

A. INTRODUCTION

According to the 2012 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give neighborhoods their 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 noise. Not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few determining elements.

As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” the proposed project would result in the renovation of the historic Kingsbridge Armory and the development of new ice rinks, food and beverage, concession, retail, parking, and community facility spaces within this structure. This analysis considers the impacts of the proposed project on the neighborhood character of the project site and surrounding area, and relies on the analyses of the components of neighborhood character (i.e., land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) as analyzed elsewhere in the ~~Draft~~ Final Environmental Impact Statement (~~D~~-FEIS) and the Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS) for the proposed project.

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

The analysis concludes that overall, the proposed project would not substantially change the character of the neighborhood. As a result of the proposed project, changes to the project site’s land use would occur, as well as increases to traffic, transit, and pedestrian activity. The proposed project would return the long-vacant Kingsbridge Armory—a historic landmark—to productive use. With the exception of transportation and noise, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts on any of the technical areas that could impact neighborhood character. Overall, the proposed changes would be beneficial to the surrounding area, as discussed below.

B. METHODOLOGY

An analysis of neighborhood character begins by determining whether a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any relevant technical area (land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) or if a project would result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that could cumulatively affect neighborhood character. If the answer is yes, a preliminary assessment is undertaken. The study area for a preliminary analysis of neighborhood character is typically consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas assessed under CEQR that contribute to the defining elements of the neighborhood; in this case, a ¼-mile study area was assessed. The preliminary assessment first identifies the defining features of the neighborhood, and then assesses whether the project has the potential to impact these defining features, either through the potential for significant adverse

impacts or a combination of moderate effects. If the preliminary assessment concludes that the proposed project has the potential to affect defining features of a neighborhood, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character may be appropriate. If needed, the detailed assessment would use the information from the preliminary assessment as a baseline and then project and compare the future No Action and With Action conditions.

As described in the relevant chapters of this ~~D-E~~FEIS and its associated EAS, with the exception of transportation and noise, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; shadows; historic and cultural resources; urban design; or visual resources. However, because the proposed project could result in moderate effects in these categories, a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character impacts from the proposed project is provided below. The preliminary assessment describes the defining features of the neighborhood and then assesses the potential for the proposed project to impact these defining features. The preliminary assessment concludes that a detailed assessment is not warranted.

C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

DEFINING FEATURES

PROJECT SITE

The character of the project site is defined and 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 are currently being used by the National Guard for military recruiting and as a garage, however, these buildings are excluded from the project site, ~~and~~ are not part of the proposed project, and have been deemed non-contributing to the historic resource. 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.

STUDY AREA

The ¼-mile study area surrounding the project site is defined primarily by residential and institutional uses. 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. 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, seven other architectural resources are located in the vicinity of the project site: the former Walton High School building at 2780 Reservoir Avenue; a portion of the Old Croton Aqueduct; Public School 86, located at 2756 Reservoir Avenue; the 1940 Fordham Manor Reformed Church at 2711 Reservoir Avenue; the 1927 seven-story Beaux-Arts style University Towers apartment building at 2685 University Avenue; the circa 1937 six-story Art Moderne apartment building at 2727 University Avenue; and the 1936 six-story apartment building at 2751 University Avenue.

Jerome Avenue and Kingsbridge Road are the primary thoroughfares in the study area closest to the project site. 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 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 moderate. 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.

Existing noise levels near the project site are moderate to high and reflect the level of vehicular and rail 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 all receptor sites are in the marginally acceptable and marginally unacceptable range.

The No. 4 train viaduct, a visually prominent structure in this area of the Kingsbridge Heights neighborhood, is a 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.

POTENTIAL TO AFFECT THE DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the proposed project would redevelop the historic Armory with approximately 795,000 gsf of new development, including 9 ice rinks; approximately 64,300 gsf of related program space, including a wellness/off-ice training center, curling rinks, and lockers/equipment storage; approximately 58,100 gsf of related food and beverage, concession, and retail space; and approximately 50,000 gsf of community facility space, which is assumed to include fitness and recreation facilities, multipurpose rooms, child care, business incubator space, and meeting rooms for local community use. Approximately 457 accessory parking spaces would be provided in the Armory's basement and cellar levels. The proposed project would support the economic revitalization of the Kingsbridge Heights neighborhood of the Bronx by converting the large, substantially vacant Armory building into productive use, and would create new employment, learning, and recreational opportunities for local residents.

The proposed project would have the potential to affect the defining features of the neighborhood as follows:

LAND USE

The proposed actions would facilitate the development of new uses on the project site. The proposed project also would introduce new signage to the interior of the Armory that would be visible from nearby vantage points. The proposed project would be compatible with, and supportive of, land uses in the surrounding area. It would enhance the surrounding Kingsbridge

Heights neighborhood by providing local residents with a new recreational resource, as well as new retail and employment opportunities and additional space for community facility uses. In addition, the proposed project would introduce a new public attraction that would attract visitors from other parts of the City, providing increased foot traffic to support local businesses. Absent the proposed actions, the Armory would likely remain substantially vacant. The proposed project presents an opportunity to further City-wide planning goals, as expressed in PlaNYC, of promoting new development in areas that are well-served by public transportation and repurposing underutilized sites for public enjoyment with commercial and recreational uses.

Overall, the changes in land use associated with the proposed project would be in keeping with the neighborhood character of the project site and study area. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character due to changes in land use, zoning, and public policy.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The proposed project would introduce new economic activities to the area by redeveloping a substantially vacant building with new uses. These new uses, primarily the proposed skating rink uses, would introduce new visitors to the site, which could create increased demand for retail uses in the surrounding area, which already has well-established commercial retail and residential markets. Furthermore, certain nearby retail uses could benefit directly from increased visitor spending in the area, and new visitors to the site could add to the customer base of existing retail establishments in the area. Demand for retail goods and services is already present in the study area, and the proposed project is not expected to substantially alter or accelerate this economic pattern. Moreover, the proposed project would not introduce new uses that would directly compete with the surrounding retail uses. Although the proposed project would include food and beverage, concession, and retail space, it is anticipated that these uses would be accessory to the proposed ice rink activities and would draw customers from the facility's users. Therefore, the proposed project and its associated new visitors would support the existing economic pattern of commercial retail use in the surrounding area. The proposed project also would not directly or indirectly displace residents, workers, or visitors that form the customer base of existing businesses in the area. Instead, the new workers and visitors to the project site could add to the customer base of existing retail establishments in the area. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character relating to socioeconomic conditions.

OPEN SPACE

The proposed project would not directly affect any of the open spaces in the neighborhood; nor would it generate a new residential population or a new worker population of sufficient size to affect the utilization of open spaces in the neighborhood. The proposed project would improve the landscaping of the project site and provide new recreational amenities for local residents. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character relating to open space.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

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 Binding Report 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.

To avoid the potential for adverse physical impacts on the Armory and Public School 86 (an 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 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. Therefore, the proposed project would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character resulting from historic and cultural resources.

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

The urban design and visual resources of the project site and study area contribute to their neighborhood character. 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 Armory's renovation would be visible from some vantage points on the elevated platform for the Kingsbridge Road No. 4 station and would improve the context of that 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 obstruct any significant view corridors or views of visual resources in the study area, nor would it limit access to any visual resource. Therefore, the proposed project would be consistent with the existing urban design characteristics of the study area and would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character resulting from urban design and visual resources.

SHADOWS

The proposed redevelopment of the Armory would not increase the height of the existing Armory building and would not create any new structures outside the building. Therefore, the proposed project would not create a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character resulting from shadows.

TRANSPORTATION

As discussed in Chapter 8, "Transportation," the proposed project would result in several significant adverse traffic and pedestrian impacts. Specifically, the proposed project would cause significant traffic impacts at ~~5~~ six intersections in the weekday midday peak hour, ~~9~~ 12 in the weekday PM peak hour, ~~6~~ nine in the Saturday midday peak hour, and ~~9~~ 12 in the Saturday PM peak hour. Potential significant adverse pedestrian impacts are anticipated for eight pedestrian analysis locations at the following three intersections: Jerome Avenue and West Kingsbridge Road; Reservoir Avenue and West 195th Street; and Goulden Avenue and West 197th Street. Traffic capacity improvements and other measures that would mitigate these significant impacts are addressed in

Chapter 14, “Mitigation.” As the traffic and pedestrian impacts would be largely mitigated, the proposed project would not affect the essential character of the study area. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character with respect to transportation.

NOISE

While noise levels in the study area would increase in the future With Action condition—due to increased traffic and building mechanical equipment associated with the proposed project—the magnitude of the increase would be generally imperceptible to most listeners and below the CEQR threshold for a significant adverse noise impact, with one exception. Specifically, in terms of CEQR noise exposure guidelines, noise levels at receptor site 7 would remain in the “marginally acceptable” category, noise levels at receptor sites 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 would remain in the “marginally unacceptable” category, and noise levels at receptor site 5 (located along Reservoir Avenue between West Kingsbridge Road and West 195th Street) would change from the “marginally acceptable” category to the “marginally unacceptable” category, and is predicted to experience an increase in noise levels that would meet the CEQR threshold for a significant adverse noise impact. Mitigation measures that would partially mitigate this impact would be made available to the affected receptors, if determined necessary based on a New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)-approved post-construction monitoring program. Furthermore, it should be noted that the “marginally unacceptable” category of noise levels is not unusual for residential areas in New York City, and the noise increases causing the impact are expected to occur only during large event conditions. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character with respect to noise.

CONCLUSION OF PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

Overall, the proposed project would not substantially change the character of the neighborhood. With the exception of transportation, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts on any of the technical areas that could impact neighborhood character (including land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, and noise). However, the significant adverse traffic, pedestrian, and noise impacts would be largely mitigated, and thus are not anticipated to adversely affect neighborhood character. In addition the proposed project would not be expected to result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that could cumulatively impact neighborhood character. Therefore the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character. *