

Association of University Architects
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AThe Events of September 11th, 2001 and The City University of New York@

(indicates slide being shown)*

[*] The events of September 11th might already seem far away for some of us. Even in New York City, we are all talking about other things: the economy rebounding, the tourists coming back, the future. At the City University, we're busy planning for a new College on Governor's Island, long before we know the fate of one of our campus buildings that was gravely wounded that tragic day.

But, though some might want to move on, in New York we are still hurting and healing, and the constant reminder of what is *not* **[*]** in our skyline is a strong, daily reminder of September 11th.

As we talk about the loss of the World Trade Center, **[*]** it is appropriate to say a few words about it, from an architectural viewpoint. Originally, I remember not liking those enormous towers, or the plaza where they sat, with its lack of human scale. One joke was that they were **Athe boxes that the Chrysler and the Empire State Buildings came in.@** However, with time they grew on everyone (or mostly everyone); they were a constant fixture and defined the entire city's skyline. On the morning of September 11th, **[*]** suddenly they were gone and we missed them more than we could have possibly imagined.

Everyone remembers **[*]** where they were or what they were doing at that moment. Many of us were like the rest of you, either at work or going to work, **[*]** and heard about the planes crashing

and ran to our TVs. After the initial shock and realization of the immensity of the tragedy, my first reaction was to call [*] Borough of Manhattan Community College, or ABMCC, one of our colleges occupying two buildings in lower Manhattan: Fiterman Hall, at the foot of the towers, and 199 Chambers Street, three blocks away (that long low building on the left of the screen). I managed to reach the Provost, who explained that all the students had been evacuated from Fiterman Hall, the building closest to the towers, and escorted by Campus Security three blocks north to the main campus on Chambers Street. Fiterman Hall, [*] a 16-story 360,000 GSF building, had a capacity of 5,000 students, plus two floors occupied by the University's Research Foundation and one floor by a College media accelerator incubator type space.

We were [*] just about to complete a \$64 Million renovation of this building, a renovation (designed by Hardy Holtzman) that had taken us five years because it was funded in phases. The process required parts of the building to be renovated while other areas were partially occupied. Opening day ironically was scheduled for October 15th. [*] However, I wasn't worried about Fiterman Hall at that time. I couldn't imagine the twin towers falling, much less that one of the other World Trade Center structures might fall on our building.

During that tragic morning, campus personnel stayed at Fiterman Hall and were outside the building when the first tower fell. [*] Covered in dust, [*] they ran to the basement for shelter. [*] Shortly thereafter they again heard the frightening sound of another building collapsing, and saw, felt, tasted the choking dust of the North Tower's demise. They ran the three blocks back to the Chambers Street building thinking the end was near. At the main campus, they found grounds

personnel had set up hoses and were spraying people down and giving them water [*] to clear the dust from their throats, as they fled the area.

The Chambers Street [*] building was also evacuated, and classes were cancelled there and throughout the University. Our College building instead [*] became a City AGround Zero@ command center. Dozens of uniformed officers took up posts, as we still had phone lines and other support. (All regular radios and cellular phones were out of service.) The Port Authority [*] Police Department first took over the theatre [*], the NYPD set up shop in the security offices and the New York [*] Fire Department headquartered in the gym. Later on the space allocation changed as the Red Cross, [*] the National Guard [*], and military units I've never heard of moved in and used our facilities.

In the midst of chaos, the College made some important decisions that led to a most fortunate outcome for its facilities. Many nearby public facilities were abandoned by their administrators during and after the attacks, and during the rescue and recovery efforts, these facilities were taken over by various State, City, and Federal agencies. Unfortunately, these agencies were focused on Ground Zero and not on respecting and maintaining their temporary facilities. At BMCC, [*] the President insisted on remaining at the College, and this crucial decision made a big difference in getting the campus up and running again.

Many BMCC staff members also remained on the campus, [*] helping with the rescue/recovery effort. While giving 100% cooperation to all the agencies that moved in, the College located them on the lower floors of the larger campus spaces, such as the gym and cafeteria, and in effect sealed off the upper floors. The rescue workers (including dogs) [*] came in from searching in

the rubble with dirty and possibly contaminated clothing. College staff mopped up constantly behind them, and provided new donated clothing. [*] All of our staff insisted that the place should be clean, and they kept it clean. This effort might sound trivial; however, it proved crucial to the College's being able to resume normal operations on October 1st. [*] The barges taking the WTC debris to Staten Island was stationed right across the street. So you can imagine how dirty everything was.

Trying to stay clean helped us avoid millions of dollars that other agencies, whose buildings were entirely taken over, spent to relocate. A lesson to learn: if you can manage to ... stay in your building.

At CUNY we assisted many that were unable to carry out their services. The Board of Ed lost its website and CUNY was able to re-route it, allowing them to connect with its two million students and inform them about school closings and relocations. [*] We instituted open clinics at all twenty of our campuses to provide counseling for those in need. CUNY security staff were part of the team at the City's command center, [*] which allowed us to receive crucial information as it happened. (They were first at our building and then moved to Pier 56.)

All in all, during those chaotic days, [*] we performed admirably. Despite having few resources ourselves, we were even able to help the Mayor's Office, which had lost its emergency Abunker@ when World Trade Center #7 fell (the infamous building that also fell on our Fiterman Hall).

Within two days **B** by September 13th **B** all of CUNY was back to school except BMCC.

After the first few chaotic days, our major goal began to gel: we needed to re-open BMCC's main building on Chambers Street B right in the middle of the Afrozen zone, @ four blocks from Ground Zero [*]. An area full of rescue workers [*] and full of tears whenever a colleague was found. The groups [*] stationed at our building created memorial tables; they would silently make a circle [*], say some words, and go right back out [*] to search for other friends and co-workers. [*] Our devastated Fiterman Hall had served 5,000 credit-bearing students and thousands more in continuing education classes. The College needed to open again; we needed to bring some normalcy back into lives that had been profoundly affected.

We started on several fronts, first seeking permission from the Mayor to bring 20,000+ additional people into the Afrozen zone@ without disrupting rescue effort. [*] We prepared an Aaccess plan@ that would require the College population to enter the campus only at the northernmost point, three blocks north of Chambers Street at the edge of Ground Zero. All fire exits were required to be staffed so that in case of emergency those using them would be directed northward. We agreed to let the Port Authority Police Department remain in the gym, but respectfully requested all others to relocate. We began testing the air for asbestos, dust, you name it, with monitors all over the building, and met with faculty and staff unions..

[*] We started to assess the damage to Fiterman Hall, our building across the street from World Trade Center Seven [*] When No. 7 burned down and fell, major pieces fell to rest on Fiterman's south side [*], but fortunately didn't cause it to collapse [*]. The building was, however, totally

in ruins [*]. Sporadic fires had ignited and been put out, but the building was left mostly open to the elements [*].

Overall, with the loss of Fiterman Hall, [*] BMCC lost the use of 45 classrooms, 20 computer labs and several other support departments. So where do we put its displaced student population.

It was important to see how many students didn't want to come back [*] to a place where horrible memories might haunt them [*], amidst great devastation. To accomplish this, BMCC's staff and faculty made a tremendous effort and they called every single student and got a 90% positive response: [*] reopen the College. The light turned green and we needed to act.

We immediately started a three-pronged planning effort: [*] First, provide a plan to accommodate a reduced number of returning students at the main building by our target date for reopening, October 1st. Second, provide additional facilities by the second semester, when the entire College population was projected to be back. And third, plan for the restoration or rebuilding of our lost structure.

First tact:[*] take a building built to house 10,000, already crowded with 12,000, and cram [*] in 5,000 more from Fiterman Hall. We hired some wonderful architects (William Hall), who B yes, were paid B but who also worked 24/7 throughout this process. We identified all non-essential spaces in the Chambers Street building to be refitted as classrooms and computer rooms and created 18 new spaces from the lounges, [*] three-quarters of the cafeteria and the fitness center.

We were planning to use the gym as well, but couldn't really throw out the Port Authority Police Department, under the circumstances. So we put six [*] double modular portable classrooms onto the sidewalk of the West Side Highway (shown as A in the site plan), and two on Harrison Street (shown as B). [*]

I would like to thank all of you who responded immediately to Eric's and my call for help regarding trailer manufacturers. We called them all. As far away as Seattle, and nearby, where we found Kullman Industries located right across the river in New Jersey. Kullman had eight trailers meeting New York City codes that were intended for City high schools. They were sitting in Canada where they're built, ready to go. We got them. But the trick was getting them down from Canada and, let's not forget, getting permission from all the NYC agencies to install them right on the sidewalks of Ground Zero. An impossible task in normal times ... but these weren't normal times.

The trailers left Canada based solely on a letter bearing my signature, stating that the Board of Education said it's okay, that we're going to pay for them (I trust me, we will pay you!), that we'll get the permits to enable you to cross the border at a time when the bridges and tunnels and highways into New York were virtually closed to all but those transporting heavy equipment to help in the rescue operations.

The Governor's office called us and said they were working on the road permits and promised to get back to us. Simultaneously, we were tracking the trailers along their route of travel. We

heard they'd crossed the border and were in Pennsylvania; then we heard they were stopped at the New York state line. However, our Atrailer heroes,@ as we started to call them, somehow got through New Jersey and at 5:00 PM were waiting on the New Jersey side of the George Washington Bridge. No one, absolutely no one, was allowed to cross the bridge until midnight, with a permit and an escort. But we had cultivated some significant good will with our Agym tenants,@ the Port Authority Police Department. When we asked them to help, they sent four cars with all the sirens, lights, bells and whistles to escort the trailers and they accompanied them, at 1:00 AM, down Hudson River drive through the frozen zone to our campus next to Ground Zero. [*] Through the night and the next four days, a crew worked to install these portable classrooms. Inside, another crew worked 24/7 building classrooms [*].

Eric was in charge of the Afurniture brigade@ and, with the help of all our CUNY colleges, our neighboring NYC colleges and some of you, multi-colored, [*] multi-style tablet arm chairs, desks and computers [*] soon sat proudly in our new classrooms and trailers.

From beginning to end: two weeks. [*] In two weeks, school started again at BMCC [*] and we welcomed the students back. [*] We met them at the subway station with signs and t-shirts, and directed them to their new classrooms. Yes, it was a bit confusing, and we heard the anticipated complaints B AWhere's our fitness center?@ B but classes resumed in our building next to Ground Zero, a full month or two before anyone else returned to the area. [*] We continued to monitor the air for asbestos and even dioxin, but everything checked out okay.

Then we started on task two: to create more classrooms for the second semester at another CUNY campus (with the help of David Helpen's office). A plan [*] was prepared to install 17 trailers providing 22 classrooms and computer labs in two parking lots at City College in Harlem. This location was remote from other buildings, and though BMCC students could use CCNY's library, gym, cafeteria, etc., [*] we had to provide generators (and enclose them when the neighborhood complained of the noise) and toilets [*] to support their needs. We used some of the contractors who had come through for us so well downtown, along with some new ones, and, [*] with procurement rules waived once more. The spring semester started right on time in January, and overcrowding at the downtown BMCC campus [*] was somewhat relieved as students from [*] upper Manhattan and the Bronx were diverted to Harlem.

We are still working with FEMA and our insurance company to get back the \$16 million it cost us to do Tasks 1 and 2.

[*] Simultaneously, we were working on Task 3: what happens now to our vacant building, [*] even more devastated now because of its open, unprotected state, and totally vandalized. [*] Isn't it disgusting? How can anyone get into a secured area that's totally sealed and patrolled by the NYPD and the National Guard, much less get out with a sack of loot? [*] Someone took the entire PBX system of the University's Research Foundation. They knew what they were taking.

Well, unfortunately the news is still not good on the fate of Fiterman Hall more than nine months later. [*] This \$30 million structure was donated to CUNY. However, the state authority that

floats our bonds and supervises the construction of our buildings also carries insurance on our buildings. Their insurance coverage is for \$9 billion and includes SUNY and other state agencies for whom they sell bonds. However, the insurance company has declared that the Authority, not CUNY, is the insured party. Very bizarre, when several policy paragraphs deal specifically with reimbursement of tuition loss **B** and the Authority doesn't teach classes.

Of course, we're suing. We've hired expensive lawyers, and an insurance claim consultant to provide all the necessary analysis of the structure to determine its status. Environmental consultants are cleaning and doing tests; [*] structural engineers have created a plan for probes, x-rays, etc., and mechanical engineers are testing systems and equipment. [*]

The City removed all of the hanging structural pieces, including two bays [*] of the building, and we sealed it off [*]. The future of Fiterman Hall remains in question. The business case [*] still needs to be made to either demolish and rebuild or restore the building, but that decision is still some months away. We hope that by September 11, 2002 we will have an answer on the insurance issue, as we need to collect either from FEMA or the insurance company, one or the other. What is clear is that BMCC will be without a building for several more semesters.

We have learned many lessons throughout this tragedy. CUNY has developed a plan [*] to provide **redundant means of communication**. We are a University with limited resources, but we now have **Nextel phones supplemented by radio** which travel over different antennas; we have **blackberries** to provide wireless access to e-mail, schedules and phone-lists. Our **computer**

center has developed back-up plans, combining centers in each borough for a regional back-up approach, and they're working with a SUNY facility remote enough to also serve as a back-up site.

All our campuses previously had emergency plans, but those plans were never developed to go beyond the campus boundaries. We hired a security company headed by a former NYPD Commissioner to create new emergency preparedness and disaster recovery plans. (I brought two three-ring binders that contain a draft copy of their first report.)

[*] Like I said at the beginning, we're still hurting. [*] We miss our towers in the skyline. [*] The Tribute of Light memorial helped a little, for the short time it was illuminated. The City is working on several plans for the site: [*] to rebuild the World Trade Center, [*] to create a permanent memorial. It's also working to bring New York out of the economic slump that the whole country is suffering from, but that has affected the City so much more.

We need to restore [*] the City that never sleeps. It's the center of the world. Come visit.

Thank you. [CUNY Logo]