

Draft Meeting Notes
Tuesday, September 13, 2005
9:00 – 11:00 a.m.
St. John's University

The meeting was brought to order at approximately 9:00 a.m. Bob Yaro welcomed the group and introduced Tom Bernstein, Co-Founder, Chairman and CEO of the International Freedom Center. Tom Bernstein introduced his colleagues, including Peter Kunhardt, Co-founder and Creative Director, Dick Tofel, President and Chief Operating Officer, and Paula Grant Berry, Vice-Chair.

Mr. Bernstein gave some background on the process that has brought the Freedom Center to this point, starting with the LMDC's call for a "living memorial," to the IFC being selected as one of four cultural institutions chosen for the World Trade Center site in June 2004. Since then, the Norwegian architecture firm Snøhetta was selected to design the Cultural Center in which the IFC is to be located. The IFC also prepared a business plan, which was submitted to the LMDC in February.

Mr. Bernstein characterized the current debate over the IFC as a crossroads for the cultural program at the World Trade Center site in which there are two different views. The opposition view, as he put it, is one that would like for the content of the site to be restricted to that which directly concerns the events of 9/11. The other view would like to put the story of 9/11 into a greater historical context, which would create a living memorial and perpetuate the memory of those whose lives were lost.

He emphasized that the IFC is not political and does not have a political bias. He was recently inspired by a New York Times article that reviewed the National Constitution Center of Philadelphia, which the IFC will emulate in the way in which it treats history and the political context.

Peter Kunhardt spoke next. He stated that the leaders of the IFC were open to ideas, flexible, and currently going through an internal, listening process of developing and refining the Center's programming. The main exhibit at the museum is the "Grand Concourse" – a sort of Freedom Walk through history.

The floor was open to comments, which Petra Todorovich moderated.

Bob Yaro began by reiterating that he felt the IFC was above politics and was devoted to the deeper values that were attacked on 9/11. He felt that the IFC would be an important element of the World Trade Center program.

He also noted that he felt the IFC had been hampered up until this point from doing the necessary public outreach that would have built them a base of support over the last year. The LMDC restricted the IFC from reaching out to the public, and as a result they have suffered. Bob experienced this last winter when the Regional Plan Association invited the IFC to their annual board dinner to make a presentation and they were almost prevented from doing so by the LMDC.

Mike Dempsey, from the WTC United Families group spoke next, making a statement on behalf of Jack Lynch. Mr. Dempsey began by noting that there would be no negotiation of any kind between the families opposed to the IFC and the IFC. His statement generally opposed the IFC and accused the institution of taking advantage of the tragedy of 9/11.

Gerry Bogacz of the World Trade Center Survivors Network spoke next. He noted that the survivors are mindful that the families are concerned about the IFC. He asked two questions:

- Was the concept of the IFC well known at the time it was selected?
- And, as any planning process must change as it goes along, why is it impossible to change the location of the IFC on the site to another place on the site, not located within the memorial quadrant?

Dick Tofel responded that yes, generally the concept of the IFC was well known at the time it was selected in as much as it would include the stories of freedom through history, that it would have an international focus, and it would host permanent and temporary exhibits. Was every gallery in the museum planned out yet? No.

He added that the IFC responded to a report put out by the LMDC in February 2004, which provided direction and guidelines for the cultural programming at the site and that the IFC strove to meet these directives.

Finally, in response to the question about moving the IFC's location on the World Trade Center site, he stated that the commercial space on the site was not subject to public control, and therefore was not being considered as an alternative location for the IFC, and that all public spaces have already been allocated, to the Memorial, Memorial Museum, the Cultural Center building and the Performing Arts Center.

Charles Wolf asked about the funding for the Snøhetta building, and asked how incoming funding to the World Trade Center Memorial Foundation would be allocated.

In response, representatives of the IFC explained that the Snøhetta building was to be financed with a combination of public and private funding, and be owned by the World Trade Center Memorial Foundation. The IFC would probably pay only nominal rent to the WTC Memorial Foundation, but these details have not yet been worked out. All donations to the World Trade Center Memorial Foundation will automatically be directed to the Memorial and Memorial Center at the World Trade Center site. Funding will only be directed to the IFC if contributors specify that it should be allocated in that way.

Ethel Sheffer spoke next. She stated that she had trouble grasping how a connection could be made between the lives of the victims and the concept of international freedom, or international freedom throughout the ages. She added, how could individual lives be subsumed to the larger story of the history of freedom? She felt this connection was very complex and very difficult.

Tom Bernstein addressed the question by noting that they had plans to make a film that would strengthen this connection and concept, tying the individual lives of people who died on 9/11 to the international struggle for freedom throughout history. Paula Grant Berry added that they had no intention of “subsuming” the lives of victims to the greater story of freedom, and this was one reason they had recently set up a family advisory group for the IFC.

A couple of participants at the meeting raised an objection that the family advisory committee to the IFC was not representative of the views of family members who opposed the Freedom Center. Dick Tofel replied that advisory committee had been purposely assembled of family members who were supportive of the concept of the IFC.

Lisa Frigand asked whether the IFC was integrating its content with the World Trade Center Memorial Museum, a separate institution. She added that she didn't see how the IFC could avoid being political – since politics seeps through history. She suggested that perhaps the IFC meant to say they would not be partisan. Finally, she noted that part of the difficulty some were having was with the word “freedom,” which is so loaded politically, particularly because of its use in building the case for the Iraq war.

David Dyssegaard Kallick made the observation that you can't put 9/11 and "freedom" together without touching on two of the most controversial topics in US politics today: the rationale for the war in Iraq, and the balance of civil liberties and security.

While he is not opposed to the idea of taking this on, he stated that he was concerned about the IFC leadership's ability to navigate some very complicated political waters. Their letter to the governor/LMDC, rather than standing up for advisors that were attacked, assured us that the advisory board is just advisory. The failure to say anything about the Drawing Center's concerns about censorship was also a problem. He also raised the concern that IFC representatives were skirting issues raised earlier in the meeting such as the Bush 2nd Inaugural address rather than taking them on directly.

Joan Byron noted that there seemed to be one point of agreement in the group – that the root problem is the allocation of space between private and public uses at the World Trade Center site, and that the division of space needed to be reallocated.

Peter Marcuse asked whether there will be debates in the IFC, and commented that having such debates would make the institution inherently controversial.

Tom Bernstein noted that there will be discussion and dialogue on the site and that they have reached out to universities and institutions like the Aspen Institute to act as

programming partners. Will this lead to “rationalizations” of the 9/11 attack? Absolutely not. He also addressed governance issues, adding that the IFC has a board, which it is working to expand.

Diane Horning spoke next, making a variety of points. First, she agreed with Joan Byron that one of the flaws of the rebuilding process was in the allocation of space. She added that the LMDC process has been flawed from the beginning. She noted that the IFC had not mentioned the role of the survivors and the aftermath of 9/11 in their remarks, and that these were important stories to be told. She was not opposed to the content of the IFC, but didn't feel that the Memorial quadrant of the WTC site was the appropriate place for it. Finally, she brought attention to the important issue of having enough space to ensure safety at the site, and building safety issues.

Tom Roger observed that there seemed to be two issues at work in this debate. First, whether should there be cultural facilities in the Memorial quadrant; and second, what context should be provided to the events of 9/11. Speaking personally, he felt that the cultural building played an important role in the Memorial quadrant, and provided a transition from the “hard edge” of the retail and commercial space that will be so prevalent at the site. People should have an opportunity to understand how 9/11 fits into the larger context and the IFC would provide this. Also, the connection between the IFC and the Memorial Museum needs to be meaningful.

Roland Gebhardt asked whether there will be other forums like this one in which dialogue like this can take place. He commented that it was an awesome responsibility to have to put 9/11 into context – and requires that this responsibility be earned. It took forty years after World War II to create a museum to the victims of the Holocaust. How do we know that there's been time enough to have perspective on the events of 9/11?

Tom Bernstein replied that the exhibits of the IFC will not be static, and there will be flexibility to change and evolve over time to reflect a greater understanding gained with the passing of time.

The meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Meeting Participants

Joan Byron, PICCED
Catherine Hughes, CB1
Coleen Delaney
David Kallick, FPI & LCAN
Jan Ramirez, Howard and Revis
Ken Lustbader, Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund
Peter Marcuse, Columbia University
Ned McGuire, Civic Alliance
Jason Franklin, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council
Kurt and Diane Horning, WTC Families for a Proper Burial

Erica Goudy, International Freedom Center
Peter Kunhardt, IFC
Paul Grant Berry, IFC
Tom Bernstein, IFC
Dick Tofel, IFC
Tom Roger
Mike Dempsey, WTC United Families Group
Roland Gebhardt, R-Dot
Roger Herz, TIME
Deborah Morris, Association for Downtown New York
Gerry Bogacz, WTC Survivor's Network
Annie Kurtin, New York New Visions
Lisa Frigand, Con Ed
Brenda Cho, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council
Peter Woodin, JAMS
Etta Sanders, Tribeca Trib
David Woods, Green Woods Associates
Ethel Sheffer, NY Metro APA
Michael Bradley, Riverside South Planning Corporation
Charles Wolf, 9/11 Family Member
Petra Todorovich, RPA
Bob Yaro, RPA
Michael Haberman, LMDC