

Empty Ground

This month we shall see who will develop Ground Zero. Well, at least we hope. The State has given the Port Authority and developer Larry Silverstein until March 14 to settle their disagreements on who will develop the site. The blame games should stop and the players that build the most important project in this century should put their disagreements behind them. But will they?

What I object to is that the City and State are trying to discredit Larry Silverstein in the press, in order to bring in a new developer for Towers Three and Four. Why don't they just say that they want to scrub the entire Daniel Libeskind plan that was once touted as the design that will transform Ground Zero from an empty pit into a beacon of freedom? Why don't they say that the last four years have been wasted in trying to please everyone from politicians to victims' families and that this attempt at inclusion has stalled the process? Silverstein isn't to blame at all, it's the lack of leadership from day one. But then someone would have to look in the mirror and take responsibility for what has become an embarrassment to this city and to this nation.

Should the agreement between Silverstein and the Port Authority be that he will relinquish his rights to build the additional towers, I would hope that he is given proper compensation for all his efforts. However, if he is to develop the entire site, the Port Authority needs to speed up its efforts to prepare the site for development and Liberty Bonds should be authorized.

The real estate industry is awaiting a finalization of sorts. Meanwhile, businesses that have long since given up reliance on what would be the new World Trade Center hold press conferences touting how great the new Downtown will be. Residential is booming, although retail development could be better, especially the gourmet food component that everyone is waiting upon. But the latest word from brokers is that Whole Foods may take as long as two years to locate Downtown.

Those in the media have been criticized for their candid comments on the lack of progress at Ground Zero. I will pose this question: If Silverstein had sole control over the site, would we be where we are today, with an empty pit of shameless delays?

We are approaching the five-year anniversary of 9/11, and several commercial projects that were in mere planning stages when the towers were attacked are soon to be completed or occupied—the Hearst Building, One Bryant Park and The New York Times Building just to name a few. For some projects progress has been made, not so Ground Zero.



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