successful new building in New York is Central Park. (laughter)

Stephanie Gelb: I like the Rector Bridge [newly in place to reconnect Battery Park City with other neighborhoods, which were separated after Sept. 11]. It gets you where you want to go.

Q: Mr. Garvin, who has control of the \$21 billion allocated to New York City, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, or the Port Authority?

Alexander Garvin: That is a little more complicated...some of the money has not yet been appropriated by Congress. We have \$ 2.7 billion that have come in the form of Community Development Block Grants. A large portion of that has gone to the Empire State Development Corporation, which is running an assistance program for affected businesses and for residents, subsidizing rents. In addition to that, there are Federal Emergency Management Programs that are being run by the federal government, and the Liberty Bond Program that is set up to bring money into Lower Manhattan. There will be a wide variety of other things, but at this point, I

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can't really take all \$21 billion and numerate them for you.

Q: Let me restate my question. Who decides how that \$21 billion is spent?

Alexander Garvin: The Congress of the United States.

Q: In your agency, or the Port Authority, who decides?

Alexander Garvin: The grant of \$2.7 billion is a grant from the federal government, from the Congress of the United States, which has been granted to the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation. We are distributing that money. Some of the money went to the Empire State Development Corporation, and it is for business retention and resident retention in Lower Manhattan. You can read about the program if you go to our website, which is [www.renewnyc.com](http://www.renewnyc.com), you can read exactly how that money is being distributed. The Federal Emergency Management money, which is in excess of \$5 billion, is being distributed by the Federal Emergency Management Association, not by us, not by the Port Authority. Some of the other money is mainly being appropriated by Congress. That is as far, and as good, as I can do at this moment. If you go to our website you will see exactly which businesses qualify and how much the grants are, they are automatic, they are non-discretionary and are given to people who rent or live in Lower Manhattan. There are three zones, one includes Chinatown, one includes Lower Manhattan south of Canal Street, they are automatic payments that come from the federal government to us, and from us to the residents.

Q: What would you say are the most important characteristics of a great building, the kind that you would like to see built in Lower Manhattan? And what do you think it will take to get that kind of building built?

Alexander Garvin: As a planner, I would tell you that an individual building is not as important as a public realm. What we need to do is create as great a public realm as we can, a public realm consisting of mass transit systems streets, squares, parks and the open spaces, all of the places in which the public moves. One of the things that the Port Authority and we are trying to do to move this forward is to present alternatives to everybody, so that you can see how you might [take part in] that public realm. (That public realm, around which the individual buildings will grow up. That public realm is what, I think, is the single most important thing to shape.

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Thereafter, there are opportunities for some great buildings, parcels and blocks and lots that will be there when we are done.) Some of that public realm will be built by the Port Authority, some of it will be built by other agencies, but we have to create a really great public realm in order to induce wonderful buildings that will make the city a better place to live.

Patricia Lancaster: I don't think this is what you meant, but as your Buildings Commissioner, I would say that the greatest building would be the one that is the safest.

Q: Even though you talk about the unprecedented cooperation that has taken place because of this tragedy, the approach sounds quite segmented, with mass transportation and other planning areas being incorporated but not really all planned together. Also, input is being requested through public hearings, and through public participation. And also, billions of dollars are being supplied by a body down in Washington D.C. that's going to decide how that money is being used. This is an incredibly chaotic array of activities that are going on, and my question is: Who is going to be in charge of all of this, not individually, but who do you see as being the power structure that is going to oversee this whole process, and how will they be able to control the actions of all these different individuals, lobbies, and money interests?

Alexander Garvin: This is a democracy, and in New York, our planning is about as complex as you are going to get. We do not have a single czar, we have community boards, we have operating agencies, we have the public. There are endless numbers of players in any decision that goes on in New York. If you come to any of the public hearings held by the Planning Commission, you will see that an ordinary, item, including a curb cut, or building a café, might involve large numbers of people who in other cities, would not be involved. We have created this culture of public participation, and we are very proud of it. So I can assure you that no single individual could be, or should be involved in determining all of these things. We have crafted, with the Port Authority, a rather extraordinary series of events that are going to unfold over the next few months.

We had a public hearing two weeks ago, we are going have a very large public event on the 20th of July at the Javitz Center, in cooperation with Civic Alliance, the Regional Planning Association, the Port Authority and we. We will be presenting to the public at that time some of those things. There will be half a dozen proposals, with all the elements, not just on the 16 acres that the Port Authority is going to rebuild, but also in the adjacent areas.

In late September we are going to have, not three out of six, but we are going to recombine, so

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if you had A, B, C, D, E, and F before, you are going to get G, H and I, which will combine two different things. The public participation, which will identify for us which elements are generally thought to be desirable, will exclude those things without support, or not enough support. Along with our consultants Parsons Brinkerhoff, Beyer Blinder and Belle and our other consultants (because both the Port Authority and we have other consultants) they will come in and bring that together. Hopefully by the end of the year we will have come to some consensus on a single recommendation to then put forward through a public procedure, rather like what usually happens when things like this take place.

Robert Davidson: Just to build on Alex's comments, yesterday there was a four-hour meeting that took place at 115 Broadway that was the first of three meetings that began to consider all of the transportation initiatives that have been out there in the public realm, and we all know what they are. The first meeting was with the Department of Transportation, City Planning, the Port Authority, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation. It was a discussion about surface transportation. We dealt with all of the transportation issues that bring vehicles into downtown Manhattan, let's say south of Canal Street. The next one will be on water born transportation, ferries. The same thing will occur with respect to rail transportation. At yesterday's meeting we also had the New Jersey contingent, and the same thing will apply to the other discussions, they will be representing both states, all the agencies, City Planning.

Q: I have made my mind up that there is going to be some form of transit hub downtown. And it seems from your plans for the new PATH terminal that it is going to be a hell of a walk from the PATH to Broadway-Nassau. What ways have you come up with to address this, if any?

Robert Davidson: Its no secret, because it has been out in the public discussion since probably November or December of this year, that we have been thinking about what we have been calling the "downtown concourse," and it is a way to deal with the issues that exist in downtown Manhattan. There has been mention of, downtown needs its own Grand Central, and that's probably true, I would agree with that in terms of public space. But the difference between Grand Central and what's going on in lower Manhattan, is that we have a linear progression of disparate transit systems that were created over time. And, some how, we need to link them up. And we need to link them up in the best pedestrian fashion possible. So [we have been discussing] the idea that this could be developed as an east-west link that would link the three business districts as we are calling them, the Financial Center, the Trade Center site, and the financial district, link those business districts with all of the transportation that exists and the new transportation that will eventually be constructed, for example the permanent PATH terminal and the potential for some bus operation to occur within that zone. That's on the table.