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Bloomberg Focuses on Rest (as in Rest of the World)

By MICHAEL BARBARO

Michael R. Bloomberg, determined to parlay his government experience and vast fortune into a kind of global mayoralty, is creating a high-powered consulting group to help him reshape cities around the world long after he leaves office.

To build the new organization, paid for out of his own pocket, the billionaire mayor is taking much of his City Hall team with him: He has already hired many of his best-known and longest-serving deputies, promising them a chance to export the policies they developed in New York to far-flung places like Louisville, Ky., and Mexico City.

For Mr. Bloomberg, the project is the first concrete phase of a post-mayoral life that aides said would remain intensely focused on cities, long viewed by him as laboratories for large-scale experiments in public health, economic development and environmental sustainability.

Above all, the new endeavor reflects a profound confidence — never in short supply with this mayor — that it would behoove dozens of municipalities to replicate the ideas that defined his tenure: turning busy roads into pedestrian plazas, posting calorie counts in fast-food chains, creating a customer-service hotline for citizens.

“We have heard this huge demand and need from other cities to learn from New York City,” said Amanda M. Burden, the director of city planning in the Bloomberg administration, who plans to join the consulting group.

“Under this mayor,” she added, “New York is the epitome that cities look to of how to get things done.”

The organization, to be called Bloomberg Associates, will act as an urban SWAT team, deployed at the invitation of local governments to solve knotty, long-term challenges, like turning a blighted waterfront into a gleaming public space, or building subway-friendly residential neighborhoods.

In a twist on the traditional business model of consulting, clients will not be charged.

Much about the new group is still unknown. But as with most of Mr. Bloomberg's undertakings over the past decade, it will involve spending eye-popping sums of money with no expectation of earning a profit. (The annual budget will run in the tens of millions.)

The group resembles a government in exile. Mr. Bloomberg has recruited at least half a dozen top aides from his administration, including Janette Sadik-Khan, the transportation commissioner; Katherine Oliver, the commissioner of media and entertainment; and Kate D. Levin, the cultural affairs commissioner.

Bloomberg Associates will be run by George A. Fertitta, who as chief executive of the city's tourism agency oversaw a record increase in annual visitors to New York, to 54 million this year. Mr. Fertitta said in an interview that the group would eventually expand to about 20 to 25 employees, most of them drawn from the mayor's office, who will work closely with Mr. Bloomberg's sprawling charitable foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies. (Like the foundation, the consultancy will be housed inside a giant townhouse on the Upper East Side, around the corner from the mayor's home.)

The consulting group is the latest chapter in Mr. Bloomberg's long journey from political neophyte to much-admired mentor to fellow mayors, dozens of whom have flocked to City Hall to study his open-seat bullpen layout, attended his conferences about urban innovation and applied for grants from his foundation (called "mayors' school" by several city leaders who have spent time there).

Mr. Bloomberg's influence has already reached from Miami to Los Angeles, Chicago to Newark.

Mayor Mitchell J. Landrieu of New Orleans recalled receiving a \$4 million grant from Mr. Bloomberg last year to hire a team of eight outside experts that advised the city on how to lower its murder rate. Since then, the city has created a multiagency team to combat gang activity, set up a midnight basketball league to keep young men off the streets and pushed to make it harder for those charged with gun crimes to get out of jail.

The murder rate in New Orleans has fallen by 17 percent this year.

"To his credit," Mr. Landrieu said of Mr. Bloomberg, "this guy is putting his personal money into making city government work better."

Mr. Bloomberg, a careful student of numbers, argues that investments in cities make mathematical sense: More than half the world's population lives in urban areas, a figure expected to surge to about 70 percent over the next 40 years. The larger the city, the likelier

that a big idea will catch fire and be adopted elsewhere, as the mayor showed with his ban on smoking in restaurants and trans-fats in foods.

“Great cities steal ideas from each other,” said Edward Skyler, a former deputy mayor in Mr. Bloomberg’s City Hall and now a top executive at Citigroup.

Ms. Sadik-Khan, the transportation commissioner, said that mayors are routinely startled to learn how little money and staffing are required to create the bike lanes, pedestrian plazas and slower-speed zones that have remade New York City’s streets under Mr. Bloomberg.

“You can make these changes quickly and inexpensively,” she said, adding that “the success we’ve had here can be tailored and replicated in other places.”

Bloomberg Associates expects a measure of skepticism from officials in faraway metropolises who may chafe at a New York-centric approach. “It requires sensitivity,” said Ms. Sadik-Khan, whose agenda has stirred sometimes intense neighborhood backlash.

Mr. Fertitta said the group’s work could extend into new areas over time, like security and law enforcement. Those people close to Mr. Bloomberg said he would be eager to bring his departing police commissioner, Raymond W. Kelly, to Bloomberg Associates, a prospect Mr. Fertitta did not rule out.

A tricky topic: whether to offer guidance to New York. The mayor-elect, Bill de Blasio, ran a campaign that frequently maligned Bloomberg-era management and is seeking to become a national leader of his own, on the issue of income inequality.

“Sure, if they are looking for advice,” Mr. Fertitta said. Then he added another qualifier: “If there is not a conflicting relationship there.”

He said the organization would try to work with four to six cities a year. Given the mayor’s reputation and largess, Mr. Fertitta expects no problem finding clients.

“There will be people,” he predicted, “who will be lined up at the door.”

