
Sea Breeze Estates, City Island, Bronx County, New York

IB Memo Report

CEQR No. 89-040X

NYSDEC App. No. 2-6003-00160/00001



PHASE 1B MEMO REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The issuance of permits by the New York Department of Environmental Conservation for the Sea Breeze Estates project on City Island (Tax Block 5639, Lots 23 and 40, and Tax Block 5649, Lots 90 and 150), Bronx County (Figure 1) is a State discretionary action subject to the State Historic Preservation Act (SHPA). A Final Environmental Impact Statement in 1991 for a larger version of the project (Konheim & Ketcham 1991) determined, based on Phase 1A archaeological research (Geismar 1989), that the waterfront site (Figure 2) had the potential for prehistoric archaeological resources (shell middens). At that time, it was concluded that monitoring to a depth of 12 feet during construction would be adequate to ensure no significant impact to these potential resources.

In 2001, to address archaeological issues prior to construction, always preferable to monitoring, a scope of work that called for two long test trenches was submitted to Konheim & Ketcham (Geismar July 11, 2001) but not implemented. The never-built project of 55 residential condominiums was downsized to 38 in 2004, and the developer began seeking state and federal permits. To more efficiently address the issue of cultural resource sensitivity, on March 2, 2005, geoprobe soil borings carried out mainly to address environmental concerns were archaeologically monitored. A total of three borings were monitored, one of them drilled expressly to obtain archaeological information, and samples from eight others were examined. All borings were 8 to 12 feet deep, and all documented fill throughout.

Construction plans call for deep foundation pilings that were not considered an impact on cultural resources in the past. This became an issue, however, following conversations with Amanda Sutphin, Director of Archaeology at the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, and Douglas Mackey, Senior Scientist, Archaeology, at the NYSHPO, that determined these foundation pilings were now considered an impact. Since the geoprobe borings had not reached natural soil, neither they, nor monitoring during construction, would now sufficiently address the issue of “adequate mitigation of potentially archaeologically significant impacts” as called for in the project’s FEIS. Consequently, a testing program that was to follow the 2001 test plan was carried out on June 17, 2009, at the Sea Breeze Estates development site. Based on the need for deeper excavations, the decision was made in the field to excavate at least one shorter but deeper test trench to determine subsurface conditions. This provided excellent information and the site was ultimately tested by excavation of two additional, similar trenches.

The developer, GBG Inc. c/o Blitman Development Corp., provided a backhoe (a Komatsu Avance PC 120 backhoe with a 36-inch bucket) and an operator for the testing program. Cosmo Marfione, the developer’s representative, was on site throughout, and testing was carried out under the direction of Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D., assisted by Shelly Spritzer. The test trench locations were mainly within the footprints of the two, three-story condominium structures planned on the site (Figures 3 and 4).

SUMMARY OF PREHISTORIC CONSIDERATIONS¹

According to the records of the New York State Museum, two shell midden sites are documented on or just north of the project site (Wellman 1989; personal communication as cited in Geismar 1989). Given this information and the site's shoreline setting, the New York State Museum considered the project area to have a higher than average potential to produce prehistoric data. With its past development, which includes a large, now-demolished commercial structure on the north side of what was formerly Marine Street on the project site, it appeared that the site's southern portion might have the greatest archaeological potential for prehistoric resources. However, the commercial structure did not have a basement, and a site visit in February 1989, revealed the presence of 10 to 12 ft. of rock rubble introduced along the shore. Therefore, it was thought that evidence of prehistoric use could be preserved under building rubble or rock deposits throughout the site.

SUMMARY OF SITE DEVELOPMENT HISTORY¹

While Marine Street, now demapped but which formerly divided the site (see Figures 2 and 3; also Photo 1), is the location of residences west of the project site, development on the project site itself was almost exclusively industrial (the exceptions are three 2-story dwellings documented on Sanborn maps beginning in 1893 that were all superseded by ship yard structures and features by 1935). According to late 19th-century Sanborn maps cited in Geismar 1989, sometime between 1872 and 1893, the boat yard of Augustus B. Wood & Son had located on the north side of what was then Franklyn Avenue, later Marine Street. The Triboro Industries Marine Service Boat Yard, a large facility that occupied the entire project site, vacated the property by early 1990. A 2004 topographic survey indicated that shoreline fill, mainly comprising large boulders and some debris as noted during a 1989 site visit, was at least 10 feet deep (Link 2003; see Figure 2 and Photos 2-4); the geoprobe boring program undertaken in the winter of 2005 revealed that an even deeper fill was present across the eastward sloping site (Geismar 2005).

METHOD

As noted above, testing of the now-vacant site (Photo 1) comprised three test trenches, 13.5 to 15.0 feet deep, two of them (TT1 and TT3) on the south side of what had been Marine Street that formerly bisected the site, and one on the north side of the former street (TT2). TT1 and TT2 were located entirely within the footprints of the proposed condominium structures, while TT3, the most easterly trench, was mainly within the southern structure's footprint but also extended beyond it to the east (see Figure 4 for test trench locations). Schematic profiles were drawn of TT1 and TT2 (Figures 5 and 6), and all three trenches were photo documented prior to backfilling (Photos 5 to 11; see Figure 7 for photo angles).

FINDINGS

Testing documented that conditions in the three trenches were variable: TT1, on the south side of what had been Marine Street and the most westerly of the test trenches, was found to contain about 15.0 feet of a relatively clean fill (see Figure 5 and Photo 5); in TT2, on the north side of the former street and east of TT1 (closer to the shore), an east-west running iron rail was exposed

¹Adapted from Geismar, Joan H., 1989.

almost directly under the ground surface. About 5 feet below this rail, excavation revealed a large, squared-off, metal-edged beam that also ran east-west. A second, parallel rail, also just below the surface but with no underlying beam, was then found 6 feet south of the first (see Photos 6-9). Since the distance between the rails was too wide for a standard railroad car, these features were apparently remnants of the site's ship-building past. Here, as in TT1, what appeared to be fill extended to the water table (Figure 6). In TT3 on the south side of demapped Marine Street, which was the test trench closest to the shore, boulders and the better part of a trashed automobile (axles, chassis, four narrow wheels, etc.) were components of a debris-laden fill. Running on the north side of the trench within the fill was a line of concrete pillars with wire cable protruding from the top of each pillar (Photos 10-11). The linear configuration of the pillars suggested they were remnants of a feature that was most likely related to ship construction.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the finding of deep and varied fill throughout, it appears this shoreline site, which is now vacant but was for more than a century the location of ship building facilities, has been worked over and filled over time. Therefore, viable archaeological resources do not appear to be an issue. No further archaeological investigation is recommended. However, should construction activities reveal any unanticipated evidence of large shell concentrations, work should be halted in that area and an archaeologist called in to assess the find.

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USGS, 1979. Flushing Quadrangle. 1966 Photorevised 1979. Delorme 2002.

FIGURES

1. Project Location
2. Topographic Site Survey
3. Site Development Plan
4. Test Trench Locations in Relation to Proposed Condominium Footprints
5. Test Trench 1 (TT1) South Wall Profile (Deepest Part), Schematic
6. Test Trench 2 (TT2) South Wall Profile (Deepest Part), Schematic
7. Photo Angles

PHOTOS

1. Looking west from what was formerly the foot of Marine Street.
2. Boulders and stones along the shore at the base of the site slope, looking north.
3. View east across Long Island Sound from top of slope.
4. Boulder and stones defining the slope and strewn along the shore, looking south.
5. Test Trench 1 (TT1) with water reached at 15.0 feet BGS; view is east.
6. North wall of Test Trench 2 (TT2).
7. Test Trench 2 (TT2) with a pair of rails exposed.
8. Relationship of iron rails and single wooden beam.
9. Test Trench 2 (TT2) with water at 12.6 feet BGS.
10. Fill material from Test Trench 3 (TT3).
11. Test Trench 3 (TT3) looking west where water was reached at 14.5 feet BGS.

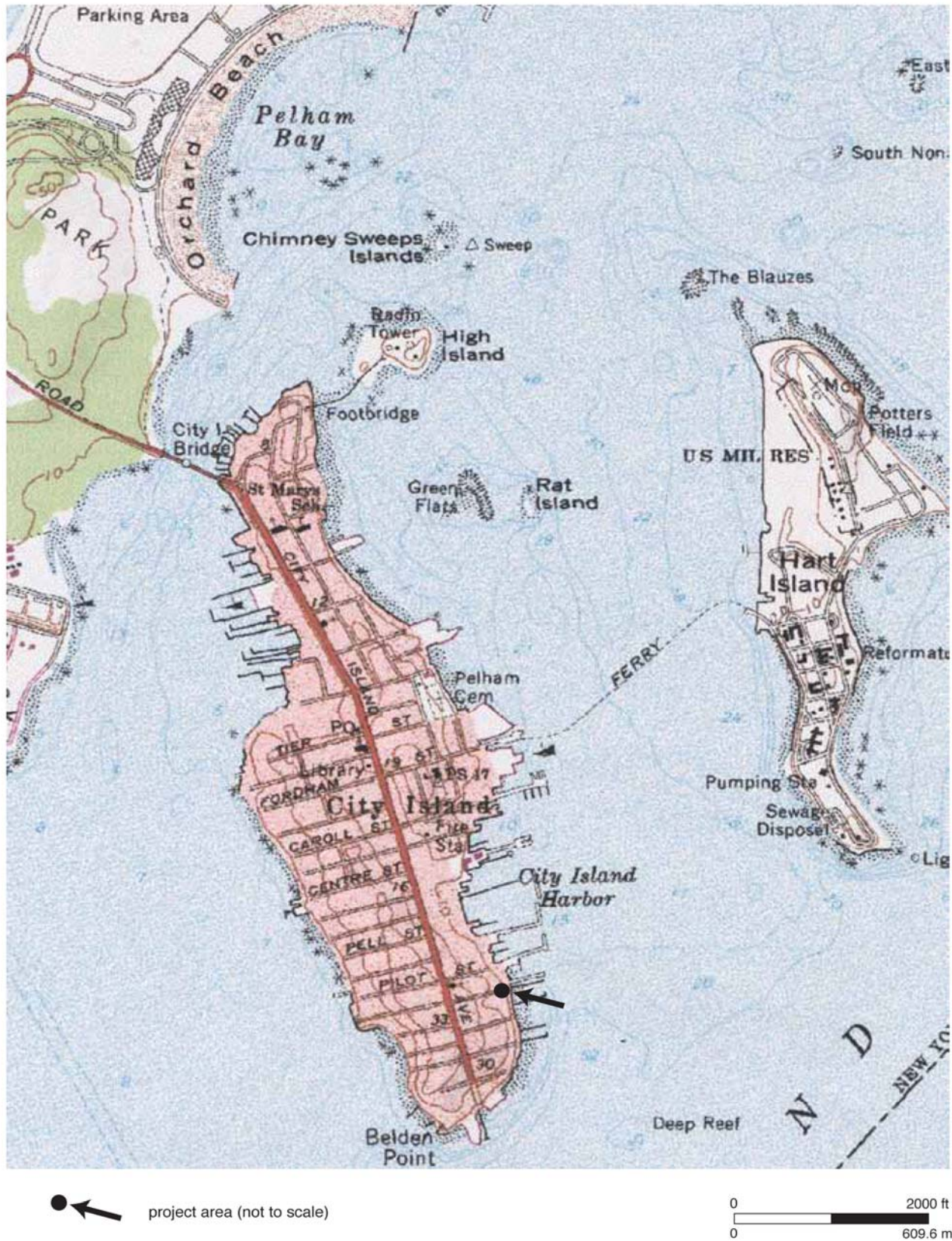


Figure 1. Project Location (USGS, Flushing Quad, 1966 photorevised 1979; Delorme 2002)

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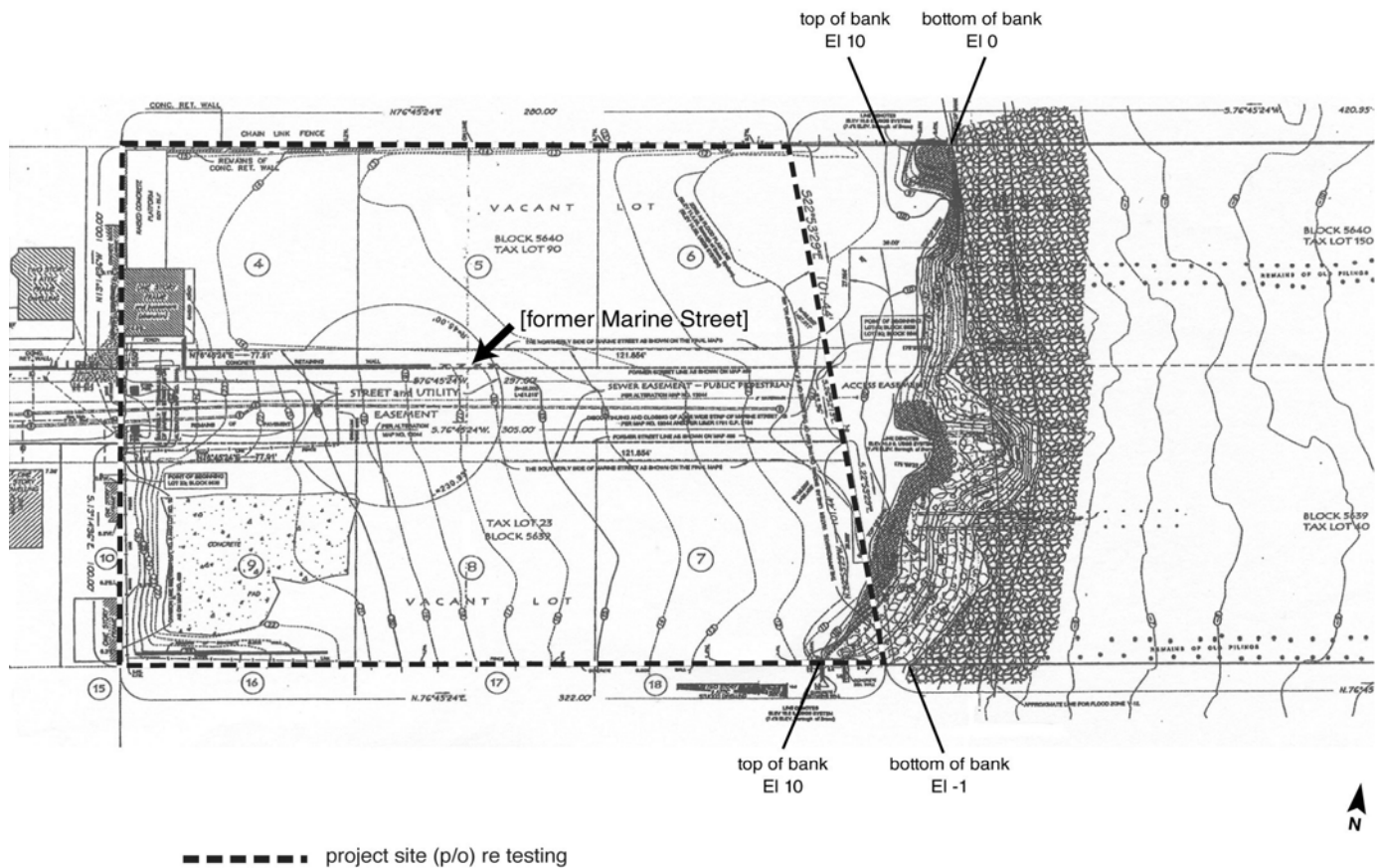


Figure 2. Topographic Site Survey (Link Land Surveyors, P.C. 2004)

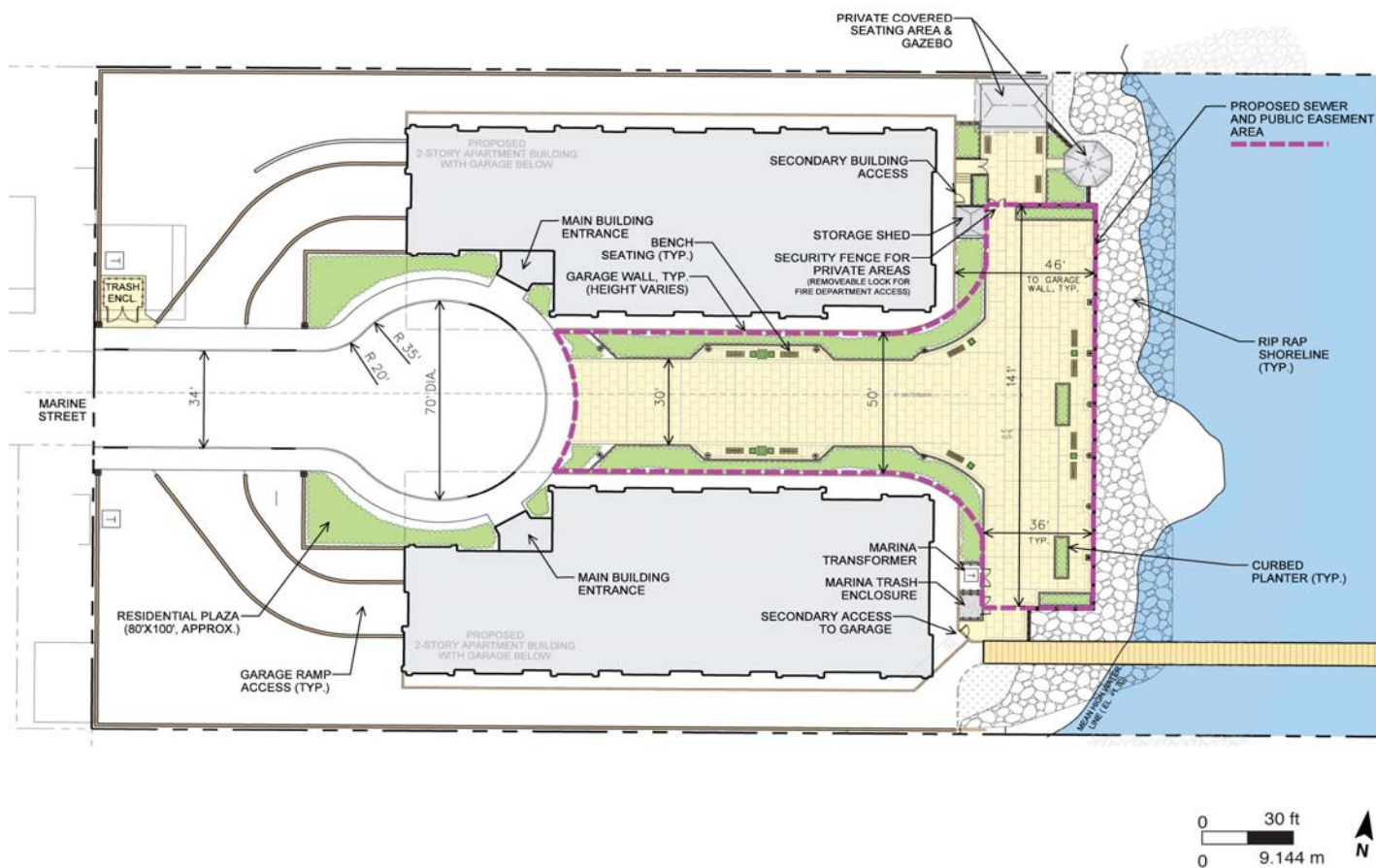


Figure 3. Site Development Plan (Divney+Tung+Schwalbe 2009)

SEA BREEZE ESTATES 1B MEMO REPORT

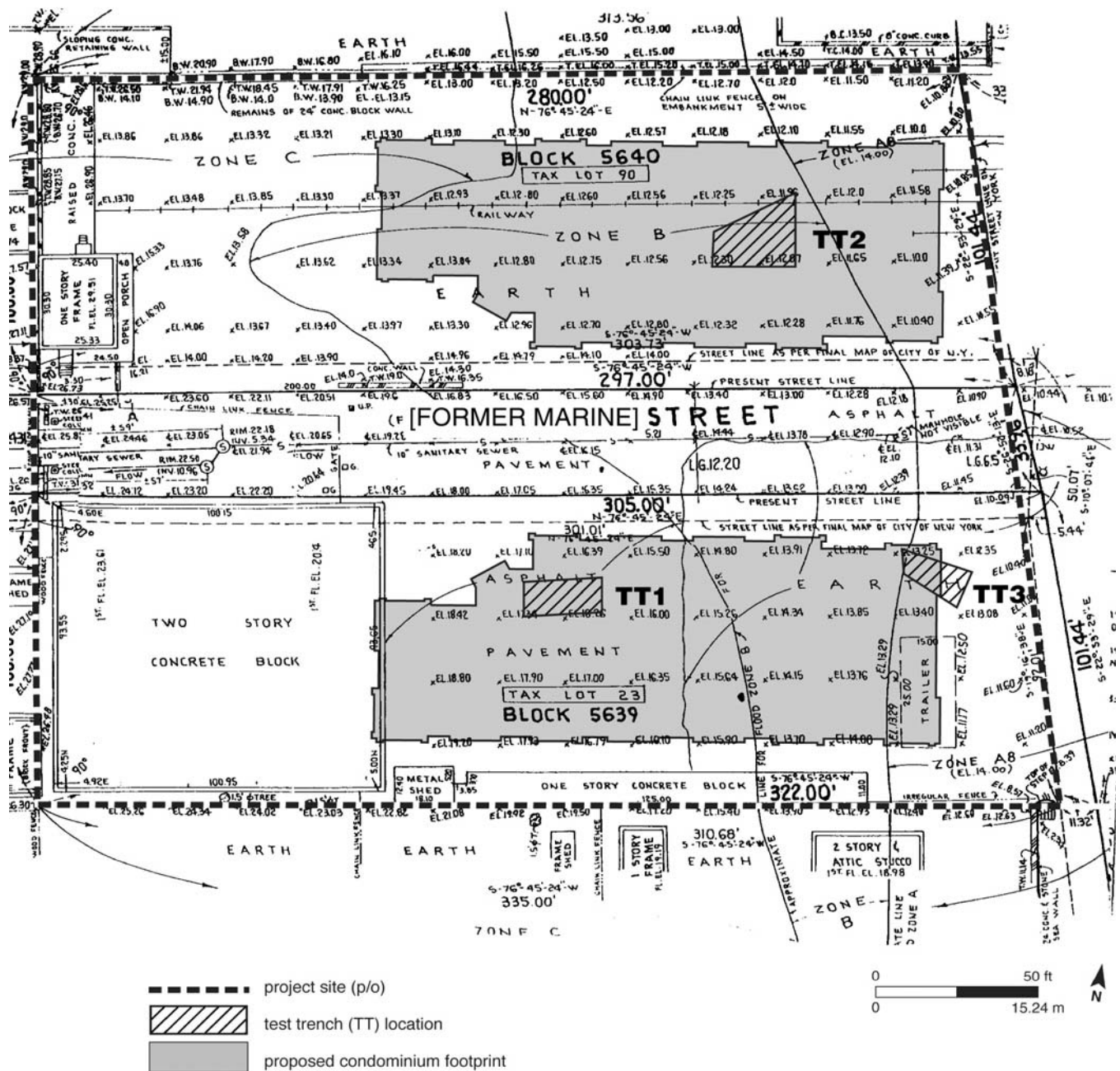


Figure 4. Test Trench (TT) Locations in Relation to Proposed Condominium Footprints

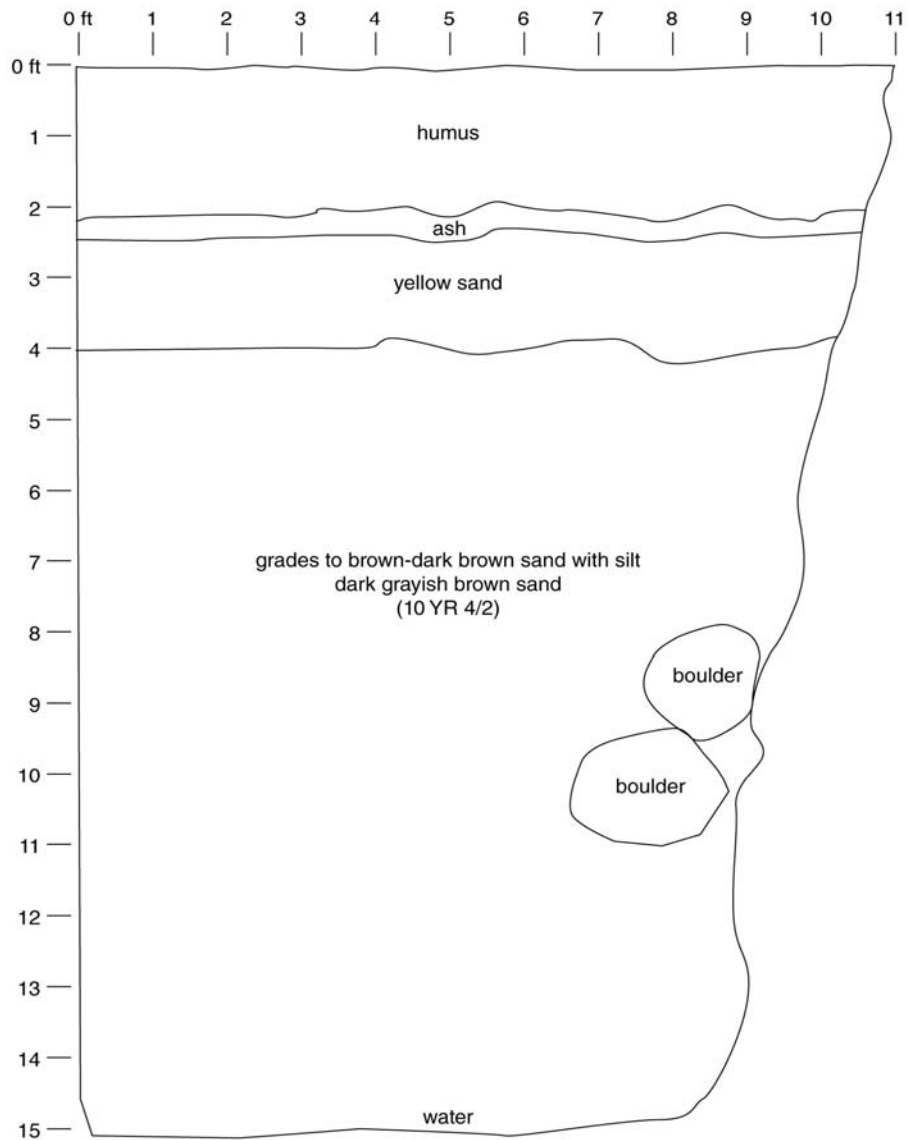


Figure 5. Test Trench 1 (TT1) South Wall Profile (Deepest Part), Schematic

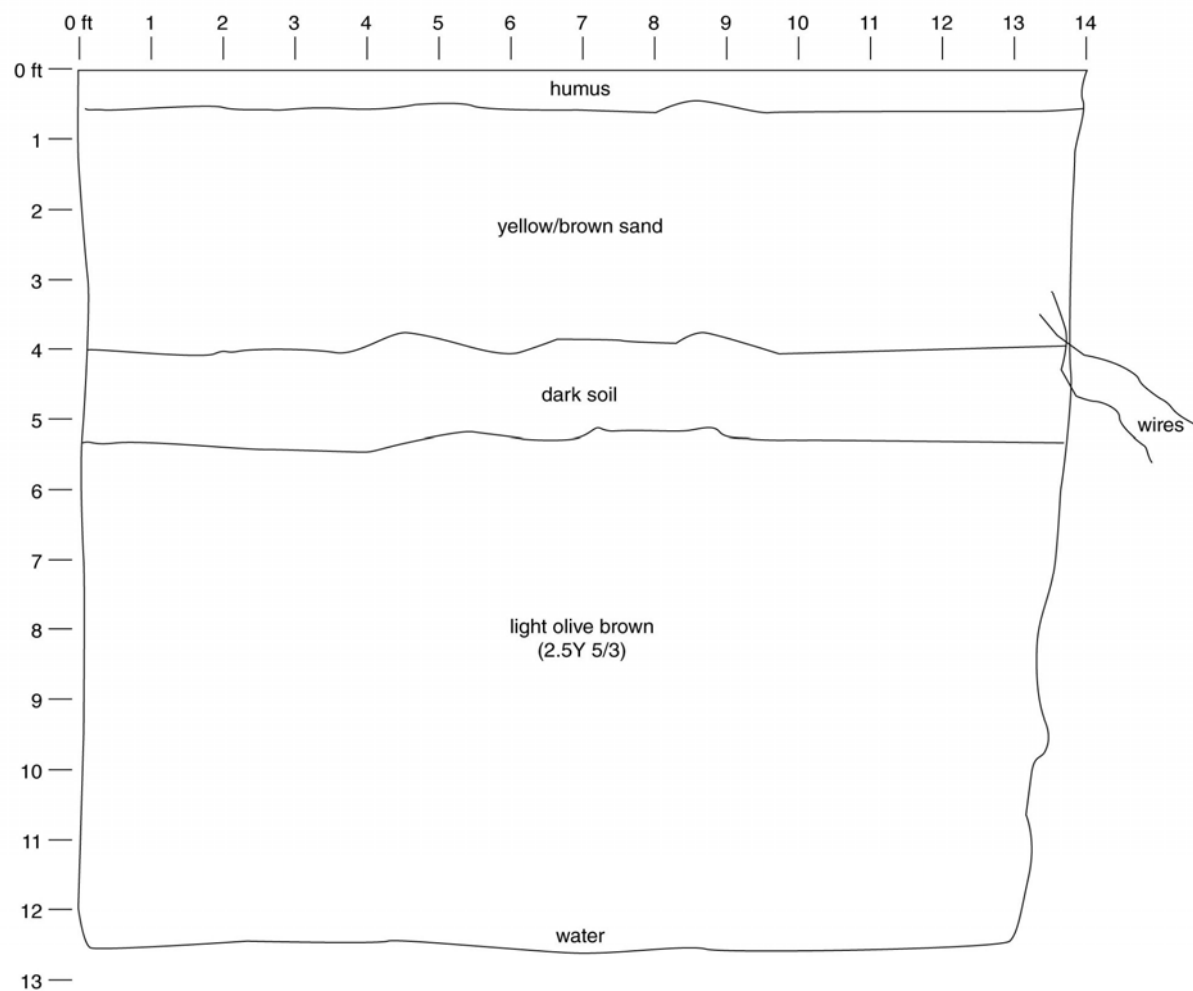


Figure 6. Test Trench 2 (TT2) South Wall Profile (Deepest Part), Schematic

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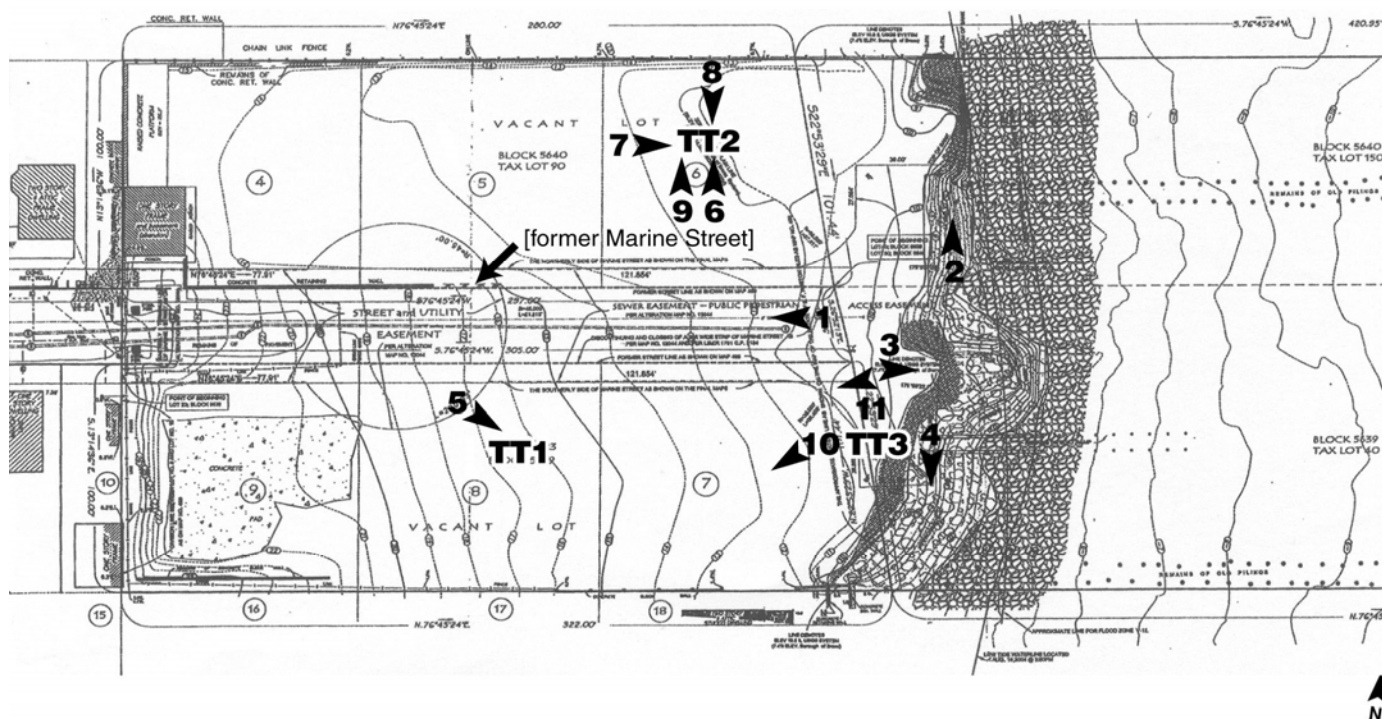


Figure 7. Photo Angles



Photo 1. Looking west from what was formerly the foot of Marine Street. (Geismar 6/17/09)



Photo 2. Boulders and stones along the shore at the base of the site slope, looking north. (Geismar 6/17/09)



Photo 3. View east across Long Island Sound from top of slope at the foot of former Marine Street. (Geismar 6/17/09)



Photo 4. Boulders and stones defining the slope and strewn along the shore, looking south. (Geismar 6/17/09)



Photo 5. Test Trench 1 (TT1) with water reached at 15.0 feet BGS; view is east. (Geismar 6/17/09)



Photo 6. North wall of Test Trench 2 (TT2). Note the iron rails (upper left and right arrows) exposed just below the surface, with a single, squared-off, wooden beam (center arrow) about 5 feet beneath the rail. (Geismar 6/17/09)



Photo 7. Test Trench 2 (TT2) with a pair of rails exposed, 6 feet apart. Note the wooden beam (arrow) 5 feet below the north rail. (Geismar 6/17/09)



Photo 8. Relationship of iron rails and single wooden beam (arrow) in TT2. (Geismar 6/17/09)



Photo 9. Test Trench 2 (TT2) with water at 12.6 feet BGS. Note metal facing (arrows) on upper edges of the wooden beam. (Geismar 6/17/09)



Photo 10. Fill material from Test Trench 3 (TT3), the trench nearest the shore on the south side of what was formerly Marine Street, included a car chassis and wheels. A concrete pier (right foreground) with a protruding wire cable proved to be one of many aligned in a row in this trench. (Geismar 6/17/09)



Photo 11. Test Trench 3 (TT3) looking west where water was reached at 14.5 feet BGS. (Geismar 6/17/09)