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[City Planning Approves African Burial Ground Memorial and Large Mixed-Use Complex](#)

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Image credit: GoogleMaps

The City Planning Commission approved the redevelopment of a city block in East Harlem to include a Burial Ground Memorial, 730 residential units and over 300,000 square feet of commercial space. On July 26, 2017, the City Planning Commission issued a favorable report on an application for multiple land use actions to facilitate the East 126th Street Bus Depot Project in East Harlem. The applicants—the Department of Citywide Administrative Services and the Economic Development Corporation—sought to develop a full city block into an African Burial Ground Memorial and mixed-use development. The application included requests for a zoning map amendment, a zoning text amendment, a City Map amendment and the disposition of city-owned property.

The project would redevelop a full block bounded by East 126th and east 127th Streets, and First and Second Avenues. From the 1940s to 2014, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority used the site as a bus depot. In 2008, a 17th century African gravesite was discovered by City employees in the process of refurbishing the Willis Avenue Bridge. Records indicate that an unknown number of free and enslaved Africans from all over Manhattan were buried there. The existing depot building would be removed from the site and an approximately 18,000 square feet of unbuilt outdoor memorial space would commemorate the former African Burial Ground.



Footprint of the Burial Ground. Image credit: EDC

The remainder of the development site would contain 655,000 square feet of residential development—about 730 residential units. Of those units, half would be affordable for households earning 80 percent of the area median income. Depending on the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing Option chosen by the City Council later, an additional 156 to 187 units would be affordable units. There would also be approximately 315,000 square feet of commercial space and 30,000 square feet of community facility space. There would also be 300 accessory parking spaces located in an above-ground garage.

On April 18, 2017, Manhattan Community Board 11 voted 26-1 to approve the project with conditions. The Community Board requested that the EDC honor the history of the Burial Ground and follow the recommendations of the Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force. The Community Board also requested that the EDC keep the Board involved in the process, continue exploring funding options for 100 percent affordability, ensure some senior affordable housing, provide preference to not-for-profit affordable housing developers, hire locally, and have a contingency plan if additional remains are found.

On June 2, 2017, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer recommended approval of the project with conditions largely similar to the Community Board's requests.



Image credit: EDC

In [its report](#), the Planning Commission found the application to be appropriate. The report described the project as a "result of an extensive public engagement process with ongoing consultations with the Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force, a community-based task force that was convened in 2009." Because of the process soliciting a developer and design after the ULURP process, the Commission noted that the Department of City Planning would continue to work with the EDC to memorialize a post-ULURP urban design review protocol to allow the Chair to review and give input on the project's final designs, and would require the Commission's sign off before the issuance of a building permit.

CPC: 126th Street Bus Depot, Manhattan (170275 ZMM; 170093 MMM; 170276 ZRM; 170278 PPM) (July 26, 2017).

By: **Jonathon Sizemore** (*Jonathon is the CityLaw Fellow and a New York Law School Graduate, Class of 2016*).

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