

AIA New York Chapter

The Founding Chapter of
The American Institute of Architects



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Hon. Alan Jay Gerson, Council Member
Chair, Committee on Lower Manhattan Redevelopment
49-51 Chambers Street
New York, New York 10007

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Dear Chair Gerson:

On behalf of the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter and its 4,000 architect and affiliate members in New York, I would like to register support for the World Trade Center 9/11 Memorial, as designed by Michael Arad, AIA and Peter Walker, FASLA, along with Davis Brody Bond Architects. The AIA New York Chapter is pleased that the City Council's Committee on Lower Manhattan Redevelopment is holding a hearing on the 9/11 Memorial because there are several points that need to be continually reiterated in a place where public attention and public process is assured.

First, the design makes sense.

It is the winning result of an independent competition devoid of politics. A strong jury selected Michael Arad's design, which features a delineation of the Twin Tower footprints and descent to bedrock. The design was selected, from over 5,200 entries, because of its simplicity, clarity and emotional power. Its strength comes from the descent away from the tumult of reinvigorated street life in Lower Manhattan. The authenticity of a memorial created at the location of a tragedy, rather than remote from the place where people perished, calls for a reaffirmation of the Memorial Competition jury decision.

Second, the Memorial is more than the footprints.

It must be remembered that the footprints alone are not the entire Arad/Walker memorial design. The Memorial Plaza, the 4.6 acre rectangle bounded by Fulton, Greenwich, Liberty and West Streets, is mostly at grade. It connects to the surrounding blocks but maintains - through its design, its plantings, and its definition - a distinctness that sets it apart, as what has been called "more sacred ground", from the rest of Ground Zero.

Third, the Memorial should not be considered on its own.

It cannot be discussed in isolation from the other commemorating projects at the World Trade Center site. The linkage between the Memorial and underground Memorial Museum is primary. Almost as important is the connection between the Memorial and the Visitors' Center by SNØHETTA Architects on the east edge of the Memorial Quadrant. The City Council's Committee on Lower Manhattan Redevelopment should call for the release of any and all information and analysis pertaining to how visitors arrive at the Memorial and the Memorial Quadrant, and how they find their way to the Visitors' Center, the Memorial and the underground Memorial Museum. Studies by LMDC's consultants concerning wayfinding, waiting areas and pedestrian movement should be released now. There is a need to know how those visiting will be greeted and oriented, and where and how they will wait to enter the Memorial. To date there has not been enough public information on the program of the Visitors' Center and its design.

Why is this connection important? It is because the Visitors' Center is the point of transition for those arriving by subway, by PATH regional rail, by foot or by bus. It is logical that the Visitors' Center will contain more than an information desk and public toilets. As a place of arrival, it should contain space, above ground, for a reminder of the events of the day. Small meeting and exhibition spaces will help transform this structure into the visitor portal to the Memorial. The projects cannot be considered in isolation. Similarly, the Memorial Museum makes sense as designed. It is the cavernous below-ground space that many of us strove to keep available as a place where large-scale artifacts can inform visitors about what happened on September 11, 2001. Fragments of the Towers' facades and steel structure, fire trucks and other emergency response vehicles, cannot be left to rust in a hangar or stand isolated in a plaza. These three spaces, the Memorial, Memorial Museum and Visitors' Center, must be presented and considered as one.

Fourth, the cultural facilities are needed now, not in the distant future.

The Memorial Quadrant marks the sacred ground, made even more significant since 2001 by the thoughts and tears of family members and friends of those who died, by those of us who survived that day, and by those who felt the impact even at a distance. We must build the Memorial now, and visitors will come, just as they have come to use the WTC Viewing Platform and stand in front of the WTC Viewing Wall. The Temporary Path Station with its unparalleled connection to the slurry wall has allowed visitors to descent into the bathtub to pay their respects. Visitors have come even to the very tip of Manhattan Island to see the displaced Globe by Fritz Konig, the "temporary memorial" which should and will be returned to the WTC Memorial Plaza.

Equally important is the "living memorial" called for in the workshops sponsored by Council Member Gerson and New York New Visions, a living memorial bringing people to the WTC site to use the cultural facilities remaining in the program and site plan. Funding for the Signature and Joyce Theaters must be now, before these institutions also succumb to the many pressures that drove out the Drawing Center and International Freedom Center. The Signature and Joyce remain in the plan, and the City Council, the Mayor's Office, the LMDC and the Foundation must emphatically reaffirm that the cultural facilities are needed, and that there is a concrete plan for their realization either on the designated site or in multi-use towers. Jazz at Lincoln Center, helps animate and enliven the Time-Warner shopping mall at Columbus Circle. Cultural uses are even more necessary at the World Trade Center. Cultural facilities are not some hypothetical, eventual or ancillary second phase.

Fifth, and last, funding is key.

A combination of public funds and insurance monies must be dedicated to make the Memorial happen now. We cannot wait a decade to see real construction start. We cannot wait a decade to see that the WTC site has, at its heart, this memorial design that justifies and makes relevant all of the other buildings. We cannot wait a decade to have a finished place to honor and to remember.

Yours truly,



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Executive Director



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