

**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 at the Staten Island Mall would result in an approximately 426,576-gross-square-foot (gsf) enlargement of the existing Staten Island Mall (the Mall), a new structured parking facility, and landscaping improvements to the project 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 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

**PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS**

As detailed below, the proposed project would not substantially change the character of the neighborhood. The character of the study area is primarily defined by its large concentration of destination retail uses. In addition, residential uses and their supporting private open spaces and community facility uses also contribute to the neighborhood character. With the exception of transportation, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on any of the technical areas that could impact neighborhood character (including land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, urban design and visual resources, and noise). As the study area already experiences high volumes of visitors due to its large concentration of destination retail uses, the proposed project would not affect the essential character of neighborhood. 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. 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.

**B. METHODOLOGY**

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an analysis of neighborhood character begins by determining whether a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts

in any relevant technical area (land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) or if a project would result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that could cumulatively impact neighborhood character. If the answer is yes, a preliminary assessment is undertaken; the preliminary assessment first identifies the defining features of the neighborhood that comprises the study area, followed by an assessment of the potential for the proposed project to affect the defining features of the neighborhood, either through the potential for significant adverse impacts or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas. If the preliminary assessment concludes that the proposed project has the potential to affect defining features of a neighborhood, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character may be warranted. If needed, the detailed assessment would use the information from the preliminary assessment as a baseline and then project and compare the future No Action and With Action conditions.

Since the DEIS includes analyses of several environmental impact categories that are relevant to neighborhood character (i.e. land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, urban design and visual resources, transportation, and noise), a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character has been prepared. The preliminary assessment describes the defining features of the neighborhood and then assesses the potential for the proposed project to impact these defining features.

## **C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT**

### **DEFINING FEATURES**

As stated in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for a preliminary analysis of neighborhood character is typically consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas that contribute to the defining elements of the neighborhood. Therefore, the study area for this analysis is consistent with Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” which includes areas up to 400-feet from the project site. The character of the study area is primarily defined by its large concentration of heavily-trafficked, regional commercial and destination retail uses. The Mall is a regional shopping center with numerous connecting retail shops, anchored by three department stores on the north (Macy’s), south (Sears), and east sides (JCPenney) of the complex.

In addition to the Mall, other commercial uses within the study area are located to the north and south of the project site. Retail uses within the study area includes a mix of large commercial and retail uses with national chain retailers, convenience goods, neighborhood services, and restaurants. North of the project site, along Richmond Avenue, is a shopping mall, including a CVS, Staples, and Dick’s Sporting Goods. An additional strip mall exists south of the project site, including a Toys “R” Us, Best Buy, and a Raymore and Flannigan furniture store.

Aside from retail uses, residential uses and supporting private open spaces and community facility uses also contribute to the neighborhood character within the study area. The project site is located near central Staten Island’s numerous residential neighborhoods, including Heartland Village. In addition, P.S. 58 is located at 77 March Avenue. A New York City Sanitation Department (DSNY) garage facility is located to the west of Richmond Avenue.

The project site is not located within reasonable walking distance from any rail line; however, service to the site is provided by numerous bus lines, including, but not limited to, the S44, S59,

S61, S79, and X17. Additionally, visitors are brought to the project site via major roadways, including Richmond Avenue, which is located directly west of the project site.

Overall, the study area is primarily shaped by its major concentration of destination retail uses. The neighborhood character is also affected by its residential neighborhoods that contain some supporting private open space and community facility uses. The combination of these defining and supporting features contributes to a distinctive neighborhood character.

### **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.

The proposed project, as described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” would result in an approximately 426,576-gsf enlargement of the Mall, the development of a new parking structure with an overall decrease from 5,844 existing spaces to a proposed 5,477 spaces, and landscaping improvements. The proposed project would be developed on parking areas that are considered by the Applicants to be underutilized.

As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” technical areas were screened out that would not have the potential for significant adverse environmental impacts as a result of the proposed project. The screened technical areas include historic and cultural resources, which typically contribute to neighborhood character. These screened technical areas would not have the potential to substantively affect the defining features of the neighborhood. Therefore, 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.” Compared to the future without the proposed enlargement of the Mall, the proposed project would introduce uses generally consistent with those that currently exist on the project site. Although the proposed project would include a cinema, which is a use not currently on the project site, this use would be compatible with the other large commercial uses in the area and would not result in any land use conflicts or adversely affect neighborhood character. The proposed development of a new parking structure would replace underutilized parking areas and would provide convenient parking for Mall users. Overall, changes to study area land use associated with the proposed project would not adversely impact the existing character of the neighborhood. Instead, changes to land use, zoning, and public policy associated with the proposed project would complement the existing large concentration of destination retail uses in the area—which is a defining feature of the neighborhood’s character.

#### *SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS*

As described in Chapter 3, “Socioeconomic Conditions,” while the proposed project would add a substantial amount of retail to the project site, well-established retail already exists within the study area; therefore, the proposed project would not introduce new economic activities that

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would alter existing economic patterns. In addition, it is not expected that the proposed project would capture retail sales in the Primary Trade Area in Shoppers' Goods, Grocery Stores, or Eating and Drinking Establishments to the extent that the market for such goods would be saturated. The proposed project would not result in significant indirect business displacement due to increased rents or retail market saturation, and would not substantially affect a specific industry or category of business. The proposed project would not affect the economic viability or substantially reduce employment in any industry or category of business. Overall, the proposed project would not adversely affect the existing concentration of retail uses in the study area; the proposed project would instead complement that element of the character of the neighborhood. Therefore, the economic activities associated with the proposed project would not adversely impact the defining features of the neighborhood's character.

### *OPEN SPACE*

The proposed project would not result in any significant adverse open space impacts. As discussed in Chapter 4, "Open Space," the ¼-mile area surrounding the project site does not contain any publicly-accessible open space resources that could be utilized by Mall workers. However, the Mall itself currently includes landscaped areas with seating that provide passive recreational opportunities, and the proposed project would include landscaped areas with seating as well as a multi-use plaza. Due to the availability of Mall common areas and landscaped areas with seating, the new worker population introduced by the proposed project would not be expected to overburden any existing open space resources. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character relating to open space.

### *URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES*

As described in Chapter 5, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," although the proposed project would be visible from the pedestrian's perspective as compared to the No Action scenario, the proposed project's height, bulk, and setback requirements would be consistent with development on the project site and in the surrounding area. The proposed project would also include improvements to landscaping, including new trees, which would enhance the pedestrian's experience of the project site and the Mall. In addition, extensive tree cover along Richmond and Marsh Avenues would limit views inward from the perimeter sidewalks and the proposed project would not partially or totally block any significant views to a visual resource. The proposed project would have no significant adverse impacts on urban design or visual resources, or the pedestrian's experience of these characteristics of the built and natural environment, and therefore changes to urban design and visual resources associated with the proposed project would not adversely impact neighborhood character.

### *TRANSPORTATION*

As described in Chapter 10, "Transportation," the transportation analysis indicated that the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse transit, pedestrian, or parking impacts. However, the traffic impact analysis conducted indicated that there would be a potential for significant adverse impacts at 14 intersections during the weekday midday peak hour, at 26 intersections during the weekday PM peak hour, and at 24 intersections during both the Saturday midday and PM peak hours. As detailed in Chapter 17, "Mitigation," proposed mitigation measures for these significant adverse traffic impacts consist of standard signal timing changes, and lane reconfiguration, ~~and parking regulation modifications~~, which are considered to be

readily implementable measures as per the *CEQR Technical Manual*. At one intersection (the unsignalized intersection of Staten Island Mall East Driveway at Marsh Avenue), an identified significant adverse traffic impact could only be mitigated by installing a new signal. With these mitigation measures in place, 129 of the 14 intersections in the weekday midday peak hour identified as having the potential for significant adverse traffic impacts could be fully mitigated; 216 of the 26 impacted intersections in the weekday PM peak hour could be fully mitigated; 11 of the 24 impacted intersections in the Saturday midday peak hour could be fully mitigated; and 12 of the 24 impacted intersections in the Saturday PM peak hour could be fully mitigated.

~~There is potential for additional impacts to be identified between Draft and Final of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and if so, additional measures will be explored, where feasible, to further mitigate the identified impacts. The proposed mitigation measures are subject to review and approval by the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT), and if certain proposed mitigation measures are deemed infeasible by NYCDOT, alternatives will be analyzed. If no other alternative mitigation measures can be identified, those impact locations would be unmitigated.~~

~~Between Draft and Final of this EIS, additional measures will be explored, where feasible, to further mitigate the identified impacts. If no additional feasible measures can be identified, the projected impacts would remain unmitigated, and would therefore be considered unavoidable adverse impacts.~~

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a significant adverse impact in a technical area that contributes to neighborhood character is not automatically equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character. Rather, the assessment should determine whether a significant change to one of the defining features of neighborhood character would occur due to a project. As noted above, a defining characteristic of the study area is the large concentration of regional commercial and destination retail uses in the area. While the proposed project would result in some unmitigated traffic impacts, the proposed project would not affect the essential character of the study area, as the study area already experiences high volumes of visitors due to the presence of the Mall and other destination retail uses, the proposed project would not affect the essential character of the study area. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character with respect to transportation.

#### *NOISE*

The proposed project would not result in any significant adverse noise impacts (see Chapter 13, “Noise”). While noise levels in the study area would increase due to increased traffic and building mechanical equipment associated with the proposed project, the magnitude of the increase would be generally imperceptible to most listeners and below the CEQR threshold for a significant adverse noise impact. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character with respect to noise.

#### **CONCLUSION OF PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT**

Overall, the proposed project would not substantially change the character of the neighborhood. With the exception of transportation, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; urban design; or noise. However, since the study area already experiences high volumes of visitors due to the existing large concentration of destination retail uses, the proposed project

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would not affect the essential character of the study area. In addition, mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce the effects of the significant adverse traffic impacts. While not all of the impacted intersections would be fully mitigated, these impacts would not be significant enough to adversely affect neighborhood character. 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. \*