

# CIVIC ALLIANCE TO REBUILD DOWNTOWN NEW YORK

Meeting Minutes

January 28, 2002 8:30-10:00 AM

The Memorial Process relating to the World Trade Center Site  
NYU Bobst Library, John Ben Snow Dining Room  
70 Washington Square South

## 1. Introduction and Welcome

Arthur Fried, of the Center for Excellence in New York City Governance, and the host of the meeting, welcomed the meeting participants to NYU. Bob Yaro, President of Regional Plan Association then began the meeting, and introduced Ray Gastil of the Van Alen Institute and the New York New Visions Memorials Committee, who acted as the moderator for the panel discussion.

## 2. Panel Discussion

Ray Gastil introduced the follow speakers of the panel:

- **Jill Lerner**, AIA, a principal in the architecture firm Kohn Pedersen Fox and co-chair of the Civic Alliance Memorials Committee and the New York New Visions Memorials Committee
- **Holly Leicht**, Director of Design, Planning and Advocacy for the Municipal Art Society and co-chair of the Civic Alliance Memorials Committee
- **Diana Balmori**, principal of architecture firm Balmori Associates, Inc.
- **Liz Thompson**, Executive Director of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and **Carol De Saram**, President of the TriBeCa Community Association, both of whom serve as co-chairs of the Community Board One Memorials Committee
- **Monica Iken**, September's Mission, widow and head of a victim's families association devoted to the memorial process

**Jill Lerner**, co-chair of both the New York New Visions Memorials Process Committee and the Civic Alliance Memorials working group, expressed her fear that the memorial would be an afterthought, and stressed the importance of how and where it will be integrated into the redevelopment scheme. The Civic Alliance should act as a steering committee to create a more cohesive, coordinated voice for all the efforts by different groups.

**New York New Visions** is creating an open process for anyone who would like to participate. They have formed 6 committees to look at the memorial process. Jill outlined several components of the NYNV process:

- a. History: NYNV has started a research effort to look at past memorials. Thirty examples have been examined and written up in New York, nationally and internationally.
- b. Outreach: Members of the New York New Visions memorials group have had focus sessions with seven different groups affected in some way by the tragedy, including: property owners, family members, rescue workers, residents, and others.
- c. Temporary Memorial: A temporary memorial group was formed to look at spontaneous memorials that emerged immediately after the disaster. The

group also created the *Around Ground Zero* map and supported the idea of a viewing platform for the general public.

**Holly Leicht** discussed the efforts of the Imagine New York group which is looking at the site and the surrounding area with two goals:

- a. To involve as broad a spectrum of people as possible
- b. Make sure voices are heard by decision makers

All the ideas collected from the participants of this process will be collected, collated, and analyzed for major themes. She added that involving the public now will expedite the process later. Partnerships with major organizations involved will form a growing steering committee to channel these ideas.

**Diana Balmori** spoke on the idea of temporary memorials as a way to open up discussion about the memorial and to present a history of the event. For example, the map of ground zero is constantly changing. Balmori was involved in the production of the public viewing platform and the map. The *Around Ground Zero* map is a good start, and we may consider producing a series of maps, which would eventually document the changes over time of the site. The spontaneous and temporary memorials also present an idea of what the memorial should be. It is crucial to put forth ideas to the people who live there and families who have been affected.

**Liz Thompson and Carol DeSaram** spoke on the importance of a broad process that focuses on the people who live, work and remain on the site. Community Board 1 meetings are held in order to keep public input coming in as well and to keep the public informed of what is going on in the broader meetings. For items that do not come through the open committee forum process, there will be archived items. Currently, common themes in public input are:

- The memorial should not just be from one voice
- It should convey peace and serenity
- The neighborhood is grieving

The question of what portion of this now-hallowed land should be used is a major issue to be addressed.

They also mentioned that the current proposals for memorials can be put in three different categories. There are proposals that have public clout and funding behind them; there are proposals that wish for public clout and funding; and there are proposals that represent the outpouring of peoples' hearts.

**Monica Iken:** Monica Iken began by noting that she lost her husband Michael Iken, who worked in Tower Two on the eighty-fourth floor of the World Trade Center on September 11. Besides September's Mission, Iken works with several widows' organizations including United Family Group, Give your Voice, and the Widows' Victims Family Group.

Iken supports the development of a memorial park that would include both public and private participants to honor the lives lost on that day. She envisions the park as a living metropolis, something in the spirit of Central Park, that could be created that would both honor the lives of the victims but also would provide cultural, business and residential opportunities for the people of the city. Before rushing into development, the qualities the land needs to possess should be carefully examined since the opportunity to make a national and international statement exists. Currently, there is no closure for the victims families and the need for a peaceful, serene place must be created.

Iken also posed the rhetorical questions:

- What are we saying to the children of the future by what we will redevelop on the WTC site?
- What are the qualities we want there?

She also expressed the view that the process seems to be moving too fast, and there is no need for haste in the rebuilding process. For example, Washington D.C. has a 100 year legacy plan that addresses their memorials, and their long term planning. They receive 20 million visitors a year to the memorials. New York should be forward thinking in a similar manner when planning the memorial to commemorate September 11.

### **3. Open Discussion and Response**

After Monica Iken finished speaking, other panel members responded to the statements made by the other panelists and then the discussion was opened for questions from the rest of the group.

#### **Panel Comments:**

- Diana Balmori addressed the question of how space would be decided upon and the importance of opening this decision to the public. Jill Lerner also reinforced the need for a public process, and asked the question “how does one create this process?”
- Monica Iken commented on the importance of children having a memorial that helps them to understand what happened and to forge a connection between them and the people they lost. Whatever is rebuilt on that site, its purpose and intent should be apparent one hundred years from now.
- On the subject of a temporary memorial, Ray Gastil proposed the consideration of a one week moratorium on all meetings regarding the process and the release of any plans as a way to catch our breath and consider in more depth the meaning of the site and its redevelopment.

### **4. Questions and Discussion from the audience**

- Does anyone know how the decision making will happen? And what interface will exist between the decision makers and other groups?

Response: Bob Yaro asserted that the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation is conducting a deliberate, public process and that he and several members of the Civic Alliance have had meetings with Lou Tomson, the new Executive Director of the L.M.D.C. and John Whitehead, the Chairman. Both Whitehead and Tomson have expressed a desire to work with the Civic Alliance. The CA should bring together all the current thinking on the redevelopment and the memorial and convey these ideas to the L.M.D.C

- Question directed to Monica Iken: Do you have a sense of how we can serve you? Do you have a vision of how the memorial should be?

Response: It is hard to envision anything but the massive construction site that is there currently, and the vision of people working there, happily, before the attack. There should be some kind of offsite refuge or hide-away for people to reflect and seek closure.

- How can the schedule be defined so that people aren't constantly disturbed by contrasting reports of when construction is set to begin on WTC #7? What will the overall schedule and critical path be? These questions sparked further questions regarding the development of WTC#7 including questioning whether there is even a real need for the building at this point in time. Will there be tenants looking for space in the building? How will it impact the timeline of the rest of the development? There is also the issues of the Con Edison substation being located on the ground floor of this building.
- Someone questioned the urgency to move so quickly. Where is the drive to rebuild immediately coming from? The Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Corporation is feeling pressure to build, but what is the source of this pressure? This group should press to prevent the development of WTC#7.
- Monica Iken agreed with this sentiment. She does not think that former tenants of #7 that have already relocated elsewhere will return to the site, nor will new tenants be interested in the building at this point. GSA was the main tenant and they have already found new quarters. A design for #7 already exists. It deals with street grid in its own way through an archway that allows for pedestrian circulation. Though this design already exists, there are economic forces working that are not understood at this point. Insurance companies are not that keen on giving insurance money to buildings that may be targets.
- How have other cities responded to disaster? Let's learn from the example of Israel and other places where terrorism is more commonplace. Where do they locate memorials and how?

- Paul Elston expressed thoughts on the memorial process. The Oklahoma City memorial took 6 years to complete and a similar length of time would be appropriate for the WTC memorial. The immediate needs to be addressed are electric, transportation, and communication infrastructure needs. A timeline is critical for the proper progression of the process and #7 will be a key element in pace setting. NRDC and the Civic Alliance are looking to see if this quick development is necessary.
- How can the process be public? For example, how can a couple from Ohio who got engaged at Windows on the World become involved in the memorial process?
  - use of the internet
  - Universities and teleconferences.
- **Carolyn Lukensmyer of AmericaSpeaks:** Carolyn asserted that the memorial will be both global and national. The first America Speaks discussion at the South Street Seaport on Feb. 7<sup>th</sup> will involve people who are all closely affected by the event. The idea is to eventually “Conversations” conference with the results of MAS’s Imagine New York project.

The memorial created will be a critical international symbol of democracy’s stance on terrorism. Traditionally, the general public interest is ignored for the demands of lobbyists with specific goals. The goal of the America Speaks project is to define common ground in all groups and avoid having too many divided interests. It hopes to find the essence of what is being memorialized through the voice of each person involved. Decision makers often feel they do not have an adequate method of responding to the public, and this provides an avenue for the public to voice their opinion in a safe and effective environment to provide decision makers with the concerns and needs of the public. By doing this well, the Whitehead commission may not even need to have public hearings.

- **Audience and panel comments:** Can it be assumed that there will be a wide variety of cultures?
- A focus group revealed that Chinatown was blocked off in terms of electricity, press, 911 services, immediately following September 11. The residents desire to speak for themselves.
- Has the idea of a living memorial been explored? Example: Global memorial at the end of WWII.

- Iken pointed out that the Oklahoma City memorial was three pronged. Firstly, there was the on-site memorial. Second, there was a “museum” to tell the story. Third, the Terrorism Institute that was set up as a result.
- Iken sees the whole redevelopment of the WTC project as a memorial. She envisions buildings, museums and other cultural centers, residential units, shopping in addition to the memorial park. In short, she envisions a vital, thriving community.
- Return to insurance question: There are already plans for the site, how can the input and ideas created by the public be incorporated if the site plan already exists? Can the process be changed?
- Bob Yaro responded that the Civic Alliance has been invited to provide input to the LMRC concerning the technical details and timeline for the project. This is absolutely necessary to the successful redevelopment of the site and creation of an appropriate memorial. He then suggested anyone interested in this speak to Steve Weber of RPA.
- Someone suggested that Madelyn Wils, who is involved with the Civic Alliance (but not here today) and is also a member of the LMRC, would be an excellent connection between the two groups.
- Many victims’ families are organized, but not politically active. Outreach should be made to these bereavement groups. By combining these voices, decision makers can be affected.
- Bob Yaro pointed out the example of Britain in the rebuilding after World War II. A “Civic Trust” was formed to restore Britain and is still an organized governmental group.
- Someone noted that perhaps the Civic Alliance should be a permanent organization.
- There was also a suggestion that we involve Amanda Burden, the new commissioner and director of the City Planning Agency of New York.
- Finally there were some comments that for several issues that Civic Alliance members feel strongly about, we may consider setting up private meeting with different decision makers such as Whitehead, Tomson, Burden, Silverstein, to convey our view points personally instead of writing letters which, someone noted, immediately “draws a line in the sand.” Interested parties may get in touch with Bob Yaro through Petra Todorovich at [Petra@rpa.org](mailto:Petra@rpa.org).

**6. The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:00AM.**