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9/11 Memorial Representatives Advise: Input And Process Vital To Permanent 12/14 Memorial

By Nancy K. Crevier
Thursday, March 6, 2014

Newtown Permanent Memorial Commission Chairman Kyle Lyddy and members of the commission met Thursday evening, February 27, with Joe Daniels, president and CEO of the National September 11 Memorial & Museum and 9/11 Memorial Project Manager Abigail Mullins for what Mr Lyddy called a continuation of the information gathering process.

The Newtown Permanent Memorial Commission is charged with determining where in the community a permanent memorial to 12/14 might be located, as well as how to fund and maintain any memorial. Members attending the February 27 session were JoAnn Bacon, Joanne Brunetti, Steffan Burns, Brian Engel, Daniel Krauss, Agni Pavlidou Kyprianou, Scarlett Lewis, Alan Martin, Sarah Middeleer, Tricia Pinto, and Donna Van Waalwijk.

“It was just a conversation,” said Mr Lyddy. “As part of our information search, we were looking for someone who could come and talk to us, face to face. The scope of these two tragedies is completely different, of course, but we thought they could be a resource,” he said.

The meeting was incredibly productive, Mr Lyddy said.

“Mr Daniels talked about the importance of soliciting ideas, of meeting with the families [directly affected by 12/14], and the scope of the work that needed to be done. It was useful information from someone who’s been through it. Everyone in the room was amazed at the magnitude of process they went through,” he said.

Mr Daniels told the group that the input they solicit will be extremely important, especially the various perspectives and emotional relationships to the event itself.

“It will be important to understand that there will be different views,” Mr Lyddy said the 9/11 Memorial representative impressed on them. What the Newtown Commission learned from Mr

Daniels, was to be open to “tons of input from our families. What the families want will be one of our main focuses,” said Mr Lyddy.

Not only the public and families will have opinions, but individuals on the Memorial Commission will have different opinions, and everyone’s perspective must be understood, Mr Daniels said.

Mr Daniels briefly addressed the Newtown Commission’s concerns on fundraising, which is a huge factor for building and maintaining any kind of permanent memorial in Newtown.

“Joe can assist us in this area. He is a fundraising guru and will be a great resource, when the time comes. Knowing there is backup for this is helpful to us,” Mr Lyddy said.

“A main theme from that evening appears to be that we suggest, out of our experience, to begin the process by listening to all stakeholder groups from all angles. For us, that included family members who lost loved ones on 9/11, rescue and recovery workers, survivors, and members of the lower Manhattan community. I imagine many of these groups will be similar in nature to the key stakeholder groups for Newtown,” said Anthony Guido, communications manager for the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, in an e-mail to *The Newtown Bee*.

“From there,” he continued, “our process was to form and empower committees from these key stakeholder groups to weigh all of the possibilities and setup firm protocols. For us, the memorial design process was one example. From there, you keep listening to all stakeholder groups and go out to the general public for comments, but with the idea at the end of the process that every opinion may not make it into the final product. It’s important to communicate that distinction every step of the way.”

The Newtown Permanent Memorial Commission has reached out to other communities affected by tragedies and that have successfully created permanent memorials, Columbine High School in Colorado being one of them, Mr Lyddy said.

“We have not heard back from them yet, but they would be another good resource,” he said. “In 1999, Columbine had no resources to go to [following the shootings at Columbine High School]. They wanted to have something available to other towns, if this situation came up again,” he said. The Newtown Commission has had the opportunity to sift through the information in the 56-page document that resulted, and has found it to be “extremely helpful,” said Mr Lyddy.

“Keeping on top of how people in Newtown perceive the process is important to us,” stressed Mr Lyddy, adding that the group plans to use social media as one means of informing the public. “If the process is going slowly, we want people to know why: We are working to do it the right way.”