

Civic Alliance General Meeting
Tuesday, February 25, 2003
Pace University

I. Introduction

Bob Yaro welcomed everyone to the meeting at Pace University. He mentioned that on Thursday LMDC will announce design the winner of the Innovative Design Study. Finalists are the THINK team and Studio Libeskind. He noted that the Civic Alliance is pleased with the selection of these two teams because they both focused their proposals around cultural and memorial space. It's been interesting that in the last few weeks, Alex Garvin has been talking about a separation of the elements of the Master Plans moving forward, with LMDC focusing on the "public realm" in the bathtub, and Port Authority focusing on the transit hub.

He noted that the major elements coming out of planning work in the last year can be categorized as: Design, Program and Process. LMDC deserves some credit for responding well to input on design. However, the integrity of the design proposals now faces threats from commercial interests. We are still following up with LMDC to make sure they address the remaining issues:

- Program: we still have a master planning process that is being driven by 10 million square feet of office space and 1 million square feet of retail.
- Process : There is still no critical path for the planning process going forward, nor outlets for public input as we move towards the construction phase.

Yaro also mentioned that we need to continue to pay attention to where the public resources are going, and recommend they be driven towards amenities, infrastructure, and creating jobs.

Yaro reported that he met with Roland Betts recently and suggested that LMDC clearly articulate a process for the rest of the planning and construction. Bob suggested to Mr. Betts that the LMDC adopt a critical process memo, and emailed him the memo that the Civic Alliance prepared last fall with New York New Visions that was submitted to LMDC with little response.

II. General Discussion

George Penesis opened the discussion by asking whether the Civic Alliance regulatory working group was still in favor of an accelerated regulatory review process in exchange for a robust public process.

Bob Yaro responded that once the regulatory committee realized that the public participation process was not going to be as “robust” as we hoped, we dropped this recommendation.

Several other meeting participants voiced their concern over the current state of public participation in the planning process. Peter Brightbill pointed out that the beginning of the construction phase should not mark the end of the public input phase. He noted that we face a challenge in working with the Port Authority and getting timely information from them before their technical and engineering work preclude alternatives.

Yaro concurred and noted that the utility infrastructure they are planning on the site is apparently predicated on 10 million square feet of office space and 1 million square feet of retail. These program assumptions should be subjected to public discussion, as we have been saying all along.

Al Papp reiterated his conviction that PATH should be connected to Lexington line in the area of City Hall, and transportation infrastructure we build now should not preclude that option.

Paul Epstein noted that the public participation process we propose takes place over the long-term. We’ve tried a few times with the “critical path”, which is something that is always needed, but it hasn’t yet been successful. Perhaps we need a way to meet them where they are. They are not ready for a whole critical plan, but perhaps they are ready for a more interactive public process.

Ron Shiffman agreed that the public process is critical for Lower Manhattan and for the rest of the City. We have never had a true decision making process. The advocacy communities need to be included as well: those who represent environmental justice and poor people in the city. We should not advocate eradicating any of the city processes unless we have something to replace them.

David Kallick stated that it’s possible to address process and content at once. What are the process issues, and how should we say this more forcefully?

Bob Yaro responded that there are two or three critical issues that we need to address. Of foremost importance is the bus terminal and the mall. We should shift the burden of proof to the Port Authority to provide us with information. As long as we have all three agencies pointing at each other, we will never have a clear decision making process.

Gene Russianoff asked whether the Civic Alliance had a consensus view on the bus garage? It was his understanding that the residents have been trying for a long time to get a bus garage downtown.

Sudhir Jain replied. Speaking for some of the residents, he said that the problem of buses idling on the street has been ongoing. They support the bus garage because it is practical solution to get buses off the street.

Cleveland Adams disagreed. As a resident of Lower Manhattan he stated that he was totally against that a bus garage and thought that a bus garage would bring more buses downtown.

Petra Todorovich noted that the Port Authority based their plans for a bus garage on some estimates on tourist counts they gave at a recent meeting of the LMDC advisory councils. The Port Authority estimates that there will be 5.5 million visitors to the memorial annually, 24,000 visitors a day, and about 4,800 visitors a day arriving by bus (or about 20%.) Petra stated that there clearly is a problem with idling commuter buses in Lower Manhattan currently, and if we oppose a bus garage, we must commit to other strategies for commuter buses and strategies for dealing with tourist buses like regulation of streets or value pricing for the district. Simply opposing the bus garage will create problems.

Ron Shiffman referred back to the R.Dot report on Street Management plan and agreed with Cleveland Adam's comment that a bus garage could encourage bus traffic. However, we can't take the traffic generated from Lower Manhattan and burden other communities with it. This needs to be incorporated into a street management strategy for Lower Manhattan.

The discussion continued and Beverly Willis brought up R.Dot's street management plan, which envisioned bus facilities under access ramps for the FDR, West Street, and West End highway. She stressed that DOT is closing a number of streets, and that we should push to make the historic district a residential district. Any street management should also consider delivery trucks, which also pose a problem to traffic circulation.

Bob Yaro proposed a resolution calling on the Port Authority to consider alternatives to a bus terminal at the WTC site. The resolution was stated as follows:

The Civic Alliance calls for further study of a range of options for accommodating buses in Lower Manhattan. In general, the Alliance asks the rebuilding agencies to encourage tourists to access the WTC site by means other than tour buses. We acknowledge that there is an urgent need to address the ongoing concerns of residents related to idling buses on residential streets. Both of these issues should be addressed in a street management plan that considers the impacts of tourist and commuter buses on the entire district and examines potential alternatives to bus parking at the WTC site.

The resolution passed. None opposed.

II. Retail Presentation

Next Beverly Willis presented R.Dot's Position Paper on Retail. She acknowledged Roland Gephardt and George Cheng who also worked to prepare the position paper. R.Dot's mission is to revitalize all of Lower Manhattan, so their focus is not just on the WTC Site, except in the way that it impacts the entire district of Lower Manhattan.

Retail to New York is a little like cars to Detroit. It's the major city where retailers must come to prove that they can succeed. It's also a city where people come from all over the world to shop. People come from Europe just to have dinner in TiBeCa.

Retail is market-driven. Given the atypical catastrophic effect of 9.11, you cannot just take the normal market-driven approach to retail. Retail was in bad shape in Lower Manhattan before 9.11. With the destruction of 720 stores it's in worse shape now. R.Dot has tried in its position paper to look at fresh ideas beyond waiting for the market to drive retail locations. They did a series of studies and a survey of all of Lower Manhattan. They broke down each one of the areas by shopping district and neighborhood.

One of the maps shows the retail categories by neighborhood. Every shopping district was characterized by type of retail, whether or not there is foot traffic, etc., food and dining, personal services, and general merchandise. They identified important retail corridors.

The memorial area at Ground Zero is capturing a lot of visitors, but it's not capturing them for retail.

The historic district has the opportunity of being a major attractor to bring people to Lower Manhattan. Willis noted that she went to Europe with some other civic alliance members to look at some of the pedestrian streets. They found out that the highest grossing retail in Europe is on pedestrian streets in historic districts.

R.Dot has identified several primary locations for development of retail such as the West Street area. They would like to see West Street as an unbroken boulevard that does not go underground.

Recommendations:

- Create a retail master plan for Lower Manhattan (City planning is supportive.)

- Coordinate the retail master plan with a program of events. (Tied to Arts and Culture events.)
- Build the Broadway/Fulton terminal which is a hub for business.
- Limit underground retail to convenience shopping. (In major cities where an underground mall has been built, it has sucked out the retail from the whole area. The underground retail has that potential)
- Create a comprehensive way finding system for Lower Manhattan.
- Provide incentives to magnet stores to attract struggling retail stores. (If we can get magnet stores in critical points, this will bring foot traffic.
- Create incentives to open up the blank walls and turn them into retail.

After Willis's presentation the floor was opened to comments.

David Cheng argued that the mall planned for the WTC site is based on the typical mall format by Westfield Properties that he doubts will work in an urban setting like New York.

Bob Yaro noted that Grand Central Terminal has about 180,000 square feet and it works very well as commuter shopping. Grand Central has twice the number of commuters than the downtown transit hub will have.

David Kallick remarked that the Fiscal Policy Institute and Good Jobs New York have been trying to move the city away from subsidizing individual companies. So, he is somewhat ambivalent about subsidizing retail in Lower Manhattan. He also brought up the fact that we may need to instate minimum job standards for retail industry.

Beverly responded that there are incentives that can be provide to retailers that don't cost the city money but make a big difference. One example of this is zoning changes.

Sudhir Jain noted that the residents he represents agree with the Mayor that the most of the retail should be on the streets and focused on Fulton and Greenwich streets though the site.

Yaro moved the group towards a resolution and proposed the following:

The Civic Alliance supports the creation of a robust retail environment throughout Lower Manhattan as a vital step to the revitalization of the district. However, we believe that the creation of a large underground enclosed shopping mall is contrary to that goal. We understand the need for commuter/ convenience related retail activities around the station area, and support limited retail for that purpose in the transit station.

Resolution passed. None opposed.

Steve Romalewski of NYPIRG's Community Mapping Assistance Project (CMAP) announced a project they have launched with Downtown Alliance,

Lower East Side BID and TriBeCa organization as part of WTC Technical Assistance Program for the Empire State Development Corporation. It is an interactive mapping tool, which stores a data base of retail services in Lower Manhattan. The mapping tool can be accessed at: www.lowermanhattanmap.com

V. Civic Alliance Work plan 2003.

Finally, Yaro introduced a proposed work plan for the Civic Alliance in the calendar year 2003. The work plan is attached to these meeting notes for review. The three major focus areas of the Civic Alliance will be design, program and process. He asked for comments on the work plan to be submitted to Petra Todorovich at Petra@rpa.org. There were a few comments on the work plan.

Paul Epstein suggested a reportorial structure for the progress of the different working groups. He suggested a better communication structure for the Civic Alliance that is more fluid and continuous from meeting to meeting. This could lead towards a more extensive networking model for Civic Alliance.

Sudhir Jain mentioned that the Lower Manhattan community has focused a lot of the air quality issues that the residents have put together proposals for how government agencies should respond to disasters.

Rick Bell announced that the Civic Alliance, NYNV, and Imagine NY wrote a letter to Anita Contini regarding the memorial competition. The point of the letter was to talk about the composition of the jury for the memorial. There will be a follow up meeting in the coming weeks to discuss the jury with Ms. Contini.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:30 AM.