



## **AIA New York works with N.Y.C. in good times and bad**

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By Joseph Aliotta, AIA, LEED AP AIA

First and foremost, I hope that readers of this newspaper and those throughout the area have been spared the full fury of Superstorm Sandy and have been able to resume normal life with minimal disruption. To those who have been hard-hit by this disaster, please know that you are in all of our thoughts. The AIA New York Chapter (AIANY) and its Design for Risk and Reconstruction Committee are working directly with the multi-agency N.Y.C. Office of Emergency Management (OEM)-coordinated recovery task force on ways in which architects might help during this difficult time. We hope to have more information in the near future.

We are grateful that before the storm, AIANY joined mayor Michael Bloomberg and buildings commissioner Robert LiMandri in October to mark the first anniversary of the N.Y.C. Development Hub, the state-of-the-art plan review center created to accelerate and streamline the construction project approval process by accepting and reviewing digital construction plans. In the first year, more than 330 new buildings and major renovation projects have been approved and more than \$1.3 billion generated in estimated economic activity in the city. The Hub has expedited approvals three fold over paper-based submissions. Along with this acceleration the department has assisted six agencies with the creation of their own mini-hubs at their respective offices to further streamline the process.

AIANY, through its Policy Board, has advocated over the years for a more efficient and streamlined process for project approval which coordinates the oversight of all agencies with purview over the design and construction process and I believe that the success of the Hub is a clear indication that coordination and greater efficiency is good for business and good for architects. We have also been very involved with the technical review committees improving the Building Code - which will similarly lead to a quicker and simpler review and approval process.

In addition to supporting the creation and goals of the Hub we have also made an effort to offer the expertise of our members and others in the industry in collaboration with the department on developing Graphic Standards for Plans and Plan Examination Guidelines and we look forward to working closely with the agency as they develop Technical Design Guidelines for use by Plan Examiners and the filing Industry.

The announcement of the success of the Hub's first year also came with the report of an expansion of the program called Hub Self-Service, to allow licensed design professionals to submit plans and obtain permits online for the smallest construction projects - such as home renovations, office improvements and facade repairs - and pay the necessary fees electronically without leaving their offices. A poster announcing the expanded N.Y.C. Development Hub was on hand at our recent sold-out Heritage Ball. In excess of 50,000 applications for small projects are submitted for this kind

of work each year, and this streamlined online approach is expected to save the building industry up to \$50 million per year in labor costs.

More than 85% of AIA NY firms are small businesses, many with fewer than 10 employees. The success and expansion of the Hub will save firms countless hours and boost productivity. All of these forward thinking initiatives and our ongoing involvement in the discussion will bring architects and inter-agency review staff together to accelerate projects and improve the quality of what we design and build and reduce the time it takes to realize a completed project. We commend the Department of Buildings for its continued partnership in expediting the review process and standardizing submissions and look forward to future collaboration in advancing development and employment opportunities.

While it might be hard to think about matters other than those now at hand following Sandy, we hope that our work with the city of New York is putting in place a new foundation for rebuilding and growth.

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