

What the City Needs *Immediately*

New York took a heavy hit on Sept. 11. How do its citizens and government go about restoring the damage — to the ground zero area, to the rest of the city and to the metro economy? The Post Opinion pages will look at these questions all week (and return to the subject frequently in the weeks ahead). Today, we begin with the first of several excerpts from Steven Malanga's important essay on the rebuilding effort from the forthcoming issue of *The Manhattan Institute's City Journal*.

— The editors

New Construction Now!



**STEVEN
MALANGA**

It is impossible to overstate the danger facing New York right now.

The city confronts obvious problems that the Sept. 11 attack precipitated: a devastated downtown, thousands of businesses struggling and some leaving, a steep drop-off in visitors and consumer spending, and a national recession, to the especial detriment of the financial industry that is the city's top economic dynamo.

BUT in addition to these woes, the big government, high-tax solutions that lie at the heart of the city and state's traditional political culture are sure to compound the problem.

These are the measures that produced economic catastro-

phe in the early 1990s, when the Cuomo and Dinkins administrations heaped higher public spending and tax increases onto a local economy buffeted by the Gulf War and a national economic slowdown, turning a mild downturn into a three-year recession that drained the city not only of jobs but of much of its fighting spirit.

Building the needed space doesn't mean lavish subsidies to developers; it means clearing away a choking jungle of gov't impediments to private builders.

To stave off disaster — to prevent jobs and residents from fleeing the city, crippling the local economy for years to come — political leaders at the state and local levels need to consider carefully their solutions before they push New York off the precipice again.

Here's the first step of what they need to do to rebuild the

city — not just downtown, but the whole economy — quickly and intelligently, and here are the reasons to think such a plan will work.

TO clear the way for the city's natural energies to reassert themselves, the first, most urgent task is to replace the 18 million square feet of modern office space lost in the attack, so that companies wanting to be in New York have somewhere to go.

Building the necessary space doesn't mean providing more lavish subsidies to developers; it means clearing away the choking jungle of impediments to private builders that New York has allowed to grow up over decades. It means, above all, getting government out of the way.

This task was a priority before the attack; the current crisis needs to focus policymakers' attention and political will on what has now become a matter of the utmost urgency.

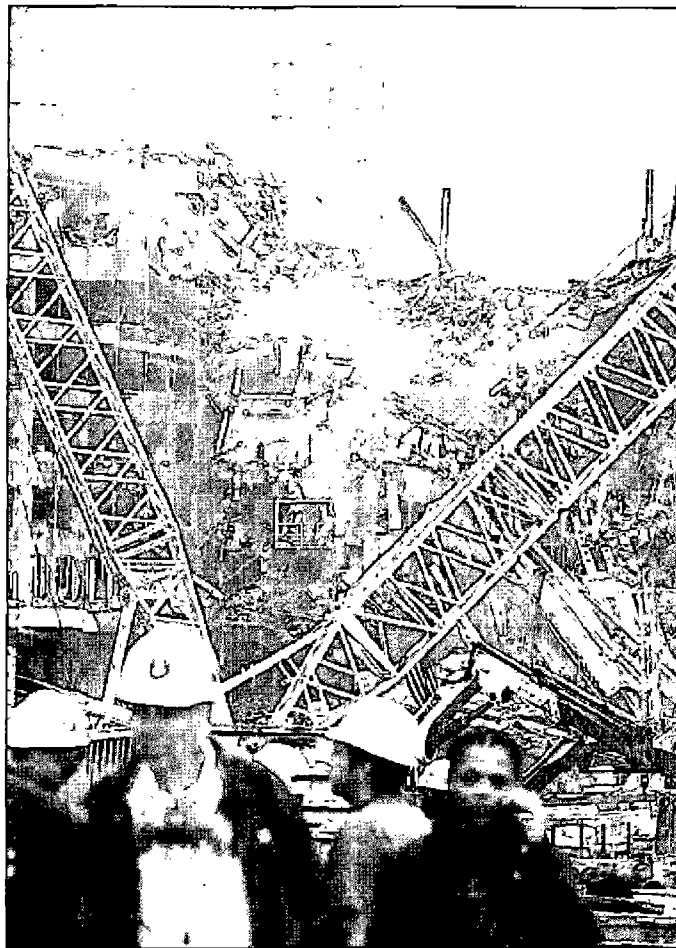
The office space we need right now can't rise on the World Trade Center site: clearing away the rubble and rebuilding the infrastructure there will probably take a year, and no construction can begin until that's done.

To produce the space we'll need soon, when the national

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City businesses need new construction to start now, but ground zero won't be cleaned up for at least a year. That means a crash building program elsewhere in Manhattan.

Brigitte Stelzer

by the Fisher Brothers plans for the huge site of a former Con Ed plant on the East River near the United Nations — would normally face two to four years of waiting and millions of dollars in costs to go through the city's planning and land-use process, to obtain permission to build the modern, economically viable structures that

stance; the borough president gets another month.

If either disapproves, the whole project gets thrown into the city council for more consideration and a vote. When developers modify plans to meet community objection — that a project is too big, say, or isn't what the neighborhood needs — the whole land-use review process goes back to Square One.

It is a process that seems designed expressly to prevent rather than to facilitate development and it needs radical reform. The city must sharply curtail the period that any government body can take to review a project and mandate that the entire process must last no longer than one year — at most — from start to finish.

EVEN more important, the city must immediately rezone its large tracts of developable land, such as Manhattan's Far West Side, where

only small buildings are now allowed, or the Brooklyn and Queens waterfronts, which are limited to manufacturing uses, so that developers can build office and apartment towers there "as-of-right," without the need to have every individual building go through the labyrinthine approval process.

Even before the tragedy at the World Trade Center, momentum was growing to rezone the area west of Ninth Avenue, from 28th Street to 42nd Street, to permit the building of giant office towers.

Today, this area — one of the few sections of Manhattan largely untouched by the nineties boom — resembles the district around the World Trade Center before the towers were built in the 1960s: a mishmash of small businesses like auto-repair shops, along with swathes of government-owned land.

The city estimates that the Far West Side could become a third great Manhattan business district, with more than 30 million square feet of new, modern office space. If it were rezoned, builders and their lenders would be free to figure out when the market was right to build, and what the market wants.

BEYOND zoning intelligently, the proper role for government is to build the infrastructure that allows private-sector development to take place. On the Far West Side, government should extend the No. 7 subway line down Eighth Avenue to 34th Street and then west to Ninth or Tenth Avenue, and it should extend the Long Island Railroad there, too, beyond its current terminus at Penn Station.

Many of the necessary tracks and tunnels for this project already exist. This estimated \$2 billion infrastructure investment would generate a tremendous increase in business activity (and tax revenues), and it would be a signal of confidence in the city's continued economic growth.

As a precisely targeted part of its reconstruction aid package to New York, sure to promote recovery, Washington should — in exchange for the city's rezoning the Far West Side — earmark federal mass-transportation money for this infrastructure project. Meanwhile, to facilitate development of the area right now, the city should accompany its rezoning with greatly increased bus service to the area.

and local economies begin to recover, we must at once accelerate the big projects throughout the city that are ready to start construction but are awaiting city approvals for the 7.5 million square feet of commercial space they will build.

The dozen or so such projects — such as the mixed-use development that a group led

Gotham's rigid, antiquated zoning code discourages on many likely sites.

IN this process, once the city's Planning Commission gives its go-ahead after months of waiting and study, myriad local groups get to put in their two cents: the local community board alone gets two months to review the project, for in-

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