

Harlem African Burial Ground Community Town Hall

September 18th, 2023

NYC / EDC

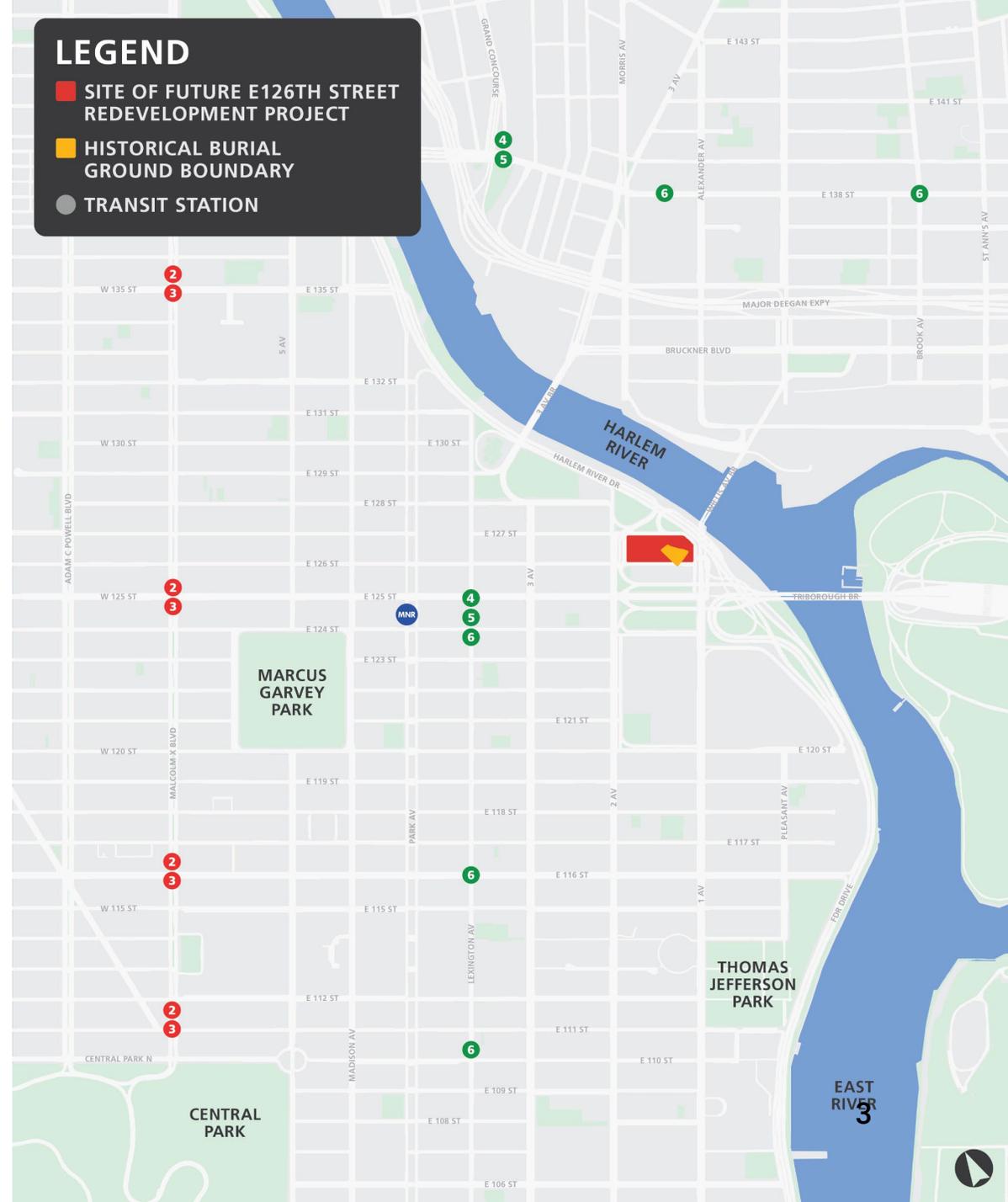


Agenda

- Background & History
- Project Goals
- Updates & Next Steps

Project Location

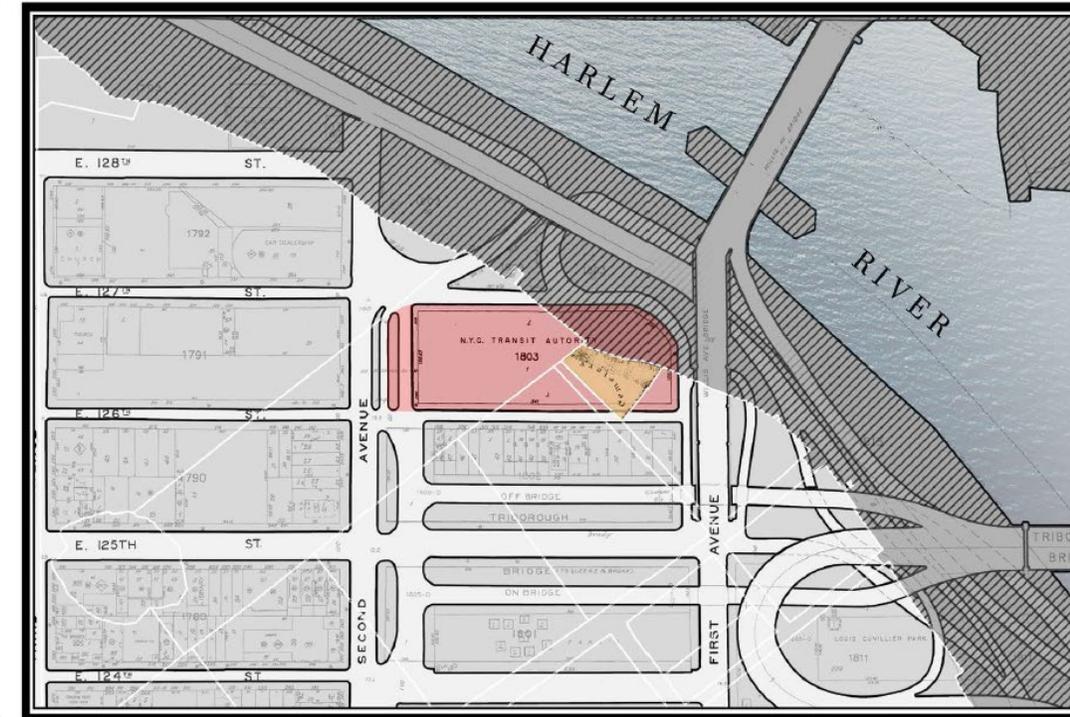
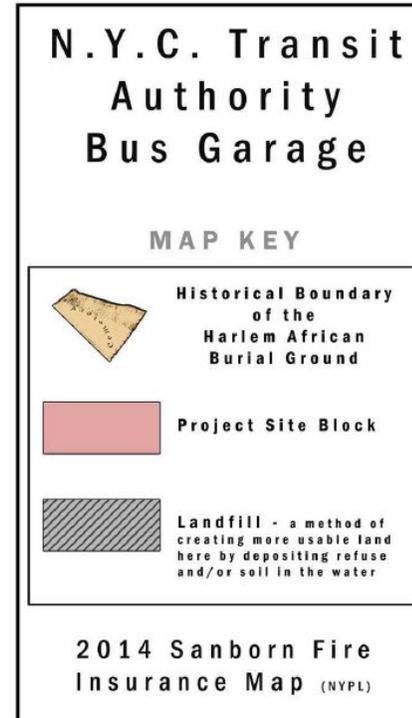
- 2660 2nd Avenue
- City-owned, full-block site occupied by a decommissioned MTA bus depot
- A portion of the site is the historic Harlem African Burial Ground (HABG)



History

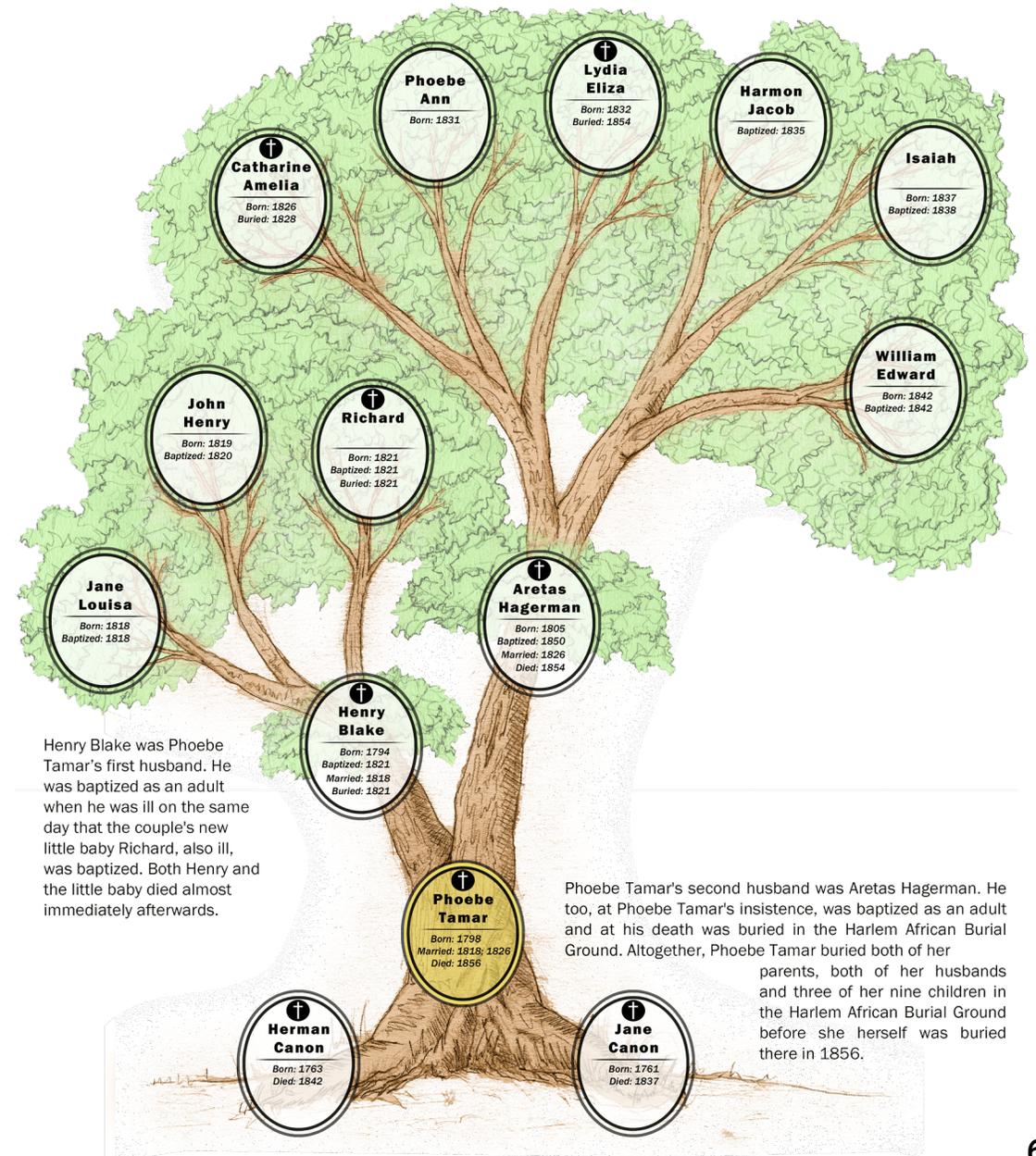
Several uses occupied the site of the Harlem African Burial Ground

- 1885-1917: Beer garden and casino
- 1917-1918: 15th New York National Guard Infantry Regiment barracks
- 1918-1945: Movie studios
- 1945-1962: Third Avenue Railway Company trolley barn; Current depot built in 1947
- 1962-2015: MTA/NYCT 126th St bus depot



Historical Records

- Through research into their records, Elmendorf Reformed Church has identified over 40 names of those buried at the Harlem African Burial Ground
- One example is Phoebe Tamar – she and at least 7 other members of her family are known to have been buried at the Harlem African Burial Ground



Harlem African Burial Ground Initiative

- The Harlem African Burial Ground Initiative (HABGI), formerly the Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force (HABGTF) and founded in 2009, includes:
 - Rev. Dr. Patricia A. Singletary
 - Melissa Mark-Viverito
 - Sharon Wilkins
 - Melinda Velez



Project Background

- 2015: MTA decommissions bus depot and vacates site
- 2015-2016: NYCEDC is asked to lead the redevelopment project and commissions a first-phase archaeological investigation, which uncovers over 140 human remains on the site
- 2017: CB11, Manhattan Borough President, City Planning Commission, and City Council approve land use actions to facilitate the redevelopment project
- 2023: Bus depot transferred to City ownership



Image: HABGTF leading a consecration ceremony in 2015 for the human remains discovered during archaeological investigation

Project Goals

- From 2015-16, the **Bus Depot Task Force** – a group of elected officials, City agencies, and community stakeholders, including the HABGTF – convened to develop goals for a future mixed-use project.
- After this community-led planning process, the **project was approved through the ULURP process in 2017** with support from Community Board 11, and the **goals developed were memorialized** in a Points of Agreement Letter



Image: The decommissioned bus depot today

Project Goals

- The project goals are to:
 - Honor and memorialize the Harlem African Burial Ground with a **public outdoor memorial** on the entire historic footprint of the burial ground and an **indoor cultural education center**
 - Address **affordable housing and job creation needs** in East Harlem on the remainder of the site through a mixed-use program including roughly 600-700 units of housing, of which at least 80% will be affordable, commercial space and additional community space



Image: The decommissioned bus depot today

Moving the Project Forward

- NYCEDC and the Harlem African Burial Ground Initiative announced next steps on August 15th, which are:
 - A new phase of archaeological work
 - An RFP for an education & engagement effort
- Currently executing a **Social Media Campaign**, including LinkNYC ads, to support the announcement and these next steps



Image: Press event announcing the next phase of archaeological work on site on August 15th

Education & Engagement RFP

- Open RFP for a multi-strategy, wide-reaching education and engagement effort in coordination with the HABGI to increase awareness and understanding of the Harlem African Burial Ground, its history, and the archaeological work
- Scope includes **stakeholder mapping**, development of an **education and engagement plan**, execution of **public events** and creation of a **public report**
- Submissions due **October 4th, 2023**



Image: Panel from 2019 La Marqueta exhibition event

Social Media Campaign

- To increase collective and public awareness of the Harlem African Burial Ground, the HABGI in partnership with NYCEDC has launched a new social media account
- Please follow us [@harlemafricanburialground](https://www.instagram.com/harlemafricanburialground) on Instagram and share our content!
- Timing: Ongoing

Did you know

there is an African burial ground in East Harlem dating back to Harlem's chartering?



The Harlem African Burial Ground served as a final resting place for enslaved and free New Yorkers of African descent from the mid-1600s to mid-1800s.



Those buried here played a crucial role in the early history of the city. Their history is New York City history.



Contact Info:

harlemafricanburialground@edc.nyc

Fernando Ortiz

AVP; Government & Community Relations

fortiz@edc.nyc

The Harlem African Burial Ground: Discovery, Collaboration, and Archaeological Recovery

Harlem African Burial Ground Town Hall

September 18, 2023



Outline

- Introductions
 - Armand, AKRF, Biocultural Anthropologist, Bioarchaeologist
- 2015 Archaeological Investigation
 - Goals, methods and results
- 2024 Archaeological Excavation and Recovery
 - Goals and potential methods



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Archaeological Team

A. Michael Pappalardo, MA

*Sr. Technical Director/Archaeologist
AKRF, Inc.*

EDUCATION

*BA: New York University
MA: Binghamton University*



EXPERIENCE

- 30+ years in industry; 16+ years at AKRF
- Registered Professional Archaeologist
- Cemetery experience throughout NY & region
- Co-authored SHA paper on HABG collaboration with Sharon Wilkins



Elizabeth D. Meade, PhD

*Sr. Technical Director/Archaeologist
AKRF, Inc.*

EDUCATION

*BA: New York University
MA: Hunter College
PhD, MPhil: CUNY Graduate Center*

EXPERIENCE

- 19+ years in industry; 17+ years at AKRF
 - Registered Professional Archaeologist
- Expert in the identification and documentation of historic period cemeteries in New York City
 - Maintains web-based database of 500 NYC burial places

Osteological Analysis

Rachel Watkins, PhD

*Biocultural Anthropologist
Associate Professor, American U.*

EDUCATION

BA: Howard University

MAA: U. of Maryland, College Park

PhD: UNC Chapel Hill

EXPERIENCE

- 25+ years
- Expertise in skeletal biology
- Worked on the New York African Burial Ground



Osteological Analysis



Aja Marie Lans, PhD

*Bioarchaeologist
Assistant Professor, Johns Hopkins*

EDUCATION

BS: Binghamton University

MA: New York University

PhD: Syracuse University

EXPERIENCE

- 13+ years
- Bioarchaeologist and historical archaeologist
- Works with Harvard's Peabody Museum and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History

Other Specialists

- Geoarchaeologist
- Soil flotation
- Organic matter identification
- Artifact specialists
- Potential participation by local graduate students

2015 Archaeological Investigation – Goals

- Collaboration
- Respectful recovery
- Presence/absence
- Examine specific location of HABG
- Examine areas outside of HABG
- Inventory any recovered human remains/artifacts

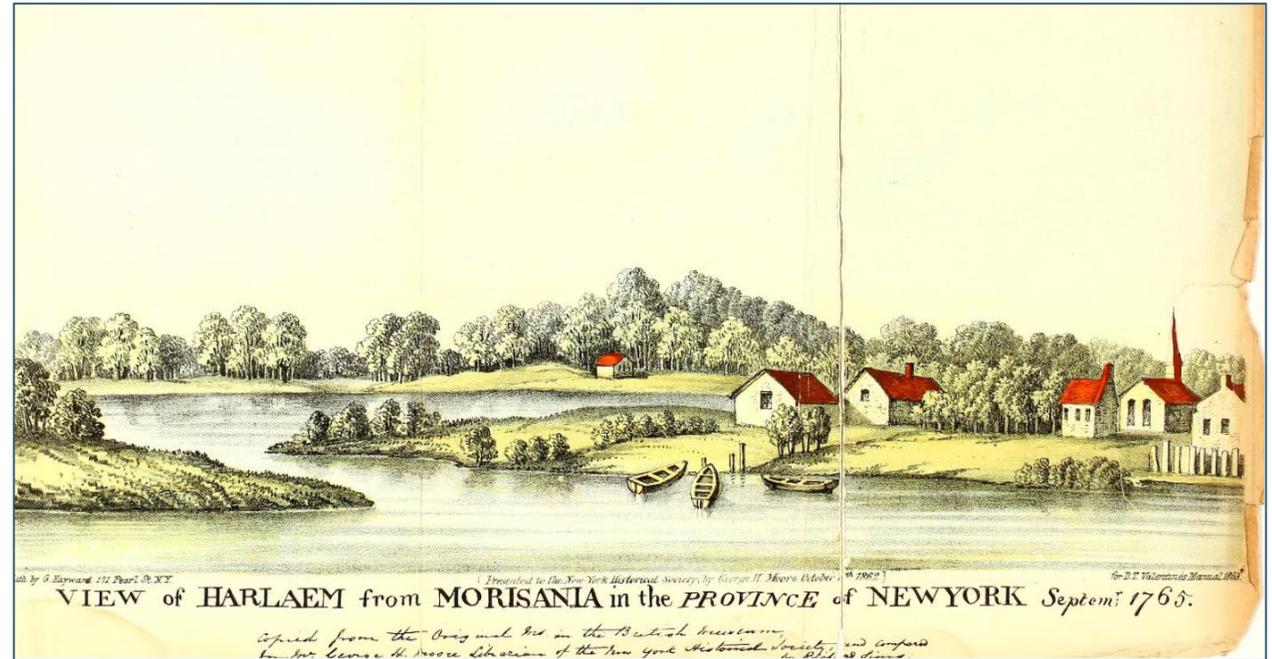


From D.T. Valentine's Manual, 1863

2015 Archaeological Investigation – Collaboration

Descendant Community - Per LPC Guidelines

- “A good faith effort must be made to identify the appropriate descendant entity. This may include a biological relative or a responsible entity such as a religious organization or successor organization (in the case of a former graveyard). The entity(ies) should be consulted about disposition and treatment of the human remains”
- May include a biological relative or a responsible entity, such as a religious organization or successor organization in the case of a former graveyard, that should be consulted for any actions that may impact burial grounds or sites with great religious or cultural significance.



From D.T. Valentine's Manual, 1863

2015 Archaeological Investigation – Methods

- Collaboration on Work Plan with HABG Task Force and Descendant Community
- Removal of slab in four test locations
- Mechanized and by hand soil removal
- Soil Screening
- Documentation
- Public Participation



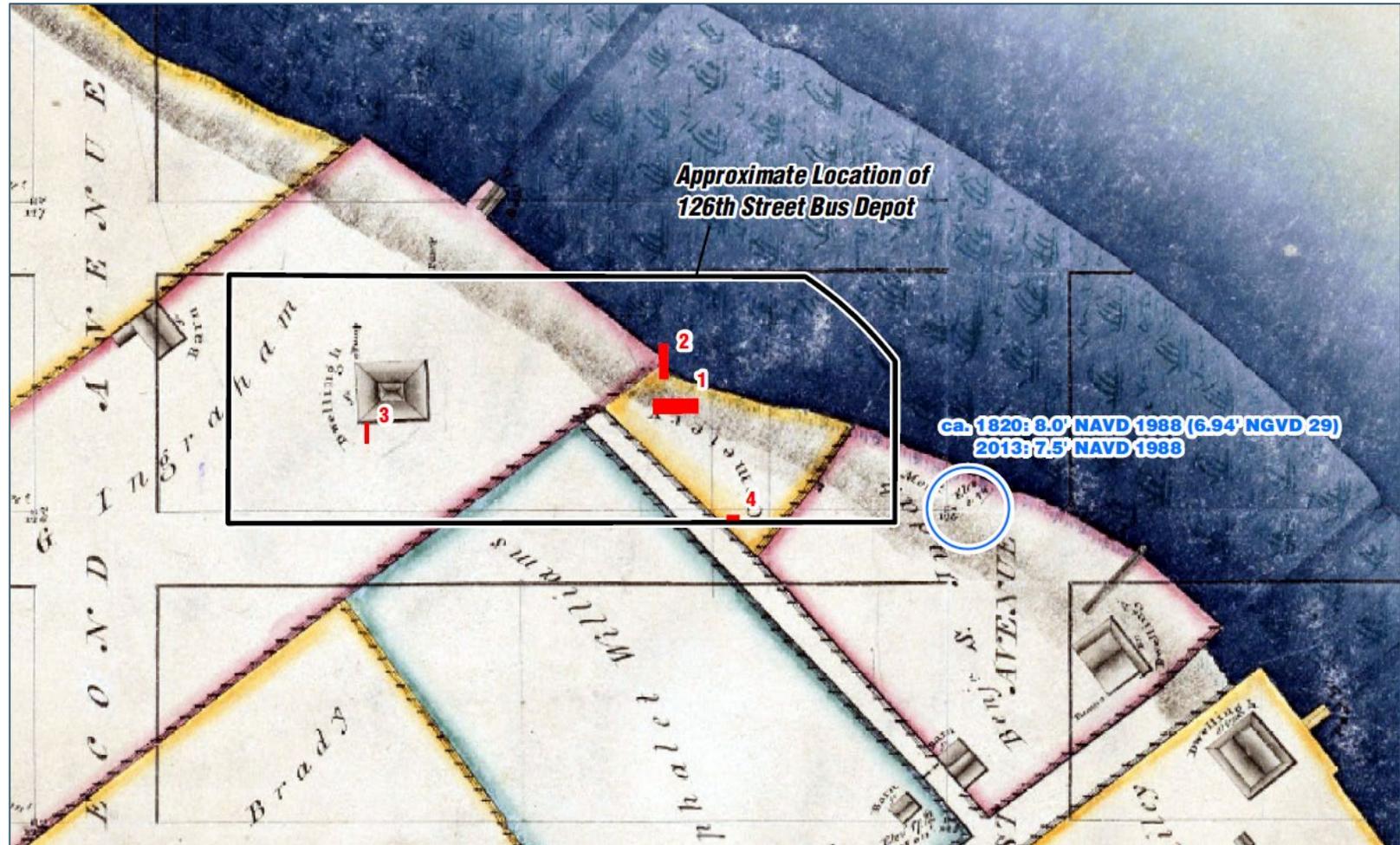
2015 Archaeological Investigation – Results

- No human remains within original cemetery footprint
- Soils containing burials likely removed when a hill was leveled in the 1850s



2015 Archaeological Investigation – Results

- Human remains recovered in fill material outside cemetery boundaries
- Additional human remains are present extending into the walls of Trench 2



2015 Archaeological Investigation – Results

- Human remains were fragmentary
- Preservation was poor
- Minimum number of individuals = 2
- One nearly complete cranium recovered
 - Likely an adult female
 - Likely of African descent



2023/2024 Archaeological Excavation

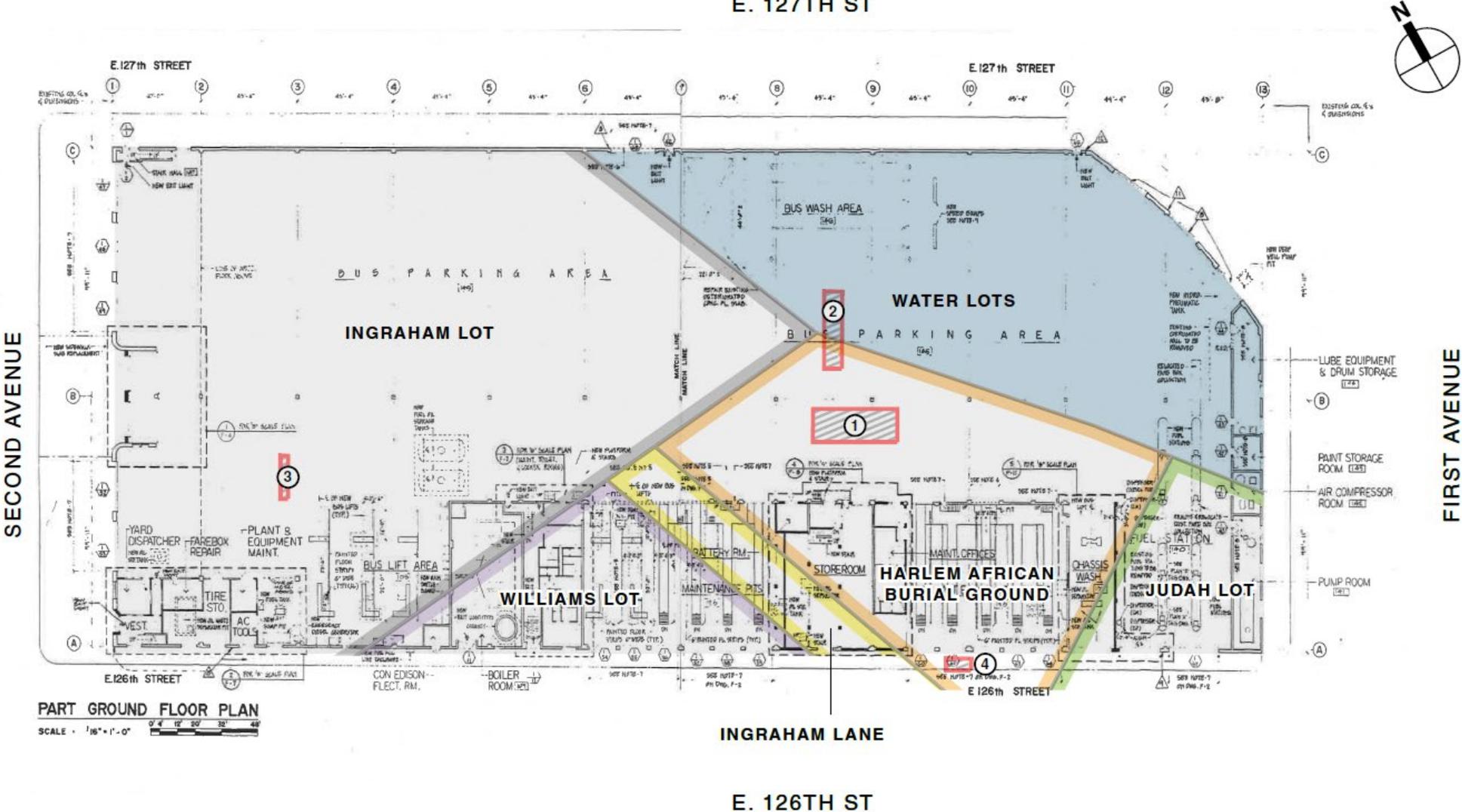
Primary Tasks

1. Planning/Consulting
2. Fieldwork
3. Analysis
4. Reporting

2023/2024 Archaeological Excavation – Goals

- On site collaboration with HABGI and descendant community
- Ensure respectful treatment of human remains at all times
- Determine horizontal and vertical extent of human remains on site
- Document and recover human remains and associated funerary materials
- Assess potential for additional human remains in depot
- Assess potential for additional human remains outside of depot
- Inventory, analyze, and stabilize recovered human remains for later reburial

2023/2024 Archaeological Excavation – Goals



2023/2024 Archaeological Excavation – Methods

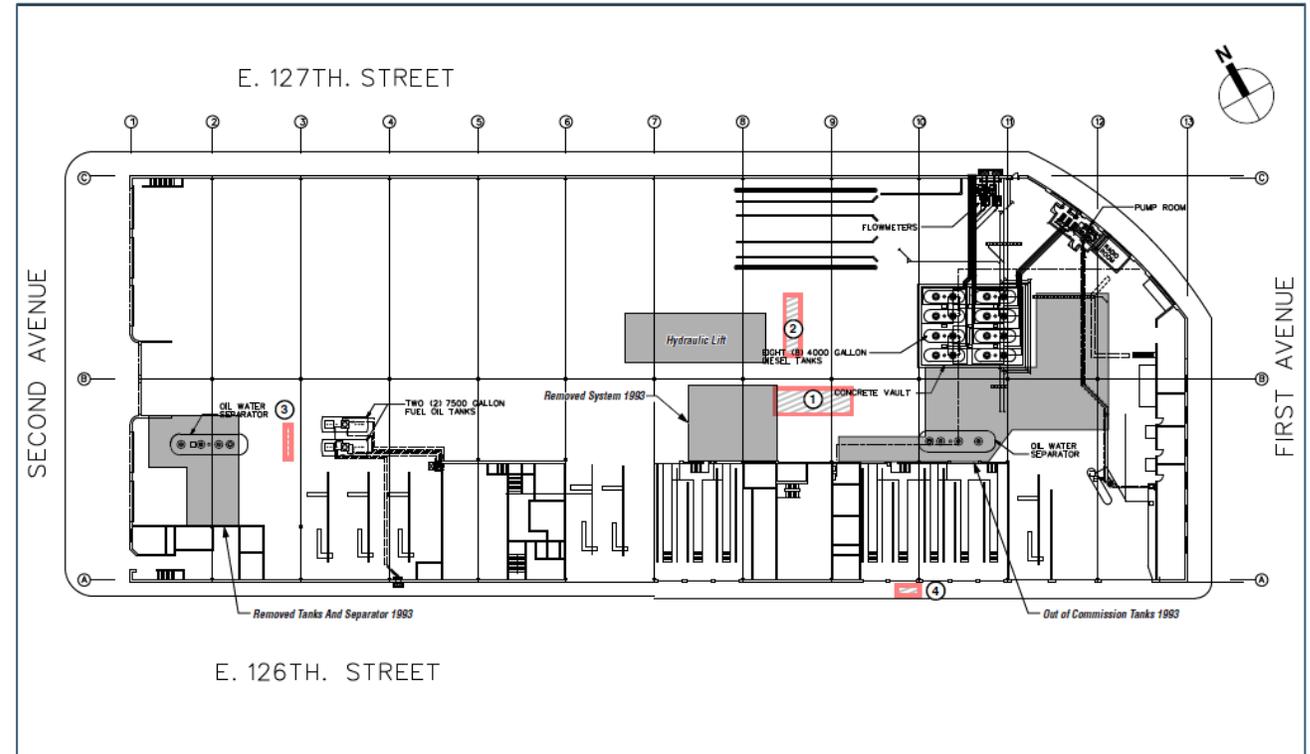
- Planning/Consulting

- Collaboration on Work Plan with HABGI and descendant community
 - Project description
 - Historic context
 - Research design
 - Field protocols
 - Management
- Public involvement
- Planning and logistics with Armand
- Agency Consultation: NYCLPC, NY State (SHPO), Advisory Council
- HABG is listed on the National Register of Historic Places

2023/2024 Archaeological Excavation

Anticipated Field Methods

1. Removal of rebar-reinforced concrete slab
2. Systematic testing across interior
3. Delineate extent of area of sensitivity
4. Expose, document, and recover



2023/2024 Archaeological Excavation

Post-fieldwork next steps

- Plan for ceremonies to commemorate and honor those buried at the HABG
- Completion of fieldwork;
- Further consultation with the HABGI and descendant community regarding analysis
- Draft and Finalize Technical Report

An aerial, high-angle view of a dense city skyline, likely New York City, featuring numerous skyscrapers and a prominent suspension bridge in the foreground. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark blue filter. The word "Questions?" is centered in the middle of the image in a large, white, sans-serif font.

Questions?



*Environmental, Engineering,
and Planning Consultants*