**SUMMARY**

*New York New Visions: Principles for the Rebuilding of Lower Manhattan* is the work of a coalition of 21 architecture, planning, and design organizations. The New York New Visions coalition was formed under the leadership of AIA New York Chapter to help guide the decision-making process for the rebuilding of the World Trade Center site and Lower Manhattan in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

**EMERGING LESSONS**

No precedent exists for architects, landscape architects, urban planners, engineers, government officials, business leaders, financiers, and ordinary citizens to follow for rebuilding an entire section of a city in the aftermath of *force majeure*—literally, force beyond the control of any of the parties that have defined roles and responsibilities under normal circumstances. Yet within six months of September 11, *New York New Visions* emerged as a detailed roadmap for rebuilding Lower Manhattan.

The scale of the event, the scale of the response, the scale and complexity of the city of New York—all make it difficult for design professionals elsewhere to apply the knowledge gained from the experience of their New York colleagues to other situations. Nevertheless, important lessons can be applied to the rebuilding of other cities under less traumatic circumstances. *New York New Visions* is a model for community leadership in times of uncertainty and ambiguity, when leadership is most urgently needed and when usual roles and responsibilities might not apply.

**DESIGNING A PLANNING PROCESS**

Among the greatest challenges faced by the people of New York after September 11 was the need for a coherent, large-scale planning process. In the context of the preceding sentence, “scale” refers to the number of people who must necessarily be involved—tens of thousands—and the complex web of social structures and relationships—families, friendships, communities, businesses, property ownership, contracts, commerce, and government—that in varying degrees collapsed with the World Trade Center towers and whose need for reconstruction is no less urgent.

This article documents in summary form the New York New Visions model for inclusive community planning—how to coordinate the voices, emotions, opinions, desires, and needs of thousands of people to arrive at a consensus for both healing and rebuilding a city.

**THE PROCESS**

*New York New Visions* outlines seven principles for the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan. The following is adapted from Principle #6, "An Effective and Inclusive Planning Process," whose essential elements include:

- Producing a comprehensive plan
- Establishing a participatory process
- Balancing urgency with informed decisions
- Keeping the process focused
- Identifying and expediting priority projects
- Updating zoning regulations
- Providing incentives for development
- Adopting a model building code

**PRODUCE A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

Early development of a comprehensive plan with short- and long-term strategies for restoration, reconstruction, and renewal is an absolute requirement for recovery from the effects of *force majeure*.

A comprehensive plan, whether or not it is binding on all parties involved, removes uncertainty about the future and the risk that results from uncertainty.
An effective plan enables the private sector and other stakeholders to develop the best possible program most quickly and to frame their individual decisions within the overall context of the plan. Even if the plan takes years to implement, cities that agree quickly on a recovery plan maintain their economic strength and are able to avoid the paralysis and years of unfocused debate that occurs in the absence of a plan.

ESTABLISH A PARTICIPATORY PROCESS
The comprehensive plan should be developed through an open, transparent process that includes government, the private sector, affected communities, the design professions, and the public. The goals of the planning process should be to
- Define a commonly shared vision
- Agree on fundamental principles
- Establish guidelines for future actions

A good planning process will
- Recognize existing community assets
- Develop place-based consensus among all stakeholders
- Acknowledge the rights and responsibilities of existing property owners and leaseholders

A participatory process does not just happen; it must be designed. A framework for participatory decision making would include
- A clear definition of participant roles.
- Adequate funding to maximize public input and achieve the desired goals.
- Use of all available communication media for developing the maximum possible consensus in an expedited manner, including direct person-to-person outreach, focus groups, the Internet, local newspapers, and local access cable television.
- A public education program on design and planning principles. Such a program provides the public with the tools for articulating their points of view and making informed decisions and recommendations. Elements of the program can include exhibits, panel discussions, and electronic or print publications. A wide array of civic groups can be invited to participate.
- Use of the Internet for holding interactive meetings, distributing information, discussions, and receiving, cataloguing, and integrating public comments into the process.
- Methodical and thoughtful analysis of the options developed through the public process by property owners, government authorities, and an advisory group of design professionals.
- A schedule for obtaining governmental approvals, including environmental and agency approvals.

BALANCE URGENCY WITH INFORMED DECISIONS
Force majeure—whether an earthquake, fire, flood, hurricane, tornado, or act of terrorism or war—is the precipitating event of a crisis. Urgent decisions need to be made immediately to preserve life, health, safety, and property, and, in the short term, to restore or temporarily replace essential infrastructure. These urgent and necessary decisions must be balanced with broader planning and design issues, which will proceed on different timelines and with different aims, constituencies, intensity, and sensitivities.

Conscious acknowledgement of the driving force behind any decision helps clarify how that decision fits into an overall framework. Decisions must be given priorities, all stakeholders fully identified, and resources allocated effectively. A structured process with an achievable schedule will help channel participation and promote development of the best possible plan in the shortest possible time.

KEEP THE PROCESS FOCUSED
Strong leadership and the capacity to make difficult decisions are required of political leaders, those they appoint, and government agencies having direct authority. Other governmental entities with local or regional planning responsibilities should have major roles, to balance the rebuilding of the affected area with development in other areas of the city or region. Civic groups and not-for-profit organizations should also have a strong voice in the review process.

To the degree that rebuilding will replicate previous uses and densities, existing planning, environmental, and building permit approval processes should apply, except as specifically noted below. Rewriting the rules at a time of uncertainty only heightens that uncertainty and consumes valuable energy and attention that should be focused on the rebuilding process.
IDENTIFY AND EXPEDITE PRIORITY PROJECTS

An interagency task force should immediately be established to identify and expedite the approval of important development projects throughout the city and the region, including but not limited to the affected area. The task force should have executive-level (mayoral, gubernatorial) authority to coordinate and streamline the approval processes of all city, state, regional, and federal governmental authorities having jurisdiction. The primary function of the task force is to coordinate the schedules, sequences, and logistics of multiple approval processes to minimize common but unnecessary delays.

UPDATE ZONING REGULATIONS

Zoning regulations often lag changes in society. If necessary and possible, zoning regulations should be revised to reflect a vision of the city’s future. Zoning should become more performance- and place-based, permit development opportunities in the context of surrounding communities, permit new and possible future uses resulting from the changing nature of work, and respond to the special needs and secondary effects of expanding sectors of the economy.

If previously existing uses did not constitute an unusual environmental hazard, local community and political leaders should seek legislation that waives the requirement for an environmental impact statement for redevelopment up to the previously existing floor areas and improvements in the supporting infrastructure, provided that total open space, including any streets, is maintained or increased, and that the development is otherwise in compliance with the spirit of state and federal environmental law.

PROVIDE INCENTIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Significant financial barriers may threaten timely rebuilding. Fostering quick and easy assembly of building sites may greatly reduce the cost of construction in relation to projected rental income, which in turn may dramatically affect the financial viability of one or more projects. This is best accomplished through cooperation, negotiation, and mediation among all the parties with an ownership or financial interest. If necessary, the condemnation powers of government should be fairly and judiciously applied. The goal should be to minimize total financial losses, which includes not just real property losses but also the income lost until reconstruction is complete. Reconstruction is also an opportunity to foster the transfer or availability of supporting technologies to targeted business sectors, including biotechnology, information technology, higher education, and small business in general. Government, business, community leaders, and design professionals must be alert to opportunities to improve supporting infrastructure, not merely replace it.

ADOPT A MODEL BUILDING CODE

A long-standing institutional bias exists among state and local authorities to adopt their own building codes, in the belief that the regulatory needs of their own jurisdictions are unique. The interests and safety of the public are better served by the adoption of a forward-looking and cost-effective model building code based on the most current national and international research. While force majeure is often a catalyst for building code revisions, such revisions are more appropriately addressed in the general context of the building type and should not be specific to a locality. The adoption of local codes duplicates national research and development efforts, inefficiently consuming precious resources. Local officials should instead be encouraged to participate in the development and revision of the model code.

TO OBTAIN THE COMPLETE REPORT


RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

22.08.06 The Pennsylvania Bridge Project: Balancing the Public Interests of Safety and Aesthetic
22.08.11 Revitalizing St. Louis: The Washington Avenue Windows Project
22.08.13 Plan Savannah 2000

Feedback

The AIA welcomes member feedback on Best Practice articles. To provide feedback on this article, please contact bestpractices@aia.org.
Keywords
Leadership
Events
News
Disaster design response
AIA components