

A. INTRODUCTION

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

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

- *Land Use:* When development resulting from the proposed project would have the potential to change neighborhood character by introducing a new, incompatible land use; conflicting with land use policy or other public plans for the area; changing land use character; or resulting in significant land use impacts.
- *Urban Design and Visual Resources:* In developed areas, urban design changes have the potential to affect neighborhood character by introducing substantially different building bulk, form, size, scale, or arrangement. Urban design changes may also affect block forms; street patterns; or street hierarchies; as well as streetscape elements such as streetwalls, landscaping, and curb cuts. Visual resource changes have the potential to affect neighborhood character by directly changing visual features such as unique and important public view corridors and vistas, or public visual access to such features.
- *Historic Resources.* When an action would result in substantial direct changes to an historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a resource, or when an historic resources analysis identifies a significant impact in this category, there is a potential to affect neighborhood character.
- *Socioeconomic Conditions.* Changes in socioeconomic conditions have the potential to affect neighborhood character when they result in substantial direct or indirect displacement or addition of population, employment, or businesses; or substantial differences in population or employment density.
- *Traffic and Pedestrians.* Changes in traffic and pedestrian conditions can affect neighborhood character in a number of ways. For traffic to have an effect on neighborhood character, it must be a contributing element to the character of the neighborhood (either by its absence or its presence), and it must change substantially as a result of the action. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, such substantial traffic changes can include:

changes in level of service (LOS) to C or below; changes in traffic patterns; changes in roadway classifications; changes in vehicle mixes; substantial increases in traffic volumes on residential streets; or significant traffic impacts, as identified in that technical analysis. Regarding pedestrians, when a proposed action would result in substantially different pedestrian activity and circulation, it has the potential to affect neighborhood character.

- *Noise.* According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, for an action to affect neighborhood character in regards to noise, it would need to result in a significant adverse noise impact and a change in acceptability category.

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

The analysis concludes that as a result of the proposed project, changes to the project site's land use and block configuration would occur, as well as increases to traffic, transit, and pedestrian activity. The proposed project would return the long-vacant Kingsbridge Armory to productive use, to include retail, cinema, fitness, and community facility spaces, and a new public open space. These changes overall would not be adverse but would be beneficial to the surrounding area, as discussed below.

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project site is located at 29 West Kingsbridge Road on an irregularly-shaped block bounded by West Kingsbridge Road to the south, West 195th Street to the north, Reservoir Avenue to the west, and Jerome Avenue to the east in the Kingsbridge Heights section of the Bronx. The project site is largely occupied by the substantially vacant Kingsbridge Armory (also known as the Eighth Regiment Armory), a New York City Landmark (NYCL) that is also listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places (S/NR). A small portion of the Armory building is currently used as a storage facility for graffiti removal trucks by the Mayor's Office "Graffiti Free NYC" program. Two outbuildings adjacent to the Armory's north façade (a one-story building to the west and a two-story building to the east) are currently being used by the National Guard for military recruiting and a garage, however, these buildings are excluded from the project site and are not part of the proposed project. The Armory and the two outbuildings are surrounded by an approximately 10-foot-tall chain-link fence, contributing to the site's underutilized appearance. The Armory, one of the largest (former) armories in the world, has a fortress-like design, is faced in red brick, and has multiple towers and decorative brick work. It is an architecturally-distinguished and prominent visual resource in the Kingsbridge Heights neighborhood. The project site includes some trees and small grassy areas, including a small area with plantings located east of the Armory's main entrance on West Kingsbridge Road. The project site also includes a portion of Reservoir Avenue and the asphalt paved area southwest of the Armory.

The No. 4 train viaduct, a visually prominent structure in this area of the Kingsbridge Heights neighborhood, is another visual resource that helps define the study area's neighborhood character. This transportation structure extends north-south above Jerome Avenue through the study area with the elevated platform for the Kingsbridge Road station adjacent to the Armory's east façade between Kingsbridge Road and West 195th Street. Both the Kingsbridge Armory and the No. 4 train viaduct are visible from several vantage points throughout the study area.

The study area contains a mix of building types, sizes, heights, and shapes, including one- and two-story commercial buildings, two- and three-story detached and semi-detached houses, five- and six-story apartment buildings, and three- and four-story institutional buildings. Most of the houses and institutional buildings are older structures, while the one- and two-story commercial buildings comprise a mix of older and newer structures. Larger buildings are generally attached structures, however, the institutional buildings on the superblock above West 195th Street are free-standing. Smaller commercial buildings are generally attached buildings, while most houses are free-standing detached and semi-detached buildings. Buildings are typically faced in brick or stone and do not have setbacks.

Jerome Avenue and Kingsbridge Road serve as the study area's primary retail corridors. Jerome Avenue south of Kingsbridge Road contains commercial, residential, and institutional uses and larger, six-story apartment buildings (some with ground floor retail). Also south of Kingsbridge Road, St. James Park and the St. James Recreation Center are on the east side of Jerome Avenue. The park includes ball courts, playgrounds, comfort stations, and a dog run, while the recreation center includes fitness equipment, classrooms, an auditorium, and other community amenities. Also on Jerome Avenue are St. James Church, Public School 246, and Poe Park. The portion of Jerome Avenue north of Kingsbridge Road is largely commercial but also includes larger, five- and six-story apartment buildings, some of which have ground-floor retail. Kingsbridge Road is generally lined with older, five- and six-story apartment buildings with ground floor retail, including beauty salons, restaurants, and supermarkets. Larger institutional uses are also located on Kingsbridge Road in the western part of the study area, as described below.

The study area north of West 195th Street across from the project site includes a large, institutional superblock bounded by Reservoir Avenue to the west and Jerome Avenue to the east that contains Public School 86, Walton High School, Public School 340, and Lehman College. These buildings have large footprints and are generally three to five stories in height and are faced in brick or stone. Northwest of this superblock is the 94-acre Jerome Park Reservoir, which is inaccessible to the public.

The area west of Reservoir Avenue and north of West Kingsbridge Road is largely residential, and contains a mix of brick- and stone-faced, two- to three-story attached and detached houses and five- to six-story, multi-unit apartment buildings. Two churches, a school, a branch of the public library, two daycare facilities and two open spaces are also in this part of the study area. West Kingsbridge Road west of Aqueduct Avenue West is characterized by large institutional uses, including a nursing home and a medical center.

South of the project site across West Kingsbridge Road, the study area is generally characterized by two- to three-story attached and detached houses, and smaller institutional uses, including a church, a nursing home, and a college. East of Aqueduct Avenue West is part of the former Croton Aqueduct, a grassy strip that contains several benches. New residential buildings and two residential buildings under construction are located in this portion of the study area along Grand Avenue.

The study area northeast of the project site includes institutional uses such as two churches, a community organization, and the Concord House, a residential development under the jurisdiction of the Fordham Bedford Housing Corporation and the University Heights Housing Program.

In addition to the Kingsbridge Armory, two other previously known architectural resources are located in the vicinity of the project site: the former Walton High School building (S/NR-

eligible) at 2780 Reservoir Avenue and a portion of the Old Croton Aqueduct (NHL, S/NR). Five structures in the vicinity of the project site also were identified as potential architectural resources and are described in more detail in Chapter 6, “Historic Resources.” In a comment letter dated April 10, 2009, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) determined that these buildings appear eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places (S/NR-eligible). The five S/NR-eligible architectural resources are: Public School 86, a five-story, tan brick and terra cotta-faced building built in 1927 with a 1938 addition, located at 2756 Reservoir Avenue; the 1940 Fordham Manor Reformed Church at 2711 Reservoir Avenue that was designed in the Georgian-Colonial Revival style and is faced in red brick with a pitched roof and copper steeple; the 1927 seven-story Beaux-Arts style University Towers apartment building at 2685 University Avenue that has decorative terra cotta elements; the circa 1937 six-story Art Moderne apartment building at 2727 University Avenue that is faced in tan, brown, and orange brick; and the 1936 six-story apartment building at 2751 University Avenue that was designed in the Art Deco style and is accented by decorative brickwork that expresses the building’s verticality.

Jerome Avenue and Kingsbridge Road are the primary thoroughfares in the study area closest to the project site. Jerome Avenue is a north-south street that divides the eastern part of the study area’s typical grid pattern of rectangular and square blocks from the more irregular street patterns and block shapes in the western part of the study area. Jerome Avenue is characterized by the columns of the elevated No. 4 train subway platform and viaduct. Kingsbridge Road, a primary east-west street, is a wide thoroughfare that carries multi-lane, two-way traffic. Other thoroughfares in the study area are the Grand Concourse and the Major Deegan Expressway. The Grand Concourse is a major north-south arterial road in the Bronx located at a greater distance from the project site. Closest to the project site—i.e., in the vicinity of Kingsbridge Road—the Grand Concourse has two travel lanes in each direction, with adjacent northbound and southbound “service roads” that provide access to the main travel lanes. In the area near East Kingsbridge Road, the land uses along the Grand Concourse are primarily residential.

The Major Deegan Expressway, located approximately ½-mile west of the project site, is a major highway that serves this area. While most streets in the study area carry two-way traffic, Aqueduct Avenue West and Grand, Davidson, and Morris Avenues allow one-way traffic only. At West Kingsbridge Road, Reservoir Avenue is divided by the Barnhill Triangle, a small, triangular traffic island with trees and benches, surrounded by a fence. All streets in the study area have a parking lane on either side. North of West 195th Street, Reservoir Avenue has bicycle lanes on both sides of the street, and University Avenue has a bicycle lane on the east side of the street.

Traffic volumes on streets in the study area are generally at acceptable levels. Each of the intersections at the four corners adjacent to the project site operate at overall acceptable levels of service during all four traffic analysis hours (weekday AM, midday, and PM, and Saturday midday). Some intersections located at a greater distance from the project site are more heavily trafficked and frequently congested; these include Fordham Road/Jerome Avenue, Fordham Road/University Avenue, Fordham Road/Webster Avenue, Fordham Road at the on- and off-ramps of the Major Deegan Expressway, and West 207th Street/Ninth Avenue. There are no public parking lots or garages within the study area, though there is one small metered parking area. Some streets in the study area also have metered and non-metered on-street parking spaces.

The No. 4 train Kingsbridge Road station’s stairways and main control area operate at acceptable levels during all analysis peak periods, and the No. 4 train currently operates within guideline

capacities during the weekday midday and weekday PM peak periods. All five bus routes analyzed presently operate within guideline capacities at their respective maximum load points. The study area sidewalks, corner reservoirs, and crosswalks operate at acceptable levels during the weekday AM, weekday midday, weekday PM, and weekend Midday peak periods.

Existing noise levels near the project site are moderate to relatively high and reflect the level of vehicular activity on adjacent streets. The noise levels at the receptor site near the Kingsbridge Road subway station are very high, due to the existing noise levels of the elevated No. 4 train line on Jerome Avenue. Noise from other sources, including local commercial uses, is limited and does not contribute significantly to local ambient noise levels. Existing noise levels at the remaining five receptor sites are in the marginally acceptable range.

C. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Without the proposed project, it is assumed that no major changes would occur on the project site. The Armory would remain in its current condition as a largely vacant building, and the portions of Reservoir Avenue and West 195th Street would not be demapped. Independent of the proposed project, the “Graffiti Free NYC” program that occupies a small portion of the Armory would be relocated to another City-owned property in the Bronx by 2013.

Three small-scale development projects in the study area south of the project site are expected to be completed by 2010. They include a new three-story semi-attached residential building at 2595 Grand Avenue, a three-story semi-attached residential building at 2600 Grand Avenue, and the conversion of an existing single-family home to a three-family home at 2613 Grand Avenue. These projects would not alter any natural features, street patterns, or block shapes in the study area. Traffic volumes in the study area would increase somewhat as a result of these projects, and available on-street parking is expected to decrease in the future without the proposed project due to the projected increase of traffic in the area. The No. 4 train Kingsbridge Road subway station, train line, bus line, and pedestrian activity would be expected to increase somewhat but would maintain acceptable levels of service. Noise levels would be expected to be similar to existing levels.

Overall, these No Build projects would not be expected to result in any substantial changes to the character of the project site or study area, as these projects are small in scale and are at too great a distance from the project site to result in any significant adverse impacts.

D. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed project would dramatically alter the land use on the project site by redeveloping the substantially vacant Armory with retail, restaurant, entertainment, fitness club, and community facility uses, accessory parking, and open space. These new uses would be compatible with and complementary to surrounding land uses and would serve the residents, workers, and visitors of the surrounding communities. The Armory has been underutilized for more than a decade, and its redevelopment would take advantage of its location on West Kingsbridge Road, a busy thoroughfare, and its direct proximity to the Kingsbridge Road station of the No. 4 train line.

The rezoning of the project site to allow the development of the proposed project would be compatible with and complementary to existing nearby land uses. Kingsbridge Road is already a busy commercial thoroughfare, and the retail and restaurant components of the proposed project would enhance this corridor. In addition, the study area is largely residential in nature, and

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residents would benefit from the new cinema, fitness center, and community facility uses on the project site. Employees at the large institutional uses in the area would also benefit from the redevelopment project, as the project would provide more shopping and entertainment options for after-work hours. In addition, new visitors to the area would be generated by the proposed redevelopment and would help to support the existing commercial uses in the area. The proposed project would reinforce the mix of building uses, types, and bulks in the study area.

As the Kingsbridge Armory is substantially vacant, the proposed project would not displace any businesses on the project site. As described above, the “Graffiti Free NYC” program that occupies a small portion of the Armory would be relocated to another City-owned property in the Bronx by 2013. The project site does not contain any dwelling units, so the proposed project would not result in direct residential displacement. The proposed project would support the economic revitalization of the Kingsbridge Heights neighborhood by converting the large, substantially vacant Kingsbridge Armory into productive use; creating new employment opportunities for local residents; providing a new shopping opportunity for area residents; and creating economic and fiscal benefits to the City in the form of economic revitalization, increased employment opportunities, and tax revenue. In addition, the new public open space and community facility space would serve the surrounding neighborhood.

As discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, “Socioeconomic Conditions,” although some existing grocery stores within the project’s trade area (1.5 miles around the project site) could be vulnerable to indirect displacement due to competition with the proposed project, their potential displacement would not adversely impact the overall neighborhood character. Smaller food stores and shoppers’ goods stores are likely to experience more moderate competitive pressure, if any, and neighborhood services stores and eating and drinking places are not expected to be significantly affected. The proposed project is not anticipated to jeopardize the viability of any neighborhood retail strips and is not expected to diminish the level of services provided. Therefore, changes in socioeconomic conditions as a result of the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.

The proposed project would modify the shape of the project site block and would change some of the roadway configurations with the closure of a portion of Reservoir Avenue to allow the creation of a new publicly accessible open space at the intersection of West Kingsbridge Road and Reservoir Avenue, a valuable public amenity in an area currently underserved by open space resources. The proposed open space would add to the visual quality of the surrounding area and contribute to pedestrian activity on the project site. A portion of the south side of West 195th Street adjacent to the project block would be demapped to provide additional land area for potential City redevelopment of property on the north side of the Armory at a future date. While the demapping of sections of these two streets would somewhat alter the project site’s block form, these changes would not adversely affect the street pattern or block form of the study area. These proposed changes would not be expected to result in any adverse affects to these urban design elements or result in any adverse neighborhood character impacts.

The proposed project would not have any significant adverse impacts on visual resources. As described above, the renovation of the Armory would improve the appearance of this visual resource and would enhance views to the Armory from the study area. The new open space at the southwest corner of the project site would somewhat alter views on parts of West Kingsbridge Road and Reservoir Avenue, however, these changes would be an improvement over existing views to the Armory, as the building has an unused appearance and the project block is surrounded by a chain-link fence. The proposed project would not obstruct any

significant view corridors or views of visual resources in the study area, nor would it limit access to any visual resource.

The proposed project would not directly affect the No. 4 train viaduct, a visual resource immediately east of the Armory. However, the Armory's renovation and the creation of the new public open space would be visible from some vantage points on the elevated platform for the Kingsbridge Road station and would improve the context of this visual resource from these vantage points, as the re-opened windows on the Armory's east façade and new uses within the building would contribute to the level of activity on the sidewalks surrounding the Armory. The proposed project would not affect views south on University Avenue that include St. Nicholas of Tolentine Church, located outside the study area to the south.

Because the Armory is a NYCL, the proposed alterations to the Armory, are subject to review and approval by LPC. Therefore, the project sponsor must consult with LPC regarding the proposed alterations to the Armory. LPC's determination of the appropriateness of the proposed modifications to the landmark site and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness would ensure that the proposed project would not adversely impact the historic character of the Kingsbridge Armory. Because the proposed project is also seeking federal historic tax credits, the project has been designed in consultation with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). Further, as a condition for receiving these tax credits, the project would also comply the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, as interpreted by OPRHP and the National Park Service (NPS), thereby ensuring that the proposed project would not adversely affect the Kingsbridge Armory. The renovation of the Armory and the proposed new, active uses would improve the building's appearance and context as the building would no longer appear empty and deteriorating through lack of active uses.

Further, to avoid the potential for adverse physical impacts on the Armory and Public School 86 (a S/NR-eligible architectural resource located within 90 feet of the project site), the proposed project would develop a Construction Protection Plan (CPP) in consultation with LPC prior to construction that would be implemented by a professional engineer. The proposed changes to the Armory and the development of the new public open space would improve the context of nearby historic resources, as it would enliven the project site by removing the existing chain link fences from the perimeter of the Armory property, adding new landscaping to the project site, and generally improving the physical appearance of the building by cleaning, repairing, and returning it to use. Overall, the proposed project would not have an adverse historic resources-related impact on neighborhood character.

The proposed project would involve geometric changes at the intersection of West Kingsbridge Road and Reservoir Avenue to improve traffic operations and to provide space on the project site for the new public open space. These changes have been developed in consultation with NYCDOT and would be expected to improve pedestrian conditions, crossings, and safety. Simultaneous to the proposed project, the roadway width along West 195th Street would be narrowed between Reservoir and Jerome Avenues, and the perpendicular parking along the south curb would be changed to parallel parking to provide additional width along the south curb for potential future development. Signal timing modifications and parking prohibitions would be implemented at the intersections of West 195th Street with Reservoir and Jerome Avenues to accommodate these changes and improve the capacity.

The proposed project would result in significant traffic impacts at nine intersections in the weekday AM peak hour, eight intersections in the weekday midday peak hour, 14 intersections in the weekday PM peak hour, and 11 intersections in the Saturday midday peak hours. The

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majority of the intersections that would be significantly impacted are located close to a ½-mile or more from the project site, at locations that are already heavily trafficked, including at interchanges with the Major Deegan Expressway. Closer to the project site, the number of significantly impacted intersections is not as great. Three of the four intersections at the corners of the project site would not be significantly impacted; significant impacts would only occur at the intersection of Kingsbridge Road and Jerome Avenue. Local intersections north of the project site, within the more residential part of the community and near its schools, would also not be significantly impacted.

Parking demands during the weekday AM, midday, and PM peak traffic hours would be fully accommodated by the proposed parking garage. There would be a modest shortfall of parking spaces in a few mid-afternoon hours, and a modest number of vehicles would need to park on-street. On Saturdays, the parking garage's capacity would be reached during the midday peak hour. During this hour, approximately 330 additional vehicles would need to find parking elsewhere in the area, either on-street or within off-street lots/garages. The projected parking shortfall at the project's garage during the Saturday midday peak period could be partially relieved by the on-street spaces available within a ¼-mile radius, but a substantial amount of project-generated traffic would need to find parking spaces further than ¼-mile of the project site.

The proposed project is also expected to increase volumes of transit and pedestrian trips compared to the No Build condition. All subway station elements would continue to operate at acceptable levels of service during the peak periods analyzed, and the No. 4 train would continue to operate within guideline capacities. All five bus routes analyzed would continue to operate within guideline capacities at their respective maximum load points, and all pedestrian elements would continue to operate at acceptable levels of service during the analysis peak periods. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse transit- or pedestrian-related impacts to neighborhood character.

The pedestrian levels at the intersection of Jerome Avenue and West Kingsbridge Road would notably increase with the proposed project during the peak activity hours; similarly, the number of peak hour project-generated vehicle trips that could potentially conflict with the pedestrians using the crosswalks would also increase. Overall, the geometry, sight lines, and crossing patterns at this location would be characteristic of that of a major urban activity center and would not present any unusual safety conditions. To enhance pedestrian safety, a high-visibility crosswalk could be provided at the north-leg of the Jerome Avenue and West Kingsbridge Road intersection, and signage directing motorists to "Yield to Pedestrians in the Crosswalks" could be installed at all four intersection approaches. With these proposed safety improvement measures in place, the proposed project is not expected to result in any significant adverse pedestrian safety impacts in the study area.

The proposed project would also result in increased pedestrian and traffic volumes at the intersections of West 195th Street and Jerome and Reservoir Avenues, north of the project site adjacent to Public School 86 and Walton High School. Since the pedestrian safety measures are already in place at these intersections, and also since these intersections are not categorized as high pedestrian accident locations (based on data obtained from DOT), the projected increases in vehicular and pedestrian levels due to the proposed project are not expected to adversely affect the pedestrian safety conditions at these locations.

Noise levels at five of the six receptor sites would remain in the marginally unacceptable range, and noise levels at the reception site near the Kingsbridge Road subway station would remain in

the clearly unacceptable range with the proposed project. Therefore, the proposed project would not have any significant noise-related impacts to neighborhood character.

In summary, the proposed project would not significantly adversely affect the combined elements contributing to the neighborhood character of the study area. Mitigation measures would be implemented to fully or partially mitigate significant adverse traffic impacts, as described in Chapter 13, "Traffic and Parking" and in Chapter 19, "Mitigation." No other significant adverse impacts would result from the proposed project. Therefore, the proposed project would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. *