

**A. INTRODUCTION**

Neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give a neighborhood its distinct “personality.” These elements may include a neighborhood’s land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and/or noise. Not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements. According to the *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare and it would be under unusual circumstances that, in the absence of an impact in any of the relevant technical areas, a combination of moderate effects to the neighborhood would result in an impact to neighborhood character. Moreover, a significant impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood’s character is not automatically equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character.

As described in greater detail in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” the Proposed Project includes the expansion and improvement of considerable amounts of publicly accessible open space, re-tenanting of a number of historic structures, and the introduction of new uses and buildings in two designated development zones, all on 150 acres of Governors Island in the center of New York Harbor. The full development of the Proposed Project would result in potential significant adverse impacts related to shadows, urban design and visual resources, historic resources, transportation, and noise. Therefore, this chapter considers the effects of the Proposed Project on the neighborhood character of Governors Island. Since many of the relevant components of neighborhood character are considered in other sections of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), this chapter has been coordinated with those analyses.

**B. PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS**

Overall, the full development of the Proposed Project would result in a noticeable change to the neighborhood character of the Island. However, it is expected that this change would be beneficial and not adverse. The character of Governors Island would continue to be defined by its unique setting in New York Harbor, geographic isolation, historic structures and landscape, open space uses, and sweeping views of the harbor. The Proposed Project would create a world-class park by opening new areas to public access and enhancing the connections between existing open spaces. It would improve neighborhood character by introducing appropriate uses in place of underutilized land and vacant buildings and enlivening the site with new worker, student, and visitor populations. The Proposed Project would restore and re-tenant the historic buildings in the North Island, which would complement the historic nature of the National Monument. The development proposed for the Island would not adversely impact existing uses or proposed open space uses, and would instead incorporate existing historical features and existing and proposed open space resources. Furthermore, Island open spaces would

accommodate the new populations on the Island and would continue to serve as a destination open space for the region.

However, it is not possible at this time to determine whether the full development of the Proposed Project would result in significant adverse impacts to shadows, urban design and visual resources, historic resources, transportation, or noise that would have the potential to affect the neighborhood character of the Island. It is anticipated that future environmental review would assess the potential impacts to neighborhood character due to potential impacts in these technical areas as a result of the full development of the Proposed Project.

### **C. SUMMARY OF 2011 FGEIS FINDINGS**

The *Final Generic Environmental Impact Statement for the Phased Redevelopment of Governors Island* (2011 FGEIS) found that the neighborhood character of Governors Island is defined predominantly by its unique setting in New York Harbor, geographic isolation, historic structures and landscape, seasonal open space uses and associated visitor population, sweeping views of the harbor, and the unique distinction between the North Island and the South Island. The analysis concluded that the Proposed Project would have a noticeable effect on the neighborhood character of the Island, but this change would be beneficial and not adverse.

#### **PHASE 1**

Phase 1 was projected to have a positive effect on neighborhood character by improving existing open spaces on the Island, opening new areas to public access, and enhancing the connections between existing open spaces. In addition, it would also provide necessary infrastructure to support the open space, institutional and seasonal accessory concession uses on the Island. Therefore, Phase 1 was not expected to result in any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.

#### **LATER PHASES**

The Later Phases—Park and Public Spaces were also projected to have a positive effect on the neighborhood character of Governors Island. Open space uses are an important contributing element to the Island’s character, and the park and public spaces component of the Proposed Project would enhance open space uses on the Island. In combination with Phase 1, the Later Phases—Park and Public Spaces would create a world class park by opening new areas to public access, and enhancing the connections between existing open spaces. The unique distinction between the North Island and the South Island would be preserved, as the South Island would be redeveloped with a major new park and public space while the North Island would retain its historic features.

The full development of the Proposed Project, including the Later Phases—Island Redevelopment, would result in a noticeable change to the neighborhood character of the Island. However, the 2011 FGEIS noted that this change would be beneficial and not adverse. The character of Governors Island would continue to be defined by its unique setting in New York Harbor, geographic isolation, historic structures and landscape, open space uses, and sweeping views of the harbor. The Later Phases—Island Redevelopment would improve neighborhood character by introducing appropriate uses in place of underutilized land and vacant buildings and enlivening the site with new residential, worker, student, and visitor populations. The development proposed for the Island would not adversely impact existing uses or proposed open

space uses, and would instead incorporate existing historical features and existing and proposed open space resources. The Proposed Project would restore and re-tenant the historic buildings in the North Island, which would complement the historic nature of the National Monument.

However, it was not possible at the time of the 2011 FGEIS to determine whether the full development of the Proposed Project would result in significant adverse impacts to shadows, urban design and visual resources, historic resources, transportation, or noise that would have the potential to affect the neighborhood character of the Island.

## **D. METHODOLOGY**

An analysis of neighborhood character begins with a preliminary assessment to determine whether changes expected in other technical areas may affect a contributing element of neighborhood character. The assessment should identify the defining features of the neighborhood, and assess whether the project has the potential to affect these defining features, either through the potential for significant adverse impacts or a combination of moderate effects.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER COMPONENTS**

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when a project would result in a significant adverse impact in any one of the following areas of technical analysis: land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; shadows; transportation; or noise. An assessment is also appropriate when the project would have moderate effects on several of the aforementioned areas.

As described in the relevant chapters of this Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (SGEIS), the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; or open space. It would also not result in effects considered reasonably close to the significant adverse impact thresholds in those technical areas. However, it is not possible at this time to precisely identify significant adverse impacts of the full development of the Proposed Project in 2030 on shadows, urban design and visual resources, historic resources, transportation, and noise because the proposed buildings in the South Island development zones have not yet been developed or designed. Therefore, because the potential for impacts cannot be ruled out, a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character impacts from the Proposed Project is provided below.

### **STUDY AREA**

As stated in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for a preliminary analysis of neighborhood character is typically consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas that contribute to the defining elements of the neighborhood. The study area for this preliminary assessment is defined as Governors Island, which includes the project site and the National Monument, and off-Island areas where relevant.

## **E. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT**

### **DEFINING FEATURES**

The character of Governors Island is defined in large part by its unique setting in New York Harbor, its geographic isolation, historic features, and sweeping views. Because all visitors must

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arrive by ferry, and because of its shady, park-like setting, the Island feels uniquely separate from the rest of New York City. The Island comprises two distinct areas: the North Island and the South Island. The North Island is the area north of Division Road, which includes and is coterminous with the Governors Island Historic District and National Historic Landmark. The South Island is the area south of Division Road, which includes landfill area with a mix of modern buildings and vacant land.

Land use on the Island is characterized predominantly by a mix of seasonal open space uses and vacant historic buildings, although it also contains vacant land and non-historic buildings, as well as institutional and cultural uses. The North Island contains park and public space areas including the Parade Ground and open spaces in and around Nolan Park and Colonels Row as well as numerous vacant historic buildings. The North Island also contains most of the active uses on the Island, including existing institutional uses and seasonal concessions accessory to the park and public space. Seasonal concessions accessory to the park and public space include an entertainment and food concession, a bicycle rental concession with two locations, and a variety of small food concessions. Existing institutional uses on the North Island include the offices of The Trust; the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's artist studios and exhibit space; and the Urban Assembly New York Harbor School, a New York City high school.

As noted above, the North Island is coterminous with the Governors Island Historic District and National Historic Landmark, which contains a number of historic structures. Some of these structures have been individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places, or have been designated as individual landmarks by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), and contribute to the significance of the Governors Island Historic District. Overall, the North Island is characterized by the historic nature of its structures, including the historic landscape in the district.

A portion of the North Island—the Governors Island National Monument—is not managed by The Trust and is outside the project site. The National Monument is a 22-acre site on the North Island with two major historic structures, Fort Jay and Castle Williams, as well as grass fields and several modern buildings.

The urban design of the North Island is roughly organized around its major open spaces: Colonels Row Green, the Parade Ground (a part of the larger Fort Jay Glacis), and Nolan Park. Its topography is characterized by a gradual increase in elevation, increasing from the bulkhead to the center of the Island. Fort Jay's Glacis (a slope running down from a fortification) is a fairly uniform grass area slightly sloping down from the Island's central fort. Its undulating, open terrain and lack of defining elements prevent it from being experienced as a single open space, but its open lawn area is an important feature in the character of the North Island.

The North Island features narrow, interior streets lined with buildings on one side and open space on the other, as well as extensive network of pedestrian walkways. Defining design elements include mature trees, which create an extensive tree canopy, and landscaping and brick walkways. The combination of these features creates a campus-like setting.

The topography of the South Island is mostly flat, indicative of its origin as landfill from the excavation of the Lexington Avenue subway between 1901 and 1912. The buildings in this part of the Island were constructed between the 1960s and the 1980s, and today the area is predominantly characterized by vacant land and modern nondescript residential, institutional, and military buildings, none of which are open to the public, as well as recreational open spaces such as Picnic Point. At the center of the South Island is an open landscape, originally an airfield

and later used for recreational purposes. Unlike the North Island, the South Island does not contain any historic structures or landscapes.

There are no block forms on the South Island; rather, this area's development pattern is indicative of its iterative construction on open land. With the exception of the buildings that the Trust uses as maintenance and operations facilities, some small buildings housing electrical equipment, and the unstaffed firehouse, which is used by FDNY to stage equipment and supplies, all buildings on the South Island are currently vacant and are not open to the public. Due to their lack of use over a number of years, the buildings and open spaces on the South Island appear dilapidated and unwelcoming. Some of the South Island structures have been demolished, and all are scheduled for demolition as part of the future without the Proposed Project.

Another defining design feature of the Island is the promenade along the perimeter and the panoramic views of the harbor that it provides. Due to its prominent position in New York Harbor, the Island, and in particular the promenade, provides panoramic views in all directions. From the North Island—in particular, from the point near Castle Williams and other areas of the Island closest to the water—one can see the towers of Lower Manhattan, the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, and the Brooklyn waterfront. From the South Island, one can see Lower Manhattan and Jersey City, the Staten Island Ferry, the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, the Hudson River, Staten Island, the Verrazano Bridge, and the industrial waterfront of Brooklyn.

The Island is not currently developed with residential uses, nor does it contain a substantial worker population, and therefore is not characterized by a particular residential or worker population. However, the Island is defined by its status as a destination open space visited by people from the City and the surrounding region. People visit the Island during the seasonal access period for recreation, picnicking, and events such as public art installations, music concerts, art festivals, food festivals, and sporting events. Seasonal access to the Island is provided by ferries. Once on the Island, transportation is limited to walking or bicycling, as vehicular traffic is generally prohibited on the Island, with the exception of a small number of service and construction vehicles.

Noise on the Island consists of noise from helicopter flights over the Island and over adjacent bodies of water, boats, and people using open space on the Island, with the helicopter noise being the dominant noise source. Traffic noise is not a substantial contributor to noise, as there is no roadway traffic. Measured noise levels are moderate and reflect the level of helicopter activity in the skies above. In terms of the CEQR criteria, the existing noise levels are in the "acceptable" category.

Overall, a diverse set of elements contribute to the character of Governors Island. The Island's character is shaped predominantly by its unique setting in New York Harbor, its geographic isolation, and historic structures and landscape. Other defining features include its seasonal open space uses and associated visitor population, sweeping views of the harbor, and the unique distinction between the North Island and the South Island.

## **POTENTIAL TO AFFECT THE DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD**

### *2022 ANALYSIS YEAR*

By 2022, it is expected that the open space and infrastructure improvements now underway, full development of park and public space enhancements, and renovation and re-tenanting of historic

structures on the North Island would all be complete. In addition, it is expected that the new Soissons Concession and other small, new structures would be complete. Taken together, these would not have the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any of the technical areas that contribute to neighborhood character, nor would they have the potential to result in a combination of moderate effects that cumulatively could affect neighborhood character.

Conversely, they would have a positive effect on neighborhood character by improving existing open spaces on the Island, opening new areas to public access, restoring and reactivating important historic elements of the Island, and providing necessary infrastructure to support the uses on the Island.

The re-tenancing of the North Island historic structures would create new active uses and would result in a noticeable change in the neighborhood character of the North Island. There could be faculty and student housing and other university uses, a conference center/hotel, office space, retail and restaurant space, cultural space, and a public school. The new populations would enliven the site and complement but not replace the existing visitor population. As a result of the proposed reuse on the North Island, historic buildings would be restored and maintained.

All the anticipated uses would be supportive of the existing uses and appropriate for the site. Some potential uses, such as the faculty and student housing, would hark back to earlier uses on the military base. Office, retail, restaurant, cultural, and public school uses would be consistent with existing uses on the site, including the existing open space uses. The proposed academic space and its associated conference center/hotel would also be consistent with the purpose of developing the Island and would enhance the Island's viability as a regional destination. The proposed restoration of historic buildings in the North Island would complement the historic nature of the National Monument. The proposed uses would be expected to benefit neighborhood character on the Island by enlivening the site with appropriate uses in place of underutilized land and vacant buildings while maintaining the open space uses that contribute to the Island's character.

The new resident, worker, student, and visitor population introduced by the full development of the Proposed Project would place additional demands on the Island open spaces. However, as noted above, the new open space would increase open space ratios on the Island, improving its ability to serve as a regional open space destination. Furthermore, the Proposed Project would also provide a wide range of active and passive facilities to serve the varying open space needs of the different user populations that would be introduced.

While details are not available regarding the renovations of any buildings within the Historic District, the reuse of these buildings would require compliance with the guidance of the Design Manual and review by LPC and OPRHP. Although the potential uses of buildings in this area could be different from historic uses, they would be an improvement over the current vacancies. The types and arrangements of the buildings in this area, and their relationship to surrounding open spaces and natural resources would not change with the Proposed Project.

The potential school playground could result in a significant adverse noise impact if it is located immediately adjacent to an open space area; however, this would affect only a small portion of the Island's open space and therefore would not affect a defining feature of its character. Noise levels in areas near the ferry landings would be high, but would be consistent with other urban parks in New York.

As described in Chapter 7, "Transportation," the Proposed Project would result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of traffic, pedestrians, and transit. However, all of these impacts

could be mitigated with the exception of traffic impacts at Broad Street and South Street in Manhattan during the Saturday peak hour and at Atlantic Avenue and Columbia Street in Brooklyn during the weekday PM peak hour, and a transit impact at the State Street stair of the Bowling Green subway station. These unmitigated impacts, however, would not be substantial enough to alter neighborhood character.

Based on the changes described above, no significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character are anticipated by 2022.

### *2030 ANALYSIS YEAR*

In addition to the project components described above for 2022, full development of the Proposed Project by 2030 would include new buildings and uses in the two future development zones on the South Island. The potential effects of the Proposed Project on neighborhood character in 2030 are discussed below.

As described above, full development of the park and public spaces and re-tenanting of the North Island would have a positive effect on neighborhood character. Development of new buildings and uses in the two future development zones on the South Island by 2030 would bring more active uses and more population to the Island. This amount of new active uses and development would result in a noticeable change in the neighborhood character of the Island. Although the future uses in the development zones have not yet been specifically proposed, determined, or defined, potential uses on the Island are limited by deed restrictions. As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” and Chapter 2, “Analytical Framework,” major new uses may include academic and/or research facilities, faculty and student housing, a conference center/hotel, cultural uses, office space, retail and restaurant space, a public school, and maintenance and support facilities. These uses would bring commuting workers, students, faculty, and staff to the Island. The new populations would enliven the site and complement but not replace the existing visitor population.

Similar to the potential uses in 2022, all the anticipated uses at full development of the Proposed Project would be supportive of the existing uses and appropriate for the site. Office, retail, restaurant, cultural, and public school uses would be consistent with existing uses on the site, including the existing open space uses. Some potential uses, such as the research facilities and conference center, would be new to the Island but would be consistent with the purpose of developing the Island and enhancing its viability as a regional destination. By keeping the new development in two zones on the South Island the Proposed Project would not be disruptive to the National Monument, as it is located in the historic North Island. New development on the South Island would generate full-time and visitor populations that could enjoy the National Monument, other historic resources on the Island, and the world-class open spaces. The proposed uses would be expected to benefit neighborhood character on the Island by enlivening the site with appropriate uses in place of underutilized land and vacant buildings while maintaining the open space uses that contribute to the Island’s character.

However, details are not available regarding the siting, height, massing, design, or materials of the buildings to be developed on the South Island. As such, it is not possible at this time to determine whether the full development of the Proposed Project would or would not be consistent with the character of the Governors Island Historic District or the Governors Island National Monument, or whether it would have the potential to negatively affect the context of the visual resources on the North Island. The Trust intends to develop design guidelines for the South Island’s two development zones. These guidelines would be intended to create a

harmonious relationship between the new buildings, the historic buildings and landscapes, and the new landscapes. Nonetheless, it is anticipated that future environmental review would assess the potential impacts to neighborhood character due to potential impacts to historic resources and urban design and visual resources.

As disclosed in the 2011 FGEIS, the South Island structures would likely result in new shadows on open spaces and sun-sensitive historic resources on the Island. It is possible that some incremental shadows from development zone structures would be considered to have significant adverse impacts, but as was the case in the 2011 FGEIS, such impacts cannot be precisely identified because the buildings in the South Island Development Zones have not been planned or designed. It is anticipated that future environmental review would assess the potential impacts to neighborhood character due to potential shadows impacts.

As described above for 2022, a potential school playground could result in a significant adverse noise impact if it is located immediately adjacent to an open space; however, this would affect only a small portion of the Island's open space and therefore would not affect a defining feature of its character. Nonetheless, it is anticipated that future environmental review for the South Island Development Zones would further assess the potential impacts to neighborhood character due to noise.

As discussed in the 2011 FGEIS, full development of the Proposed Project may affect off-Island areas in Brooklyn and Lower Manhattan. Technical areas in which significant adverse impacts could occur include transportation and urban design and visual resources. For other technical areas, such as socioeconomic conditions and open space, the full development of the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts to off-Island study areas and therefore would not have the potential to affect neighborhood character. It is anticipated that future environmental review for the South Island Development Zones would assess the potential impacts to neighborhood character. \*