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Port Authority Of New York & New Jersey wants to rescue half-built Greek Orthodox church



It's another boondoggle at the World Trade Center site, and this time the Port Authority wants to play the white knight.

The bi-state agency, which took 12 years and spent \$4 billion to build the Oculus transportation hub, is ready to step in and rescue a half-built Greek Orthodox church and shrine at the corner of the site.

"The Port Authority could facilitate construction based on appropriate commitments or could assemble a group to take over construction. We could also assist with redesign of the project to make it financially feasible," Port Authority executive director Rick Cotton wrote last month in a letter to the leaders of the church, including its head in Istanbul. "If completion is not possible, we would assist in any way possible to find an alternative configuration to complete the project."

The shrines sits on land owned by the Port Authority at Liberty Street.

"I believe we can all agree that the status quo cannot continue as it is a negative for all involved," Cotton wrote in the Nov. 6 letter, a copy of which was published in The National Herald newspaper, which covers the Greek community.

Cotton noted they had talked to Gov. Cuomo about the situation and the governor "feels deeply and passionately about the project."

Construction stopped on the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine one year ago, when the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese ran out of money for the \$80 million project.

The shrine, which like the Oculus was designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, was supposed to glow at night and provide "a spiritual beacon of hope and rebirth."

The church used \$3.5 million in donations meant for the shrine to shore up its finances, according to report by a church-hired consultant.

The US Attorney's office has been probing the project's finances.

The Archdiocese has said it will take another \$38 million to finish the shrine.

Archbishop Demetrios, the head of the Greek Orthodox church in the US, insisted to the Port Authority in his response that "the project is on the right course and that construction will resume in the not too distant future."

The Archbishop, perhaps needling the Port Authority, noted past delays in the agency's own work at the site, added, "just as the Port Authority overcame those hurdles, we are confident that the Archdiocese will do the same."

A Port Authority spokesman said the agency was ready to provide support but "the construction and financial obligations for completing the project continue to rest solely with the church."

Source: New York Post