

Flatbush African Burial Ground Remembrance and Redevelopment Task Force

March 24th, 2021 from 5:30-7:40pm | Task Force Meeting #4 Notes

Table of Contents

- I. Meeting Summary
 - II. Affordable Housing Presentation
 - III. Discussion Reflections: Populations Served Recommendations
 - IV. Discussion Reflections: Non-Residential Uses Recommendations
 - V. Questions and Answers
 - VI. Next Steps
 - VII. Attendance
 - VIII. Appendix: HPI Descendant Research Update
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Agenda for the Meeting

I. Meeting Summary

Task Force Meeting #4 was held on Wednesday, March 24th in the evening from 5:30-8:00pm. The meeting provided the opportunity to 1) learn more about affordable housing and clarify HPD's Affordable Housing programs, 2) review housing program options and have a meaningful discussion on the types of households that would be served by new housing in this development, and 3) have meaningful discussions on the different non-residential amenities, services and programming the development could include. The meeting included presentations, Q&A, a breakout discussion, and group reflections. 12 Task Force Members, along with 5 City agency staff and 3 consultants, were in attendance. The meeting was recorded on Zoom and made accessible to the public via Livestream.

II. Affordable Housing Presentation

HPD presented the basics of affordable housing in New York City, starting with the crisis that impacts affordability across our neighborhoods. This included the limited housing stock, segregation, low incomes and homelessness, as well as underinvestment in public housing. This transitioned into an overview of affordable housing, where they walked the Task Force through Area Median Income (AMI) and sample rents. HPD then walked the FABGRR Task Force through the neighborhood demographics in Brooklyn Community Districts 14 and 17, including data in relation to incomes, current rental versus ownership amounts, units by regulatory status and rents over time. Lastly, HPD presented their strategies for affordable housing that their agency deploys, including the creation of new housing, preserving existing housing, and community land trusts.

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

III. Discussion Reflections: Populations Served Recommendations

Building on the affordable housing basics presentation, HPD shared five examples of affordable housing projects with the FABGRR Task Force to help facilitate a conversation on the types of populations in the neighborhood that could be served by this affordable housing development. The five affordable housing examples included affordable

rentals for seniors, affordable rentals with on-site supportive services, affordable rentals for a range of incomes, affordable rentals for a more varied range of incomes, and lastly, affordable homeownership.

The following is a summary of the prioritized populations to come out of those discussions, which were shared by the smaller breakout groups in the larger group reflection.

Key Themes for Populations Served:

The need for more data

- The need for more data on what populations are being served by current and upcoming housing developments surrounding the site.
 - Many recent and upcoming developments seem built for higher incomes. More data is needed to identify who currently is not being served by these developments and how we can keep community members in the neighborhood.
- Apart from types of affordable housing programs being offered in the community, FABGRR Task Force members expressed the need to know the types (and size) of units being offered. If there are many studios or one-bedrooms, then there is a clear need to build units for larger families (2+ bedrooms or more).

This development should fill gaps in the neighborhood

- FABGRR Task Force members hope that this development can help balance other developments, filling in gaps of needs that are being missed.
- While the city has a housing shortage, the same does not seem true for Flatbush as there are many developments under construction currently. This development should benefit those currently being priced out of the neighborhood, the more disenfranchised.

Rent burdened households

- Both CB 17 and CB 14 have a high percentage of severely rent burdened households. FABGRR Task Force members shared additional details to support the need for this development to address rent burdened households.
 - In citywide data on the number of serious housing code violations per 1000 units, CB 17 ranks second and CB 14 ranks fourth. Both CBs are extremely burdened by housing code violations.
 - Land use in CB 14 shows that much of the area is zoned for single- and two-family homes, this forces all the larger apartment buildings into one smaller area.
- Existing rent burdens in this neighborhood has been impacted by segregation and gentrification. Any affordable housing program must address this, serving the most rent burdened. "If we're talking about segregation, and we're talking about fairness, gentrification has completely transformed Flatbush Avenue."
- This is amplified by also ranking high in terms of severe overcrowding. Many families in the neighborhood are doubled up.

Homeownership as a means for building wealth

- Home ownership leads to another avenue of creating wealth.
 - "Homeownership would help us to be intentional in doing something that is really sustainable and recognizing the inequities in our history. It is mainly the Black and brown persons living in the neighborhood who are being priced out, the city should find a way to make homeownership as affordable as possible for these populations."
- Homeownership can stabilize the building and the immediate neighborhood, encouraging those living there to maintain and care for the area.
- The people in the neighborhood who would benefit the most from this development are first-time homebuyers and seniors.
 - Buying a home in this neighborhood is unaffordable, when they do go up for sale, someone from outside the neighborhood is able to purchase it.

- Homeownership is inaccessible and the city should address this. There are many people who cannot afford to purchase who still have a stake in the community.
 - Mortgages will not be available to those with lower incomes. A bank may approve you to pay a high monthly rent price, but they will not approve you for a mortgage for similar monthly costs. Homeownership can be extremely expensive.

Different types of housing to meet mixed needs

- “There is a need to prioritize, we can’t do it all. There is a need for supportive housing, there's need for some homeownership, there's need for deeply affordable and, and housing for local workers like teachers and post-office workers, but what is the most important thing for this particular site. One of the things that we want to see around city land usage is that we're prioritizing 100% affordability”.
- Balance of ownership options to rent options. Not everyone wants the responsibility of being a homeowner. Caring for property can be burdensome for many.
 - Individuals who rent still want to have a stake in their community.

Housing for families

- Make sure there is adequate supply for families, not just small families or singles who are out there looking for rentals or purchase.

Serving the homeless population

- There is a large street homeless population in this neighborhood, so affordable housing programs should benefit them.
- There are many homeless shelters in the neighborhood, but there is still a need for supportive housing.

Seniors are being priced out of this neighborhood

- Make sure the homeownership plan includes seniors. There are many who are struggling to stay in the neighborhood, and they need to be included.

IV. Discussion Reflections: Non-Residential Uses Recommendations

To support the FABGRR Task Force’s discussion on the youth and community space opportunity and the potential ground floor usage, TYTHEdesign presented an overview of the existing programs and services across Brooklyn CB 14 and 17, as well as the existing land uses across both districts. TYTHEdesign then shared a variety of possible youth and community programs and services, as well as a variety of possible ground floor uses to inspire the conversation.

FABGRR Task Force members shared their prioritizations for programs and services and ground floor uses to be located within the future development. The following is a summary of these prioritizations as shared by the smaller breakout groups in the larger group reflection.

PART 1: Key Themes for Youth Programming and Facility Space Recommendations:

Robust programming

- Young people in the community need a third space. A non-school or home space that they can make their own between the hours of three to seven pm.
 - Youth need multiple options for programming spaces in the neighborhood.
- Summer programming for teens is greatly needed. Currently, families often leave the neighborhood for more robust teen programming.
- Arts and culture should play a role in continuing education for youth. This space should provide a service and unity as the community changes.
- Provide a space for all ages but older youth have the least amounts of services available to them. Programming for little kids to early teens is robust, but is then greatly reduced for older youth.

- Recently, two students were lost to gun violence in the neighborhood. A space for programming that focuses on conflict resolution could greatly benefit the neighborhood and youth.

Vocational and job training

- Teen summer programming and vocational or job training is needed. Education loss in the summer is a major concern for this community.
- There needs to be programming that bridges the gap between high school and career readiness.
 - Youth are in need of supportive programming that offer them marketable skills outside a traditional academic to career path.
- Vocational or job training for coding and tech sector jobs can prepare youth for the future.

Youth programming tied to memorialization

- Youth programming at this site should be directly tied to memorialization of the site's history, specifically this history of African burial grounds in Flatbush, New York City, and the United States.
 - This site could be a job opportunity for the neighborhood youth. Young people can work there and support others in leaning their history, teach the next generation about their culture.

Open space opportunities

- Green Space. Though Prospect Park is not far, there is still a need in this community to have accessible green space.
- This site could be used as an open and free space for youth sports and recreation. When not in use for youth recreation, it could be an open, outdoors space for cultural programming.
 - A recreation center could be used by the entire community, not just the youth.

Leverage the neighborhood resources

- Programming should partner with, and take advantage of neighborhood school's underutilized space during afterschool hours and weekends.
- To partner with larger venues, i.e., Kings Theatre to cross-pollinate and support local arts and culture in the neighborhood.

Utilize the youth space as a multi-purpose community space

- To use the space for other community needs in the off hours. For example, hold senior programming such as digital trainings in the space.

PART 2: Other Non-Residential Recommendations:

The need for more data

- A commercial needs study from 10 years ago was referenced by one FABGRR Task Force member. A current and reliable needs assessment of the neighborhood is essential to making informed decisions.
- Community input on non-residential use is necessary for the FABGRR Task Force to make more informed decisions.

Ground floor (non-residential use) should be tied to memorialization

- The memorialization is what makes this site unique and should be part of the ground floor experience.
 - Memorialization should look at the past, but should also connect to the present. Memorialization must address the current concerns of the community and city, specifically in regards to safety.

Utilize the ground floor for arts and culture

- Flatbush is rich in culture. There is a need for an arts and cultural planning space to represent and celebrate this rich culture.
 - An arts and culture space needs to pay respect to our indigenous people who have lived and are currently living in this area.

- There is a lack of affordable arts and culture spaces to host neighborhood programming, exhibits or events.
- Potential to have an indoor to outdoor space for cultural programming, like an outdoor theater or amphitheater. This could also tie with memorialization.
- Being more specific than a youth space and an arts and culture space, the neighborhood needs a programming space that celebrates the Caribbean and African diaspora.
 - There are many Caribbean and African cultural groups in need of a space to expand their current program offerings. A Caribbean and African diaspora focused space will teach young people to embrace parts of their culture and be multi-generational. This type of cultural programming can be unifying, especially in the face of neighborhood change.
 - “This location should be a museum and that we need to have it dedicated to the African and Caribbean diaspora.” There is a need for a space to showcase the costumes or other artifacts created for current cultural events, like Carnival.

Other community-based programming

- A community center- Erasmus High School has many requests for space rentals for community programming, there is a need for additional community spaces that can accommodate a variety of programming.
 - Community space should be flexible for a variety of community needs, like hosting graduation ceremonies, community meetings or renting to outside organizations.
- A senior center specifically around vocational and skills training that support seniors. This programming can go beyond job-specific training, and focus on contemporary skills, like how to use the internet or computer electronics.

Addressing a local need

- The neighborhood lacks access to a hardware store and fitness center.

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. What is the difference between affordable housing and low-income housing?

Some affordable housing is also considered low-income housing. We do not think of affordable housing in terms of quality, we think of it in terms of how well it meets the need of the extremely low to moderate income brackets (see reference chart in Affordable Housing Presentation). Low-income is defined as 0-80% of Area Median Income (AMI). This tells us how much income a family may have available to them. It is not a determinant of the housing quality that is available to them.

Q. How do these AMI percentages come into effect with people who have now lost their jobs or are working fewer hours due to COVID-19?

HPD is actively thinking through this, and we as an agency are making sure that the available resources to safeguard affordability are available for New Yorkers in need. We do this by trying to increase the supply of housing to ensure it is affordable to a lot of households, while safeguarding existing housing through preservation.

Q: Is there a precedent where HPD used a median income of a neighborhood or CB to process the affordability of a development? Is there an effort to eradicate income-based discrimination with the voucher program?

Metropolitan area reference point is just that, a reference point. We use percentages of this to better reflect the community’s actual incomes. We take income-based discrimination very seriously. A part of addressing it is providing more opportunities for families who may qualify for housing vouchers. If someone suspects they

are experiencing income discrimination, they can report it to the NYC Commission on Human Rights which can be accessed through 311.

Q: Brooklyn CB 14 and 17 have severely burdened households according to data. Does this have an impact on housing overcrowding in the community?

We wouldn't be able to confirm that by looking at this level of data. However, severely rent burdened households, overcrowding and housing code violations tend to point to the need for more quality affordable housing that meets needs of households.

Q: In reference to the ground floor, do we have to make a recommendation on commercial space zoning with memorial space?

The FABGRR Task Force's recommendations on ground floor uses do not need to be confined to existing zoning, but should be compatible with the affordable housing development, youth programming, and memorial that are already envisioned for the future project.

Q: Could the future development provide revenues for subsidizing housing?

When the FABGRR Task Force engages the public in the two workshops, we are striving to look for ideas around the potential ground floor opportunities the site could provide. Housing developers can provide solutions for subsidization, and they will make those connections as available.

Q: Could the future development support both rentals and homeownership?

To support this mix, the development would have to be built as two separate buildings. For this project, there are size constraints for the site that would make two buildings difficult to achieve and this would most likely not be financially feasible. Two separate buildings that are financed separately will cost much more, which must be weighed in this context. Additionally, there is a tradeoff of the depth of affordability that will be available when considering rental versus homeownership.

VI. Next Steps

To close the meeting, TYTHEdesign presented the following next steps and expectations for the FABGRR Task Force. **The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 14th at 5:30pm.** The next meeting will include a presentation by the City Team on potential site planning and meaningful discussions on site planning and building design. Additionally, we will review and refine the recommendation discussion from the previous four meetings to support refinement prior to the upcoming public workshops.

VII. Attendance

Name	Organizational Affiliation
Ryan Lynch	Office of Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams
Roslyn Joinvil	Office of District 40 Council Member Mathieu Eugene
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)
Pastor De Lafayette Awkard	Reformed Dutch Church of Flatbush

Reverend Sheldon N.N. Hamblin	St. Paul's Church in the Village of Flatbush
Kathy De Meij	CAMBA
New York City Agencies + Task Force Technical Advisors	
Eleni DeSiervo	NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC)
Lena Ferguson	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)
Kristina Drury	TYTHEdesign
Claudie Mabry	TYTHEdesign
Hillary Clark	TYTHEdesign



March 19, 2021

2286 Church Avenue/ Bedford-Church 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 dates of use has been found.
2. HPI revisited published books. An 1881 book included a biography of a formerly enslaved woman by the name of Sarah Hicks, who was reportedly born in the Zabriske homestead near the corner of Flatbush and Church Avenues prior to the 1790s. The book stated that Sarah recalled that: *“during her youth the Indians used to come round with baskets to sell; that after the death of her twin sister she put cake and flowers in one of these baskets and took them to her sister’s grave, which was in the burial-ground for colored people, which was situated in East Broadway, near the present public-school house. This burial- ground was abolished and the land sold for building purposes in the year 1861...She had a twin sister named Phyllis...”* (*A Historical Sketch of the Zabriske Homestead, Flatbush, LI* by Peter Schenck 1881:69). We are led to understand that Phyllis Jacobs, Sara Hicks’s sister, was interred in the Bedford and Church Avenue burial ground.
3. HPI received several scanned pages of vestry records from Reverend Sheldon Hamblin of St. Paul’s Church in Flatbush (established 1836). References to deceased parishioners who were recorded as Black were reported to have been buried in the “Colored Cemetery of Flatbush.” The dates provided were late (1870s), post-dating the reported construction of Locust Avenue (1860s) across the Church and Bedford site. A second African Burial Ground was identified in Flatbush (the African Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church/Lincoln Cemetery, 1835-1904), mapped north of Church Avenue immediately west of Kings Highway between East 57th and East 58th Streets (crossing Linden Boulevard). It is likely that African American burials post-dating the 1840s, and almost uncertainly those dating post-1860s, as reported in the St. Paul’s vestry records, were instead interred here.
4. HPI reviewed baptism records from the Reformed Dutch Church of Flatbush to collect names of infants of African ancestry who may have grown up in Flatbush and been interred in the burial ground, and found records from 1681 and 1754 for nine individuals.
5. HPI collected and reviewed information relevant to the enslaved population of Flatbush and burial ground. The census of 1877 and 1887 references four enslaved people, three by name, in Flatbush.