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Meeting About Ground Zero Finds Security at Forefront

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Amid continuing security concerns over the future of ground zero, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Gov. George E. Pataki met yesterday for an hourlong strategy session on speeding redevelopment of the site and holding onto potential tenants for the area, in particular Goldman, Sachs & Company.

Developers at ground zero are now grappling with a range of concerns, chiefly from the police, about the vulnerability to attack posed by the location of the 1,776-foot Freedom Tower, as well as traffic flow and other factors.

Aides to Mr. Bloomberg and Mr. Pataki said that the two men discussed the security concerns yesterday, and were both satisfied that developers were taking the issues under advisement and would make any changes necessary to protect the tower.

But they also emphasized that the site of the Sept. 11 attack should be restored and developed without fear of attack, the aides said.

"The Freedom Tower should be built with the highest safety and security standards, yet allow for a soaring design that reclaims New York's skyline with an enduring symbol of freedom," said Lynn Rasic, a spokeswoman for Mr. Pataki, after the meeting. "The governor believes that the tower must be a building that will make our city and nation proud."

Some police officials remain frustrated over the handling of their security concerns by city and state representatives, and lingering tensions remain on all sides.

In August 2004, Deputy Police Commissioner Michael Sheehan sent a letter to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey that cited security concerns, but when he received no response, a follow-up letter was sent in October, according to a person who has been briefed on the correspondence.

A significant concern, the person said, was the 25-foot setback for the tower. The concern was that the short distance from the street would leave the building vulnerable to a truck bomb, the person said, and security experts have said a larger setback would reduce the threat.

The second letter expressed concerns that an earlier meeting on the matter had been postponed, the person said; at that meeting, Port Authority officials were to provide information on the Freedom Tower to the police to aid in preparation of their security assessments.

But one official involved in the rebuilding effort said city and state officials had responded to the correspondence in due course. The official said the bigger problem had been that the police were imprecise

about their security concerns for months, and that they took months to provide clear standards for security of the building projects.

This official said that some security issues remained unresolved by the city and state, including choosing the streets that will be reopened and managing the security of traffic in the area.

Mr. Pataki also restated his intent to persuade Goldman, Sachs - a large and symbolic presence in Lower Manhattan - to return to its plans for building a new headquarters on West Street, which were shelved because of the company's concern about a proposed tunnel near the site for a restored West Street-Route 9A. Those plans for a tunnel have since been abandoned.

"There will be ongoing conversations with Goldman, Sachs, which everyone agrees is very important," said a city official who was familiar with the meeting and spoke on condition of anonymity because it was considered a private talk. "Keeping Goldman in that area is still very doable."