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Many visions for WTC site

Plans lacking a consensus

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In the first days after Sept. 11, it all seemed so simple. In defiant tones, politicians and planners declared that the twin towers must be rebuilt. Anything else was unthinkable.

"Our skyline will rise again," Mayor Giuliani vowed.

Developer Larry Silverstein, who controlled the World Trade Center, vowed to build four shorter, 50-story towers.

"We have an obligation to replace this," Silverstein said *three months ago.*

But as the impact of the catastrophe sank in, other voices clamored to be heard. Hesitations arose about rebuilding on a space many considered to be hallowed ground.

One such voice belonged to Monica Iken. Iken's husband, Michael, died in Tower 2, and his remains have not been recovered. The 31-year-old widow from Riverdale, the Bronx, has started her own group, September's Mission, whose goal is "to make sure that we take that land and turn it into a peaceful sanctuary for our loved ones," she said.

"We need a place to go, because I don't have any closure. I have nothing," Iken said.

The site of the first battle of what President Bush called the first war of the 21st century is becoming a battlefield of a different sort. Already, people are lining up with claims of controlling what happens there.

The contenders

They include Silverstein and shopping mall giant Westfield, who hold a 99-year lease on the land; the Port Authority, which owns the land and wants to rebuild its damaged PATH lines below; Mayor Giuliani and Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg; Gov. Pataki; the Empire State Development Corp. and its new subsidiary, the Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Corp., and people like Iken who lost family members on Sept. 11.

So while Silverstein has already hired architect David Childs to design new office buildings, Iken has hired an architect of her own to come up with designs for a memorial. Like many who lost family members in the attack, she feels she has some claim to the land.

The Port Authority is the legal owner of the land. Last summer, the agency turned the twin towers and surrounding buildings over to Silverstein in history's biggest real estate deal, valued at $3.2 billion. The arrangement was seen as sweet for both sides: The Port Authority would no longer have to manage the towers and was guaranteed yearly lease payments starting at $116 million. Silverstein and Westfield stood to profit by increasing efficiency and raising rents.

Push to rebuild

The players inked the deal at the Trade Center's outdoor plaza under a burning July sun.

Six weeks later, everything changed.

After the attacks, Silverstein, still hard-charging at 70 years old, hammered on the theme of rebuilding. No one doubted that his 99-year lease gave him a strong legal claim. The $9 million monthly rent he is still paying to the Port Authority gives him the right to rebuild.

"It's pretty clear that Silverstein can rebuild, under our agreement, what was there before," said Charles Gargano, the Port Authority's vice chairman who also heads the Empire State Development Corp.

But conflicting ideas of what to build there quickly emerged.

Silverstein said rebuilding two 110-story office towers was not "feasible" and broached the idea of four smaller towers. He later said he also would like to build a performing arts center, a hotel and condominiums on the site.

The necessity of change has already loosened Silverstein's legal hold on the property.

"If he wants to deviate and change the design, then he has to get approval from the Port Authority," Gargano said. "And obviously, that means he's going to need the approval."

Giuliani had his own ideas about what to do with the land, saying that a memorial to the victims should "dominate" the 16-acre plot. He also said Silverstein's development rights could be transferred uptown, to the far West Side.

"If you do something with that site that draws millions of people here every year to relive, to consider, to ponder, to think about what happened — the way they've done at Normandy — you do that right, and you just think of millions of people coming there," Giuliani said.

Giuliani's views echo those of many of the groups formed by the families of those killed. Giuliani invoked Normandy. John Lynch, whose firefighter *son was killed, compared the* site to Gettysburg in a Daily News Op-Ed column. Others mentioned Oklahoma City. Some, like Stephen Push of the Families of September 11, say building commercial buildings in the exact spot where the towers stood would be "sacrilegious."

"If our wishes are ignored and *inappropriate things are done* with that property, either out of *indifference or ignorance, then* we'll feel victimized a second time, and it's just not right," Push said.

Push said commercial buildings could be built on some part of the site, as long as it didn't interfere with the families' wishes.

But Sally Regenhard, whose firefighter son died in the attack, said, "I'm absolutely categorically opposed about building a commercial building. And *I actually do have a lot of reservations* about any type of building there."

Silverstein agreed that there should be a memorial where the towers stood. "The voices of those who have lost loved ones are going to be terribly important in whatever is done on the memorial," he told The News.

"We're all going to have to get together and work on a consensus that each of the constituencies is happy with," he said.

Consensus is his mission

The job of forging a consensus could fall to John Whitehead, chairman of the Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Corp., the new agency charged *with rebuilding downtown.* At the news conference announcing his appointment, Whitehead addressed what he said was the group's priority.

"This is the final resting place for the loved ones of so many people in the city who need to find a place where they can visit," he said. "We need a very important memorial of some *sort, be it a park, a chapel,* who knows what it should be. But land must be set aside."

Whitehead said he will appoint advisory boards to help make decisions about building on the site. Each will represent one of the "constituencies" with a stake, including victims' families, people who live in the neighborhood, and business owners and Wall Street leaders, with the mayor and governor as "final arbiters."

That much democracy might not sit well with some of the victims' families. Stephen Push acknowledged the rights of all those involved, but said, "The interests of the families of the deceased trump all those other interests."

Silverstein, in the meantime, is fighting another battle, trying to win $7 billion in insurance payments that will enable him to rebuild.

"It's not his thing to build anyway he wants, and we all know that," Gargano said. "There's going to have to be consensus, cooperation between many, many people."

With Frank Lombardi

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