



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose M. Serrano

Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force Update!

JOSÉ M. SERRANO August 4, 2010

| ISSUE: **ARTS AND CULTURE, HISTORICAL PRESERVATION**



After the Joint Senate Hearing on the Elmendorf Reformed Church (EFC) African Burial Ground on March 19th, the office of Senator José M. Serrano and the rest of the Colonial African Burial Ground Task Force, co-chaired by Reverend Patricia Singletary and Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito, have been meeting regularly to work toward the reclaiming, preserving, and official recognition of the burial ground. As the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is considering redeveloping the site in question, the area requires a series of environmental reviews, including an assessment of known and potential cultural resources.

On Thursday, July 29th, the EFC African Burial Ground Task Force met with the MTA, and it was announced that although the design of the project has not been determined, the MTA has accelerated the archaeological study recognizing the significance of the resource potentially buried below the depot. This will ensure adequate time is available for public input and informed decision making.

"The acceleration of this study is ultimately the result of the work of the Task Force to raise community awareness of the Burial Ground, as well as a result of the MTA being called to testify at the March 19th hearing," said Senator Serrano. "Although this is a great step toward reaching our goals, we must continue working to ensure that this burial ground is recognized and treated as the cultural landmark that it is."

The 126th Street Bus depot, owned and operated by the MTA and New York City Transit (NYCT), sits on land that was once a colonial-era burial ground for African slaves and free blacks. The burial ground occupied a quarter acre lot on the original Elmendorf Dutch Reformed Church grounds, on First Avenue between 126th and 127th Streets, and was in operation until as late as 1845. Many community leaders fear the historic burial ground might be lost or defiled due to ongoing work expanding the Willis Avenue bridge, as well as a plan to entirely rebuild the bus facility.

Get Involved!

The Burial Ground Task Force will meet again on Thursday, September 30th at 4pm at the The Elmendorf Reformed Church located at 171 East 121st Street (Between Lexington and Third Avenue). These meetings are open to anyone who is interested in learning more about the Burial Ground.

For more information and to follow our progress in preserving and commemorating our community's history join the Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force on Facebook! [CLICK HERE.](#)

To view the March 19th Hearing regarding the African Burial Ground [CLICK HERE](#).