

NJ CT
NY

Regional Plan Association

Contact: Jeremy Soffin, 212/253-2727, ext. 303 or jeremy@rpa.org

HIGH EXPECTATIONS REMAIN UNMET IN LOWER MANHATTAN REBUILDING PROCESS

*Report Praises Heroic Recovery Effort, Raises Concerns Over Limited Implementation
of Visions for Rebuilding, Public Participation*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 9, 2004

NEW YORK – Regional Plan Association today released *A Civic Assessment of the Lower Manhattan Planning Process*, a report to the Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York that updates the progress of the alliance’s objectives for Lower Manhattan rebuilding. The report applauds government officials for getting Lower Manhattan back on its feet after 9/11, but concludes that the civic community’s high expectations for the rebuilding process have not yet been met despite the best efforts of public officials. The full report and an executive summary are available at www.rpa.org.

“After 9/11 the civic community united behind the idea of ‘raising the bar’ for the rebuilding process,” said Robert D. Yaro, chair of the Civic Alliance and President of Regional Plan Association. “While the recovery efforts were truly heroic and several important projects have emerged, Lower Manhattan now seems unlikely to set new standards for public input, design and planning excellence or environmental sustainability.”

The report provides a status update to the Civic Alliance’s 2002 *Planning Framework* (available at www.civic-alliance.org), which outlined an extensive set of goals and principles for the planning process. Regional Plan Association prepared this assessment for the Civic Alliance to help guide the advocacy agenda of the civic community moving forward and to point to areas of opportunity and priority for its efforts. Following the issuance of this report, the Civic Alliance will meet to frame its policy agenda for the coming year and set goals to be met before the next anniversary of 9/11.

“The vision put forward by the Civic Alliance two years ago was a long-term blueprint for creating a 21st Century city in Lower Manhattan,” said Petra Todorovich, an RPA planner and the principal author of the report. “We remain hopeful that thanks to the hard work of all of the government agencies our high expectations will be met, but the report shows that in many areas progress is not being made toward the Alliance’s goals.”

--more--

While the rebuilding process has responded to several civic-supported recommendations—most notably restoring and expanding Lower Manhattan’s transportation infrastructure and connections to the region—it has neglected many other recommended strategies. Most importantly, none of the official planning efforts to date have seriously considered the recommendation to change the program for the WTC site by introducing a more diverse mix of uses or reducing the amount of commercial office space located on the site. Other civic recommendations to diversify Lower Manhattan’s economy, provide a range of housing options, and lead the City and Nation in pioneering environmental sustainability and green building design, have largely been neglected. The report’s principal findings are summarized below. A complete executive summary and report are available at www.rpa.org:

- **The Port Authority, New York City, New York State and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority repaired and restored Lower Manhattan’s infrastructure and public spaces with unprecedented speed and efficiency.**
- **Several exemplary transportation projects have resulted from the rebuilding effort and should help restore Lower Manhattan’s vibrancy as they are implemented.**
- **The commitment to incorporate public input in the planning process, while laudable in some instances, has been uneven over time and across subject areas. In many cases public agencies have failed to follow through on public input received.**
- **Major challenges and uncertainties underlie the current direction of planning for the World Trade Center site. The implementation of design excellence is not assured, as Libeskind’s Master Plan has been stripped and design guidelines languish in negotiation.**
- **Economic initiatives to date have not supported the diversification of Lower Manhattan’s economy, nor they do they promote a range of housing options that would encourage a socially, economically and racially diverse residential community.**
- **Efforts to build Lower Manhattan’s civic amenities to create a more attractive and livable community, as articulated in the Mayor’s “Vision for Lower Manhattan,” are lagging.**
- **The success of the “Reflecting Absence” memorial design is greatly dependent on integration with the overall master plan for the site, and logistical, funding and maintenance issues that are in development. The cultural program for the site, while promising, is also highly dependent on funding and implementation issues, and has not benefited from sufficient public input.**
- **While individual buildings on the WTC Site will meet a minimum threshold of environmentally sustainable design, they will be upstaged by other projects in the City that are demonstrating greater levels of environmental innovation and sustainability.**

Rebuilding Assessment/Page 3

In preparing this report, RPA has drawn on its experience of convening and staffing the Civic Alliance since shortly after 9/11, and its extensive involvement in leading efforts to promote public participation in the rebuilding process with its Civic Alliance partners. The views expressed in the paper are those of RPA, but are influenced by its extensive experience working with the members of the Civic Alliance and by input of Civic Alliance members specifically on this report.

The input and comments of the general public are also considered, gathered from the Civic Alliance's many public participation events it has sponsored since 9/11, such as two "Listening to the City" forums in February and July of 2002, the "How Can \$1.2 Billion best Revitalize New York After 9/11?" public workshop in March 2004, and numerous public panel discussions that were hosted by different organizations as part of the "Beyond 16 Acres" series, on topics ranging from housing to green buildings to Chinatown.

RPA also wishes to acknowledge the hard work of the public agencies and civil servants who face the daunting task of executing the rebuilding agenda, and for their unwavering professionalism and dedication since 9/11. Specifically, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the City of New York and the State of the New York are to be commended for their extraordinary efforts.

Regional Plan Association (RPA) is an independent regional planning organization that improves the quality of life and the economic competitiveness of the 31-county New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region through research, planning, and advocacy. Since 1922, RPA has been shaping transportation systems, protecting open spaces, and promoting better community design for the region's continued growth. We anticipate the challenges the region will face in the years to come, and we mobilize the region's civic, business, and government sectors to take action. For more information about Regional Plan Association, please visit our website, www.rpa.org.

###