



Gerson outlines plan for his Downtown district

By Josh Rogers

Councilmember Alan Gerson, whose district includes the World Trade Center site and all of its surrounding neighborhoods, last week released a “blueprint” on how to make Lower Manhattan a more livable place as the grandiose plans to rebuild Downtown proceed.

“What we need is a human vision, a human blueprint for rebuilding,” Gerson said at a City Hall press conference last Thursday. “The people who live here need to have their livability needs be taken into account as the fundamental framework as we move forward.”

The 13-page report is primarily a summary of positions Gerson has taken since the Sept. 11 attack forever changed his district. The Democratic primary for the open City Council seat was scheduled for Sept. 11, 2001, but was postponed that morning. Gerson went on to win the primary two weeks later and won the general election in November.

Some of his positions, such as a call to preserve affordable housing in the district, pre-date the terror attack.

Gerson said his proposals fit in well with the Lower Manhattan plans of Mayor Mike Bloomberg and Gov. George Pataki, who have both outlined improvements to attract and retain residents Downtown.

“It’s absolutely compatible,” said Gerson. “It’s an extension of it.”

One of the only contradictions Gerson saw with Pataki’s plan is the governor’s call to build a West St. tunnel adjacent to the W.T.C. site. Gerson said there needs to be more study and consultation with residents before a decision is made on the \$900 million tunnel, which some think will improve pedestrian connections to Battery Park City and others feel will be an expensive worsening of the situation.

“We don’t want a fait accompli from the governor,” he said.

Gerson also called for a tour-bus parking facility under the W.T.C. site. Pataki and two agencies he has 50 percent control over, the Port Authority and the Lower Manhattan Development Corp., at first indicated a preference for a bus garage under the W.T.C. memorial area, but after many relatives of the victims of the 9/11 attack raised objections, the agencies said they were looking for alternatives at or near the site.

Gerson said last week he was against parking under the “core elements” of the memorial site, but P.A. officials have said efforts to build parking around the footprints of the Twin Towers, for example, would put severe limits on the number of spaces you could build under the memorial.

Other recommendations in the report included:

- * A call for a Lower Manhattan Housing Preservation Trust Fund. Gerson did not propose a mechanism to finance the fund, but said it should be used to help residents maintain rent protections in Independence Plaza in Tribeca, Gateway Plaza in Battery Park City, and housing complexes in the Lower East Side and Chinatown.

- * A call for the L.M.D.C. to allocate about \$20 million, a figure which represents about one percent of the agency’s federally-funded Community Development Block Grant, for support services to “vulnerable” groups such as children, senior citizens and the unemployed.

- * A call for the city’s Dept. of Environmental Protection to conduct dust and particle tests for dangerous W.T.C. chemicals in businesses, parks, and Downtown air vents. He did not have any recommendations for the federal Environmental Protection Agency, which has been criticized by some residents for not doing enough, outreach and follow-up when officials have found chemicals in the E.P.A. apartment and cleanup and testing program.

Gerson said he mentioned the report to John Whitehead, L.M.D.C. chairperson, who “seemed genuinely interested and responsive.”

Spokespersons for the L.M.D.C. did not return a call for comment.

In the course of the news conference, Gerson extracted a pledge from Matthew Goldstein, City University chancellor. As Goldstein was leaving an appointment at City Hall, Gerson asked the chancellor to support his call to rebuild the Borough of Manhattan Community College’s Fiterman Hall, which was badly damaged Sept. 11.

“I agree with everything you say,” Goldstein told Gerson.

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