

# Seaside Park and Community Arts Center

## Chapter 14: Neighborhood Character

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### A. INTRODUCTION

Neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give neighborhoods their distinct “personality.” These elements may include a neighborhood’s land use, urban design, visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomics, traffic, and/or noise. A neighborhood character assessment under the *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual* considers how elements of the natural and built environment combine to create the context and feeling of a neighborhood and how a proposed project may affect that context and feeling. Thus, to determine a project's effects on neighborhood character, a neighborhood’s contributing elements are considered together.

An assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any of several technical areas that are assessed separately in other EIS sections, or when the proposed project may have moderate effects on several of the elements that define a neighborhood’s character. The relevant technical areas are Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy; Socioeconomic Conditions; Open Space; Shadows; Historic and Cultural Resources; Urban Design and Visual Resources; Transportation; and Noise. A significant impact identified in one of these technical areas is not automatically equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character. Rather, it serves as an indication that neighborhood character should be examined.

As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” the proposed project involves the development of approximately 2.41-acres of publicly accessible open space, which would include an approximately 5,100-seat seasonal amphitheater, as well as the restoration and reuse of the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building, a designated New York City landmark (NYCL), in the Coney Island neighborhood of Brooklyn Community District 13. The proposed project is intended to continue the City of New York’s efforts to reinvigorate Coney Island by introducing a new recreational, entertainment, and restaurant destination on the Riegelmann Boardwalk. This analysis considers the impacts of the proposed project on the neighborhood character of the development 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~~ Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the ~~Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS)~~ for the proposed project. The analysis year for the proposed project is 2016.

### B. PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

As described elsewhere in this EIS, the proposed project would not cause significant adverse impacts regarding land use, zoning, and public policy; open space; shadows; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; or noise. 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 (Former) Childs Restaurant Building—a historic landmark—to productive use. 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. The scale of significant adverse impacts to transportation would not affect any defining feature of neighborhood character, nor would a combination of moderately adverse effects affect the neighborhood's defining features. The proposed project would therefore not have a significant adverse neighborhood character impact, as discussed below.

## C. METHODOLOGY

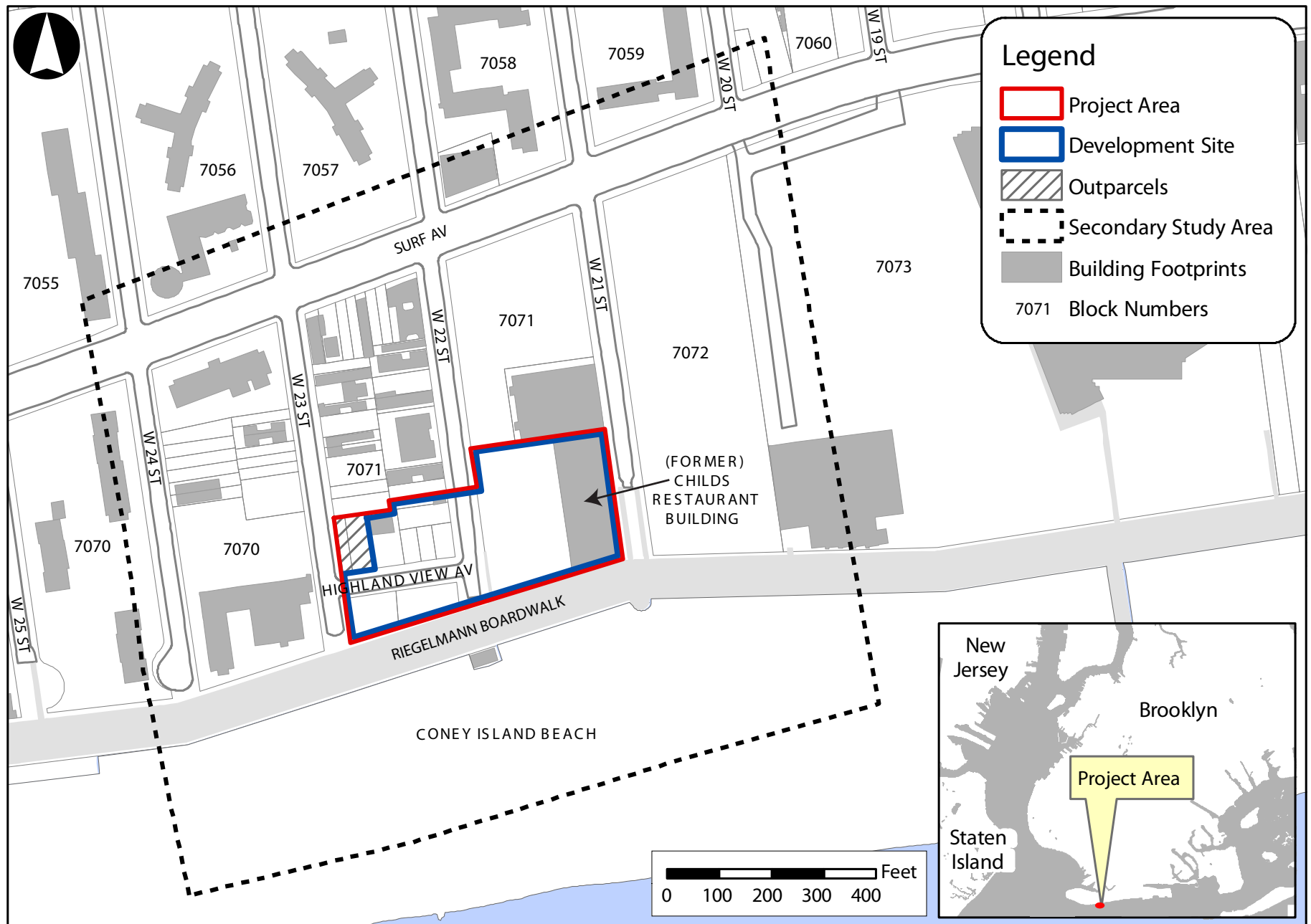
The purpose of a neighborhood character preliminary assessment is to determine whether changes expected in specified technical areas may adversely affect a contributing element of neighborhood character. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the assessment should answer the following two questions:

1. What are the defining features of the neighborhood(s)?
2. Does the project have the potential to affect the defining features of the neighborhood, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas?

The preliminary assessment therefore begins with a description of the existing conditions and defining features of the neighborhood that comprises the primary and secondary study areas, followed by an assessment of the potential for the proposed project to affect the defining features of the neighborhood, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas. If the assessment results indicate that the anticipated impacts and effects related to those technical areas would not have the potential to adversely affect any defining feature of neighborhood character, then, according to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a detailed analysis is not warranted.

### Study Areas

The neighborhood character study area has been delineated in accordance with the CEQR statement that 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. As shown in Figure 14-1, it consists of the area within approximately 400-feet of the project area. The study area boundaries are similar to those used for the land use, zoning, and public policy, historic and cultural resources, and urban design and visual resources chapters. The primary study area is generally bounded by West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street to the west, the Riegelmann boardwalk to the south, West 21<sup>st</sup> Street to the east, and properties fronting Surf Avenue to the north, encompassing the southern third of Block 7071. The secondary study area extends approximately 400-feet from the boundary of the project area, encompassing an area generally bounded by West 24<sup>th</sup> Street to the west, Surf Avenue to the north, West 20<sup>th</sup> Street to the east, and the Coney Island Beach to the south.



## **D. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT**

### **Existing Neighborhood Character and Defining Features**

#### ***Primary Study Area (Project Area)***

Vacant and underutilized land surrounded by metal fencing is a defining feature of the primary study area. Approximately 54.2 percent of lots in the project area are vacant land, approximately 23.5 percent of lots accommodate vacant buildings, and the remaining 22.3 percent of lots in the project area are used for vehicle storage and parking. The project area also includes approximately 28,516 square feet of existing public streets, including the beds of Highland View Avenue and a portion of West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street. These are characterized as narrow streets which carry local traffic and have parking on both sides. West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street has concrete pedestrian sidewalks on both sides of the street while Highland View Avenue has a concrete pedestrian sidewalk on the north side of the street. These pedestrian sidewalks are lined by the metal fencing which surrounds the adjacent lots, and accommodate light foot traffic.

There are no open space resources in the project area, nor are there significant natural resources. The vacant (Former) Childs Restaurant Building is a significant visual resource in the project area. Located in the easternmost section of the project area on Lot 130, the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building is a designated NYCL and a defining feature of both the project area and the surrounding neighborhood. The building is 60,000 square feet, three stories tall, and built-out to the lot line, and is considered an important visual resource in the project area. As detailed in Chapter 5, "Historic and Cultural Resources," the architecturally significant facades of the historic building are the eastern and southern facades. These facades can be seen from West 21<sup>st</sup> Street and from the Riegelmann Boardwalk. The building is currently vacant and boarded up, and its important architectural features are deteriorating.

#### ***Secondary Study Area***

The secondary study area supports a variety of land uses, densities, and building types along a generally standard street grid. Nearly every street in the study area is lined with parked cars and concrete sidewalks. Surf Avenue in the northern portion of the secondary study area is one of the neighborhood's main pedestrian and automotive thoroughfares. It is the only wide road in the secondary study area, with four lanes of two-way traffic. All other streets in the secondary study area are narrow and carry local traffic. The majority of pedestrian traffic in the study area occurs on the sidewalks and crosswalks of Surf Avenue and on the pedestrian-only Riegelmann Boardwalk.

To the west of the project area are two large institutional facilities which are four to five stories tall, surrounded by bushes and trees. The lots to the northwest, north, and east of the project area are dominated by vehicle storage, parking, and vacant land surrounded by metal fencing and low-rise residential buildings on narrow lots. There are also commercial, mixed-use, and institutional buildings located on these blocks. Many of these residential, commercial, mixed-use, and institutional buildings are older structures which are not well-maintained, with boarded-up windows and deteriorating facades. However, there is one seven-story, approximately 37,753 square-foot building immediately north of the project area on the western side of West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street between Surf Avenue and the Riegelmann Boardwalk (Block 7071, Lot 19) which was constructed in 2005 and is well-maintained.

The blocks to the west of West 24<sup>th</sup> Street and to the north of Surf Avenue, on the edges of the secondary study area, are completely residential, accommodating tall "towers-in-the-park" which are owned and operated by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). The NYCHA towers define the

areas to the west and north of the secondary study area and they can be seen from many viewpoints throughout the neighborhood. These dense housing complexes, which are not oriented towards the streets, are surrounded by passive and active open spaces, including grass, trees, benches, playgrounds, and basketball courts.

To the south of the project area is the Riegelmann Boardwalk and Coney Island Beach, which are significant open space resources in the secondary study area and are defining elements of the neighborhood. The Coney Island Beach is the most significant natural resource in the secondary study area, and is also considered an important visual resource. However, because the Riegelmann Boardwalk to the south of the project area is elevated, it obstructs many of the potential view corridors of the beach from points north. The (Former) Childs Restaurant Building in the project area is the only significant historic resource in the secondary study area and, as noted above, is a defining feature of both the primary and secondary study areas.

## **Assessment of Proposed Project's Potential Effects on Neighborhood Character**

### ***Technical Area Significant Adverse Impacts and Moderate Adverse Effects***

The analysis below presents the potential changes in the technical areas comprising the neighborhood character of the study area. As stated above, this analysis focuses on the potential changes to neighborhood character resulting from changes in Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy; Open Space; Shadows; Urban Design and Visual Resources; Transportation; and Noise. Detailed technical analyses for each of these areas are presented in their respective chapters. As discussed in greater detail in those chapters, environmental and social changes in the areas with respect to neighborhood character are as follows:

#### ***LAND USE, ZONING, AND PUBLIC POLICY***

As discussed in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," no significant adverse impacts on land use, zoning, or public policy, as defined by the guidelines for determining impact significance set forth in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, are anticipated in the future with the proposed project in the primary and secondary study areas. The proposed project would not directly displace any land uses so as to adversely affect surrounding land uses, nor would it generate land uses that would be incompatible with land uses, zoning, or public policy in the secondary study area. The proposed project would not create land uses or structures that would be incompatible with the underlying zoning, nor would it cause any existing structures to become non-conforming. The proposed project would not result in land uses that conflict with public policies applicable to the primary or secondary study areas. The construction of the proposed amphitheater would facilitate the Special Coney Island District plan through the development of vacant and underutilized land.

The proposed project would result in the development site's use year-round as an expansive neighborhood park with an amphitheater and indoor and outdoor dining facilities at the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building. The proposed project would provide recreational, entertainment, and restaurant uses which would be consistent with the area's existing and historic land use patterns. The proposed project would activate the area between West 21<sup>st</sup> Street and West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street during a period when the residential and commercial development contemplated by the Coney Island Rezoning proceeds in the surrounding area to the east and north of the development site. The proposed project would provide opportunities for active and passive recreation as well as dining and entertainment resources for the existing residential community as well as the residents of the newly developed multi-family housing that

is intended to emerge as a result of the Special Coney Island District plan. As such, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on land use, but is expected to have a beneficial effect on the neighborhood character of the project area.

### ***OPEN SPACE***

As discussed in Chapter 3, “Open Space,” although the proposed project would result in changes to the planned Highland View Park, it would not diminish or eliminate any acreage of this open space resource or reduce its utilization or aesthetic value. The proposed project would result in an additional 1.14 acres of publicly accessible open space in the project area compared to No-Action conditions, and would provide comparable or better amenities and facilities than would have otherwise been provided. As such, the proposed project would not result in a significant adverse direct impact to open space.

In the future with the proposed project, the secondary study area would be well-served by both passive and active open spaces. On concert days, the proposed park and amphitheater would provide approximately 90 percent passive and 10 percent active uses, compared to approximately 20 percent passive and 80 percent active uses in the No-Action scenario. On non-concert days, seating ~~could~~would be removed from the proposed amphitheater’s paved plaza, which could be and used for active and passive recreational use. Similarly, during the off-season, the paved seating area could be transformed for recreational uses. Therefore, the proposed park and amphitheater would be used for both passive and active recreational activities throughout the year.

### ***SHADOWS***

As detailed in Chapter 4, “Shadows,” the proposed project would cast new incremental shadows ~~at times throughout the year on the Riegelmann Boardwalk and Coney Island Beach in the secondary study area, which does not contain vegetation, for approximately three minutes on the June 21 analysis day. Although the boardwalk and beach would be subject to varying amounts of incremental shadows as a result of the proposed project, ranging from 5 minutes to 51 minutes, these~~ This increments would not be significant due to ~~their~~its limited extent and duration. As such, project-generated shadows would not adversely affect the utilization or enjoyment of ~~either this~~ open space resource. Therefore, incremental shadows resulting from the proposed project would not create significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

### ***HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES***

As discussed in Chapter 5, “Historic and Cultural Resources,” the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts to archaeological or architectural resources in the primary or secondary study areas. The proposed project would benefit the area’s only NYCL-designated historic resource through the extensive façade restorations of the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building. Because the proposed project involves the full restoration of the building’s historic facades pursuant to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC)-approved plans, it would not adversely affect the exterior of the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building. As such, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse direct physical impacts to designated historic resources. Additionally, as the proposed open space and amphitheater would be located to the west of the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building, neither would eliminate or screen significant building views of the historic resource or alter its visual relationship to the streetscape. There are no other designated or eligible historic resources in the primary or secondary study areas. As such, the proposed project would not have any potential indirect contextual impacts on historic resources.

## URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

As discussed in Chapter 6, “Urban Design and Visual Resources,” the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on urban design and visual resources, as defined by the guidelines for determining impact significance set forth in the *CEQR Technical Manual*. The proposed project would positively affect urban design by facilitating the construction of new open space and recreational space on the development site. The proposed project would also involve the restoration and reuse of the NYCL-designated (Former) Childs Restaurant Building, which is currently vacant and dilapidating. The creation of publicly accessible open space and an amphitheater on the development site as well as the rehabilitation and reactivation of the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building would enhance pedestrian experiences in the primary and secondary study areas. The proposed project would invigorate and enliven the development site and surrounding area, providing opportunities for extending pedestrian activity along the western portion of the Riegelmann Boardwalk and improving the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

Additionally, the proposed open space and amphitheater would not block any significant view corridors, views of visual resources, or limit access to any visual resources in the study area. The creation of the open space and amphitheater would create new view corridors between the project area and the Coney Island Beach, further enhancing the pedestrian experience in and around the project area. As detailed above, the NYCL-designated (Former) Childs Restaurant Building is an important visual resource in the primary and secondary study areas, and the proposed project would rehabilitate and reuse the currently vacant and dilapidating structure, enhancing the significant visual resource. As such, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts on urban design or visual resources in the primary or secondary study areas, and the proposed project would not create significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

## TRANSPORTATION

The character of the secondary study area, like many neighborhoods in New York City, is in part defined by a range of travel modes, including heavier foot, auto, and bus transit traffic along major corridors and lighter pedestrian and auto traffic along side streets. The greatest volume and most visible travel in the northern section of the secondary study area is by auto and bus, predominately along Surf Avenue which is a major thoroughfare in Coney Island, while there is more foot traffic in the southern section of the secondary study area along the pedestrian-only Riegelmann Boardwalk. Like many neighborhoods in New York City, patterns and timing vary for auto and pedestrian activity associated with residents, workers, and visitors to the area.

The proposed project would result in additional trips to the primary and secondary study areas. However, the travel associated with these additional trips would be distributed throughout the secondary study area and would vary depending on the season and concerts occurring in the proposed amphitheater. It is expected that the level of travel demand generated by off-season uses at the amphitheater would be substantially less than the demand generated by concerts during the summer months. As such, summer weekday and Saturday concerts coinciding with Brooklyn Cyclones baseball games at MCU Park to the east of the secondary study area were selected as the reasonable worst case condition for the transportation analyses in Chapter 9, “Transportation.” The travel associated with the additional trips generated by the proposed project would increase utilization of the area’s transportation facilities and in some cases would result in significant traffic impacts, most of which would be ~~either fully or partially~~ mitigated, as discussed below.

As detailed in Chapter 9, "Transportation," under the reasonable worst case condition, the proposed project would not have a significant adverse impact on transit or pedestrian conditions or parking availability, but would result in significant adverse traffic impacts at eight intersections in one or more peak periods. Those impacted intersections are: Shell Road and Shore Parkway, Neptune Avenue and Cropsey Avenue/West 17<sup>th</sup> Street, Surf Avenue and West 17<sup>th</sup> Street, Neptune Avenue and West 20<sup>th</sup> Street, Surf Avenue and Stillwell Avenue, Shore Parkway at Cropsey Avenue/Bay 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, Shore Parkway at Cropsey Avenue/Bay 50<sup>th</sup> Street, and ~~Neptune Avenue and West 19<sup>th</sup> Street~~ Mermaid Avenue and West 20<sup>th</sup> Street. However, the mitigation analysis in Chapter 16, "Mitigation," indicates that most of the significantly impacted intersections would be fully mitigated with a series of traffic capacity improvements. Unmitigated increases in traffic at the remaining impacted locations (the intersections of Shore Parkway Westbound Service Road at Shell Road and Neptune Avenue at Cropsey Avenue/West 17<sup>th</sup> Street) would be monitored during a concert event that overlaps with a game at MCU Park and, if determined to be necessary, traffic enforcement agents would be assigned to these two intersections during game days on days when amphitheater events coincide with baseball games (fewer than ten times per year) to facilitate traffic flow and eliminate any adverse impacts. As such, these increases in traffic would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character because the change in traffic over conditions in the future without the proposed ~~actions~~ project would be small enough that it would not have a noticeable effect on the character of the study area. The proposed project would increase pedestrian activity in the vicinity of the project area. This new activity would enliven the streets and would have a markedly positive effect on neighborhood character within the study area and surrounding neighborhood.

Therefore, while there would be increased transportation activity as a result of the proposed project, the resulting conditions would not result in density of activity or service conditions that would be out of character with the surrounding neighborhood. Thus, the changes in transportation due to the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

### **NOISE**

As discussed in Chapter 12, "Noise," the proposed project would not result in significant adverse noise impacts, as defined by the guidelines for determining impact significance set forth in the *CEQR Technical Manual*. Noise increases as a result of additional traffic that would be generated by the proposed project ~~area~~ are expected to be imperceptible in the secondary study area. However, the proposed project includes the establishment of an amphitheater that would hold concerts during the summer months. As discussed in detail in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the amphitheater would employ sound reduction features during concerts, which would limit propagation of noise beyond the site boundaries. As such, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse noise impacts and, therefore, would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.

### **Potential to Affect a Defining Feature of the Neighborhood**

If the proposed project would have the potential to affect the defining features of the neighborhood, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas, then a detailed assessment is required to determine whether the proposed project may have a significant adverse neighborhood character impact. Of the relevant technical areas specified in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the proposed project would not cause significant adverse impacts regarding land use, zoning, and public policy; open space; shadows; historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, or noise. The potential significant adverse impacts on transportation would not affect any defining feature of neighborhood character as the impacts would be



~~either fully or partially~~ largely mitigated. Additionally, moderate adverse effects that would affect such defining features, either singly or in combination, have not been identified.

Thus, based on the results of the preliminary assessment, there is no potential for the proposed project to result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character, and further analysis is not warranted.