

**Testimony of Ethel Sheffer, President
New York Metro Chapter
American Planning Association**



Public Hearing before the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, January 13, 2003

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in this hearing. I am here on behalf of The New York Metro Chapter of the American Planning Association, which represents 950 members working within the five Boroughs, Long Island, Westchester County, and the Hudson Valley.

The LMDC effort, which has resulted in these nine visions, is an important event in the history of public dialogue about architecture and about our hopes for the city. Although these great architects' designs represent exciting opportunities for the future of Lower Manhattan, the nine striking schemes had to accommodate the same square footage per use, or more, as the Trade Center buildings prior to September 11, 2001.

Our purpose today is to shift some focus from the images presented of the skylines to what the designs would mean at the street level. But our longer term concerns are these: that the many parties involved in shaping Lower Manhattan's future agree upon a clear set of priorities for Downtown based on extensive research into current and future conditions shaping the New York region and that a public process be established that gives adequate time for feedback and a clear method to incorporate this commentary from the public.

Developing a good plan requires a good public process. What has been missing so far in this respect is a mechanism for adequate *response* from LMDC, and from all of the agencies involved, to comments made at hearings like this one and posted on web sites. Time must be taken, without rushing, to allow all these needs, policy decisions, and public understandings to ripen. Unwise speed and a rush to incomplete judgment about a design approach and uses is not "deliberate speed".

Some Comments on the Designs

While much of the discussion to date has centered on towers that soar as high as 2,100 feet, the pedestrian on a city sidewalk sees about four stories of the buildings immediately ahead. Without active ground floor uses, many a fine building is abandoned at the street level. Good architecture elevates civic pride and image, but it must truly inhabit its surroundings and the larger city to become a real masterpiece. In his plan for Lower Manhattan, the Mayor articulated a comprehensive vision to promote a vibrant downtown with improved transit connections, a greater mixing of uses and a revitalized retail sector at the street level. The approach selected as a result of this process should work well with the Mayor's vision, as does Liebskind's Memorial Foundations, eschewing the outdated super block to provide key street, pedestrian and visual connections to the rest of the city. As illustrated by the Peterson

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Littenberg plan, the plan should pay careful attention to building at a human scale and include a variety of pedestrian experiences such as retail on the commercial streets and quiet places for reflection. It should also provide generous public open spaces, as described by Foster and Partners, that can be used by the residents as well as workers and visitors, especially at the street level.



Planning, Coordination and Politics

LMDC has said: “At the conclusion of this process, the LMDC may choose to retain one or more of the participants to continue, or choose to retain none of them. Such election will be made at the discretion of the LMDC.”

This statement flashes as a warning that design and architecture are not the same things as planning and urban vision. These designs were developed before there has been any real agreement on what are the needs and desired uses for the site and its surroundings. Before decisions are made about any one—or all—of these designs, the LMDC, the Port Authority, and the City administration have a duty to coordinate their policies, programs, and procedures so that the architecture and uses for the sixteen-acre site are not in competition with, but in accord with, a larger planning vision for the city and the region.

Why six hundred thousand to a million square feet of retail on the site, which has been considerably increased from what was stipulated last year? Why six to ten million square feet of office and cultural center space on the site? How do these requirements and mandates to the architects reflect or show any compatibility at all with Mayor Bloomberg’s commendable vision for neighborhood development, waterfront enhancement, housing, open space, and regional transportation?

What is to be contained in the soon-to-be-released Port Authority’s plan for Lower Manhattan that we hear will be accommodated in whatever choice is made among these architectural submissions? How do these designs for the site relate to the realities of private risk and public investment in the future and the governing lease agreements, as Mr. Silverstein goes ahead with the rebuilding of Seven WTC? When can the public see and evaluate in a coherent way the public transportation plans of the MTA and the Port Authority, so basic to the renewal and rebuilding of our city?

The APA commends you for your diligent efforts in organizing this meeting tonight, and for seeking to provide New York and the community with an inspirational vision for what downtown can be. We pledge to work with you to refine this public process and to give life to a program of comprehensive and democratic planning.

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