NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

In the days after the attack, many developers and city officials had argued with patriotic fervor that if six big office towers had been destroyed, then six new buildings should be built immediately, with government subsidies to stimulate construction.

But it soon became apparent that there was little demand for new office space. In the short term at least, real estate brokers said, any corporations that want to expand or move downtown, where rents are lower than in Midtown, can lease vacant space in existing buildings.

Some analysts and state officials now contend that it is more important to fix longstanding problems in Lower Manhattan, and to make the area more attractive to tourists and residential and commercial tenants.

"This is probably the fifth major crisis of confidence in downtown since 1959," said Robert D. Yaro, executive director of the Regional Plan Association, a private planning organization. "The solution has always been to subsidize some more office space. We don't deal with the fundamental problems in the neighborhood: you can't get there from here. The residential population in and around downtown is still only a fraction of what it should be, and it needs amenities like culture, arts, restaurants and retailing."

Mr. Yaro and others have proposed subway and rail improvements linking Lower Manhattan to Midtown and Westchester to the north, and to Brooklyn and Long Island to the east. He and a coalition of 80 civic groups have also called for a comprehensive plan that would reflect a more diverse economy and include residential development, cultural institutions and shopping, as well as office space and a substantial memorial park dedicated to the victims of the terror attack.

Charles A. Gargano, chairman of the Empire State Development Corporation, said the Pataki administration was focused on the long-term needs of Lower Manhattan, in particular, transportation. He said he favored building a terminal that would link a rebuilt PATH station at the trade center site with existing subway lines to the east. The state is also considering ways to better connect Battery Park City and the World Financial Center to the rest of Lower Manhattan by burying a stretch of West Street, which separates the enclave from the World Trade Center.

"It's important to focus on what's going to be helpful in the long term to revitalize Lower Manhattan, making it a place where people want to live, work and visit during the day and at night," Mr. Gargano said. "It's about transportation, transportation, transportation. When the market comes back, we're hoping that private developers will put up new buildings."

Mr. Gargano said he has also encouraged Larry Silverstein, the developer of 7 World Trade Center, to use the insurance money he expects to get to rebuild his tower, which was destroyed in the Sept. 11 attack. As for the trade center site itself, Mr. Gargano said it would take perhaps a year to clear the land. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey owns the site and would plan for its redevelopment, "but we do not have to follow the same design as in the past," Mr. Gargano said.

In the meantime, downtown tenants and landlords said that it remained difficult to move around the district because of the loss of a PATH rail terminal and three subway stations at or near the trade center. Many downtown workers and residents near the trade center also complained that the smoky, acrid air near the trade center site was an unwelcome reminder of the attack.

They said that too little had been done to assure companies that the problems would be fixed soon and to stave off another round of defections.

"Businesses are making their decisions right now as to what they're doing going forward," said Kathryn S. Wylde, president of the New York City Partnership. "They want to have some certainty that downtown will return to normalcy and the level of amenities we had before the attack."

Ms. Wylde also worried that many of the transportation proposals by the Regional Plan Association and others were too expensive and grandiose and would be a distraction from getting the downtown PATH and subway stations reopened.

"The focus of public investment should be on infrastructure and making downtown more attractive for private investment," Ms. Wylde said.

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