

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines whether the Proposed Action would adversely impact the neighborhood character of the area surrounding the Project Site. Neighborhood character is an amalgam of the many factors that combine to give an area its distinctive personality. These components include land use, scale and type of development, historic features, patterns and volumes of traffic, noise levels, and other physical or social characteristics that help define a community. Not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; rather, a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few determining elements.

This analysis finds that the implementation of the Proposed Project would result in a substantial land use change on the Project Site with the development of a new shopping center and increased vehicular traffic and transit activity. However, these changes would not result in a significant adverse impact on the combined elements that define the neighborhood character of the study area, as discussed below.

B. METHODOLOGY

According to the 2001 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when the action would exceed preliminary thresholds in any one of the following areas of technical analysis: land use, urban design, visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomic conditions, traffic, or noise. An assessment is also appropriate when the action would have moderate effects on several of the aforementioned areas. Potential effects on neighborhood character may include:

- *Land Use:* When development resulting from the proposed actions would have the potential to change neighborhood character by introducing a new, incompatible land use; conflicting with land use policy or other public plans for the area; changing land use character; or resulting in significant land use impacts.
- *Socioeconomic Conditions.* Changes in socioeconomic conditions have the potential to affect neighborhood character when they result in substantial direct or indirect displacement; a substantial increase in population, employment, or businesses; or substantial differences in population or employment density.
- *Historic Resources.* When an action would result in substantial direct changes to a historic (architectural) resource or substantial changes to public views of a resource, or when a historic resources analysis identifies a significant impact, there is a potential to affect neighborhood character.
- *Urban Design and Visual Resources:* In developed areas, urban design changes have the potential to affect neighborhood character by introducing substantially different building bulk, form, size, scale, or arrangement. Urban design changes may also affect block forms, street

patterns, or street hierarchies, and streetscape elements such as streetwalls, landscaping, and curbcuts. Visual resource changes have the potential to affect neighborhood character by directly changing visual features such as unique and important public view corridors and vistas, or public visual access to such features.

- *Traffic and Pedestrians.* Changes in traffic and pedestrian conditions can affect neighborhood character in a number of ways. For traffic to have an effect on neighborhood character, it must be a contributing element to the character of the neighborhood (either by its absence or its presence), and it must change substantially as a result of the action. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, such changes can include: changes in level of service (LOS) to C or below; changes in traffic patterns; changes in roadway classifications; changes in vehicle mixes; substantial increases in traffic volumes on residential streets; or significant traffic impacts. Regarding pedestrians, when a proposed action would result in substantially different pedestrian activity and circulation, it has the potential to affect neighborhood character.
- *Noise.* According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, for an action to affect neighborhood character in regards to noise, it would need to result in a significant adverse noise impact and a change in acceptability category.

The analysis considers the potential effects on areas within ¼ mile of the Project Site (see Figure 9-1).

C. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Project Site is located in southeast Brooklyn in the undeveloped portion of the Fresh Creek Urban Renewal Area (FCURA). The site is bounded by Flatlands Avenue to the north, Fountain Avenue to the east, the Gateway Center to south, and Hendrix Creek to the west, and also includes an undeveloped parcel south of the Brooklyn Developmental Center.

LAND USE, ZONING, AND PUBLIC POLICY

The Project Site is vacant except for two paved streets (Elton Street and Vandalia Avenue) and the 184 units of Nehemiah housing that are under construction.

The developed portion of the FCURA is primarily defined by large-scale uses, including the Gateway Center, the Brooklyn Developmental Center, the Thomas Jefferson High School Athletic Field, and Spring Creek Park. Several other large utility and institutional uses nearby emphasize this character, including the 26th Ward Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP), the Spring Creek Auxiliary WPCP, and the Spring Creek Bus Depot.

The study area around the Project Site and FCURA is characterized by a mix of land uses, including residential, industrial, and open space. The residential uses are characterized by a broad range of height and bulk. To the west of the Project Site is Starrett City, a high-rise residential development with 46 towers ranging from 11 to 20 stories. To the northwest, mid-rise residential developments mix with several blocks of two- to three-story single- and multi-family rowhouses between Schenk Avenue and Elton Street. Multi-family rowhouses and three-story apartment buildings are located north and east of the site.

A large cluster of industrial uses, including warehousing, distribution, food processing, and light manufacturing is located in the Flatlands Fairfield Industrial Business Zone (IBZ). This area is bounded by Flatlands Avenue, Fountain Avenue, Elton Street, and Linden Boulevard. Other

warehouse and distribution uses are located near the western boundary of the study area along Louisiana Avenue. There is a lack of streetscape amenities in this industrial area. Because of the lack of retail activity in the area, it is not well-traveled by cars or pedestrians and appears underutilized.

South of Shore Parkway are two former landfills that will be developed as open space. The area includes the 62-acre Spring Creek Park and the Fountain Avenue Landfill, now capped and awaiting restoration as a park.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The Project Site is largely vacant. The study area has experienced a decrease in population since 1990. The study area population has a higher percentage of residents over 50 and under 18 compared with Brooklyn and New York City as a whole. In general, the residents are also lower income; the median household income in 2000 was lower than both Brooklyn and New York City's median household income and a higher percentage of residents were living below the poverty line. According to 2000 Census data, almost 17,000 workers were employed at businesses or institutions within the Census Tracts that are part of the study area, with a significant portion of this employment concentrated in sectors associated with industrial uses as well as the education, health, and social services sectors.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

The Project Site does not contain any known or potential architectural resources.

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

The built environment of the study area consists of low- to mid-rise buildings with a mix of arrangements. In general, low-scale residential uses are set back from the street behind paved or landscaped areas while large-scale uses are freestanding buildings surrounded by parking lots and open spaces. Industrial uses, such as those located in the Flatlands-Fairfield IBZ, are low-rise buildings with large footprints that are built either to the lot line or set back with parking. The street pattern in the study area is predominately rectilinear, with streets running generally north-south and avenues extending east-west.

There are no visual resources on the Project Site or views to visual resources located beyond the Project Site. Views are long along Flatlands Avenue, Fountain Avenue, and Schenck Avenue although they do not contain any prominent natural features or historic buildings. Gateway Center, Spring Creek Park, the Fountain Avenue Landfill, and Starrett City dominate views from the Shore Parkway.

TRAFFIC AND PEDESTRIANS

In general, pedestrian activity is light in the neighborhood and most trips are made by auto or transit. Key north-south streets include Erskine Street, Pennsylvania Avenue, and Fountain Avenue, and important east-west routes include the Shore Parkway, Gateway Drive, and Flatlands Avenue. Traffic volumes are heaviest during weekday PM rush hours, and intersections in the study area generally function at acceptable overall levels of service. Along the Shore Parkway, traffic is heaviest during the weekday PM peak hour and lightest during the weekday midday peak hour. The study area is also served by three subway lines and three bus routes. In addition, the Project Site has a variety of pedestrian facilities as a result of the 1996

Plan, such as a pedestrian/biking path through Spring Creek Park and new sidewalks that are in excellent condition but are lightly used.

NOISE

Existing noise levels in the study area are generally low. Noise measurements taken on Erskine Avenue and Elton Street indicated low ambient noise levels on these side streets. In contrast, measurements taken on Flatlands Avenue, a major thoroughfare in the study area, indicated moderate to high noise levels (higher than the rest of the study area). Ambient noise from traffic on the Shore Parkway is generally not audible in the study area.

D. 2011 THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTION

Absent the Proposed Action, the Project Site will be developed according to the 1996 Plan. By 2011, this will result in the construction of Nehemiah at Spring Creek, a residential development with 378 units. As described above, 184 of these units are currently under construction, and 194 are in advanced planning stages.

In the surrounding neighborhood, defined as approximately ¼ mile from the Project Site, one commercial development will be completed by 2011. This development, a shopping center at 830 Fountain Avenue, is expected to be complete by the end of 2008.

LAND USE, ZONING, AND PUBLIC POLICY

These projects reflect the neighborhood's trend toward an increasingly mixed-use and residential character. There will not be a substantial change to land use patterns in the neighborhood.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

No change to socioeconomic conditions in the neighborhood is expected in the future without the Proposed Action.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

As discussed above in Section C "Existing Conditions," there are no known or potential architectural resources on the Project Site.

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

As described above, these projects reflect the neighborhood's trend toward an increasingly mixed-use and residential character. There will not be a substantial change to urban design patterns in the neighborhood.

TRAFFIC AND PEDESTRIANS

These projects are not expected to affect the level of service on nearby subways or buses. However, this development will result in the creation of new streets and intersections on the Project Site pursuant to the 1996 Plan. In addition, these projects will increase traffic volumes, and some intersections with previously acceptable levels of service will become somewhat congested. The Shore Parkway will experience moderate increases in traffic volume.

NOISE

Ambient noise levels in the neighborhood will increase slightly, but moderate and high noise levels will continue to be confined to the study area's major thoroughfares. Noise levels on side streets are expected to remain low.

E. 2011 PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The first phase of the Proposed Project would be constructed on the site by 2011, which would result in 1,027 residential units, a 630,000-square-foot shopping center, 68,000 square feet (sf) of local retail, and accessory parking spaces on the Project Site. Compared to the 2011 No Build Condition, the Proposed Action results in 649 more housing units and 698,000 square feet more retail space within the FCURA.

The shopping center would be constructed north of the existing Gateway Center and would consist of one- and two-story buildings with large floor plates. Residential and local retail uses would be constructed along Elton Street in six- and seven-story buildings with retail on the ground floor and residences above. Elton Street would serve as the main thoroughfare for pedestrians, and would terminate with a small plaza and town center with one- and two-story retail buildings. Gateway Drive and Erskine Street would be the main access points to the shopping center for vehicles.

LAND USE, ZONING, AND PUBLIC POLICY

While the Proposed Action would result in a different land use plan than was proposed in the 1996 Plan, vacant and underutilized land would be replaced with housing and retail, furthering the revitalization that the FCURP was intended to bring about and continuing the neighborhood's trend toward a more residential and mixed-use character. In addition, the new retail would complement the existing retail at Gateway Center, the new retail development at 830 Fountain Avenue, and existing local retail.

As discussed in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," conflicts between land uses would be minimized under the Proposed Action. Existing industrial uses in the neighborhood are part of the Flatlands Fairfield IBZ and would continue to be protected by policies for the preservation of industry. The shopping center would be constructed on the southern portion of the Project Site, adjacent to the existing Gateway Center, and the shopping center's 2,067-space accessory parking lot would be screened from surrounding residential areas by trees and vegetated swales. The Proposed Action would also not conflict with the predominant zoning classifications or land use public policy in the area. While the proposed residential zoning may seem like a contrast to the existing manufacturing zones north of the site, the IBZ contains light manufacturing zones that are already adjacent to, and generally do not conflict with, residential zones. In addition, the new residential areas could provide a source of employees for the IBZ.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Although the Proposed Action would result in accelerated residential development and significantly more retail space than proposed under the 1996 Plan, these changes would not significantly alter the socioeconomic profile of the neighborhood. The total number of dwelling units developed would not change; instead, 649 would be introduced two years earlier, in 2011 rather than 2013. All of the additional units introduced in 2011 would be affordable and would not add a substantial new population with different socioeconomic characteristics. In addition,

while the Proposed Action would result in a substantial addition to the retail space of the FCURA compared with the 1996 Plan, the neighborhood already contains a “critical mass” of retail uses in the Gateway Center. Therefore, this addition would not make it any more attractive for residential use. Further, the new retail space is not expected to jeopardize the viability of neighborhood businesses, retail, or industrial uses. As described in Chapter 3, “Socioeconomic Conditions,” there is an outflow of consumer spending from the primary trade area, and the Proposed Project would recapture some of the sales dollars currently flowing out of the trade area. Further, neighborhood businesses would remain more convenient for many shoppers, and nearby retail corridors would offer more neighborhood service stores than are expected under the Proposed Action. Therefore, changes to socioeconomic character would not significantly impact neighborhood character.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

As discussed above in Section C, “Existing Conditions,” there are no known or potential architectural resources on the Project Site.

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

The urban design features of the Proposed Project are expected to be compatible with those of the surrounding neighborhood. The street pattern and block shapes would not be substantially different from what was approved under the 1996 Plan, and the overall streetscape of the area would be improved by developing a large, vacant parcel of land and adding streetscape elements such as landscaping and street lighting. The buildings developed on the Project Site would be in keeping with the height and bulk of buildings in the neighborhood. Like existing residential structures north of the FCURA, some of the proposed residences would be set back from the street while others would be built to the lot line. The shopping center envisioned by the Proposed Project would be similar in bulk and arrangement to the existing Gateway Center. In addition, the parking lot for the expanded shopping center would be built to comply with the Department of City Planning’s (DCP’s) green design standards for parking lots.

While more development would occur by 2011 under the Proposed Action, it would not obstruct any significant views or vistas in the area. The Project Site has no visual resources, and there would be no adverse impact to on-site visual resources. In the surrounding area, the proposed shopping center would not affect views to or from Spring Creek Park, or across Shore Parkway.

TRAFFIC AND PEDESTRIANS

The Proposed Action would result in increased transit trips as compared to the 1996 Plan. In particular, the increases in bus ridership would constitute significant adverse bus line-haul impacts. However, the proposed bus layover facility could result in increased service to the Project Site, and, in any event, bus guideline capacities are not a determining characteristic of the neighborhood. Therefore, the bus-line haul impact would not result in an impact on neighborhood character.

Development of the Proposed Action to 2011 would result in physical changes to the roadway network and increases in traffic volume. The increased traffic volume would constitute a significant adverse traffic impact at a number of intersections, including Erskine Street at Gateway Drive, Fountain Avenue at Flatlands Avenue and at Wortman Avenue, and Flatlands Avenue at Pennsylvania Avenue. However, most automobile traffic would reach the Project Site from thoroughfares designed to accommodate heavy traffic, such as Shore Parkway or other

arterials, and the impacts would be mitigated through a variety of measures. One segment of Shore Parkway would be significantly impacted, but the reduction in speeds would be less than one mph, which would not be noticeable to motorists. Therefore, no significant adverse impact to neighborhood character is expected as a result of potential traffic impacts.

NOISE

Ambient noise levels would increase as a result of the increased traffic in the study area. However, these increases would occur in areas with existing moderate to high noise levels and would not be expected to affect quiet side streets. As such, increased noise levels would not constitute an adverse impact on neighborhood character.

Overall, these changes on the Project Site would not result in a significant adverse impact on the combined elements that define the neighborhood character of the study area.

F. 2013 THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTION

In the 2013 future without the Proposed Action, the FCURA would be fully developed with the 1996 Plan. This would result in a total of 2,385 housing units, professional office space and local retail, new schools and other public/community facilities, the completion of Spring Creek Park, and the construction of three interior parks. In addition, the former Fountain Avenue and Pennsylvania Avenue Landfills south of the site would be converted to parkland.

LAND USE, ZONING, AND PUBLIC POLICY

The additional residential units completed by 2013 without the Proposed Action will further the neighborhood's trend towards greater residential use. The office space and community/public facilities will be compatible with the varied land use context of the neighborhood study area. The 1996 Proposed Project will not result in substantial changes to land use patterns in the neighborhood.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Because the new residential units will be affordable, they will not introduce a population with substantially different socioeconomic characteristics. In addition, the new residents will generate additional demand for retailers in the neighborhood. Therefore, there will not be a substantial change to socioeconomic conditions in the neighborhood.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

As discussed above in Section C, "Existing Conditions," there are no known or potential architectural resources on the Project Site.

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

The development of the FCURA will be beneficial to the urban design of the neighborhood and will not substantially change the urban design patterns of the neighborhood.

TRAFFIC AND PEDESTRIANS

As in 2011, traffic volumes will continue to increase, and additional intersections will become congested. The full development of the 1996 Plan is not expected to affect the level of service on nearby subways or buses.

NOISE

Noise levels will increase, but will continue to be confined to major thoroughfares.

G. 2013 PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

By 2013, the second phase of the Proposed Project would be complete, resulting in a total of 2,385 housing units, a public high school, a day care facility, and other unspecified community/public facilities; and an additional 36.5 acres of publicly accessible open space. Many aspects of the Proposed Project in 2013, including the number of residential units and the amount of open space, would be similar or identical to the 1996 Plan. However, the Proposed Action would include a high school instead of an elementary and intermediate school, no explicitly programmed professional office space (although some could be located in the Proposed Project's local retail space), and a greater number of parking spaces. As with the 1996 Plan, the full implementation of the Proposed Action would complete the transformation of the FCURA from a vacant, underutilized site to a mixed-use center with affordable housing, senior housing, a new shopping center, a town center, community/public facilities, streets, landscaping, and parks.

LAND USE, ZONING, AND PUBLIC POLICY

While this development represents a substantial land use change on the Project Site, the overall effect on neighborhood character would be positive. The Project Site would be linked to the surrounding neighborhood by the main street developed on Elton Street, and the day care center, school, community/public facility, and open space would provide much-needed services for the surrounding area. The land uses would be compatible with uses in the surrounding area and, where necessary, would be buffered from conflicting uses (see Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy").

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The full implementation of the Proposed Action would not significantly alter the socioeconomic profile of the neighborhood. Between 2011 and 2013, 1,358 units would be developed. This is fewer than would be introduced in this time period under the 1996 Plan, but the total number of units in the FCURA would remain at 2,385. Like the units proposed under the 1996 Plan, these units would be affordable and would not add a substantial new population with different socioeconomic characteristics compared to the size and character of the population introduced by the 1996 Plan. Overall, the new population would not be substantially different from the existing population either. The Proposed Action would also not significantly affect competitive stores within the Primary Trade Area or jeopardize the viability of local shopping areas near the Project Site.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

As discussed above in Section C, “Existing Conditions,” there are no known or potential architectural resources on the Project Site.

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

As with the 1996 Plan, the full implementation of the Proposed Action would substantially improve the urban design of the neighborhood. As described above, the FCURA would be transformed from a vacant, overgrown site to a fully developed neighborhood with streetscape elements, open spaces, and a coherent design. The perimeter park would be completed and would include a bike and pedestrian path, grassy areas for both active and passive recreation, and areas of natural and planted vegetation. The street pattern, although it would be slightly different from what was approved in the 1996 Plan, would be in keeping with the pattern in the surrounding area. Like the residences approved in the 1996 Plan, the units built by 2013 would be similar in height and bulk to buildings in the neighborhood and would be built to the lot line to create a consistent streetscape.

TRAFFIC AND PEDESTRIANS

Through 2013, it is expected that the majority of trips to the Project Site would continue to be by auto or transit. Additional traffic generated by development resulting from the Proposed Project would constitute a significant adverse traffic impact at a number of intersections. However, most automobile traffic would reach the Project Site from thoroughfares designed to accommodate heavy traffic, such as Shore Parkway or other arterials, and the impacts would be mitigated through a variety of measures. Therefore, no significant adverse impact to neighborhood character is expected as a result of potential traffic impacts. Similar to 2011, transit capacity will continue to be impacted. Subway stations are expected to operate at acceptable levels of service, but increases in bus ridership would constitute significant adverse bus line-haul impacts. As discussed above, the proposed bus layover facility could mitigate these impacts, and, in any event, bus guideline capacities are not a determining characteristic of the neighborhood. Therefore, the bus-line haul impact would not result in an impact on neighborhood character.

NOISE

Ambient noise levels in the neighborhood would increase, but most increases would occur along arterials as a result of the increased traffic. Quiet side streets in the neighborhood are not expected to experience a significant increase in ambient noise levels. As a result, increased noise levels would not constitute a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

Overall, these changes on the Project Site would not result in a significant adverse impact on the combined elements that define the neighborhood character of the study area. *