

**A. INTRODUCTION**

Neighborhood character is an amalgam of the many components that give an area its distinctive personality. These components can include land use; street layout; scale, type, and style of development; historic features; patterns and volumes of traffic; noise levels; and other physical or social characteristics that help define a community. However, not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements.

In terms of neighborhood character—both in the Willets Point Development District and in the adjacent neighborhoods—this chapter discusses existing conditions, the future without the proposed Plan in 2017, and the probable impacts of the proposed Plan. In accordance with the approach outlined in Chapter 2, “Procedural and Analytical Framework,” this chapter also considers to the extent possible the cumulative impact of the Willets Point Development Plan and the anticipated development on Lots B and D, as well as a scenario that evaluates the proposed Plan without a convention center component.

**PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS***WILLETS POINT DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT*

The proposed Plan would dramatically change neighborhood character in the District, replacing predominantly low-density auto-related, manufacturing, warehousing and distribution, and waste transfer and recycling uses with a new mixed-use neighborhood. While specific development plans have not been formulated, the Special Willets Point District regulations would create a dynamic, sustainable community by integrating regional attractions, residential (with approximately 20 percent affordable housing), retail, and other uses within a network of pedestrian-scaled streetscapes. The proposed Special Willets Point District would set forth the location of uses, building heights and setbacks, street layout and hierarchies, streetscape design, and basic site planning and design provisions.

Overall, the pedestrian-oriented environment and active mix of residential, retail/entertainment, office, open space, hotel and conference center, and community facility uses would be an improvement over conditions in the future without the proposed Plan. Development within the District would be scaled to enhance pedestrian activity, with prescribed streetwall heights and locations, mandatory pedestrian amenities, and other design elements to enhance building façades. The Special District regulations would also mandate the provision of adequate sidewalks, street trees and landscaping, and the development of a minimum of eight acres of publicly accessible open space, including a centrally located park. Together, these features would create a lively, pedestrian-oriented streetscape throughout the District. The proposed Plan would also include environmental remediation, grading and elevating the District above the

floodplain, the installation of new sanitary and storm sewer lines, and the creation of a new connection to the Van Wyck Expressway.

The proposed changes, while significant, would result in an improvement in neighborhood character and would not have a significant adverse impact.

### *ADJACENT AREAS*

The proposed convention center and commercial uses would enhance Flushing and Corona's roles as regional economic centers, and would attract visitors to the area. The proposed residential, commercial office, retail, hotel, community facility, open space, and parking uses would be consistent with the uses and character in the surrounding area, particularly those within the dense commercial center of Downtown Flushing.

The site planning and urban design of the District would serve to integrate the District with surrounding entertainment and recreational uses. In the future with the proposed Plan, 126th Street would connect the entertainment and commercial center and the adjacent Citi Field with pedestrian-oriented design elements, and would include dedicated bicycle lanes providing connections to points to the north and south.

The adjacent Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) property, which would be unaffected by the proposed Plan and would remain zoned for heavy industrial uses, would not be compatible with all of the uses proposed in the District, such as residential and community facility uses. However, it is not uncommon for new higher-density residential and commercial districts to be located next to older heavy manufacturing districts near the waterfront. In terms of neighborhood character, this juxtaposition would result in a contrast of types—with the mixed-use, primarily residential proposed development on one side of the street, and the industrial uses of the MTA property on the other.

As described in Chapter 17, "Traffic and Parking," traffic generated by the proposed Plan would be in addition to high baseline volumes and poor levels of service at many of the analysis intersections and along key sections of the highway network, largely due to other developments planned in the area and substantial additional background traffic growth. As a result, the proposed Plan is expected to have significant traffic impacts at numerous signalized and unsignalized intersections, as well as at certain highway and ramp locations. However, since these areas are, and would continue to be, heavily traveled, the incremental increases resulting from the proposed Plan—while defined as traffic impacts—would not be such that the proposed Plan would result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

The traffic generated by the proposed Plan would be expected to produce significant increases in noise levels only at the World's Fair Marina Park north of the District during one analysis period. Despite these significant increases, the projected noise levels at the park are not expected to be higher than typical for parks in New York City. This noise increase would not have a significant adverse neighborhood character impact on the park, which exists next to highway roads and functions primarily as an active boating marina.

Overall, the proposed Plan would not have a significant adverse neighborhood character impact on surrounding areas.

*LOTS B AND D*

The potential development of Lot B with new office and retail uses would complement the new Citi Field and the mix of new uses proposed as part of the Willets Point Development Plan. The additional commercial uses on Lot B would help attract and retain visitors to the area, adding to the synergy created between Citi Field and the proposed Plan. The anticipated development on Lot B would bring new active uses and enhance the streetscape along Roosevelt Avenue and 126th Street, contributing to the pedestrian-oriented entertainment and commercial center and regional destination that would be created under the proposed Plan. The potential development of a five-level parking garage on Lot D, south of Roosevelt Avenue, would consolidate parking capacity on Lots B and D, as well as provide additional parking to serve the new commercial uses. Overall, the redevelopment of Lots B and D and the proposed Plan would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

*NO CONVENTION CENTER SCENARIO*

As with the proposed Plan, the No Convention Center Scenario would change the development potential of the District in a manner consistent with the proposed Urban Renewal Plan (URP) and the Special Willets Point District. The effects of the No Convention Center Scenario on neighborhood character would be largely the same as with the proposed Plan. Both development scenarios would dramatically change the face of the District by replacing predominantly low-density industrial uses with a new higher-density mixed-use neighborhood. Residential and retail uses would be the core activities, supported by office, hotel, community facilities, and open space uses. The additional residential and retail development that would be introduced by the No Convention Center Scenario would be located in the northern portion of the District, and the Special District regulations pertaining to the residential zone would also apply. Therefore, while it would result in additional residential and retail uses and no convention center, in comparison with the proposed Plan, the effects of the No Convention Center Scenario on neighborhood character would be similar. Overall, like the proposed Plan, the No Convention Center Scenario would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

**B. METHODOLOGY**

**STUDY AREAS**

The analysis of neighborhood character is addressed in two geographical areas: the District and the adjacent neighborhoods. The neighborhood character study area is generally defined as the area ½ mile from the boundaries of the District and includes neighborhoods adjacent to the District. A larger secondary study area was not considered necessary for the neighborhood character analysis due to natural and man-made barriers (described below), and because this area is too distant from the District to contribute to the existing neighborhood character and would not experience effects to neighborhood character as a result of the proposed Plan (Chapter 3, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” concludes that the proposed Plan would have no significant adverse impact on land use patterns in this wider area, as it is too far from neighborhoods in this area to exert much influence on them).

**NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER COMPONENTS**

According to the 2001 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when an action would exceed

preliminary thresholds in any one of the following areas of technical analysis: land use, urban design and visual resources, cultural resources, socioeconomic conditions, traffic and pedestrians, or noise. The proposed Plan, which would result in major changes in the District, would affect many of the components of neighborhood character, including:

- *Land Use.* Development resulting from a proposed action would have the potential to change neighborhood character when it introduces a new, incompatible land use, conflicts with land use policy or other public plans for the area, changes land use character, or causes 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, and landscaping. 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.* According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, when an action would result in substantial direct changes to a historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a resource, or when a 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 cause 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: substantial changes in level of service (LOS); change in traffic patterns; change in roadway classifications; change in vehicle mixes; substantial increases in traffic volumes on residential streets; or significant traffic impacts, as identified in that technical analysis. 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 regard to noise, it would need to result in a significant adverse noise impact and a change in acceptability category, as defined by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) external noise exposure standards.

This chapter's impact analysis focuses primarily on changes in the technical areas discussed above, since changes in these technical areas are most likely to affect neighborhood character. The *CEQR Technical Manual* states that several moderate changes, none of which rises to the level of a significant impact, could combine to create a significant impact on neighborhood character. Therefore, where appropriate, the effects of changes are also looked at cumulatively to determine whether, taken together, they would result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

## C. EXISTING CONDITIONS

### WILLETS POINT DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

The Willets Point Development District is an active industrial neighborhood in a busy urban setting. Largely defined by its concentration of auto-related uses, the area is a jumbled assortment of structures, signage, cars, open storage, and materials handling. Little relief—in the form of open space, cohesive urban design, attractive streetscape elements, or even basic infrastructure—is provided to alleviate the neighborhood’s prevailing sense of disorder. As described below, the area also lacks connectivity to other nearby neighborhoods and is generally perceived as a stand-alone enclave.

The approximately 61-acre District is well-defined by its location. It covers most of the Willets Point peninsula, which is itself defined by the Flushing River and Flushing Bay. In addition, the neighborhood is surrounded by a network of above-grade roadways, connectors and viaducts (including the Van Wyck Expressway, Northern Boulevard, and the elevated No. 7 subway line) that form a relatively hard-edged boundary. On its western edge, the District is bounded along 126th Street by Shea Stadium and the development site for its replacement, Citi Field. Together, these natural and man-made barriers function as a visual and physical barrier that effectively isolates the neighborhood from surrounding areas. The District is relatively flat, with no notable natural features, landscaping, or vegetation. The buildings in the District are a combination of small, low-scale structures and larger, boxier buildings.

As described in Chapter 3, the District is an active industrial neighborhood primarily made up of auto-related businesses. These services consist of auto-body repair, auto glass, car washes and auto detailing, used and new auto part sales, tire sales, and vehicle towing. For the most part, these auto-related businesses occupy one-story garage buildings and Quonset-type structures, many of which contain multiple auto-related businesses. There are also a number of car junkyards in the District, which support auto salvage businesses.

The District also contains several larger industrial uses, including warehousing and distribution, construction-related services and materials, and waste transfer and recycling. There are also undeveloped lots used for storage of construction materials or auto parts. Various local commercial uses also dot the area, including delis, check-cashing establishments, a health club, and a clothing and supply store. There is one residential unit in the District, located on Willets Point Boulevard.

The District is partially developed in a street grid, although most of the blocks are irregularly shaped. At the District’s edges are a number of busy roadways (both at grade and above grade) that include portions of the Van Wyck Expressway, Northern Boulevard, and Roosevelt Avenue. Within the District itself, Willets Point Boulevard and 127th Street are the main thoroughfares. The streets and sidewalks in the District are in poor condition, with large potholes, broken pavement, missing signage, and a general state of disrepair. The sidewalks are also used for car parking, auto parts storage, and waste storage. There are few lane markings, sidewalk crossings, or stop signs. Throughout the District, stormwater drainage is a serious problem, and streets in the area often flood during storm events. In some areas of the District there are no sidewalks and the streets are unpaved, adding to the underdeveloped and degraded look of the area.

The majority of structures in the District are generally small masonry or metal buildings, temporary metal sheds and Quonset huts, or brick buildings with small footprints. Exterior

building materials include corrugated metal, concrete block, and brick. The majority of the buildings have large, projecting advertising signs. Most of the buildings in the District are attached or located close together. However, there are also a number of freestanding buildings that are larger and boxier in form. These include the Tully Construction site, the House of Spices distribution site, and the Fodera Foods site, among others.

As described in Chapter 8, “Historic Resources,” the Fodera Foods building is the only historic resource in the District. This two-story building is located near the intersection of Willets Point Boulevard and the Van Wyck Expressway. It has a red brick front section, which faces onto Willets Point Boulevard, and a large, double-height, multi-paned glass section in the rear. The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) has determined this structure (the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building) to be eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places (S/NR). However, for a number of reasons, the building does not meaningfully contribute to neighborhood character. Tucked into the northeast corner of the District, the building’s primary façade is not visible from most of the District or from most parts of the study area due to the elevated Van Wyck Expressway—the primary views of the building’s façade are when driving past it. The building is not particularly tall and therefore is not highly visible from either the District or the study area, and it is not a defining feature of a view corridor or a visual terminating point.

As described in Chapter 9, “Urban Design and Visual Resources,” there are no visual resources in the District, nor are any visible from the sidewalks and streets. Views to the west are blocked by Shea Stadium and the new Citi Field, currently under construction. Natural features surrounding the District, including those in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, Flushing Bay, and the Flushing River, are not visually accessible, primarily due to the elevated transportation structures to the north, south, and east of the site.

Noise conditions in the area are typical of an urban neighborhood adjacent to elevated subway operations and well-trafficked roads. As described in greater detail in Chapter 20, “Noise,” most of the noise affecting the District is from vehicular traffic along area roadways and from the elevated No. 7 subway line that runs above Roosevelt Avenue. Airplane flights from nearby LaGuardia Airport also contribute to background noise levels. Overall noise levels are generally relatively high, and reflect the level of activity in the area.

As described in Chapter 4, “Socioeconomic Conditions,” approximately 227 establishments or 87 percent of all businesses located in the District are in auto-related sectors. Auto-related businesses in the District include auto repair and service and maintenance businesses, salvage yards selling recycled automotive parts, retail establishments selling new and used parts and tires, and towing companies. Together, auto-related businesses include approximately 1,057 jobs, or 62 percent of the district total. Other industries with a notable presence in the District include specialty food product wholesalers, construction companies, and waste transfer businesses. Together, these industries employ approximately 654 people, or 38 percent of the District total. The largest employers in the District are Tully Construction, a general contractor that works on large infrastructure projects; House of Spices, a regional distributor of South Asian food products; and Evergreen Recycling of Corona, a solid waste collection business. Each employs approximately 100 on-site workers.

### ADJACENT AREAS

Nearby areas include other parts of the Willets Point peninsula that lie outside the Willets Point Development District, a portion of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, and downtown Flushing.

Uses nearest to the District include a mix of industrial activities. Directly east of the District is a large undeveloped MTA property located along the Flushing River waterfront, a majority of which is leased to Tully Environmental, Inc., which operates a construction and debris recycling operation on the site. To the north of the District, across Northern Boulevard, is a New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) Maintenance and Repair facility, and between Northern Boulevard and the Van Wyck Expressway is an asphalt plant. To the south of the District across Roosevelt Avenue are the New York City Transit (NYCT) Corona Yards and NYCT Casey Stengel Bus Depot. Taken together, the uses surrounding the District have an industrial character typical of transit infrastructure, manufacturing zones, and working waterfront uses. While they are the geographically closest sites to the District and contain uses compatible with those found in the District, aside from the MTA property these sites are all buffered from the District by intervening raised roadways and the elevated superstructure of the No. 7 subway line.

Primarily to the south and west of the District is Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, a major recreational and cultural destination that covers approximately 1,255 acres. Immediately west of the District across 126th Street, the park includes the construction site for Citi Field, a new stadium for the New York Mets. Immediately west of the Citi Field construction site is Shea Stadium, the current 56,000-seat home of the Mets. On game days and during special events, the area becomes a hub of activity with the presence of fans, vendors, and vehicles. But much of the time, particularly when baseball is not in season, the stadium is inactive and quiet.

Another part of the park near the project site is the Flushing Bay Promenade, which winds along Flushing Bay for approximately 1.4 miles from LaGuardia Airport to the Willets Point peninsula. The promenade provides access to the World's Fair Marina and a restaurant located north of Shea Stadium, as well as many sitting areas located throughout the promenade. There are more than 1,000 parking spaces spread throughout the promenade, which are also available for parking for Mets games. Additional parts of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park are more distant from the District and include the USTA National Tennis Center and other recreational spaces and activities.

In contrast to the underutilization that characterizes much of the District, east of the District and across the Flushing River is the vibrant urban core of Downtown Flushing. Flushing is a thriving business and residential area, as well as a center for ethnic goods and culture. Downtown Flushing is also a regional transportation and commercial hub for Queens. Downtown Flushing and the greater Flushing area contain a substantial Asian population, with large Chinese and Korean communities, and there are many specialty food and retail stores, restaurants, and other services. Most of the commercial and cultural activity is centered along Northern Boulevard, Roosevelt Avenue, and Main Street. The predominantly industrial areas in Flushing extend in a band along College Point Boulevard and along the Flushing River up to College Point.

## **D. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PLAN**

### **WILLETS POINT DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT**

In the future without the proposed Plan, while some redevelopment or improvements may occur within the District, substantial change is not expected by 2017 due to the low-density industrial zoning regulations, contamination concerns, and other unappealing conditions. Without the proposed Plan, it is expected that the District would continue to support the same types of uses

now found in the area and to remain relatively isolated from surrounding neighborhoods. As a result, the character of the neighborhood is expected to remain largely unchanged. Traffic within and around the District would increase as a result of other development in the future without the proposed Plan, resulting in more congested conditions. Noise levels within and around the District would likely remain unchanged.

### ADJACENT AREAS

In the future without the proposed Plan, the existing uses on the remainder of the Willets Point peninsula, including the undeveloped MTA property to the east of the District, are expected to remain unchanged.

As described in Chapter 2, development of new residential and commercial uses is expected to continue between now and 2017 in the areas outside of the proposed Plan. A number of privately and publicly sponsored development projects that are now proposed or in construction would be completed.

Immediately west of the District, the new home of the New York Mets, Citi Field, is currently under construction and is scheduled to be completed in 2009. This 44,000-seat stadium will replace the existing 56,000-seat Shea Stadium, located immediately to its west. Along 126th Street, the stadium will provide ground-floor retail space and Mets executive offices within a four-story, 100,000-sf building. The retail uses are likely to primarily include team apparel and other Mets-related items, as well as food service for stadium visitors. The existing traffic circle north of the stadium that connects Meridian Road with Boat Basin Road and provides access to the northern parking area will be converted to a standard four-legged, signalized intersection. The reconfiguration of the existing traffic circle is intended to provide improved access to the new main gateway into the stadium parking area. In addition, a bus parking area will be located north of Meridian Road, in a lot that is currently being used for stadium visitor parking.

The Downtown Flushing area has been changing in character in recent years as more high-density residential and large-scale mixed-use developments are either under construction or planned throughout the area. Sky View Parc is a mixed-use development under construction on a large site located south of Roosevelt Avenue that extends between the Flushing River and College Point Boulevard. It will ultimately include 750 residential units, 760,000 sf of retail, a 51,800-sf restaurant, and 3,000 parking spaces. It will also include a 40-foot-wide waterfront esplanade along the Flushing River. North of Sky View Parc, along the Flushing River, the River Park Place project is planned. This mixed-use development will contain 475 residential units, 251,000 sf of office, as well as retail, community facility use and possibly a hotel, and will include a waterfront esplanade. In recent years, there has been increased interest in the further development of mixed-use projects along the Flushing River waterfront, and it is expected that the trend of new mixed-use development along the waterfront could continue over the long-term by 2017 without the proposed Plan.

In the heart of Downtown Flushing, a mixed-use development called Queens Crossing was recently completed. It contains 144,000 sf of office space, 110,000 sf of retail space, 29,600 sf of community facility space, and 400 parking spaces. Immediately east of this site, Flushing Commons, a new mixed-use project proposed for development on Municipal Lot No. 1, is expected to contain approximately 508 residential units, 219 hotel rooms, 436,000 sf of retail space, 85,000 sf of community facility space, and 1,603 parking spaces. The former Caldor building at Roosevelt Avenue and Main Street may also be redeveloped with new retail uses. Several other new office buildings and residential developments are under construction in the



vicinity of Prince Street. In addition, in an effort to relieve traffic congestion in Downtown Flushing, Main and Union Streets will each be converted from two-way to one-way streets, running north and south, respectively.

Future traffic conditions are expected to be significantly worse than existing conditions due to these and other background developments planned in the area and additional background traffic growth. Noise levels are not expected to noticeably increase.

## **E. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PLAN**

The proposed Plan would significantly change the neighborhood character of the Willets Point neighborhood from an uninviting and underutilized industrial area to a center of mixed-use 24-hour activity. This heightened level of activity would not be out of character with the revitalizing effect of the new Citi Field, the existing community of Flushing, the projects planned for the area, and the character of other nearby neighborhoods.

All future development will be governed by the Willets Point URP and the zoning regulations for the Special Willets Point District. The proposed Plan would also change the underlying zoning of the District from the existing M3-1 and R3-2 districts to a C4-4 district and demap some or all of the streets within the District.

### **WILLETS POINT DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT**

The proposed Plan would change the development potential of the District in a manner consistent with the framework set forth by the URP and the Special Willets Point District. As a result, a range of new development could occur within the District. While specific development plans have not been formulated, the Special District regulations would create a dynamic community by integrating regional attractions—such as the convention center and destination retail—and residential, community facility, and other uses within a network of pedestrian-scaled streetscapes throughout the District. The Special District regulations would determine elements that would apply to each area, 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 detail in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” and Chapter 2, the maximum development envelope that would be permitted under the URP includes up to 8.94 million gross square feet (gsf) of new buildings, which would include residential, retail, office space, a hotel and convention center, as well as community facilities and open space. Residential development is expected to include approximately 20 percent affordable housing. In addition, the Plan would include construction of a new connection between the Van Wyck Expressway and the District to facilitate the movement of traffic into and out of the District and minimize traffic on nearby local roadways.

The proposed Plan would include environmental remediation, the installation of new sanitary and storm sewer lines, and the grading and elevation of the entire District above the 100-year floodplain, and would result in the displacement of all existing uses in the District.

Overall, the proposed Plan would dramatically change neighborhood character in the District, replacing predominantly low-density auto-related, manufacturing, warehousing and distribution, and waste transfer and recycling uses with a new mixed-use neighborhood. As part of the Plan, residential and retail uses would be the core activities, and office, hotel and convention center

uses would complement those uses to create a regional economic center. Community facilities and open space would support the residential and commercial uses and improve the quality of life for area residents and visitors. As described in Chapter 3 and Chapter 9, the proposed Plan is not expected to have significant adverse environmental impacts on land use or urban design.

The Special District would include a pedestrian-oriented regional entertainment and commercial center along 126th Street and would combine retail, residential, office, and parking uses in mixed-use structures. Major retail uses would be concentrated in the center of this zone, in proximity to the new Citi Field, while a mix of smaller shops and apparel stores would be located along the primary and secondary retail streets within the zone.

East of the 126th Street corridor, the Special District would provide more flexibility in the placement of various uses and of architectural design, within established parameters, to ensure the compatibility of adjacent uses and the adequate provision of light and air within the District. The convention center would be located in the northeastern portion of the district, with frontage oriented along one of the two connector streets. Accessory uses—including a hotel and accessory parking—would be located in proximity to the convention center.

The Special District would encourage the development of a primarily residential community in the eastern part of the District, with residential and ground floor local retail, as well as community facility, office, and parking uses. The residential community would also include an approximately two-acre centrally located park, with frontage on a connector street, programmed primarily for active recreational use. The Special District regulations include design parameters such as setbacks, maximum block dimensions, and building entrances on each blockfront to encourage a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood environment.

The Special District regulations allow the development of a wastewater reclamation facility, a cogeneration facility, and an electrical utility substation within the District, provided they would primarily serve the District. These uses, if pursued, would be subject to separate environmental and public review processes. For the water reclamation facility and cogeneration facility, the Special District text requires that 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. Additionally, the siting and architectural design and landscaping of a water reclamation facility would be required to minimize the interruption of retail frontage and blend harmoniously with the surrounding area. Furthermore, it would be required to meet high performance standards and would not result in any noxious odors or noise. Therefore, if developed, each of these potential facilities would be compatible with the surrounding uses in the District.

The Special District regulations would create a walkable, urban streetscape environment by requiring that off-street parking facilities be fully enclosed and wrapped by active uses (with some exceptions, including along parts of Northern Boulevard and the upper level parking along 126th Street). The Special District regulations would mandate the provision of adequate sidewalks, street trees and landscaped areas, and the development of a minimum of eight acres of publicly accessible open space, including a centrally located park. Together, these features would create a lively, pedestrian-oriented streetscape throughout the District.

As described in greater detail in Chapter 1, 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), and buildings constructed under the proposed Plan would range in

maximum height from approximately 60 feet to 218 feet above ground level. Development within the District would be scaled to enhance pedestrian activity, with prescribed streetwall heights and locations, pedestrian amenities, and other design elements to enhance building façades.

The site planning and urban design of the District would serve to integrate the District with surrounding entertainment and recreational uses. In the future with the proposed Plan, 126th Street would connect the entertainment and commercial center and adjacent Citi Field with pedestrian-oriented design elements. 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.

As described in Chapter 8, the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building (S/NR-eligible) would be demolished as part of the proposed Plan. Demolition of this building would constitute a significant adverse impact on historic resources. Retaining the building would be challenging from a site grading and engineering perspective and would limit the flexibility of uses and building locations within the District, which is one of the key aspects of the Special District regulations and the URP. Nonetheless, the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) would encourage future developers to retain part or all of the building as part of their formal request for proposals process. Measures to partially mitigate this impact would be developed in consultation with OPRHP and could include recording the building through photographic documentation and an accompanying narrative.

As described above in “Existing Conditions,” the building does not meaningfully contribute to neighborhood character for a number of reasons. It is a low building tucked into the northeast corner of the District, and its primary façade is not visible from most of the District or from most parts of the study area due to the elevated Van Wyck Expressway. Therefore, demolition of the Former Empire Millwork Corporation Building would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

As described in Chapter 4, the proposed Plan would not result in significant adverse impacts as measured by the five socioeconomic areas of concern prescribed in the *CEQR Technical Manual*. These areas include direct displacement of a residential population; direct displacement of existing businesses and institutions; indirect displacement of a residential population; indirect displacement of businesses and institutions; and adverse effects on specific industries. The businesses and institutions that would be displaced were determined not to be of substantial economic value to the region or City as defined under CEQR. The District’s businesses are not unique; similar services and products are provided throughout Queens, the City, and the region. In addition, the vast majority of these businesses and institutions would be able to relocate to other properties within Queens or the City. Although rental costs would likely increase—as a result of the significantly lower rents currently paid in the District compared with other manufacturing areas, and a competitive industrial real estate market citywide—most of these businesses would remain viable elsewhere.

Overall, the proposed Plan would create a dynamic new mixed-use neighborhood with pedestrian-scaled streetscapes, provide new attractions and amenities, and integrate the District with surrounding entertainment and recreational uses.

### **LOTS B AND D**

As described in Chapter 2, if the proposed Plan is approved and the District is redeveloped into a new mixed-use community and regional destination, it is likely that this could generate increased demand for additional development on Citi Field parking lot B, which is located across 126th Street from the District, directly south of the stadium. While specific development plans for Lot B have not yet been proposed, it is anticipated that the existing parking lot may be replaced with new office and retail uses. The Lot B development could include a one-story retail structure containing 184,500 sf and a 10-story office building containing 280,000 sf. In addition, a new five-level parking garage containing approximately 1,543 spaces may be developed on Lot D, south of Roosevelt Avenue. This garage would replace the parking uses on Lots B and D, as well as provide additional parking to serve the new commercial uses on Lot B.

The potential development of Lots B and D with new office, retail, and parking uses would complement the new Citi Field and the mix of new uses proposed as part of the Willets Point Development Plan. The additional commercial uses on Lot B would help attract and retain visitors to the area, adding to the synergy created between Citi Field and the proposed Plan. The anticipated development on Lot B would bring new active uses and enhance the streetscape along Roosevelt Avenue and 126th Street, contributing to the pedestrian-oriented entertainment and commercial center and regional destination that would be created under the proposed Plan. The development of a five-level parking structure on Lot D would consolidate the parking uses associated with Lots B and D. Overall, the redevelopment of Lots B and D and the proposed Plan would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

### **NO CONVENTION CENTER SCENARIO**

Since the URP would allow flexibility in the combination of uses to be developed in the District, the GEIS analyzes a development scenario in which the convention center is replaced with additional residential and retail development (the No Convention Center Scenario). As with the proposed Plan, the No Convention Center Scenario would change the development potential of the District in a manner consistent with the proposed URP and the Special Willets Point District.

The additional residential and retail development in the No Convention Center Scenario would be located in the eastern portion of the District, and the regulations pertaining to the residential community zone within the Special District would apply. There would be no changes to the provisions in the Special District text with respect to streets and streetscapes, the entertainment and lifestyle center, the residential community, open space, parking and loading, and signage.

Both development scenarios would dramatically change land uses in the District, replacing predominantly low-density industrial uses with a new higher-density mixed-use neighborhood. Residential and retail uses would be the core activities, supported by office, hotel, community facilities, and open space uses. Without the convention center, the entertainment and commercial center would be the primary regional attraction within the District. As with the proposed Plan, the No Convention Center Scenario would not result in any significant adverse impacts with respect to land use compatibility or density. The effects of the No Convention Center Scenario on technical areas such as traffic, noise and socioeconomic conditions would not be noticeably different in terms of their effect on neighborhood character, and conditions would largely be the same as those with the proposed Plan.

Overall, the No Convention Center Scenario would not result in any significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

## ADJACENT AREAS

The probable impact of the proposed Plan on neighborhood character in the surrounding areas is expected to be largely beneficial. Issues associated with the proposed Plan as they relate to neighborhood character focus on the compatibility of the new land uses and densities with those nearby.

The proposed regional attractions and commercial uses would enhance Flushing and Corona's roles as regional economic centers, and would attract visitors to the area. The proposed residential, office, retail, hotel and convention center, community facility, open space, and parking uses would be consistent with the uses and character in the surrounding area, particularly those within the dense commercial center of Downtown Flushing.

The site planning and urban design of the District would serve to integrate the District with surrounding entertainment and recreational uses. In the future with the proposed Plan, 126th Street would connect the entertainment and commercial center and the adjacent Citi Field with pedestrian-oriented design elements, and would include dedicated bicycle lanes providing connections to points to the north and south. In addition, 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 and Corona. The Special District regulations would require new bicycle lanes on the connector streets in the District. The new bicycle lanes in the District would connect to this area-wide bicycle and greenway network, improving connectivity between Willets Point and surrounding areas.

The adjacent MTA property, which would be unaffected by the proposed Plan and would remain zoned for heavy industrial uses, would not be compatible with all of the uses proposed in the District, such as residential and community facility uses. However, it is not uncommon for new higher-density residential and commercial districts to be located next to older heavy manufacturing districts near the waterfront. In terms of neighborhood character, this juxtaposition would result in a contrast of types—with the mixed-use, primarily residential proposed development on one side of the street, and the industrial uses of the MTA property on the other.

As described in Chapter 4, the proposed Plan would not result in significant adverse impacts due to indirect residential displacement. Although it would introduce a substantial number of new residential units to the area, the potential for development in the District to substantially affect housing values and socioeconomic characteristics in the surrounding study area is limited by a number of factors, including the geographic separation of the District from surrounding communities and the well-established nature of those surrounding communities, the provision of affordable housing as part of the proposed Plan, and the likelihood that introducing new housing could serve to relieve, rather than increase, residential market pressures in the area. As also described in Chapter 4, the proposed Plan would not result in significant adverse impacts due to indirect business displacement from increased commercial rents or from competition.

As described in Chapter 17, traffic generated by the proposed Plan would be in addition to high baseline volumes and poor levels of service at many of the analysis intersections and along key sections of the highway network, largely due to other developments planned in the area and substantial additional background traffic growth. As a result, the proposed Plan is expected to have significant traffic impacts at numerous signalized and unsignalized intersections, as well as at certain highway and ramp locations. However, since these areas are and would continue to be

heavily traveled, the incremental increases resulting from the proposed Plan—while defined as traffic impacts—would not be such that the proposed Plan would result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

The traffic generated by the proposed Plan would be expected to produce significant increases in noise levels only at the World’s Fair Marina Park north of the District during one analysis period. Despite these significant increases, the projected noise levels at the park are not expected to be higher than typical for parks in New York City. This noise increase would not have a significant adverse neighborhood character impact on the park, which exists next to highway roads and functions primarily as an active boating marina.

Overall, the proposed Plan would not have a significant adverse neighborhood character impact on surrounding areas. \*