

Chapter 20 : NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses the Proposed Action's potential effects on neighborhood character. The *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, defines neighborhood character as an amalgam of the various elements that give neighborhoods their distinct personality. These elements can include land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation and/or noise but not all of these elements contribute to neighborhood character in all cases. For neighborhood character, CEQR considers how those elements combine to create the context and feeling of a neighborhood, and how an action would affect that context.

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare, and it would be unusual that, in the absence of a significant adverse impact in any of the relevant technical areas, a combination of moderate effects to the neighborhood would result in an impact to neighborhood character. Moreover, a significant impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood's character is not automatically equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character, but rather serves as an indication that neighborhood character should be examined.

B. PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

The Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character. A screening analysis of neighborhood character concluded the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts on the following technical areas that comprise the elements that make up neighborhood character: land use, urban design and visual resources, socioeconomic conditions, and transportation. While the Proposed Action would result in significant adverse impacts with respect to noise, shadows and historic resources, the combined effects would not raise the potential to significantly impact neighborhood character.

C. METHODOLOGY

The *CEQR Technical Manual* states that an assessment of neighborhood character is needed when a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any of the following technical areas: land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; shadows; transportation; or noise. An assessment may also be appropriate if the project would result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that cumulatively may affect neighborhood character. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a "moderate" effect is generally defined as an effect considered reasonably close to the significant adverse impact threshold for a particular technical analysis area.

The Proposed Action is a "Generic Action," and there are no known potential or projected development sites and, due to its broad applicability, it is difficult to predict the sites where development would be facilitated by the Proposed Action. To produce a reasonable analysis of likely effects of the Proposed Action, 27 representative development prototypes have been established to assess the potential for significant adverse impacts in those technical areas mentioned above. As described in the relevant chapters of this EIS, based on prototypical analysis, the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts in most technical analysis areas, but has the potential to result in significant impacts in the areas of shadows, noise, hazardous materials, and historic and cultural resources. Based on the methodology provided in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a screening analysis was conducted to determine the Proposed Action's effects on neighborhood character.

D. SCREENING ANALYSIS

Land Use

Development resulting from a Proposed Action could alter neighborhood character if it introduces 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. As described in Chapter 1, Project Description, the Proposed Action would affect zoning regulations on a citywide basis, and would result in changes to the use, bulk, and parking regulations for multi-family residential, inclusionary housing, affordable senior housing and long term care facilities; however the underlying zoning districts would remain the same. The Proposed Action would not introduce new land uses that would conflict with the existing land uses or change the land use character. The proposed text changes would not affect the neighborhood character, but rather encourage better quality buildings that contribute to the fabric of neighborhoods.

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. The Proposed Action would not displace any existing residents or businesses over the No Action scenario. The Proposed Action would also not affect real estate market conditions in a way that would result in indirect displacement of residents or businesses; on the contrary the Proposed Action is expected to result in more affordable housing that would help house the city's more vulnerable low income residents.

The Proposed Action would provide opportunities for new residential and community facility development without changing the socioeconomic character of any study area across the city's affected zoning districts. The proposed zoning addresses a citywide initiative to reduce barriers to housing development and facilitate the construction of more affordable housing. The multiple components of the Proposed Action are expected to work on concert with one another to promote the efficient development of housing, and especially affordable housing, but is not likely to result in significant changes to the character of any individual neighborhood.

Open Space

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, for an action to affect neighborhood character with respect to open space, it would need to result in the encroachment and loss of open space, or the imposition of noise, air pollutant emissions, odors, or shadows on public open space that may alter its usability. As described in Chapter 6, Open Space, the Proposed Action would not result in direct physical loss of open space resources nor would it result in significant increase in demand for existing open spaces facilities that would diminish the ability of the open space to serve the existing and future population in neighborhood. While there is potential for incremental shadows being cast on sunlight sensitive features of existing public open space, this would not significantly impact neighborhood character.

Historic and Cultural Resources

The Proposed Action would not result in substantial direct changes to a historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a resource, nor would it result in significant adverse impacts to historic resources.

Therefore, there is a potential to affect neighborhood character. While the Proposed Action would not result in any significant adverse visual or contextual (indirect) impacts to architectural resources, there is potential for incremental shadows being cast on sunlight-sensitive features of historic resources. However, the potential for incremental shadow impact is limited, as described in Chapter 7, Shadows, and it would not significantly impact 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 street walls, 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.

The proposed zoning changes would provide additional flexibility to the existing regulations to facilitate housing development and enhance the quality of both new housing and street-level commercial activity. Thus, the Proposed Action is intended to reinforce and improve existing neighborhood character citywide through additional growth opportunities and improved regulations for street walls, courtyards, and ground floor transparency.

The Proposed Action would promote new development that is consistent with existing uses, density, scale and bulk, and would not result in buildings or structures that would be substantially different in character or arrangement than those that currently exist in neighborhoods.

Shadows

As described in Chapter 7, Shadows, the Proposed Action would potentially result in incremental shadows being cast on sunlight sensitive features of historic resources and public open spaces; however, the duration and coverage of incremental shadows would be limited and would not significantly impact neighborhood character.

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. The Proposed Action would not result in changes in traffic patterns; changes in roadway classifications; changes in vehicle mixes, substantial increases in traffic volumes on residential streets; or significant traffic impacts, nor would it result in substantially different pedestrian activity and circulation. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not affect neighborhood character.

Noise

The Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse noise impacts due to vehicular operations; however, it would potentially result in significant adverse noise impacts due to train operations on elevated train tracks. Although, it is highly unlikely, the potential for impact exists because the Proposed Action may introduce noise sensitive receptors closer to an elevated train line, as described in Chapter 18, Noise. This would not significantly impact neighborhood character.