

**Statement by New York New Visions
21 June 2005
New York City Council
Select Committee on the Redevelopment of Lower Manhattan**

Chairman Gerson, distinguished members of the City Council and the Select Committee on the Redevelopment of Lower Manhattan, my name is Rick Bell, and I am Executive Director of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. I am here today, along with Annie Kurtin of New York New Visions to speak about office space at the World Trade Center site in the context of the site plan and interim site uses. The AIA New York Chapter, I should note, has 4,000 architect and public members here in New York and is one of the twenty component organizations of New York New Visions, the *pro bono* coalition of architecture, engineering, planning and design organizations which came together in September of 2001, committed to honoring the victims of the September 11 tragedy by rebuilding a vital New York. Members of the AIA New York Chapter including New York New Visions executive committee co-chairs Jordan Gruzen, FAIA and Ernest Hutton, Assoc. AIA – who could not be here today – have assisted in the analysis prepared by the coalition, and the AIA has been supportive of the positions expressed here and at hearings conducted by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation.

At a prior hearing of this Committee, New York New Visions and the AIA New York Chapter presented a 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. At the hearing of this Select Committee held here on 24 January 2003, we highlighted nine distinct points in regard to the site plan and the construction of office space at the World Trade Center site. These concepts are still valid today in answering the programmatic questions on hand.

The questions today are:

- Do we need for ten million square feet of office space?
- What are the alternatives to office space? and
- How do we envision interim uses and phasing?

The answers to these questions start with a half dozen general principles, previously expressed here by New York New Visions and the AIA New York Chapter, but taken in a new light. These principles pertain to:

- streetscape
- design excellence
- green architecture
- mixed-use
- building and site safety, and
- integration of memorial and cultural uses

Streetscape

It is necessary to first of all speak about the importance of the **ground** at Ground Zero. The site plan has been largely represented by a focus on the tall buildings. Although the skyscrapers give height and drama and generate exciting architectural renderings, much more significant is how the site and such structures 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. It is clear that the site will take years and possibly more than a decade to be fully re-developed. We therefore stress the need to look carefully at the phasing of the General Project Plan build-out, knowing that a comprehensive plan must allow for incremental development and phased buildings over time, by many architects.

Specifically we call for a public review at this Committee and at the LMDC of design guidelines that address the materials of paving, curbs and signage, as well as those to be used for the design of any interim tax-payer commercial space. Such space may occupy on a temporary basis the sites eventually to be occupied by office buildings, or possibly mixed-use structures that might bring a combination of hotel and housing uses to the WTC site.

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. The New York City Council and this Committee can help assure that design quality remains a civic priority. At the World Trade Center site, there needs to be 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. 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 the General Project Plan fits into the Mayor's plan for Lower Manhattan. Design excellence is expressed by the particular components of the General Project Plan. New York New Visions and the AIA New York Chapter have been heartened by and support the attention to bold and vibrant design

represented by chapter member and AIA Gold Medal winner Santiago Calatrava's design for the PATH Transportation Center along with the design of the MTA Fulton Street Transit Hub by the offices of Nicholas Grimshaw and Lee Harris Pomeroy, FAIA. We have also been watching with appreciation the evolving expression of the first new office building at the site, 7WTC, designed by Skidmore Owings & Merrill, and set back from Greenwich Street in a way that allows the street and view corridor to be expressed, re-opening visual and vehicular access to the World Trade Center site from the north. We look forward to the unveiling of the new design for Freedom Tower, expected within a week of today's hearing.

Specifically we call for a similar attention to design excellence as the additional commercial and mixed-use towers take shape over the next years at the sites designated for Towers 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Green Architecture

Guidelines for the World Trade Center memorial by AIA New York Chapter member Randy Croxton call for attention to and compliance with environmentally appropriate or "green" development principles which have characterized construction of new buildings from Austin, Texas to Portland, Oregon. Whatever office towers are to be built must also speak to the need for energy use reduction, inclusion of daylighting and careful attention to material selection. At issue is the importance of the agenda for green architecture on this site and a significant symbolic reduction of energy demands in its office buildings. Design guidelines for the commercial space on the World Trade Center site were prepared in draft form by Studio Libeskind two-and-a-half years ago, but have not yet been released. They should be made public and adopted so as to assure both environmental and urban design excellence. The Battery Park City Authority, through its recently developed projects just to the west of the World Trade Center site, provides excellent institutional and administrative examples of the incorporation of green guidelines for both commercial and residential structures into all agency development decisions. Projects such as the Solaire by AIA New York Chapter member Rafael Pelli demonstrate environmental initiatives such as embodied photovoltaics and on-site gray water treatment that should be considered for all new structures to rise in Lower Manhattan. In Midtown, office buildings such as 4 Times Square – the Conde Nast Building – by Fox & Fowle Architects, indicate the cost effectiveness of environmentally appropriate commercial construction.

Specifically we call for LEED certification and developer-accepted and agency-administered green guidelines to govern the development of all future structures on the World Trade Center site. We are encouraged that the City Council through Intro 324A, the "Green Bill", has taken a hard look at the principles and economic conditions for building green public projects in NYC.

Mixed-use

The concrete site development questions posed in the announcement of the hearing, "Should LMDC Continue to Plan to Build 10 Million Square Feet of Class 'A' Office Space on the Ground Zero Site? What Alternatives to Office Space Exist? If Office

Space is to be Phased in, what Uses can the Space be put to in the Near Term?” were addressed by the AIA New York Chapter and New York New Visions in the document Principles for the Rebuilding of Lower Manhattan: Under the heading “Plan for a variety of office types” we wrote: “With the concentration of several financial exchanges and other related institutions in the district, including the New York Stock Exchange, NASDAQ, New York Mercantile Exchange, and others, financial services will continue to be the backbone of the office market in Lower Manhattan. Adding to the economic diversity of Lower Manhattan is a surprising array of small- and medium-sized businesses whose spatial requirements and financial capacities are far different from the larger firms so frequently associated with the area. Planning efforts must accommodate the ‘Class A’ office space required by large firms, but they must also recognize the needs of a whole range of business types and sizes. There should be an emphasis on adaptable floor plates that allow flexibility at low costs.”

Specifically we call for a market-based review of the need for 10 million square feet of office space, paying attention to what the real estate community and the LMDC’s Development Advisory Council have to say about demand and phasing. We call upon the Port Authority and the LMDC to make public planned interim uses for the office tower sites. Big box retail is not the preferred solution for Lower Manhattan.

Building and Site Safety

Proposals for tall office buildings, now with heightened attention since the NYPD report and the NIST dialogue, must, by code, address how egress and exiting assures safety. We also note that the discussions scheduled by the City Council in this Chamber for later this week on the adoption of an up to date model code, the International Building Code which will supplant the archaic and unworkable New York City Building Code, has major building safety improvements. Intro 478A should be brought to a vote and adopted by Council as soon as possible. Today we have more attention being focused on how the buildings fit together on the site plan, how the office space to be provided works functionally in relation to the arrival of people by public transportation and the occasional taxi, how goods are delivered and trash removed. The new office buildings must be designed with safety as one of the most stringent determinants of form, but that does not mean that these buildings have to be fortress-like, or isolated elements of occupied sculpture in what might become overly pedestrianized theme park-like setting. Keeping streets, particularly Fulton Street, open for vehicles, has been a basic principles of the New York New Visions site analysis, from both functional and security perspectives. The new 7WTC tower designed by SOM is an excellent example of how building safety can be successfully combined with keen attention to aesthetics and the incorporation of public art. At 7WTC the solidity of the base which encloses and protects the ConEd substation is to be sheathed by a major art installation by Jamie Carpenter. In traditional skyscraper designs, the base, the middle and the top have not had to look exactly the same – in fact most skyscrapers in New York and elsewhere have a much more solid appearing base, symbolizing the solidity and permanence of the construction and its rootedness in the Manhattan bedrock.

Specifically we call for keeping Fulton Street, Dey Street and Cortlandt Street open for vehicular traffic, consistent with opinions previously expressed by representatives of the

NYC Department of City Planning and the NYC Department of Transportation. Safety starts with streets that are alive and buildings that adhere to and are governed by reasonable Codes such as the IBC.

Integration of Memorial and Cultural Facilities

It should also be remembered that the discussion of the need for office space at the World Trade Center site is not being conducted in a vacuum. This site is not in Long Island City, not in Tremont or Greenpoint, and not in Stapleton. New York New Visions wrote previously that “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.” The new office towers will be not only looking down at the memorial plaza, but cradling and protecting the memorial site, as seen in the context of Studio Libeskind’s original site plan, the key principles of which still pertain in the LMDC’s General Project Plan. A central aspect of the master plan for the World Trade Center site was and is the use of cultural facilities to form a threshold, a kind of buffer zone, but not a neutral ground between the sacred space of the memorial and the anticipated commercial hurly-burly of much-needed on-grade commercial space and the eventual office or mixed-use towers to rise above such new storefront structures. It may be remembered that the Studio Libeskind site proposal allowed for mixed-use towers.

There has been much attention in the press and elsewhere expressed recently about on the one hand the funding of the performing arts center component of the site plan, and, the programmatic aspects of the cultural center comprising the Drawing Center, the International Freedom Center and the Visitors’ Center for those coming from near and far to the World Trade Center site and the memorial to those lost. These cultural facilities are critical and we strongly support the need to maintain their central role in the development of an edge condition to the WTC Memorial that is not entirely composed of commercial structures. The cultural center becomes and defines a point of entry at the northeast corner of the memorial precinct that helps make the transition between arrival at the site, whether by public transportation or by the scores of buses that will be seen passengers disembark along Greenwich Street. We have appreciated the design of the cultural center building by Snoheta, and the window onto the site that its elevated form permits. Like any window the visual access goes in both directions, and the proposed structure also puts into perspective the return to New York’s noisy sidewalks and busy streets for those many millions of visitors each year who will be moving back up the ramps from the Memorial and the Memorial Center, coming back to the City with an appreciation of the primacy of the Memorial. We need to recognize the importance of creating living memorials and places where people can live and work in Lower Manhattan.

Specifically we call for “filling the hole,” getting the Memorial built well and built first. The sacred ground of the Tower footprints has generated an exemplary design by Michael Arad, Peter Walker and Max Bond. But we also emphatically state that the cultural facilities proposed, including the cultural center complex by Snoheta, are necessary as a living memorial and an architectural veil to separate memorial and office uses, and help put both into perspective.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned and Process

New York New Visions and the AIA New York Chapter participated in a series of workshops that it helped to organize with Councilmember 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. Civic and 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.

As we turn our attention to the need for office space it is clear that jobs must return to Lower Manhattan and a certain amount of square footage, not necessarily the full 10 million square feet in the General Project Plan, but enough to satisfy anticipated market demand for both a strong financial services industry and new uses that might call for smaller floorplates, or the flexibility to divide larger spaces into increments that encourage new market sectors to flourish in the cradle of our City and the heart of our civic home. Perhaps we will see the Deutsche Bank site developed as housing, like 90 West Street adjacent. Perhaps we will see hotel and housing use complimenting office space with market-driven alacrity on sites 2, 3 and 4. Perhaps we feel the emotional need for such interim uses as a flower-market on one of the sites that define the path of movement for visitors to the Memorial. The possibility of these alternative uses needs much more focus and more attention, and we commend the City Council, this Committee and its Chair for starting this public process forward. Thank you.