

Flatbush African Burial Ground Remembrance and Redevelopment Task Force

April 14, 2021 from 5:30-8:00pm | Task Force Meeting #5 Notes

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Agenda for the Meeting

I. Meeting Summary

Task Force Meeting #5 was held on Wednesday, April 14th in the evening from 5:30-8:00pm. The meeting provided the opportunity for the Task Force to 1) learn more about the possibilities for planning and design of the site and building, 2) have meaningful discussions regarding site planning and urban design, and 3) to reflect on the topics discussed in the previous meetings (#1-4), including all the insights collected so far, and to share feedback on the information we plan to share with the public during the community workshops. The meeting included presentations from the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP) and TYTHEdesign, Q&A, breakout discussions, and group reflections. 9 FABGRR Task Force Members, along with 7 City agency staff and 3 consultants, were in attendance. The meeting was recorded on Zoom and made accessible to the public via livestream.

II. DCP Scenarios Site Planning Analysis Presentation

DCP presented different site analysis explorations to support the Task Force's shared understanding of the site and building design. The purpose of the presentation was to present a series of site design options to support conversations around recommendation development for the FABGRR Task Force. None of the options represent final decisions made by the agency or City team. The presentation walked through different design considerations for the current site, as well as existing conditions and site context. DCP then presented different explorations related to building setbacks, open space and outdoor memorialization, and building height and massing.

Following DCP's presentation, the FABGRR Task Force engaged in a question-and-answer session with DCP and HPD. DCP's presentation has been attached to the Task Force's post-meeting email and can also be viewed on the project website.

III. Discussion Reflections: Building Site/Design Recommendations

To support the FABGRR Task Force's discussion on site planning and urban design, TYTHEdesign shared a set of three DCP slides that showed the different explorations related to building setbacks, open space, and building height. FABGRR Task Force members shared their prioritizations for site planning and urban design. The following is a summary of these prioritizations.

Maximize open space

- Overall, the Task Force expressed a strong preference towards maximizing open space irrespective of the building design, massing or height. Maximizing open space can support recognizing the site's past and honoring its history in a real and meaningful way.
 - More open space would allow for ongoing performances or activities and provides more varied opportunities for how the space is used.
- The approach to open space does not need to be just on the ground level. Explore opportunities for utilizing the rooftop for open space, recreation or an arts and cultural space.
- Concerns were shared that the specific exploration DCP shared showing the prominent open space located between the proposed new building and Erasmus High School could feel more like a tunnel than a comfortable space, as both these buildings would be substantial in size.
 - If open space is only located on this area of the site, it might not be welcoming.
 - Open space on the site should feel welcoming and not that it belongs to the building.

Setback(s) should be used as a connection to prominent open space

- The exploration DCP showed where the prominent open space connects to the street and wraps around both sides of the site (along Bedford Avenue and Church Avenue) was acknowledged as a great opportunity, as it can draw people into the open space.
 - Concerns were shared that if the open space is unconnected to the street (located only between the proposed new building and Erasmus Hall High School), it will not be accessible to the public.
 - Concerns were shared that setbacks on Church Avenue could set a new precedent for future developments on the street.
- Setbacks could be designed to foster a welcoming open space environment.
- A setback consideration with the prominent open space between the proposed new building and Erasmus Hall High School creates more space for performance or activity. Additionally, Bedford Avenue is less busy and open space there could support a more reflective experience.
- Utilizing the building's design instead of a setback, such as having glass windows along Church Avenue could draw people to a memorial on the other side of the building.

Maintenance is a concern for both setbacks and open space

- As this is a busy intersection, and two busy streets, maintenance as it relates to trash is a major concern.
 - The site and block already struggle with litter and waste management issues.
 - A setback consideration on Church Avenue could potentially have more onerous maintenance requirements. A setback consideration on Bedford Avenue might have less maintenance.

Show respect through the building footprint

- The building should not be built over the location of where human remains were found.

Prioritize open space for the memorialization

- The open space should intentionally build a quiet and reflective space for memorialization, and be welcoming and distinct from other activities on the site.
 - Open space between the proposed future building and Erasmus Hall High School will foster a more quiet and reflective space as opposed to open space on the corner of Church and Bedford Avenues, where there will be much more noise and activity from traffic. This location is more appropriate as it is more intentional and honors the sacredness of the site.

Memorialization should be integrated into the building design

- The building's design should be artistically and intentionally focused towards memorialization. The developer should have a vision of how this building will be respectful of the site history, integrating memorial ideas and open space.
- The building's design should lead people between the public portions of the building and the open space and memorial. Adding glass windows to the ground floor could add to the accessibility of the space. Pedestrians could see the open space through the windows, further drawing them in.

Building height is a concern

- The building height is both a concern for this site and for the community in general.
 - This building and site design will set a precedent for developments to come, especially with increasing development in the area. Height is important to consider for this building but also for how increased height set an example for other developments on this block in coming years.
 - A 14-story building would be the tallest building on the block, and would seem out of scale surrounded by much shorter buildings. A tall building hasn't been proposed in this community without significant community pushback.
- Concerns were shared about how the building height might affect light of the open space.
- A higher building could provide space for more affordable homes, which is beneficial, especially if the units could be larger and for families.

IV. Discussion Reflections: Reflection of topics and themes from previous Task Force Meetings

To support the FABGRR Task Force's reflection and discussion of past insights collected in previous meetings (#1 to #4), TYTHEdesign presented an overview of the insights collected so far across all recommendation topics. Following the presentation, TYTHE asked Task Force members to select two topics to discuss in more depth in a breakout group.

In the breakout rooms, the FABGRR Task Force reflected on the past insight and identified what information they would want to gather from the public to help prioritize and refine their recommendations. The following is a summary of these discussions.

Reflection on the shared set of themes for memorialization

- Regarding the open space priority, have the memorial located away from the corner and instead located between the future building and Erasmus Hall High School, as this could ensure a more private and larger space. The memorial space (either inside or outside the building) should be not only sacred but more meditative.
- In addition to a larger open space portion of the memorial, include something visual at the corner of the site on the burial ground footprint:
 - Could be an eye-catching, freestanding marker to ensure that individuals passing by understand this site is a sacred space.
 - Could incorporate a statue (not a figure) with educational information.
- No specific questions suggested for the public workshop, but the Task Force is curious to hear what the public will say as we assume most of the public isn't aware of the site's history.

Reflection on the reinternment options for sensitive handling of human remains

- A key consideration for the idea of repatriation of the human remains to West Africa is that this would be contingent on DNA testing indicating the ancestral country of origin. If DNA testing is possible and a country of origin is identified, then the descendants, not the Task Force or public, should determine the final resting place for repatriation.
- No specific questions for the public workshop were identified.

Reflection on the priority population for the new affordable housing development

- To prioritize affordability for this neighborhood:
 - To make sure the recommendations are clear whom the new development is affordable to. The development should ensure there is affordable rent for people in this community- not just the City's definition of affordable. Concerned about telling the community that housing will be affordable if it will not actually be affordable to them.
 - To provide preference to people living in the district.
 - To reflect the priority populations based on the statistical needs of the neighborhoods.
- To prioritize affordable units that are built for families with the exception of single units for seniors.
- To provide an opportunity to address the needs of the homeless population, in particular the homeless families, in the community, even though this might be politically unpopular.
- The future development should balance the current needs with the anticipated needs.
 - The new development could address the current needs of the severely rent burdened and overcrowded households in the neighborhood, while thinking ahead to the needs of those just moving into the neighborhood.
- In the public workshop, the Task Force is interested to gather input on preference for homeownership.
 - Task Force members indicated this will be a new conversation for the community and are unsure their level of interest. This is a priority of the Task Force as it could promote generational wealth.

Reflection on the Youth Programming for the new affordable housing development

- To prioritize a safe space for teens to gather. There is lots of afternoon programming for elementary and middle school students but there are gaps in programming for the high school age students.
- Concerned that it is difficult to find programming partners and feel it will be difficult to find the appropriate service provider to lead the programming based on the requested needs of the community.
- The Task Force is looking for public input to prioritize youth programming ideas:
 - Concerned we will hear that students want Basketball courts but are unsure how that would be received by tenants or how it will work with the memorial space.
 - Could be a youth leadership space with job training, readiness and licensing, space for teaching youth how to cook, etc.
- In the public workshops, the FABGRR Task Force is interested to understand the priorities of the students (and families) in the community and are particularly interested in the outcomes of the student questionnaire.

Reflection on the non-residential amenities for the new affordable housing development

- To prioritize local arts and culture organizations to support community buy-in and address potential fears about gentrification and new things coming into the neighborhood.
 - To ensure this space is used by the whole community, we should make sure we have gathered input from organizations in the neighborhood such as caribBEING and the organization that runs the West Indian Day parade.
- There are already many fitness centers in the area, so maybe this is not a priority.
- Area does not have a lot of senior centers, but unsure if it fits well with youth programming.
- The area could benefit from access to fresh food.
- In the public workshops, the FABGRR Task Force is interested to understand the priorities by asking 'what are they (the public) going to other neighborhoods for that they wish they could do in Flatbush?'

V. Questions and Answers

During the meeting, FABGRR 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: Does the number of floors of the building impact the size of the units?

The examples presented by DCP present an estimation of what the number of units can be across different height options, and are based on standard averages that are in line with [HPD's Design Guidelines](#). These estimates use uniform assumptions, so the number floors do not impact or consider the size or types of units.

Q: Has there been a decision made yet on which demographics and family sizes in Flatbush would qualify for future housing units?

HPD has not made any determination as to specific unit sizes (square footage) or unit mix (studios, one-, two-bedrooms, etc.), and will glean toward the input from the community during the upcoming public workshops. The City does have a citywide policy regarding unit mix and unit sizes for the housing programs that were discussed in Task Force Meeting #4. This policy is not specific to any one neighborhood so does not consider local demographic mix. For example, Senior Affordable Rentals are limited to a mix of studios and one-bedrooms. Affordable Rentals (multi-family) are suggested to have a minimum of 15% one-bedroom, a minimum of 30% two-bedroom *or larger*, and a maximum of 25% studio units. Unit size ranges for these types of units can be found in [HPD's Design Guidelines](#). By hearing what preferences of programs and unit mixes the community expresses, the selected team will ultimately work with the agency to find a unit mix for such program that considers the stated preferences expressed by the community while still complying with citywide policy on unit mix and unit sizes. Note that the size of the units will not impact the decisions around the building setbacks or the placement of the memorial.

Q: How can you diversify the unit sizes so the building is not only studio apartments?

HPD is wary of providing too many studios in affordable housing development, unless a building is population specific (senior units and supportive units) and our affordable rentals (multi-family) programs have a maximum cap of how many you can build, including a minimum and maximum number of multi-bedroom units.

Q: Who has priority with the future affordable housing?

All HPD affordable housing programs can promote different mixes of populations through different unit sizes programs that target specific populations. Affordable housing can provide a mix of studios, one, two and three bedrooms that can be geared towards housing seniors, homeless families, and targeted groups, in addition to the general population. Depending how much the community would like to prioritize particular populations, a minimum of 15% and maximum of 60% of the total units can be set aside for populations that need supportive services (eg formerly homeless households and/or special needs populations).

Q: Can seniors receive priority in the housing lottery?

Seniors would most likely be unable to receive priority for buildings financed by HPD unless such a building is programmed as Senior rentals. Seniors are the only population given priority in a lottery for Senior rentals. Note there is no Senior homeownership program. As senior households are typically comprised of fewer people, the building would most likely promote studios and one bedrooms in order to serve more seniors. It is important to note that any affordable housing development is open to seniors, but affordable housing that is Senior rentals would restrict other priority populations from applying.

Q: Can homeless populations receive priority for housing?

Units can be set aside for families or individuals living in shelters or experiencing homelessness. Any such units should not be misconstrued as shelter – these set aside units for homeless are permanent housing with supportive services provided for the residents. With the exception of developments using HPD's

Homeownership program, the new development would require a portion of the units to be set aside for formerly homeless, ranging from 15% to 60% of the units.

Q: Do these site and design explorations anticipate zoning changes, for instance, a 14-story tower would require an upzoning?

Zoning is not the focus of this part of the FABGRR Task Force and RFP process. The explorations presented in the DCP presentation are instead for prompting discussion around priorities and trade-offs related to the number of housings units, setbacks, open space and memorialization, and massing and height, and how they impact the existing block and neighborhood landscape.

Q: Are there known financial incentives the developer who is awarded the RFP to provide one type of unit versus another type.

We suggest having these conversations once a developer is onboarded. The selected development team can work with HPD to slightly adjust their unit mix proposal according to feedback from local community, and identify financial mechanisms that achieve goals for desired unit mix. Regardless of the feedback, the unit mix would have to meet citywide policy.

Q: In regards to air and light, how much would a taller building impact that for the block and neighborhood?

Regardless of where the building is erected on the site, there will be some type of shadow on Church avenue since the site is south of the avenue, which could potentially also have a shadow on the open space and memorialization. There would have to be a more thorough analysis to understand if there would be a big difference in shadow bouncing from a 9-story building versus a 14-story building.

Q: How are parking requirements impacted by the number of units? How would parking impact and interact with the site design?

Standard parking requirements for affordable housing developments are less than market rate housing. They are often minimal, if there are any at all, for affordable housing financed by HPD. Parking might be required by code for certain larger commercial or community facility uses. As the site is in a central commercial area with public transit accessibility, that reduces the amount of required parking. We don't anticipate that such parking requirements, if any, would significantly impact the open space or memorial.

VI. Next Steps

To close the meeting, TYTHEdesign presented the following next steps and expectations for the FABGRR Task Force related to the workshops on May 5th and May 22nd. The next Task Force meeting will be held on Wednesday June 16th at 5:30p. The next meeting will include reviewing the insights collected as part of the public workshops and questionnaire and participatory decision-making to support the finalization of recommendations for the RFP.

VII. Attendance

Name	Organizational Affiliation
Ryan Lynch	Office of Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams
Roslyn Joinvil	Office of District 40 Council Member
Shawn Campbell	Community Board 14
Lauren Collins	Flatbush Ave. BID & Church Avenue BID
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
Reverend Sheldon N.N. Hamblin	St. Paul's Church in the Village of Flatbush

Robin Redmond	Executive Director of Flatbush Development Corp.
New York City Agencies + Task Force Technical Advisors	
Eleni DeSiervo	NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC)
Lena Ferguson	NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC)
Josh Saal	New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)
Erin Buchanan	New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)
Jonah Rogoff	New York City Department of City Planning (DCP)
Jesse Hirakawa	New York City Department of City Planning (DCP)
Amanda Sutphin	New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC)
Kristina Drury	TYTHEdesign
Claudie Mabry	TYTHEdesign
Hillary Clark	TYTHEdesign



April 9, 2021

2286 Church Avenue/ Church and Bedford Avenue Site HPI Research Update

Winter 2021-Spring 2021

1. HPI continued online research into any references to the Flatbush African Burial Ground. No new information about size of the burial ground and its dates of use has been found.

2. HPI reviewed Kings County Records from the Municipal Archives online, which did not include additional information about the burial ground and those buried there. These records include:
 - a. Flatbush Town Meeting Minutes
 - b. Records of Flatbush School District No. 1
 - c. Records of the Overseer of the Pool
 - d. Road Records (Overseer of roads, laying out and opening roads and streets, boundary changes, etc.)
 - e. Board of Health Records, including multiple references from before 1840 for payments issued for coffins and burials of people potentially of African descent. These records do not indicate burial location.
 - f. Flatbush Records of Slave Holders, Slave Births, Indentures, and Manumissions, which include first names. These records are from the late 1790s and early 1800s and do not record deaths.