

One World Trade Center Construction Remains on Schedule as Crowning Spire Rises over Manhattan

By Connor Adam Sheets

Majestic images of large steel pieces of the 408-foot-tall crowning spire of One World Trade Center arriving in New York City by barge on Dec. 11 made their way into the pages of newspapers around the world as work progressed on the largest building planned for the Ground Zero site in Manhattan.

But in the months since the spire segments arrived, little news has emerged about construction on the office tower, which is slated to be completed by early next year, and anticipation remains high among New Yorkers and others who are eagerly awaiting the completion of the iconic building once referred to as the Freedom Tower.

On Wednesday, a Port Authority of New York & New Jersey spokesperson spoke with the International Business Times about the tower's progress, and confirmed that much work has been done since the spire arrived at the construction site.

"We have 12 pieces of the spire currently up. There's 18 [pieces to the spire] so it's not there yet," the spokesperson said, adding that as for the date when the spire's installation will be completed, "I would say sometime first quarter [of 2013] or early second."

At that point, the skyscraper, which is being co-developed by the Port Authority and the Durst Organization, will tower 1,776 feet (104 stories) over Lower Manhattan, making it the tallest building in New York, and according to the Port Authority, the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere.

But the claim that the building will be considered taller than the 1,451-foot Willis Tower in Chicago was called into question by reports that emerged last year claiming that a late decision not to include "radome" cladding -- a key part of the spire's original design -- would result in the spire instead being considered an antenna, and therefore not necessarily included in the "official" height of the building.

"The proposed radome -- short for radar dome -- would not be able to be serviced or maintained, so the cladding was rejected. Without the cladding, the needle could be classified simply as an antenna added to the structure, and not part of the true height of the skyscraper," CNN wrote last May. "The Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, an independent organization that certifies the official height of skyscrapers and acknowledges record setting buildings, counts spires and structural elements such as radomes in its height calculations, but not antennas, according to its website."

The Port Authority spokesman rejected that argument on its face, saying that the decision not to apply radome will not jeopardize the building's status of largest in the hemisphere once its construction wraps.

"We took the radome off the building, which is an aesthetic choice that has nothing to do with the spire. It was an aesthetic choice," the spokesman stated. "It actually is a spire and I think that if you look at places like the Empire State Building, they, I think, also call their spire an antenna. It did not impact the height is the short answer."

And despite the controversy over the minutiae of whether or not the building will be the "official" tallest building in the country, construction is on schedule, and moving along smoothly.

"The completion date remains early 2014 and in terms of what's left to be done: any number of things. We're still putting in windows, completing the spire and any internal work that needs to be done," the spokesman said, adding later that "everything is currently on target, and that's good news. Site-wide, everything's on target."