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**TRANSMITTAL COVER SHEET**

Date of Transmittal: 12 May 2009

Sent To: Peter Biagiotti

From: Steve Oberon

**Contents:**

Revised proposal for supplementary Phase IB sampling at Riverfront Development site.

**Comments:**

This is what the others have. Hopefully it is now sufficiently detailed for Ms. Blakemore.

**RECEIVED**

MAY 14 2009

**U.W. MARX INC.**

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## **PROPOSAL FOR SUPPLEMENTARY PHASE IB ARCHAEOLOGICAL SAMPLING PROPOSED RIVERFRONT DEVELOPMENT CITY OF RENSSELAER, RENSSELAER COUNTY, NEW YORK**

**21 April 2009**

The initial component of a Phase IB Site Identification Survey was performed in 2008 to determine whether proposed construction might affect intact cultural resources pertaining to the Native and/or the European American era of occupation. A series of mechanically-assisted trenches dug across the affected area indicated all construction impact with the exception of driven pilings would be restricted to the railroad-related fill material that was found to underlie the entire property. A fragment of a large early 20th century roundhouse building was identified under fill in a subarea where no excavation is planned and the location and particulars of this historic structure remnant were recorded on a historic site inventory form to be included in the historic and archaeological site files maintained by the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) at Peebles Island. No project impact was anticipated for possible culture-bearing soils underlying the extensive fill deposit, which was noted to exceed 14 feet.

Project plans developed concurrent with the Phase IB investigation now include construction of a marina adjacent to the Hudson River in the west-central portion of the affected area and would entail removal of all fill and underlying soils to below the level of the river. This raises the potential for project impact to any archaeological remains that might be present beneath the fill in that area, which encompasses approximately 1.9 acres not created by 19th and 20th century deposition to extend the riverbank to the west. A supplementary program of Phase IB field investigation is required to determine whether proposed marina construction is likely to cause impact to intact cultural remains. During consultation with representatives of OPRHP and the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), it was suggested that the soils beneath the footprint of the former Rensselaer Central School building, which included a basement extending some 14 feet below the ground surface, also be investigated to shed light on the potential for the presence of native and early Dutch settlement era cultural remains. Sampling of this subarea is therefore also included in this proposal.

Using information gathered from 19th and early 20th century maps, the accompanying graphic was created reconstructing the shore line of the land form known at various times since the arrival of Europeans in the seventeenth century as Van Rensselaer, Calebacker's and DeLaet's Island and depicting the extent of subsequently made land relative to proposed development. The western portion of the area for which the marina is planned was noted to lie to the west of the former shoreline of the island and is characterized by fill deposited in the former river channel during the 19th and early 20th century to increase the amount of usable land surface. A series of geoprobes will be used to identify the presence and more clearly define the extent of upper soils possibly pre-dating the 19th century. This subsurface sampling method, mechanically executed using a hollow drill mounted on a rubber-tired or track vehicle, will be carried out by a specialist experienced technician and the data it produces will be interpreted by a professional geomorphologist familiar with soils present along this part of the Hudson River.

Demolition of the school building in the Autumn of 2008 included removal of the concrete floor of the basement that underlay the structure and the partial filling of the building footprint. We propose to now dig a series of five to six mechanically-assisted trenches at representative locations within the existing foundation footprint. In order to comply with operative safety requirements, excavation will proceed at a ratio of one foot dug horizontally for each vertical foot. We will temporarily remove whatever fill is encountered to expose the soils present beneath the former school building. Fill that is present should be recorded by the geoprobe sampling and will be removed to the depth of original soils by controlled excavation that will involve stripping in four- to six-inch levels. A 20-foot wide sampling transect will be exposed. Once this has been completed, transects of hand-dug shovel tests will be placed across the exposed area at 26-foot intervals. Shovel test hole contents will be screened through 1/4-inch hardware cloth to facilitate the recovery of smaller cultural items. The locations of any positive shovel tests that yield possible pre-1840 material will be marked for further investigation. This will involve the more intensive archaeological sampling of such subareas and include additional consultation with OPRHP, the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), and ACOE staff.

A similar method of archaeological field sampling would be implemented for the proposed marina site. Here, the logistical constraints presented by the presence of some 14 feet of heavy fill across the entire impact area also require removal of the overburden. Using the data produced by the geoprobes as a guide, fill in areas above water prior the the 19th century would again be mechanically removed from a series of transects, along which the archaeological sampling would then take place. The overburden that has been removed from each transect would be deposited alongside the excavated area, and the trench walls would again be sloped at a 1:1 vertical-to-horizontal ratio to prevent slumping or collapse while field work is taking place. The trenches will be placed as near to one another as feasible and as many hand-dug shovel tests as feasible will again be executed at 26-foot intervals once the overburden has been removed.

For both sampling subareas, any soil anomalies encountered on the exposed ground surface or in the shovel tests that might constitute cultural features will be further investigated. Any cultural features or potentially intact structural remains identified will be marked for additional investigation as part of a Phase II site evaluation study, whose scope and methodology would be determined in consultation with OPRHP and ACOE staff. Field work will be conducted when ground conditions are suitable. Any intact cultural remains and other cultural information encountered will be shared with Dr. Paul Huey and Shirley Dunn, both of whom have expressed great interest in the investigation of this former island and whose expertise would be very helpful in assessing what has been found and how most profitably to direct any additional field and/or research efforts.