no small plans

By Daniel L. Doctoroff

INTRODUCTION

The history of New York City's development is one not of incremental change, but rather of great leaps forward. Perhaps more than any other city, the current landscape seems largely attributable to a few critical, identifiable decisions.

Almost 200 years ago, in 1811, the New York state legislature approved a plan to divide Manhattan into a precise grid of north-south avenues and east-west streets – a plan that essentially determined the development of the city for decades to come.

The construction of the Erie Canal in the early 19th century linked the port of New York to the interior of the country, forever changing the competitive position of the city and ushering in an era of unprecedented prosperity. Governor DeWitt Clinton planned the canal as other cities – including New Orleans, Philadelphia, and Baltimore – threatened to become the primary connection to the ever-expanding west.

As the canal linked New York to the West, the Brooklyn Bridge – completed in 1883 – linked Manhattan to Brooklyn. This physical linkage accelerated the political linkage that followed in 1898, when the City of Brooklyn became the Borough of Brooklyn, thus joining the nation's largest and third largest cities into one metropolis.

In the mid-19th century, New York's leaders sought to build Central Park to provide open space to an increasingly crowded urban environment. Although it was to be built on rough and as yet undeveloped land, the 843-acre site was nonetheless already in the heart of the city. The decision to invest a massive amount of public funds in open space rather than development was therefore particularly prescient and in retrospect absolutely essential to the health of New York.

The Harbor District will link 182 acres of new or enhanced parkland and six miles of waterfront esplanades with the Brooklyn Bridge, the Statue of Liberty, and the Manhattan skyline to create one of the world's greatest waterfront destinations.

Equally significant, was the building of the subway system. Between 1913 and 1923 alone, New York added 325 miles of subway track, making Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens broadly accessible for the first time. This gave a teeming city the breathing room it needed to develop into the capital of the world.

In each of these cases and in selected others, New York City's leaders demonstrated an uncommon willingness to take bold steps – often in the face of intense criticism and meaningful risk – that led to a transformation in the city's landscape – and its fortunes. And while some of New York's prosperity can be attributed to the fortunes of geography or the vagaries of luck, a remarkable portion is the direct result of the ambitious planning of its distant past.

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THE REBIRTH OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NEW YORK CITY

From Central Park to the subway system, the history of economic development in New York City is a series of big, bold endeavors. And despite a lack of grand plans during the second half of the 20th century, New York City is once again thinking big. With an economic development strategy that focuses on the three objectives of making the city more livable, more business friendly, and more economically diverse, the Bloomberg administration has set an agenda that will last for decades. From reclaiming its crumbling waterfront to the transformation of the Hudson Yards on Manhattan's Far West Side – New York City has once again adopted the famous advice of legendary urban planner Daniel Burnham: "Make no small plans."

But what of New York's recent past? What planning has taken place in the last 50 years that future generations of New Yorkers will look back upon as shaping the future of the city?

There are some contenders for that list in post World War II New York. The attraction of the United Nations helped to cement the city's place as the unofficial international capital – as the world's second home. Similarly, the redevelopment of Times Square in the 1990s, along with a corresponding drop in the citywide crime rate, helped engineer a dramatic reversal in the perception of New York as a city in decline.

Fresh Kills, once the largest landfill in the United States, is currently being transformed into a magnificent park, offering more than 2,000 acres of active recreation, wetlands, bike trails, and areas of natural beauty.

But by and large, as planners and historians look for the great economic development achievements of the second half of the 20th century, they will find that the cupboard is bare. There are a variety of explanations for the paucity of great planning initiatives from that era. One is the general social and economic upheaval that faced all American cities during the post-war era, including a massive influx of overwhelmingly poor domestic migrants, civil rights unrest, and the siren song of suburban living that lured away much of the urban middle class and its contributions to the tax base. In New York, the admirable devolution of power and incorporation of community input that was so lacking during the Robert Moses era provided a significant obstacle to big projects. These forces – along with state control over the city's day-to-day operations – left little room for grand plans.

The terrible tragedy of September 11, 2001, caused New Yorkers to challenge their basic assumptions – about security, community, and perhaps more importantly, about New York's place in the world. It would have been natural to conclude that the mightiness – even arrogance – of New York's past should be replaced by humility and by diminished expectations. One might have expected New Yorkers to shy away from the very boldness that made the city a target for terrorists. It seemed possible that the terrorists who had destroyed buildings and lives had also finally destroyed New York's special capacity for thinking and acting boldly. The fundamental question in the immediate wake of 9/11 was: would New York City affirm its 400-year-old promise – that anyone from anywhere with a dream and desire has the potential to make it to the top?

A look across New York City today demonstrates that the answer to that question is a resounding yes. For the first time in decades, New Yorkers are thinking big. And big visions are being backed by real public and private investments – in majestic places that will define the New York of the future, in transportation, in housing, and in open space – to ensure that the city grows even greater; and to ensure that New York is able to offer its promise to more and more people. Under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the city has returned to its roots by once again taking action today to build the New York of tomorrow.

This is the story of New York's return to economic development on a grand scale.

THE 50-YEAR CYCLE

In January of 2004, developer Bruce Ratner and his firm, Forest City Ratner, announced plans to buy the New Jersey Nets and move the team to Brooklyn to play in a magnificent new arena to be designed by renowned architect Frank Gehry. The arena will be the centerpiece of a plan to add 7,300 units of housing and 628,000 square feet of office space over old rail yards in Downtown Brooklyn. The move is scheduled to take place in 2009 – just over 50 years after Walter O'Malley wrenched the beloved Dodgers out of Brooklyn.

That a major sports franchise would consider leaving the suburbs for Downtown Brooklyn would have been unthinkable even a few years ago. In fact, the possibility of the Nets' move represents the closing of a 50-year cycle of challenges that have faced the City of New York. Today, for the first time in recent memory, New York City has the tools necessary to create change: a comprehensive and forward-looking strategy, supported by a robust and committed private sector that is working in creative ways with the current administration all over the city. With these tools, the city can meet the challenge issued by prior generations of New Yorkers: to apply vision and action to transform the city.

NEW YORK'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

From the beginning, the *objective* of the Bloomberg administration's economic development policies was clear: to create jobs for New Yorkers and to grow the tax base in order to pay for essential programs and services. The *strategy* for achieving that objective, however, was less clear. The Bloomberg administration decided to approach government like a business and develop a strategy based on competitive advantage. This was a useful framework, particularly as it led the administration to consider New York's value proposition – especially its strengths and weaknesses.

It is clear, for example, that one of New York's strengths is its huge market size, with leadership in several key industries such as finance and media. Moreover, New York also obviously has a powerful image that people around the world recognize.

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But New York's real strength is much harder to define. It is often said that New York is the world's second home. Currently about 40 percent of New York residents were born outside the United States. Another 28 percent have at least one parent who is an immigrant, and another 15 percent are from somewhere else in the U.S. New York is a beacon for dreamers and risk takers from all around the world. That in turn continuously attracts companies looking to tap into this huge pool of energy and ambition. Since 9/11, New York has one other important strength: an incomparable unity of purpose and sense of community that has brought New Yorkers closer to one another and to people across the globe.

That's not to say that all things are wonderful in New York. It has its weaknesses. The city is expensive. There are lingering perceptions – largely false – about crime and grime. New York doesn't educate its children like it should. And New York doesn't have a reputation for being an easy place to do business, for small or large employers.

To build on the city's strengths and tackle its weaknesses, the team developed a three-part economic development strategy. The basic formula is not complicated. First, make New York City more livable, so that businesses and individuals want to locate there. Second, make New York City more business-friendly. That means creating an environment that gives businesses the tools to be competitive and create jobs. Finally, diversify the New York City economy, in order to reduce the city's dependence on financial services and on Manhattan.

STRATEGY #1: MAKE NEW YORK CITY MORE LIVABLE

The first pillar of New York's economic development strategy is to make the city more livable. New York simply cannot attract employers or residents without a high quality of life. Of course, livability is driven to a very large degree by issues outside the economic development arena – namely crime and schools. As such, the staggering drop in the crime rate first seen in the mid 1990s was the starting point. This drop has continued unabated since Mayor Bloomberg took office, with New York safer today than it's been in four decades. Overall, since 1993, crime in New York has fallen by almost 70 percent.

Attention has also focused on improving the school system to make sure New York's children have the skills they need to thrive. The effort began with state legislation to provide for direct mayoral control over the city's public schools for the first time. Other major educational initiatives underway include an end to social promotion, a significant capital program to expand the system's infrastructure, better school safety, expanding the number of charter schools, and new curricula in both reading and math.

But beyond safe streets and better schools, there are things that an economic development team can do to make a city more livable. In particular, this includes strengthening neighborhoods by building housing and parks across the city.

The effort to build new and revitalize existing neighborhoods extends across all five boroughs, thanks to the New Housing Marketplace Plan – a $7.5 billion plan to build and preserve 165,000 units of affordable housing in New York City by the year 2013.

The effort also relies heavily on the legacy of New York's industrial past – namely old manufacturing sites throughout the city and 578 miles of waterfront, most of which is filled with run-down wharves and warehouses. Residential buildings are springing up across the entire city on vacant or run-down sites. Even the neighborhoods that had been given up for the dead – including East New York, where the aptly named "Death Wish 3" starring Charles Bronson was filmed – are becoming vibrant communities again.

The administration has embarked on the most ambitious waterfront reclamation effort in our city's history, across all five boroughs. The most spectacular example of waterfront reclamation is the Greenpoint/Williamsburg area of Brooklyn. There, the rezoning will transform a litany of crumbling piers, and abandoned factories and warehouses, into an elegant waterside promenade with 54 acres of parks and open space with 10,000 units of new housing facing the most dramatic skyline in the world.

In every borough, the administration is turning old uses like crumbling piers, abandoned factories, garbage dumps, and coast guard bases into modern housing and stunning new parks – which we believe will catalyze investment in new neighborhoods. This includes the area under the Brooklyn Bridge, the city's largest landfill on Staten Island, – which will become the city's largest park – and Governor's Island, 172 acres just off the tip of Lower Manhattan – which the city and state acquired in 2003 from the federal government for the whopping price of one dollar. The Island will become the centerpiece of this sweeping new effort to transform the city's underused waterfront into the greatest harbor district in the world.

STRATEGY #2: MAKE NEW YORK CITY MORE BUSINESS-FRIENDLY

The effort to make New York more livable will help the city attract and retain a strong talent pool, and in turn help attract and retain businesses. But there is more to be done to ensure that New York is increasingly business-friendly. This requires efforts to ensure that businesses – large and small – think of the city's government as a partner in their growth, not an obstacle to it.

For example: in the past, our workforce development efforts had failed due to the lack of a meaningful linkage between the needs of employers and the training offered to employees. Virtually no attempt had been made to ensure that providers tailored their training to produce graduates with the skills required by companies that were hiring. Similarly, there had been only minimal efforts to attract or aid businesses by helping to provide a labor pool with the necessary skills to help those businesses grow further.

It was therefore decided to merge the Department of Employment into the Department of Business Services, to better link employers and employees. Additionally, the Department of Business Services was renamed the Department of Small Business Services (SBS) to reinforce the agency's goal of promoting the growth of the small enterprises that collectively account for the core of the city's workforce.

The most pressing need in New York is to provide companies with adequate office space. In 2002, Economic Research Associates predicted that over the coming two decades, the New York metropolitan region (including New Jersey, Long Island, Westchester, and Connecticut) would add about 450,000 office-using jobs. For the region as a whole, this translates to approximately 110 million square feet of office space for the region. To capture New York's fair share of the projected growth, the city must add 68 million square feet of office space.

The most immediate source of additional office space will, of course, be in Lower Manhattan, where the rebuilding in the wake of the destruction of the World Trade Center is well underway. For New York City and for the world, the rebuilding is more than just an investment. It is a moral imperative to demonstrate resolve in the face of attacks that struck at the heart of what makes New York great: dynamism, diversity, and creativity. The rebuilding effort underway reflects a determination to make downtown better than ever.

The effort starts at the World Trade Center itself, where construction of the Freedom Tower will soon begin. The city will also continue to work closely with the state, the Port Authority, and Silverstein Properties to ensure a plan that builds out the much needed retail on the site as quickly as possible, restoring life and activity to the surrounding streets.

But no matter how magnificent the World Trade Center site proves to be, it must be complemented by an equally bold vision for all of Lower Manhattan – one that will make it a "Downtown for the 21st Century." For example, transportation will be a critical part of restoring the area. Over the last 30 years, even before 9/11, Lower Manhattan lost more than 60,000 jobs to Midtown and elsewhere. It was simply less attractive and less accessible than it should have been. Midtown enjoys easy access from Long Island, Westchester, and New Jersey. More than 3.8 million suburban residents live within an hour's commute. That's 50 percent more than can get to Lower Manhattan in the same amount of time.

This gap has serious implications for the location decisions of major employers, which typically seek to minimize employee commuting time – particularly for the most senior managers. With new transit stations, new airport and commuter connections, new boulevards and streets, the Bloomberg administration and the state will make Lower Manhattan easier to get to – from the region and the world – thereby enhancing its competitive position.

To keep Lower Manhattan on a par with Midtown and make it a global center, the area must have direct airport access. Imagine stepping onto a train and 30 minutes later walking to your gate at JFK. This can become a reality by extending the new AirTrain system – from JFK through a new or existing tunnel to Lower Manhattan. Perhaps more importantly, improved airport access to JFK also will enable an easier trip for commuters to Lower Manhattan from Long Island, via an intermediate station in Jamaica, Queens.

The South Bronx Gateway Center is part of the city's five borough economic development strategy. The Center, which was approved in February, will bring almost $400 million in investment to the South Bronx, produce thousands of new jobs for local residents, and create a safer and stronger quality of life for local residents.

Greenpoint-Williamsburg is one of 52 rezonings the Bloomberg Administration launched during the first term, in the most ambitious land-use transformation in the city's modern history.

To make it easier and more exciting to get around Downtown once commuters and visitors arrive, the new Fulton Transit Center will untangle the knot of 15 subway lines that converge in Lower Manhattan. And Santiago Calatrava's breathtaking design for the PATH station will welcome commuters to the new World Trade Center site. These two stations will be exhilarating gateways that lift everyone's eyes and spirits – whether it's a visitor from Buenos Aires seeing Lower Manhattan for the first time, or a commuter from New Jersey seeing it for the first time that day. These stations can be the first of Lower Manhattan's many additions to the landmarks of tomorrow.

To strengthen Lower Manhattan's commercial viability, it also must be a place that is attractive for employees and others at all times. Creating a true mixed-use, 24-hour community is the last element of the strategy for Downtown. For example, Fulton Street is the major east-west artery in Lower Manhattan. If you walk along Fulton Street today, you'll see 99-cent stores and vacant storefronts. The proposed plan can begin the transformation of that street into a great place to shop, see a movie, look at art, or just people-watch as pedestrians walk from river to river.

But though critically important for both practical and symbolic reasons, the full build-out of Lower Manhattan will provide only about 14 million square feet of the 68 million square feet of commercial space New York City needs to capture its fair share of the regional office market – leaving a big gap. The Bloomberg administration has put forward a plan to fill much of that gap by transforming a desolate area of Manhattan called the Hudson Yards.

The inspiration for this transformation is one of the bold initiatives of the early 20th century – the creation of Park Avenue. One hundred years ago there was no Park Avenue. Instead, there was just a twisted mass of tracks, ushering trains in and out of the city to an old, run-down station. Forced to act by the state legislature after the latest in a string of deadly accidents, the New York Central Railroad built a deck over these tracks, from Madison Avenue to Lexington Avenue, from 42nd to 56th Street. Down the middle of the deck a grand boulevard – Park Avenue – was built. And 30 years later, dozens of buildings stood on the platform – including the Waldorf-Astoria hotel and a new Grand Central Station. One hundred years later, the trains still run under Park Avenue. Today on the blocks over the tracks, 160,000 people earn their living, forming the core of the greatest central business district in the world.

New York now faces a similar opportunity, just blocks from Midtown Manhattan. The area known as the Hudson Yards – on the Far West Side between 28th and 42nd streets, between 9th Avenue and the Hudson River, features rail yards surrounded by block after block of vacant lots, parking lots, rail cuts, warehouses, and auto body shops. The transformation of the Hudson Yards is the single best investment New York City can make in its future, through the creation of a spectacular new community.

Perhaps the most important step is to provide mass transit access to the area by extending the #7 line from its last stop in Times Square to a magnificent new station at 34th Street. Construction on the subway line will begin this year – along with a badly needed expansion of the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center. By finally bringing mass transit into this inaccessible area, upgrading the convention center, creating grand public buildings and a magnificent park network, and by rezoning the area, the public sector will unleash a wave of private market activity: 24 million square feet of office space and more than 14,000 apartments, many of which will be affordable to low- and middle-income families.

With the Hudson Yards expansion, and the new Moynihan Station as a gateway, Midtown will remain easily the country's largest central business district. Midtown and Downtown will meet companies' needs for space in the most sought-after business districts, at a premium price. But just as companies offer multiple products to meet the varying needs of different consumers, so, too, must New York offer a variety of types of spaces for different users and different uses. As globalization and technology force companies to cut costs, they look for less expensive and more flexible real estate. In recent years, they increasingly looked away from Manhattan and toward Jersey City.

The Bloomberg administration will not stand by idly while major employers leave New York. Instead, we're fighting back, by pursuing development in the outer boroughs on a never-before-seen scale. For example, New York is investing selectively to catalyze a significant expansion in central business districts in Brooklyn and Queens. Both of these areas provide lower cost facilities than Manhattan but with the convenience of the city's transportation infrastructure and access to the city's talent pool. The goal is to make the east bank of the East River as viable an alternative as the Jersey side of the Hudson.

As we look ahead to the next four years, we have already begun to move these projects from the minds of great designers to blueprints to shovels in the ground to ribbon-cutting ceremonies. We have the resources, we have a plan, we have a deadline. And perhaps most importantly, we have a vision.

The effort to meet the city's diverse office needs stretches into Queens to the Flushing neighborhood near LaGuardia Airport. It also extends into the South Bronx, which will see the development of new office buildings, including one that will house the city's Department of Finance.

Citywide development of new commercial space requires adequate commuter access if New York is to achieve its full potential. A look at New York City history makes one thing clear: where transportation goes, neighborhoods follow. Beyond Lower Manhattan and the Hudson Yards, plans are underway to expand and upgrade New York's transportation infrastructure. For example, the $5 billion East Side Access project will connect the Long Island Railroad to Grand Central Terminal via Queens. This project will enable faster access to Midtown and the emerging business district in Long Island City.

Ferries are another major piece of the transportation puzzle. In 1986, New York had just one ferry line – the Staten Island ferry. Today, dozens of lines carry 135,000 passengers a day across the Hudson and the East River to terminals up and down the waterfront. All across the five boroughs, the city is investing in new ferry terminals.

Collectively, investments in office space and transportation will preserve for New York its dominant share of the region's commercial base. But the city doesn't just need space to work and the means to get there. For example, the administration has tailored its corporate attraction and retention efforts to deliver service to customers – the companies that employ New Yorkers.

STRATEGY #3: DIVERSIFY THE NEW YORK CITY ECONOMY

After just a cursory study of the New York economy, two things are apparent: the city is becoming increasingly dependent on financial services, and increasingly – even alarmingly – Manhattan-centric. In 1975, financial services accounted for 16 percent of New York's total payroll. By the year 2000, that number had more than doubled – to 33 percent. Similarly, Manhattan's share of the city's payroll mushroomed from 21 percent to 40 percent.

Decades ago, the New York City economy included strong bases in industries like shipping, manufacturing, and printing. And while these and other industries remain in the five boroughs, they have suffered in the face of the same national and international competition that has drawn manufacturing employment out of the Rust Belt. New York City simply had too many cost and other disadvantages to hold onto these industries in the face of change.

The resulting concentration in financial services and in Manhattan has two important consequences. First, the city's economy is overly exposed to the boom and bust cycle of Wall Street. When the stock market booms and financial institutions' profits and payrolls grow with it, the city's budget enjoys a windfall frequently used to fund new programs and services. This proliferation is encouraged by the city's budget rules, which restrict the ability to build a "rainy day fund" to reduce the size of deficits in lean years. As a result, when the stock market falters and financial institutions cut bonuses and layoff workers, there is very little margin for error. Once or more each decade, therefore, New York's leaders face the need to trim even essential services. As Mayor Bloomberg has said, "When the economy catches a cold, Wall Street gets the flu, and New York City gets pneumonia."

The second significant ramification of this concentration of economic activity is on the lives of New Yorkers that don't have the skills to compete for high-paying jobs in financial services. While it is true that these high wage jobs result directly and indirectly in a variety of lower paying skilled and unskilled jobs, many New Yorkers are left out of the economy.

In decades past, manufacturing and other industries provided good jobs at attractive wages for less educated city residents, especially immigrants. For some, these jobs afforded entrepreneurial opportunities that led to great wealth. But for most, it was

All across New York, the city is reclaiming miles of abandoned industrial land along the waterfront and creating new riverfront parks, housing, and recreation centers.

simply the path to a stable income and the opportunity to care for and educate one's children, who might then have the chance to pursue even better things. In short, the New York economy offered a wide range of jobs to those on the lowest rung of the economic ladder. As lower-skilled jobs flee for lower-cost environments, there is a dearth of opportunities for upward mobility.

The job is to ensure that the economy provides employment to residents in all boroughs, from all backgrounds. As described above, however, the pursuit of a diversified employment base cannot proceed in a vacuum, with a fantastical disregard for economic realities. The city should not and will not seek to diversify into industries where New York cannot compete without heavy government subsidies. Instead, efforts are rooted in an understanding of New York's strengths and weaknesses. New York has natural competitive advantages for financial services, including a heavy concentration of both employers and employees. But New York's competitive advantage does not reach its limit at the northern side of Wall Street.

Take life sciences. New York is home to several of the world's top scientific research institutions, including Columbia University, Mount Sinai Hospital, and Rockefeller University. But researchers have consistently gone elsewhere to found companies. Led by New York's Economic Development Corporation, the administration is working to change that, by reaching out to scientists and entrepreneurs both in New York and around the world. For instance, on Manhattan's East Side, work will begin this year on the new East River Science Park, which will create 2,500 biotech jobs.

Tourism is another strong example. Not only is this an industry where New York can compete and win, it is also an industry that provides good jobs to people on the lowest rung of the economic ladder, often immigrants. That's why the administration successfully sought legislation to more than double the size of the woefully inadequate Jacob K. Javits Convention Center. That is also why the administration has been creative in developing our tourism base.

We created NYC Big Events to bring major attractions to New York, like the Republican National Convention in 2004. And we are the first city to have a chief marketing officer dedicated to building the city's brand and generating tens of millions of dollars in promotion. In the coming year, these two agencies will work even more closely together – and benefit from an additional $15 million in annual funding – nearly tripling our current tourism investment. That's what is necessary in order to compete with cities that spend far more than we do to attract tourists and the jobs they create – and to achieve our goal of '50 by 15' – 50 million visitors by 2015.

Another example is film and TV production – a $5 billion industry in New York that creates good jobs not just for actors, but for carpenters, electricians, and caterers. As a result of recent tax credits passed in partnership with the state, New York's studios – for the first time in decades – are now competing with Hollywood – and holding their own. The city's three major studios – one here at the Navy Yard, two in Queens – are fully booked with $650 million in new productions, creating 6,000 jobs.

New York has also not abandoned its industrial heritage. Instead, the administration has just recognized where the city can compete. There will never be large-scale manufacturing again in New York. But there is ongoing growth in niche manufacturing of products that serve the huge local market, like ethnic products or specialized garment work for high-end designers requiring quick turnaround. And that's just the beginning. The Bloomberg administration has focused efforts underway in a variety of sectors where New York can make a distinctive offer to companies, and thus help put more New Yorkers to work.

CONCLUSION

As we look ahead to the next four years, we have already begun to move these projects from the minds of great designers to blueprints to shovels in the ground to ribbon-cutting ceremonies. We have the resources, we have a plan, we have a deadline. And perhaps most importantly, we have a vision. It's a vision that started in the wake of 9/11, when the nation and the city vowed to rebuild – even as smoke was still rising from the ashes of the World Trade Center. It's a vision that recognizes and builds upon the economic forces of the last 50 years – forces that create both challenges and opportunities. It's a vision that reasserts the incomparable will of New Yorkers to stand together through times of crisis to not just rebuild, but rather to renew our great city and make it greater than ever before.