

# An Open Memorial Process

**T**he World Trade Center site and its adjacent areas have been witness to extraordinary tragedy and heroism. There is urgent need to begin an official memorial process both in its own right and in the context of redeveloping the site and revitalizing Lower Manhattan. The original configuration and occupants of the site should be reflected in the memorial. The successful rebuilding of Lower Manhattan, if carried out with sufficient high purpose, would also be a memorial in itself.

## Honor the people and the place

A memorial that recognizes the scale and significance of the events of September 11 seems almost impossible to conceive today, yet by harnessing a process that has already begun, and through research, outreach, and determination, a vision can be achieved and implemented. Focusing grief, energy, and imagination into an open and inclusive memorial process under public leadership will yield compelling memorials, meaningful for present and future generations.

## Principles

- The memorials should have a mission established through a broad and inclusive process.
- The memorials should offer a profound experience and significant site for remembrance.
- The memorials should not be an afterthought, and a permanent memorial should be integrated into the planning and design of the entire site.
- The memorials should be conceived in the context of a vital community.
- The official memorial process should begin as soon as possible.

## Formalize the process

New York City and the world began memorializing the tragedy of September 11 almost immediately after the event. The spontaneous memorials and ongoing discussion are in fact the beginning of the memorial process, which the permanent memorials should draw on. A broad cross-section of New Yorkers and visitors from around the world are recognizing Ground Zero as a pilgrimage site. Temporary installations and exhibitions are being mounted throughout the city. Several groups of family survivors have emerged and require an official advocate and sounding board. With all this activity, we must ensure that the unofficial record of immediate response is not lost or disregarded.

In tandem with the development of temporary memorials and viewing places, an organized listening process should be initiated quickly to bring together the many local, regional, national, and international individuals and groups who are speaking out. They need immediate recognition by an official Memorials Task Force, so that the dialogue can be as constructive as possible. We strongly recommend that the Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Corporation dedicate its board, an advisory committee, and staff to a Memorials Task Force, in cooperation with the Office of the Mayor.

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### Define the site

What is the official definition of Ground Zero and who will decide its extent? Should it be regarded as sacred ground, public land, or private property? Should there be one central memorial or several? Is Ground Zero the only option for the primary memorial or are there other viable sites, such as nearby parks or Fresh Kills?

### Define the program

Should the primary memorial stand alone, or seek to incorporate a Visitors Center, a museum, site artifacts, or even temporary memorials? Who will fund it? Who will be responsible for its design, construction, administration, and maintenance? How will it be related to potential memorials in Washington, DC, Pennsylvania, and other communities, or be integrated with existing memorials in Lower Manhattan?

### Define the process

How can the Task Force participants work together to arrive at a mission statement and then begin a design selection process? Is an open or invited competition the best method to achieve an inspired design for temporary and permanent memorials? If so, who will organize and oversee it? Who would jury a competition? Are there other options?

### **Build a mandate from the dialogue underway**

It is urgent that the dialogue on the memorial be inclusive. The Memorial Process Team of New York New Visions, which draws on the expertise and experience of professionals and concerned citizens (including people directly affected) held several preliminary outreach sessions. Among those who attended were rescue workers and families of victims, civic leaders, business people, property owners, students and educators, and local residents. The opinions expressed by the participants afforded a glimpse of the future process, establishing the parameters of the broadly based Memorials Task Force that must be formed and the issues that it will surely face.

The substance of the discussions suggests the difficulty of the path ahead and the challenge of accommodating the enormous range of constituencies and opinions. There was agreement, however, that those affected most should be heard first, and that the process should not be rushed. There was a demand for public forums of many kinds, including the use of the Internet as a way to listen and build consensus.

### **Build a memorial for the future**

The participants in these preliminary outreach sessions voiced a diversity of views, yet most spoke of their desire for a beautiful, calming, neutral place of sacred ground. Participants hoped for an uplifting and optimistic process that was celebratory of the rebirth of downtown Manhattan. They wanted to memorialize heroism, resilience, and sacrifice, and reference the downtown communities' loss in the broadest sense. Some were strongly against a "war" memorial like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, while others supported such an approach because it could elicit a profound experience.

Some participants thought that the former main plaza of the World Trade Center should be the primary site of a permanent memorial. Artifacts of the tragedy, such as fragments of the World Trade Center buildings and other items from the debris pile, could be retained at the site or transported to other memorial sites. Not just "another granite fountain," their vision of the memorial was of an experience that could be social and fluid, a place for stories.

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Although the volume of tourists was an issue, they favored reclaiming the plaza for public use as a park, performing arts center, cultural center, or learning center for children.

Building on the experience of recent memorial processes, even at this early date we endorse a strong initial call for the largest vision possible and of an expanded concept of the memorial as both commemoration and continuing process. The inclusion of an educational component in the form of exhibits and/or a museum should be part of a long-term commitment to an active public program that deepens our understanding of the tragedy and promotes a dialogue with future generations.

### **Urgent action items:**

- Form a broadly based Memorials Task Force, aimed at reaching a mission statement for the memorials by September 2002, with a timeline leading to a full program and design.
- Sustain dignified interim viewing places for visitors, respecting the community's ongoing needs.
- Create a plan for temporary memorials, integrated with viewing places, that addresses visitor and resident needs.
- Dedicate major resources, broad focus, and professional staff to this process under a Memorials Advisory Committee of the Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Corporation and the Office of the Mayor.
- Obtain recognition and funding from the federal government identifying the World Trade Center site as a site of national significance.