

**A. PROJECT IDENTIFICATION**

The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development, in coordination with the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and the Department of City Planning (DCP), proposes to rezone, create an urban renewal area and implement a comprehensive development plan—the Willets Point Development Plan (“proposed Plan”)—in a portion of Willets Point, Queens (see Figures 1-1 and 1-2). The overarching goal of the proposed Plan is to transform a largely underutilized site with substandard conditions and substantial environmental degradation into a lively, mixed-use, sustainable community and regional destination.

The proposed Plan calls for the redevelopment of the Willets Point Development District (“District”), an approximately 61-acre area generally bounded to the east by the Van Wyck Expressway and an undeveloped lot owned by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), to the south by Roosevelt Avenue, to the west by 126th Street, and to the north by Northern Boulevard. The development program for the District includes a mix of uses, including residential, retail, hotel, convention center, entertainment, commercial office, community facility, open space, and parking. In addition, the proposed Plan includes a new connection between the Van Wyck Expressway and the District. Although no specific development plan is in place at this time, the maximum permitted development under the proposed Plan would be 8.94 million gross square feet (gsf) of new construction.

Adoption of the proposed Plan would require public review, including by the local Community Board and the Queens Borough President, and approvals by a number of government agencies, including the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development, HPD, the New York City Planning Commission (CPC), and the City Council. Additionally, approvals would be required from the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) regarding the proposed new connection to the Van Wyck Expressway. Because it has been determined that the proposed Plan may result in significant adverse impacts, it requires review and the preparation of a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) under City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR).

**B. PROJECT PURPOSE AND NEED**

The Willets Point peninsula is an underutilized industrial area with extensive environmental contamination issues, numerous open building code violations, poor road and sidewalk conditions, and limited storm and sanitary sewer infrastructure. Site conditions within the District have hindered redevelopment efforts for decades, and present numerous challenges to any future development efforts in the Willets Point Development District. Two of the greatest challenges are site contamination and site elevation; up to seven feet of fill are required to raise the grade of the District so that it is out of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)



 Willets Point Development District

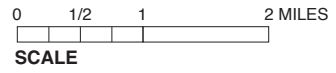


Figure 1-1  
Project Location



 Willets Point Development District

0 1000 2000 FEET  
SCALE

## **Willets Point Development Plan**

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100-year floodplain. These issues are discussed below under “Components of the Proposed Plan.”

The Willets Point Development Plan is an outgrowth of the Downtown Flushing Development Framework (“Framework”), a land use and economic planning strategy for the growth of Downtown Flushing, the Flushing River waterfront, and the Willets Point peninsula.<sup>1</sup> The Framework was developed between 2002 and 2004 by the Downtown Flushing Task Force, a group of city and state technical agencies, local developers and business owners, community board members, and local elected officials that the City requested to identify opportunities for growth and improvement in Downtown Flushing, the Flushing River waterfront, and the Willets Point area.

Recognizing the importance of Willets Point to the environmental, economic, and aesthetic welfare of the broader community, the Task Force outlined specific redevelopment goals for the Willets Point area, including:

- Create a regional destination that would enhance economic growth in Downtown Flushing and Corona;
- Improve environmental conditions in the District and reflect the sensitive nature of its waterfront setting;
- Create a larger, expanded Flushing core, by integrating the two sides of the Flushing River through land use and design;
- Complement the adjacent recreational and sporting facilities;
- Optimize use of existing highway, public transit, and parking infrastructure to minimize local traffic impacts; and
- Create substantial positive economic value for the City and provide a source of quality jobs for area residents.

The City has adopted these goals as part of the proposed Plan. In addition, the proposed Plan aims to achieve the following goals, which are consistent with the overall Framework vision, but are not specifically articulated in the 2004 report:

- Provide a substantial number of new housing units to help meet the growing demand for housing in Queens and the City as a whole;
- Ensure that District housing would be affordable to a mix of incomes;
- Provide a world-class example of superior urban design, with a focus on green building and sustainable design practices; and
- Strengthen the role of Flushing and Corona as commercial centers in Northern Queens, while helping to meet the demand for office space in Queens and the City as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Downtown Flushing Development Framework*, released in May 2004, was sponsored by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, Deputy Mayor Daniel L. Doctoroff, the New York City Economic Development Corporation, and the New York City Department of City Planning.

## C. PROJECT BACKGROUND

### HISTORY OF WILLETS POINT<sup>1</sup>

The history of the Willets Point area is closely connected to the fast-paced development history of Queens and New York City in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In 1850, the District was part of a swamp on the banks of the Flushing River, used primarily for recreation. By the turn of the century, the City's population was pushing farther east, following new roads and railroad lines that made the once remote area accessible to cars and trains. Around 1900, the city of Queens leased a large portion of the swamp stretching from the mouth of the Flushing River to what is known today as Forest Hills to a Brooklyn ash removal company. Fishhooks McCarthy, the owner of the company, also acquired the right to dump incineration ashes into the tidal marshland. In the years that followed, historical sources estimate that McCarthy dumped approximately 50 million cubic yards of ash into the swampland—the equivalent of about 100 railroad cars of ashes per day between 1906 and 1932. The dumping left the area with a layer of ash 30 feet thick on average, with mountains of ash rising up to 90 feet, an eerie sight that led F. Scott Fitzgerald to declare the area a “valley of ashes” in his novel *The Great Gatsby*.

During this time the area became a breeding ground for rats and mosquitoes, and it is reported that the smell of garbage and smoke was noticeable within a mile of the site. At the same time, nearby villages and towns such as Corona began to expand, and by the early 1930s political opposition to the use of the Willets Point area for dumping began to mount. In response to this opposition, the City cancelled its contract with McCarthy in 1934.

It was also in the mid-1930s that Robert Moses developed his vision of a World's Fair in New York City to be located at the former dumpsite. In the years leading to New York's first World's Fair in 1939, the ash hills were leveled, the Grand Central Parkway was constructed, and the World's Fair complex was built. Although included in Robert Moses' vision, the Willets Point area never became an integral part of the overall World's Fair complex. However, as part of the World's Fair construction, the street grid in the District, including Willets Point Avenue, was put in place. Historical United States Geological Survey (USGS) maps from 1947 identify Willets Point Boulevard, some interior roadways, and a few buildings within the area.

The enormous construction effort required for the World's Fair, combined with the excellent road and direct rail access at Willets Point, may have been the main reason why contractors, heavy manufacturers, and equipment rental businesses were among the first to settle in the District. USGS maps from 1947 and 1955 and an aerial photograph from 1954 indicate that it was not until the end of the 1940s that the Willets Point area started to take on its present character, with a mix of auto-related uses operating out of small structures and lots. It did not take long for the area to become known for its junkyards and stacked car frames. It was during this time that the District first acquired its long-lasting reputation as the “Iron Triangle.”

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<sup>1</sup> Information on the history of Willets Point was gathered from a number of sources including: Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA), East River Neighborhoods Series: “Willets Point,” 2005; *The Village Voice*, “Melting the Iron Triangle,” June 2006; and Harrison, Helen A., *From Dump to Glory: Robert Moses and the Flushing Meadow Improvement*, as presented in *Robert Moses: Single Minded Genius*, edited by Joann P. Krieg, Interlaken, New York, 1989.

## **REDEVELOPMENT EFFORTS**

Since World War II, there have been numerous attempts to redevelop Willets Point. Not long after auto repair businesses and junkyards first settled in the area, City officials made their first attempt to steer development in the area in a different direction. In 1960 Robert Moses proposed including Willets Point in the redevelopment plan for the City's second World's Fair. This proposal was subsequently abandoned.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the number of auto-repair and junkyard uses in Willets Point greatly increased. An aerial photograph from 1974 indicates that the numerous auto repair shops and related businesses covered the majority of the District, and that the area had almost reached its present day condition.

By the mid 1980s Willets Point again became the subject of renewal and redevelopment plans when the area was viewed as a location for a stadium to house the New Jersey Generals football team. The plan was abandoned when the USFL ceased to exist and the Generals were dissolved.

In the early 1990s, Willets Point was the focus of a planning study prepared by NYCEDC (at that time operating as the New York City Public Development Corporation) that examined a number of redevelopment options for the area, all focused on retaining industrial uses on the site. In 1993, the Queens Borough President's office released a study entitled "Willets Point—A New Direction," which proposed the redevelopment of Willets Point into a major commercial center or as an international trade center that would be used to host import/export shows and to provide exhibition and office space for wholesalers and retailers.

Planning efforts related to Willets Point have accelerated since 2000. In 2001, HPD held a design workshop that explored potential redevelopment ideas for Willets Point. The workshop recommended land uses that would connect Willets Point with its neighboring communities and complement the nearby attractions and facilities. Suggested land uses included entertainment facilities such as movie theaters, an international commercial center that would utilize the mixed backgrounds of the surrounding communities, restaurants and retail shops that would profit from visitors coming to downtown Flushing, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park or Shea Stadium, and hotels servicing nearby LaGuardia and Kennedy Airports.

In 2002, the City created the Downtown Flushing Task Force to undertake a community planning process focused on the Downtown Flushing area of Queens. As described earlier under "Project Purpose and Need," the Task Force developed the Downtown Flushing Development Framework, which outlined land use and economic goals for the redevelopment of Willets Point. The proposed Plan represents a critical step in implementing this development Framework.

## **D. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS ON PROJECT SITE**

Willets Point is located in northern Queens, adjacent to Shea Stadium, the USTA National Tennis Center, and Flushing Meadows-Corona Park (see Figure 1-2). The neighborhood of Corona is located just west of Shea Stadium, and Downtown Flushing is located east of Willets Point across the Flushing River. The District is located at the intersection of several major arterial highways, bordered to the east by the Van Wyck Expressway and an undeveloped lot owned by MTA, to the south by Roosevelt Avenue, to the west by 126th Street, and to the north by Northern Boulevard. In addition to highway access, the District connects to the New York

City metropolitan area via the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) and the No. 7 subway line, and is located in close proximity to both LaGuardia and JFK International Airports.

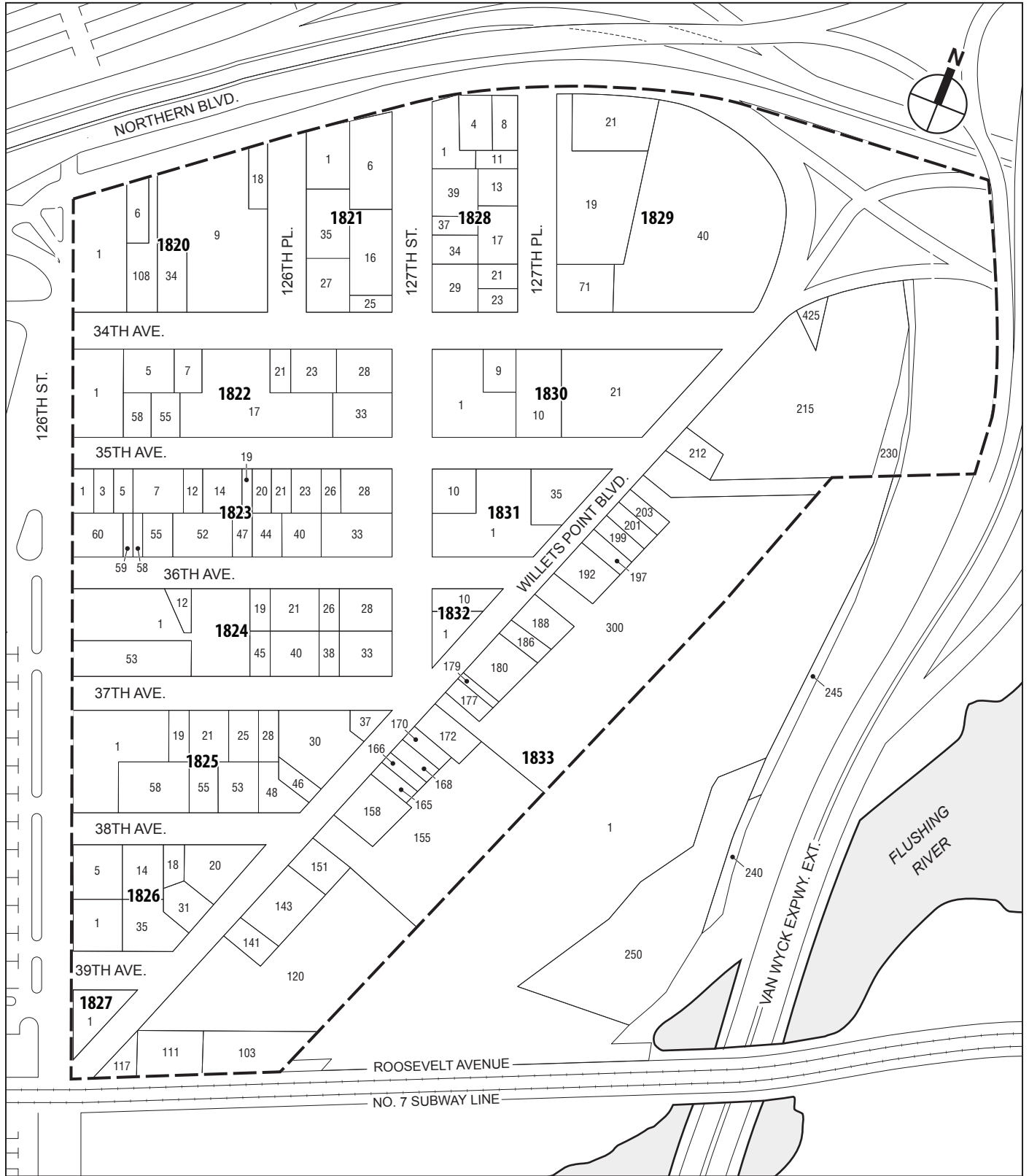
The District is approximately 61.4 acres in size, of which approximately 15.8 acres are within public street rights-of-way, approximately 45.0 acres are privately owned land, and approximately 0.6 acres are owned by MTA. The District comprises 128 tax lots and one partial lot (block 1833, lot 1) located on 14 blocks (see Table 1-1 and Figure 1-3). It contains approximately 260 businesses—primarily a mixture of automotive repair and auto body shops, junkyards, wholesalers, construction companies, and auto-related retail establishments—that employ an estimated 1,711 workers. As illustrated by the aerial photograph presented in Figure 1-4, the site contains a patchwork of small structures with some larger buildings located on the eastern and northern portions of the site; auto uses are scattered throughout the site.

**Table 1-1  
Blocks and Lots Affected by Proposed Action**

<b>Blocks</b>	<b>Lots</b>
1820	1, 6, 9, 18, 34, 108
1821	1, 6, 16, 25, 27, 35
1822	1, 5, 7, 17, 21, 23, 28, 33, 55, 58
1823	1, 3, 5, 7, 12, 14, 19, 20, 21, 23, 26, 28, 33, 40, 44, 47, 52, 55, 58, 59, 60
1824	1, 12, 19, 21, 26, 28, 33, 38, 40, 45, 53
1825	1, 19, 21, 25, 28, 30, 37, 46, 48, 53, 55, 58
1826	1, 5, 14, 18, 20, 31, 35
1827	1
1828	1, 4, 8, 11, 13, 17, 21, 23, 29, 34, 37, 39
1829	19, 21, 40, 71
1830	1, 9, 10, 21
1831	1, 10, 35
1832	1, 10
1833	1 (partial)*, 103, 111, 117, 120, 141, 143, 151, 155, 158, 165, 166, 168, 170, 172, 177, 179, 180, 186, 188, 192, 197, 199, 201, 203, 212, 215, 230, 300, 425
<b>Note:</b> * Approximately 24,600 sf of block 1833, lot 1 (owned by the MTA) is included in the Willets Point Development District. The remaining approximately 429,000 sf of that lot, which extends along the Flushing River waterfront, is outside of the District.	

Most properties in the District are underutilized. Utilization rates were determined by comparing actual square feet of built space on the property with the built square feet allowable under applicable zoning (zoning square feet).<sup>1</sup> Only 9 of 128 tax lots were found to utilize more than 50 percent of the allowable square footage. The remaining 119 lots, or 93 percent, are considered to be underutilized. Of these lots, 27 lots (21 percent) are significantly underutilized, using only 11 to 25 percent of their development potential, and 50 lots (39 percent) are considered to be severely underutilized, utilizing no more than 10 percent of their development potential. Many of these lots are unimproved and are used as open air storage areas for building supplies, junkyards, and waste transfer uses.

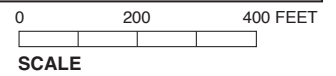
<sup>1</sup> Data were gathered from the New York City Department of Finance Real Property Assessment Data (RPAD).



--- Willets Point Development District Boundary

**1826** Block Number

14 Lot Number



This figure has been updated since the DGEIS





 Willets Point Development District Boundary

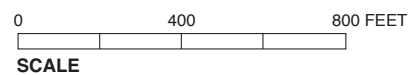


Figure 1-4  
**Aerial View**

## Willets Point Development Plan

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Building code violations are common in the District. According to the Department of Building's Business Information System, there were 192 open building code violations in the District as of January 2008, many of which were for Work without a Permit, Occupancy Contrary to Certificate of Occupancy, and Failure to Maintain Building. Violations were reported for buildings located on half of the tax lots in the study area, many recording multiple violations. These violations indicate that numerous structures on the project site have either been built or altered illegally, not adequately maintained, or are occupied by businesses not permitted to be operating on site.

Site conditions within the District have hindered past redevelopment efforts and present complex challenges to any future redevelopment. Much of the land area within the District is below the FEMA 100-year floodplain; up to seven feet of fill is required to grade and raise the District above the floodplain. The District lacks sanitary sewers and adequate storm sewers, and its roadways and sidewalks are in poor condition.

Site contamination is another challenge facing future development in the District. As indicated above, the area's historical use in the early 1900s was as a dumping site for ash. Today, some of the existing automotive repair and service businesses and junkyard operations have continued to add contamination to the area through illegal dumping and poor housekeeping. As a result of Willets Point's history and past uses, soil and groundwater have been impacted in varying degrees throughout the District. In 2001, the State Attorney General announced the indictment of 21 junkyards and 35 individuals for violating State environmental laws by dumping motor oil, antifreeze, transmission fluid, and other vehicle fluids onto the ground and into storm drains and Flushing Bay. All of the indicted businesses were convicted, which resulted in the payment of more than \$100,000 in fines and forfeitures, and the entry of civil consent judgments requiring businesses to clean up their properties. The forfeited equipment was released only if businesses presented a plan to adequately address the environmental problems identified in the indictments. Monetary assets, however, were released only if a convicted business employed an environmental consultant, who would help to remediate the environmental issues. According to the Attorney General's Office, only a few companies entered into a comprehensive agreement and invested in remediation activities.

Environmental crime investigations and the resulting indictments were a byproduct of the criminal sting operation, conducted to battle car theft and the resale of stolen parts. In recent years, law enforcement entities have uncovered criminal activity in the District, and the New York State Attorney General and the New York City Police Department (NYPD) have issued several indictments for auto theft, insurance fraud, and racketeering. Most recently, on April 3, 2008, the NYPD seized eight tractor-trailer loads of counterfeit sneakers, handbags, and other goods from a large warehouse building located in the northeast portion of the District (Block 1833, Lot 215). The seizure, which included 50,000 pairs of sneakers, 30,000 to 40,000 handbags, and 5,000 pieces of clothing, is believed to be one of the largest seizures of fake goods in the history of New York City.<sup>1</sup> The illegal activities and harmful environmental practices in the District have created a condition that is threatening to the environment and to the neighboring communities, and a continuation of these practices would burden the health of New York City's residents and economy.

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<sup>1</sup> Mason, Bill "Police Seize Millions in Massive Counterfeit Bust." [www.newsday.com](http://www.newsday.com). April 4, 2008.

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

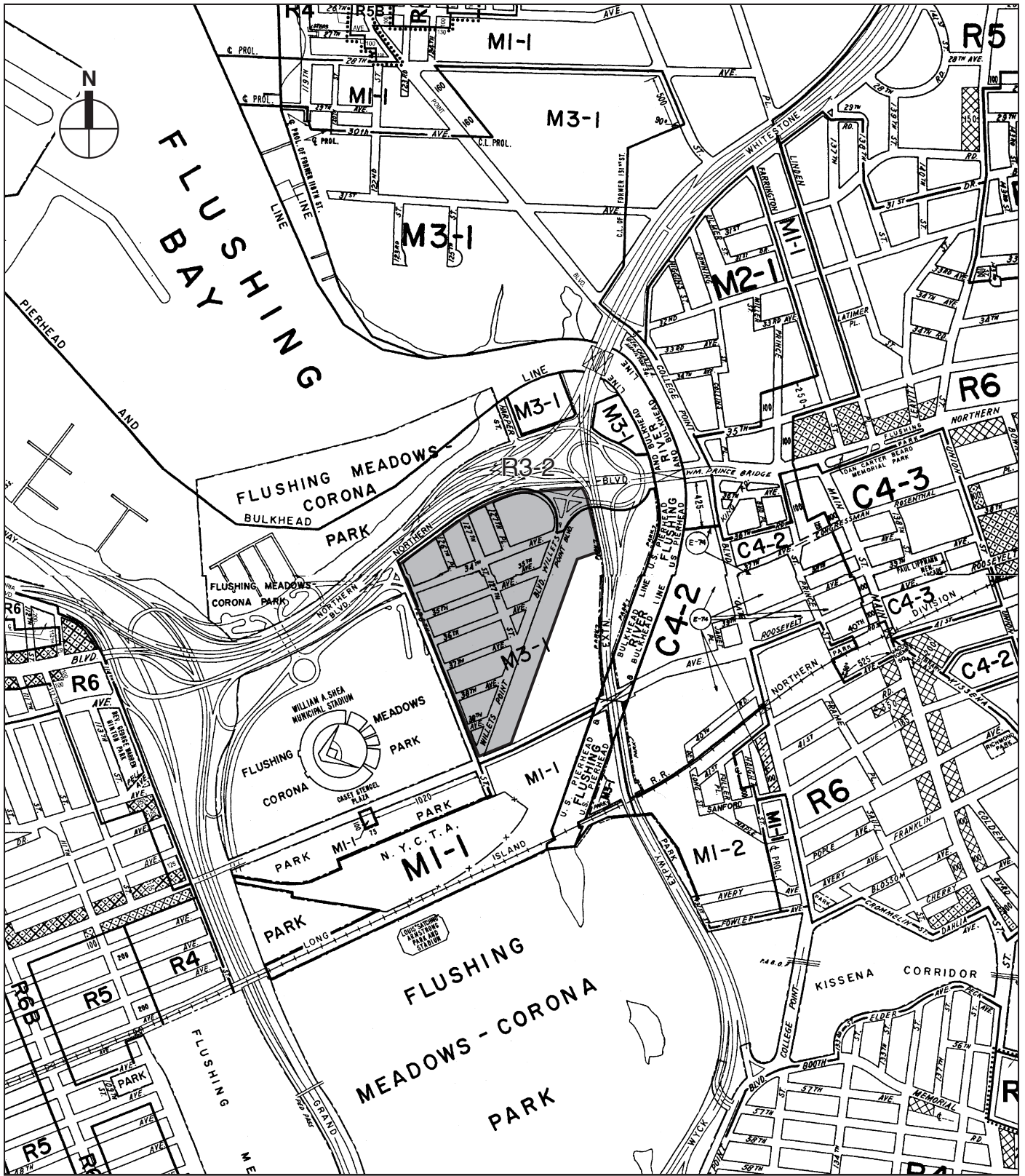
Redevelopment of the District to meet the City's stated goals and objectives and facilitate development of the proposed Plan would require a number of City, State, and Federal approvals. Most of these are discretionary actions requiring review under CEQR/State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA)/National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); others are ministerial and do not require environmental review. The discretionary actions required or that may be required for the proposed Plan include:

### *CITY DISCRETIONARY APPROVALS*

- The adoption of a Willets Point Urban Renewal Plan (URP) by HPD, to define District boundaries and the area to be redeveloped, as well as to establish maximum development envelopes, in accordance with the City's redevelopment goals. The draft URP is appended to this document as Appendix A.
- Acquisition of property in accordance with the URP.
- Disposition of property within the District for development in accordance with the URP.
- A change to the underlying zoning of the District from the existing M3-1 and R3-2 districts<sup>1</sup> to a C4-4 district (see Figures 1-5 and 1-6), pursuant to CPC approval. The proposed C4-4 zoning would allow for the range of uses anticipated. The existing permitted FAR in the M3-1 district is 2.0. A maximum permitted FAR of 3.4 would apply across the entire District, as established by the proposed Special Willets Point District, described below.
- Creation of a zoning Special District to further guide development in the District, pursuant to CPC approval. In order to promote redevelopment of Willets Point consistent with the goals and objectives of the proposed Plan and to eliminate unnecessary rigidities that would prevent the achievement of the best possible site plan, the proposed Special District would waive certain C4-4 district requirements and the need for certain CPC and New York City Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA) special permits. To create an appropriate scale and density within the District's surroundings, the urban renewal area would have special provisions regarding streetscape and urban design components. A summary of the proposed Special District regulations is appended to this document as Appendix B.
- Demapping of streets within the District, pursuant to CPC approval. In order to allow maximum flexibility in the creation of the redevelopment site plan, the proposed Plan would include the demapping of some or all streets within the District. The development rights generated from the demapping of these streets would be utilized in the development of the associated blocks and lots. Streets to be demapped may include:
  - 126th Place between Northern Boulevard and 34th Avenue;
  - 127th Street between Northern Boulevard and Willets Point Boulevard;
  - 127th Place between Northern Boulevard and 34th Avenue;
  - 34th Avenue between 126th Street and Willets Point Boulevard;
  - 35th Avenue between 126th Street and Willets Point Boulevard;
  - 36th Avenue between 126th Street and Willets Point Boulevard;
  - 37th Avenue between 126th Street and Willets Point Boulevard;

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<sup>1</sup> A small area within the Willets Point Development District is included within an R3-2 district. The portion of the District that is zoned R3-2 district contains roadway connections to Northern Boulevard.



Willets Point Development District  
 Zoning District Boundary

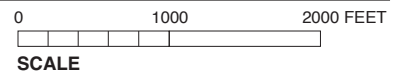
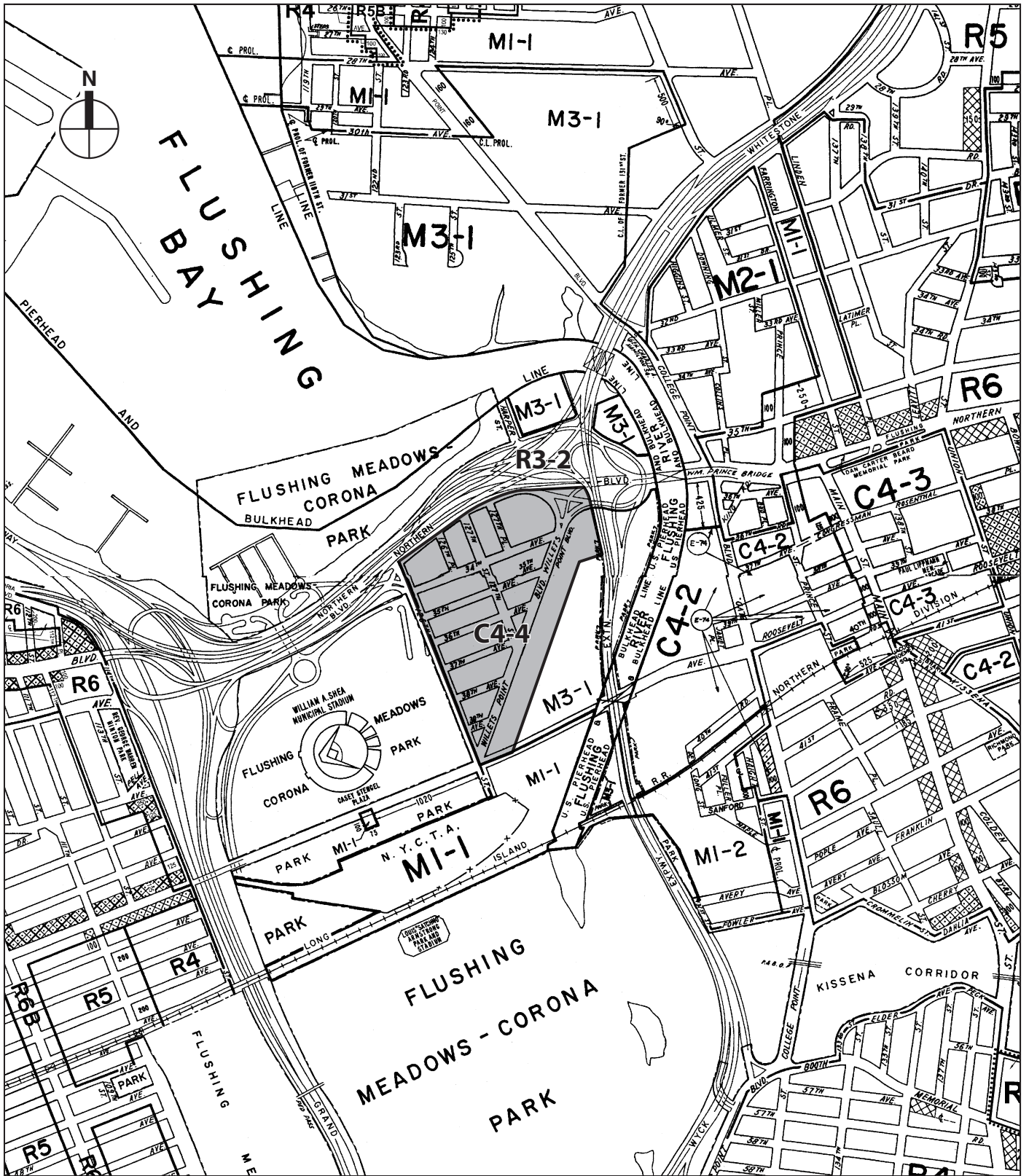
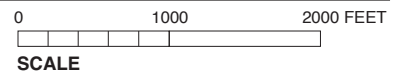


Figure 1-5  
Existing Zoning



Special Willets Point District  
 Zoning District Boundary



## **Willets Point Development Plan**

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- 38th Avenue between 126th Street and Willets Point Boulevard;
  - 39th Avenue between 126th Street and Willets Point Boulevard; and
  - Willets Point Boulevard between 126th Street and Northern Boulevard.<sup>1</sup>
- Possible acquisition of property by the City pursuant to the Eminent Domain Procedure Law (EDPL).
  - Possible approval by the Queens Borough Board of the business terms of the disposition pursuant to Section 384(b)(4) of the New York City Charter.

### *STATE/FEDERAL DISCRETIONARY APPROVALS*

- Review and approval of a Freeway Access Modification Report by NYSDOT and FHWA for new access ramps to and from the Van Wyck Expressway, a highway on the Interstate System.

### **COMPONENTS OF THE PROPOSED PLAN**

The proposed Plan is intended to stimulate the redevelopment of the District in accordance with the proposed zoning Special District and URP. The proposed Plan envisions residential and retail uses as the core activities within the District. Office, hotel, and convention center uses would complement this foundation, enhancing Flushing and Corona's roles as regional economic centers, while community facilities and open space would provide amenities and enhance the quality of life for area residents and visitors (see Figures 1-7 through 1-9). Although no developer or specific development plan is in place at this time, the URP prescribes a maximum permitted floor area of 8.94 million gsf in the District, and allows flexibility in the combination of uses to be developed in the District. The zoning Special District would ensure the development of a dynamic, pedestrian-oriented community, by determining elements such as the placement of uses within the District, building heights and setbacks, street hierarchies, streetscape design, and basic site planning and design provisions, as described in greater detail below.

Since the flexibility provided in the URP could result in a variation in the future development in the District, this DGEIS analyzes two development scenarios—the proposed Plan, which includes an approximately 400,000-square-foot convention center, and the No Convention Center Scenario, in which the convention center is replaced with an additional 350,000 sf of residential use and 50,000 sf of retail use. The anticipated uses are shown in Table 1-2, and the various components of the proposed Plan are described in greater detail below and in Chapter 2, “Analytical and Procedural Framework.”

### *RESIDENTIAL*

According to the most current New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey data published by HPD, the residential vacancy rate in Queens was only 2.82 percent in 2005, slightly lower than the citywide average of 3.09 percent. At the same time, the most recent DCP demographic study, *New York City Population Projections by Age/Sex and Borough* (2006), estimates that the

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<sup>1</sup> In order to ensure adequate access to the existing 72-inch water main that runs beneath Willets Point Boulevard, a permanent easement would be mapped on the City Map. The width and designation of this easement would be determined in consultation with and in accordance with the requirements of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).



Illustrative rendering of the District

This figure has been updated since the DGEIS



Illustrative rendering within the District

This figure has been added since the DGEIS





Illustrative rendering within the District

This figure has been added since the DGEIS

**Table 1-2  
Willetts Point Development Plan**

Use	Urban Renewal Plan	Proposed Plan	No Convention Center Scenario
Residential	Up to 5,850,000 gsf	5,500,000 gsf (5,500 units)	5,850,000 gsf (5,850 units)
Retail	Up to 3,160,000 gsf	1,700,000	1,750,000
Office		500,000	500,000
Convention Center		400,000	0
Hotel		560,000 (700 rooms)	560,000 (700 rooms)
Community Facility	—	150,000 gsf	150,000 gsf
School (K-8)*	—	130,000 gsf (Approx. 850 Seats)	130,000 gsf (Approx 900 Seats)
Parking Spaces**	—	Approx. 6,700	Approx. 6,000
Publicly Accessible Open Space	Minimum 8 Acres	Minimum 8 Acres	Minimum 8 Acres
<b>Total gsf</b>	8,940,000 gsf Maximum	8,940,000 gsf	8,940,000 gsf
<b>Notes:</b>			
* The capacity of the proposed school would meet the project-generated shortfall in school seats. A 130,000-sf school would accommodate up to approximately 900 seats; the square footage of the new school may be smaller if the project-generated shortfall in seats is less than anticipated.			
** The number of proposed parking spaces would be determined based on anticipated project-generated demand. Parking floor area is exempt from the gross floor area calculations, per the Special Willetts Point zoning district.			

population in Queens will increase by 15.1 percent between 2000 and 2030. The proposed Plan would permit a substantial amount of housing to be constructed in the District, which would help accommodate future population growth in Queens, and contribute to the City’s overall efforts to meet its short- and long-term demands for housing. Under the proposed Plan, 20 percent of the proposed units would be reserved for households earning between 60 percent and 130 percent of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Income Limit for New York City. As is typical for units developed under New York City’s affordable housing program, approximately half of the affordable units developed under the proposed Plan would likely be two- and three-bedroom units. Income levels are based on HUD Income Limits, which are set annually for metropolitan areas and non-metropolitan counties by HUD. As of 2008 the HUD Income Limit for New York City was \$76,800 for a family of four. Therefore, a family of four would need to earn between approximately \$46,080 and \$99,840 in order to qualify for an affordable housing unit in the District. Because housing units in the District would offer rental and homeownership opportunities for a range of incomes, housing constructed under the proposed Plan would support the goals outlined in the Mayor’s New Housing Marketplace Plan, which commits to the construction or rehabilitation of 165,000 affordable housing units in the City.

**RETAIL**

With a population of greater than 2 million, Queens is significantly underserved by retail of all types. The potential spending pool of Queens’ residents is able to support far more retail space and entertainment venues than are currently available in the borough. Based on the most current retail sales and expenditure data compiled by ESRI, a national provider of geographic planning data, retail and food and drink stores in Queens are capturing only 55 percent of the demand generated for those goods by Queens households.<sup>1</sup> Many Queens residents travel to regional malls in Nassau County, Westchester County, and New Jersey, and to entertainment venues

<sup>1</sup> ESRI, Retail MarketPlace Profile, 2007.

## **Willets Point Development Plan**

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outside the borough. The accessibility of the District via mass transit and highways presents an opportunity to create a first-class retail, recreation, and entertainment destination that would attract people from all over the borough, as well as the larger tri-state area. Entertainment venues would satisfy local and City-wide demand while providing activities for before and after the sporting events that occur in the area.

### *OFFICE*

New office space in the District would strengthen the role of Flushing and Corona as commercial centers in Northern Queens and would help meet demand for office space in Queens and the City as a whole. As of the end of the second quarter in 2007, the office vacancy rate in Queens was 8.0 percent, which is lower than the vacancy rates for adjacent counties of Brooklyn (8.7 percent) and Nassau (10.1 percent), indicating that demand for office space in the borough is high.<sup>1</sup> Given its proximity to two major airports and the thriving and expanding Downtown Flushing office district, the District is a suitable location for new office development.

### *CONVENTION CENTER*

A convention center would offer substantial benefits to Queens and the City by hosting large tradeshows, consumer shows, festivals, conferences, corporate events, banquets, and local events. Currently, there are no facilities in Queens that are suitable to host such events. In 2004, the Queens Chamber of Commerce commissioned a study to examine the market for a conference and exhibition space in the Borough of Queens. The study shows a strong demand for such a facility at Willets Point.<sup>2</sup> Convention center visitors would include residents of Queens and the broader metropolitan region attending one-day events or tradeshows, as well as visitors from outside the region attending multi-day conventions and staying at the nearby hotel.

### *HOTEL*

Demand for the hotel would be driven by its proximity to LaGuardia and JFK airports, the growing Flushing community, the future Mets stadium, the USTA National Tennis Center, and the proposed convention center. Occupancy rates at hotels in the area are high and much of the hotel stock in the area is aging. Redevelopment of the District offers an opportunity to create a premier hotel facility in northern Queens.

### *COMMUNITY FACILITY*

The community facility space could include a mix of facilities, including medical offices, day care facilities, community recreation space, or uses such as dance studios, art galleries, theaters, community arts centers, museums, or a library.

### *SCHOOL*

A new public school would be provided to serve the District residents and would be programmed to meet the project-generated shortfall in school capacity. The new school could be either elementary (kindergarten through 5th grade) or combined elementary and intermediate

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<sup>1</sup> The CoStar Office Report, "Long Island Office Market, Mid-Year 2007."

<sup>2</sup> HVS Convention, Sports, & Entertainment Facilities Consulting, Queens, New York Conference/Exhibition Center and Hotel Feasibility Study, 2004.

(kindergarten through 8th grade). However, based on the projected shortfall in elementary school seats in the future with the proposed Plan (see Chapter 5, “Community Facilities”), it is currently anticipated that the school would be programmed to serve elementary students.

#### *OPEN SPACE*

A minimum of eight acres of publicly accessible open spaces would be created to serve the range of user groups introduced by the proposed Plan, including residents, workers, tourists, and shoppers. This would include an approximately two-acre park programmed primarily for active recreational use, which would be centrally located within the District. The Special District regulations would also require pedestrian amenity areas or open landscaped areas at various locations along the perimeter of the District. In addition, NYCEDC would encourage the future developer to incorporate ground level active open space and other recreational resources, such as rooftop and interior programming of recreational amenities, into the project design as part of their formal request for proposals (RFP) process.

#### *PARKING*

Off-street parking would be provided to meet the demand generated by the proposed uses, which is estimated to be approximately 6,700 spaces with the proposed Plan, or 6,000 spaces with the No Convention Center Scenario. It is anticipated that parking would be dispersed throughout the District, in above- and below-grade parking facilities located in the bases of the proposed buildings. Limited on-street parking would also be available in parts of the District.

#### *VAN WYCK EXPRESSWAY CONNECTION*

A new connection between the Van Wyck Expressway and the District would be provided to facilitate the movement of traffic into and out of the District and minimize traffic on nearby local roadways. NYSDOT is currently considering conceptual design alternatives, which include new entrance and exit ramps that touch down in the northeast portion of the District and connect with the primary connector streets in the District (see Figure 1-10).

#### *SITE GRADING*

The District would be graded and elevated above the floodplain. One of the greatest barriers to redevelopment in the District is that much of the land area within the District is below the FEMA 100-year floodplain level of 14 feet Above Mean Sea Level (AMSL).<sup>1</sup> Depending on the existing elevation, up to seven feet of fill would be required to raise the District out of the floodplain. Development at the existing grade would require costly engineering measures for flood control on lower floors.

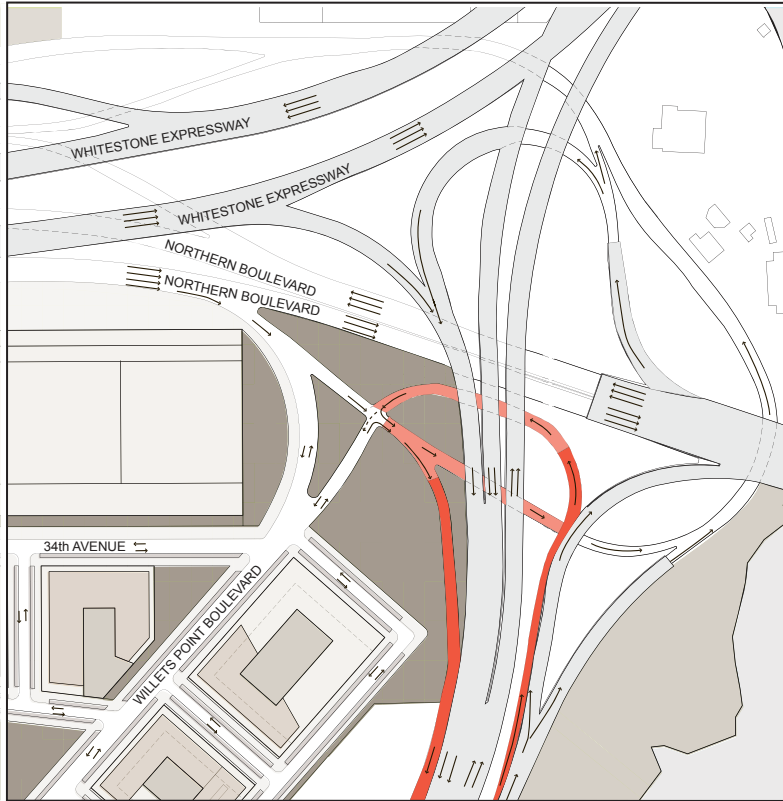
#### *SITE REMEDIATION*

Environmental remediation would take place across the District as part of the proposed Plan. As a result of past uses in the area, soil and groundwater have likely been impacted in varying degrees throughout the District, possibly resulting in vapor intrusion issues within the existing buildings. Under the proposed Plan, environmental remediation would take place across the site, employing strategies such as the removal and/or capping of contaminated soils and the

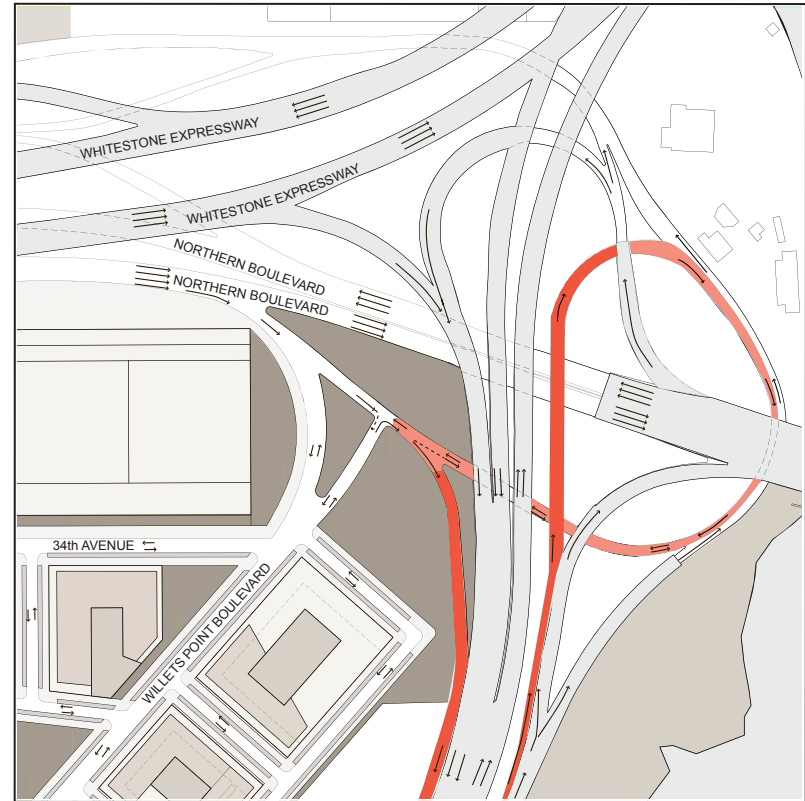
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<sup>1</sup> Referencing National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929 (NGVD29).

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## **Willets Point Development Plan**

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establishment of minimum engineering and/or institutional controls (e.g., vapor barriers under new buildings). This comprehensive approach enables the City to establish a cohesive remediation goal and end use for the entire District, while ensuring that a mechanism is in place to prevent recontamination from surrounding uses or off-site contaminants.

### *INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS*

New and sanitary and stormwater lines would be installed as part of the proposed Plan. In order to accommodate stormwater flow within the District, and alleviate the current flooding conditions, stormwater detention would be provided on-site. A new sanitary pump station and force main would be constructed to convey sanitary flow from the District to the existing 96-inch-diameter City sewer at 108th Street (which flows to the Bowery Bay Water Pollution Control Plant [WPCP]). The pump station and force main would be designed and constructed to DEP standards. The Special District text allows for the development of a water reclamation facility, provided it would primarily serve the District. This facility would support the City's goal to incorporate the latest innovative building and planning technologies in the District, as described in greater detail below. The water reclamation facility would treat the District's sanitary wastewater to DEP's effluent standards, return a portion of the treated water for reuse in the District (for toilets, cleaning, irrigation, air conditioning, etc.), and direct the remaining treated water to the stormwater system and existing outfall at 126th Street. The product of wastewater treatment is sludge, which is compressed and removed once every one to three days. It is anticipated that a water reclamation facility would be a centralized structure approximately 11,000 sf in size. If proposed by a future developer, a water reclamation facility would require a special permit by BSA and likely a permit from DEC, and would be subject to separate environmental and public review processes. If a water reclamation facility were constructed, it would obviate the need for a new pump station.

While the 72-inch water main beneath Willets Point Boulevard would remain in place, other water and sewer lines within the District may be replaced and realigned, depending on the site plan that is ultimately selected, to serve the new uses in the District. New roadways would also be provided as part of the proposed Plan.

The proposed Plan would ensure that project-generated demand for energy is met by providing additional power lines in the District and potentially providing a new cogeneration facility and/or substation, provided they would primarily serve the District. If proposed, these uses would be subject to separate environmental and public review processes. The cogeneration facility would require approval by BSA, as well as air quality permits from DEP and DEC. The substation would require authorization by CPC. For the water reclamation facility and cogeneration facility, the Special District text requires that the reviewing agencies prescribe appropriate conditions to minimize adverse effects on the character of the surrounding area, including emissions limits, as well as the concealment of such uses with building enclosures, landscaping, buffer zones, or other methods.

### **DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS**

Placement of uses within the District would be guided by urban design regulations set forth in the Special Willets Point District, a zoning Special Purpose District. These regulations address design elements such as the placement of uses within the District, building heights and setbacks, street hierarchies, streetscape design, and basic site planning and design provisions. Key elements of the Special District and its intended purpose are described below.

*SITE PLAN AND URBAN DESIGN*

The site planning and urban design of the District are intended to create a dynamic community by integrating regional attractions and residential, retail, and other uses within a network of pedestrian-scaled streetscapes throughout the District.

The Special District regulations would allow for the provision of three zones with distinct land use and design provisions: a commercial and entertainment center, a residential community, and a convention center zone (see Figure 1-11).

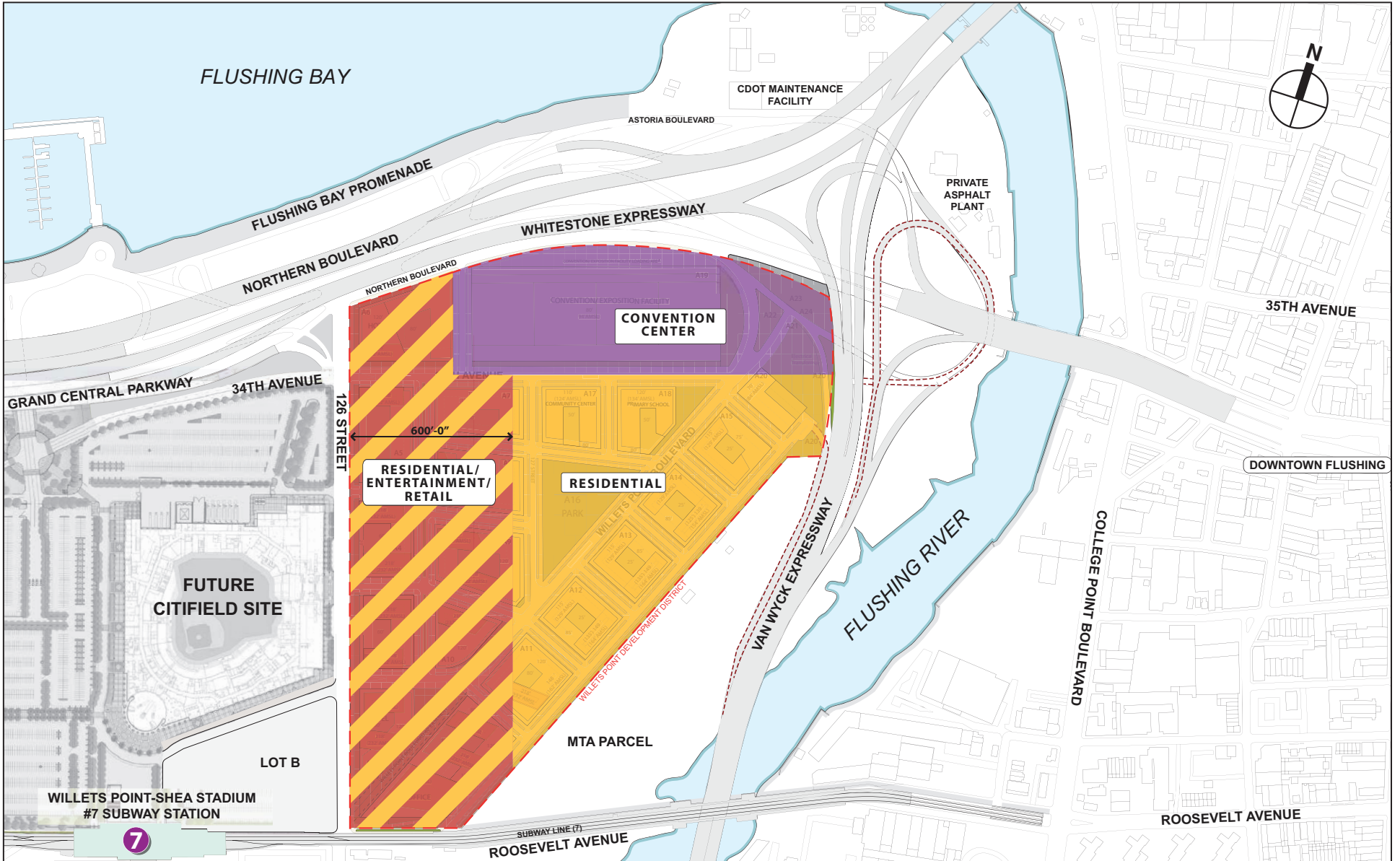
The commercial and entertainment center would be located in the western portion of the District, with a lively, pedestrian-oriented retail corridor extending approximately 600 feet east of 126th Street. This area would contain mixed-use structures with extensive restaurant, entertainment, and nightlife uses along 126th Street, and a mix of retail shops on primary and secondary retail streets east of 126th Street. The upper stories of the buildings in this zone could contain residential, office, or community facility uses (see Figure 1-12). Large commercial anchor blocks would be located at Northern Boulevard and Roosevelt Avenue along 126th Street, with retail uses concentrated in proximity to the new Citi Field. The proposed commercial and entertainment center would create a synergy between the new Citi Field and the District, and would function as a new regional attraction.

The residential community would be located in the eastern part of the District, and could include residential, office, community facility, ground-floor local retail, and parking uses. Design parameters such as setbacks, maximum block dimensions, and building entrances on each blockfront would encourage a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood environment (see Figure 1-13).

The Special District regulations would permit a convention center to be located in the northeastern portion of the district, within 650 feet from Northern Boulevard. Accessory uses—including a hotel and accessory parking—would be located in proximity to the convention center. In the No Convention Center Scenario, additional residential and ground floor retail uses would be developed in place of the convention center.

The Special District would regulate the general layout of the principal private streets, by mandating four or five specific intersections along 126th Street and establishing design parameters for six different street types (see Figure 1-14). These streets would establish the basic form of the District and ensure that the future uses in the District are integrated into a cohesive site design. Two connector streets would be required. One would extend from the intersection of 126th Street and 34th Avenue east into the District, and the other would extend east into the District from Citi Field's southern edge. The illustrative street network and illustrative site plan maintain the current alignment of Willets Point Boulevard in order to allow continued operation and maintenance of the existing 72-inch water main that runs beneath it. A mapped easement would ensure adequate access to the water main in the future. The Special District regulations would require the creation of one primary and two to three secondary retail streets within the entertainment and commercial center, and residential streets within the residential community. An eastern perimeter street would be located within 20 feet of the eastern boundary of the District, extending between Roosevelt Avenue and a connector street. Service streets may be located as one of the streets bounding each anchor block.

The Special District would create a walkable, urban streetscape environment by requiring that off-street parking facilities be fully enclosed and wrapped by active uses so as not to be visible from adjacent sidewalks or open spaces (with some exceptions, including along parts of Northern Boulevard and the eastern perimeter street and service streets, and upper level parking



- Entertainment
- Residential Zone
- Convention Center Zone

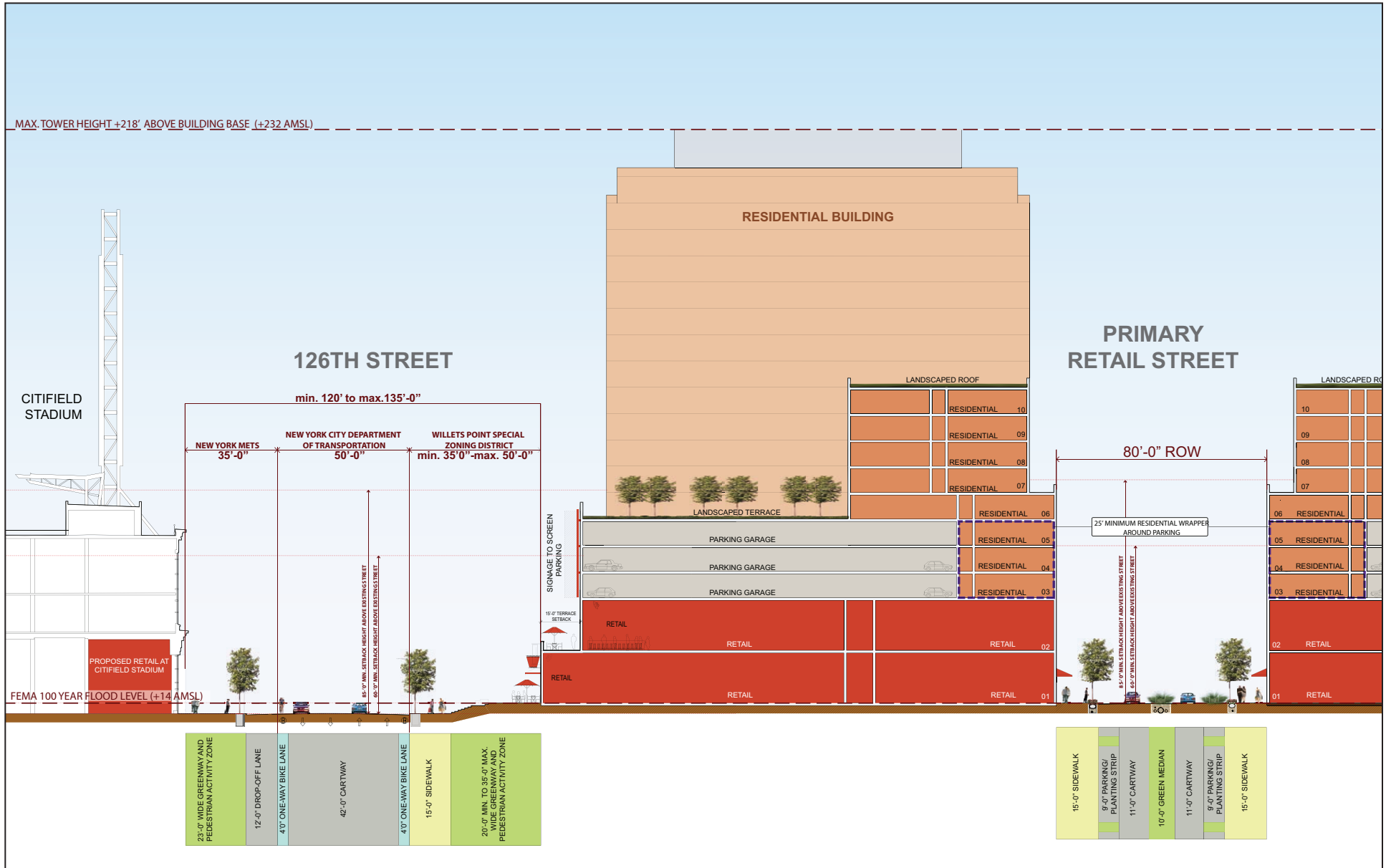


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Figure 1-11

**Proposed Special District Zones**

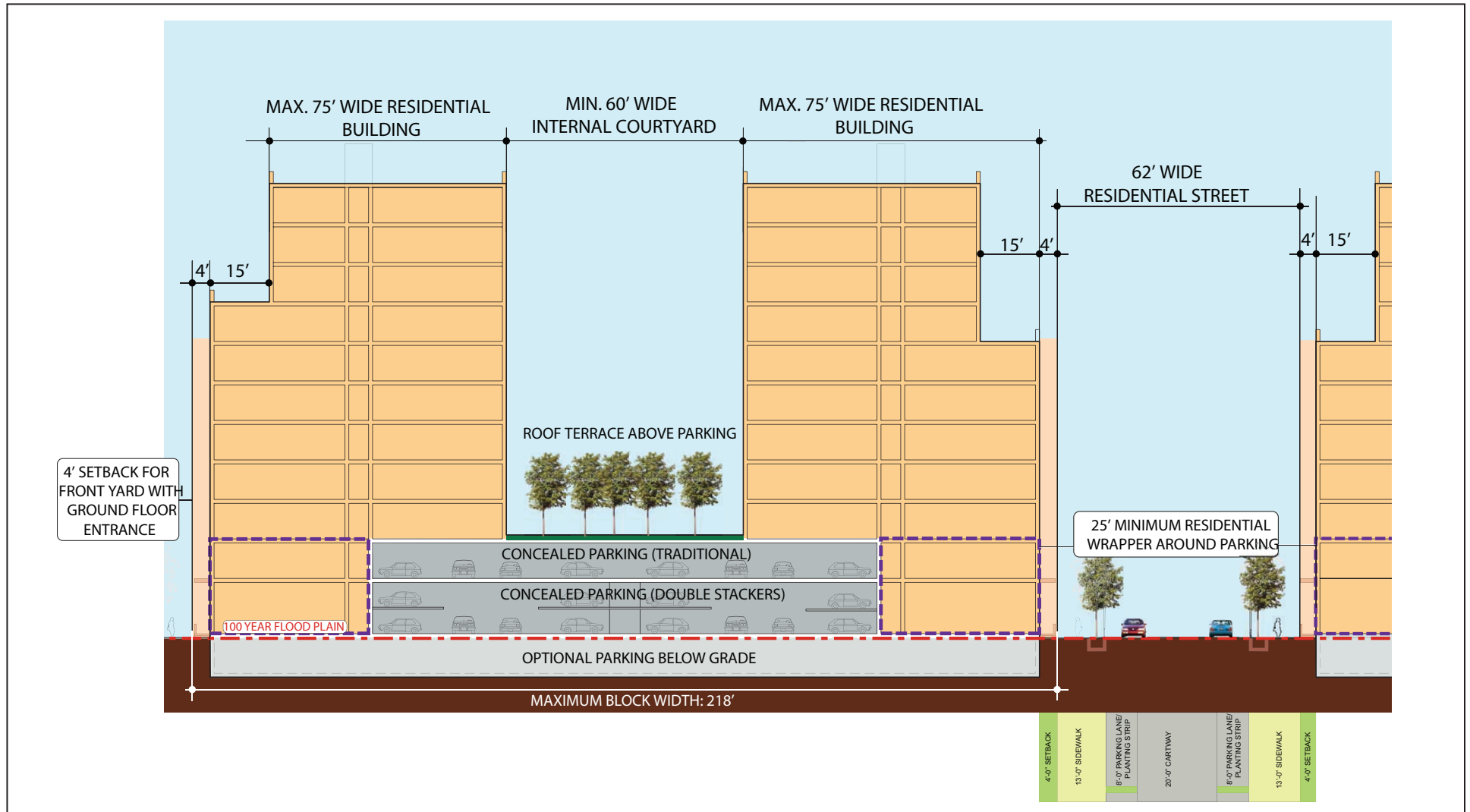




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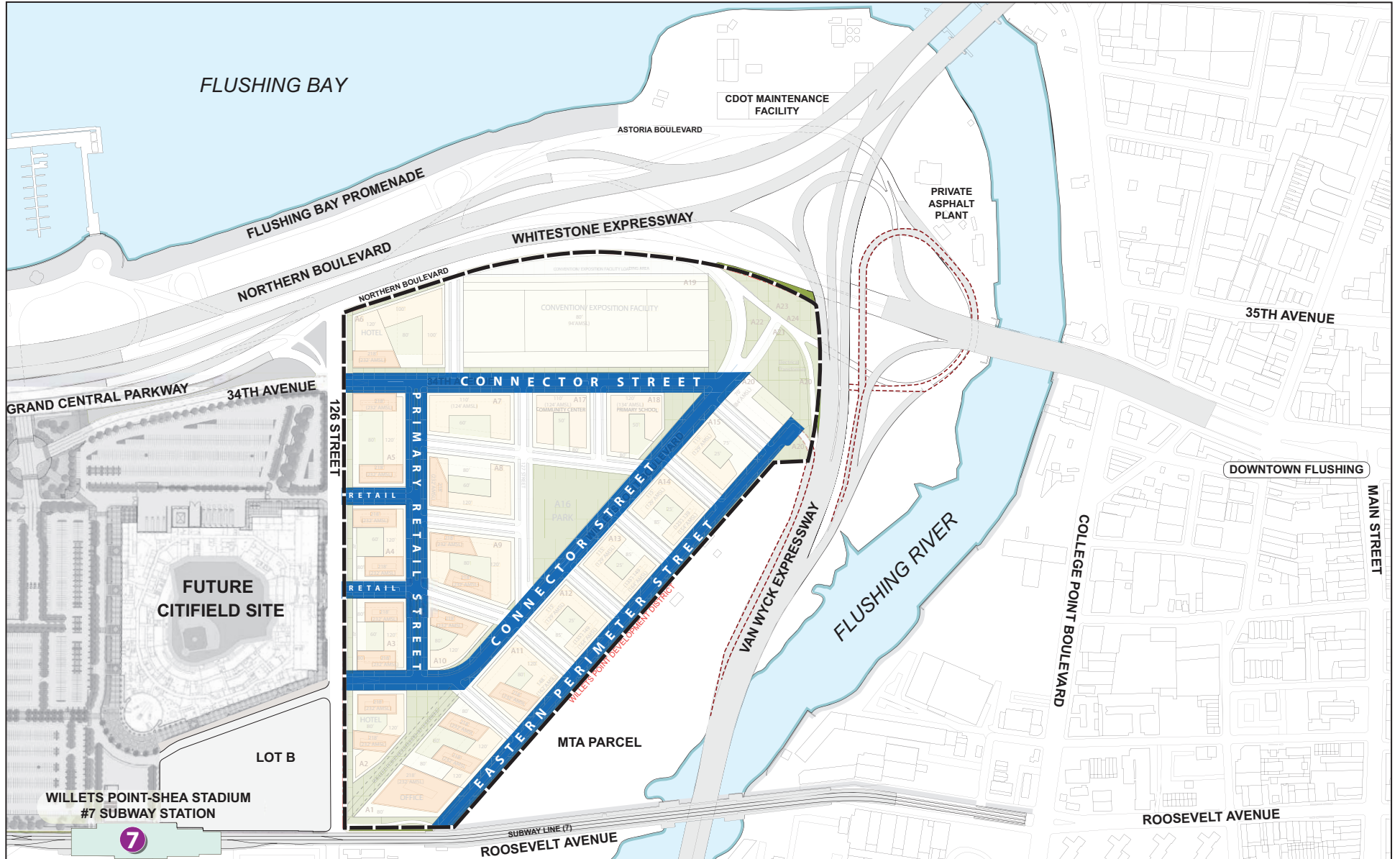
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Figure 1-12 Entertainment and Commercial Center - Elevation



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along 126th Street). The Special District would establish dimensions and design parameters addressing sidewalk width, travel lanes, parking lanes, bicycle lanes, street trees, and other pedestrian amenities. It would also ensure the development of a minimum of eight acres of well-designed open spaces, including a two-acre centrally located park in the residential community with frontage on a connector street. Together, these features would create a lively, pedestrian-oriented streetscape throughout the District.

Figure 1-15 provides an illustrative view of how the land uses and massing could be distributed across the District. The eventual built configuration of uses will be subject to change based on the results of the environmental review, market factors, and engineering considerations, but would be subject to all restrictions and guidelines outlined in the Special Willets Point District.

The City is currently pursuing opportunities to improve bicycle and pedestrian connections between Willets Point and surrounding destinations, such as Flushing Bay Promenade, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, and Downtown Flushing. A number of bicycle and pedestrian access improvement measures have been identified throughout the area, and NYCEDC is currently seeking funding and approvals to implement these improvements. (See Chapter 6, “Open Space,” for an illustration of the proposed improvements.) The bicycle lanes required on connector streets within the redeveloped District would connect to this area-wide bicycle and greenway network, improving connectivity between Willets Point and surrounding areas.

### ***BUILDING HEIGHTS***

Buildings constructed under the proposed Plan would range in maximum height from approximately 60 feet to 218 feet above ground level. Due to its proximity to LaGuardia Airport, the District is subject to height restrictions established by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANY/NJ). Across a majority of the District, height limits are determined by the distance from LaGuardia Airport and the “slope area” in which the site is located. Each point within the slope areas has a different allowable height associated with it, as dictated by its distance from the runway, as shown in Figure 1-16.

Buildings in the northeastern section of the District are located within the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Engine Out Splay area and are permitted to rise one vertical foot AMSL for every 62.5 feet away from the end of the runway. Buildings located in the FAA Departure Splay area farther southwest are permitted to rise one vertical foot AMSL for every 40 feet away from the end of the runway. Buildings in the splay areas along the northern boundary of the District would have a maximum height of between approximately 94 feet AMSL and 133 feet AMSL, while points in the splay areas near the southern boundary may rise as high as approximately 172 feet AMSL. The building height restrictions that apply to the District are also regulated by special controls provided in Article VI of the New York City Zoning Resolution. The southwestern portion of the District falls outside of the ICAO and FAA splay areas. Buildings on this portion of the site may be built to a maximum height that is no greater than the new Citi Field, which is approved for 218 feet above ground level, or 232 feet AMSL. As described previously, up to seven feet of fill would be used to grade and raise the District to an elevation of between 14 and 17 feet AMSL. However, the buildings developed as a result of the proposed Plan would not exceed the maximum AMSL height limits described above.

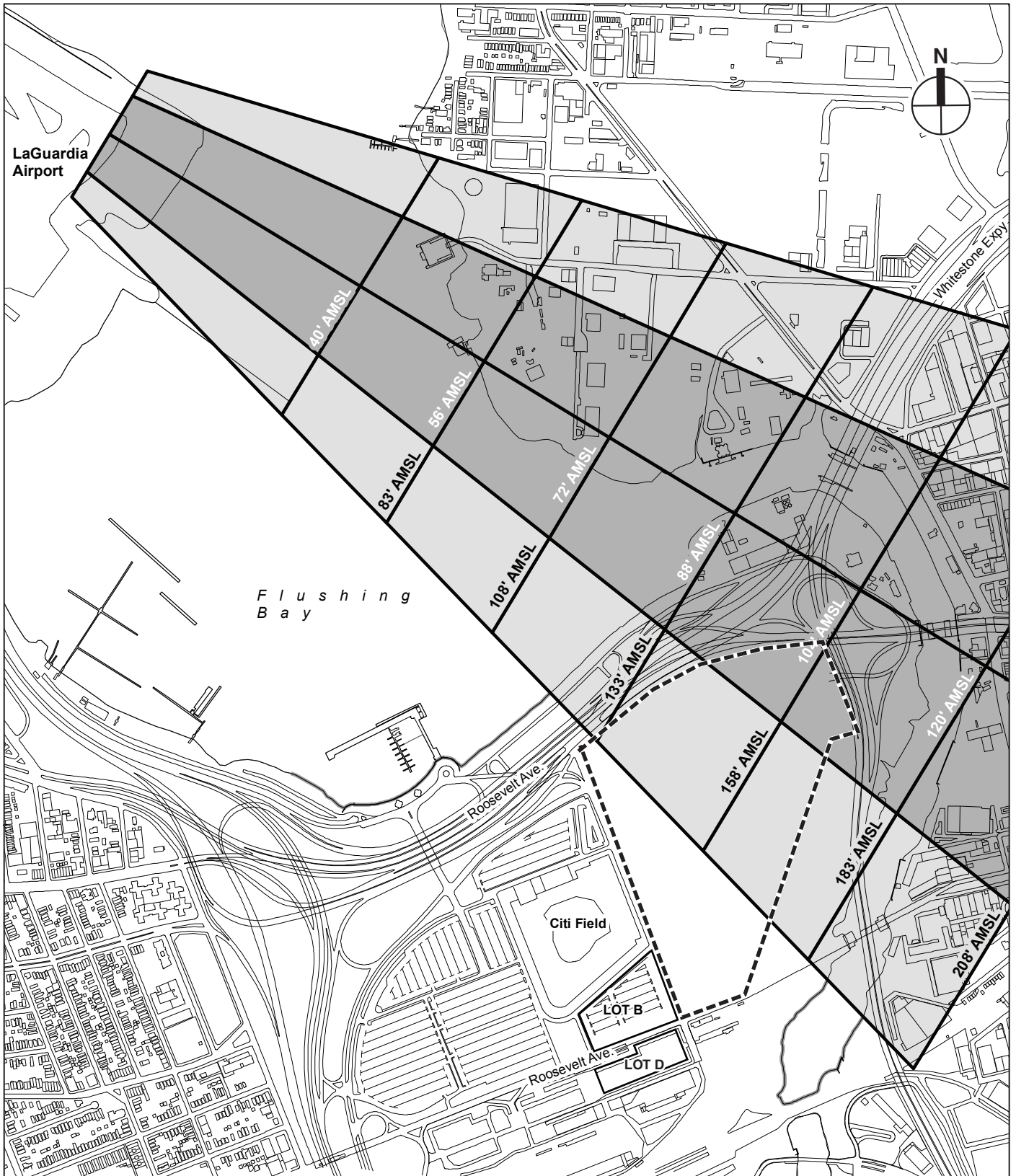
### ***SUSTAINABLE DESIGN***




The size and scope of the proposed Plan represent an opportunity to incorporate integrated sustainable design measures in meaningful ways. Not only would the proposed Plan create a



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|---|---|--|
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:red; border:1px solid black;"></span> Retail     | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightgreen; border:1px solid black;"></span> Rooftop Courtyard             | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:purple; border:1px solid black;"></span> Convention Center                    |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:cyan; border:1px solid black;"></span> Office    | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:purple; border:1px solid black;"></span> Hotel                             | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:blue; border:1px solid black;"></span> Primary School, Community Facility Use |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:yellow; border:1px solid black;"></span> Housing | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:darkgreen; border:1px solid black;"></span> Publicly Accessible Open Space | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:gray; border:1px solid black;"></span> Parking                                |

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-  Willets Point Development District
-  International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Engine Out Splay
-  Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Departure Splay

0 1000 FEET  
SCALE

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Figure 1-16  
ICAO and FAA Heights Limits

transit-oriented urban infill development that would leverage the District's superior transit and highway infrastructure, it would also encourage the latest innovative building and planning technologies.

The Willets Point Development Plan has been accepted as a pilot Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) project by the United States Green Building Council (USGBC). The illustrative site plan (as shown in Figure 1-15) has been designed to achieve LEED-ND certification, and the City would require any future development in the District to achieve LEED-ND certification.

In accordance with LEED-ND certification requirements, the proposed Plan (and the No Convention Center Scenario) may incorporate a number of sustainable practices from the following LEED categories:

- Smart Location and Linkage: Includes Floodplain Avoidance, Brownfield Redevelopment, Reduced Automobile Dependence, Bicycle Networks, Housing and Jobs Proximity, School Proximity, Restoration of Wetlands, and Conservation Management of Wetlands.
- Neighborhood Pattern and Design: Includes Compact Development, Diversity of Uses, Affordable Housing, Reduced Parking Footprint, Walkable Streets, Transit Facilities, Transportation Demand Management, Access to Surrounding Vicinity, Public Spaces, and Active Public Spaces, Universal Accessibility, and Community Outreach and Involvement.
- Green Construction and Technology: Includes LEED Certified Green Buildings, Energy Efficiency in Buildings, Reduced Water Use, Contaminant Reduction in Brownfields Remediation, Stormwater Management, Heat Island Reduction, Solar Orientation, On-site Energy Generation and Renewable Energy Sources, District Heating and Cooling, Infrastructure Energy Efficiency, Wastewater Management, Recycled Content in Infrastructure, Construction Waste Management, and Light Pollution Reduction.
- Innovation and Design Process.

A number of sustainable features have been incorporated into the proposed Plan. These sustainable features, which are reflected in the Special District text as well as the illustrative site plan (Figure 1-15), include:

- The primary retail street would have an option to include a 10-foot landscaped median that could be utilized for stormwater management. If a median is provided, the right-of-way could be expanded from 70 to 80 feet wide.
- Seventy-five percent of residential towers in the District would face within 25 degrees of true south. This would allow for more passive maintenance of interior thermal comfort, decreasing overall energy consumption by reducing the need for traditional heating and cooling systems.
- The off-street parking garages within the District would include a combination of traditional, valet, and stacked parking, which would reduce the overall floor area needed to accommodate District parking. This modification allows some residential buildings to be C-shaped (as opposed to Donut-shaped), which encourages greater energy efficiency by allowing more light into the building and the rooftop courtyard areas.
- Up to five percent of the off-street parking spaces would be available for vehicles being shared by multiple households (e.g., car-sharing vehicles), in order to promote efficiency in parking and provide an increased range of transportation options for residents.

## Willets Point Development Plan

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- Indoor accessory bicycle parking would be required for all developments. Residential buildings with greater than 10 units would require 1 bicycle space per every 2 units, with a maximum of 200 spaces. Office use would require 1 space for every 5,000 sf of office area, to a maximum 200 spaces. Retail use would require 1 space for every 10,000 sf of retail area, to a maximum of 100 spaces.

In addition, the proposed school would be built according to the New York City Green Schools Guide, published by the New York City School Construction Authority in March 2007, which guides the sustainable design, construction, and operation of new schools, modernization projects, and school renovations in New York City. The New York City Green Schools Rating System contains requirements that are as stringent as those for LEED New Construction (version 2.2), required to obtain a LEED-certified rating. Green school improvements reduce operating costs, improve indoor air quality, conserve natural resources, and enhance the learning environment by making schools healthier and more comfortable places to work and learn. \*