

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the effects of the proposed project on neighborhood character. According to the 2014 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, 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 and 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 defining elements.

As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” the proposed project would result in the sequential demolition of the existing buildings in the Development Site and redevelopment with a total of 1,665 affordable residential units at the completion of the project, for an increment of 934 units over the No Action condition; approximately 61,100 gsf of retail uses, for an increment of 21,610 gsf over the No Action condition; and a new public school of approximately 86,608 gsf. The redevelopment has been designed to restore the density of the pre-urban renewal development of the neighborhood, creating a “downtown” sense to West Farms Square and extending it to the rest of the site.

This analysis considers the impacts of the proposed project on the neighborhood character of the study area, and relies in part on the analyses of the components of neighborhood character as analyzed elsewhere in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). As detailed in this chapter, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.

B. METHODOLOGY

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an analysis of neighborhood character begins with a preliminary assessment to determine whether changes expected in other technical areas may affect an element that contributes to 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. Potential effects on neighborhood character may include:

- *Land Use.* When development resulting from a 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.
- *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; substantial differences in population or employment density; or if a project results in changes to a unique industry.

- *Open Space.* Changes in open spaces have the potential to affect neighborhood character when a proposed project would result in the overburdening of existing open space facilities or would exacerbate an existing deficiency in open space.
- *Shadows.* When an action would result in a substantial reduction in the usability of an open space, or in the use, enjoyment or appreciation of the sunlight-sensitive features of a historic resource as a result of increased shadow, there is a potential to affect neighborhood character.
- *Historic Resources.* When a project would result in substantial direct changes to a historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a resource, or when a historic resources analysis identifies a significant impact in this category, there is a potential to affect neighborhood character.
- *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, curb cuts, and loading docks. 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.
- *Transportation.* Changes in transportation 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 project. Such substantial traffic changes can include: change in level of service (LOS) to C or below; change in traffic patterns; change in roadway classifications; change in vehicle mixes; substantial increases in traffic volumes on residential streets; or significant traffic impacts, as identified in that technical analysis. Regarding pedestrians, when a proposed project would result in substantially different pedestrian activity and circulation, it has the potential to affect neighborhood character.
- *Noise.* For a project to affect neighborhood character in regard to noise, it would need to result in a significant adverse noise impact and a change in acceptability category.

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a proposed project can also have a combination of moderate effects to several elements that cumulatively may affect neighborhood character. Therefore, this analysis also evaluates the potential for the proposed project to affect neighborhood character through a combination of effects.

STUDY AREA

As described 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. Therefore, the study area for this analysis reflects those considered for the other analyses, which generally extend 400 feet from the Development Site.

C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

DEFINING FEATURES

The neighborhood character of the study area west of Boston Road and north of Parcel 10 is predominantly residential. Residential uses in the study area largely consist of multifamily apartment buildings, which encompass a variety of building typologies, ranging from three-story attached rowhomes to 22-story “tower in the park”-style developments. A substantial portion of the residential units within the study area are affordable housing. The westernmost portion of the study area, particularly along Vyse Avenue, is generally characterized by lower-density buildings, with a higher concentration of rowhomes and small apartment buildings of up to five stories. Neighborhood retail uses, which are generally contained on the ground floor of residential buildings, are found along East Tremont Avenue and Devoe Avenue. Residential uses and neighborhood retail uses are the primary defining features of the study area.

The remainder of the study area is largely characterized by commercial and transportation and utility uses, including the elevated Nos. 2 and 5 trains, which run above Boston Road. The West Farms Square—East Tremont Avenue station, which provides access to the 2 and 5 lines, is located at the intersection of Boston Road and East Tremont Avenue, directly southwest of the Development Site.

As a result, the substantial concentration of low-, mid-, and high-rise multifamily housing and the elevated subway line are defining features of the neighborhood.

POTENTIAL TO AFFECT THE DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The *CEQR Technical Manual* recommends that, after the defining features of a neighborhood are identified, the potential for the project to affect the defining features of the neighborhood should be examined, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas.

As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” the proposed actions would facilitate the demolition of the existing Lambert Houses buildings and the phased redevelopment of the Development Site with an incremental increase of 934 affordable residential units, approximately 21,610 square feet (sf) of retail uses, and a new school of up to approximately 86,608 sf.

The following sections discuss potential changes resulting from the proposed project in the remaining technical areas that are considered in a neighborhood character assessment under CEQR.

LAND USE, ZONING, AND PUBLIC POLICY

The proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts to land use, zoning, and public policy, as described in Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy.” The proposed actions would result in the phased redevelopment of the Development Site with new multifamily residential buildings containing affordable housing units; additional retail uses, and a new school. Although the proposed project would increase residential density by nearly doubling the number of housing units within the Development Site, the proposed project would be compatible in use and scale with the study area, which is generally characterized by multifamily residential buildings of up to 21 stories, as well as neighborhood retail uses.

Overall, changes to study area land use associated with the proposed project would not adversely impact the existing character of the neighborhood.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts to socioeconomic conditions. As described in Chapter 3, "Socioeconomic Conditions," the proposed project is not expected to introduce or accelerate a trend of changing socioeconomic conditions or displace a population of renters living in units not protected by government regulations restricting rents. All of the proposed new residential units would be affordable; it is expected that the new units constructed with the proposed project, as well as the new population those units would introduce to the study area, as a whole would generally be similar to the existing income profile of the surrounding neighborhood. Further, the study area currently contains a high concentration of rent-regulated units whose tenants are not vulnerable to indirect residential displacement. The residential population within the study area who currently occupy rent-protected affordable housing units would not be adversely affected by the introduction of new housing units.

Overall, the proposed project would not cause any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character resulting from changes in socioeconomic conditions.

OPEN SPACE

As described in Chapter 4, "Open Space," the proposed project would result in both direct and indirect effects to open space resources within the ¼-mile open space study area. The proposed project would reduce the size of the public seating area located at the edge of the Development Site, adjacent to Parcel 10, from 0.10 acres to 0.05 acres. In addition, River Park, adjacent to Parcels 1, 3 and 5 of the Development Site, would receive approximately six hours of new shadows in the mid-day and afternoons of the fall, winter and early spring, and the use of the park during these times could consequently be significantly impacted. In the late spring and summer, new shadows on River Park would be more limited in duration and extent but would still be substantial in the final hour of the analysis day and would cause significant adverse impacts in those seasons.

The proposed project would result in indirect effects to open space resources in the study area by introducing a new residential population. However, although the proposed project would result in a decrease in the open space acreage/1,000 residents ratio of 4.440 percent, the reduction would not exceed the 5 percent threshold triggering detailed analysis described by the *CEQR Technical Manual*. Further, the project would result in qualitative improvements to the existing open spaces enclosed in courtyards surrounded by the Lambert Houses buildings. Because these open spaces are accessible only to Lambert Houses residents, they are not considered publicly-accessible open space resources for the purposes of the quantitative open space analysis; however, they would contain lawn and seating areas that would offer passive recreation opportunities to Lambert Houses residents; children's play equipment would also be provided, as would indoor fitness rooms for residents.

Overall, the proposed project would not cause any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character resulting from changes to open space resources.

SHADOWS

As stated above, when an action would result in a substantial reduction in the usability of an open space, or in the use, enjoyment or appreciation of the sunlight-sensitive features of a historic resource as a result of increased shadow, there is a potential to affect neighborhood character.

The potential shadow impact on the east façade windows of the Beck Memorial Presbyterian Church would not affect neighborhood character as this building is closed with no currently available plans to re-open the church or make building repairs in the near future or by the 2029 build year for the proposed project.

As detailed in Chapter 6, “Shadows,” the proposed project would result in some incremental shadows on area resources; however, with the exception of shadows on River Park, these changes would not adversely affect natural features or vegetation, or the use of open space. At River Park, new shadow from the proposed project would significantly impact the use of the park in the mid-day and afternoons of the fall, winter and early spring and in the final hours of the analysis day in the late spring and summer.

Overall, while the project would result in increased shadow on River Park, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character resulting from new shadow.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

As described in Chapter 5, “Historic and Cultural Resources,” the proposed construction within the Development Site would not entail the demolition of any known or potential architectural resources. Furthermore, the proposed project would not have any direct, physical impacts on known or potential architectural resources in the study area, as a result of the implementation of a Construction Protection Plan (CPP). The proposed project would not isolate any architectural resource from its setting or visual relationship with the streetscape, or otherwise adversely alter a historic property’s setting or visual prominence. The proposed buildings would be of a comparable height to the existing taller buildings in the surrounding area, and of a comparable footprint to the structures currently located within the Development Site itself. As stated above, there is the potential for a shadows impact on the east façade windows of the Beck Memorial Presbyterian Church; however, this would not affect neighborhood character as this building is closed with no currently available plans to re-open the church or make building repairs in the near future or by the 2029 build year for the proposed project.

Overall, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character related to historic and cultural resources.

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

As described in Chapter 8, “Urban Design and Visual Resources,” the proposed project is likely to have a beneficial effect on urban design within the study area, and would therefore not result in any significant adverse impacts to urban design or visual resources.

The proposed project would alter the urban design of the Development Site in several ways, resulting in more cohesive street frontages and stronger streetwalls, which would improve the pedestrian experience throughout the Development Site. In addition, the proposed project’s site

Lambert Houses

plan would have fewer points of access/egress than the current configuration of Lambert Houses, which would improve site security for residents.

The proposed project would not result in any changes to buildings, natural features, open spaces, or streets in the study area. While the proposed project would notably alter the visual character of the surrounding area, the neighborhood is already experiencing change as a result of numerous planned and under-construction residential developments. In addition, the proposed project would enhance the visual character of the Development Site as compared to existing/No-Action conditions, and would thus enhance the pedestrian experience of the neighborhood. The proposed development is intended to enhance the urban design and visual character of the surrounding area by restoring the density of the project site to that of the pre-urban renewal redevelopment of the neighborhood.

Overall, the proposed project would be expected to improve neighborhood character by introducing beneficial effects to the urban design and visual resources of the Development Site.

TRANSPORTATION

As discussed in Chapter 12, “Transportation,” traffic conditions were evaluated at 16 intersections for the weekday AM, midday and PM peak hours. Some of the locations where significant adverse traffic impacts are predicted to occur could be fully mitigated with the implementation of the recommended mitigation measures (see Chapter 21, “Mitigation”). However, the significant adverse impacts at the intersections of East Tremont Avenue and Boston Road/West Farms Road, East Tremont Avenue and Devoe Avenue/East 177th Street, East 177th Street and Sheridan Expressway, East 178th Street and Boston Road, and East 180th Street and Boston Road could not be fully mitigated during one or more analysis peak hours.

Pedestrian conditions were evaluated at 15 sidewalks, 8 corners, and 6 crosswalks for the weekday peak hours. In the 2029 With Action condition, the proposed project would result in significant adverse pedestrian impacts at one crosswalk during the weekday AM, midday, and PM peak hour. Widening future crosswalks were identified to mitigate the projected pedestrian impacts.

The thoroughfares and sidewalks in this neighborhood are already heavily trafficked. Therefore, while there would be increased traffic and pedestrian activity, the resulting conditions—even if unmitigated—would be similar to those seen in the high activity urban neighborhoods defining the study area and would not result in density of activity or service conditions that would be out of character with the study area or surrounding neighborhoods. Therefore, while certain traffic impacts would not be fully mitigated, this would not result in a significant adverse neighborhood character impacts.

NOISE

As described in Chapter 15, “Noise,” the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts related to noise.

The predominant sources of noise within the study area are vehicular traffic on major roadways and the elevated Nos. 2 and 5 trains, which run on elevated tracks above Boston Road. The proposed project would not generate sufficient vehicular traffic to have the potential to cause a significant noise impact, and would not affect the operation of the elevated subway.

The increase in noise levels with the proposed project would be imperceptible. Noise conditions would remain, depending on the location in the “normally unacceptable” and “unacceptable” categories (as per HUD criteria) and in the “marginally unacceptable” and “clearly unacceptable” categories (as per CEQR criteria), depending on the location. Although noise levels in this area would be in these categories, they would be comparable to noise levels throughout the City.

Overall, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character related to noise.

D. CONCLUSION

Overall, the proposed project would not substantially alter the character of the neighborhood and would likely have beneficial effects on the study area’s urban design. The character of the study area is primarily defined by multifamily residential buildings and neighborhood retail uses, with taller, larger-footprint buildings in the central portion of the study area and smaller walk-up buildings in the western portion. In addition, the elevated Nos. 2 and 5 trains, which run above Boston Road, and other transportation infrastructure contribute to the character of the neighborhood.

With the exception of transportation and shadows, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on any of the technical areas that could impact neighborhood character. As noted above, the potential shadows impact on the east façade windows of the Beck Memorial Presbyterian Church would not affect neighborhood character as the church is closed with no currently available plans to re-open the church or make building repairs in the near future or by the 2029 build year for the proposed project. While there would be a shadows impact on River Park overall, this impact would not affect neighborhood character within the area surrounding the Development Site. Mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce the effects of the significant adverse transportation impacts. While some of the significant adverse traffic impacts would not be fully mitigated, the unmitigated effects would not be substantial enough to adversely impact neighborhood character. As noted above, the thoroughfares and sidewalks in the neighborhood are already heavily trafficked. 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. Overall, the proposed project would be consistent with the existing character of the neighborhood and would not result in any significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character. *