

9/11 MEMORIAL MUSEUM

2009 - 2010 Museum Planning Conversation Series Report

Rendering: Courtesy Thinc Design with Local Projects



Museum Planning Conversation Series

Fall 2009 – Spring 2010

Since 2006, the Museum Planning Conversation Series has provided a forum for discussions ranging from the aspirational potential of envisioning a 21st century museum to the nuts and bolts challenges of designing the exhibitions and visitor experience at the National September 11 Memorial Museum. Individual participants have changed over time, but the group as a whole remains representative of a broad spectrum of parties—whether family members of 9/11 victims, survivors of the attacks, uniformed rescue personnel, lower Manhattan residents and business owners, landmark preservationists, interfaith clergy, government leaders, historians, or members of the professional museum, arts and education communities—all with a vested interest in the successful realization of the Museum.

With the National September 11 Memorial Museum scheduled to open in September 2012, the focus of this season's series turned specifically to design development of the core historical exhibition. Each of three sessions provided an in-depth examination of the narrative, proposed contents, and design studies for one of each of the three main parts of this exhibition: the events of the day; the historical context leading up to 9/11 including the 1993 World Trade Center bombing; and the world after 9/11.

As always, Memorial and Museum staff listened and learned from the range of responses and the robust exchange of ideas, bringing this input and guidance to bear on the evolving conception and design of the historical exhibition.

Presentation on the Core Historical Exhibition: Part 1

This opening program of the 2009-2010 Museum Planning Conversation Series focused on the content and design of the first part of the historical exhibition, which covers the day of the 9/11 attacks. Overall, the historical exhibition is divided into three parts and covers some 22,000 sq. ft. within the Memorial Museum and is located within the North Tower footprint. Plans for Parts 2 and 3 would be presented during future sessions of this season's Conversation Series.

The stark emotionality of the events of the day, as depicted in the historical exhibition, elicited concerns that visitors be prepared for some of the most difficult materials that they would face. Advance notice – both before a Museum visit and within the Memorial Museum, before coming to particularly troubling elements of the exhibition – was advised.

Specific cautions were urged for selected segments of the Museum's audience: children, with a suggestion that the Museum propose (but not enforce) an appropriate minimum age; and 9/11 family members, with a suggestion that they be given private viewing opportunities before the Museum opens. A request was made for local residents to be offered special opportunities to view the Museum.

The inclusion of photographs of individuals who either fell or jumped from the towers evoked a range of responses. Some meeting participants expressed concern that such images could be viewed as exploitative of the dilemma that these people faced. For others, the images represented critical documentation of a defining characteristic of the attacks and the true experience of some people inside the towers. The proposal to present these images in separate alcoves, off the main visitor path, found support from a majority of participants, as this segregation of content would enable visitors to make their own choice about whether or not to view these images.

Some support was expressed for the view that the first part of the historical exhibition should address the daily life of the towers, rather than beginning the 9/11 story with the moment of the plane piercing the North Tower at 8:46 am. A separate, interpretive display on the construction of the World Trade Center including information on the "life of the Towers" is planned for another part of the Museum, alongside an archaeological excavation of historic box column remnants.

There was discussion about the abundance of material proposed for presentation in Part 1 of the historical exhibition. For some, this amount of material provided welcome depth to the story of the day; for others, there was concern about whether so much material could be digested by visitors.

A related discussion focused on the presentation of an event timeline, along the perimeter wall of the exhibition space adjacent to, and corresponding with, the main pathway through the exhibition. This placement, in one view, provided a helpful balance to the multiple narratives that are incorporated into the main path through Part 1. Another participant questioned whether the timeline was sufficiently integrated into the rest of the exhibition, so that it could help viewers organize the range of materials they would see.

Presentation on the Core Historical Exhibition: Part 2

The second session of the 2009-2010 Museum Planning Conversation Series turned to the content and design development of the second part of the historical exhibition, which explores the context and historical background leading up to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, including information about the February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.

Covering six percent of the exhibition's total area, this portion of the historical exhibition is comprised of four sub-sections: an exploration of the World Trade Center (WTC) towers' symbolic value in American and global culture; an examination of the 1993 attack on the WTC; the emergence of al Qaeda during the Soviet-Afghan war and its subsequent declaration of war and plots against the US; and the details of the 9/11 plot. The story is told in this part of the exhibition through the use of artifacts, oral histories, timelines and multi-media presentations.

Much of the conversation focused on the planned identification of the 9/11 hijackers within the Museum. Some meeting participants expressed the view that inclusion of photographs of the hijackers might be offensive to some visitors within the context of a museum that is also commemorating the victims. A response to this view was that, as a history museum charged with telling the story of the terrorist attacks, the identification of the perpetrators was critical. Still another response was that the hijackers were only tools of the plot masterminds, and that, in addition to identifying the hijackers, more attention should be given to Osama bin Laden and other senior leaders of al Qaeda. Another participant commented that her first exposure to photos of the terrorists had come during a meeting with the FBI; in her view, a visitor's eye-to-eye confrontation with images of the killers was an appropriate part of the story.

Another view sought more explanation of the plot and the ideology that motivated it; in particular, that the dangers of fanaticism should be highlighted. To this view was added the note that the 9/11 attacks, though occurring in the United States, took the lives of citizens from 93 nations.

Further discussion touched on the question of whether this part of the story should be more integrated with the account of the events of the day in the first part of the historical exhibition. Focusing on the historical context for the attacks separate from the progression of events as experienced on 9/11,

seemed to separate the victims from their killers. It was suggested that combining these elements of the story could provide greater context to the account of the attacks and heighten the visitor's sense of the brutality of the killers.

Regarding American intelligence agencies before the attacks, a number of comments urged that the exhibition discuss what was known and what wasn't, particularly by political leaders. One participant recalled the immediate question as the attacks were unfolding—*Who did this?*—and urged that it be considered in light of the actions of intelligence agencies at the time. Other comments urged the inclusion of the history of the 9/11 Commission—both in terms of how it was formed and what it learned. (This subject is slated for inclusion in the third part of the historical exhibition).

Presentation on the Core Historical Exhibition: Part 3

This final program of the 2009-2010 Museum Planning Conversation Series season presented the third part of the historical exhibition, which examines the immediate and long-term aftermath of 9/11, from efforts to rescue victims and recover bodies at the site to consideration of how the world changed in the years since the attacks. Emphasis was given to content that was under consideration for inclusion, rather than design approaches to this part of the exhibition. Design will be presented once it is further developed.

Within this final part of the core historical exhibition, approximately two-thirds will focus on the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, presenting thematic subject areas within a roughly chronological framework that ends in May 2002, which marked the close of the recovery period at ground zero.

Responding to the presentation on this section of the exhibition only, a number of comments urged the inclusion of (or greater emphasis on) the following:

- Initial formal ceremonies including an October 2001 gathering for families, as well as the Yankee Stadium multi-denominational prayer service;
- The impact of the devastation on different neighborhoods in the local community, and dislocations in living, schooling and work;
- In the early days, the presence of volunteers on the “Pile,” whose role was eventually supplanted by hired labor;
- Extensive voluntary provision of health care services (podiatry, mental health counseling) as part of the recovery effort;
- The emotionally-charged process by which families of 9/11 victims gradually coalesced around key issues as advocates and activists;
- A closer examination of the struggles of 9/11 family members to confront the loss of loved ones, particularly through the creation of missing posters.

A separate presentation focused on the longer-term impact of 9/11 on the global community, which will constitute the closing section of the historical exhibition. Here, the exhibition will focus on critical questions that emerged

over the extended aftermath of the attacks, using these questions both to introduce relevant historical information and events, and to create a dynamic framework for dialogue and further consideration of the range of responses to these issues. As currently formulated, the questions are presented first in a pragmatic formulation and then, in a way that suggests the ongoing implications of those questions. For example:

What happened on 9/11?

- *Is it possible to ensure citizen safety?*

How were victims identified?

- *What is society's obligation to victims of violent crimes and their families?*

Who was responsible?

- *Can governments predict and prevent terrorism?*

How did America attempt to re-establish national security?

- *How does a democracy balance national security and civil freedoms in response to terrorism?*

What were the lasting health effects on survivors, residents and recovery workers?

- *What is society's responsibility to individuals collaterally damaged by terrorism?*

How did we remember?

- *Why should we remember?*

Comments on this part of the exhibition suggested a further exploration of themes that, in the views of some attendees, were characteristic of the overall response. These included innovation and creativity, leadership and love.

Of particular interest to a number of participants was the history of planning for the 9/11 Memorial, and in particular, the role 9/11 families played in advocating for, or objecting to, key features of the Memorial. Through this advocacy and activism, they said, broad issues were more fully debated; this level of commitment and involvement created, one participant asserted, a sense of “family” among the 9/11 families.



Fall 2009 - Spring 2010

Additional Invitees,
Participants, and Speakers

New Invitees to the Conversation Series in 2009-2010

Family Members of Victims and WTC Survivors

Juliette Bergman, WTC Survivor

Michael Kuo, Project Manager, Colgate Development, 9/11 Family Member

Jim Riches, Deputy Chief, FDNY, 9/11 Family Member

Debbie Westfal, Family Liaison, Voices of September 11th

Lower Manhattan Residents, Business Community and Government

Michael Connolly, Co-Chair, Community Board 1 WTC Redevelopment
Committee

Linda Dienst, Vice President of Marketing, Alliance for Downtown New York

Kirsten Gillibrand, U.S. Senator

Deborah J. Glick, Assembly Member, New York 66th District

Nicole LaRusso, Vice President, Planning & Economic Development,
Alliance for Downtown New York

Caitlin Olson, Executive Director, Project Rebirth

Nicole Rittenmeyer, New Animal Productions

Daniel Squadron, New York State Senator, 25th District

Elizabeth Tyson, New Animal Productions

Preservationists

Bob Boerum, Art Conservator, Art Preservation Services

Uniformed Rescue and Recovery Agencies

Edward S. Kilduff, Chief of Fire Department, FDNY

Interfaith and Multi-Cultural Perspectives

Rabbi Irwin Kula, President, Clal-The National Jewish Center for Learning
and Leadership

Museum, Education, and Cultural Perspectives

Edward Berenson, Director, Institute of French Studies, Professor of History,
New York University

Caroline Bevan, Tribute WTC Center

Greg Blackburn, Senior Graphic Designer, Thinc Design

Damon Campagna, Curator, New York City Fire Museum

Julie Chung, Senior Designer, Thinc Design

Glenn Corbett, Chair, Dept. of Protection, James Jay College

Sam Franklin, Content Coordinator, Thinc Design

Rachel Schreck, Project Manager, Thinc Design

Steve Shaw, Design Director, Thinc Design

Robert Weible, State Historian and Chief Curator, New York State Museum

David Winkler, Composer

National Perspectives and International Affairs

Anna Pardo, Curator, FBI Tour, Federal Bureau of Investigation

National September 11 Memorial & Museum Staff

Jonathan Byerley, Collections and Cataloging Assistant

James Connors, EVP of Operations

Meredith Davidson, Memorial Exhibition Content Assistant

Michael Frazier, Senior Communications Manager

Noelle Lilien, General Counsel

Juliana Ochs, Researcher

Jessica Ondusko, Cataloguer

Ryan Pawling, Coordinator of Partnerships

Edward Rowlands, Collections and Cataloging Assistant

Jay Weinkam, Director, Government Affairs & Partnerships

Robert Vinci, Exhibition Development Project Manager

For a complete listing of all invitees to, and participants and speakers at, the Museum Planning Conversation Series since 2006, please refer to the summary reports for prior seasons.