

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

CB11 Updates – Operator RFP, Archaeology & Engagement

November 19th, 2025



Agenda

- **Background**
- **Project Updates**
 - Archaeology
 - Engagement
- **Operator of Cultural Facility RFP**
 - Scope
 - Pre-Development Support
 - Developer RFP
- **Next Steps**

The Harlem African Burial Ground

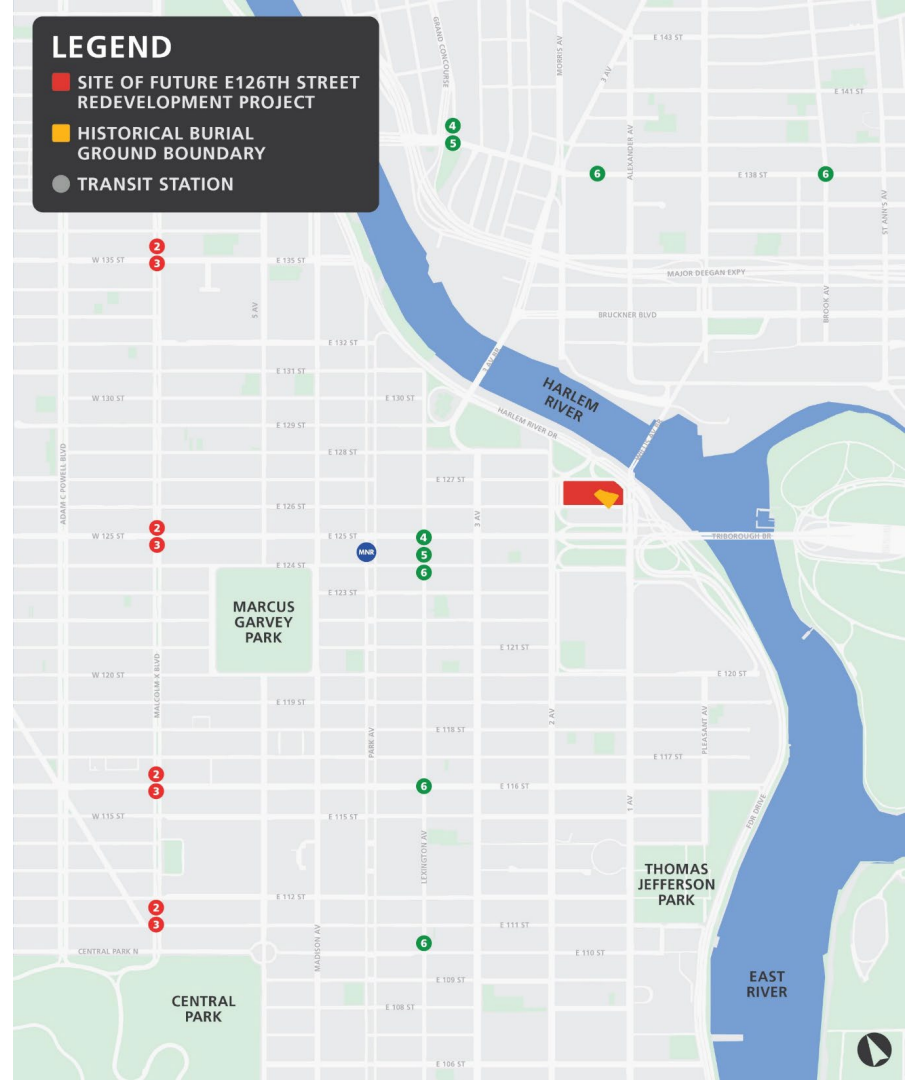
As a cemetery for free and enslaved Africans from the mid-1600s to the mid-1800s, **the Harlem African Burial Ground is a sacred site of New York City's early history**, with great significance for communities of Black and Indigenous descent. For decades, the site was forgotten and disrespected, but tireless **research and advocacy brought this history to light**.

Now the **New York City Economic Development Corporation** is leading efforts in partnership with the Harlem African Burial Ground Initiative and NYC Department of Cultural Affairs to properly memorialize and honor the people buried there.



Project Location

- 2460 2nd Avenue in East Harlem (MN Block 1803, Lot 1)
 - **City-owned, full-block site**, a portion of which is the historic Harlem African Burial Ground (HABG)
 - Occupied by **decommissioned MTA bus depot**; MTA has transferred ownership to the City



History

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

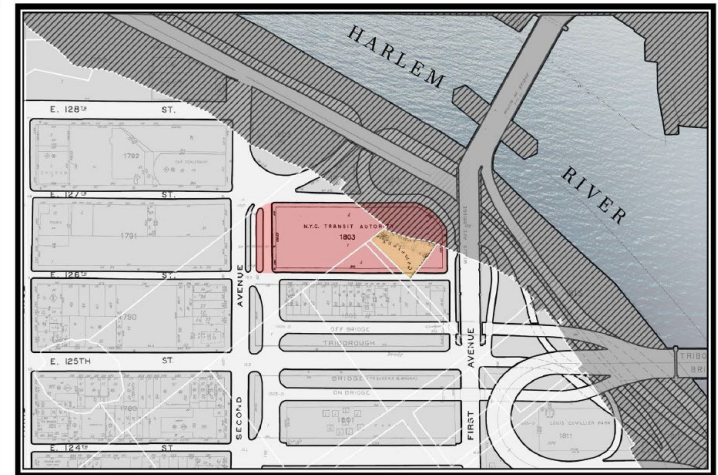
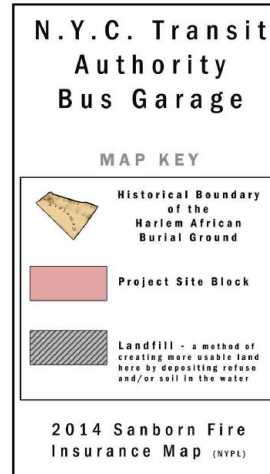
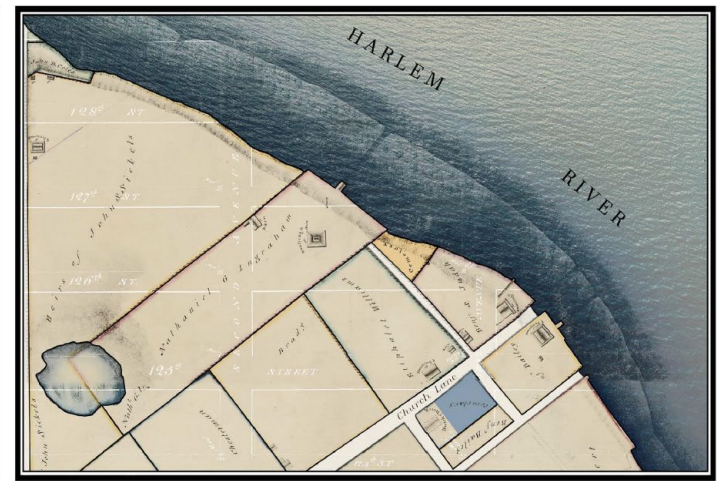
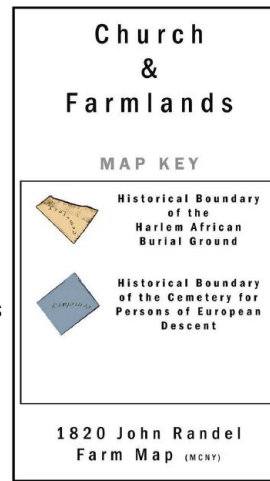
- 1660: Nieuw Haarlem is chartered by the Dutch on indigenous land with Low Dutch Reformed Church as founding church.
- 1869: Prompted by northward expansion of the city, church leaders begin transferring human remains of white Europeans to new plots. Those buried in the HABG are left behind.

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

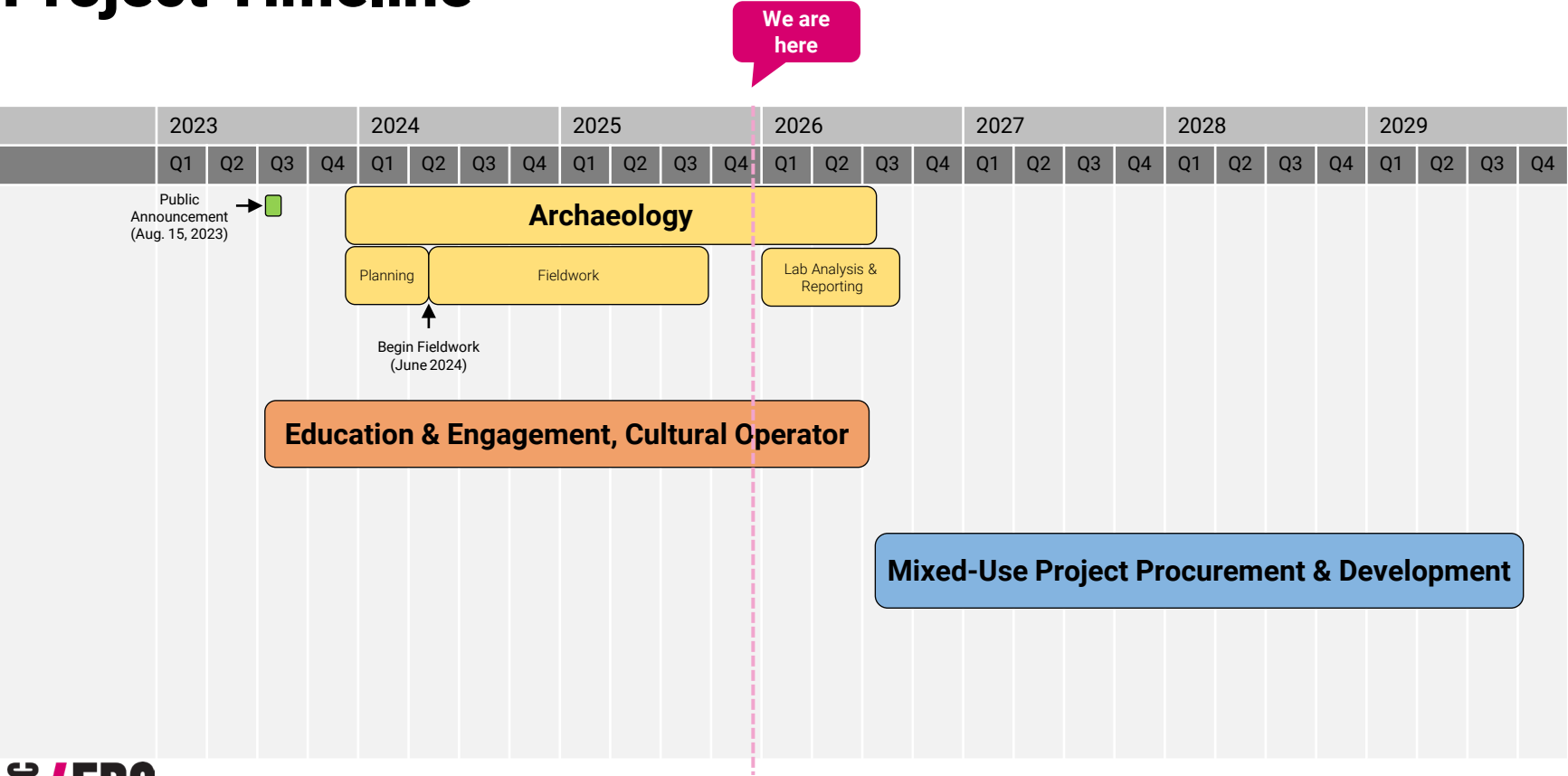
Present day efforts for memorial and mixed-use program

- 2009: Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force (now Initiative) founded to advocate for memorial
- 2015-16: First phase of archaeology
- 2017: ULURP
- 2024-5: Second phase of archaeology



Project Updates: Archaeology & Engagement

Project Timeline



Archaeology

- Fieldwork

- Archeological team has expanded to include two **Black bio-archaeologist consultants with expertise in human remains of African descent**, Dr. Rachel Watkins and Dr. Aja M. Lans
- **Excavation and screening completed in August 2025**

- Indigenous Nations consultations

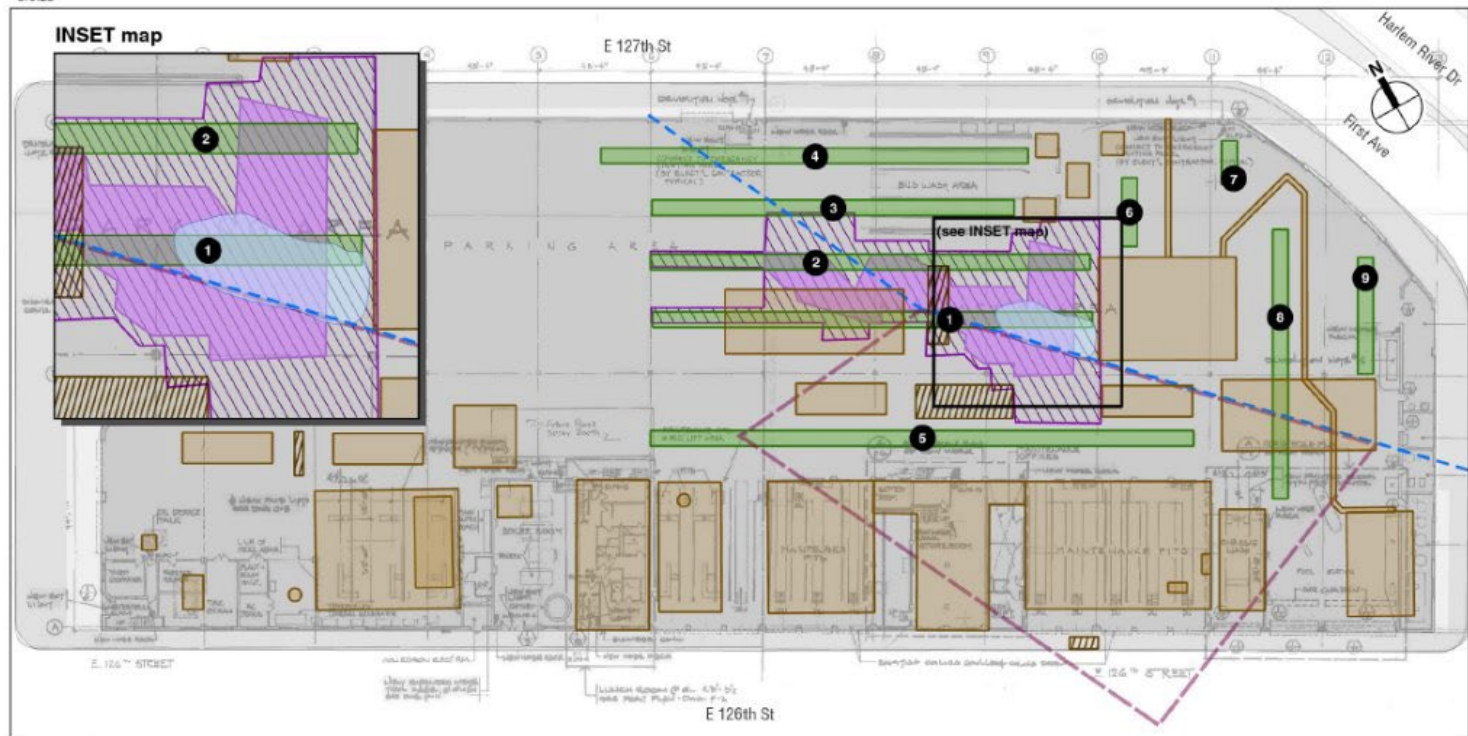
- Artifacts from pre-contact and historic periods have been recovered, emphasizing the **importance of recognizing the Indigenous histories of this site**

- Next Steps

- **Analysis of human remains**, which have been transferred to AKRF's lab
- Coordinating eventual storage at City repository w/ DCAS and LPC for period between analysis and reinterment on site
- Technical report of archaeological fieldwork and findings

Fieldwork Map

8.8.25



- | | |
|--|---|
|  2024 Test Trenches |  Approximate Harlem African Burial Ground |
|  2015 Test Trenches |  2024 Expanded Excavation Area (incomplete) |
|  Former edge of Harlem River |  Extent of Recovered Human Skeletal Remains |
|  Narrow Floodplain |  Areas of modern disturbance, 4-20 feet below grade, Unconfirmed |

Onsite Fieldwork



Engagement Effort

- NYCEDC and the HABGI partnered with Harlem-based Bridge Philanthropic Consulting for a wide-reaching engagement and education campaign entitled "**History Beneath Our Feet: Unearthing Our Legacy.**" This included:
 - Over 20 events and **over 1000 people** reached this past year
 - Family history workshops at senior centers & NYCHA developments
 - Panel discussions at the Museum of the City of New York, Dyckman Farmhouse Museum, NYC Coalition of Black Architects, and CCNY's Spitzer School of Architecture
 - Community concert in collaboration with Uptown Grand Central and CM Diana Ayala



Pictured above: Sing Harlem Choir performing at Elmdorf Church (top left), Residents of Taft Houses attending family history workshop (top right), Sharon Wilkins and Peggy King Jorde at a Feb 2025 MCNY panel (bottom left), BPC facilitating a workshop at the A. Phillip Randolph Senior Center (bottom right)

Engagement Milestones

■ Event highlights

- Juneteenth convening at the **Schomburg**
- Walking tours with Save Harlem Now
- Tabling at NYCHA Family Days and Harlem Week
- Site Visits w/ HABGI & **Royal Delegation from Ghana**
- **End of fieldwork** celebration

■ Engagement Report

- “Unearthing Our Legacy Together: Sharing the History of the Harlem African Burial Ground and Planning for the Future” will be released in December
- Summarizes findings from 18-month campaign to inform future stages



Pictured above: Project Team with members of the Ghanaian Royal Delegation at HABG

End of Fieldwork Ceremony



1. Sharon Wilkins (member of the Harlem African Burial Ground Initiative, HABGI) providing remarks during the ceremony

2. HABGI members praying over the remains and artifacts uncovered during archaeological fieldwork

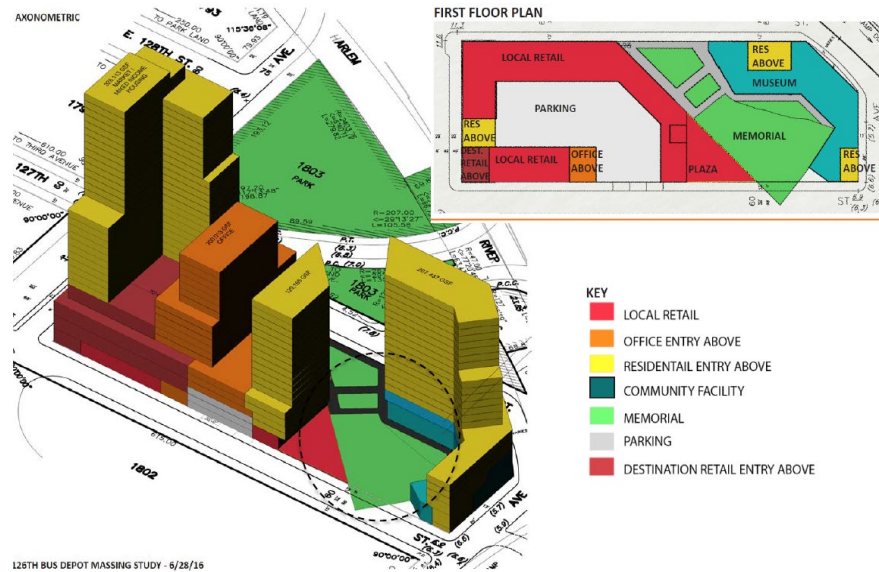
3. The Antoinette Montague Experience performing a collection of gospel and jazz songs to close out the event

4. HABGI members and CM Diana Ayala with the Mayoral Proclamation declaring Sept 27th as Harlem African Burial Ground Initiative Day

Upcoming RFP: Operator of Cultural Facility

Project Vision

- **Establish a permanent outdoor memorial and cultural education center** (up to 15K sf) to honor and commemorate the HABG's history and those who were buried there through a variety of programmatic uses, not limited to:
 - **museum/exhibition space**
 - **community space**
 - **visitor center**
- Develop a mix of uses on the remainder of the site, including **mixed-income affordable housing** (600+ units, 80% affordable) 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



Note: This is an illustrative site plan from the 2017 EIS subject to change.

HABG Cultural Operator Opportunity

A forthcoming competitive and public procurement to conditionally select the future Operator of the HABG Cultural Education Center.

- The Operator will be responsible for **operating a cultural education center of up to 15,000 sf** about the history of the Harlem African Burial Ground and **managing the permanent, public outdoor memorial** on the historic burial ground's footprint (approximately 0.4 acres).
- The Harlem African Burial Ground project has **a committed city capital budget (\$25M total) to support** the fit out and acquisition of a purpose-built Cultural Education Center and Memorial.
- **Up to \$1M annually towards eligible operating costs** will be provided to the selected Operator by the Developer of the site's mixed-use program.



Pictured above: BPL New Lots Library, African Burial Ground National Monument, Abolitionist Place

Cultural Operator Experience and Capacity

- An ideal candidate is **an established non-profit** (or consortium including non-profits) with experience **running cultural and educational programming** and **fundraising** for a campaign to support the build out of a major capital project.
- The Operator should be equipped to **thoughtfully engage the East Harlem community** and preserve the Harlem African Burial Ground as a **space to process** and confront larger citywide and national narratives about race, particularly the **erasure of Black and Indigenous histories**.
- We anticipate that the future Operator, in partnership with EDC, DCLA, and the HABGI, would support a **public design process for the permanent outdoor memorial**

Timeline for Cultural Education Center Operator RFP

