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Offer of Governors Island Inspires a Host of Ideas for City Use

By DIANE CARDWELL

A biotechnology incubator. A public beach. A Colonial theme park with actors in period garb. These are but a few of the ideas floated yesterday at a City Council hearing examining potential uses for Governors Island.

Since President Bush announced last week that he would return the island to the city if officials had a satisfactory plan, a slew of ideas have been tossed out, springing from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's proposal to use it primarily as a campus for the City University of New York.

But several council members expressed concern yesterday over the apparent lack of details for that plan, which Bloomberg administration officials say is just in the preliminary stages. Asked, for example, if an estimate of \$282 million to create a campus on the island seemed realistic, Josh Sirefman, the chief operating officer of the Economic Development Corporation, said that there was "no question that it would be expensive" to rehabilitate the buildings of the former Coast Guard station for any purpose, but added that "in the absence of a specific plan," it would be premature to speculate.

Also at issue is what sort of projects the city could develop there. Some officials have argued that a provision in the 1997 Balanced Budget Act requires the government to sell the island at fair market value, although the Bush administration has proposed getting around that requirement by using the island as a public amenity.

Officials proposed a host of their own ideas to make the island economically viable, mentioning hotels, water parks, amphitheaters, athletic fields, beaches and a historic village like Colonial Williamsburg.

Cristyne L. Nicholas, president of NYC & Company, the city's visitors' bureau, testified that an educational conference center should be part of the plan because there is strong demand that the city cannot meet, and responded enthusiastically to a proposal by Councilman James Sanders of Queens to create a Colonial attraction. Later, a spokesman characterized the idea of "heritage tourism" as one of many being considered.

Bloomberg administration officials were lukewarm. "Unfortunately, all the buildings do not date back to the Colonial period," said Daniel L. Doctoroff, the deputy mayor for economic development and rebuilding, "but right now we are focusing on CUNY."

And William T. Cunningham, the mayor's communications director, cautioned that any for-profit enterprise could jeopardize the city's ability to buy the island for a token sum, and that projects undertaken should support the mission of the school.