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Push for smoother reconstruction

Execs want to give redevelopment group more power; governor wary

REAL ESTATE EXECUTIVES ARE lobbying to give the new Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Corp. the power to expedite legal challenges that could block or slow down construction at the World Trade Center site.

However, legislation would be needed, and insiders say that Gov. George Pataki is wary of giving the Legislature, especially Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, any say in how the new redevelopment agency would be run.

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Charles Gargano, chairman of Empire State Development, parent of the lower Manhattan agency, does not appear worried over lawsuits.

"If there are legal challenges, we've had them before," he says. "If some legislation is required, we'd look at that."

Mr. Silver has strongly criticized the governor because all nine members of the new agency's board will be named by Republicans—six by Mr. Pataki and three by Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

Insiders also say that the post of corporation president—the day-to-day operating officer—will be just as important. The agency's chairman position will be an unpaid post, while the presidency will be a full-time job.

No names have surfaced for president yet. But officials say that there are few suitable candidates in state government, so they expect Mr. Pataki to tap someone from the private sector.

As for the chairman, the ideal candidate is said to be a businessman with close ties to both the governor and President George W. Bush.

Insiders say that Mr. Giuliani, despite his popularity, is considered unlikely to be chosen.

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