

# LOCAL OPPOSITION TO WEST ST. TUNNEL SURFACES

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## Big Business and Real Estate Interests Collide with Community Concerns for Quality of Life

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After CB1 Passes a Resolution That Does not Specifically Address the Issue, the Chairperson Offers a Joint Statement with Business Groups That Recommends Tunneling; Dissenters Catch the Discrepancy And Insist on a Public Process

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[www.SaveWestStreet.com](http://www.SaveWestStreet.com) is Launched

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**W**hy are so many people in Battery Park City protesting the idea of tunneling West Street, when the rest of the city seems to think it's such a great idea?

Bill Love, an attorney says, "Even after the construction phase has ended, our access to the rest of Manhattan will be significantly worse than it is now."

Dan Lenahan, a resident building manager, says, "Aside from the time it would take to accomplish such a project, the resulting noise, disruption of services, dirt, and lack of access would make it a nightmare to live here."

Karen McDermott, head of internal communications at a private bank, says, "We residents who have lived through this ordeal, the threat of health problems, the loss of our streets and our beloved WTC are being pushed to the edge with this proposal to bury West Street."

Planners involved in redeveloping the World Trade Center site see West Street as a barrier that cuts Battery Park City off from the rest of the Manhattan. Earlier this year, the BPC Authority sponsored a study that investigated options for West Street, including tunnels, bridges, and platforms. BPCA president Tim Carey said the study, which has not been released, drew no conclusions and was meant to prepare his staff for discussions with the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation.

Several redevelopment plans for West Street have been proposed by the LMDC, with most attention focussed on putting part of the highway underground. Tunnel options have been envisioned from Chambers Street to the Battery, from Murray to Albany, and from Vesey to Liberty.

After taking in the redevelopment plans and subsequent discussions, downtowners say there are widespread misperceptions about West Street and Battery Park City. "Some of the well-meaning proposals to bury West Street "I believe that this 'isolation' is more a perception of people who don't live in the neighborhood than it was a reality for residents prior to 9/11/01. Pedestrian access to transportation and shopping was easy and convenient in all sorts of weather conditions."

Joanne Taylor, chief financial officer for a restaurant management company, agrees. "So many of the people quoted in the media seem to have no familiarity with the area," she said.

CB1 chairwoman and LMDC board member Madelyn Wils counseled patience. "People should reserve judgment until there's a plan," she said. She personally likes the idea of a memorial promenade over a tunnel.

On September 17, CB1 members passed a resolution that stated the community's position on the future of the WTC site. In this resolution, transportation and access issues are addressed generally, and the tunneling of West Street was not addressed. Although Bob Townley, executive director of Manhattan

Youth and a CB1 member, pressed the board to come to a consensus on the future of West Street and include this opinion in the resolution, the board decided to use the more general wording in the section that addresses transportation, which is, in part, "alleviate congestion, and ensure accessibility and livability."

Mr. Townley was not satisfied. "It's going to be hard for the community board to stop [plans to tunnel West Street] when we have designs and there's some momentum going," he said. Nancy Owens, an architect and board member who lives in Tribeca, agreed. "We know the nuances of our neighborhood, and we need to let the architects and planners know that we are concerned about what they do at the perimeter of the site," she said.

After this resolution was passed, a separate draft statement on WTC site plans co-authored by the executive committee of CB1 with the Downtown Alliance, Association for a Better New York, NYC Partnership, and the Real Estate Board of New York, was handed out for approval by the full board, with the warning that no one other than a CB1 member be allowed to see it. After a few minutes of reading, a public discussion on this private hand-out ensued.

Listeners soon understood that while the joint statement duplicated the community board's resolution on the future of the WTC site to a great extent, there were variations which some board members were reading for the first time. Among these was a reference to West Street, with board members being asked to ally themselves with the business organizations in approving a recommendation to the city and state to tunnel the street.

A number of CB1 members protested this particular point, and the board's participation in the statement was not approved. Two days later, the joint statement was released to the media without the endorsement of Community Board 1.

Some BPC residents are more sanguine at the idea of a West Street tunnel. Craig Hall, a technology consultant at JP Morgan Chase, said, "Some type of disruption unfortunately is going to be something that we will have to live with for at least the next five to seven years. During the WTC rebuild, there will be no escape apart from leaving downtown. The key here is to force a minimization of that disruption."

*Reprinted from the Battery Park City Broadsheet, Oct. 5, 2002.*

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