

DEAL EASES WAY TO BUILD GROUND ZERO ARTS CENTER

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By ROBIN POGREBIN

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The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey on Tuesday approved an agreement under which the city will reimburse the authority up to \$44 million for building underground foundations and infrastructure for a performing arts center at ground zero.

The vote does not guarantee that an arts center will be built on the World Trade Center site, as called for by the master plan. Though the authority, which owns the site, and the city support that plan, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, which controls \$50 million in federal funds earmarked for the project, has explored a different location nearby.

The development corporation has yet to release those funds. It has been negotiating a "clawback" agreement with the city and the authority that would require that the funds be returned to the corporation, should they ultimately be used for private development rather than a performing arts center or some other public purpose. Then the corporation could direct the money toward an arts center elsewhere.

The development corporation is exploring building the arts center at the Deutsche Bank site at 130 Liberty Street — which the corporation owns — where they believe construction would be faster and less expensive. Construction of an arts center at ground zero cannot begin until the PATH station is completed.

An outside consultant retained by the city has estimated the cost of building the arts center at more than \$540 million, according to one downtown official. The architect Frank Gehry has completed a design for the performing arts center, which is to be occupied by the Joyce Theater.

But the authority's approval "is an important step forward for both the performing arts center and the overall redevelopment of the World Trade Center site," said Kate D. Levin, the cultural affairs commissioner.

Tuesday's vote ensures the construction of columns and other elements necessary to build something at the site — an area bounded by Fulton, Greenwich, Vesey and Washington Streets. If an arts center became unfeasible, for any reason, an office building could also be built using the foundation, officials said. "It's our full intention that a performing arts center will be built on that location," said Steve Coleman, a spokesman for the authority.

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