

CIVIC PLANNING INITIATIVE FOR REBUILDING THE WORLD TRADE CENTER DISTRICT

This paper has been prepared by Regional Plan Association to stimulate discussion on ways that the business, labor and civic leaders of New York City and the Tri-State Metropolitan Region can promote the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Our goals are twofold: to rebuild the World Trade Center district as a living memorial to those who died there and as a proclamation of the Region's confidence in its future; and to anticipate and find solutions to the urban design, infrastructure, public safety and other issues that can improve and speed the rebuilding process.

Overview

The September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center shocked the Tri-State region, America and the world. This catastrophic loss of life and destruction of the fabric of New York City will never be forgotten. Every community across the Tri-State Metropolitan Region has been affected by this event. The economy is confronted with a sharp downturn and a potential crisis of confidence, as a number of companies have announced either temporary or permanent relocations outside Manhattan—and in some cases, outside the region. Importantly, however, this tragic event has elicited a fresh realization of the economic and social interdependence of the metropolitan region and has brought the region's often fractious interest groups and political jurisdictions together. It also creates a responsibility to put aside divisive and contentious issues of the past and create a consensus to quickly rebuild for the future.

Perhaps the best monument honoring those who died there would be the reconstruction of the area as a beautiful and functional new district of the city and a revitalized center of the regional economy. RPA is, therefore, proposing the creation of a *Civic Planning Initiative* (CPI) that would help expedite the redesign and reconstruction of the Trade Center area and strengthen Lower Manhattan's economic and transportation links to the region. Our goal is to envision and promote the creation of the world's first 21st century urban center arising from the ashes of the World Trade Center. This will be a place that represents the best practices in urban design, green building, energy efficiency and public safety.

This process will be led by a *Civic Alliance* (CA) representing a cross-section of the city's and the region's top business, labor, civic and community leaders. The Alliance would work in support of whatever public entity or process is established to oversee redevelopment of the area—to help create the best possible comprehensive plan for rebuilding Lower Manhattan. This alliance will function in much of the same way that similar coalitions have worked to promote adoption of the new MTA capital program and the preservation of Governors Island. The alliance will coordinate the advocacy and planning efforts of its participants, promote common action on key policies and investments, and speak with the authority of all of the participating groups in dealing with the city and states. It will not impede participants from taking their own actions, but will aid them to add value to each other, and bring the attention of public agencies, the media and the general public to the overall effort.

The Civic Alliance would also seek to maintain an active dialogue with city and state agencies to insure that civic initiatives support the work of the public rebuilding efforts. Since the alliance would not be subject to the political and legal constraints and delays that any new public agency would face, it would be well positioned to complement public sector planning. The Civic Alliance will have the independence, flexibility and long-term perspective to provide well reasoned solutions to some of the critical economic, transportation, security and urban design concerns that must be addressed. It would conduct an open public dialogue that would help the governmental process create the best possible urban development plan for this important district, while generating broad public support for its rapid implementation.

The unique role of the Civic Alliance will be to ensure that the best minds, from here and across the country, and in particular, the energy and vision of the civic community, are brought to bear on these issues. It will help “set the bar high” for the proposals that emerge from the government-led planning process. Finally, the Alliance will work to build broad public support for a visionary redevelopment plan. This support will be essential if city, state and federal regulatory reviews are to be expedited, and the city is to be rebuilt as soon as possible. It is crucially important to rebuild quickly if we are to maintain business confidence in the future of Lower Manhattan, New York City and the Tri-State Metropolitan Region.

The Process

The Civic Alliance would convene the region’s civic leaders to help achieve a public consensus on the goals, process and outcomes of the rebuilding effort. This response will seize on the extraordinary unity of purpose that emerged from the crisis while providing a forum for debating legitimate issues. It will enable the region’s civic organizations to coordinate their agendas to maximize their effectiveness and enhance the region’s ability to secure the public and private resources that will be needed to sustain the reconstruction effort. Immediate actions will include the following:

- Develop and maintain an inventory of public, private and not-for-profit initiatives related to the rebuilding effort. This database will facilitate the coordination of related efforts and help identify gaps in planning activities that the alliance can help to address.
- Create a forum for ongoing communication among civic organizations to address common concerns, coordinate agendas, and develop consensus when needed. This common table will insure that a broad range of perspectives have access to the process, and will also help develop a stronger voice for New York and the region among political and business decision-makers around the globe.

In addition, the Civic Alliance would *initiate a fast-track civic-led planning initiative*, described below, that can inform and help guide the public planning process.

The Civic Planning Initiative

Approximately 13 million square feet of office space was permanently destroyed in the attack, and approximately 17 million has been damaged. This represents over a third of the total commercial floor area of the Lower Manhattan business district. But it also makes it possible and desirable to master plan a district stretching from Broadway to the Hudson River, in the context of a broader vision for all of Lower Manhattan.

Despite the extreme height of its two towers, the Trade Center was actually built out at FAR 14 (a floor area ratio of 14 times the underlying land area) – slightly less than the density of the Midtown district (FAR 16) north of Grand Central Terminal. This means that it could be possible to recreate an intensively developed, mixed-use district on the Trade Center site, without the extreme high rise buildings. By implementing a bold new vision, we can create an inspirational addition to the Manhattan skyline while reconnecting this district into the historic fabric of Lower Manhattan.

The Civic Alliance will draw from the region's deep well of planning, design, transportation and development expertise to develop a conceptual plan for the district. In addition to activities already sponsored by leading planning and design organizations, the Alliance would undertake a comprehensive civic planning process that would include the following components:

A “Call for Ideas”

The Civic Alliance would sponsor a public invitation to submit concept proposals for the district from a variety of perspectives—urban design, economics, politics, social relationships, the arts, etc. Proposals could include physical renderings for the district, concepts for memorializing the site, papers on the role of the district in the global social, economic and political structure. The joint objectives would be to provide a public outlet for the creative ideas that have been developed since the attack, and to insure that both civic and official planning efforts are not constrained by conventional thinking. Proposals would be displayed in a public exhibit and would be evaluated as part of the other planning activities in the Civic Planning Initiative.

Public Lecture Series

In partnership with the region's universities, the Civic Alliance would co-sponsor a series of 6-8 lectures that would address different policy questions, such as the changing role of global cities, the emergence of a “regional central business district” that incorporates outer borough and New Jersey locations, the relationship between the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan and suburban sprawl, and the impact of redevelopment on low-income neighborhoods and community development. These lectures would expand the audience for the initiative, particularly outside of New York City, and provide a stronger role for academic institutions.

Expert Roundtables

Between October and December 2001, the Alliance would convene five expert roundtables, in which invited experts and civic, business, labor and government leaders would discuss the opportunities and concerns related to each of these issues:

Urban design. How the district could be redesigned to maximize its livability, beauty safety and convenience. Issues to be addressed would include the layout of streets and public spaces, options to achieve density without great building height, and strategies to maximize public safety.

Economic development. How the changing economic geography of the region, the requirements of the global economy and the needs of the region's diverse communities should guide the design and infrastructure investments for Lower Manhattan and access to the rest of the region. This group would look at how a reconstructed district can best support economic development in the city and the region. This would include the type of space and mix of activities that would create the most successful redeveloped area.

Transportation and circulation. How the existing transit and ferry network could be adapted to make Lower Manhattan even more accessible to residential and employment centers across the region. In addition, strategies will be explored that would improve pedestrian and transit circulation within Lower Manhattan, including the potential to make much of Lower Manhattan traffic-free.

Institutional and regulatory framework. Mechanisms to expedite the redevelopment of the area while still ensuring high quality planning and design and essential environmental and community interests.

Green building and new technologies. How the new district can incorporate principals of green building design to increase energy efficiency and decrease negative environmental impacts. This roundtable will explore sustainable design features such as the use of natural light and passive heating and cooling systems for proposed buildings and the use of new technologies to render buildings more cost effective, energy efficient, and pleasant to occupy.

Public Forum

In addition, early in 2002, the Civic Alliance would invite noted urban designers, economists, planners and others from the US and Europe to discuss ways that all of these elements could come together to create a prototype 21st century city and region. The forum would draw from the concepts and proposals developed in the Call for Ideas and the Expert Roundtables. These presentations would be open to the public and designed to stimulate public debate on these ideas. A summary of these presentations would be compiled into a published report.

Public Master Plan Charrette

The results of the roundtables and forums would be summarized and provide the basis for a public charrette planning process. (A "charrette" is an intensive planning workshop, in which an expert multi-disciplinary team develops a concept-level plan in a period of 3-7 days.) The charrette would bring together a team of planners, urban designers, real estate experts and others to develop this plan in a public process. The charrette may produce a single plan or a few alternatives that would address such critical concerns as the proposed overall density and

massing of development, the proposed mix of activities, layout of streets, parks and public spaces, the most appropriate way to include a memorial in the site design, circulation systems, and other concerns.

Following the charrette, a small team would further develop a concept-level master plan for the area. This could form the basis for the master plan that would be adopted by the public entity designated to oversee redevelopment of the area. (This is the sequence that occurred at Governors Island, where a public charrette process and a civic-sponsored feasibility study guided preparation of the state's development plan for the Island.)

Public Communication Campaign

As described above, each component of the initiative provides for public input and the wide dissemination of ideas and proposals. Following completion of the formal planning process, the Civic Alliance will develop and execute a public communications strategy to develop a broad-based consensus for the initiative's planning concepts. This strategy will include an ongoing dialogue with key decision-makers in the public and private sectors, forums with citizen groups and organizations throughout the region, and a sustained media campaign.

Principles for Community Planning Initiative

Throughout the process, the Civic Planning Initiative will continue to refine the design, economic development and transportation and regulatory principles that should guide the reconstruction of the World Trade Center District. However, a few overriding principles will shape the initiative from the outset:

- 1. *Respect:*** From the beginning of the rebuilding process to the final shape of the reconstructed district, respect for the victims of the September 11 tragedy must be a central principle. The mourning is international in scope and will continue long after we raise new structures on the World Trade Center site. Regardless of what we do, this will become a global pilgrimage site. Creating a memorial that honors the victims is essential, but not sufficient. Everything from the design of the entire location to the activities that are encouraged on the site to the way we conduct the process needs to respect the victims' memory and loved ones, and recognize the symbolic importance of the site.
- 2. *Economic Vitality:*** The devastation in Lower Manhattan is revealing the scope of its economic importance to the city and the metropolitan region. Lower Manhattan accounts for approximately 15% of the city's economy and 7% of the region's economy. One preliminary estimate puts the economic losses of the September 11 attack at \$40 billion, not even counting the continuing effects of the likely national recession. Among those most affected are the 50,000 residents of Lower Manhattan and the thousands of maintenance workers, restaurant employees and other low-income workers whose livelihoods were affected. Over the long term, it is unclear how the event will change the district's attractiveness to business and the region's economy. Therefore, a primary goal of the rebuilding effort must be to restore economic capacity as well as business and public confidence in the future of Lower Manhattan, and to sustain its pivotal role in the global economy.

3. ***Vision:*** Our sights should be set high to create a new and recognizable place that is worthy of both historical significance and future aspirations. For all of their flaws, the World Trade Center towers announced that the New York region was the center of global finance and commerce in the 20th Century. To project an image for the 21st Century, we need to design a world-class district that is an attractive destination for the next generation of residents, businesses, immigrants and visitors. While the trade center complex can be the focal point of this district, its boundaries need to include all of Lower Manhattan. If we insist on exemplary planning, design, and technology for the area, this district, which was the world's first great 20th century city, could become the world's first great 21st century city.
4. ***Community:*** The place must also strengthen its connections, both physically and symbolically, to a wider Community on several levels. The devastation of the Trade Center laid bare the human, economic and cultural importance of the Lower Manhattan to regional, national and international communities. Neighborhoods across the metropolitan region—in New Jersey, Long Island, Connecticut and upstate New York as well as neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs—were home to most of the victims of the attack. In addition, most states and 63 nations also lost citizens. And while New York City is bearing the brunt of the economic and psychic damage, these impacts have rippled across the regional and global landscape. The city's recovery will be strengthened by insuring that the rebuilding effort includes these communities and improves their physical, social and economic links to Lower Manhattan.
5. ***Social Justice:*** The World Trade Disaster entailed the loss of life of hundreds and perhaps thousands of minority and immigrant workers who toiled at the bottom of the economic ladder. Moreover, hundreds of small minority, immigrant and female enterprises that were based on the dense traffic of the Twin Towers will never regain their livelihoods. In rebuilding Lower Manhattan, we have to reconceptualize the socioeconomic map as well. In this process of renewed reconstruction, we must recognize the need to heal the gaps in income and opportunities that persist in the region's fabric. This can include creating new avenues that provide job opportunities in construction jobs and other sectors, and the inclusion of minorities in the planning and rebuilding efforts.

6. **Democracy:** Ultimately, the long-term civic and economic health of the city and the region, as well as the nation as a whole, depends on making the right decisions. We all have a stake in an outcome that will have such a profound impact on New York City, its environs and the nation's image. The rebuilding process should be designed to maximize public involvement, with the goals of generating the best ideas and creating the broadest possible support for the recommended outcomes. A democratic process will also take the best advantage of our diverse communities, their interests and concerns –the very values opposed by the terrorists who attacked us.
7. **Security:** Enhanced security is an obvious priority for the area. To attract tenants, residents and visitors, the district must be redesigned to become recognized as a safe place to live, work and visit, a place that takes every precaution against potential security risks, while at the same time not becoming an armed camp, isolated from the life of the city. Here, we may be able to learn from the experience of the City of London, which in response to IRA bombings, created a pedestrian precinct that is safer, more pleasant and more economically vital than its was before.
8. **Speed:** There is a tension between the need to quickly restore economic capacity with the need to for an open process that insures that the best ideas are considered and implemented. However, the hard facts of lost business and income argue for a process that cuts through unnecessary delays to restore usable office space and functional transportation. It is essential that we strike the right balance between the need for an accelerated recovery and the need to provide a foundation for long-term strength and superb quality of life.