

**Kate Collignon, Senior Vice President for Special Projects  
NYC Economic Development Corporation**

**Opening Statement, May 1, 2007**

Good morning. My name is Kate Collignon and I am the Senior Vice President for Special Projects with the New York City Economic Development Corporation. I appreciate the opportunity to address the Council this morning.

In 2004, EDC joined other City agencies in bringing before the City Council a ULURP application for rezoning and other actions related to a major economic development initiative in Downtown Brooklyn. The plan sought to create jobs by providing new opportunities for development, and to enhance the overall environment in Downtown Brooklyn for local residents. A key component of the plan was a 1 acre public park on Willoughby Street between Duffield and Gold streets, with public parking below.

During Council review, assertions were made that certain properties affected by the plan played a historic role in the Underground Railroad. When the Council approved the Plan in June 2004, the City committed to additional research in response to these claims. Since that time, the consultant firm of AKRF, Inc. has conducted an exhaustive research study, with the participation of a peer review committee comprised of 12 historians and academics. The research consisted of 3 components:

- Research of historic records
- An evaluation of physical site characteristics of the buildings, and
- Recording of oral traditions that might be relevant in determining whether the subject properties had potential connections to the Underground Railroad.

The 2.5 year research study, the most extensive ever documented in the City, is now complete. It has not confirmed a history of Underground Railroad activity at the sites in question. However the study has provided extensive documentation of the substantial history of Underground Railroad activity throughout the larger Downtown Brooklyn neighborhood. The City is now prepared to move forward with the plans approved for creation of Willoughby Square, and to work with the Council going forward to appropriately commemorate underground railroad activity within the larger area.

I am pleased to be able to join you today to discuss the details of the research effort and the findings detailed in the report. The report itself has been provided to the Committee in advance of the hearing, and, I will note for the record, is available to the general public on-line at EDC's web site.

I am joined today by Tom McKnight, Vice President for Special Projects at EDC, and Linh Do, Senior Vice President at AKRF, who is the principal-in-charge of the study. Linh is prepared to present the details of the study, Tom will describe next steps, and then the three of us will be open to answering questions you may have about the research.

## 5/1 UGRR HEARING - CLOSING STATEMENT – Tom McKnight

With the approval of the Downtown Brooklyn Plan in 2004, the City committed to the completion of a detailed research effort to determine whether the Duffield and Gold Street properties had a documentable link to the Underground Railroad. That commitment has been fulfilled and the work is now completed. The research was thorough and far-reaching – many, many avenues of research were pursued and investigated. The effort was bolstered through the participation of the peer reviewers, who provided guidance and expertise throughout the process.

The report has not identified a connection between the subject properties and the Underground Railroad. What it has reconfirmed, however, is the significant role that the greater Downtown Brooklyn community did play – primarily through its religious institutions – in the Underground Railroad.

With the conclusion of the report, the City is moving ahead with the plan for Downtown Brooklyn approved by the Council in 2004. The Plan calls for the creation of Willoughby Square, a signature one-acre park with below-grade parking. The project will both provide a new open space resource for the community and address the area's long-standing parking problems. As the next step toward implementation, the City has scheduled an EDPL hearing for May 22. This public hearing will provide affected property owners and community members with an opportunity to comment on the property acquisitions necessary to move ahead with the plan for Willoughby Square.

At the same time, the City recognizes that the greater Downtown Brooklyn area played a significant role in the history of the Underground Railroad, as was disclosed in the research report. This is an opportunity to make sure this fact is widely known to the general public. The City looks forward to working with the City Council and community stakeholders to create a task force whose mission would be to commemorate Downtown Brooklyn's historic role in the Underground Railroad. This task force could solicit proposals from Brooklyn's cultural community, with the goal of identifying an appropriate way to commemorate this unsung history. We look forward to further developing this concept in partnership with the Council in the coming weeks.

With that, we would now be pleased to answer any questions you may have about the research effort.

# Read into the Record

**Ms. Sabine Aronowsky**  
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**April 29, 2007**

**To: City Council public hearing on AKRF UGRR report** at City Hall on Tuesday, May 1 at 11AM  
before the Landmarks Subcommittee chaired by Jessica Lappin

My name is Sabine Aronowsky, a woman born and raised in Park Slope, Brooklyn, who now lives several blocks away from the Downtown Brooklyn Plan site in Boerum Hill. I'm also the Producer of a local Brooklyn Community Access (BCAT) Television show, called Freddy's Brooklyn Roundhouse (FBR). FBR provides a non-commercial, unsubsidized voice for community leaders, artists, musicians and activists in Brooklyn to address local and national issues threatening everyone's civil liberties. The threat of eminent domain has been featured prominently on the show because this is such a huge imperilment to so many residents in the Borough. Concerns about the use of eminent domain and private interests using tax abatements and the city planners contracted consultants', such as the AKRF, to defend the seizure of local private properties and displacement of local residents feature largely in most of the huge development plans presently being put forth by the NYCEDC and the ESDC. This destabilizes residents and communities at places such as Duffield street, brought forth by the "need" to seize historic homes for parking and access to the Aloft/Sheraton Hotel as put forth by the Downtown Brooklyn Development Plan, and also in communities like Prospect Heights, to make room for an arena and luxury condos as part of the proposed Atlantic Yards project. The FBR show also examines the National trend of private developers and city planners to use eminent domain even in such extenuating instances as hurricane ravaged New Orleans, to appropriate the property of displaced residents. We've discussed this topic so much on the show that it leads us repeatedly to question "is any home safe?"

Along with this written comment, I am submitting a DvD of one show I produced documenting two of the threatened homeowners' at Duffield street, Joy Chattel & Lewis Greenstein, along with local historians, Robert J. Swan, Ph.D., American, African American History, Michael Hooper, President, Roots Revisited, <http://www.freedomtrail.org> and Christabel Gough, Society for the Architecture of the City, also author of Village Views, <http://www.villageviews.org/>. The show documents their deep concerns with the AKRF Underground Railroad report produced for NYCEDC (NYC Economic Development Corporation).

Having read the report I also have my own concerns about this study and the continued relationship and contractual use of the AKFR Corporation by city and state to support development projects that continue to sanction the use of eminent domain in their project plans. What is the role of the AKRF? Where do you their interests lie? The AKRF has an article on their own website entitled [How to Stay Ahead of Preservation Constraints](#). They, themselves, advertise on their website that they work with

company's to understand "which regulations affect their project, so the architect and development team can avoid delays and design modifications." Can a group with this aim truly research in an unbiased manner something as historically abstract, yet completely acknowledged, as part of the Brooklyn Underground Railroad? The study does note that the collected oral traditions' do reference Duffield street in general as being active in the Underground Railroad activities, as well as the existence of a tunnel linking the buildings in Duffield street, but denounce the potential existence of such tunnel because it had not been verified by any documentary sources, isn't this a strong contradiction that any oral historian could understand?

The study also concludes that there is NO DOUBT that this area supported Underground Railroad activity, from the oral histories, to the proximity to the African American and abolitionist churches, African American settlements and businesses in the area. The study claims to simply lack the documentary sources and artifacts' from the time period. If this is the case, why then, when there is so much at stake for the owners of these residences and our collective local history would there not be further attempts to research these findings using a neutral and specialized third party, as opposed to a group like the AKRF that is contracted for numerous city development reports?

The AKRF report also states, on the Underground Railroad association of Duffield and Gold streets "that archaeological testing is unlikely to offer any definite information about whether or not these structures were part of the underground railroad", given their own previous statements how could anyone come to that conclusion? The report additionally states that "assuming a tunnel was discovered, there would be no way of knowing if it served as a passageway for freedom seekers without corroborating artifacts". Corroborating artifacts have already been discovered, such as the artifacts' from Lewis Greenstein's home, yet have not been seriously examined, and isn't it likely more artifacts would be found if archeological testing and the opening up of an "assumed tunnel" were done?

The AKFR study also puts forward the case that they are trying to establish the potential eligibility of the Duffield Street houses as National Historic Landmarks using a 1 thru 5 rating system. 227 Duffield street, Joy Chattel's home, receives a 3 from the AKRF study, where a 4 or 5 would indicate eligibility for Historic Landmarks designation. These landmark criteria rely largely on historic corroboration with documented proof and archeological findings, as opposed to oral histories, so if Joy's home received a three without the large archeological findings, why wouldn't there be a further recommendation for excavation in the Chattel home by the AKRF?

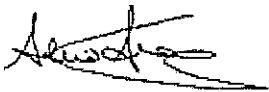
223 Duffield Street, Lewis Greenstein's home, only receives a rating of 1, designating it was probably not involved in the Underground Railroad, and there is no mention of the feeding station, water well or access to the street from the subbasement that Lewis has documented in his home's subbasement. Why are this seemingly very important archeological finds not mentioned?

In reading the peer reviews of the study numerous peer reviewers, like Wellman and Jackson, rate additional properties at a level 3, some like Wellman and Dobard, rate Joy Chattel's home higher and some, like Larouch, Jackson and Hourahan, disagree with the conclusions and/or methodology of the report.

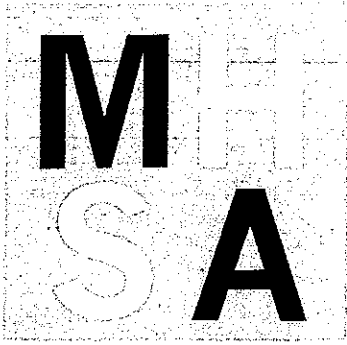
In its attempts to undermine this Brooklyn Underground Railroad study, the AKRF study brings together a large number of scholarly folks who all definitely agree that this was a center of abolitionist activity in Brooklyn and Underground Railroad activity. This report, along with the dedicated homeowners on Duffield street, has unearthed our history and brought to the attention of Brooklynites, and the nation, a historical landmark that cannot be reburied or paved over by a parking lot without making a major moral mistake. The only beneficiaries' of this destruction appear to be the Sheraton Hotel chain, which would lodge visitors to our great Borough; who would know nothing of the true history of the area literally laying beneath their feet and, along with Brooklynites, be denied any chance to learn. This is a discovery of immense historical significance that could rebirth the legacy of a historical freedom center, with large economic and healing power for all New Yorkers.

I strongly encourage further and thorough exploration of the Duffield street homes and surrounding areas by a non-partisan, experienced, historically reputable agency. I also encourage the city council to reject any project plans that rely on the corrupt use of eminent domain for private interests to displace existing homes and businesses. For all of the above reasons this AKRF study's conclusions must be rejected and the entire historical investigation process reviewed and improved. This Downtown Brooklyn Development plan should be reconceived to promote and enhance Brooklyn's historical significance within these communities that literally risked their lives to develop. This AKRF study and Downtown Brooklyn Development project typify the city's current urban development model that consistently disregards and attempts to discredit community input, obliterates history, and channels ownership, wealth and local empowerment out of our neighborhoods instead of into them, further dividing our communities, physically, economically and historically, the antithesis of the forebears and abolitionists that struggled for this community and land.

Sincerely,



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# **Metropolitan Historic Structures Association, Inc.**

c/o Neighborhood Preservation Center  
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**Public Hearing - City Council  
May 1, 2007  
Duffield Street - Underground Railroad Study  
by AKRF Consultants**

My name is James Trent, president of the Metropolitan Historic Structures Association, an umbrella group for approximately 100 historic sites around the metropolitan region. We were founded in 1976 and are one of the oldest general preservation groups in the City.

Studying whether the Duffield Street houses were in fact part of the Underground Railroad sort of misses the point of a much larger issue: the use of eminent domain to acquire private property so it can be turned over to private interests.

Duffield Street is not Times Square. A new hotel would be good for Brooklyn, but a bad situation is being created by knocking down sound, private buildings, so the City can make more money. This is an abuse of the power of eminent domain. The fact that the Supreme Court of the United States gives you cover to do this doesn't make it morally right.

The Metropolitan Historic Structures Association believes that the Duffield Street houses would make an excellent site for a museum of the Underground Railroad. Such a focus does not exist anywhere in the City. While studies and exhibits of the issue of slavery have been undertaken, it would be exciting to locate a museum in buildings that are believed to have been the actual site of such activities.

The MHSA urges the City Council and the City of New York to find a way to accommodate the building of a new hotel with off-street parking without the condemning of private property, an act that can grow to become a common practice. We urge you, also, to facilitate the preservation of the Duffield Street buildings by landmark designation.



Rev. Clint Miller  
Brown Memorial Baptist Church

The word underground implies "underground history". Much of African-American history is based on the oral tradition. The EDC misunderstands this integral dynamic of African-American history. Reknown historians such as Albert Rabreau, "Slave Religion" and John Hope Franklin "From Slavery to Freedom" confirm this unique aspect of Black history. The EDC will not likely find what it may define as plausible evidence in regard to this site.

Considering the climate of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, participants in the Underground Railroad like Henry Ward Beecher would have been unwise to document

locations of the Underground Railroad. Again, substantial documentation would have jeopardized the "Underground" aspect of the railroad.

Students of history know that when there is a discrepancy in findings, a ~~third~~ third party is usually asked to intervene and investigate.

In this case, it would be hard for a historical organization to objectively investigate after being compensated up to \$500K. This is a conflict of ~~interest~~ interest.

Can another historical investigation be launched. An investigation that would be paid for by an objective party?

## **Testimony in favor of saving the houses on Duffield Street connected with the Underground Railroad**

My name is James Driscoll. I am President of the Queens Historical Society and served on the peer review panel involved in researching the history of the homes on Duffield Street and their possible connection with the Underground Railroad.

I am here because I believe that the homes on Duffield Street, particularly 227, should not be torn down and because I basically disagree with the conclusions stated in the AKRF report which is that information about the houses doesn't reach the level of proof that justify there being saved.

Many years ago someone told me that the problem with Underground Railroad Research is that too much emphasis is placed on the buildings not enough on the people involved, the fugitives and the abolitionists who assisted them in their escape. Looking at the story of the people who lived on Duffield Street will help lead us to the conclusion that their homes should be saved.

It appears at this point that the most important story on the block is the story of Thomas Truesdale and his wife Harriet Lee Truesdale. The story of this couple's involvement in the anti-slavery movement begins in Providence Rhode Island around 1830. He was an agent for the Genius of Emancipation, William Lloyd Garrison' first abolitionist newspaper. He was also an original member of the Rhode Island Anti-slavery society, attending its convention in 1836. Harriet Lee Truesdale was also an active abolitionist serving as an officer in the state's woman's anti-slavery society. She attended a woman's anti-slavery convention in Philadelphia, the one where pro-slavery forces burned down the convention hall. There she served on a committee with Julia Tappan the daughter of Lewis Tappan, the famous abolitionist who lived in Brooklyn Heights. Years later, when they moved to downtown Brooklyn, the Truesdales would live near Julia

We know that the Truesdales were living in Brooklyn Heights as early as the late 1830s. Here they continued their association with William Lloyd Garrison. We know from his letters that Garrison visited their home in 1838 and 1840. That the Truesdales were friends of the most famous and one of the most radical abolitionists is important.

Although some would argue that many of these actions of the Truesdales did not take place while they were living on Duffield Street, it seems to me that they established a pattern of behaviour that would continue when they moved to their new home. Certainly information taken from the Anti-Slavery Standard supports this idea. The paper lists Thomas Truesdale as a subscriber to the Standard, the official paper of the American Anti-Slavery Society and also as a frequent contributor to the Society.

To me, the most important part of their story as it relates to Duffield Street revolves around William Harned. Harned was a close associate of Lewis Tappan. For years he retained an office in Tappan's building on John Street, where among other things he published many pamphlets on slavery and some of the first books in America on African History. The AKRF report properly points out that Harned was an officer in the New York State Vigilance Committee, which seems to have been a successor to the earlier New York City Vigilance Committee. These organizations had one purpose: to help fugitive slaves. The state group claimed to have helped hundreds of fugitives escape. Its membership consisted of both African-Americans and whites.

If you look at the map of neighborhood in the report, which I didn't find user friendly, you will notice that Harned lived in a corner house on the next block, just a few doors down from the Truesdales. He lived there for a year or two until 1853. He had been living in the downtown Brooklyn area since the late 1840s and like the Truesdales, moved quite often. It is documented that Harned helped a number of slaves escape to freedom. This is certainly significant and I think this fact should have been emphasized more in the report: that the Truesdales were practically next door neighbors to an officer in an Underground Railroad Organization. I know this does not prove that Truesdale was involved in the Underground Railroad himself but if it is combined with all the other information we have on the Truesdales it certainly makes a good case for saving the homes on Duffield Street.

**STATEN ISLAND BRANCH #2227  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE  
Post Office Box No. 141064, Staten Island, New York 10314-0005  
Telephone: (718)981-8428 Founded 1925**

May 1, 2007

Dear Members of the New York City Council:

I am not able to attend today's hearing concerning the attempted destruction of the homes on Duffield Street in Downtown Brooklyn. I have asked Ms. Linda Eskenas of the Four Boroughs Neighborhood Preservation to read a statement from me.

My Statement reads as follows:

The homes located on Duffield Street played a very important role in the history of African-Americans in this country during a very sad period of American history. Slavery was the foundation for great wealth for this country at the expense of the African Slave. The African Slave was regarded as property and had very few rights a white man had to recognize.

The Underground Railroad which ran through Duffield Street was run with great risk, but it gave hope of freedom for many. The under ground Railroad represented a great struggle by whites and blacks to gain Civil Rights for those who were denied their rights. Today, in the year 2007 the Civil Rights struggle is still apart of our everyday life. The homes on Duffield Street should not be demolished to build a parking lot or any other structure. Instead, a project should be put in place to give a complete historical narrative of the area and give it a landmark status.

Many States have apologized for their part in slavery. It is my understanding that on April 20<sup>th</sup> the City Council planned to introduce legislation apologizing for NYC's role in slavery. Within that piece of legislation, the legislation would be more meaningful if the preservation of Duffield Street and other meaningful properties relating to Black History be investigated for land mark status.

Sincerely,

Edward C. Josey  
President S.I. Branch NAACP  
Phone # (718)981-8428

**Duffield St/ Abolition Place**

**Underground Railroad Houses**

**c 1848**

**City Council Hearing  
Landmarks Subcommittee**

**May 1st 11am  
City Hall**

**FOR THE RECORD**

**Historic Duffield Street/ Abolition Place  
An Underground Railroad Site**

The issues involved in the attempted destruction of this historic American site, as well as homes and places of business, are of national importance and involve many crucial issues. This has an enormous diverse, and far reaching effect on the positive future of our city.

**The Taking Of An Abolitionist/ Underground Railroad  
Historic Site and Peoples' Homes and Businesses  
For a Private Developer's Parking Garage**

This is an obliteration of Black history and the Black struggle, and of the greatest defining event of the history of our country.

This is a Civil Rights issue, This extraordinary attempt to obliterate and denigrate the horrendous struggles of the Black, and white, people, all those with courage enough to fight for humane justice, which is the goal of our country. IT is a denial of Civil Rights.

It is as if the Civil Rights movement, "never happened".

It is also an issue of immense importance across the country, in another way. EMINENT DOMAIN ABUSE. EMINENT DOMAIN FOR A PRIVATE DEVELOPER, made worse and more heinous, because it is using our democratic government to destroy our heritage, and take peoples' homes and livelihood. This is a collaboration with a private developer, to destroy this irreplaceable historic place, these homes, for a PARKING GARAGE. It is undeniable, as they have already made drawings of the Hotel they want to erect. They have hired a consulting firm, which is working on behalf of the developer and its conduit. Apparently this firm is hired in many similar cases. They are now being sued in another state. The "research" done has glaring omissions of the true facts relating to this sensitive and important historic site, and untrue assertions.

Though New York City has experienced scholars whose expertise is in the Underground Railroad and slavery in New York; This consulting firm, hired by those who wish these historic buildings destroyed, brought in people to do research from other states, who knew nothing about the Underground Railroad or Abolitionists in New York, or New York City.

The oral histories conducted omitted information which supported the fact that these were Underground Railroad Abolitionists sites.

New York City was active in the Abolitionist movement.

The American Anti Slavery Society, William Garrison, was founded in New York City and had their annual meeting here.

People who hid fugitives slaves could be branded or killed, with unspeakable

consequences for Blacks; Therefore everything was done with the greatest secrecy for the protection of all of these brave people, black or white , and the success of the Abolitionists movement.

These actions also show a blatant disregard for race relations and the good will and concord necessary for the positive future of New York City.

The taking of citizen's property and livelihood; in this case the stores are below and their homes are upstairs, is a heinous act and an attack on everything our country stands for.

The fact that the destruction of peoples' homes is to put up a Parking Garage for the developers hotel is heinous abuse. This must be voted down, and stopped immediately. It is completely unacceptable.

This is also a WOMENS" RIGHTS ISSUE ; FURTHER INVOLVING the taking of a home and livelihood of a Black grandmother, responsibly raising at least 5 grandchildren and preparing for their future.

FURTHER and of great significance it is the attempted demolition of our American history and Historic Preservation, known to be the major component of successful communities and urban restoration. We can see this in all the successful restorations of now thriving neighborhoods, which were saved from demolition and a low point in NYC history. The restoration of New York was done by 1000's of people restoring buildings and neighborhoods. On Duffield St. a rare , intact wood Greek Revival house c1848, and this most significant HISTORIC DISTRICT is threatened with demolition, to be lost to all of us forever.

It is clearly, and glaringly, an Underground Railroad site, where famous Abolitionists lived. It is why the Landmarks law was written. It qualifies as both a Historic Landmark and a Cultural Landmark. This should be a time of celebration and incredible pride for New York City at saving this wonderful and significant American history on Duffield Street/ Abolition Place for future generations to come, for ourselves and for those who visit to see what our country is all about. We must stop it from being the scene of a disgraceful attempted destruction of our heritage, our history, and everything we believe in.

This is a crossroads. This historic place MUST be saved. This senseless and heinous demolition must be voted down. This should be a Museum that those after us can speak of with pride, gratitude and respect for those people of great courage who overcame great struggles for the general good, for justice and humanity, and for the rights we now enjoy.

We must honor them for a humane, successful and great future for New York City and for our country.

The AKRF report quoted Christopher Moore as saying that this was not an Underground Railroad site. Christopher Moore said THEY NEVER CONTACTED HIM .

AKRF has manipulated the facts, made untrue statements, and omitted information for three years using taxpayers money to try to "prove " this is not an Underground Railroad site and they have completely failed to do so; Because it obviously is an Underground Railroad Site.

**AKRF says that Tappan, an ardent Abolitionist, founded The Brooklyn Eagle. This is absurd because not only was it founded by someone else, but it was a PRO SLAVERY NEWSPAPER and was against the Civil War. They fired Walt Whitman.**

**This shameful attempt to obliterate and demolish these important historic houses which are our heritage, and peoples' homes, endanger our future and show an extraordinary disrespect for the memory, and inspiring actions of some of the most courageous people our country has ever known, black and white.**

**Thank You**



**FOR THE RECORD**

**The Underground Railroad Houses  
On Duffield St./Abolition Place**

I support the preservation of the houses on Duffield Street which were part of the Underground Railroad to lead slaves to their freedom. Slavery is an ugly piece of our Nation's history, but it should not be forgotten. In order to preserve our freedom, the memory must be preserved.

George Branwell  
Staten Island, New York

**Concerned Citizens To Preserve The  
Underground Railroad/ Abolitionist Site  
On Duffield Street  
End Eminent Domain Abuse and Racism  
Stop The Demolition of Underground Railroad Site  
For A Parking Garage !**

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**FOR THE RECORD**

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James G. Nease  
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**FOR THE RECORD**