



## **AIA New York Chapter Statement on the Nine Eight Plans**

*24 January 2003*

*New York City Council*

*Select Committee on the Redevelopment of Lower Manhattan*

Chairman Gerson, distinguished members of the Council and the Select Committee, honored guests, I would like to start with the poetic equivalent of a moment of silence, twenty-odd words from an elegy by Allen Ginsberg:

“....aetherial Spirit  
bright as moving air  
blue as city dawn  
happy as light  
released by the day  
over the City’s new buildings...  
That’s my New York Vision....”

I am pleased to be here today on behalf of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. The AIA strongly supports the New York New Visions comprehensive evaluation of the innovative site plans prepared for the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. As founding members of the New York New Visions design and planning coalition, AIA architects have been integrally involved in its plan review task force. Rather than repeat the conclusions or summary of the New York New Visions analysis (see the NYNV page of the AIA website, [www.aiany.org](http://www.aiany.org)), there are nine points to be highlighted here.

### **Design Excellence**

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation should be applauded for making design a household word in New York. Design matters! It is by careful attention to the quality of urban design on the site that we best pay our respects to those who lost their lives and those who still grieve. Mediocrity and crass commercialism on the site are not acceptable. The New York City Council and this Committee can help assure that design quality remains a civic priority. By bringing seven superlative architectural teams to the task of rebuilding on the World Trade Center site, the LMDC has elevated the discourse of what can be expected not only here, but on all significant sites in our city from the Far West Side of Manhattan to Queens West and beyond. The schemes all have something important to say about the future of architecture and planning, both in our city and throughout the world. In the context of the criteria set forth by New York New Visions, however, some of the plans lead to a more comprehensive balance of the dual imperatives of memorializing the ground made sacred by loss and revitalization of a vibrant and connected urban district. Inclusion of the existing slurry wall and bathtub as the memorial competition site is a compelling feature of one of the plans. Well-integrated streets, boulevards and vibrant park spaces, along with the creation of cultural structures as iconic elements in the landscape, satisfying program requirements in an incrementally developable manner, are also worth impassioned support. We should also be discussing how these plans fit into the Mayor’s excellent plan for Lower Manhattan.

### **Importance of the Ground at Ground Zero**

The innovative projects have been largely represented by a focus on the tall buildings. Although the skyscrapers give height and drama to the architectural renderings, much more significant is how the site will look on the ground, and how the complex works at street level. This emphasis is important not only in the distant future when all the proposed buildings will have been built, but, more critically, in the short run, when only a few of the structures may have taken shape. There is every likelihood that the site will take years if not decades to be fully developed. We therefore support the plans that suggest a comprehensive plan allowing for incremental development and phased buildings over time, by many architects.

### **Green Architecture and the Future**

At a recent symposium it was stated that all the problems of the world cannot be solved on the World Trade Center site. At this early site planning stage, the buildings are necessarily conceptual. But they do indicate a path towards energy use reduction, inclusion of natural light and internal gardens. There is even the suggestion, in one proposal, of wind turbines to generate some on-site power. At issue is the symbolic importance of pushing an agenda for green architecture on this site. The proposals represent a start in this direction. We believe that if you can make it green here, you can make it green anywhere.

### **Program Issues**

The program for the site should not be entirely about revenue generation. Towers containing gardens or concert halls resonate because they speak to a world changed, a world center that is no longer predicated on commerce as a determinant. Much more discussion is needed about the civic gesture that available funds can allow. It is clear that a combination of cultural and memorial uses on and around the area of the footprints can be made affordable as a first priority, be it below ground or soaring above.

### **Safe Buildings and Site Plan Innovation**

The first of the criteria for the selection of these innovative design teams was risk-taking. This, of course, does not mean building unsafe buildings. All the proposals, to their credit, address how egress and exiting the tall buildings will be safer. More exits and paths of movement are provided. All the teams have taken risks in other areas, although not particularly in regard to the program. Some have commented that these designs are too aesthetically risky, too different from what might have been expected if this were just another sixteen-acre site next to a different urban highway. The conceptual risks the design teams take make them all, in different ways, exemplary and commendable. These truly innovative plans lead us to a glimpse through the construction fences of the future. We look to the public sector to rise to the task and to support design innovation. On this site, and at this time, the future is now.

### **Financial Issues**

Forty thousand dollars is not a large stipend for the services rendered and each of the teams spent this allocation many times over. Architectural presentation costs, including the monies spent building the extraordinary models on display at the Winter Garden, should be reimbursed. Those who may wish to hire architects in the

future, whether in the public or private sector, should not expect the level of financial sacrifice that each of these firms, to their credit, has made to help heal the wounds of the 9/11 attack.

### **Integration of Memorial**

There are three very important sentences in the preface to the memorial program addressing how the new site plan for the World Trade Center can be influenced and revised by the memorial design competition winner. It is commendable that the LMDC will also use the memorial approach, attitude and concept as major criteria to help narrow down, to two or three schemes, the broad range of ideas presented. The full integration of the memorial in a meaningful, clear and realizable manner is critical to the success of the urban planning on the World Trade Center site. A memorial cannot be simply “plopped” down on set-aside lands without connection to the organization of the site. The memorial is well integrated in several of the schemes. How the memorial becomes part of the planning process needs more attention in regard to the schedule. At the point when the competition winner is announced, the site planning, including transportation planning, should not be complete. The artist, landscape architect, architect or other entrant who wins the competition must be able to help change a plan that may have developed significant momentum.

### **Lessons Learned from Council-sponsored Workshops**

The AIA participated in a series of workshops that it helped to organize with Council member Gerson. Many lessons can be learned from the common ground achieved when family members and neighborhood residents sat down without the glare of television cameras or the bombast broadcast by boom microphones. Perhaps the most important of these lessons was that the site is large enough for both “sacred ground” and a “living memorial” to co-exist on a site made sacred by tragic loss. Sacred space in a secular society speaks to our age-old need for ceremony and for sequence. Ceremonies, including civic or civil ceremonies, can mark anniversaries and rites of passage. A processional path of movement leading to a memorial can contain quiet spaces needed for contemplation and reflection.

### **Public Process**

In conclusion, the AIA New York Chapter strongly supports the New York New Visions review and analysis of the site plans and memorials. Along with many of the other civic organizations and professional groups working on a *pro bono* basis in New York New Visions, the Civic Alliance and the Imagine New York coalition we encourage the City and the City Council to have more impact on the decisions being reached about land-use, site planning and the creation of a lasting and inspirational memorial to those who perished on September 11<sup>th</sup>. This public hearing, and the reasoned testimony and give-and-take of the questioning from Council members, is an excellent example of how public meetings can and should work. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this “Listening to the Citizens” forum.

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