

126th Street African Burial Ground Memorial and Mixed-Use Project

Update for CB11, Land Use, Landmarks & Planning

June 14, 2023

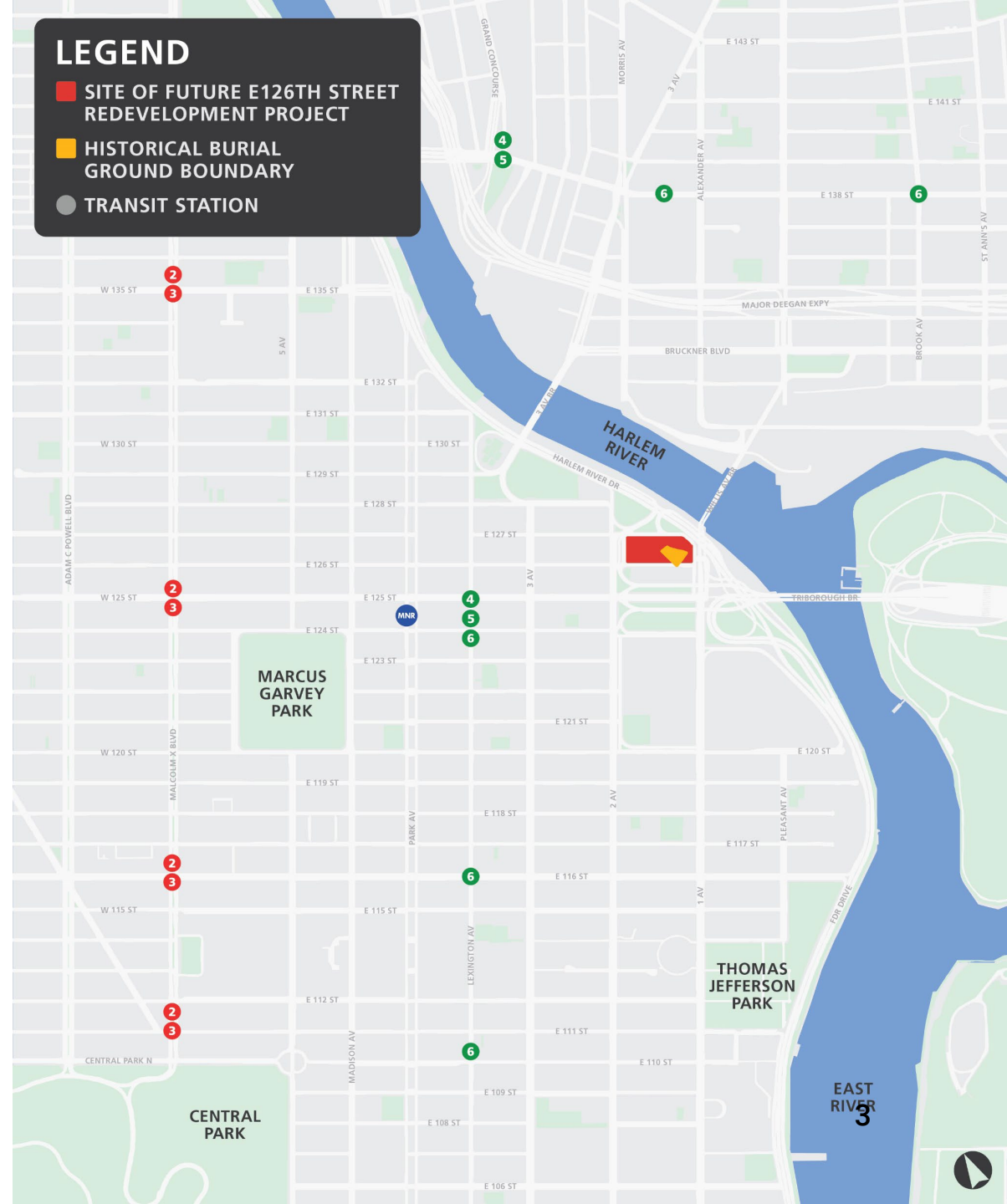


Agenda

- Project Background
- Project Goals
- Next Steps

Project Location

- 2660 2nd Avenue
- City-owned, full-block site occupied by a decommissioned MTA bus depot
- A portion of the site is the historic Harlem African Burial Ground (HABG)



History

The Harlem African Burial Ground dates to Harlem's earliest days

- 1660: Nieuw Haarlem is chartered by Dutch settlers on indigenous land
- Mid-1660s: Low Dutch Reformed Church (predecessor of today's Elmendorf Reformed Church) is founded with two cemeteries: one for people of European descent and one for both freed and enslaved people of African descent
- 1869: Prompted by northward expansion of the city, church leaders begin transferring human remains of white Europeans to new plots. Those buried in the HABG are left behind, and cemetery is displaced as hills are leveled and parts of Harlem River shoreline are filled in

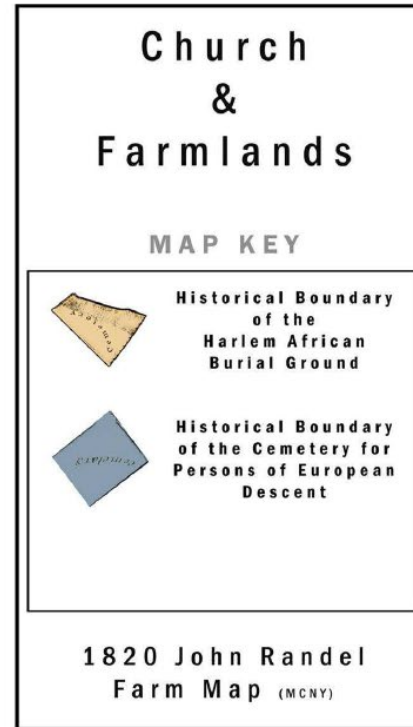


Image: www.habgtaskforce.org

History

Several uses occupied the site of the Harlem African Burial Ground

- 1885-1917: Beer garden and casino called Sulzer's Harlem River Park
- 1917-1918: Barracks for the 15th New York National Guard Infantry Regiment, an all-Black unit
- 1918-1945: William Randolph Hearst's Cosmopolitan Productions and other movie studios
- 1945-1962: Third Avenue Railway Company trolley barn; Current depot built in 1947
- 1962-present: MTA/NYCT 126th St bus depot; It was in active use until 2015

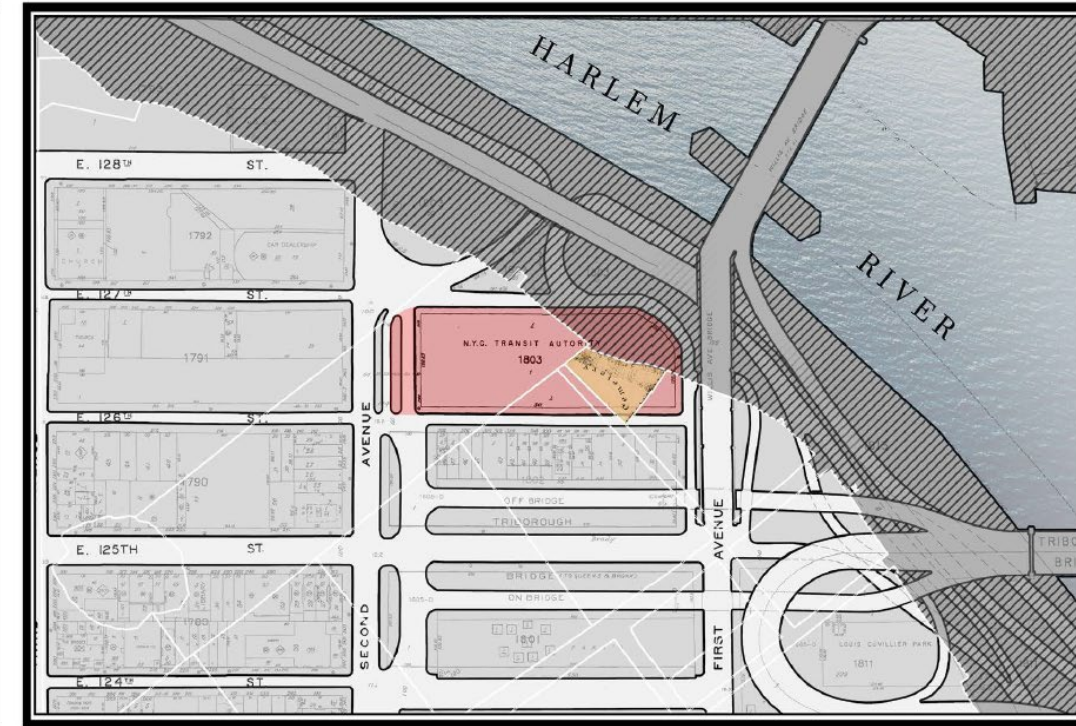
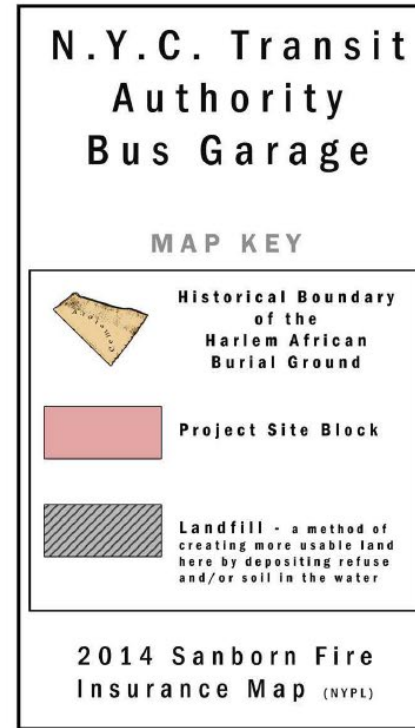


Image: www.habgtaskforce.org

Project Background

- Early 2000s: Intensive documentary study for the Willis Avenue Bridge Reconstruction project uncovers evidence of the HABG
- 2009: The Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force (HABGTF), co-chaired by Melissa Mark-Viverito, then Councilmember for District 8, and Rev. Dr. Patricia A. Singletary, Pastor of the Elmendorf Reformed Church, is founded to advocate for a memorial. The successor of this group is the Harlem African Burial Ground Initiative (HABGI)
- 2011: CB11 designates HABGTF as the organization representing the interest of the HABG
- 2015: MTA decommissions bus depot and vacates site
- 2015-2016: NYCEDC is asked to lead the redevelopment project; Phase 1B archaeological investigation uncovers more than 140 disarticulated human bones or bone fragments on the site
- 2017: CB11, Manhattan Borough President, City Planning Commission, and City Council approve land use actions to facilitate the project



Image: HABGTF leading a consecration ceremony for the human remains discovered during initial archaeological investigation

Project Vision

- The project goals, memorialized in the 2017 Points of Agreement letter, are to:
 - Establish a permanent outdoor memorial and cultural center to honor and commemorate the HABG's history and those who were buried there
 - Develop a mix of uses, including mixed income affordable housing and job-creating commercial uses
 - Enhance the streetscape and pedestrian connections to the surrounding neighborhood
 - Advance a financially feasible project that can support the cost of constructing and operating the memorial and cultural center
- Program: 524-655K sf housing (80% affordable), 315K sf commercial/retail, 18K sf outdoor memorial, 15K sf cultural center, 15K sf community facility



Image: The decommissioned bus depot today

2015 Archaeological Work

- In 2015, NYCEDC commissioned an **archaeological investigation** of the site. The work involved digging four test trenches through the floor of the Bus Depot and the soil underneath
- More than 140 **disarticulated human remains were found in one trench** near the northern edge of the historic boundary
- In close consultation with the HABGTF, the **decision was made to remove the human remains from the site** for further study and to prevent further decomposition
- The human remains are currently stored at the **New York City Archaeological Repository** until they can be reburied at the future memorial

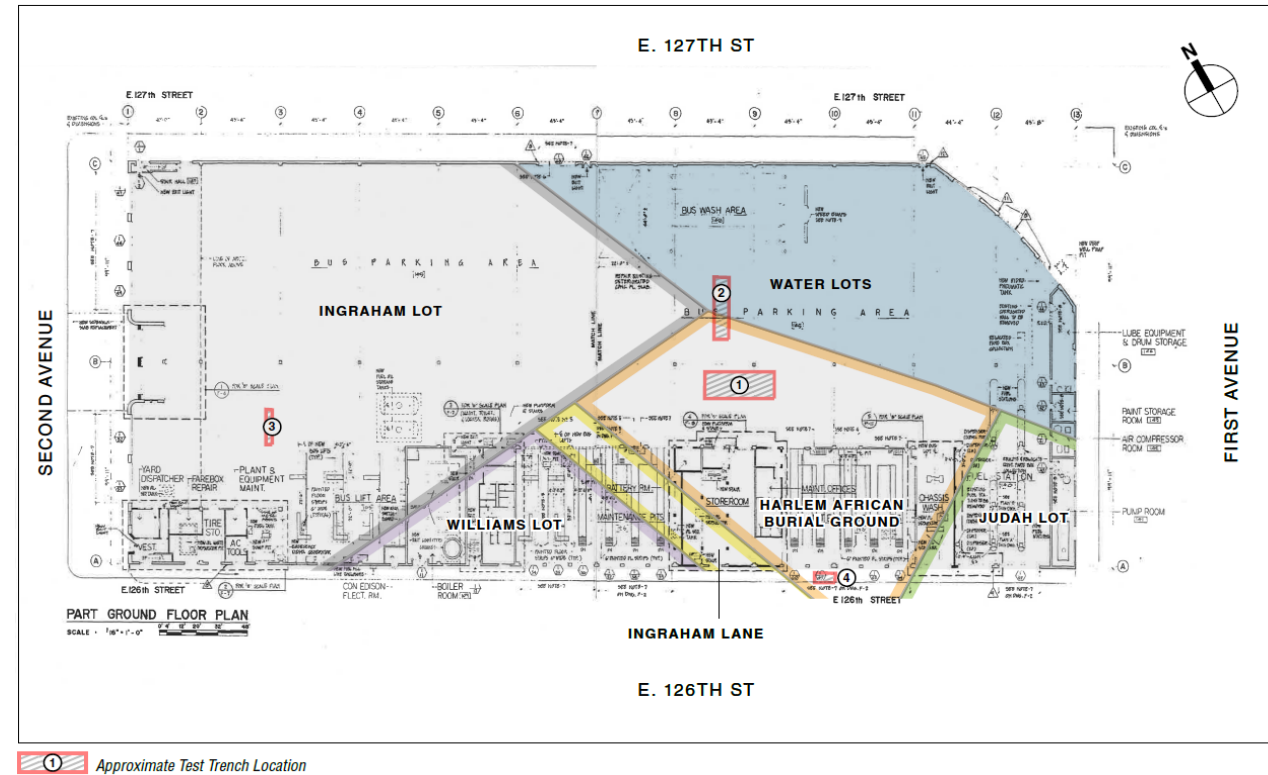


Image: 2015 archaeological investigation map

Next Steps

- The next step for this project is to complete a **second, more robust phase of archaeological work** in close consultation with the HABG Initiative
 - Will determine the **complete distribution of human remains across the site and recover, analyze and store them** until they can be reinterred at the memorial
 - Begins with the co-development of a workplan with the HABGI, followed by fieldwork, lab analysis and reporting
- We plan to pair this work with a **multi-strategy, wide-reaching education and engagement effort** in partnership with the HABGI to increase awareness and understanding of the Harlem African Burial Ground, its sacred history, and the archaeology work. A team to create and execute this effort will be publicly procured.
- These steps will **prepare the site** for safe, sensitive demolition of the bus depot and for the future project



Images: 2015 archaeological investigation

Questions