



**Date:** February 23, 2009  
**To:** RPA Board of Directors, State Committee Members, Supporters and Friends  
**From:** Tom Wright, Executive Director

**Re:** J. Max Bond, Jr., RPA Board Member

I wanted to share with you the sad and shocking news of Max Bond's death last week from cancer.

In addition to being a leading architect, urbanist and teacher, Max was a Board and Executive Committee Member of Regional Plan Association. Among his incredible qualities was a generosity of spirit and talent which meant that he was frequently being asked – and kindly agreeing – to participate in our public forums and community design workshops. In 1994, he was a member of the Architects Committee convened by Robert Geddes to create visions of the redevelopment of Manhattan's Far West Side for RPA's Third Regional Plan. His idea of a mixed-use district on top of the Hudson Yards is included in the Plan: a powerful image of a democratic and sustainable community on the edge of Midtown Manhattan. As Bob Geddes writes, "Max was a CIVIC architect. He devoted himself to civic engagement in his practice of planning and design, in his teaching architecture as Chair at Columbia and Dean at City College, and in his participation in RPA, notably, as a creative force in The Architects' Committee for the Third Regional Plan."

After the publication of the Third Regional Plan, Max participated in RPA charrettes for Governors Island, workshops for rebuilding Lower Manhattan after 9/11, and Mayors Institutes across the region. In 2006, when Mayor-elect Cory Booker asked RPA to create a new planning framework for the City of Newark, our first step was to ask Max to Chair the Community Development workshop. Rob Lane, RPA's Director of Design, went so far as to insist that the only way we could undertake such an ambitious project was if Max would agree to lead the effort. Of course, he did.

Among his many great achievements, Max oversaw the planning of the 9/11 Memorial in Lower Manhattan after the selection of Michael Arad's design through a competition. The moment he became involved, the entire plan benefited from his clarity and vision. It was a contested and political project, and at times various individuals or factions would throw slings and arrows in the press to try to win their points. Max always kept his perspective and managed to keep the process moving forward. One cold winter's night, after a long and difficult public hearing, Max and I went to a bar to have a drink and catch up. He had been subject to unfair attacks, which left me frustrated and angry, but Max remained his usual cheerful self. I asked him how he managed to stay so composed through such a difficult process, to stay above the petty arguments, and even be kind to the people who were opposing him.

"Tom," he said in his gravelly yet buoyant voice, "my grandfather was born in slavery. When these things happen, I think about what he faced, and how fortunate I have been in my life. And I just decide not to let these things bother me."

The Region has lost one of its greatest voices for civic design, social justice and gracious humanity. We're all sad to lose him, but also fortunate to have had the chance to learn from his example.

A link to last week's obituary in the New York Times is pasted below:

[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/19/arts/design/19bond.html?\\_r=1&scp=2&sq=max%20bond&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/19/arts/design/19bond.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=max%20bond&st=cse)