



**Greenwich
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Society for
Historic
Preservation**

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December 18, 2006

Hon. Michael Bloomberg
Mayor, City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:

As you know, human remains from what appear to be a more than 100 year old graveyard have been found at 246 Spring Street, Manhattan, the site of a 45-story condo-hotel planned by Donald Trump and partners. While the origin of these remains are not yet confirmed, it is highly likely that they are of historic significance, and may well be connected to one of several historically significant institutions, events, or settlements associated with this site.

It is therefore quite unfortunate that excavation work was allowed by the City to proceed here. The City has treated this project as "as-of-right" and therefore allowed it to avoid the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) that we and scores of other groups throughout New York City have said (and continue to say) it should have been subject to. ULURP would have entailed following the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) and City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR), which requires a review of historic records of the site, followed by field testing in coordination with the Landmarks Preservation Commission, to determine if there are historic archaeological resources on site. Thus this burial ground would have likely been identified before any excavation work began, and the disturbance and destruction which has now occurred would have been prevented, which is exactly what these procedures are designed to do. One would hope that the harm which has occurred to these remains and the burial ground is not irreparable.

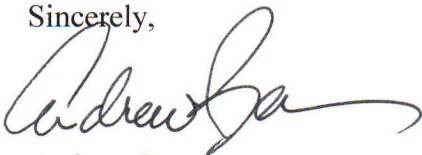
While the City has thus far not chosen to require this project to go through the ULURP process, I strongly urge that no further work be allowed on this site until and unless the full archaeological review outlined by SEQRA and CEQR procedures, which a ULURP would require, are fulfilled. SEQRA guidelines require that if archaeological resources are determined to be "significant" and if it is determined that they would be "impacted by proposed construction," that impact must then be "mitigated." Mitigation may include "scientific excavation including conservation and stabilization, curation and storage of artifacts, project redesign" or a combination thereof. The Landmarks Preservation Commission may also choose to designate the site a New York City Landmark, as was done in the case of the African Burial Ground.

At this point, it appears likely that these remains may be a "significant archaeological resource." Because the remains found appear to be from a graveyard of at least 100 years in age, the graveyard is likely connected to the Spring Street Presbyterian Church, located on the site from 1811 to 1963. This

was an activist abolitionist church which was attacked and nearly burned to the ground in 1834 because of its anti-slavery work. Nineteenth and Twentieth Century accounts supplied by the Schomburg Center and others from *The New York Times* and the journal *The Colored American* indicate that the church also hosted events for African-Americans and included African-American congregants throughout its history. In light of the church's history, a review should also be conducted to see if this site may have served as part of the Underground Railroad, which would require additional mitigation and preservation measures. If the graveyard predates the Spring Street Presbyterian Church, it was likely connected to Trinity Church, which records indicate owned the property before the Presbyterian Church. Trinity Church was the first and the official church established under English rule in New York. If the graveyard pre-dates that era, it may be associated with freed black settlements which occupied much of this area during Dutch and early English colonial times, intended to serve as a buffer between European settlers and Indians to the north.

The origins and significance of these historic human remains and possible graveyard must be fully and independently investigated before any further work is allowed to proceed. Depending upon the findings, the possibility of landmark designation for the site should be actively considered, and the existence of any connection between the site and the Underground Railroad should be fully investigated. Even if this project is not required to undergo the ULURP process that we and many others have contended it should, the archaeological review should be done in full accordance with SEQRA and CEQR guidelines which such a process would require. If the existence of intact historic archaeological resources on site are confirmed, then the City must require that this project be altered to preserve them, or they be removed from the site and found an appropriate site where they can be studied, curated, and preserved.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: City Planning Commission Chair Amanda Burden
Department of Buildings Commissioner Patricia Lancaster
Landmarks Preservation Commission Chair Robert Tierney
New York State Historic Preservation Office
Office of Lieutenant Governor-elect David Patterson
City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer
Congressman Jerrold Nadler
State Senator Tom Duane
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
State Senator-elect Bill Perkins
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National Trust for Historic Preservation

Preservation League of New York State
Municipal Art Society
New York Landmarks Conservancy
Historic Districts Council
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
African Burial Ground
Weeksville Society
Christopher Owens