Home in Manahatta:

Planning to Affirm the Continued Lenape Presence in Lenapehoking

Spring 2025 Studio | GSAPP Urban Planning

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Chapter 1: Acknowledgement

Living Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge with gratitude and humility that the land on which we work, live, and learn is Lenapehoking, the unceded homeland of the Lenape.

We consider this a living land acknowledgement that marks one part of a continued collaboration with the Lenape Center working to affirm continued Lenape presence in Lenapehoking. As future urban planners, we will actively work to challenge the legacy of settler colonialism, undo its extractive and exploitative land practices, and commit to preserving and celebrating Lenape culture and sovereignty in Lenapehoking.

As students at Columbia University, one of the largest landowners in occupied Manahatta, it is our responsibility to resist the continued displacement and erasure of Lenape peoples who first inhabited this land. We reject the historic and ongoing violence of white supremacy and settler colonialism in all forms.

My Bleeding Heart
David Haff
2021

(Un)Learning Acknowledgement

This studio would not have been possible without an entire community of learners, teachers, and Indigenous scholars who informed and guided our collective process of (un)learning.

Liv Aira
Dancer and Choreographer at Invisible People Contemporary Dance Company

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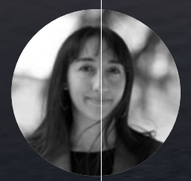

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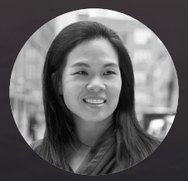

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Studio Values

As a studio, we are committed to centering and reconciling multiple ways of knowing. Our studio values revolve around reinforcing the Lenape concept of home and supporting the continuous Lenape connection with the Land. We are guided by the Lenape concept of Ohshixay, or "nest," which serves as a powerful metaphor and methodology for collaboration, rooted in Lenape wisdom and enriched by the eight Lenape Laws:

1. Everything in nature has a spirit, and should be given thanks, gifted and asked permission before taking from it. **Alanunukwe wemi keku ok alanunukwe wemi awin manhelushpa, ok kenihaw a, ok milkwetan a milwikawin okewelstonanwan a kishi kelendkw chikhitenien.** This law informs our approach to knowledge exchange, ensuring that intellectual and cultural resources are accessed with proper permission and acknowledgment.

2. Take care of our Mother Earth. **Kenhakhaw Keleshna Haki.** Within the ohshixay collaboration, environmental sustainability becomes not just an objective but a methodology, influencing every aspect of our practice.

3. Mother Earth gives us all we need to live. **Keleshna Haki milkuna wuleh keku.** This principle encourages us to recognize and honor abundance rather than scarcity, fostering creative approaches that celebrate what we have rather than lamenting what we lack.

4. We are all relatives. Respect all relations. **Wemi entalawih kelahkunthtra. Maxkizwi wemi entahlihtnelamanik.** The collaborative methodology of ohshixay acknowledges the interconnectedness of all participants, human and non-human, creating space for multiple ways of knowing and being.

5. Take care of our relatives. This principle extends beyond human connections to encompass responsibility toward all related beings, informing ethical frameworks for collaborative research and creative practice.

6. Think good thoughts when we speak. Within the collaboration, this law guides communication protocols, encouraging mindfulness and positive intent in all exchanges.

7. Everyone has an ability to heal. This principle recognizes the inherent creative capacity within each participant, fostering a strengths-based approach to collaboration.

8. Don't be greedy. Do not take more than necessary to live.

Through intentional partnerships and meaningful collaboration, our work seeks both symbolic and concrete reconciliation between historically oppressive Western planning regimes and the enduring Indigenous presence of the Lenape people in Manahatta.

As students of urban planning at Columbia University, we are uniquely situated in a positionality of immense privilege and responsibility. By engaging in an interdisciplinary critique of the built environment, this studio challenges the traditional discipline of planning and its ongoing role in consolidating, normalizing, and remaking colonial hierarchies of power.

Studio Purpose

These values–of centering knowledge, learning, and partnerships–frame our work, which is to support the important work the Lenape Center has been undergoing since 2009: to affirm the continued Lenape presence in Lenapehoking. The creation of Manahatta's first Indigenous center will not only advance the Lenape Center's vision, but expand its reach to a broader audience while accommodating new forms of programming. Our work is directly tied to this purpose, and our responsibility is to connect the Lenape Center to different opportunities for the development of their Center.

Studio Vision

This work is situated within a wider vision and larger undertaking, and is a step towards the liberatory possibilities of decolonization. Our studio vision builds on the notion of *planning for coexistence*, a necessary step in the continual process of decolonization. Rather than an equalizing discourse that ignores historical realities, *planning for coexistence* proposes an alternative planning praxis that considers land use planning as a particularly effective realm for leveraging Indigenous territorial rights and claims to belonging within their ancestral homeland. As a future-oriented project, this studio seeks to contribute to new modes of planning theory and practice beyond contemporary regimes of planning, neoliberal urbanism, and capitalist-colonial domination. In the long term, we hope our work becomes a step towards creating a model for the future of the discipline that frees itself from colonial planning practices and instead leads with Indigenous values. Our work this semester has been a step in the direction of decolonizing our own practice, and looks towards Lenape visions of coexistence and decolonization in Manahatta.

Introduction to the Lenape Center

Who are they?

The Lenape Center is a nonprofit organization fiscally sponsored by the New York Foundation for the Arts. They are involved in the creation, production and development of exhibitions, public art, symposia, performances, music, theater, courses, lectures and publications.

What do they do?

The Lenape Center has built partnerships with the Brooklyn Public Library, the Columbia Teachers College, the Madison Square Park Conservancy, and countless others. They have been integral to historic achievements including advising the renovation of Tammany Hall in 2020, which includes a turtle shell dome inspired by the Lenape Creation Story, the first ever Lenape-curated exhibition in New York in 2022, and Mayor Eric Adams's designation of November 20th as Lenape Heritage Day in 2024. Having first supported a GSAPP planning studio in 2023, the Lenape Center's long-time vision for a physical site became the purpose of last year's studio who presented a plan located up the Muhheacanituk in Orange County. Given this context, the work of the Home in Manahatta studio is a continuance of these existing and enduring partnerships.

Their Needs

The Lenape Center co-founders describe their future site as a welcoming space where guests are taken care of, similar to the act of welcoming someone into your home. Joe Baker describes Lenape art as "beautiful resistance" which carried them through forced removals and attempted cultural erasure. A physical Lenape Center would provide an immersive experience reflecting this beautiful resistance. It will be a space where visitors can gather for storytelling, performances, art, farming, and learning. And most importantly, the future center will be a living work of art that is grounded in Lenape hospitality and cultural preservation.

As a welcome home, the physical center will need to be accessible for the surrounding community as well as present-day Lenape people. Some Lenape are regularly involved with protecting cultural sites and pursuing land claims in Lenapehoking. Others may never have set foot in their ancestral homeland before. The high cost of living in and visiting Manahatta is an important factor to consider for both Lenape and non-Lenape. In the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, the median household income was $52,000 in 2023. In Manahatta, while the median household income is $100,000, nearly one-quarter of renter households spend more than 50% of their income on rent.

The need for a physical center raises challenges related to New York's competitive real estate environment, including the increasingly unaffordable cost of housing on the island. The current planning framework in New York City makes it difficult for a nonprofit cultural institution like the Lenape Center to ensure long-term presence.

Designation of November 20th as Lenape Heritage Day
New York
2024

A Physical Lenape Center

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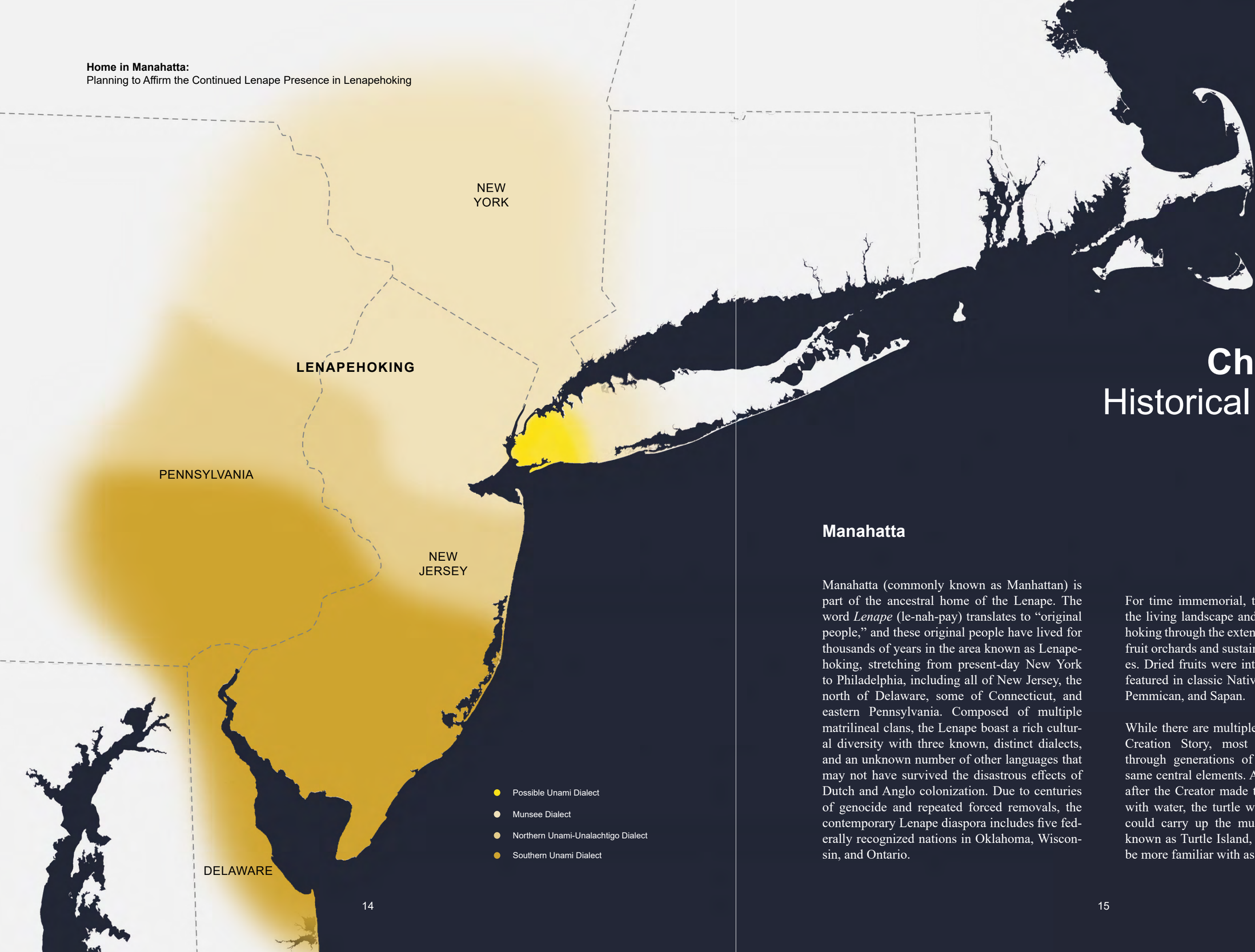
Lenape-curated exhibition
New York
2022



Chapter 2:
Historical Context

Manahatta

Manahatta (commonly known as Manhattan) is part of the ancestral home of the Lenape. The word *Lenape* (le-nah-pay) translates to "original people," and these original people have lived for thousands of years in the area known as Lenapehoking, stretching from present-day New York to Philadelphia, including all of New Jersey, the north of Delaware, some of Connecticut, and eastern Pennsylvania. Composed of multiple matrilineal clans, the Lenape boast a rich cultural diversity with three known, distinct dialects, and an unknown number of other languages that may not have survived the disastrous effects of Dutch and Anglo colonization. Due to centuries of genocide and repeated forced removals, the contemporary Lenape diaspora includes five federally recognized nations in Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and Ontario.

For time immemorial, the Lenape have shaped the living landscape and topography of Lenapehoking through the extensive cultivation of native fruit orchards and sustainable agriculture practices. Dried fruits were integral to Lenape cuisine, featured in classic Native dishes like Succotash, Pemmican, and Sapan.

While there are multiple versions of the Lenape Creation Story, most tellings, passed down through generations of oral history, share the same central elements. According to the Lenape, after the Creator made the Earth and covered it with water, the turtle was the only animal who could carry up the mud that formed the land known as Turtle Island, the continent some may be more familiar with as North America.

Pre-colonization, the Lenape traversed all throughout Lenapehoking, linked to each other through rich culture, family ties, and deep respect for the land. The Lenape did not practice any system of private land ownership, instead viewing the land, the sky, the water, and all of life as an interdependent, interconnected web (Baker 2023, 26). For the Lenape, land is never treated as a commodity to be owned, controlled, or squeezed for profit; it is respected for its ability to sustain the multiple interconnected networks of life, human and non-human. As Joe Baker reminds us, "the idea of selling one's mother is unspeakable, so the idea of selling the Mother that is life itself is equally so" (Baker 2023, 24).

The Myth of the "Sale" of Manahatta

Colonial legends claim that in 1626, the Dutch West India Company purchased Manahatta from the Lenape for mere beads and trinkets, acquiring land and properties now worth well over a trillion dollars today. The only letters used as evidence of this so-called "sale" lack crucial details like the date of sale, who sold the land, or even who purchased it. Where else in history has such hearsay been used as verification of such a historic business transaction? The answer: only in colonial history.

Nonetheless, a plaque in Inwood Hill Park still memorializes this legendary "sale" as historical fact. The plaque, situated on the site of a desecrated Lenape burial ground, helps perpetuate distorted narratives of history that overlook centuries of colonial violence that drove the Lenape from their homeland.

Forced Displacement

In 1609, Henry Hudson sailed up the *Muhheakanituk*, now called the Hudson River on behalf of the Dutch West India Company, marking a watershed moment for the spread of Christian Capitalist domination. By the late 17th century, Dutch and British greed for land pushed the Lenape westward to the territory of the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee. In 1737, the sons of William Penn signed the Walking Purchase, an intentional land swindle that carved out more than a million acres of Lenapehoking for the colony of Pennsylvania. During the French and Indian War, the British deliberately sent the Lenape small-pox infected blankets in one of the earliest documented acts of biowarfare. Soon after, the colonial government enacted a scalp bounty, encouraging settlers to kill Native peoples on sight. Fearing for their lives, the Lenape were forced further west past the Allegheny Mountains and into eastern Ohio. In 1778, Lenape Chief White Eyes allied his people with the Americans during the Revolutionary War and signed the Treaty of Fort Pitt, the first tribal treaty in US history. This treaty promised the creation of a 14th state with Lenape representation in Congress. We all know by now this Lenape state never came to be, as broken promises and successive waves of settler violence, like the infamous Gnadenhutten Massacre, displaced the Lenape yet again. Violently pushed from their lands and facing mounting threats, the Lenape practiced and preserved their culture as a form of resistance. Rifts began to grow among the Lenape as some converted to Christianity while others held to their spiritual origins. White settlers followed them West again, pressuring the US government to push the Lenape further—and further—and further, some into Canada, others into Wisconsin, Kansas, even as far as Texas, and finally into federally designated allotments known as "Indian Territory" in Oklahoma.

Shorakapok Rock
Inwood Hill Park
1954

Colonization and Resistance Continue

Today, the Lenape diaspora is left largely fragmented and disconnected from their ancestral homeland, spread across three federally-recognized tribes (the Delaware Nation, the Delaware Tribe of Indians, and the Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians) as well as two tribes in Canada (the Delaware Nation at Moraviantown and the Munsee-Delaware Nation).

Lenape resistance to colonization has been sophisticated and sustained, continuing to challenge historical inequities and evolving threats ranging from oil pipelines to the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2 Spirit people (Nichusak 2023, 204). Tribal governments still lack the legal authority to prosecute non-tribal persons who commit crimes on their territory, despite the alarming fact that Indigenous women on reservation lands are murdered at a rate ten times the national average.

Indigenous perspectives acknowledge that seeds are much more than commodified, technologies of industrial agriculture. Seeds, according to the Lenape, are “lost relatives with cultural resonance that can heal the historical traumas of separation from home and erasure of presence”. Beginning in April 2022, the Lenape Center has collaborated with the Hudson Valley Farm Hub in a seed rematriation partnership, growing three Native bean varieties and Sehsapsing Flint Corn, a striking blue-black corn that has travelled with Lenape people through their fractured and forced Diasporas as far west as Oklahoma.

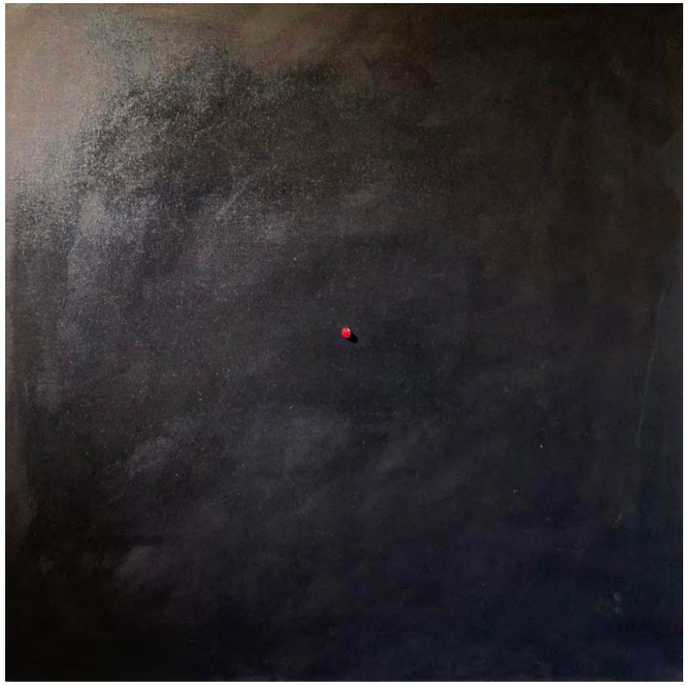
Despite deep-seated inequities and the legacies of settler colonialism, Lenape histories of resistance, survivance, and resurgence continue to inform the struggle to sustain the Lenape presence in Manahatta. Through their work in seed rematriation, art exhibitions, education, publications, music performances, and more, the Lenape Center has taken on the difficult task of challenging colonial misconceptions and celebrating Lenape culture and community in present-day New York City. As co-founders Joe Baker and Hadrian Coumans explain, the call to do this work came "as a sign from the ancestors – they want us to do this."

Our Planning Context

This year, the Home in Manahatta studio has been working to continue the existing collaboration with the Lenape Center on developing a plan for realizing their vision in Manahatta.

The Western framework within which current planning regimes operate traditionally views land as a commodity. The real estate state is the dominant force in urban planning, causing urban planners to serve capital more than they serve cities. Planning for highest and best use drives the decision-making process, and real estate speculative development drives up land and property values. In our planning context, which is situated in New York City, the costs of the planning process and the land acquisition process are astronomical, serving as obstacles for even established organizations such as the Lenape Center to further their work. Lenapehoking has been transformed over the last 400 years, and current planning regimes have heavily contributed to the picture of New York today, as well as contributing to the continued erasure of the Lenape people's lived history and relationship to the land.

As it stands, our studio is operating within a context of widespread amnesia, misinformation, and willful ignorance of historical realities. The current understanding of truth – of the Lenape people's history, of the myth of the sale of Manahatta, of the countless forced displacements and removals from the land – is far from established and commonly recognized. Working toward Indigenous visibility is a long journey, one where New York City and the United States are failing to adequately address. Through their persistent and tireless efforts, the Lenape Center is leading local efforts to reinforce the Lenape presence in Manahatta while dismantling harmful historical narratives and misconceptions. Publishing *Lenapehoking: An Anthology* is one major milestone demonstrating how the Lenape Center has been planting the seeds for reconciliation and resurgence in New York City and Lenapehoking.



Manitu Mënatay
(Creator built Islands)
2022

Chapter 3:
Process

Literature Review

Our studio is guided by multiple modes of knowledge production within, between, and beyond institutions of Western academia. In an effort to recenter local and Indigenous knowledge, this project is principally informed by the generous guidance of the Lenape Center and especially Lenapehoking, an anthology of essays, stories, poetry, and visual art by Indigenous scholars, historians, and community members that has proven central to the work of this studio (Baker, Coumans, & Whitney 2023).

Indigenous approaches to urban planning have been the topic of much academic debate and recent scholarly attention. Over the past few decades, a growing, yet consistently marginalized, body of literature has emerged to address questions of Indigenous rights and sovereignty in the city and how we might envision urban futures beyond the limiting confines of settler institutions and contemporary planning paradigms. From architects (Castillo-Pilcol 2014) and geographers (Porter 2010, 2016) to sociologists (Tomiak 2017) and planners (Ortiz 2022), numerous scholars have contributed to an emergent and robust discourse on Indigenous approaches to planning.

In recognizing the unmistakable complicity of urban planning in historic and contemporary processes of Indigenous dispossession, critical geographer Libby Porter and urban planning scholar Janice Berry examine how land-use planning can be a particularly effective realm through which to leverage political claims and exact demands for Indigenous rights. Porter and Berry conceptualize planning models rooted in coexistence – not posited as an equalizing discourse that overlooks historic and ongoing inequities, but rather a way of articulating a demand for sharing space in ways that are more just, equitable, and sustainable. Landscape architect José Castillo-Pilcol further elaborates on notions of sovereignty and Indigeneity in urban environments, emphasizing the critical role of architecture and planning in challenging settler colonial structures while advancing Indigenous autonomy beyond a politics of recognition and reconciliation. We are also guided by anthropologist Samuel Rose's notion of the 'Indigenous shadow state,' which accounts for the shifting articulations of Indigenous sovereignty and urban governance with regard to community land trusts and other Indigenous-led nonprofits, such as the Lenape Center itself.

Storytelling continues to play an integral role in Lenape culture as a means of survivance, resistance, and cultural preservation. Rather than perpetuating depoliticized, neoliberal narratives of resilience, geographers Kevin Glynn and Julie Cupples consider how Indigenous storytelling in Guatemala is deployed as a strategy of decolonial resistance. Within conventional models of spatial planning, "storytelling" is normatively considered as a means of encapsulating local knowledge and the views of those who live in, and use, the landscape. Others, however, engage in "storytelling" as a method for revealing how formal planning practices may be destabilized by more vernacular narratives seeking to subvert dominant discourses and processes.

Acknowledging the continuing legacies of planning in perpetuating Indigenous dispossession, especially in settler contexts like the United States, Canada, and Australia, several scholars have considered questions of "unsettling" planning – that is, recentering Indigenous knowledge within planning practice, theory, and the continuous process of decolonization. We are guided here by Ananya Roy's *Toward an Ethics of Accountability in Planning Praxis*, which problematizes the normative binary between the planner and their 'beneficiaries,' calling for new modes of planning theory and practice that move beyond a liberal ethos of 'responsibility' and toward an ethics of 'accountability' that truly contend with present conditions of postcoloniality.

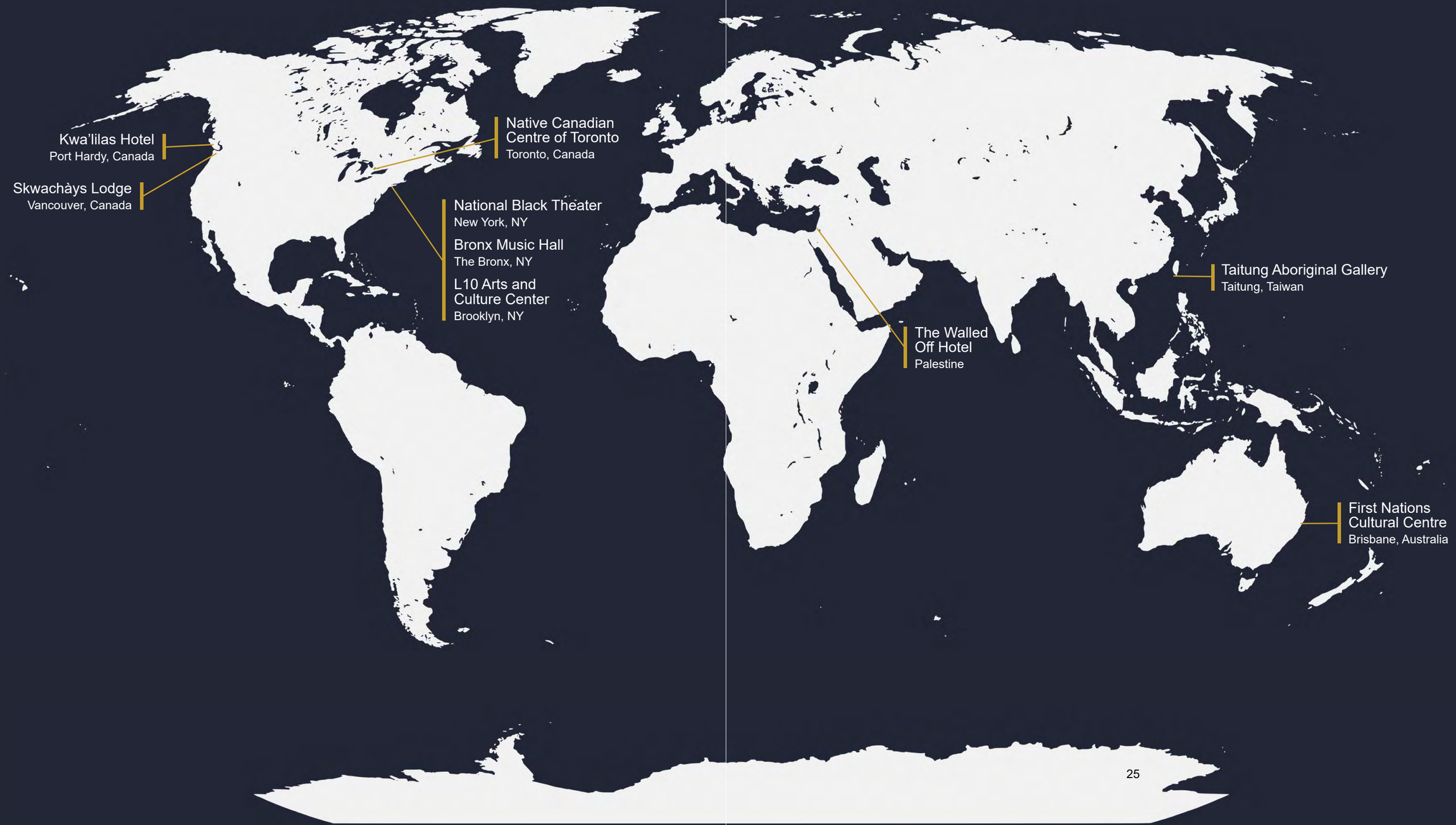
Conversations

Throughout this semester, we have had the opportunity to meet with many leading scholars, practitioners, artists, and Indigenous voices, allowing us to immerse ourselves in the learning process. We learned about many different ways of knowing, and learned of the different work that is being done to contribute to the broader movement of highlighting and recentering Indigenous ways of knowing in our everyday systems and frameworks.

Precedents

Part of our learning process required us to understand how others around the world have been doing their work. We wanted to know what a potential Lenape Center could look like, by looking towards other working examples of Indigenous visibility. These examples were taken from both the global and NYC context, including locations such as Canada, Australia, Taiwan to inspire us with their approaches, funding, and partnership structures.

Precedents


Kwa'lilas Hotel
Port Hardy, Canada
Skwachàys Lodge
Vancouver, Canada
Native Canadian Centre of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
National Black Theater
New York, NY
Bronx Music Hall
The Bronx, NY
L10 Arts and Culture Center
Brooklyn, NY
The Walled Off Hotel
Palestine
Taitung Aboriginal Gallery
Taitung, Taiwan
First Nations Cultural Centre
Brisbane, Australia

Taitung Aboriginal Gallery
Taitung, Taiwan

The Taitung Aboriginal Gallery is a cultural and creative center that promotes Indigenous heritage through exhibitions of art, design, performing arts, and agricultural innovation. Funded and owned by the Taitung County Government, the impressive gallery demonstrates a strong public commitment to reinforcing the Indigenous culture and their presence in Taiwan. The gallery not only inspires with a vision for strong partnerships with public governments, but integrates Indigenous cultural identity through creative architectural forms. Through direct financial support from the Taitung County Cultural Affairs Department, the Taitung Aboriginal Gallery illustrates an effective model that could be replicated by the Lenape Center with public grants and government funding to support Indigenous arts and culture.

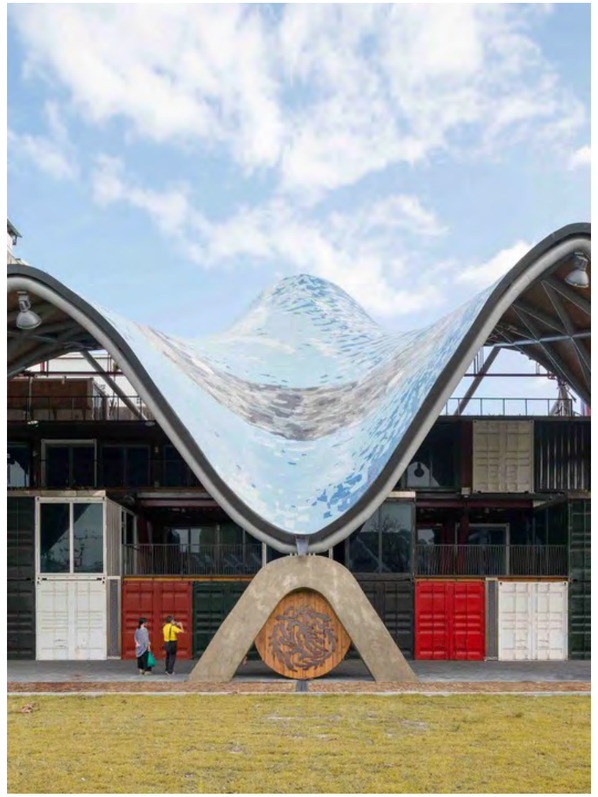
Bronx Music Hall
Lenapehoking, United State

Cultural centers in New York City often take the shape of mixed-use development, such as the Bronx Music Hall on 163rd Street and Melrose. Originally an affordable housing project that was later expanded to include a cultural space, the Bronx Music Hall addresses the demand for affordable housing in the Bronx, while preserving and amplifying local musical heritage. Leveraging city, state, and federal funding, the Bronx Music Hall represents a combined public, private, and non-profit effort.

Partnerships like this might help the Lenape Center navigate the challenging New York City real estate environment through a coalition of shared interests. Reconciling the importance of Lenape presence in Manahatta with the needs of existing residents will be critical to the success of the project.

Skwachays Lodge
K'emk'emeláy̓ "Vancouver," Canada

Next, the Skwachays Lodge in Vancouver, Canada presents a possible funding structure where Indigenous entrepreneurship takes on cultural initiatives in an urban context. Owned and operated by a registered nonprofit, – the lodge is an Indigenous social enterprise that combines a boutique hotel with on-site housing, studio, and gallery space for Indigenous artists with the vision of cultural preservation and empowerment. Skwachays Lodge is able to leverage cultural tourism to directly support Indigenous artists through the income generated by the hotel. From this example, we might consider how the Lenape Center's site could incorporate other uses that provide a source of operational income for the upfront cost of development and ongoing maintenance.



Taitung Aboriginal Gallery
Taitung, Taiwan

Taitung Aboriginal Gallery
Taitung, Taiwan

Taitung Aboriginal Gallery
Taitung, Taiwan

The Bronx Music Hall
Manahatta, Lenapehoking

The Bronx Music Hall
Manahatta, Lenapehoking

The Bronx Music Hall
Manahatta, Lenapehoking

Skwachays Lodge
K’emk’emeláẏ “Vancouver,” Canada

Skwachays Lodge
K’emk’emeláẏ “Vancouver,” Canada

Skwachays Lodge
K’emk’emeláẏ “Vancouver,” Canada

Site Visits

To take our learning outside of the classroom and into the real world, we explored many sites around Manahatta to contextualize our learning with firsthand impressions. Some were educational and related to our studio work, and some were for our own enjoyment of arts and culture in the city. Through these experiences, we began to see examples of colonial narratives everywhere, seeing for ourselves just how deep-rooted these frameworks are.

Chapter 4:
Analysis

Site Selection Model

Selecting a site for the development of a physical Lenape Center in Manhattan within the current New York City planning context is inherently a colonial setting within which our studio had to operate. Existing regulatory frameworks prohibited us from pursuing a fully decolonized planning process. Given this, we grounded our work in planning for coexistence. By planning for coexistence, we recognize the Lenape Center's autonomy to use planning tools on their own terms. Understanding these existing colonial planning systems first allows us to better critique and challenge them, with the ultimate goal of transforming them.

To this end, our site selection research was structured around existing models of Western land ownership as well as development approaches. Each of these models overlap in different ways, and we chose them because they would shape the project process and costs differently, allowing us to more easily analyze the opportunities and challenges they pose to coexistence.

Ownership Model

- **Private:** The most common and straightforward kind of real estate development, private property ownership would offer significant autonomy but is inherently rooted in colonial dispossession. Commodifying the land, it is typically bound by market dynamics that drive up prices to create investment value.

- **Institutional:** A kind of private ownership, institutional owners often receive financial incentives such as tax exemptions. Institutional partners could carry benefits that make the development process easier, but finding the right partner can be a challenge.

- **Public:** Property owned by the government is strictly controlled through various processes and often has a responsibility to serve policy goals. However, public property also has an obligation to serve the public interest and therefore is not strictly a commodity bound to market pricing.

- **Quasi-public:** A hybrid structure of public and private governance, quasi-public property is often owned and operated privately by a particular agency but with a public mandate and government backing. In New York, public benefit corporations share many similarities with government agencies, but are not necessarily constrained by the same regulations.

Development Model

- **New Build:** Building from scratch often takes longer and costs more, but the process is generally more predictable. There is greater design flexibility but a greater environmental impact. Regulatory requirements include a zoning analysis, an environmental impact assessment, permitting, and compliance with building codes.

- **Adaptive Reuse:** Though starting with an existing building can be cheaper and faster upfront, highly variable building conditions can delay timelines and increase costs as unforeseen issues arise. The design would need to work within the existing structure, but adaptive reuse generates less waste. Older buildings must often be brought into code compliance and sometimes face historic or landmark preservation restrictions.

Zoning Analysis

Within this colonial context, our site selection process began with understanding where existing zoning laws would permit the Lenape Center's planned development. The potential site would need to suit the programmatic needs of the Lenape Center, which includes space for greenhouses, symposia, kitchens, recording studios, and sleeping accommodations. Based on this program, we determined that any potential site would need to be zoned under Use Group III which consists of community facility uses, and specifically Use Group IIIA—community facility with sleeping accommodations. Considering the different uses that the Lenape Center wants to include, a space of 20,000 to 30,000 square feet would be appropriate to accommodate the center.

Cost Analysis

Looking at different development approaches, we understood there would be different financial considerations building new on a vacant lot versus adapting an existing building. With guidance from an expert cost consultant, we calculated construction costs for different development types based on the Lenape Center's specific program needs. Estimating the required amount of space for each of the Lenape Center's desired programming, we then applied a gross-up factor to reflect additional operational and facility space. These gross-up factors were slightly different for new build (1.6x) versus adaptive reuse (1.4x) based on the assumption that certain facilities would only be necessary in a new building and not an existing one, such as an elevator.

Not including soft costs, land acquisition, or other site specific considerations, a new building would cost between $1,200 and $1,500 per square foot, while adaptive reuse would cost $750 to $1,000 per square foot. The relative affordability of adaptive reuse accounts for both fewer construction costs as well as more modest square footage needs. These wide ranges reflect the most likely minimum and maximum estimates for different types of development, and the exact cost will ultimately be highly dependent on specific site conditions.

To account for inflation and rising construction costs over time, we factored in a 4.75% annual, compounding cost escalation into our projections. The results showed a consistent and increasing gap between adaptive reuse and new builds. Depending on when pre-planning begins, construction on a vacant lot could range anywhere from $28 million to $55 million, while retrofitting an existing building could cost $15 million up to $32 million.

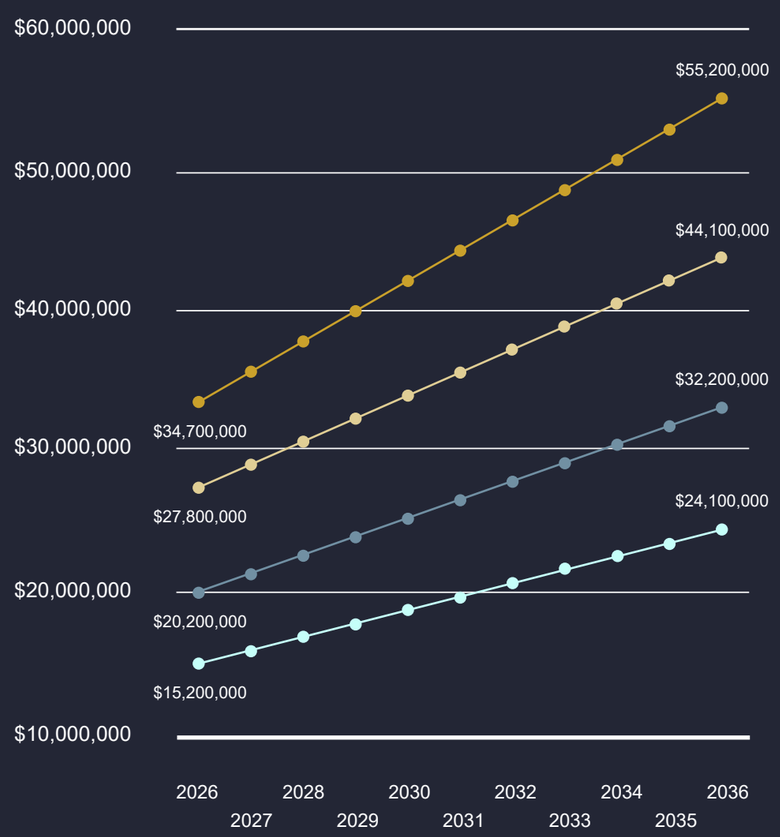
In addition to construction costs, the type of development will impact what opportunities are available for financing both development and ongoing operations. Precedent cases demonstrate how the Lenape Center could pursue a range of funding sources geared towards different causes, from Indigenous-focused grants to programs supporting educational or cultural initiatives. Potential sources of funding can come from public programs, such as grants from agencies like the New York State Council on the Arts; private, nonprofit philanthropic organizations like the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; or even crowdfunding.

Cost Estimation

New Build	Net Area (sqft)	Gross Area (sqft)	Min Cost ($1,200/sf)	Max Cost ($1,500/sf)	Share (%)
Public Program - Performance Center / Lobby / Recording Studio	7,900	12,650	$15,200,000	$19,000,000	55%
Guest Rooms - 19 Unit Guest Room	6,100	9,760	$11,700,000	$14,600,000	42%
Administration Offiices	450	720	$900,000	$1,100,000	3%
Total	**14,450**	**23,130**	**$27,800,000**	**$34,700,000**	**100%**

Adaptive Reuse	Net Area (sqft)	Gross Area (sqft)	Min Cost ($1,200/sf)	Max Cost ($1,500/sf)	Share (%)
Public Program - Performance Center / Lobby / Recording Studio	7,900	11,070	$8,300,000	$11,100,000	55%
Guest Rooms - 19 Unit Guest Room	6,100	8,540	$6,400,000	$8,500,000	42%
Administration Offiices	450	630	$500,000	$600,000	3%
Total	**14,450**	**20,240**	**$15,200,000**	**$20,200,000**	**100%**

Cost Escalation



Model 1: Public
(city-owned parking lot)

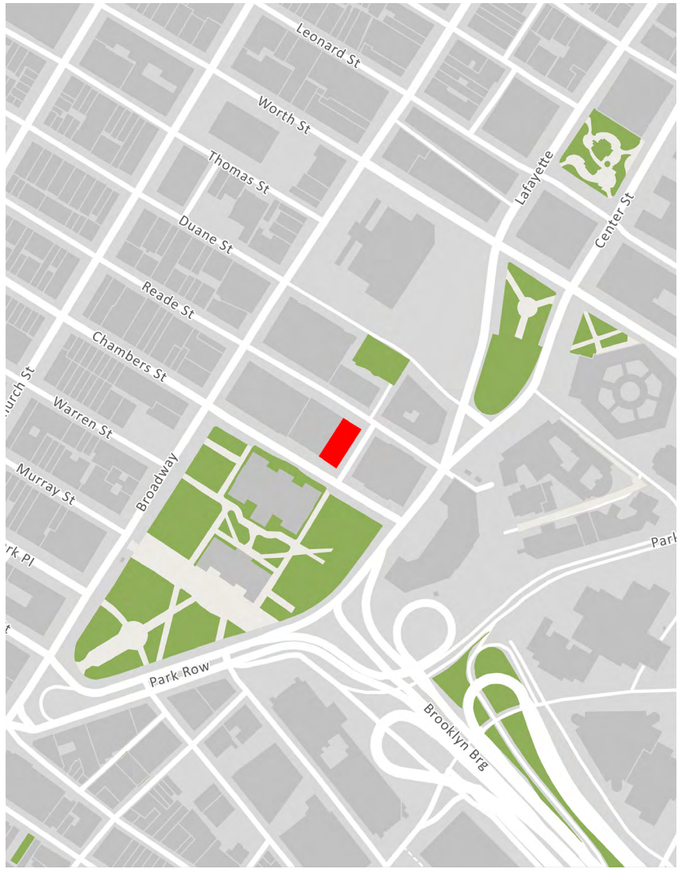
Model Overview

Though developing public property requires time-consuming, complex, and political processes, a meaningful collaboration with the City would increase the Lenape Center's visibility. Given the history of violence and erasure against the Lenape, the disposition of public property for the Lenape Center would represent a significant step towards planning for coexistence.

Analysis

To exemplify the potential of developing the physical Lenape Center on public property, we chose a city-owned parking lot that is currently available for lease. This parking lot is located at the heart of political and administrative power in New York City, right next to City Hall. Near the Brooklyn Bridge, the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, the Holland Tunnel, and served by fourteen Subway lines across several different stations, the surrounding area is highly walkable and transit accessible. Such a central location would dramatically amplify the Lenape Center's visibility. A diverse group frequents the civic center every day. Having the Lenape Center here or in other bustling areas could tell stories about erasure and survival that reach a broad audience, embedding Lenape culture into daily encounters and collective memory.

Zoned as C6-4, typically mapped within the city's major business districts, this site supports commercial use with a maximum floor area ratio (FAR) of 10. With a lot area of 11,000 square feet, a building on this lot could accommodate over 100,000 square feet of space—more than enough for the Lenape Center's planned program. It is now used as the parking lot for the Department of Citywide Administrative Services. Decisions about public property are typically made by the specific agency with jurisdiction over the property in alignment with broader policy goals. Dispositions of public land typically occur through public auctions, requests for Proposals (RFPs), and the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP). While these processes can often be competitive, with many different visions for any given site, public property does not have to be bound to market pricing. The Irish Arts Center in Hell's Kitchen "bought" their site from the City for $1, though this took decades to achieve and support from the local council member was critical to the success of the project.



Site Location
Elk St, New York

Zoning

- Commerical Districts
- Parks

Developments involving city-owned properties or receiving funding from public agencies bear additional requirements that private developments do not which must be factored into project planning and procurement strategies. Public developments typically entail much higher standards for public contractors, including adherence to prevailing wage standards and minimum participation of Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprises (M/WBE), which may create a less competitive bid environment.

Understanding that this site is not a blank slate as colonial planning frameworks so often claim, it is important to consider how different layers of history are overlaid on a site like this. Adjacent to the African Burial Ground National Monument, this parking lot sits above a portion of the largest colonial-era cemetery of the enslaved African people that built much of Manahatta.

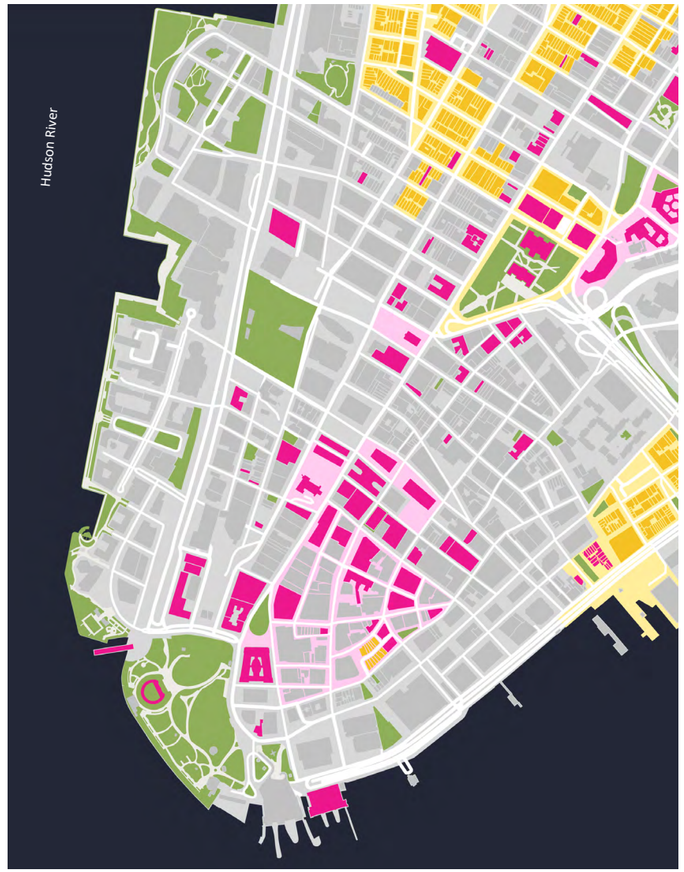
Located above an historical African Burial Ground, any development on this site would require careful archeological excavation and reinterment to care for the remains of those buried. This process not only extends the project timeline to undertake the significant community engagement that is necessary to respect such a sensitive topic, but it also increases costs relative to sites without such historical significance.

This parking lot presents a compelling opportunity for solidarity between the present-day descendants of two histories that have been intentionally erased by colonial governments, however this partnership should not come at the expense of the specificity of these different stories. Decisions about this burial ground should ultimately be led by Black community leaders, and whether or not the Lenape Center chooses to collaborate on such a complex development, this site challenges selective colonial narratives. This land deserves to be more than a parking lot.

This model could be applied to other available city-owned properties, for example, a stand-alone community facility at 154 Eldridge Street or a mixed-use development at 390 Grand Street in the Lower East Side. 390 Grand St is owned by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development and will likely be turned into affordable housing, but the Lenape Center could occupy the ground floor of a housing development. In addition to garnering city council support, pursuing uses that incorporate city-wide policy goals like affordable housing might facilitate the process for a public development.

Conclusion

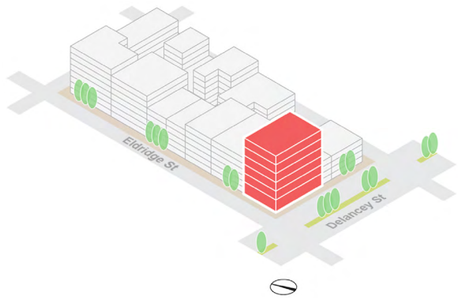
In times of uncertainty, developing a Lenape Center on public property may pose challenges, especially in terms of time and complexity of the process. However, this model presents meaningful opportunities to build relationships with the City to advance Lenape political visibility, reflecting Lenape presence in Manahatta as a priority. Lenape culture has outlived every past municipal administration and will continue to outlive all future ones.

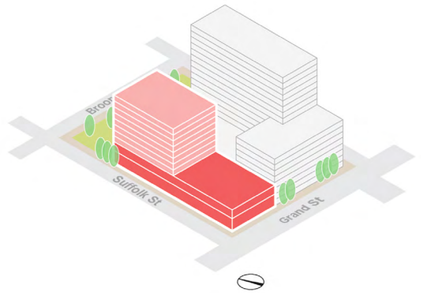


Lower Manhattan Landmarks

0 0.1 mile

- Landmark Building
- Individual Landmark
- Historic District Building
- Historic District





Lenape Center

Affordable Housing

154 Eldridge St

Block:	415
Development Lot(s):	1
Zoning District:	C6-2A
Special District:	N/A

Site Area

154 Eldridge St	3,201 SF
Total Development Area:	3,201 SF

Permitted Area	**FAR**	**Area**
Residential	6	19,206 SF
Commercial	6	19,206 SF
Maximum Mixed Use Total:		19,206 SF

390 Grand St

Block:	346
Development Lot(s):	1
Zoning District:	C2-5
Special District:	N/A

Site Area

154 Eldridge St	15,485 SF
Total Development Area:	15,485 SF

Permitted Area	**FAR**	**Area**
Residential	6	92,910 SF
Commercial	6	92,910 SF
Maximum Mixed Use Total:		92,910 SF

Model 2: Institutional
(Columbia vacant lots)

Model Overview

With the possibility to pursue a development as-of-right, institutional property presents a model that offers the Lenape Center a potentially more manageable process. A typology of private ownership that offers certain additional benefits, institutional development could leverage partnerships to create paths for coexistence in ways that traditional private ownership cannot.

Analysis

Partnering with private landowners and institutions offers a unique avenue for development built on strengthening partnerships. Columbia University is the largest private landowner in New York City with 320 properties valued at almost $4 billion – all while paying very little in property taxes thanks to an exemption written into the state constitution 200 years ago. Columbia University was founded as “King’s College” and established by royal charter of King George II of England. Derived from the explorer Christpher Columbus, the University’s very name tacitly celebrates the arrival of European settlers and the subsequent atrocities and dispossession of Lenape and other Native peoples. While a plaque on Columbia’s campus acknowledges Lenape “displacement, dispossession, and continued presence,” the University is uniquely situated to translate these well-intentioned words into meaningful action.

The Lenape Center has already partnered with Columbia, not just through urban planning studios at GSAPP the last two years, but also with the Columbia Teachers College, where they co-developed a curriculum exploring the experiences of the Lenape people throughout history and today. Collaboration on the part of an institution like Columbia would represent a concrete action toward a more lived commitment to acknowledging its location in Lenapehoking and how the university continues to benefit from the colonial dispossession of the Lenape. While most of Columbia’s real estate decisions are based on programmatic needs, there is precedent for the donation of university-owned space for non-university use. The university claims that it has an obligation to follow a transparent process to address community needs and benefits with its real estate decisions, but no such process seems to exist. The University continues to expand its reach into Harlem and Manahattanville against community concerns over gentrification and displacement. In reality, having the support of a trustee would be one of the best approaches to make this kind of appeal.

Columbia University is the largest private landowner in New York City

Columbia Owned Properties

In addition to its portfolio of real estate for academic use, administration, and student life, Columbia currently owns two adjacent underutilized lots in Inwood. In 2018, the city rezoned the neighborhood to encourage affordable housing development and commercial growth. Despite disapproval by Community Board 12, citing concerns about gentrification and insufficient guarantees for affordable housing, the rezoning was passed by the City Council. While the area west of the subway line was largely residential to begin with, the eastern side has a much more industrial character and is home to an MTA rail yard. There is a significant disparity in median household income between the neighborhoods on either side of the Subway line, and Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine has identified the site as a potential location for future housing development. While both the City and Columbia have issued RFPs for affordable housing projects on these lots, no plans have materialized.

In a Mandatory Inclusionary Housing area, any development at this site would require an affordable housing component to address the surrounding community's needs. In a C6 zoning district, a mixed-used project could accommodate both housing and the Lenape Center. Depending on the space needs, the two lots could be combined through a lot merger. All of these opportunities are possible as-of-right without the need for discretionary approval.

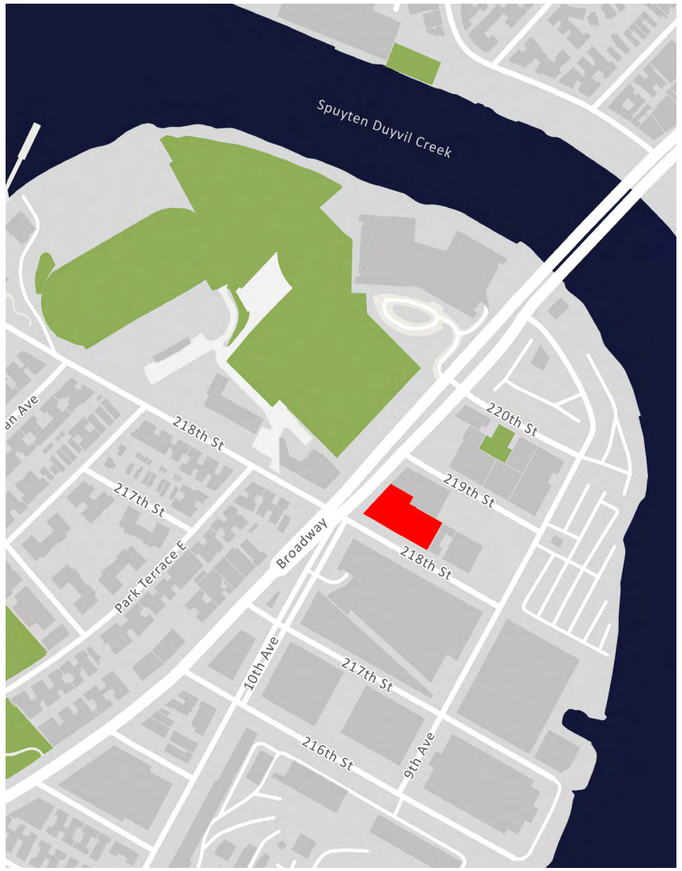
Incorporating housing would inevitably increase the scale of the project, but it would also create opportunities for cost sharing between the different uses. An affordable housing project would also access greater public funding opportunities, including programs such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, the National Housing Trust Fund (HTC). While the future of federal grant programs may be uncertain under the current administration, developing the physical Lenape Center in combination with other uses creates opportunities for meeting surrounding community needs while offering some financial benefits.

The site's proximity to an elevated subway presents another factor that will impact a potential project's overall cost. Development on this site would require MTA review and special building requirements to mitigate noise and vibration, among other considerations. As these lots are near a flood zone, the site may also require flood resilience measures. These environmental and regulatory requirements may extend the project timeline and increase associated costs.

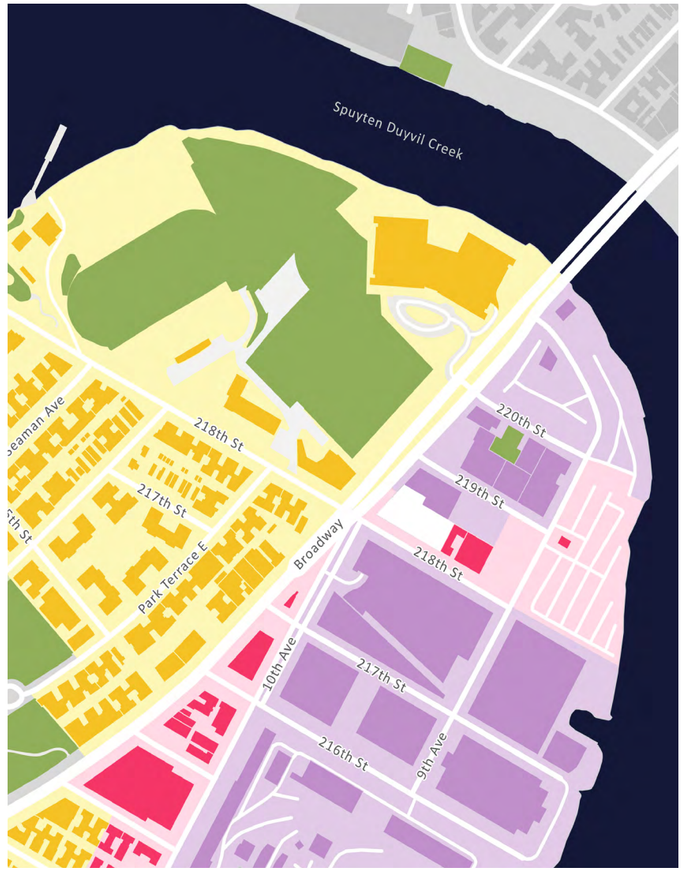
Though Inwood is transit accessible via the 1 train, it is not centrally located, posing potential challenges to the visibility and accessibility of a physical Lenape Center. However, the area does bear additional cultural and ecological significance. Inwood Hill Park is home to Manahatta's last remaining salt marsh, the last old growth trees on the island, and the historic Lenape caves. Moreover, the notorious plaque commemorating the fictitious "sale of Manahatta" is located in Inwood Hill Park. Proximity to this park would not only offer public space for the Lenape Center's outdoor program but also stand as a powerful affirmation of Lenape presence in Manahatta today despite ongoing colonial erasure.

Conclusion

Institutional partners, like Columbia, present an opportunity for an enduring collaboration that goes beyond education into real action, especially if the Lenape Center is able to gain support from a trustee or other university leader. Collaboration like this could serve as a model for other colleges and universities, particularly land-grant universities, across the country to reckon with their histories.

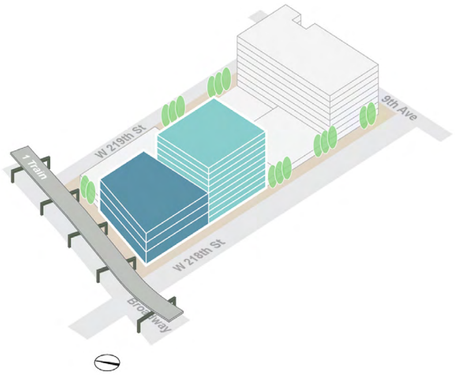


Site Location
425 W 218 St + 5094 Broadway



Zoning

- Commerical Districts
- Residence Districts
- Manufacturing Districts
- Parks



Lenape Center
Affordable Housing

425 W 218 St + 5094 Broadway

Block:	2214
Development Lot(s):	2
Zoning District:	C6-2
Special District:	Special Inwood District

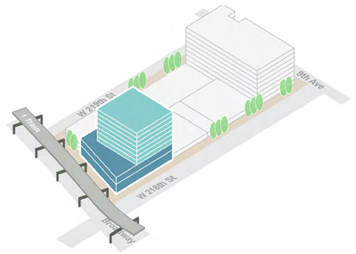
Site Area

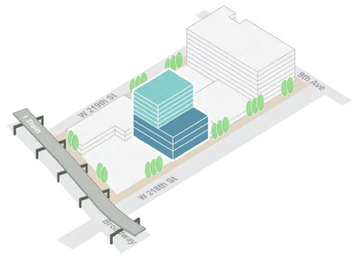
1425 W 218 St	10,000 SF
5094 Broadway	17,655 SF
Total Development Area:	27,655 SF

Permitted Area	**FAR**	**Area**
Residential	6	165,930 SF
Commercial	6	165,930 SF

Maximum Mixed Use Total: 165,930 SF

Other possibilities





Model 3: Quasi-Public
(Governors Island)

Model Overview

Strong partnerships are similarly an important component developing quasi-public property, a unique category of hybrid governance between public and private entities. This model of partnership would offer the Lenape Center a blend of structure, flexibility, and collaboration.

Analysis

One example of a quasi-public model can be found on Governors Island. Receiving almost one million visitors each year, Governors Island is a 172-acre historic landmark in New York Harbor, administratively part of Manhattan but physically separated from Manahatta. The island was originally called Pagganck," meaning nut island, which Dutch settlers translated into "Nooten Eylandt." Since colonization, the island has been used for military and civic purposes and in 1985 was declared a National Historic Landmark District. In 2003, ownership of the island transferred from the federal government to the Trust for Governors Island, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established by the City of New York to manage the majority of the land as a public asset for residents and visitors. In addition to its open space and historic amenities, the Island offers 1.3 million square feet of historic buildings ready to be leased through adaptive reuse and 33 acres of fully entitled development area that can accommodate new academic, commercial, convening, and cultural facilities.

Who governs Governors Island?

- The Trust for Governors Island
- The National Park Service
- The Governors Island Foundation

Divided into northern and southern sub-districts, a series of rezonings have transformed the development opportunities on the Island. A 2013 rezoning allowed for a wide range of uses in the North Island Historic District. Historic buildings in the northern district are available for lease through the Trust's real estate team for cultural, educational, and convening purposes among others. In 2021, the southern district was rezoned from low-density residential (R3-2) to commercial (C4-1) to create a mid-density mixed-use district supporting up to 4.5 million square feet of new development through a public RFP (request for proposals) process. Extending the permitted uses from the northern district, the southern district rezoning also allows for research and light manufacturing in two designated development areas.

Site Location
Governors Island

0 250 feet

Zoning

0 250 feet

- Commerical Districts
- Residence Districts
- Parks

To be anchored by an educational or research center, these Western and Eastern Development Zones will pursue academic, commercial, non-profit, cultural, convening, and hospitality users, with a special requirement to support the development of a center for climate solutions. Only permitting additional FAR in these designated development subareas, the park space in the middle of the South Island Special District would be preserved and additional open space is required with any new development.

Zoning in both the Northern District (R3-2) and the Southern District (C4-1) could support the Lenape Center's planned program encompassed in Use Group III. A physical Lenape Center could take multiple shapes on Governors Island, with leases for adaptive reuse in the Northern District presenting a nearer-term opportunity. Offering a range of building types and sizes, thirty-six of the fifty-two existing buildings on the north island are currently listed for lease on the Trust's website. Adopting a "campus style" development across multiple buildings would offer the Lenape Center increased flexibility to scale or progressively develop its presence according to programming needs and available funding. For example, a combination of buildings along Colonel's Row could be adapted for the Lenape Center's program. Buildings 409 and 410 combined represent a potential option, with Building 409 large enough to accommodate the public program and Building 410 suitably sized for guest rooms.

The condition of existing properties on the island varies significantly. Any adaptive reuse project would require an assessment to ensure compliance with building codes and accessibility standards. Exterior modifications must be reviewed by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, although internal renovations are typically exempt. Retrofit costs will vary based on the condition of the selected property. Transportation and logistics present unique challenges for any development on Governors Island. All construction materials and labor must be transported by ferry or other shipment methods, with additional trucks required to move supplies on and off the island. These logistical constraints are likely to increase both the complexity and cost of the project.

In addition to construction challenges, the Island's distance from Manahatta would affect a potential physical center's accessibility as it requires a ferry to reach. The relative remoteness of the location makes this site a less convenient option for Lenape Center co-directors and their guests in addition to mitigating potential visibility to a wider audience. However, the Lenape Center's outdoor programming, including seed rematriation powwows, and stomp dances, would benefit from convenient access to the Island's extensive open space, which is more challenging to accommodate in Manahatta's dense built environment.

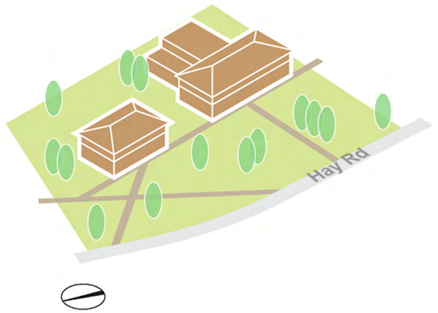
Other than adaptive reuse, the Lenape Center could also become an Organization in Residence on Governors Island, leasing space to host public programs, artist residencies, and cultural events. This would allow them to showcase Indigenous art, storytelling, and workshops while engaging visitors in activities that celebrate Lenape heritage.

Conclusion

A quasi-public governance structure could foster flexible partnerships that align with the Lenape Center's collaborative approach. Whether on Governors Island, at Pier A near Battery Park, or elsewhere in Lenapehoking, this model offers opportunities to plan with coexistence in mind, balancing the Lenape Center's vision and needs with development feasibility.

Access to Governors Island

0 0.5 mile



Lenape Center
Available Space

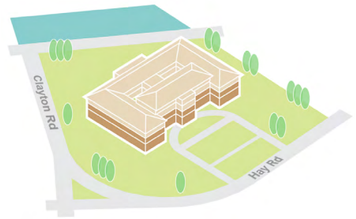
Building 409 + Building 410

Block:	N/A
Development Lot(s):	N/A
Zoning District:	R3-2
Special District:	Special Governors Island District

Building Area

Building 410	5,518 SF
Building 409	15,623 SF
Total Development Area:	21,141 SF

Other possibility



Chapter 5: Continuance

The efforts towards building a physical and enduring representation of Lenape culture and heritage in Manahatta will be an ongoing process. These models each represent a different approach to development, and each has their own challenges and opportunities that will be important for the Lenape Center to weigh and consider.

Future 400

Even as we work to collectively imagine a future rooted in Indigenous perspectives and the continued presence of Lenape people in Manahatta, others continue to perpetuate harmful and misleading narratives echoing colonial visions for the future. In 2024, the Kingdom of the Netherlands unveiled a new cultural initiative called *Future 400*, a celebration honoring the arrival of Dutch settlers and four centuries of their "contributions" to New York City's history. While advertising their intention to "candidly and meaningfully address the past" and "incorporat[e] perspectives that go beyond the Eurocentric," the glossy initiative deploys progressive language without critically engaging with the historical horrors of Dutch and European colonization in Lenapehoking. With dozens of institutional collaborators, *Future 400* does not include a single Indigenous partnership. Worse yet, representatives of the Dutch Government repeatedly snubbed the Lenape Center, refusing to issue any formal apology for their historical role in colonizing Lenapehoking.

In response, this studio proposes an alternative vision for *Future 400* – a vision for the next four centuries that truly centers the continued presence of Lenape peoples, culture, and knowledge in guiding the future of New York City. As aspiring urban planners, we must learn from the past with humility and honesty while charting new paths into the future. What alternative modes of planning theory and praxis are needed to achieve this vision? What would it mean to truly center Lenape values and perspectives in planning? How can we imagine the role of the planner beyond the limitations of contemporary planning paradigms?

Continuance

The development of a Lenape Center to bring long overdue attention and visibility to Lenape heritage and culture in Lenapehoking is one crucial step in the direction towards this alternate Future 400. While the struggle for decolonization and reconciliation is a longer term process, there are immediate, actionable steps that could be taken to strengthen Indigenous connections to Manahatta and help redress the harms of the past. To move this work forward, we propose five key recommendations:

1. First, issue a formal apology to acknowledge historical and ongoing harms—this simple gesture is a necessary first step in building trust, foregrounding future collaboration, and dispelling widespread historical inaccuracies that continue to perpetuate Lenape erasure.

2. Second, embed Indigenous consultation into core planning processes like ULURP, public land disposition, and environmental review. Consultation here must mean real, meaningful participation in decision-making and would likely require a revision to the New York City Charter.

3. Third, create accessible public education initiatives to build broader awareness and understanding of Lenape histories, Indigenous rights, and Native contributions to New York City. The process of (un)learning is a necessary and crucial component in the ongoing effort to subvert Lenape erasure and affirm their continued presence in Lenapehoking.

4. Fourth, develop and advance ecological and cultural programs that promote restoration of natural areas and seed rematriation in partnership with city agencies like Parks, NYCHA, DOT, and DEP. Seeds are far more than commodified technologies of industrial agriculture. According to the Lenape, seeds are “lost relatives with cultural resonance that can heal the historical traumas of separation from home and erasure of presence.”

5. And finally, deepen relationships with community boards and local City Council members to build political momentum and ensure lasting support. Without support of local elected officials and the community, it would be significantly more difficult to achieve a physical center on city-owned or quasi-public land.

As future urban planners, we still have much to learn from Lenape culture, art, wisdom, and knowledge. What the Lenape have always known and lived by is only recently becoming widely accepted through ecology, conservation, biology, and regenerative practices that urban planners can no longer afford to overlook. Our ability to redress the harms of the past, to center Indigenous knowledge and specifically Lenape perspectives in our work as planners, is not just a moral imperative – it is a matter of ensuring our collective and continued presence for generations to come.

Who we are (Studio):
The authors section

Each of us comes from a unique and different background that informs our approach to the work. The Lenape Center has taught us that partnerships can be a seed for continuance, so we have sought to be intentional about how we work together and with others. We value collaboration, as our work would not have been possible without those who came before us.


Charlie Back

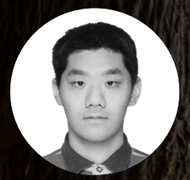

Anna Carl


Kelly Eta


Tata Hirunviriya


Jane Hutton


Sarah Kim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Jerry Zhou

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