

Corzine calls state memorial 'absolutely essential'

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The state's planned Sept. 11 memorial in Liberty State Park is called "Empty Sky," but for now it remains an empty lump of dirt and weeds surrounded by a fence - and some people argue that if and when it is built, it will still be an eyesore.

Gov. Jon Corzine came to the Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal building yesterday to announce that a foundation will raise roughly \$12 million in private funds for the project, as its cost balloons to an estimated \$25 million. The original tab for the project was \$9 million when ground was broken in 2004.

Designed by architect Frederic Schwartz, it will consist of a pair of stainless steel walls - 200 feet long and 30 feet high - replicating the imprint of the Twin Towers on the Manhattan skyline. The walls will contain the names of the 743 New Jersey residents who died in the attacks.

"It's absolutely essential to maintain that memory," Corzine said.

He said the state will use \$1.2 million of the \$13 million previously committed - \$7 million from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and \$6 million from the state - to do grading and landscaping on the memorial site.

Money is not the only obstacle to the memorial.

The Friends of Liberty State Park, the park's volunteer caretakers, say the memorial will wreck views of Downtown Manhattan from the busiest part of the park. Tanya Chauhan, a Jersey City resident who worked in Tower 5 of the World Trade Center, said she used to bring family and friends to the spot before it was fenced off.

"I loved how the closer you got to the city, the bigger it was, and the more majestic the view was," she said.

The Friends have filed a lawsuit charging that the state Department of Environmental Protection failed to hold necessary public meetings before it issued permits for the project.

Their attorney, Cynthia Hadjiyannis, said the state's reply to the lawsuit was due yesterday, but oral arguments may not take place for several months.

In addition, all nine Hudson County state legislators signed a letter to Corzine in April stating their opposition to using any more state funds for the project.

State Sen. Sandra B. Cunningham, Assemblyman Anthony Chiappone and Jersey City Mayor Jerramiah T. Healy attended the event yesterday to reiterate that they do not approve of the project as it is currently designed.

Corzine suggested that modifications to the design could be considered, although he said he has seen no evidence that views would be significantly harmed.