

# Former PS 90 Site Task Force Meeting #2

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February 3, 2021



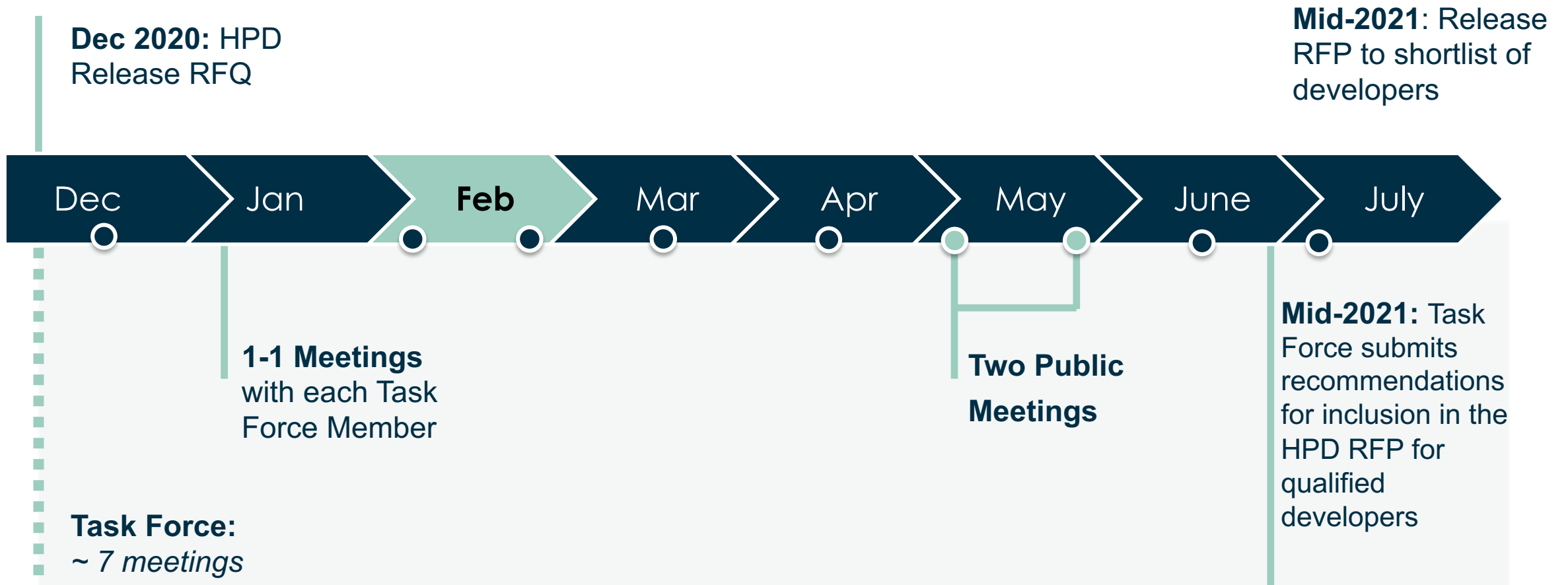
# Welcome

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## Goals for today's session:

- To build on the intentions set in Task Force Meeting #1 regarding guidelines for productive dialogue and building transparency.
- To provide additional clarity on the site's archaeological findings, history, and the ongoing descendant community research being conducted by HPI.
- To review the City's regulations on the respectful treatment of human remains.
- To hold meaningful discussions on the recommendations that honors the historical significance of the site, the archeological findings, and the descendant community.
- To outline next steps.

# Task Force Timeline



# Zoom 101

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## Framing best practices for this platform.

- **The chat box is a great tool!** Use the chat box for questions, comments and thoughts.... This is a helpful space for discussion.
- **Please stay on mute** unless you are asking a question or in the breakout sessions. Trick: you can use the space-bar like a walkie-talkie.
- **We love seeing you!** If you are comfortable, please keep your video on. It helps me to see if you are nodding, confused... and looking to say something.

### IN FULL TRANSPARENCY

- We are currently recording
- We are currently livestreaming
- The recording, notes and presentations will be hosted on the PS90 website after the meeting

# Acknowledgement

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We are **providing a moment of silence for reverence**, paying respect to Enslaved Africans and Native Americans who once lived in Flatbush and across Munsee Lenape and Canarsie land.

We do this in the quest for the liberation and justice of Black people and people of color across the community, historically and today.

# Task Force Members Introductions

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Building our shared leadership through knowledge building of perspectives, skills and resources.

Each Task Force Member will have **15 seconds or less** to share the following:

- **My name, role, organization, pronouns** (if interested)

# Intention Setting for Productive Dialogue

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Building out a set of guidelines that help set intentions, tone and manage challenges.

**What intentions and guidelines should we keep in mind that would support this being a productive experience?**

TYTHE proposes the following:

- Have empathy to, and awareness of, the unique perspectives in the virtual room.
- Being conscientious and acknowledging to the lens and perspective you speak of. Where possible, speak from the I. Acknowledge if you are speaking from your lived experience, the lens of your organization or an assumption.
- Assume the best intentions of your fellow group members. Be mindful not to make assumptions about others or their experiences.
- Be comfortable with discomfort as we together unlearn history related to slavery in this community, and be wary of oppressive, offensive or racialized language that may be triggering to others.

# Site History Presentation

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**HPI will present an extended overview of the site's history and archeological findings, building off the Meeting #1 presentation. HPI will also detail their ongoing descendant research.**



# **SITE HISTORY OVERVIEW**

**FEBRUARY 3, 2021**



**Former Public School 90 Site  
2274-2286 Church Avenue  
Block 5103, Lot 58  
Flatbush, Brooklyn, NY**



# HPI Presentation Agenda

- Provide more detail about the results of prior archaeological testing, additional research, and the analysis and interment of remains.
- Respond to questions posed during or after the first Task Force meeting on December 12, 2020.
- Explain agency involvement, oversight, and summarize pertinent regulations.
- Recommend goals for the Task Force and Descendant Community that will serve to represent the unknown persons originally interred on or near the PS 90 site.

**Please be aware that the nature of this discussion involves some disturbing information that we strive to handle and share sensitively and with respect.**



# HPI's Involvement

- HPI has completed four separate documentary studies of the PS 90 Site (1998-2019).
- Archaeological testing (2001) found limited human remains within disturbed soils, possibly of African American ancestry.
- HPI developed a *Community Engagement Plan* and an *Unanticipated Discoveries Plan* to address the respectful treatment of human remains should they be found on the site in the future (2019).
- **Current research is focused on persons who were enslaved in Flatbush who may or may not have been buried in the vicinity of the PS 90 Site, and the likely descendant community.**



# Historical Context

- Flatbush (Midwout) established ca.1651
- Reformed Dutch Church of Flatbush was founded in 1654 and at one time owned the PS 90 Site.
- Many Flatbush families enslaved Africans; Native Americans were also sometimes enslaved.



# Cemetery Research Results To Date

- **New Data:** A map recently made available by the Center for Brooklyn History (BHS) shows the location of the “Negro Burying Ground” as it existed in 1855; the period of use is now estimated as the 17<sup>th</sup> c. through ca. 1840.
- However, **secondary** references (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c.) reported that burials were found further west than this map shows.
  - Human remains were reportedly found in 1842 basement excavations for Flatbush School No. 1 in what is now Church Avenue, and in 1865 when Locust Street (Bedford Avenue) was laid out. These were reportedly reburied in Holy Cross Cemetery, or on land that belonged to the Reformed Dutch Church adjacent to that cemetery.



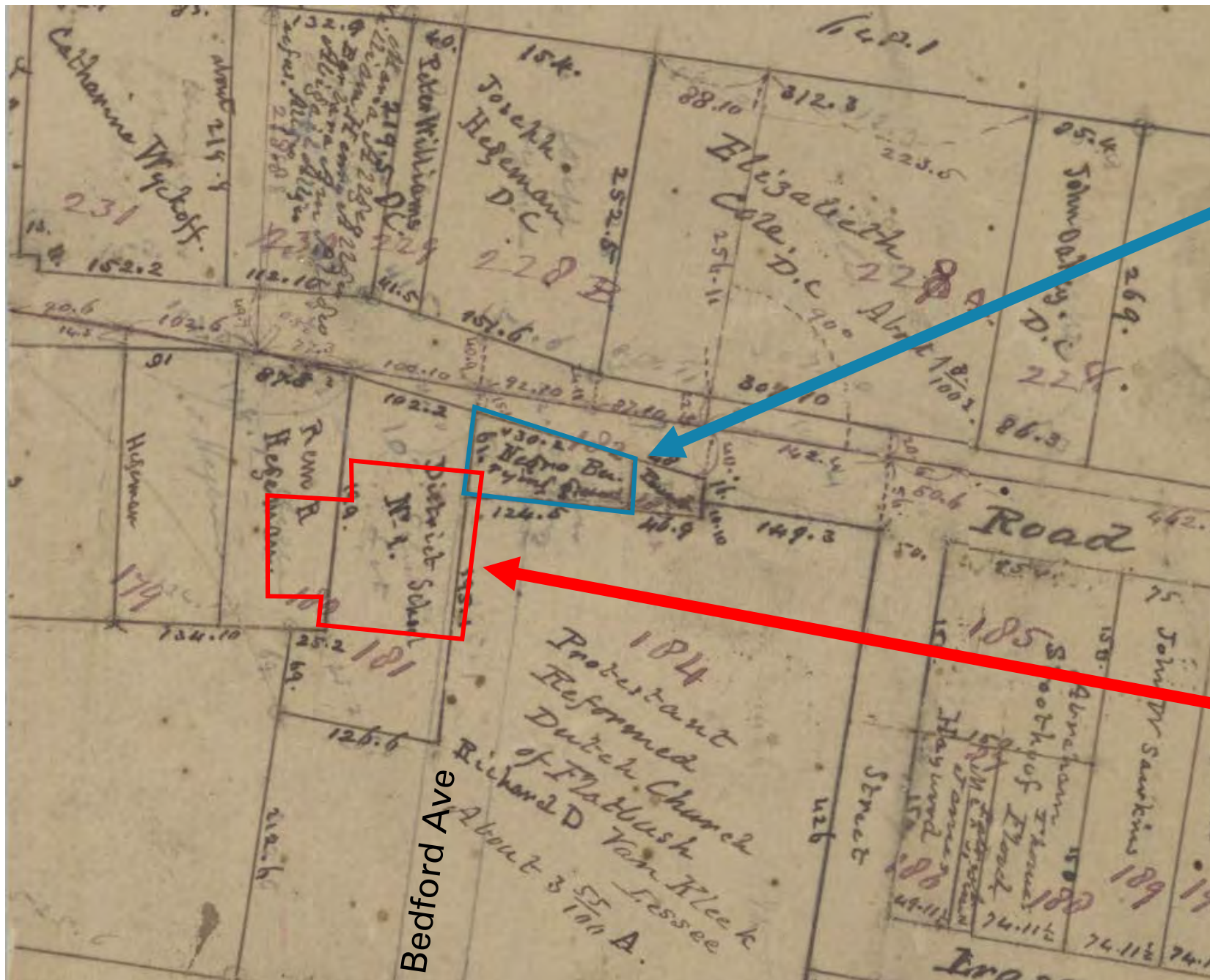
# 1855 Map

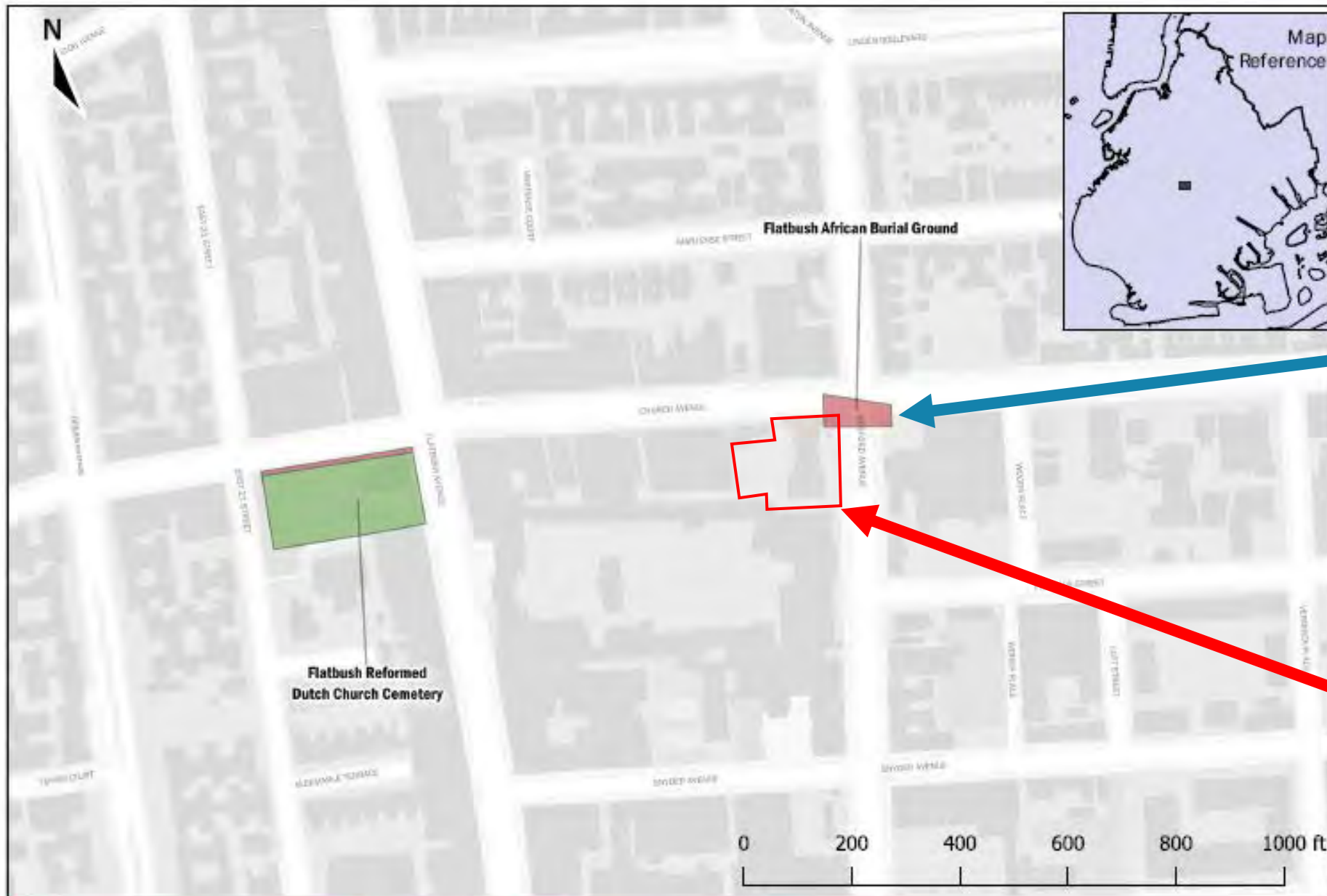
These are the approximate boundaries of the "Negro Burial Ground" as mapped in 1855.

It may have once been larger.

Reportedly burials were encountered in 1842 during basement excavations for Flatbush School No. 1, which stood to the west of these mapped boundaries.

Approximate location of PS 90 Site.





## 2020 GIS

Elizabeth Meade's 2020 dissertation on lost cemeteries of NYC used GIS to map the approximate location of the "Flatbush African Burial Ground" (as depicted in 1855) on the modern landscape.

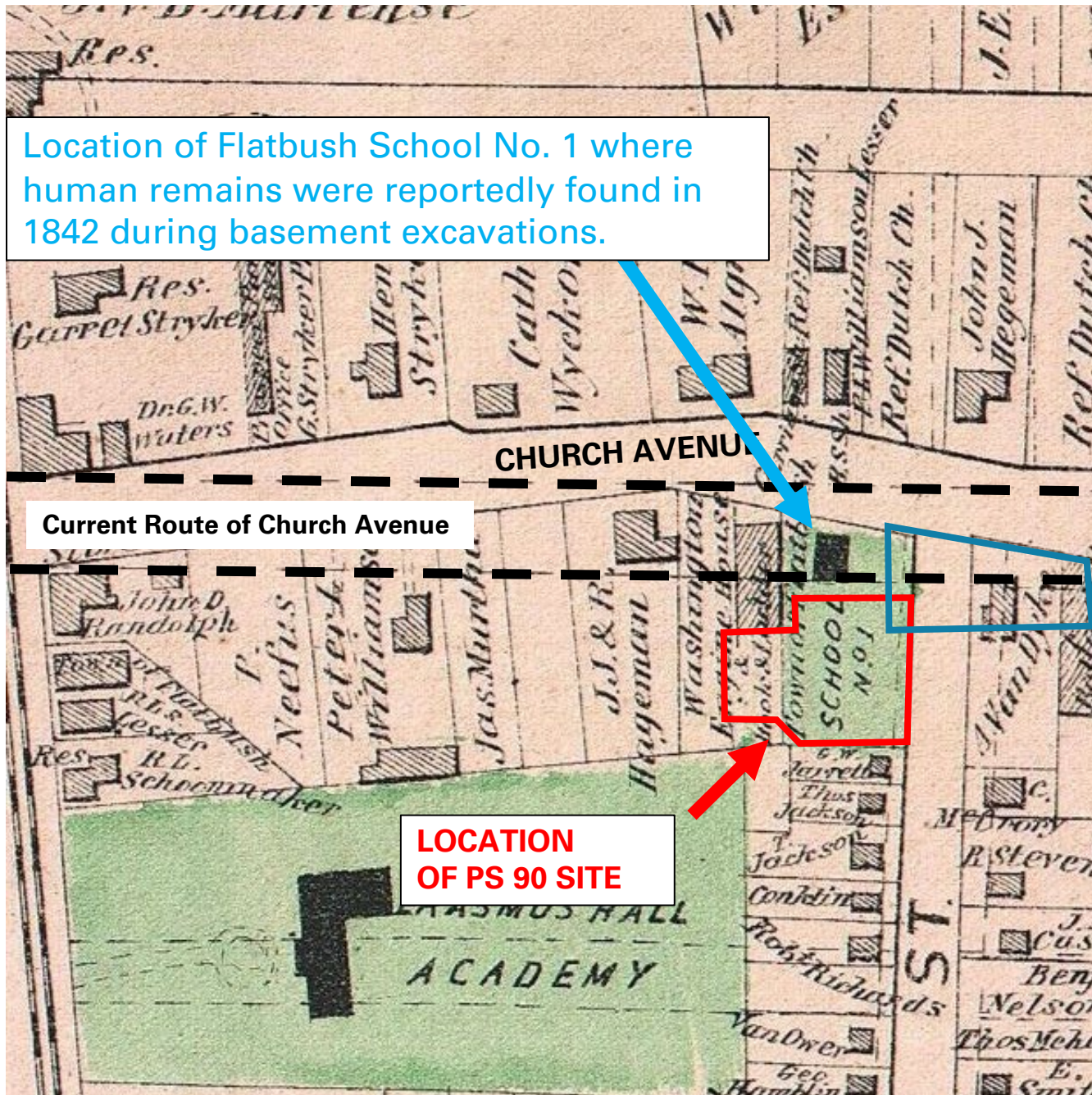
It may have once been larger.

Location of PS 90 Site.

Cemetery Location Unknown
  Active Cemetery
  Obliterated Cemetery
  Preserved Cemetery

**Map 2.2-14: Brooklyn Cemeteries**





Location of Flatbush School No. 1 where human remains were reportedly found in 1842 during basement excavations.

Current Route of Church Avenue

LOCATION OF PS 90 SITE

This 1873 map shows where Flatbush School No. 1 stood; human remains were reportedly found when its basement was excavated.

Approximate burial ground boundaries as mapped in 1855.



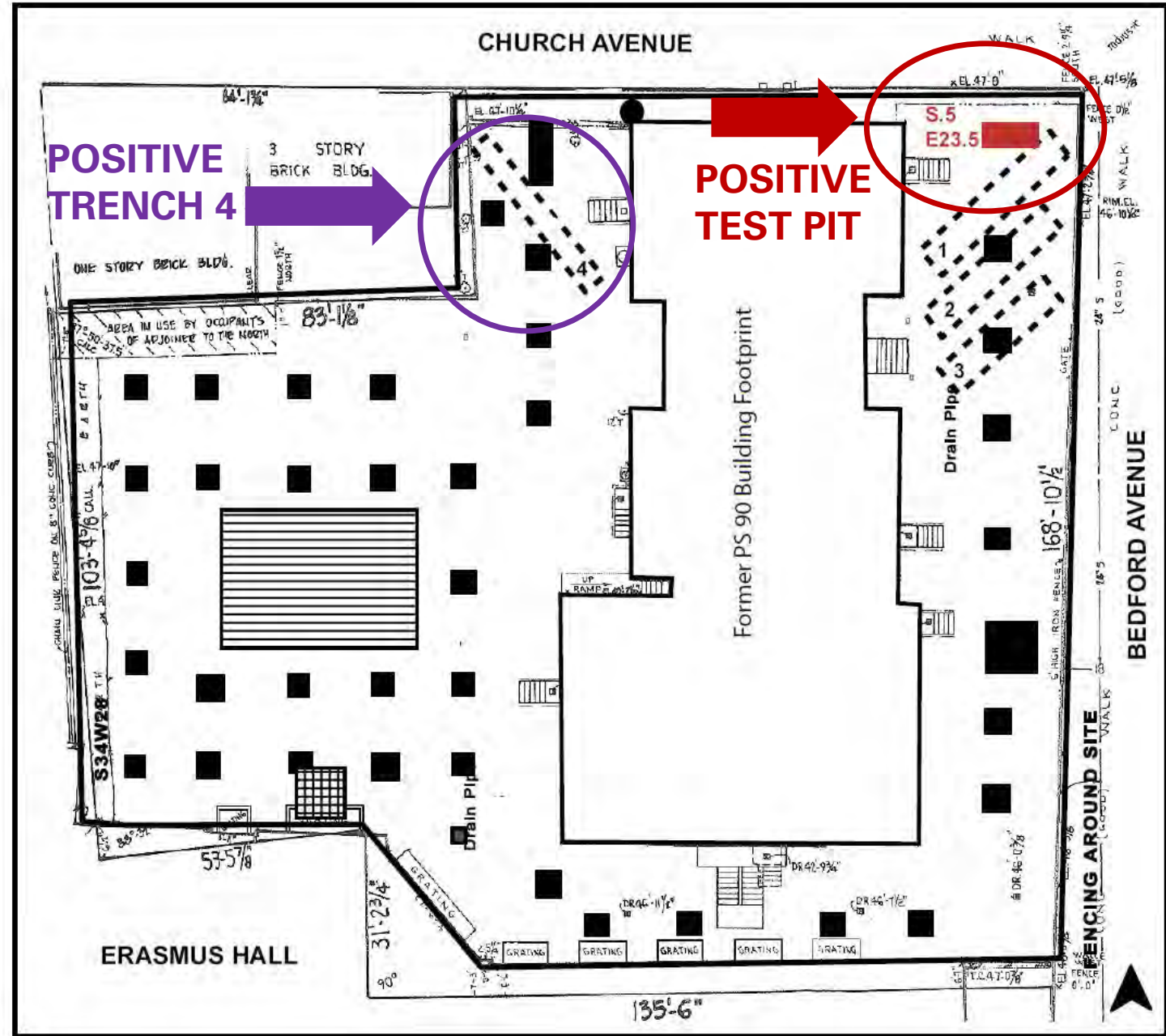


**Yellow** - Approximate location of former Flatbush School No. 1

**Red** – PS 90 Site

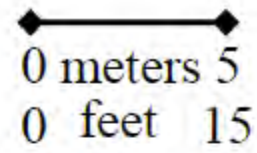
**Green** – Approximate 1855 boundaries of the “Negro Burial Ground”



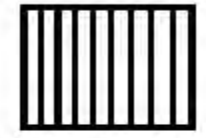


## Archaeological Testing 2001

One **Shovel Test Pit** had an adult premolar immediately below an upper ash layer in disturbed soils and **Trench 4** contained 3 teeth and small fragments of a lower jawbone in upper disturbed soils. No other tests had human remains.



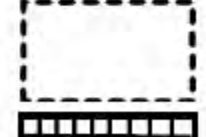
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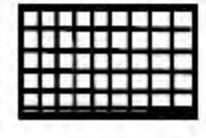
- Ca. 1905 Water Closet



- Shovel Test Locations



- Machine Excavated Trenches



- Brick Lined Privy Shaft



# Physical Anthropologist Review (2001)

- Recovered human remains were analyzed by Physical Anthropologists Thomas A.J. Crist, Ph.D. and Arthur Washburn, Ph.D.
- Dr. Washburn is a dental anthropologist with expertise in the analysis of human dental remains.
- No testing of the bone (DNA or other) was undertaken. In 2001 DNA testing was a very destructive technique.



# Analysis of Recoveries

- Test Pit: Tooth
  - An adult lower jaw premolar.
  - Represented a young to middle-aged adult (20-35 years old) of unknown sex and ancestry.
- Trench 4: Bone and Teeth
  - The three teeth and lower jaw fragments appeared to represent one person, possibly female.
  - Small defects in the tooth enamel suggested that metabolic stress affected this person early in life.
  - One tooth, the second Lower Molar, showed a minor degree of crenulation (enamel wrinkling) that has been associated with African ancestry.



# Reinterment

- The human remains were accepted by the Flatbush Reformed Church for respectful reburial.
- Reverend Daniel Ramm (then at the Church) confirmed that at the request of the School Construction Authority, and as agreed upon in 2002 by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the remains were respectfully reburied in the Flatbush Reformed Church cemetery, one block west on Flatbush Avenue.
- They remain in an unmarked grave.
- If a marker is requested, it would be necessary to speak with the Consistory of the Church.



# What Can DNA Analysis Tell Us?

- Mitochondrial DNA could point to the origin of those interred *but will not likely allow us to establish descendants.*
- Several scientists are now working with historic and ancient skeletal material to pinpoint origins using non or minimally destructive techniques.
- References to two relevant articles are included at the end of this presentation.



# Who Is The Descendant Community and What Will They Do?

- To date, we do not know the biological kin of the deceased, so we are now trying to identify the descendant community.
- This descendant community can be self-identified people with a vested interest in serving as the voice of those interred. We we hope the Task Force members will be part of this effort, which may come to include others as they are identified through further research and outreach.
- They are often community members that are interested in continuing research and/or working together to:
  - establish a preferred course of action for the respectful treatment, examination, and reinterment of human remains should they be found;
  - establish goals for future memorialization; and,
  - find ways to honor and remember an abandoned past.



# Breadth and Depth of Research

- HPI will be involved in this research effort through the Public Meetings through the spring.
- Research will be ongoing long after we are not involved with the project.
- Research to establish the individual names of enslaved people in Flatbush can include:
  - Reading early Flatbush probate records and deeds;
  - Reviewing personal diaries (if available);
  - Diving deep into archives as more material becomes available; and
  - Collecting census data enumerating the enslaved peoples over time.





# PS 90 Research Database

- Our hope is for the collected research to become a living document that can be a communal database of the enslaved population.
- This database could be a springboard for the development of educational material, public programming, and also serve as a virtual form of memorialization.
- As more information about enslaved peoples becomes available, the depth and breadth of the information should be revised, expanded, and continued to be shared.
- Collection point: <https://forms.gle/FnQUrM2b6qEEhZYV7>



# Questions

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**How can we support your understanding of the site history, the findings and the ongoing descendent research?**

Process Notes:

- As we are limited by time, we encourage you to use the **CHAT box** to share all your questions.
- Your questions will either be answered as part of a follow-up email or as part of an upcoming meeting.
- Additionally, your questions, comments and concerns will support the development of the full engagement plan.

# Discussion: Visioning How to Honor the Site

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Let's take time to talk through what you heard in more detail and collaboratively discussion your (and your community's) vision for honoring the site.

**How is this an opportunity to honor this historical importance of the site and show reverence to enslaved Africans buried on or near it?**

Breakout Groups:

- Split into 2 different breakout groups so that we can talk in more details about how this is an opportunity to honor the past and use for the future.
- Each breakout with have time to discuss and then we will come back to reflect as a full group.

# Sample Recommendations

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Design Guidelines Created By The Harlem African Burial Ground Memorial Task Force.

- **Be Iconic and Timeless:** The particular features of the Harlem African Burial Ground memorial should tell the story of this site and simultaneously present a powerful, original and universal statement about human suffering and sacrifice, energy and optimism, recognition and reconciliation.
- **Evoke Historical Significance and Impact Through Education, Interpretation and Empowerment:** The connected indoor and outdoor elements of the memorial should provide a sacred space in which the solemnity and sacredness of the once desecrated hallowed ground can be acknowledged, and prayers for enlightenment and peace can be offered.
- **Foster A Sacred Sense of Place:** The memorial should be an elegant, versatile, sacred place where individuals and groups can assemble for education, dialogue, performance, meditation and prayer.

# Discussion: Visioning How to Honor the Site

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Let's take time to talk through what you heard in more detail and collaboratively discussion your (and your community's) vision for honoring the site.

**How is this an opportunity to honor this historical importance of the site and show reverence to enslaved Africans buried on or near it?**

## Breakout Groups:

- How do you want people to feel in this space?
- What type of emotions should this space evoke? What type of sensory experience should we keep in mind?
- Irrespective of the solution, how accessible do you hope the site and its honoring (no matter the format) is to the general public?

# Reflection: Visioning How to Honor the Site

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## Breakout Room Sharing:

Each group will share what was discussed regarding their vision for honoring the site, surroundings, and history.

Order for the Discussion:

- Kris' Room
- Claudie's Room

# Presentation: Regulations for the Sensitive Handling of Human Remains

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A short presentation of the New York City and State requirements for the sensitive handling of human remains, and how the descendant community can be involved in making such recommendations.

# Relevant Agencies and Regulations

- New York City has a Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), a mayoral agency that designates and regulates historic sites in the city, including all archaeological work.
- The State of New York has a Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) that becomes involved in a development project if federal or state monies or permitting is required.
- Future work at the PS 90 Site will involve LPC archaeological review but may also include SHPO review if state funding is utilized. Reviews would proceed in tandem.





# *LPC Guidelines for Archaeological Work in New York City (2018)*

- Since the site is sensitive for human remains, LPC has been involved for some time.
- In 2019, EDC retained HPI to develop a Protocol for Community Engagement that called for the creation of this Task Force and for the identification of a Descendent Community, as recommended in the *Guidelines*.
- Further, it included an Unanticipated Discoveries Plan that provides a framework for creating a future Archaeological Fieldwork Protocol (Protocol) that addresses field testing and the respectful treatment of any human remains, with input from the Descendant Community.



# LPC *Guidelines: Archaeologists, Ethics, and Qualifications*

- Professional archaeologists must be qualified under the *Secretary of the Interior Standards (NPS)* and must abide by the ethical standards outlined by the Register of Professional Archaeologists (RPA).
- They must be present for all phases of excavation in an area that may contain human remains.
- Any areas with the potential for graves must be hand-excavated.



# Existing Requirements For the Protocol

- LPC: must be notified immediately if human remains are found.
- Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME): must be contacted immediately if human remains are found and will determine what, if any, further involvement they will have with the project.
- New York City Department of Health (DOH): must issue a permit if human remains are to be disinterred, reinterred, or moved. This may only be secured by a licensed funeral director.
- **The Protocol must also include the procedure for temporary and permanent disposition of human remains found in the course of the project.**



# Physical Anthropologist Involvement

- A qualified physical anthropologist must be available to come to the field as needed to identify and appropriately treat any human remains that may be encountered during archaeological investigation or construction work.
- If any human remains are found, the physical anthropologist would then submit a scope to LPC that delineates their proposed analysis.
- This analysis should, when possible, identify the minimum number of individuals present, ancestry, sex, age, cause of death, and any pathology.



# Task Force and Descendant Community: Decisions to Consider as Part of the Task Force Discussion

- What should memorialization accomplish?
  - Will there be any commemorative programming?
- Where should any recovered remains be reinterred?
  - Are DNA tests appropriate? This would likely require additional funding, but grants may be available.
- Does the descendant community wish to be notified if discoveries are made?
  - Are there any rituals or observances that should occur (i.e., saying a prayer)?



# Articles About Non-Destructive or Minimally Destructive DNA Analysis

Genetics for Justice. *UCONN Magazine*, Spring 2020.

- <https://magazine.uconn.edu/2020/02/19/genetics-for-justice>

A Minimally Destructive Protocol for DNA Extraction from Ancient Teeth. *bioRxiv*, August 19, 2020. (article is in preprint and has not yet been peer reviewed)

- <https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.08.19.256412v1>



# Questions

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**How can we support your understanding of the city/state regulations and the opportunity for recommendation development?**

Process Notes:

- As we are limited by time, we encourage you to use the CHAT box to share all your questions.
- Your questions will either be answered as part of a follow-up email or as part of an upcoming meeting.
- Additionally, your questions, comments and concerns will support the development of the full engagement plan.

# Discussion: Recommendation Development

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We will take time to talk through the potential options for the recommendations.

**If future human remains are discovered, how do you hope these are honored (in relation to the site)?**

## Breakout Sessions:

- Split into 2 different breakout groups so that we can talk in more details about how this is an opportunity to honor the past and use for the future.
- Each group will have time to discuss and then we will come back to reflect as a full group.



# Discussion: Recommendation Development

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Recommendation for sensitive handling of the remains, if found.

**If future human remains are discovered, how do you hope these are honored (in relation to the site)?**

## Prompts:

- Where should they be reinterred?
- Does the descendant community wish to be notified if discoveries are made?
- Are there any rituals or observances that should occur (i.e., saying a prayer, services, ceremonies)?
- How do you hope the handling of the remains are connected to the site memorialization?

# Reflection: Recommendations Discussions

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## Breakout Room Sharing:

Each group will share what was discussed regarding the recommendations.

Order for the Discussion:

- Claudie's Room
- Kris' Room

# Next Steps

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## Request for information from Task Force:

- Complete the **post-meeting survey** (which will be shared through email) outlining your questions and comments.

## What happens next on our end:

- **Notes** from this meeting will be shared before the next meeting.
- **The goals for the next session and reading materials** will be share before the next meeting.

# Next Session

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## Focus for Task Force Meeting #3

- To build on today's discussion, we will continue the conversation around honoring with a focus on the on- and/or off-site memorialization.
- Additionally, we will focus on collecting insights regarding the site/urban design, with a focus on setting parameters for the building not designing the building.
- Co-design for the public engagement process and intention setting for outreach/survey and workshop approach.

**Next Task Force meeting will be February 24, 2021**

# Thank You!

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