

# **Proposed Affordable Housing Development at 1074-1080 Washington Avenue**

**MORRISANIA, BRONX COUNTY, NEW YORK**

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## **Phase 1B Archaeological Survey Report**

**Prepared for:**

BP UM Partners LLC  
1605 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
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**Prepared by:**



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**MAY 2018**

## Management Summary

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**SHPO Project Review Number:** 17PR08412

**Involved Agencies:** New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

**Phase of Survey:** Phase 1B Archaeological Investigation

**Location Information**

*Location:* Bronx, New York  
*Minor Civil Division:* 00501  
*County:* Bronx County

**Survey Area**

*Length:* Approximately 10.67 meters (35 feet)  
*Width:* Approximately 7.62 meters (25 feet)  
*Area:* 0.02 acres (875 square feet)

**USGS 7.5 Minute Quadrangle Map:** Jersey City

**Survey Area**

*Length:* Approximately 49.3 meters (161.76 feet)  
*Width:* Approximately 30.9 meters (101.3 feet)  
*Area:* 0.38 acres (16,368 square feet)  
*Number of Backhoe Trenches:* **3**  
*Size of Backhoe Trenches:* **4 feet by 15 feet**  
*Depth of Backhoe Trenches:* **6 to 9 feet**

**Results of Archaeological Survey**

*Prehistoric Sites Identified:* **None**  
*Historic Sites Identified:* **None**  
*Sites Recommended for Avoidance:* **None**

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**Date of Report:** May 2018

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**A. INTRODUCTION AND PROPOSED PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

BP UM Partners, LLC proposes to redevelop a site at 1074-1080 Washington Avenue in the Morrisania neighborhood of Bronx County, New York (see **Figure 1**). The proposed project site includes Block 2370, Lots 16 and 17 and is located at the southeast corner of Washington Avenue (also known as Rev. Robert G. Ln Boulevard) and East 166th Street (see **Figure 2**). The project site is currently developed with a vacant church, which would be demolished as part of the proposed project. The site would be redeveloped with a 12-story building containing affordable housing units and community facility space. The proposed project would be financed in part through New York City Senior Affordable Rental Apartments (SARA) funding from the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), and United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 8 Project Based Vouchers (PBV) administered by HPD. The project is therefore subject to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 14.09 of the New York State Historic Preservation Act, and New York City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR).

**B. SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW****PHASE 1A STUDY OF MORRISANIA URBAN RENEWAL AREA, 1992**

The project site was included within a Phase 1A Archaeological Documentary Study of the larger Morrisania Urban Renewal Area that was completed in 1992 by Joan H. Geismar, PhD. That assessment analyzed the archaeological sensitivity of nine blocks, including Block 2370. Geismar’s study included a comprehensive summary of the foundation of the 19th century village of Morrisania as well as a summary of early land ownership of the project site and surrounding area. The majority of the project site was not identified as archaeologically sensitive, although the eastern 25 feet of modern Lot 17 was included within a “recommended test area” (RTA) identified by Dr. Geismar. This RTA—“RTA 10,” as it was identified in the report—was the site of the 19th century residence of Conrad Hubner, of which approximately half is situated within the 1074-1080 Washington Avenue project site. Geismar (1992) also identified the land to the north and south of the existing church (excluding the location of a former parsonage on modern Lot 16) as an “area of no known development” (Geismar 1992: Exhibit 37b).

**PHASE 1A STUDY OF THE PROJECT SITE, 2018**

In a comment letter dated October 11, 2017, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) identified the lots making up the project site as potentially archaeologically significant and requested that a Phase 1A Archaeological Documentary Study (“Phase 1A Study”) of the project site be prepared. AKRF prepared a Phase 1A Study of the project site in February 2018. The study documented the development history of the project site and its potential to yield archaeological resources, including both precontact and historic cultural resources. The Phase 1A Study was designed to satisfy the requirements of LPC, the New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and the New York Archaeological Council (NYAC).

### *PRECONTACT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY*

The precontact sensitivity of project sites in New York City is generally evaluated by a site's proximity to level slopes, watercourses, well-drained soils, and previously identified precontact archaeological sites. As described in the 2018 Phase 1A Study, the project site is located 300 feet west of a reported Native American feasting place and in close proximity to natural springs and freshwater streams. Given the site's location inland and proximately to both a reported feasting location and Mill Brook, it is possible that a temporary campsite or resource exploitation/tool processing site could have been located in the vicinity of the project site. However, Native American archaeological sites are typically shallowly buried and are often within 5 feet of the original ground surface, which appears to be in the vicinity of the current ground surface. Therefore, given the extent to which the project site has been disturbed as a result of the construction and demolition of buildings, the project site is determined to have low sensitivity for archaeological resources associated with the precontact occupation of the area.

### *HISTORIC PERIOD ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY*

The project site was included within a larger tract of land to the Morris family in the 18th century. The historic period occupation of the project site began in the late 1840s, when the planned community of Morrisania was established and the area surrounding the project site was divided into blocks and lots to encourage residential development. The project site was initially included within a lot granted to Cornelius Hurley, who appears to have lived to the south of the project site. Hurley sold the majority of the project site, including all but the eastern 25 feet, to the trustees of the Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church in 1866 and the church was completed on the site in 1868. A now-demolished parsonage was constructed on Lot 16 to the south of the church in 1886 and the Sunday School building was added to the east of the church in 1903. The Phase 1A concluded that the construction of the church, Sunday School building, and parsonage likely disturbed any archaeological resources in that portion of the project site. Furthermore, No evidence was found that would suggest that the church maintained a cemetery or burial vaults on the property. The Phase 1A study concluded that Lot 16 and all but the eastern 25 feet of Lot 17 have no sensitivity for archaeological resources associated with the historic period.

The eastern 25-foot portion of the project site was included within a larger parcel that was sold by Hurley to Conrad Hubner in 1863. Hubner was a local saloon owner who owned property across the street and he appears to have constructed a home to the east of the project site after he purchased the property. The Hubner home is still located to the east of the project site at 498 East 166th Street and the eastern 25 feet of the project site was originally the side yard lining the western side of Hubner's property. In 1873, Hubner sold the western half of the lot and it was developed with a dwelling (known as 496 East 166th Street) that was initially inhabited by the family of William Fechner, a local teacher. That home was demolished in the 1940s and the area became a parking lot and was incorporated into the property of the Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church and was most recently used as a play area. A small 1-story addition to the Sunday School was constructed across the northern side of the property in the late-20th century.

The South Bronx was annexed to the City of New York in 1874, by which time sewer and water networks were available in neighborhood streets. However, residents of the Hubner and Fechner homes may have relied on domestic shaft features (such as privies, wells, and cisterns) for the purposes of water gathering and sanitation before that time. As described above, the entire Hubner property, including the portion of the project site formerly located at 496 East 166th Street and the site of the existing home (formerly Hubner's) at 498 East 166th Street, was identified as potentially archaeologically sensitive in Geismar's 1992 Phase 1A study of the Morrisania Urban Renewal Area. The 2018 Phase 1A Study determined that the rear yard of the property formerly located at 496 East 166th Street (within the eastern 25 feet of Lot

17) has moderate sensitivity for shaft features including cisterns, privies, and wells. The area of archaeological sensitivity is depicted on **Figure 2**.

### **PHASE 1B ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING PROTOCOL**

In a comment letter dated February 26, 2018, LPC concurred with the conclusions and recommendations of the 2018 Phase 1A study and requested that a scope of work for field testing be prepared. In a comment letter issued March 8, 2018, SHPO also concurred with the Phase 1A study. A Phase 1B Archaeological Testing Protocol was prepared for the project site by AKRF in March 2018 and was subsequently submitted to LPC and SHPO for review and comment. LPC concurred with the testing plan in a comment letter issued March 20, 2018. SHPO also concurred with the plan in a comment letter dated March 22, 2018, but requested that the plan be amended to include a plan for the unanticipated discovery of human remains. The protocol was revised and resubmitted and SHPO accepted it in comments issued on March 23, 2018.

### **C. CURRENT SITE CONDITIONS**

The project site is currently developed with a church that was constructed in 1866 and an attached Sunday School building/recreational hall constructed in 1903. The Sunday School building was constructed with a basement even though the presence of a basement is not indicated on modern Sanborn maps. To the east of the Sunday School is a small (approximately 15- by 30-foot) one-story structure that was constructed along the southern side of East 166th Street, closing off a former parking lot at the eastern side of the property that was subsequently converted into a play area. This play area, which includes the area of archaeological sensitivity that was the subject of this investigation, contains playground equipment. The buildings on the project site have been vacant since 2016. The grade of the church property is elevated slightly above that of the streetbed of Washington Avenue to the west. A grassy play area is situated to the south of the church within Lot 16 in the location of a former parsonage associated with the church.

**A. RESEARCH GOALS**

The objectives of this Phase 1B Archaeological Investigation of the former rear yard of 496 East 166th Street were to (1) ascertain the presence or absence of 19th century archaeological deposits and buried backyard shaft features within the rear yard of the historic lot; and (2) to determine the significance of any resources that are recovered. The determination of significance is largely dependent on the types of potential archaeological resources that could be encountered on the project site and on the specific research questions that can be answered through the analysis of those resources. The types of archaeological resources that are expected to be present in the historic lot and potential research questions/research goals are described below. As described above, the church/Sunday School property was determined to have little to no archaeological sensitivity and only the rear yard of the building formerly at 496 East 166th Street was the subject of this investigation.

**POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES**

The 2018 Phase 1A Study determined that the property at 496 East 166th Street was included with the property of the ca. 1863 Hubner home and was later developed with the Fechner Home ca. 1873. Both homes may have been occupied before water and sewer lines were available within the streetbed of East 166th Street. The rear yard of this lot does not appear to have been disturbed by subsequent excavation and was therefore determined to have sensitivity for archaeological resources associated with the 19th century residential occupation of the homes that formerly stood on the adjacent properties. These archaeological resources were expected to include domestic shaft features such as privies, cisterns, and wells. Privies—the shaft features constructed beneath outhouses—that were constructed to dispose of human and household waste. Such features are typically expected to be located at the rear of the historic property in order to minimize odors within the house and to avoid the contamination of water-gathering features. The property also potentially contained a cistern or a well, which would have been used to gather water and would have been located near the rear of the home(s) that utilized them for convenience. Any such features would have remained in use until the home was connected to municipal sewers, and may have been used for the deposition of household refuse for many years until it was finally full.

In addition to the domestic shaft features referenced above, historic features potentially located on the site could have included paving/drainage stones, retaining walls, trash deposits, foundations of buildings and outbuildings such as barns, stables, storage sheds, etc.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND GOALS**

According to the guidelines for cultural resources as laid out in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the determination of significance of a project site is directly related to whether the identified resource type “is likely to contribute to current knowledge of the history of the period in question” (2014; Section 320: p. 9-11). In order to determine if any archaeological resources from the project site would be considered to have significant research value, the following list of research issues was developed as part of the Phase 1B Archaeological Testing Protocol, which was approved by LPC and SHPO as described above. These

research topics are specific to the types of potential archaeological resources that could have been encountered within the project site as described in the previous section.

Archaeological resources recovered from the site could produce data about the individuals who resided and/or worked on the project site during the second half of the 19th century. Domestic shaft features—such as those that may be located within the former rear yard of 496 East 166th Street—can contain important archaeological resources. As described above, these features were frequently filled with domestic refuse after they were no longer used for their original purposes. In the case of privies, such refuse deposition would typically also have occurred during the period of active use, as there were few alternate methods of garbage disposal at the time. As such, filled shaft features often contain valuable information about the daily lives of a site’s residents.

Artifacts recovered from trash or surface deposits are the material remains of what an individual purchases and/or uses on a daily or routine basis and they can provide insight into certain aspects of his or her life. Such consumption patterns are strongly influenced by socioeconomic status, occupation, household composition, and ethnicity. What a person buys and/or uses on a routine basis is behavior that reflects the multiple components of that individual’s life. Archaeological evidence from residential lots can provide information on how different characteristics such as socioeconomic status or ethnicity have influenced consumer choice behavior. Information that can be gathered from domestic shaft features can be used to make generalizations about what life was like for the individuals and families that resided on a property. This information can then be compared and contrasted with data associated with similar populations elsewhere in the city. Similarly, if resources associated with the industrial use of the project site are encountered, they can be compared and contrasted with other archaeological sites in the region to identify broader patterns. It was determined that such comparisons could yield previously unknown insights into the ways of life of the individuals living in this area of the Bronx during the second half of the 19th century.

## **B. PHASE 1B ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING METHODOLOGY**

As stated in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, although documentary research determines archaeological potential, excavation is required to determine if resources are actually present on a site. It is not the objective of the Phase 1B Archaeological Investigation to completely document or evaluate discovered resources, only to determine the presence or absence of archaeological resources within the project site. Archaeological excavation within the project site took place within the area of sensitivity identified on **Figure 2**. All field testing and subsequent reporting was completed in accordance with LPC’s *Guidelines for Archaeological Work in New York City* (2002);<sup>1</sup> SHPO’s *Phase 1 Archaeological Report Format Guidelines* (2005)<sup>2</sup>, and the New York Archaeological Council’s (NYAC) *Standards for Cultural Resource Investigations and the Curation of Archaeological Collections in New York State* (1994, adopted by SHPO in 1995).<sup>3</sup> All archaeological testing was completed by a Registered Professional Archaeologist (RPA) with industry standard qualifications. Each testing location was documented using standard nomenclature, recorded through digital photography and field notes, and their locations were established using measuring tapes and surveyed on-site landmarks. Soil colors were identified using Munsell soil color charts.

Subsurface testing consisted of the mechanical excavation of three trenches and the partial hand excavation of an ash-filled brick-lined cistern. Only few artifacts were observed and none were collected due to their lack of context, recent provenance, and lack of research value.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/lpc/downloads/pdf/pubs/ayguide.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://parks.ny.gov/shpo/environmental-review/documents/PhaseIReportStandards.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://nyarchaeology.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/NYACStandards.pdf>

The Phase 1B Archaeological Investigation of the former rear yard of 496 East 166th Street involved the excavation of three trenches. As described in more detail below, two of the trenches encountered disturbed soils to at least 6 feet below grade or sterile subsoil while the third encountered an ash-filled brick-lined cistern.

### TRENCH 1

Trench 1 was oriented north-south in order to identify the rear foundation wall of the former residence. It was excavated 5 feet west of the chain link fence marking the test area's eastern border and 20 feet east of the back of the church (see **Figure 3** and **Photo 1**). The trench had a length of 15 feet and a width of 5.5 feet and was excavated to a depth of 6 feet below grade. As indicated in **Photo 2**, below several inches of modern overburden, the archaeologist encountered disturbed soils and demolition debris along the northern half of this trench to a depth of 6 feet below grade and clean, undisturbed subsoil at a depth of about 1 foot below grade in the southern portion. It appears that this trench extended across the location of the former rear foundation wall of the former structure located in this area revealing a filled-in basement cavity. The disturbed soils consisted of a mixture of dark brown sands and gravels and demolition debris such as brick, concrete, and cinder block intermixed with a small quantity of modern artifacts such as plastic packaging material. The clean, undisturbed subsoil outside of (south of) the filled-in cavity consisted of strong brown (7.5YR 4/6) sand. Having established construction disturbance in the northern half and undisturbed sterile subsoil across the rest of the trench, excavation stopped at a depth of about 6 feet below grade. No historic resources were observed in this trench.

### TRENCH 2

Trench 2 extended to the west from the southern end of Trench 1 in order to investigate for the presence of backyard shaft features. The trench was excavated to a point approximately 8 feet east of the back of the church and was 12 long and 8 feet wide (see **Figure 3**). At a depth of 1.5 feet below grade the archaeologist encountered a circular, brick-lined cistern that once served as a storage structure for water (see **Photo 3**). At its surface, the cistern appeared to be filled with ash. A small circular shovel test was excavated into the center of the cistern to determine if it contained historic artifacts. As the two-foot deep test encountered only ash and no evidence of household refuse the field archaeologist decided to mechanically expose the eastern face of the cistern's exterior in order to facilitate a more extensive investigation of its contents.

**Photos 4** and **5** depict the excavation of the exterior of the cistern into the reddish brown subsoil, which involved excavation of an approximately 4 foot by 6 foot trench adjacent to the cistern. At a depth of about 5 feet below grade the brick was partially dismantled with the backhoe revealing that the ash continued deeper and that no artifacts were present (**Photo 5**). Excavation proceeded to a depth of 7.5 feet below ground surface at which point the cistern's bottom was encountered. The cistern had a width of 6 feet and a height from its top (at 1.5 feet below grade) of 6 feet. The bottom of the cistern is mortar-sealed brick and its walls consisted of a single course of mortared brick. Periodically the archaeologist used a trowel and/or shovel to excavate the ashy fill from the cistern's eastern third (**Photos 5** and **6**). Close examination of the ashy fill suggested multiple dumping episodes, perhaps as part of the regular cleaning

of a coal-fueled heating system. Given the total absence of artifactual material the cistern has no archaeological research value.

### **TRENCH 3**

The final trench was oriented east-west and excavated along the southern edge of the test area in order to investigate for privy features in the rear edge of the former residence's back yard (**Figure 3** and **Photo 7**). The trench was placed 5 feet north of the new residential building lining the southern edge of the test area and 4 feet west of the chainlink fence lining the property's eastern edge. Trench 3 had a length of 11 feet, a width of 8 feet, and was excavated to a depth of 8 feet below grade. Trench 3 was excavated in halves. The southern half encountered uniform dark gray fill to a depth of 8 feet (**Photo 8**). The northern half encountered sterile strong brown (7.5YR 4/4 to 7.5YR 5/6) sandy subsoil below several inches of modern overburden. Examination of the profile of the trench's eastern wall (see **Photos 9** and **10**) revealed that the project site had been previously excavated and backfilled with the uniform grey fill, presumably as part of the construction of the new residential building to the south. No historic resources were observed in this trench.

The Phase 1B Archaeological Investigation of the former rear yard of 496 East 166th Street involved the excavation of three trenches in an area initially identified as having archaeological sensitivity for historic shaft features. The survey identified a single brick-lined cistern in the portion of the rear yard that would have been closest to the former residence. Partial excavation of the cistern to its bottom at a depth of 7 feet below grade revealed that it had been filled with clean ash containing no artifactual material. The single feature has no archaeological research value. Excavation of a trench along the rear edge of the former residence's rear yard revealed extensive soil disturbance associated with construction of the new residence located south of the project site. This disturbance extended to a depth of at least 8 feet below grade. Given the absence of archaeological resources, features, or artifacts the project site is not considered archaeologically sensitive.

## References

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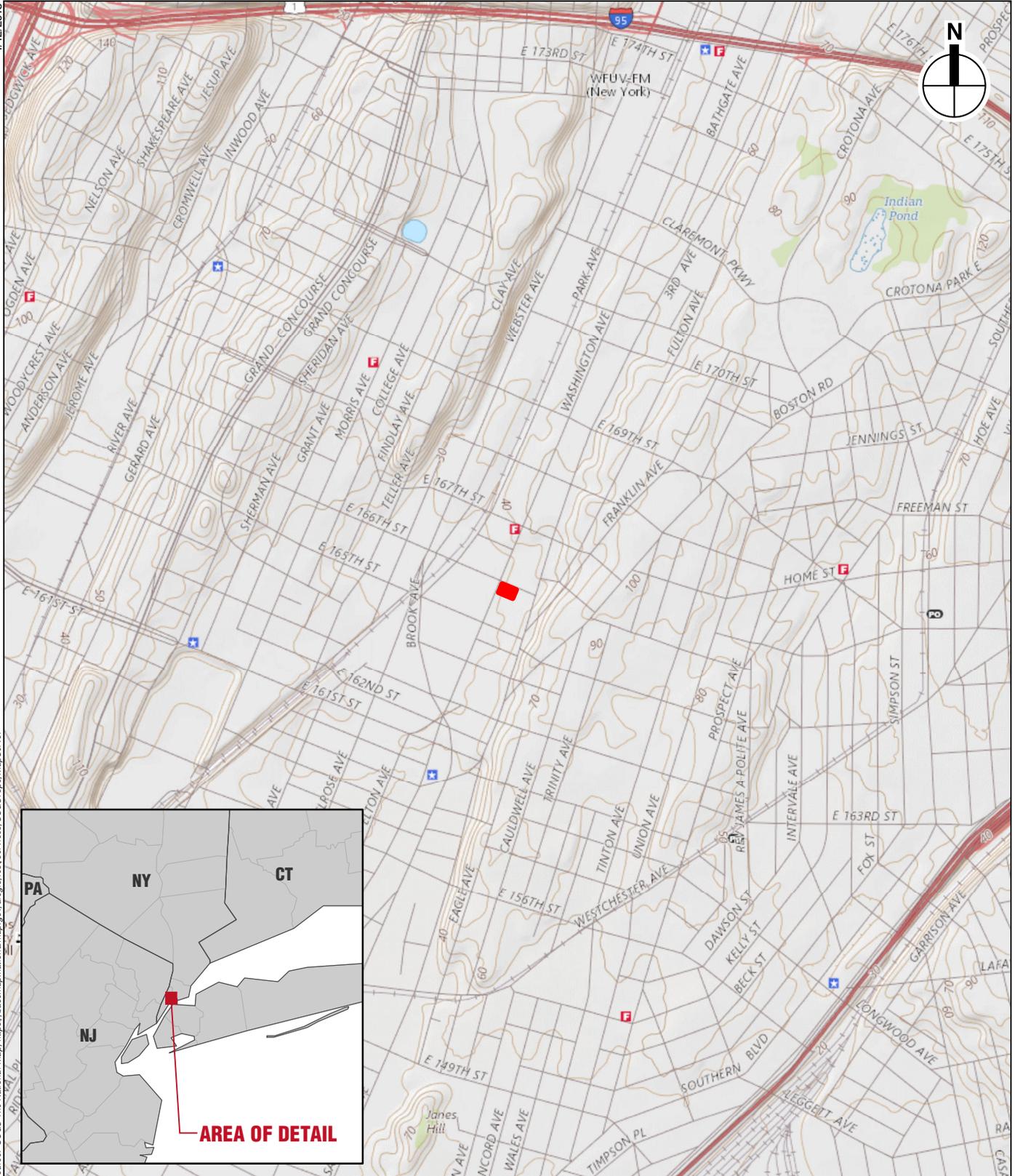
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# FIGURES

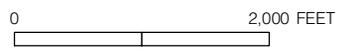


1/12/2018

Source: USGS The National Map. <https://basemap.nationalmap.gov/arcgis/rest/services/USGSTopo/MapServer>



Project Site



Approximate coordinates of Project Site:  
 73°54'30"W 40°49'40"N

**1080 WASHINGTON AVENUE**

USGS Topographic Map  
**Figure 1**

5/24/2018

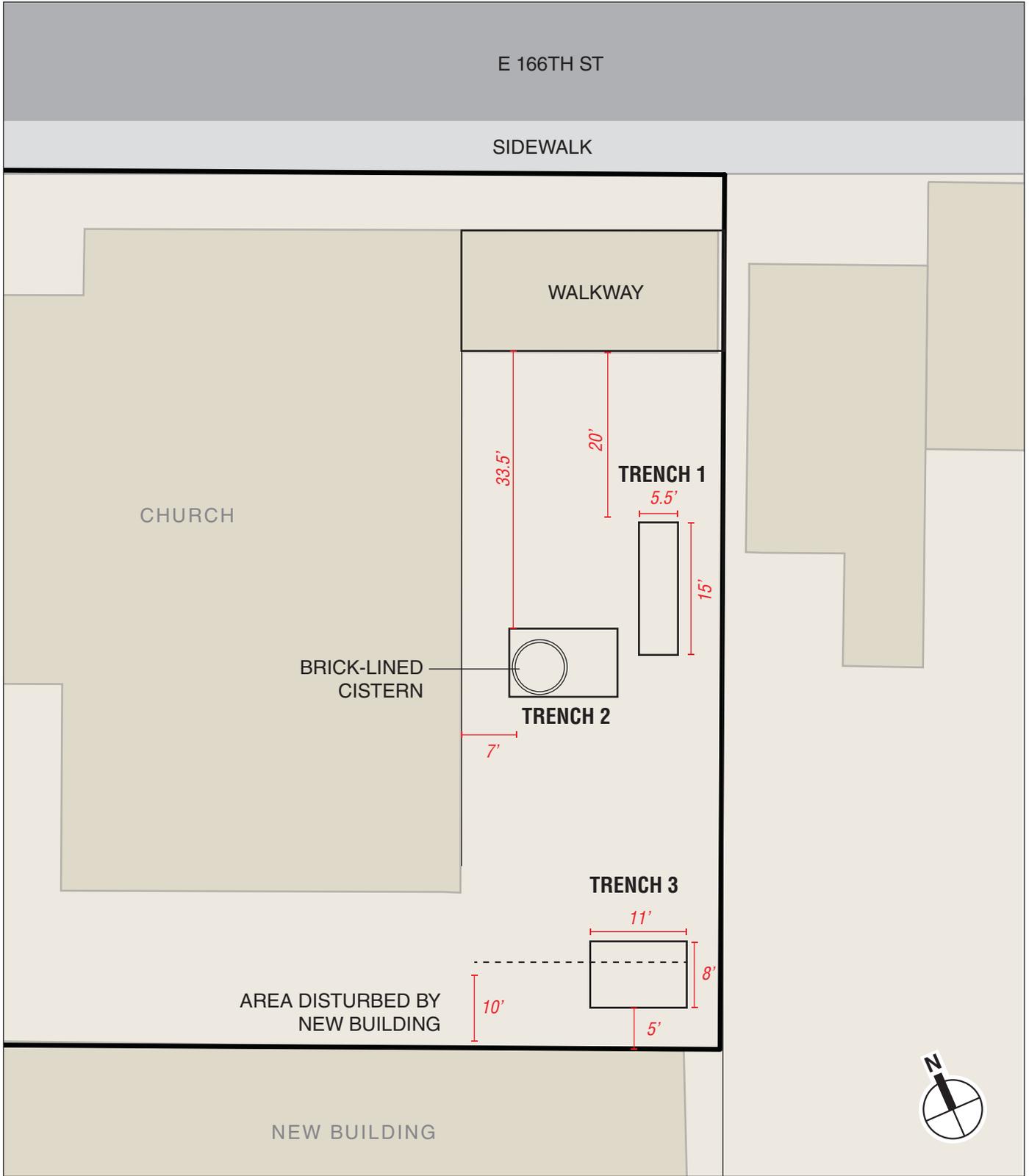


-  Project Site
-  Area of Sensitivity



**1080 WASHINGTON AVENUE**

Area of Archaeological Sensitivity  
**Figure 2**



 Project Site

# **PHOTOGRAPHS**





Facing southeast from center of site showing rear yard of church and excavation of Trench 1 1



Facing west showing the western wall of Trench 1. Note natural brown sandy soil to the left and demolition debris and fill to the right 2



Facing west showing Trench 2 close to the rear wall of the church. Note circular brick-lined cistern **3**



Facing west showing Trench 2 after excavation of a shovel test pit into center of brick-lined cistern and excavation of several feet of natural sandy brown soil from east side of cistern **4**



Facing west showing Trench 2 after removal of a portion of the cistern's eastern side, revealing dense deposits of coal ash **5**



Facing west from within Trench 2 showing that the ash deposits extended to a depth of 5 feet below the top of the feature **6**



Facing northwest from the southeast corner of the backyard area showing excavation of Trench 3 **7**



Completed excavation of the south half of Trench 3 to a depth of 8 feet below ground surface. Note that excavated soil consisted of clean dark grey fill **8**



Facing southeast showing excavation of north half of Trench 3. The dark grey sandy soil to the right is clean fill associated with construction of the building at the right edge of photo. The brown sandy soil to the left is natural

9



Detail of east wall of Trench 3 showing natural brown sands to the left and dark grey fill to the right

10