



# **AIA New York Chapter Position on the Nine Plans**

*for release and presentation: 13 January 2003*

The New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects strongly supports the New York New Visions comprehensive evaluation of the nine innovative site plans prepared for the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. With the AIA as a founding member of the New York New Visions design and planning coalition, AIA members have been integrally involved in its plan review task force. Rather than repeat the conclusions or summary of the New York New Visions analysis, there are six points that we have highlighted here.

## **Design Excellence**

The Lower Manhattan Design Corporation should be applauded for making design a household word in New York. 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 nine 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 the memorialization of 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. The creation of towers of culture as iconic elements in the landscape, while satisfying program requirements in an incrementally developable manner, is also worth considering.

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

The nine 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 automatically 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.

### **Risk Taking**

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 in addition to the stipend. 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.

For additional information and comment contact:

**George Miller**, FAIA  
President  
AIA New York Chapter  
212-872-4040

**Rick Bell**, FAIA  
Executive Director  
AIA New York Chapter  
212-683-0023 x25