

Flatbush African Burial Ground Remembrance and Redevelopment Task Force

February 24th 2021 from 5:30-8:00 pm | Task Force Meeting #3 Notes

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Agenda for the Meeting

I. Meeting Summary

Task Force Meeting #3 was held on Wednesday, February 24th in the evening from 5:30-8:00 pm. The meeting provided the opportunity to 1) review memorialization options and have a meaningful discussion on potential recommendations for memorialization that honors the historical significance of the site, the descendent community, and the relationship with the building, 2) clarify HPD's Request-For-Proposal (RFP) process for building recommendations, and 3) start to co-design the public engagement process. The meeting included presentations, Q&A, a breakout discussion, and group reflections. 14 Task Force Members, along with 6 City agency staff and 3 consultants, were in attendance. The meeting was recorded on Zoom and made accessible to the public via livestream.

II. Discussion Reflections: Project Name and Language Change

This discussion built off of the discussion started in Task Force Meeting #2 regarding the use of appropriate language throughout this process. Attending Task Force members were provided an opportunity to vote through a gradient of agreement on the language they feel comfortable using, and what they consider most appropriate for both the Task Force name and terminology for 'human remains'. Following the voting process, the Task Force members discussed the new language for the Task Force name.

The following is a summary of the voting process and the themes that came out of those discussions. These themes are not in any particular order, and they reflect all points shared during the breakout rooms and group share-back.

PART 1: DETERMINING A NEW PROJECT NAME:

Proposed Names	Fully Agree	Agree with Reservations	More Discussion Needed	Serious Disagreement
Option #1: Flatbush African Burial Ground Task Force [FABG]	3 votes	4 votes	2 votes	1 vote
Option #2: Flatbush Descendent Community Task Force [FDC]	1 vote	3 votes	4 votes	2 votes
Option #3: Flatbush African Cemetery Remembrance and Redevelopment Task Force (FACRR)	5 votes + 1 vote (post-survey)	4 votes	0 votes	1 vote

Following the vote of the language preferences around the new Task Force name, it was determined that Options #1 and #3 were preferred by the Task Force. During the discussion, Task Force members were provided an opportunity to discuss the options. Following the meeting, a post-meeting survey was shared with the Task Force for the purpose of final decision-making, which included Options #1 and #3. Based on the vote results from the Meeting, and the results from the post-meeting survey distributed to Task Force members, the new language change moving forward for the Task Force name will be Option #3. To ensure this Task Force name is consistent with other New York City projects and the historical map naming for the site, the term Burial Ground will be used instead of Cemetery. Moving forward the Task Force name will be Flatbush African Burial Ground Remembrance and Redevelopment Task Force (FABCRR).

Key themes for language considerations based on the discussion following the vote:

Emphasis on “African Burial Ground”

- Emphasis of this phrase is necessary as all evidence points to it being an African Burial Ground. The lack of emphasis on this phrase in any name is problematic as Task Force members joined because of this aspect of the project process.
- The emphasis of only this phrase in a name can be limiting. Terminology like “redevelopment” is important as it can explain what actions are happening at the site.
- The emphasis of this phrase could be misleading as it has not been 100% confirmed that this site was an African Burial Ground or that the burial ground was located on the entire site.

Concerns regarding Flatbush Descendent Community [FDCTF]

- The acronym FDC is well known in this community as Flatbush Development Corporation and it might not have enough distance between the well-known and established organization and this project.
- This name does not make reference to the African burial ground.

PART 2: DETERMINING APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

Proposed Language change for ‘Human Remains’	Fully Agree	Agree with Reservations	More Discussion Needed	Serious Disagreement
Option #1: Ancestral Remains	5 votes	4 votes	2 votes	0 votes
Option #2: Disinterred Ancestors	3 votes	3 votes	3 votes	2 votes
Option #3: Human Remains <i>(a term to be used by the City Team)</i>	4 votes	2 votes	1 vote	4 votes

Based on the vote, it was determined that we had a final decision about the language used for “human remains”. It was determined that the City Team (HPD, EDC, LPC and consultants) will use “human remains” and that “ancestral remains” may be used by Task Force and community members.

III. Memorialization Presentation Overview

EDC presented on memorialization by defining aspects of successful projects and presenting a series of options, drawing from local and national precedents. EDC then walked Task Force members through some physical site considerations, and highlighted considerations for public access, longevity and maintenance, and the relationship between the future development and memorial.

Following EDC’s presentation, the Task Force engaged in a question-and-answer session with EDC and the broader project team. EDC’s presentation has been attached in the post-meeting email. The presentation can also be viewed on the website.

IV. Discussion Reflections: Building Memorialization Recommendations

Building on the Memorialization Presentation by EDC, Task Force members were provided time to talk through what they heard in more detail and their initial thoughts and vision for memorialization. TYTHEdesign facilitated the conversation by asking: what are your hopes for the memorialization of the descendants discovered on this site and the historical importance of the site within Flatbush's history?

The following is a summary of themes to come out of those discussions. These themes are not in any particular order, and they reflect all points shared during the breakout rooms and group share-back.

Key themes for visions regarding memorialization:

Need for ongoing funding and sustained maintenance

- Memorialization needs funding to ensure posterity for future generations.
 - Interest in the potential of creating a 501c3 to support key aspects of memorialization, including ongoing education about the African Burial Ground.
 - Alternatively, potential funding for memorialization and its maintenance could be a responsibility of the developer and built into the recommendations and RFP.
- There is a need to find an ongoing funding stream as maintenance and upkeep are a concern. It is likely City agencies will not have the capacity for maintenance. The RFP should incorporate some sort of funding stream that would provide sustainable maintenance.
- Council Member Mathieu Eugene emphasized the importance of memorialization and mixed-use. The Council Member pledged his own capital funding allocation for the future memorial and that he would work to support this process.

Outdoor space

- Memorialization that allows for public, open outdoor green space is necessary. There is limited green space in Flatbush, and specifically in CB14. Open public space should be for people to come, sit and reflect on the history of the location.
- The open space should be incorporated into the building's set back.
- The space should be built so it looks like it belongs in the community, and should incorporate artist and intergenerational play.
- The entire site should be outdoor space or community space – not housing. The community needs green space, community environments, and cultural organizations.

Opportunity for education

- The memorial should pull people in for a greater education and dialogue. It should tell the story of the site to those who don't know the history of the site and surrounding area. There is an opportunity to engage young people, as there are thousands of students within a few blocks of this site.
- Storytelling through the memorial should be intentional and evoke reflectiveness, not shame. Memorialization must find a new way to tell the story of stolen Africans that does not cause young people nearby to feel shame.
- Education on the history of the site needs to be sustainable for the future and never dissipates, so that the history of this location and the history of Brooklyn are not forgotten.

Programming

- Programming will be a necessary part of evoking the sacredness of the site, regardless of whether the memorialization is indoor or outdoor, to make sure awareness and intentionality of the site history is not overlooked.
- There is an opportunity to create a modular and multi-prong approach, especially because of site setbacks and youth programming on the site. Programming could take advantage of the multi-use space.
- Successful education through the memorialization should include ongoing programming and collaborations with artists.

Reflection and sacredness

- The memorialization should evoke sacredness and be a reflective space where people can sit in remembrance. The sacredness cannot be allowed to dissipate. The memorialization should be about remembering and honoring the horrific acts that are part of our history.
- The space for memorialization should be built in a way that all who occupy it are aware of the history. People should not enjoy the space without first reflecting on what is there.

Accessibility to the public

- The memorialization should be built for high traffic and made readily accessible.
- Indoor space and doors can be a hinderance to many, they may not feel comfortable walking into a space. Any memorialization must be physically and psychologically accessible.

Highly engaging

- Memorialization should incorporate features that invite and engage the public, those visiting and those passing by. The incorporation of large markers and displays are a possibility, as are more innovative techniques to foster engagement such as digital features, website or interactive displays, audio and Wi-Fi features. Engagement should include education. A mini-museum or arts and cultural programming would help tell the evolving story of the site.
- The use of connecting the indoor and outdoor features can offer a multi-pronged approach, ensuring memorialization fits many needs. Outdoor features can draw people in and offer a reflective open space, while indoor features can add context and highlight the history of the site.
 - There is an opportunity to utilize architectural features to play with bringing the outside inside.
 - Memorialization features should be inviting, and any indoor programming space could be a place to get more detail and a broader perspective of the history of the location and the surroundings.
- Memorialization should include youth and intergenerational engagement. Young people should feel refreshed, energized, empowered and appreciated in this space.

Memorialization should incorporate history

- Memorialization must incorporate an authentic, accurate, and cohesive history.
- Histories that should be highlighted are the Dutch Colonial Period, the trade of stolen Africans in New York, New York City, and Brooklyn, and the history of the school previously on the site. This connection to the broader New York City history is an opportunity to rewrite the local history books accurately and provide programming opportunities across the city.
- The memorialization should tie to other historical buildings in the area, specifically the Erasmus High School. This is a possible partner opportunity and programming opportunity. The memorialization should tie to schools and the history of schools on this site. There is an opportunity to be part of early education curriculum which currently includes the history of the Village of Flatbush.

Location specific

- The corner of this site is the best place for memorialization. It is a high traffic area and it would overlap where the actual African Burial ground most likely stood.
- Memorialization can directly connect to Erasmus High School, through physical features and programming.

V. Request for Proposals Process Presentation

HPD presented on the Request for Proposals (RFP) process to provide the Task Force members with more clarity on the project/process and how recommendations play a key role in building a project that meets the goals of both the community and city at-large. HPD first outlined how community engagement shapes the project by providing information on how the public benefits of a development should serve both the residents of the building and the neighborhood. The Task Force and public engagement identify priorities and goals, which are incorporated into the RFP. HPD then outlined the multi-step selection process for developers, including criteria for selection. Development teams that apply to the RFP gain a competitive advantage by proposing solutions that reflect the

overall priorities and goals set out by the community and the City. Proposals are evaluated favorably for thoughtfully responding to Task Force recommendations and community priorities that are identified through community engagement. Additionally, HPD walked the Task Force members through a case study of this process featuring the Chestnut Commons project in East New York, which was selected through the Dinsmore-Chestnut RFP, and highlighting post-selection engagement opportunities.

Following HPD's presentation, the Task Force was invited to ask any questions they had to better support their understanding of the RFP process, in order to understand how their recommendations impact the development of the site. HPD's presentation has been attached in the post-meeting email. The presentation can also be viewed by accessing the YouTube Livestream link on the PS 90 Website

VI. Public Engagement Presentation

TYTHEdesign presented on the Public Engagement Process to provide more clarity on the process and goals for community engagement and the Task Force's roles, and to frame the brainstorming activity on best approaches for equity, inclusion and accessibility for public engagement and leveraging existing networks of the Task Force.

VII. Discussion Reflections: Community Engagement Co-Design

Building on the Public Engagement Presentation by TYTHEdesign, Task Force provided their insights and feedback through facilitated dialogue. The following is a summary of themes to come out of those discussions. These themes are not in any particular order, and they reflect all points shared during the breakout rooms and group share-back.

Part 1: TYTHEdesign guided this conversation by asking: *How do we make sure that public engagement (the questionnaire, outreach and public workshops) is accessible, inclusive and equitable?*

Key themes for visions regarding public engagement:

Leveraging learning lessons from this last year

- Utilize insights from census outreach and engagement throughout COVID-19 to build a more inclusive and response approach. Utilize targeted outreach for specific populations, including text messages if there is budget.
- Leverage locations where people regularly gather including PTA meetings, barbershops and hair salons, house of worship, schools, healthcare providers, fraternities and sororities, Medgar Evers College, the Caribbean Women's Health Center and local businesses.

Take a multi-prong and creative approach

- Be creative, by engaging local arts and cultural institutions to spread the word and perhaps identify an incentive or an art or video competition for awareness and engagement.
- Get outside to use the development site and make direct engagement to the community.

Acknowledge the digital divide

- Be cognizant of the reality of the digital divide. Zoom is not easily accessible for all. Make sure the meeting is designed to include individuals on the phone.
- Ensure staff (and potentially youth) are available to support individuals, especially seniors, navigate the technology. Create webinars or additional resources to support participation. If possible, support survey completion through the phone, along with paper and digital.
- Acknowledge that the digital environment is exhausting. Do not hold the meeting for more than 1.5 hours.

Be inclusive

- Make sure to include translation for materials, including the questionnaire. Have multiple translators at the workshops. Many in the neighborhood do not speak English as their first language.
- Be conscious about language used throughout and make sure to include some plain language for those unfamiliar with the topics or language specific to this project.

Create compelling messaging and materials

- Roll out a campaign that emphasizes authentically about getting the community involved, and that community voices are wanted, needed, and welcomed, and make sure engagement reaches everyone in our catchment area.
- Develop media and marketing that speaks directly to the target audience.

Be Transparent

- Provide time to explain the project, the decisions we are looking for community input on and next steps.
- Make sure to articulate the need for this development and if possible, outline how this development can address other needs of the neighborhood (such as jobs, especially for youth).

***Part 2:** TYTHEdesign asked a series of questions regarding the most inclusive approach and time for leading the public workshops. The Task Force discussed the pros and cons of having one workshop repeated twice or two workshops focusing on different topics in the recommendations, along with options for time of day.*

Key themes for planning the workshops:

Repeating the same workshops

- This provides more opportunities for participation. This ensures that if one person misses one meeting, they can have an opportunity to go to another one and give their input.
- The concern is being able to discuss all aspects of the projects, not only the affordable housing section. Concerns were expressed that there are some very strong, affordable housing advocates in the community, in the zip codes that this project is happening, and they might dominate the discussion.

Two stand-alone workshops

- This option is more realistic to the amount of content we need to cover.
- Be prepared for affordable housing advocates. There is a very strong voice about housing affordability, what affordability means and what is affordable to whom. Providing a full workshop on the future development and housing could lead to a more productive discussion of memorialization.

Inclusive time of day for hosting workshops

- Provide the community with multiple times for engaging, including 1 during the weekday (evening) and 1 during the day on a weekend.
- If possible, have four workshops, including a weekend morning and weekday evening slot for each of the 2 meetings.

TYTHEdesign will be utilizing the insights from this discussion to develop a public engagement plan, outreach materials and a calendar for the public workshops.

VIII. Questions and Answers

During the meeting, Task Force members raised the following questions. The answers are a summary of what was shared through discussion and Zoom Chat by the City Team. These are in-person responses that are for informational purposes only and are not written in any particular order.

Q. What is the total square footage of the setbacks?

We will have that level of detail for future meetings. We will evaluate what is required by zoning and what may be required by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to determine this.

Q. Is the Task Force a 501c3 organization? Organization like the Pomeroy Foundation, supplies grant money to New York State nonprofits for various similar projects.

The Task Force is not currently a 501c3. Forming a 501c3 is a potential outcome that could come out of this process, and could open up the opportunity to secure several funding streams, including grant funding. This is something the Task Force can consider as part of this process as a solution for the long-term sustainability of the site.

Q. What were the funding streams for the memorialization examples shared?

The City team will provide this information for later discussions. The affordable housing project will be financed by City funds to ensure it provides permanent affordability to New Yorkers, and other additional funding sources such as City capital funds, discretionary funds from elected officials, and privately raised or donated funds, could also be used to support making the vision for memorialization fully realized.

Q. When the RFP was released, did it include a budget or deliverable for the developer regarding to the memorialization development cost and maintenance?

To ensure clarity, the RFP itself has not gone out yet. Only the Request for Qualification (RFQ) has been released. We are in the process of drafting the RFP with the support of the Task Force recommendations. The purpose of the RFQ starts the process for this project by identifying a shortlist of development teams. The RFQ is focused on qualifications and is not very detailed. As a result, we did not specify programming or memorialization requirements or budgets. We are looking for candidates (developers) with experience in affordable housing, their community development and outreach experience, as well as experience with historically sensitive sites. Ultimately, through these discussions with the Task Force and the public, we will have to figure out how the RFP can include such details relating to the planned memorial and related obligations for the developer.

Q. In the presentation it was stated that HPD presides over public lands and development of affordable housing on public lands. For the apartments, which are erected on the public land, are the rents normally cheaper compared to apartments erected on private lands?

We will cover this in more depth during our next Task Force meeting when we cover affordability. Whenever HPD is financing a project, whether it is on a public or private site, we have term sheets that require a level of affordability. The public land (city-owned land) distinction is that we have more leverage to include community input. Through this process, we will collect these recommendations through community workshops and taskforce input around affordability.

IX. Next Steps

To close the meeting, TYTHEdesign presented the following next steps and expectations for the Task Force. **The next meeting will be held on Wednesday March 24th at 5:30p.** The next meeting will include meaningful discussions on the populations served by the future affordable housing development, and the development's non-residential uses, including ground-floor use, youth space and programming.

X. Attendance

Name	Organizational Affiliation
Mathieu Eugene	District 40 Council Member
Ryan Lynch	Office of Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams
Roslyn Joinvil	Office of District 40 Council Member
Carol Reneau	Community Board 17
Shawn Campbell	Community Board 14
Lauren Collins	Flatbush Ave. BID & Church Avenue BID
Samantha Bernardine	Erasmus Hall High School for Youth and Community Development
Ron Schweiger	Brooklyn Borough Historian
Natiba Guy-Clement	Center for Brooklyn History at Brooklyn Public Library
Tyrone McDonald	Neighborhood Housing Services of Brooklyn CDC Inc. (NHS Brooklyn)
Naima Oyo	Ifetayo Cultural Arts Academy
Dr. Ben Talton	Author and Professor of African History from Temple University
Kathy De Meij	CAMBA
Robin Redmond	Executive Director of Flatbush Development Corp.
New York City Agencies + Task Force Technical Advisors	
Eleni DeSiervo	NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC)
Julianne Herskowitz	NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC)
Perris Straughter	New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)
Josh Saal	New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)
Uriah Johnson	New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)
Amanda Sutphin	New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC)
Kristina Drury	TYTHEdesign
Claudie Mabry	TYTHEdesign
Hillary Clark	TYTHEdesign

HISTORICAL **PERSPECTIVES** INC.



February 19, 2021

Flatbush African Burial Ground Remembrance and Redevelopment Task Force HPI Research Update

Winter 2020-Spring 2021

1. HPI contacted interested members of the Task Force regarding joining research efforts.
2. HPI spoke to Reverend Sheldon Hamblin of St. Paul's Church in Flatbush (established 1836). He reports that their church has records of "Black" parishioners listed in the records of deceased, some of whom were buried in the "Burial Ground for Coloreds." He will be copying and sharing these records with HPI.
3. HPI is now focusing on identifying additional churches in Flatbush established before and through the mid-19th century that did not have associated burial grounds or may have had African American parishioners who may have also been interred in the African Burial Ground.
4. HPI collected and reviewed information relevant to the enslaved population and burial ground detailed below:
 - Reviewed additional 19th century newspapers for references to the burial ground.
 - Downloaded and created an excel database of all 792 deeds predating 1900 with the word "Flatbush" from the *New York Land Records* at Familysearch.com.
 - Spoke to researchers and searched multiple websites for relevant data including:
 - The Periwinkle Initiative
<http://slaveryandremembrance.org/partners/partner/?id=P0087>
 - Colonial Williamsburg Slavery and Remembrance site
<http://slaveryandremembrance.org/>
 - Center for Brooklyn History <https://www.brooklynhistory.org/>, and more specifically the Lefferts Family History and Slavery in Brooklyn
<https://lefferts.brooklynhistory.org/introduction/>
<https://lefferts.brooklynhistory.org/slavery-in-brooklyn/>
 - The New York Slavery Records Index at John Jay college
<https://nyslavery.commons.gc.cuny.edu/>
 - The New-York Historical Society <https://www.nyhistory.org/>
 - New York City Municipal Archives
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/records/about/municipal-archives.page>