Chapter 9: Neighborhood Character

A. INTRODUCTION

As defined by the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character is considered to be a combination of the many elements that creates each neighborhood's distinct personality. These elements include land use, urban design, visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomics, traffic, and noise, as well as the other physical or social characteristics that help to describe the community. This chapter has been updated since the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) to reflect the changes made to the Reasonable Worst Case Development Scenario, as described in Chapter 1, "Project Description."

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

- *Land Use.* Development resulting from a proposed action could alter neighborhood character if it introduced new land uses, conflicts with land use policy or other public plans for the area, changes land use character, or generates 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; or substantial differences in population or employment density.
- *Historic Resources.* When an action would result in substantial direct changes to a historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a resource, or when a historic resource analysis identified 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, for, 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 could affect neighborhood character if they directly alter key visual features such as unique and important public view corridors and vistas, or block public visual access to such features.
- *Transportation.* Changes in traffic and pedestrian conditions can affect neighborhood character in a number of ways. For traffic to have an effect on neighborhood character, it must be a contributing element to the character of the neighborhood (either by its absence or its presence), and it must change substantially as a result of the action. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, such substantial traffic changes can include: changes in level of

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

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

This chapter of the EIS examines neighborhood character within the area to be rezoned and its surrounding blocks (a study area of up to ½ mile, coterminous with the land use study area, see Figure 2-1 in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning and Public Policy"), and the proposed actions' effects on that character. The impact analysis focuses on changes in neighborhood character resulting from changes in the physical and social environments discussed above, since these areas are most relevant to neighborhood character.

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

For the purposes of assessing neighborhood character, this chapter discusses the study area in four districts/neighborhoods: 1) Downtown Jamaica (the Central Business District) and York College; 2) commercial corridors; 3) residential neighborhoods; and 4) industrial districts. The residential neighborhoods are discussed in terms of those areas targeted for modest residential growth and those targeted for contextual zoning and neighborhood preservation. An important built feature of the study area are the elevated tracks of the Long Island Rail Road that run across the study area, separating the north and south neighborhoods and limiting access and connections in this direction.

PROPOSED ACTION AREA

DOWNTOWN JAMAICA AND YORK COLLEGE

Downtown Jamaica and the Central Business District (CBD) is characterized excellent mass transit access with a mix of commercial and institutional/civic offices, local and regional retail, and a mix of residential uses. The approximately 25-acre York College Campus is located south of the LIRR tracks and the core of the Jamaica CBD. North of the tracks and central to the CBD is the 11.5 acre Rufus King Park. Within the CBD, transportation access is available to the Long Island Rail Road at Jamaica Station, Kennedy Airport via the AirTrain (which is connected to the LIRR Jamaica Station), and to a number of New York City Transit subway and bus lines at Jamaica Center. The York College campus is located immediately south of the Jamaica Center transportation hub and east of the LIRR Station. With the elevated LIRR tracks crossing the study area, there are limited north/south connections. One such connection is Guy R. Brewer Boulevard which also passes through the York College Campus.

Retail uses are concentrated along the commercial strips of Jamaica Avenue and along 165th Street, which is a pedestrian mall north of Jamaica Avenue to 89th Avenue. Major retail uses include the recently constructed mall and multiplex theater on Jamaica Avenue between Parsons Boulevard and 160th Street, Gertz Plaza Mall at Jamaica Avenue and Union Hall Street, and the Jamaica Coliseum along the pedestrian Mall on 165th Street. Commercial and government offices are located throughout the CBD.

Major institutional uses within the CBD include important government and civic facilities at the Federal, State, and City levels. Among them are the Civil Court and Surrogate's Court along Sutphin Boulevard, the Queens Family Court on Jamaica Avenue at 153rd Street, the Queens Central Library on Merrick Boulevard, and the United States Postal Service Jamaica Post Office. Other institutional uses include a hospital (Mary Immaculate Hospital, located north of Rufus King Park), as well as several churches and schools. The CBD also includes pockets of residential use in the form of single- and two-family houses and apartment buildings. Larger residential buildings include the 14-story Jamaica Towers and the 7-story Shelton Hall and the 6-story Park View Apartments residential buildings. At the northern edge of the CBD is Hillside Avenue, which has low- and mid-rise commercial buildings and apartment buildings with retail uses on the ground floor. This corridor features auto associated retail activities.

Central to the Downtown is Rufus King Park which includes the historic Rufus King Manor House and provides both active and passive recreational facilities. Cultural events are also held here.

With respect to urban design the study area has an irregular street grid pattern with three major street non-rectilinear street corridors that traverse through the area—Sutphin Boulevard (which runs north-south), Jamaica Avenue (which runs east/west and is located north of the LIRR tracks), and Liberty Avenue (which runs east/west and is located south of the LIRR tracks). Since those three streets follow irregular paths, they create offsetting grid patterns with the perpendicular streets. In addition, with many of the north/south streets interrupted by the LIRR tracks this creates a number of narrow, long blocks along the LIRR corridor.

In terms of traffic flow, the major east-west streets are: Jamaica Avenue, a busy two-lane commercial road with additional bus lanes that runs through the center of the project area and access to the MTA Jamaica Center Station; Hillside Avenue, a four-lane road bordered by low-rise commercial and auto-related buildings along the northern edge of the area; and Liberty Avenue, a divided six-lane road located south of the LIRR tracks that is primarily bordered by low-rise industrial buildings and the York College campus. All three roads carry two-way traffic. Of these avenues, Jamaica Avenue is the busiest pedestrian corridor. It has significant street life with its active commercial and institutional uses. Community facility uses also play an important role in the vitality of this street and the area as whole.

The major north-south streets across the study area are: Sutphin Boulevard, which is located at the western edge of the project area and is a wide two-lane road mostly lined by commercial buildings and providing access to the LIRR Jamaica Station/AirTrain complex; Merrick Boulevard, a four-lane road lined by low-rise auto-related buildings and residential yards south of Archer Avenue and by institutional and commercial buildings north of Jamaica Avenue; Guy R. Brewer Boulevard, which is a wide two-lane road that runs south from Jamaica Avenue through the York College campus and the residential neighborhoods south of the campus; and Parsons Boulevard, a two-lane road that runs north from Jamaica Avenue and is lined by several churches, the former Queens County Family Courthouse, mid-rise apartment buildings, and low-rise commercial taxpayers. All four roads carry north and southbound traffic.

York College covers most of 6 large blocks (about 25 acres) with a campus that originated as part of an Urban Renewal Area first designated in 1968. Today, it is largely built-out with the exception of two remaining vacant properties. York College provides a major educational and civic center that anchors Downtown Jamaica on the south side of the LIRR tracks. The campus also includes the Queens High School of Science at York College as well as a U.S Food and Drug Administration Laboratory. The performing arts center at the College is also used for

special events and performances for both the college and is a cultural amenity for the Jamaica area. There is also a large athletic and recreational field that is part of the campus. All told, York College plays an important role in the neighborhood character of Jamaica as a community facility and also supports the Downtown district.

There are no designated or potential historic districts in the study area, however, there are 14 individual resources listed on the State and National Register, with the majority located in Downtown area. These architectural resources date from the middle of the 17th century to the early 20th century, and represent a range of building types and architectural styles that illustrate multiple periods from the area's historical development, beginning with European colonization and including the early Federal period, expansion in the middle of the 19th century after construction of the Long Island Rail Road through the area in 1836, and commercial boom at the turn of the 20th century. These include the Long Island Railroad Station, several churches and the Jamaica Savings Bank. There are also nine additional potential architectural resources in this downtown area that contribute individual historic features to the center (these historic resources are defined as potential historic resources that have been identified by the City's Landmarks Preservation Commission [LPC] during the preparation of this EIS).

As of 2002, there were approximately 25,000 private sector employees working in the project area (see Table 3-4). Over 43 percent of the private sector employees (10,782 people) worked in the Health and Social Services sector, which includes employment in hospitals (such as Mary Immaculate Hospital, located north of Rufus King Park), nursing and residential care facilities, outpatient care centers, physician's offices, and individual and family services centers. The next largest employment sector was retail, with approximately 4,044 employees, or about 16 percent of the total project area employment. As described in detail below, retail employment in the project area is most heavily concentrated along Jamaica Avenue, 165th Street, and Hillside Avenue.

Vehicular traffic levels in the Downtown Jamaica area are generally high. Within the downtown area, congestion occurs during peak hours at numerous intersections along Jamaica Avenue and Archer Avenue.

The Downtown Jamaica area exhibits the highest levels of pedestrian activity in the proposed action area. Pedestrian traffic is generally concentrated on the major arterials and streets bounded by Sutphin Boulevard to the west, Hillside Avenue to the north, Merrick Boulevard to the east and Archer Avenue to the south.

Noise levels at receptor sites in the Downtown Jamaica area are generally in the "marginally unacceptable" or "clearly unacceptable" categories due to high levels of traffic as well as the proximity of the LIRR tracks.

COMMERICAL CORRIDORS

As a mixed-use commercial center, there are a number of major commercial street corridors that cross the study area. On the north is Hillside venue. Hillside Avenue runs from west to east. The western segment of this corridor is characterized primarily by commercial and auto-related uses. Further east, Hillside Avenue has a mix of retail buildings, office buildings, and mixed-use buildings with a transition to residential use on the upper floors and storefronts on the ground floor. There are several community facilities, including schools and medical offices, most of which are located along or near Hillside Avenue.

South of Hillside Avenue is Jamaica Avenue. To the west of the CBD, from Sutphin Boulevard to the Van Wyck Expressway, Jamaica Avenue has a mix of residential and commercial uses. This area is characterized by apartment buildings and single- and two-family houses. Within the CBD, Jamaica Avenue is lined with commercial and institutional uses as well as the Jamaica Center Plaza transit station.

Further south is Merrick Boulevard. This boulevard is characterized primarily by community facility uses, including churches and a hospital, as well as primarily local retail uses.

Of these corridors, Jamaica Avenue exhibits the greatest pedestrian and street activity. Vehicular traffic levels on Hillside, Jamaica, and Archer Avenues are high and a number of intersections along these corridors experience congestion during peak hours. Due to high traffic volumes, noise levels along these categories are generally in the "marginally unacceptable" or "clearly unacceptable" categories.

RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

To the east of the Jamaica Center CBD and north of the LIRR tracks is the Hollis neighborhood. This area consists primarily of low density residential uses with one- and two-family detached houses and some multifamily apartment buildings concentrated along Hillside Avenue. There are several community facilities, including schools and medical offices, most of which are located along or near Hillside Avenue.

The South Jamaica neighborhood comprises the area south of York College. This neighborhood includes a mix of one- and two-family buildings, apartment houses, and the housing complex of South Jamaica Houses. To the east of the LIRR Montauk line tracks is the residential neighborhood of St. Albans. The portion of this neighborhood that lies within the primary study area is almost entirely residential. It is comprised mainly of single family detached houses with some two-family houses and as well as a few blocks of small walk-up apartment buildings.

Vehicular and pedestrian traffic levels in the residential neighborhoods surrounding Downtown Jamaica are low.

INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS

To the west of York College and south of the LIRR tracks is an industrial area housing businesses such as warehouses, automotive products dealers and repair shops, construction supply companies, and food wholesalers. Interspersed among the industrial and automotive uses are vacant lots, parking lots, and clusters of one- and two-family residential buildings.

South of the LIRR tracks to 109th Avenue, Merrick Boulevard is dominated by automotive uses. These include repair shops, gas stations, and car dealerships. East of Sutphin Boulevard, in the CBD area, Archer Avenue is lined with a mix of industrial, automotive, retail, and commercial uses.

Further east, from 179th Place to the eastern edge of the primary study area, Jamaica Avenue is predominantly industrial.

Since these areas are largely industrial, there is limited street activity and there are no or few community facilities.

SECONDARY STUDY AREA

The secondary study area for neighborhood character is coterminous with the secondary study area for land use, which is a half-mile distance from the boundary of the primary study area. This includes portions of the residential neighborhoods of Briarwood, Jamaica Hill, Jamaica Estates, Holliswood, St. Albans, and Kew Gardens (see Figure 2-1 in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning and Public Policy").

North of the rezoning area, the secondary study area is characterized primarily by single family detached houses of two to three stories with institutional uses that include schools, churches, and hospitals. The neighborhood of Briarwood, located north of Hillside Avenue and east of the Van Wyck Expressway, also includes a number of 6-story apartment buildings. The segment of Queens Boulevard that runs through Briarwood is lined with commercial uses including strip malls and small office buildings. Jamaica Hill, a residential neighborhood east of Briarwood, consists predominantly of 2- to 3-story single family detached houses. At the northeastern edge of the secondary study area are the neighborhoods of Jamaica Estates and Holliswood which consist mainly of 1- to 2-story single-family detached houses on large lots. Two complexes of 2-story garden apartments are located two blocks north of Hillside Avenue along either side of Marengo Avenue. Institutional uses in the area include Holliswood Hospital, the Mary Lewis Academy, and several churches and temples.

The neighborhoods of Kew Gardens, Richmond Hill, and Ozone Park are located to the west of the rezoning area. Kew Gardens and Richmond Hill, located north of the LIRR tracks along Atlantic and 94th Avenues, are defined mainly by residential use. Residential buildings include a mix of single and two-family detached houses, semi-detached houses, and apartment buildings. Jamaica Avenue is characterized primarily by residential buildings with retail uses on the ground floor. Industrial and auto-related uses are located along the LIRR tracks. Ozone Park, located to the south of the LIRR tracks and west of the Van Wyck Expressway, is comprised mainly of two-story single family detached houses. The neighborhood's main commercial strip is along Liberty Avenue, which is lined with attached residential buildings with ground floor retail use. Additionally, clusters of commercial uses are located along 101st Avenue.

To the south of the rezoning area, the South Jamaica neighborhood extends from the primary study area into the secondary study area. Residential land use dominates the area, and most housing takes the form of detached single family dwellings with community facilities such as churches and schools interspersed. Sutphin Boulevard is the focus of commercial and institutional use in the area. The residential neighborhood of St. Albans covers the southeastern portion of the secondary study area. Single-family detached and semi-detached houses dominate the area. Commercial uses are concentrated along Merrick Boulevard, which has a few small strip malls, and Farmers Boulevard, which has retail uses on the ground floor with residential use above.

C. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTIONS (NO BUILD)

PROPOSED ACTION AREA

Absent the proposed actions, it is anticipated that the area of the proposed actions would experience some growth in commercial, residential and manufacturing uses. Among the development projects that are proposed in the primary study area in the future without the proposed actions (as described in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy") is a

proposal by a private developer to create approximately 360 residential units, 42,800 square feet of retail space, 19,400 square feet of community facility space, and parking on the 2-acre former Queens County Courthouse site at 89th Avenue and Parsons Boulevard in the Jamaica Center CBD. Also in the Jamaica Center CBD, a 225,590 square foot Home Depot building is under construction on the northern side of 93rd Avenue between Merrick Boulevard and 168th Street. The Greater Jamaica Development Corporation (GJDC) also proposes to undertake several transportation and streetscape improvements in the Jamaica Center area with the goals of increasing pedestrian access and safety, improving traffic flow, accommodating increased bus volumes, creating public open space and spurring transit-oriented development. It is also expected that approximately 139 residential units would be constructed on a number of urban renewal sites in the South Jamaica I URA.

In addition to the above, the RWCDS assumes that development would occur on projected and potential development sites that are underbuilt as per current zoning (see Figure 1-9, in Chapter 1, "Project Description"). It is anticipated that, in the future without the proposed actions, there would be approximately 1,815 residential units, 1,663,485 square feet of commercial space, 214,344 square feet of community facility space, and 500,646 square feet of industrial space on projected and potential development sites.

SECONDARY STUDY AREA

The neighborhood character of the secondary study area is expected to undergo little change in the future without the proposed actions. Jamaica Hospital is expected to construct a new nursing home facility in the Kew Gardens portion of the secondary study area, to the west of the Van Wyck Expressway on the block bounded by 89th Avenue, 135th Street, 91st Avenue, and 134th Street. Furthermore, it is anticipated that some development will occur in the western portion of the secondary study area due to the rezoning of Kew Gardens/Richmond Hill in recent years. The Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS) for the Kew Gardens/Richmond Hill rezoning identified new development that would occur on four sites within the secondary study area. The four projected development sites are located west of the Van Wyck Expressway between Jamaica Avenue and Kew Gardens Road and fall within the secondary study area. Development on these sites is expected to include approximately 109 housing units and 51,740 square feet of retail space.

D. THE FUTURE WITH THE PROPOSED ACTIONS (BUILD)

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER ANALYSIS BY TECHNICAL AREA

The analysis below presents the potential changes in the neighborhood character of the study area by 2015. As stated above, this analysis focuses on the potential changes to neighborhood character resulting from changes in Land Use, Socioeconomic Conditions, Historic Resources, Urban Design and Visual Resources, Transportation (traffic and pedestrians), and Noise. Detailed technical analyses for each of these areas is presented in Chapters 2, 3, 7, 8, 16, 17 and 19, respectively. 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

Land use is the strongest factor in determining the character of the area because land use creates changes that can alter the "look and feel" of the area, as well as the levels of activity in an area

(e.g., traffic and pedestrian flows). Land use changes are also the foundation for neighborhood character elements such as urban design and visual character, socioeconomic conditions, and vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

The Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy analysis (see Chapter 2) concludes that the proposed actions would change the scale and density of land use within the Downtown Jamaica district while providing for appropriately scaled development in the neighboring low-rise residential communities to the east. New residential development would be directed to wide major corridors such as Hillside Avenue, Guy R. Brewer Boulevard, Merrick Boulevard, and Liberty Avenue, where there wide streets with good transportation access, transit options, and local commercial retail and office uses that would support walk trip and neighborhood connections. In addition, the character of established lower-density neighborhoods including St. Albans and Hollis would be maintained. Industrial districts would also be preserved with an increase in floor area at certain locations to allow expansion and growth in a diverse job mix for the community. It is the conclusion of Chapter 2 that these changes are positive in that they reinforce the Downtown Jamaica Central Business District, protect existing residential neighborhoods, and allowing for the preservation and expansion of manufacturing uses.

In sum, the proposed actions would result in changes in the area's land use patterns, with new, large-scale developments on a number of sites in the Downtown Jamaica area. The proposed actions acknowledge the need for transit-oriented development, contextual residential neighborhoods, and mixed-use areas that also preserve manufacturing uses. The proposed actions would allow the redevelopment of vacant and underutilized lots, especially those in the Downtown area that have been subject to a declining demand for parcels zoned for manufacturing and industrial use. In addition, developments under the proposed actions would help create the critical mass of commercial, institutional, and residential uses that is necessary to help expand a vibrant Jamaica Center and create 24-hour activity in the Downtown while preserving residential communities.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

As discussed in Chapter 3, "Socioeconomic Conditions," it is concluded that the proposed action would not result in significant adverse socioeconomic impacts on direct residential displacement, direct business displacement, effects on specific industries, and indirect business displacement in the proposed action area or the larger Jamaica study area. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, the proposed action has the potential to cause significant indirect residential displacement. Conclusions related to indirect residential development, as outlined in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, are summarized below.

The *CEQR Technical Manual* suggests that a population increase of 5 percent or more could be large enough to trigger a socioeconomic change that would negatively affect a population at risk of displacement. The proposed action would result in a net increase of 11,337 residents in the area, which would be approximately 12.3 percent of the 2015 project area population. This would represent a population increase of 5.2 percent over the future No Build condition in the combined project area and primary and secondary study areas. This increase exceeds the 5 percent threshold laid out in the *CEQR Technical Manual*. However, in recent years, the project area has experienced an increase of new market-rate residential development, attracting residents with higher-income occupations. As a whole, the socioeconomic characteristics of the population living in the project area is already changing and, based on current trends and the RWCDS in the future without the proposed action, is likely to continue to change over the next

ten years. Nonetheless, the socioeconomic characteristics of new households introduced under the proposed actions would differ from the characteristics of the population living in a portion of the unprotected housing units in some parts of the study area. These residents constitute the potentially "vulnerable" population—those who could be subject to indirect displacement under the proposed actions.

In total, it is estimated that approximately 1,835 housing units in the project area could be vulnerable to indirect displacement pressures under the proposed actions. Although the *CEQR Technical Manual* does not suggest thresholds for determining the significance of indirect residential displacement impacts, it does say that an impact could generally be considered significant and adverse if "households or individuals would be displaced by legal means…they would not be likely to receive relocation assistance, and, given the trend created or accelerated by the proposed action, they would not be likely to find comparable replacement housing in their neighborhood." There is the potential for this to be the case for low- and moderate-income residents living in unprotected housing units in the three study areas—a population estimated to be about 5,400 individuals, according to currently available data and conditions. The proposed actions have the potential to cause a significant adverse impact with respect to indirect residential displacement. The population vulnerable to indirect displacement constitutes about 7 percent of the population of the total study area. The potential indirect displacement of this population could alter the socioeconomic character of the neighborhood, potentially reducing the diversity of population and households in the area. Because of this potential socioeconomic impact, an Affordable Housing Alternative was examined (see the discussion in Chapter 23, "Alternatives").

HISTORIC RESOURCES

As discussed in Chapter 7, "Historic Resources," the proposed actions would not impact any historic districts. To avoid adverse construction-related impacts on architectural resources adjacent to projected and potential development sites, construction protection mechanisms are implemented by the City's Department of Buildings (DOB) plans and *TPPN #10/88*, which is a monitoring program to reduce the likelihood of construction damages to historic structures and to detect at an early stage any potential damage so that construction procedures can be changed. With these measures in place, it is not expected that any significant damages would alter a historic structure to the extent that neighborhood character is significantly adversely impacted.

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

As discussed in Chapter "Urban Design and Visual Resources," in the 2015 future with the proposed actions, significant, but not adverse changes would occur with respect to urban design conditions in the area of the proposed actions. Downtown Jamaica Center would undergo the most appreciable change, as new bulk, heights, and uses would create a vibrant mix of uses and support the revitalized Jamaica CBD. Taller buildings of varied bulk and design would be located near the Jamaica transit hub while low-rise buildings would be allowed at the neighborhood edge to create a transition of scale from the Central Business District to the nearby residential communities. As a result of the proposed actions, the new, locally oriented retail uses at street level and the street trees would transform barren streets into active and appealing streetscapes featuring amenities that support pedestrian activity. In the residential neighborhoods, the implementation of contextual zoning would be sensitive to the local neighborhood scale and context.

No adverse impacts on visual resources are anticipated as a result of the proposed actions. The propose actions would considerably change views of and within the area. However, these impacts are expected to be positive and would not block public view corridors, vistas, or natural or built features.

It is also not anticipated that the proposed actions would have adverse visual or contextual impacts on other architectural resources, because new development pursuant to the proposed actions would not eliminate or screen publicly accessible views of a significant visual resource, isolate an architectural resource from its setting or alter its visual relationship with the streetscape, or introduce an incompatible visual element to a resource's setting. Further, new development would not result in any significant adverse shadow impacts.

In sum, the urban design and visual resources analysis finds that the proposed actions would result in considerable improvements to the urban design and visual quality of the area, especially downtown. These would include substantial changes to building bulk, form, size, and scale, as well as enhancement to streetscape elements. Most of the projected development in Downtown would occur in the proposed Special Downtown Jamaica District (SDJD). Contextual zoning districts would be applied to much of the area surrounding the CBD and the nearby residential neighborhoods of South Jamaica, Hollis, and St. Albans. These contextual zoning districts would limit building heights and street wall setbacks and would enhance the visual character of these areas by creating a continuous streetwall on blocks that are currently broken by vacant and underutilized sites. In low-density areas, contextual zoning would ensure that new development would be of similar scale and height to existing buildings. Additionally, the proposed contextual zoning districts as well as the SDJD require the planting of street trees, which would visually enhance the streetscape.

TRANSPORTATION

Chapter 16, "Traffic and Parking," analyzes the effects of added traffic and parking demand from projected development sites on the Jamaica street network during the weekday AM, midday, and PM peak hours as well as the Saturday midday peak hour. The results of the analyses show that project demand would create significant traffic impacts, with the AM peak hour having the most impacts, with 31 impacted intersections (30 signalized, one unsignalized), followed by the PM, Saturday midday and weekday midday, with 26, 19 and 17, respectively (all signalized). Significant adverse traffic impacts would occur at 10 intersections along the Hillside Avenue corridor; one intersection along the 89th Avenue corridor; 12 intersections along the Jamaica Avenue corridor; five intersections along the Archer Avenue corridor; two intersections along the Atlantic Avenue/94th Avenue corridor; four intersections along the Liberty Avenue corridor; and at South Road and Guy. R. Brewer Boulevard. Chapter 22, "Mitigation," of this EIS provides a description of measures developed to mitigate the traffic impacts identified in the traffic analysis. As discussed in Chapter 22, the proposed mitigation measures would mitigate most of the traffic impacts that would occur as a result of the proposed action, including 27 of the 31 intersections with impacts during the AM peak hour, 16 of the 17 intersections with impacts during the midday peak hour, 22 of the 26 intersections with impacts in the PM peak hour, and 15 of the 19 intersections with impacts in the Saturday midday peak hour. The remaining intersections would have lane groups that are unmitigable. The intersections at which traffic impacts would not be fully mitigated are generally characterized by high levels of traffic currently, and the additional traffic resulting from the proposed actions would not constitute a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

With respect to pedestrian activity, Chapter 17, "Transit and Pedestrians," concludes that new pedestrian activity would not result any significant adverse crosswalk or sidewalk impacts, but would result in significant impacts to the corner area at the intersection of Jamaica Avenue and Merrick Boulevard in the PM peak hour. These impacts would affect a total of four corner areas and all but one of these could be mitigated.

NOISE

As discussed in Chapter 19, noise increases as a result of the additional traffic that would be generated by the proposed actions are expected to be imperceptible at all monitoring sites. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character with respect to noise.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER ANALYSIS BY AREA

DOWNTOWN JAMAICA AND YORK COLLEGE

In the future with the proposed actions, the Downtown Jamaica CBD would be expanded and revitalized in the SDJD area. The proposed actions are expected to result in the development of 3,895,445 square feet of commercial space within the proposed SDJD area, as well as 126,740 square feet of community facility space and 2,040 housing units. The commercial space developed in this area is expected to include offices, local retail, regional retail, and a hotel. This growth would be consistent with downtown urban centers in the City and region and would support the continued revitalization of Downtown Jamaica based in the opportunities to create new significant transit-oriented development in this regional downtown center.

The proposed actions would facilitate mixed-use development containing office, retail, and residential uses, a hotel, new open space, and parking on development sites in the proposed Jamaica Gateway Urban Renewal Area (JGURA) adjacent to the Jamaica Station. This new development would occur on sites that are currently underutilized. Designation of a URA is consistent with prior URA designations in Jamaica that have been the catalyst for growth in housing, commercial and civic offices and retail spaces and major community facilities such as York College. Of the development expected to occur within the proposed SDJD area, 2,113,904 sf of commercial space and 206 residential units are expected to be constructed within the proposed JGURA. Development of these sites is intended to catalyze additional private investment in the area around Jamaica Station. This development would be consistent with the proposed zoning for the area and would support the above-described initiatives. Redevelopment of the JGURA, by removing blight and underutilized conditions that are inconsistent with the Downtown Jamaica objectives, would allow the resurgence to Downtown Jamaica to continue. The urban design and visual character changes would contribute positively to the character of the Downtown Jamaica district and would not adversely impact the York College area as well. The impacts on the individual historic buildings would not have an overall impact on any potential or existing historic districts nor would it adversely impact neighborhood character as a whole in the Downtown.

In the York College area, the focus of development under the proposed actions would be along Guy R. Brewer Boulevard. The proposed actions would provide for a mix of low-rise development (40 feet and under) extending south from the college and infilling development sites with a mix of residential uses with ground floor retail and expanding community facilities. All of these uses would support the residential community of South Jamaica, eliminating underutilized sites that do not positively contribute to the neighborhood and enhancing

connections between South Jamaica and the College campus. These uses would support a community development pattern initiated by the South Jamaica and York College Urban Renewal Areas. There would also be no adverse impacts on historic resources and urban design in this area.

While there would be significant adverse traffic impacts along all major corridors in the area of Downtown Jamaica and York College, most of these could be mitigated. However, there would remain unmitigated traffic impacts at four intersections along the Hillside Avenue corridor, one intersection along the Hillside Jamaica Avenue corridor; one intersection along the Archer Avenue corridor; one intersection along the Atlantic Avenue/94th Avenue corridor; and one intersection along the Liberty Avenue corridor. Additionally, new pedestrian activity would not result any significant adverse crosswalk or sidewalk impacts, but would result in significant impacts to the corner areas at the intersection of Archer Avenue and 160th Street in the weekday midday peak hour.

While the proposed actions would result in the direct displacement of approximately 182 firms and 1,193 employees, mostly in the downtown area, it is concluded that the proposed action would not result in significant adverse socioeconomic impacts on direct business displacement, effects on specific industries, or indirect business displacement in the proposed action area or the larger Jamaica study area.

COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

Under the RWCDS, the proposed actions are expected to result in the development of new residential and ground floor retail space along Hillside Avenue. Higher density housing of up to approximately 12 stories would be directed to this corridor. New apartment buildings with ground-floor retail use are expected to be developed along the Sutphin Boulevard corridor. The proposed actions would facilitate the development of new medium-density housing with ground-floor retail uses along the Merrick Boulevard and Guy R. Brewer Boulevard corridors. Development along these corridors would provide for new housing along the boulevard supported by commercial, retail, and community facility uses. There would not be any adverse impacts on urban design and visual character along these corridors.

RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

As stated above, the proposed actions would expand opportunities for new residential and mixed use development along several corridors including Hillside Avenue, Jamaica Avenue, Liberty Avenue, Sutphin Boulevard, Guy R. Brewer Boulevard, and Merrick Boulevard. In addition, expanded opportunities for contextual residential development would also be created in the residential neighborhoods just east of the Jamaica Center CBD. The proposed actions would allow greater residential density and development along wide corridors such more Hillside, but would significantly preserve the character of the low-density neighborhoods in neighborhoods such as Hollis, St. Albans, and South Jamaica through the proposed zoning techniques which would limit density and heights in these communities (e.g, heights 35-40 feet, floor areas ratio 1-2) .

Under the proposed actions, the low-density residential neighborhoods of Hollis, South Jamaica, and St. Albans would be preserved and experience very little or no new development in the future with the proposed actions. Zoning changes in these areas would require new development in low-density residential neighborhoods to be of a scale similar to the existing housing stock. The proposed actions would therefore help to maintain the existing neighborhood character by eliminating the potential for out-of-scale development in these areas. With these preservation

techniques, no historic resources in this area would be adversely impacted and urban design and visual resources of the neighborhood would be preserved.

As described above, it is estimated that approximately 1,835 housing units in the project area could be vulnerable to indirect displacement pressures under the proposed actions. There is the potential for indirect displacement of low- and moderate-income residents living in unprotected housing units in the three study areas—a population estimated to be about 5,400 individuals, according to currently available data and conditions. Overall, the vulnerable population represents 7 percent of the total study area population. The potential indirect displacement of this population could alter the socioeconomic character of the neighborhood, potentially reducing the diversity of population and households in the area. Because of this potential socioeconomic impact, an Affordable Housing Alternative was examined (see the discussion in Chapter 23, "Alternatives").

INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

The proposed actions would reinforce the industrial character of the industrial core of Jamaica immediately north and south of the LIRR tracks in the central portion of the study area. The industrial character of the study area would also be reinforced under the proposed plan with no adverse impacts on urban design and visual character or historic resources in this area would be impacted. As stated above, the proposed industrial districts would preserved industrial space area with an increase in floor area at certain locations that would allow building expansion and growth providing a diverse job mix for the community.

SECONDARY STUDY AREA

The proposed actions would not result in direct physical changes in the secondary study area. Any potential impacts of the proposed actions on the secondary study area is likely to be related to secondary socioeconomic as well as secondary effects of traffic.

E. CONCLUSIONS

The principal conclusions of this chapter with respect to the potential for the proposed actions to result in impacts of neighborhood character are as follows:

- Overall, the proposed actions would alter neighborhood character in a number of beneficial ways, by creating opportunities for new housing and commercial development on underutilized and vacant land. The proposed Downtown mixed-use district would allow greater flexibility for residential and mixed-use development that would encourage transit-oriented development. In addition, the proposed actions would facilitate the development of a pedestrian-friendly streetscape and a compelling skyline in Downtown Jamaica. Manufacturing zoning would be retained in areas where concentrations of industrial activity exist. New residential development would be directed to appropriate corridors with wide streets and good transportation access. The character of lower density residential neighborhoods would be protected with zoning that would ensure that any new development would be consistent with the scale of existing buildings.
- The proposed actions would allow land uses mixes and densities that support the revitalization and expansion of Downtown Jamaica's regional central business district while providing for appropriately scaled development in the neighboring low-rise residential communities in the primary study area. The proposed actions would enhance character of the

neighborhood by establishing a distinctive urban fabric with new larger-scale mixed-use development in the Special Downtown Jamaica District and contextual residential districts in the nearby neighborhoods to ensure that new development in this area integrates appropriately with the existing low-rise character. For these reasons, the proposed actions are expected to have many beneficial effects on neighborhood character and significant adverse impacts to overall neighborhood character of the study area are not expected.

- The proposed actions have the potential to cause a significant adverse impact with respect to indirect residential displacement. The population vulnerable to indirect displacement constitutes about 7 percent of the population of the total study area. The potential indirect displacement of this population could alter the socioeconomic character of the neighborhood, potentially reducing the diversity of population and households in the area. Because of this potential socioeconomic impact, an Affordable Housing Alternative was examined (see the discussion in Chapter 23, "Alternatives").
- Although the proposed actions would result in a number of significant adverse impacts on traffic, the impacts could be mitigated at most intersections. Unmitigated traffic impacts would occur at intersections that are already characterized by high traffic volumes, and therefore the impacts would not cause a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. Significant adverse impacts relating to pedestrian congestion would occur at only one intersection and would not substantially change neighborhood character. Noise increases as a result of the additional traffic that would be generated by the proposed actions would not be perceptible and therefore would not adversely impact neighborhood character. ✷