



**REBUILDING DOWNTOWN**

**Downtowners brainstorm at L.M.D.C. workshops**

By Josh Rogers

Before the Lower Manhattan Development Corp. had a staff or an office, John Whitehead, the agency’s chairperson, in Jan. 2002 said it was “the only organization in history to get over \$2 billion that we never asked for.” Now with about \$1.3 billion of federal money left to spend, the L.M.D.C. has begun a series of invitation-only neighborhood workshops to get feedback on how best to use the money.



*Downtown Express photo by Elisabeth Robert*  
Bill Love, right, a leader of a group opposed to building a tunnel under West St., and Robin Forst, far left, a Battery Park City resident who is Councilmember Alan Gerson’s deputy chief of staff, participated in last Thursday’s invitation-only workshop organized by the Lower Manhattan Development Corp.

The first two of six brainstorming sessions were held in the Financial District and Battery Park City last week and many of the participants said they were glad they went.

Catherine Hughes, a Financial District resident whose apartment overlooks the World Trade Center site, said it was the best of many similar workshops she has attended because at this one, everyone had strong ties to Lower Manhattan.

“You have people who live and work and are invested in the community,” said Hughes, a member of Community Board 1. “You don’t have people from other places saying ‘restore the skyline.’ They don’t have to walk past the garbage.”

The L.M.D.C. has invited up to 100 residents, business people and leaders of Downtown non-profit institutions to each of the forums. Kevin Rampe, L.M.D.C. president made opening remarks at the first session Tuesday, and Daniel Doctoroff, deputy mayor of economic development and rebuilding, spoke at the one in Battery Park City. They said they will use the information at the meetings to help them make decisions about Downtown’s future.

This week, there will be workshops in the City Hall/Seaport area and Chinatown. Next week the sessions will cover Tribeca/Soho and the Lower East Side/Little Italy.

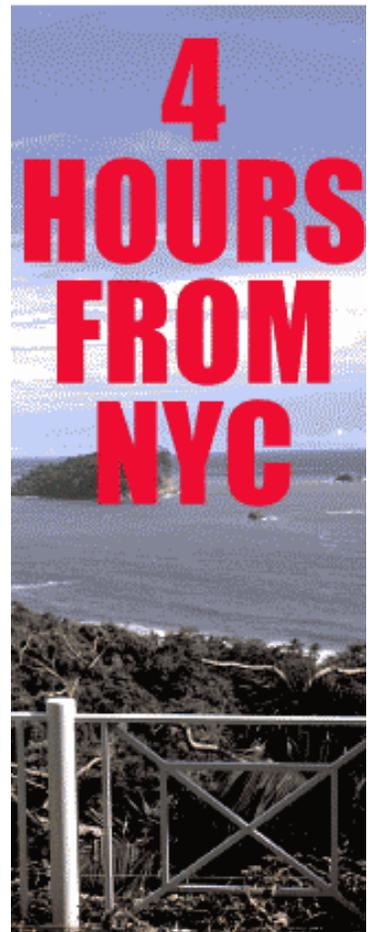
Kelly Clarke, a Battery Park City resident whose brother died in the W.T.C., may have been the only participant last week who lost a close relative to the Sept. 11 attack. She said discussing the neighborhood issues in small groups reduced the tensions between 9/11 family members and residents. “Everyone was respectful,” Clarke said Thursday as she was leaving the B.P.C. meeting. “There wasn’t a lot of anger like there was at other meetings.”

Clarke, who was profiled in the June 17 issue of Downtown Express, moved Downtown from New Jersey so she could be closer to the place where her brother died. She said she came to the meeting to give her thoughts about making the pedestrian crossings at West St. safer and heard many good ideas on other subjects from her neighbors. In particular, she liked the idea of turning the closed 10/10 firehouse across the street from the W.T.C. into a fire museum/memorial and opening a new firehouse in Battery Park City, closer to where more people live.

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The subject of West St. was a dominant theme at just about all of the tables at the B.P.C. session. At least one person at almost every table expressed opposition to a proposed vehicular tunnel along West St., either because of the costs, the construction disruption or skepticism about whether the tunnel would ease pedestrian connections.

At the Financial District session, the tunnel was hardly mentioned. At both meetings, there was a lot of concern about the amount of construction being planned in and around the W.T.C. site.

“If you have construction going on all of the time and you’re hearing the jack hammering, it is really difficult to live in a place like that,” said Katy Popielarczyk, 24, who lives in the Wall St. area.

One participant, an executive at a large Downtown department store, said she felt the meetings were too geared to residents and did not focus enough on business needs such as easing traffic problems.. In particular, the executive, who requested anonymity, said the city move to close Church St. and make it into a bus lane has made it harder for customers to get to the store. She did say she felt comfortable expressing her views at the forum.

There was a lot of support for improving parks and creating programs, spaces and housing for local artists at the workshops. There was strong support for building a connection to the Long Island Rail Road and J.F.K. Airport at the Wall St. session.

“You’ve got to bring in that transportation center because the businesses are going to leave,” said Donald Simone, a partner at Thacher Proffitt & Wood. The mid-sized law firm had offices in the W.T.C. and plans to move from its temporary Midtown home to the World Financial Center around Labor Day. Simone said he was skeptical that business people would take a train to the airport, but he thought a new commuter connection was essential.

One Battery Park City resident, Victor Chiu, said he was concerned about what will happen once the \$280 million in federal grants to encourage residents to move and stay Downtown runs out. He said there needs to be other incentives to get people to stay past the two year commitment that the L.M.D.C. program requires. “What’s going to happen after the grants are over,” Chiu asked.

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