

A. INTRODUCTION

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; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few determining elements.

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.
- *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; as well as streetscape elements such as streetwalls, landscaping, and curb cuts. 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.
- *Historic Resources.* When an action would result in substantial direct changes to an historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a resource, or when an historic resources analysis identifies a significant impact in this category, there is a potential to affect neighborhood character.
- *Socioeconomic Conditions.* Changes in socioeconomic conditions have the potential to affect neighborhood character when they result in substantial direct or indirect displacement or addition of population, employment, or businesses; or substantial differences in population or employment density.
- *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 substantial traffic 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, as identified in that technical analysis. 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.

This chapter examines neighborhood character in the area surrounding the project site, defined as a ¼-mile perimeter around the project site, and how the Proposed Project would affect that character. The chapter's impact analysis focuses primarily on changes to neighborhood character resulting from changes in the technical areas discussed above, since changes in these technical areas are most likely to result in changes to neighborhood character.

The analysis concludes that as a result of the Proposed Project, changes to the project site's land use and design and scale of the buildings would occur, as well as increases to traffic and transit activity and minor increases to noise levels. However, these changes overall would not be adverse, as discussed below.

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project site is bounded by the Metro North Rail Road tracks to the north, River Avenue to the east, 149th Street to the south, and Exterior Street to the west. The 18-acre parcel comprises a mixture of low-rise commercial and community facility uses and paved land. On the site there are three dilapidated Bronx Terminal Market buildings (Buildings B, C, and D) that are partially occupied, and the Bronx House of Detention which is in reserve status and currently closed. The primary uses on the project site are wholesale food warehouses and markets. The site also contains paved areas that provide parking seasonally during games at Yankee Stadium and are used for truck parking when needed. A farmers market which was previously held on the northern portion of the project site was relocated to an off-site location managed by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYCDPR) (i.e., Yankee Stadium parking lots 13A and 13B located along the Harlem River) in March 2005.

The low-rise buildings are 1- to 2-story rectangular concrete-block, stucco, or brick structures. The Bronx House of Detention ranges from 8 to 10 stories and is faced with gray brick. The long rectangular shape of many of the project site buildings creates an uninterrupted street wall. With the exception of Building C, all of the buildings on the project site have been found eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places (S/NR).

The project site is dominated by the presence of the elevated Major Deegan Expressway above Exterior Street, which forms the western boundary of the project site. While the Expressway is elevated, it is located at a level low enough to block views to and from the site. In addition, entrance and exits ramps for the Expressway are located within the boundaries of the project site and affect both vehicular and pedestrian traffic, by causing traffic congestion and creating intersections that are difficult to cross.

The streets within the project site are arranged in an irregular pattern, and some are also unpaved and/or in poor condition. The sidewalks are only slightly elevated and in some points they are

almost flush with the ground. Often delivery trucks and vans are parked on them. The condition of the streets, the irregular street pattern, and the elevated transportation structures limit pedestrian accessibility and the pedestrian experience on the project site.

While not visibly accessible from much of the study area, the Harlem River, which separates the Bronx from Manhattan, is a defining element of the ¼-mile neighborhood character study area, as is the Major Deegan Expressway, which runs alongside the waterway. The river is not easily accessible within the project site, due to the presence of access ramps for the elevated Expressway and waterfront warehouse buildings. The Macombs Dam Bridge and the 145th Street Bridge, which connect the Bronx and Manhattan, are also not visible from much of the project site, as they are obscured by the Expressway and project site buildings.

Within the Bronx portion of the study area, there is a large mix of uses, with types of land uses generally segregated by Gerard Avenue and 157th/153rd Streets. The Metro North Rail Road line, which runs just south of 153rd Street, is a contributing factor to this division. A heavy commercial/industrial area with food and beverage suppliers/distributors, warehouses, auto-related uses, and parking lots occupies the central portion of the study area—generally south of 153rd Street and west of Gerard Avenue. This area has an underutilized, degraded quality and has very little street life or pedestrian activity, due to the nature of the businesses in the area.

North of the project site are Yankee Stadium and its related parking facilities, which are enclosed by chain-link fencing. At approximately 130 feet tall, the stadium is a prominent visual feature of the study area, and is visible from various parts of the project site. The stadium has a concession and ticket area and a small plaza space containing concrete blocks with flower planters, lampposts, and some mature trees. Macombs Dam Park, a 12-acre park with soccer fields, baseball fields, basketball courts, and lawn areas is also located north of the project site.

East of Gerard Avenue the area is predominantly residential, with six-story residential apartment buildings lining Gerard and Walton Avenues north of 153rd Street and 2- to 3-story attached residential buildings along Walton Avenue south of 151st Street. Many of the six story buildings are clad in coarse red brick and have distinctive Tudor ornamentation, including steeply pitched gables and mock timbering. Hostos Community College, the largest institutional use in the study area, is located along Walton Avenue and the Grand Concourse, south of 149th Street. A major park in this portion of the study area is Franz Sigel Park, a 16-acre park with largely active recreational facilities, located along Grand Concourse north of 151st Street.

Several historic resources are located in the vicinity of the project site (see Figure 7-1 for a map indicating the location of the resources). The remainder of the Bronx Terminal Market buildings (S/NR-eligible) are located on the west side of Exterior Street. The study area's two bridges—the S/NR-eligible 145th Street Bridge and the New York City Landmark (NYCL), S/NR-eligible Macombs Dam Bridge and 155th Street Viaduct—are both historic resources. The remainder of the study area's historic resources are located along the Grand Concourse. These include Public School 31 at 425 Grand Concourse (NYCL, S/NR-eligible), the Bronx Post Office (NYCL, S/NR-listed) at 558 Grand Concourse, and the Mott Avenue Control House (S/NR-listed) at 149th Street and Grand Concourse. Two additional potential architectural resources located in the vicinity of the project site are the Oxford Knolls, located at 691 Gerard Avenue/109 153rd Street, and 690 Gerard Avenue, located at the northeast corner of Gerard Avenue and 153rd Street.

The irregular street pattern in the study area—with north-south avenues running on a slight angle to the east and narrower streets running on an angle from northwest to southeast—creates

irregular-shaped blocks as well as long blocks that are uninterrupted by cross streets. The superblocks created by Yankee Stadium and its associated parking structure are irregularly shaped and create impediments to pedestrian traffic.

Traffic volumes along streets in the study area are generally at acceptable levels, though congestion exists at some intersections during both the AM and PM hours. The Major Deegan Expressway, which runs above the project site on a viaduct, is frequently congested in the northbound direction during peak traffic hours. Many sections of the local street network that serve the site have substantial amounts of unused capacity, particularly Exterior Street; however, some sections of the local street network—most notably the approach and departure routes to/from the 145th Street and Macombs Dam Bridges, the Major Deegan Expressway, and River Avenue before and after games at Yankee Stadium—are at times congested. Frequently before games, the Major Deegan ramp traffic queues back along the northbound side of the Expressway.

149th Street is one of the major thoroughfares in the area, with entrance and exit points for the 145th Street Bridge. It is one of the few streets in the study area lined with restaurants and small retail shops, increasing the pedestrian activity and traffic on this thoroughfare. The Grand Concourse is the study area's major roadway and has the largest concentration of commercial uses in the area. The level of pedestrian activity near the project site is low due to the industrial character of the area. Pedestrian bridges between 151st and 153rd Streets along River and Gerard Avenues cross over sunken railroad tracks for the Metro North Rail Road. The 2/4/5 149th Street-Grand Concourse Station and the 4/B/D 161st Street-Yankee Stadium Station are located to the southeast and northeast of the project site, respectively. The Bx1, Bx6, Bx13, and Bx19 bus routes all operate near the project site.

Existing noise levels near the project site range from being marginally acceptable on the northern and western edges of the site to clearly unacceptable near Exterior Street north of 150th Street.

The Manhattan portion of the study area, separated by the Harlem River, is largely residential. Several high-rise residential complexes define the area, including Harlem River Houses, a New York City Housing Authority development, and the private Esplanade Gardens complex. The area is well served by parks, such as the Colonel Charles Young Triangle, Colonel Charles Young Playground, Bill 'Bojangle' Robinson Playground, and Frederick Thomas Playground.

C. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTIONS

2009

Without the Proposed Project, it is assumed that no major changes would occur on the project site. The site would remain a partially-occupied wholesale food marketplace, and the Bronx House of Detention would remain unused. The paved areas would continue to be used for Yankee Stadium parking. The project site buildings would continue to obstruct views to the waterfront from the surrounding area.

One major project proposed within the study area that could be developed by 2009 is a new stadium for the New York Yankees, in the portion of Macombs Dam Park located north of the existing stadium across East 161st Street. The potential neighborhood character impacts of that No Build project are discussed in Chapter 22, "Future Conditions with a Relocated Yankee Stadium."

The other projects that are planned for construction within the study area by the year 2009 would not be expected to create any substantial changes to the character of the study area. Several of the projects would be transportation-oriented and would not significantly alter any natural features, street patterns, or block shapes. These transportation projects are not expected to alter travel patterns in the area. Traffic in the study area would change modestly as a result of projects planned for the study area. Pedestrian activity would be expected to remain moderate, with acceptable levels of congestion. Noise levels would be expected to be similar to existing levels. The reconstruction of East 149th Street between Griffin Place and Exterior Street would enhance the vitality of street and sidewalk and improve both vehicular and pedestrian access on the street. The potential reconstruction of the 161st Street tunnel below the Grand Concourse as part of the Grand Concourse streetscaping and rehabilitation project between 161st and 166th Streets would not change the capacity of this portion of the street network. Additionally, the reconstruction of Lou Gehrig Plaza, located just outside the ¼-mile study area along 161st Street between the Grand Concourse and Walton Avenue, will improve neighborhood character by transforming a site currently used for parking into a civic gathering space.

Several institutional projects are also planned for the area: a new Emergency Assistance Unit for the New York City Department of Homeless Services is planned for 151st Street and Walton Avenue to replace the existing facility at this location. Hostos Community College has plans to renovate a 125,000-gsf academic building, and has future capital investment projects that are pending budget allocation. Outside the study area, Lincoln Hospital is in the process of constructing several new facilities, including a labor and delivery center and an MRI unit. The New York City School Construction Authority (SCA) has proposed the construction of an approximately 275,000 gross square foot, 2,300-seat school complex on the northeast corner of Concourse Village West and East 153rd Street, just north of the planned East 153rd Street Bridge. It is expected that the school complex would be ready for occupancy by September 2009.

2014

Access to the area would be improved by two projects planned for completion prior to 2014: the widening of the Major Deegan Expressway viaduct and the potential construction of a Metro North Rail Road station. There would not, however, be any major change to neighborhood character as a result.

D. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTIONS

2009

The first phase of the Proposed Project would result in a major change in land use on the project site. This change is considered to be complementary to the area, as it would create a major retail facility that would serve the residents, workers, and visitors of surrounding communities and Yankee Stadium. Wholesale commercial uses, vacant space, and an unused detention center would be removed from the site to allow for development of active retail uses and parking. The project site is currently underutilized, and the Proposed Project would bring a greater intensity of use to the project site.

The proposed buildings would be larger and squarer in form than the existing buildings, and their expected materials, coloration, and style would be different and more modern than those of the existing buildings on the project site. The buildings would, however, be similar in height to

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the residential buildings located along East 153rd Street and along Gerard and Walton Avenues north of East 153rd Street, the buildings at Hostos Community College, and Yankee Stadium. Therefore, the proposed buildings would be in keeping with the height and bulk of some of the existing structures in the study area. As the existing buildings on the project site are currently unutilized or underutilized and have a neglected quality, the proposed buildings would be expected to improve the visual quality and the character of the area.

The Proposed Project would modify the shapes of the project blocks by demapping portions of several streets to create a superblock. These streets are currently underutilized and form blocks with unusual shapes. The change would not result in a negative neighborhood character impact related to urban design, as it would not significantly alter the basic street pattern or block shapes of the study area.

In general, the Proposed Project is expected to enhance the vitality of the surrounding streets by introducing active retail uses and increasing visitation to the project site. The Proposed Project would also add to the visual quality of the surrounding area, by creating landscaped passageways between buildings, introducing street lighting and trees, and opening up views from the project site to the Harlem River.

In the future with the Proposed Project, it is anticipated that the City, with contributions from the project sponsor, would develop a portion of the waterfront area west of Exterior Street with a 2-acre public open space. The City is committed to developing the off-site public open space by the Proposed Project's 2009 Build year. The programming of this open space and the actions required for its development are yet to be determined. This new open space would facilitate access to the Harlem River, and views from Exterior Street to the waterfront would be improved. The Proposed Project's landscaped passageways across the project site would be publicly accessible and would facilitate access to this public open space.

Although the context of surrounding views would be altered by the introduction of taller, modern buildings to the area, this change is not considered to be adverse, as these buildings would replace underutilized, deteriorating buildings and the project would create new waterfront access and views to the Harlem River. Yankee Stadium would continue to be a prominent feature in surrounding views. Some existing views to the stadium would be eliminated, but other new views would be created with the removal of the detention center.

Although the Proposed Project would require the demolition of two of the historic resources on the project site (Building B and the Bronx House of Detention)—this impact would be lessened by mitigation measures being developed in consultation with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Mitigation measures are anticipated to include retaining and reutilizing Building D for retail development in conjunction with the Proposed Project; reutilizing ornamental elements from the Bronx House of Detention within the River Avenue façade of the proposed Retail Building B/F as well as the plaza on River Avenue at the entrance to the southern passageway through the site; affixing a plaque either to the side of Retail Building B near the plaza or incorporated into the plaza design, describing the Bronx House of Detention's significance as an example of WPA-era institutional architecture designed by Joseph Frelander; affixing a plaque to the side of Building D describing the history of the Bronx Terminal Market and its role in the development of terminal markets in the United States; and recording Buildings B and D and the Bronx House of Detention through a Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)-level photographic documentation and accompanying narrative.

The construction of the off-site open space to be developed by the City with contributions from the project sponsor would presumably require the demolition of Bronx Terminal Market Buildings F and G.

The project site is located far enough away from Bronx Terminal Market buildings on the west side of Exterior Street (Buildings F, G, H, and J) and the other known and potential historic resources to not have any direct physical effects from the Proposed Project. While the Proposed Project would be expected to alter the context of the historic resources in the surrounding area, these resources already exist in an environment that is predominantly industrial, and there would be no significant adverse neighborhood character impact related to changes to views of historic resources. The proposed buildings would not block views from the area bridges to any historic resource, yet would provide new views to the historic bridges from the project site waterfront, thus providing heightened visibility for these historic resources. Overall, the Proposed Project would not have an historic resources-related impact on neighborhood character.

The Proposed Project would displace some existing businesses; however, the businesses on the project site are not dependent upon siting on the waterfront and do not substantially contribute to defining the neighborhood, and thus removal would not result in a significant adverse impact to the neighborhood character of the area. As described in Chapter 3, “Socioeconomic Conditions,” the Proposed Project would not have the potential to adversely affect competitive stores throughout the study area. The project’s destination retail would not compete with local shopping areas that are neighborhood-oriented and would not jeopardize the viability of any retail strips in the study area.

The Proposed Project would include several improvements to the roadway network. Exterior Street between 149th Street and its northern terminus and River Avenue between 149th and 153rd Streets would be substantially upgraded to include pavement resurfacing, dedicated turning lanes into the site, and widening along certain sections to provide two full travel lanes in each direction. New traffic signals would also be installed at parking garage driveways on Exterior Street in order to facilitate vehicle access in and out of the proposed parking garages. Yankee Stadium parking facilities would be displaced by the Proposed Project; however, the Proposed Project’s parking facilities would provide capacity for the displaced Yankee Stadium parking activity. Although there would be significant increases in traffic volumes in the surrounding neighborhood, including along the Major Deegan Expressway, street network and Expressway capacities would be sufficient to accommodate traffic from the Proposed Project with the proposed mitigation measures, which include standard traffic engineering improvements as well as the widening of the northbound Major Deegan Expressway ramp at 149th Street.

The Proposed Project is also expected to generate a number of pedestrian trips to and from the site and to increase public transportation demand in the area. All subway station stairways would operate at LOS D or better during all peak periods, with the exception of several stairways at the 161st Street-Yankee Stadium Station during game day peak periods. During Saturday midday game and non-game peak periods, the north crosswalk at 149th Street and River Avenue would experience decreases in levels of service. However, the neighborhood’s sidewalks, subways, and buses are expected to have sufficient capacity to accommodate these increases in demand with the mitigation measures proposed. Therefore, the Proposed Project should not have traffic- or transit-related impacts on neighborhood character. With the Proposed Project, changes in noise levels would be barely perceptible and there would be no resulting noise-related neighborhood character impacts. The off-site public open space to be created by the City with contributions

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from the project sponsor would have elevated noise levels because of its proximity to the elevated Major Deegan Expressway.

In summary, the first phase of the Proposed Project would not significantly adversely affect the combined elements contributing to the neighborhood character of the study area. No significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character would result from the Proposed Project.

2014

The second phase of the Proposed Project would introduce a new hotel use to the project site. The hotel would be compatible with the retail center that would already exist on the project site by 2014. No businesses would be displaced by the construction of the hotel, which would be constructed on a vacant part of the project site, and it would be the only such facility in the study area. Activity would be increased on the currently vacant northern portion of the project site and the visual quality of this area would be enhanced by the addition of a modern building and landscaping. The development of the hotel would not alter any street patterns, block shapes, or natural features on the project site or in the study area, or have any significant adverse effects on views to visual resources from the project site. There would be no significant adverse impacts on open spaces from the second phase of the project.

The proposed hotel would continue to bring greater activity to the streets of the project site and the study area, and the building form would be compatible with the previously developed retail center. At approximately 230 feet in height, the hotel would be taller than the buildings currently on and proposed for the project site, as well as existing buildings in the study area; moreover it would occupy a much smaller footprint than the proposed retail buildings, and therefore its bulk would be most noticeable from across the Harlem River or along 153rd Street near the project site. The proposed hotel would also not have significant adverse impacts on the visual resources within the study area; it would not block existing views of Yankee Stadium from the majority of the study area.

There are no historic resources on the area of the project site to be developed as a hotel, and there would be no historic resources on the remainder of the project site by 2014. Therefore, the development of the proposed hotel would not affect any historic resources on the project site. Construction of the proposed hotel would be far enough away from the known and potential historic resources in the study area so as not to have any direct, physical effects on these resources. While the development of a new, modern hotel on the project site would be expected to alter the context of the historic resources in the surrounding area, these resources already exist in an environment that is predominantly industrial, and this change is not considered a significant adverse impact.

The majority of the increases in traffic and pedestrian volumes and public transportation demand would be generated by the retail portion of the Proposed Project to be developed by 2009. Therefore, the proposed hotel would generate smaller increases in traffic, pedestrians, and public transportation demands, and the Proposed Project would not have any traffic- or transit-related neighborhood character impacts by 2014. Noise levels with the completion of the Proposed Project would change imperceptibly and would have no resulting impact on neighborhood character.

In summary, the completion of the Proposed Project would not adversely affect the combined elements contributing to the neighborhood character of the study area. No significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character would result from the Proposed Project. *