

Chapter 19: NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

19.1 Introduction

The *CEQR Technical Manual* defines neighborhood character as the “context and feeling” of a neighborhood that is attributable to a combination of factors associated with the built and natural environment. Particular elements of a neighborhood that are of concern to context and feeling, and which are the subject of study in various technical areas described in this EIS, include: land use, open space, urban design and visual resources, historic and cultural resources, socioeconomic conditions, transportation and, in particular, traffic activity, pedestrian safety, and noise.

The neighborhood character assessment begins with the identification of the defining features of a neighborhood and then evaluates whether the proposed project has the potential to affect these defining features, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare; only under unusual circumstances would a combination of moderate effects to the neighborhood result in an impact to neighborhood character. A significant impact identified in one of the technical areas that contributes 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.

19.2 Principal Conclusions

As described in the respective chapters of this EIS, the proposed action would result in no unmitigated significant adverse impacts related to key components of neighborhood character, including land use and open space, urban design and visual resources, historic and cultural resources, socioeconomic conditions, pedestrian safety or noise. To the extent that significant adverse traffic impacts may result with the increased delay at certain signalized intersections in the area, such impacts could be mitigated. Thus, the proposed action would not significantly adversely affect neighborhood character, overall. Rather, as described in Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” the proposed action would, in effect, represent a marginal continuation of the physical extent of the recently established residential and commercial neighborhood comprising the Fresh Creek Urban Renewal Area (“FCURA”). Further, as described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” and Chapter 3, “Socioeconomic Conditions,” the proposed

action would introduce needed affordable housing to New York City and would be consistent with the similar goals of the FCURA. Therefore, the proposed action would not result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character.

19.3 Preliminary Assessment

DEFINING FEATURES

Land Use and Open Space

As described in Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” the project site is located within the FCURA, which currently is nearly fully developed through the implementation of the Fresh Creek Urban Renewal Plan (“FCURP”) and the Gateway Estates development that is currently underway. The project site is located on an irregularly-shaped City block that was originally developed as the Brooklyn Developmental Center (“BDC”) in the 1970s. The BDC no longer operates as a residential facility, providing on-site patient care, but instead houses Office for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (“OPWDD”) administrative functions within the existing buildings on Lot 300 (between parcels A and B of the project site). Gateway Center, a regional retail center set amid large parking lots which features national-chain stores and restaurants, dominates the character of the portion of the neighborhood directly west of the project site. North of the project site, and including portions of the neighborhood to the northwest, north of the Gateway Center, apartment buildings and single-family attached housing have been constructed pursuant to the FCURP.

The land to the east and south of the project site comprises the extensive Spring Creek Park, part of which (to the east of Fountain Avenue) is currently inaccessible to the public and will remain so in the future without the proposed action. The portion of Spring Creek Park directly south of the project site, south of Seaview Avenue, is also currently publicly inaccessible, but is expected to be developed for public use as part of Gateway Estates development, which would be complete by 2018. This portion of redeveloped parkland would be similar to the parkland already developed for public use south of Gateway Center (south of Gateway Drive), southwest of the project site. Together, these residential and commercial land uses and open space conditions surrounding the project site contribute most substantially to the character of the neighborhood.

Urban Design and Visual Resources

As described in Chapter 8, “Urban Design and Visual Resources,” the street pattern, block form and resultant urban form is effected by the implementation of the FCURP, which has introduced the large

commercial center and developed residential streetscapes in the FCURA. The neighborhood blocks surrounding the project site are arranged according to a street network that is generally a regular grid, though with some streets slightly curved, and the blocks will be fully built-out with the completion of the Gateway Estates development in the future without the proposed action. The residential streetscapes are designed and constructed with consistency in bulk, building height, and setback. The commercial areas are typical of large destination retail centers, with expansive parking areas, themselves featuring some landscaping in the form of planting strips. The most substantial natural landscape in the neighborhood is the Spring Creek Park, both the publicly inaccessible portions and also the areas that already have been developed for public use or will be available for public use upon the completion of the Gateway Estates development.

Historic and Cultural Resources

As described in Chapter 7, “Historic and Cultural Resources,” there are no designated historic resources in the vicinity of the project site, as almost the entirety of the neighborhood has been developed since the 1990s.

Socioeconomic Conditions

As described in Chapter 3, “Socioeconomic Conditions,” the populations of the neighborhood Census Tracts (“CTs”) have been introduced to the neighborhood since the 1990s, as most of the housing in the area has been completed per implementation of the FCURP, thereby representing a higher rate of population growth in the neighborhood over recent years, as compared to the borough and City. As discussed in Chapter 3, demographic data, as well as data describing households, income, and industry, indicate a substantial presence of rental occupancy and low-income residents, as well as minority residents.

Traffic, Transit and Pedestrian Safety

Street Network

As described in Chapter 14, “Transportation,” an irregular grid system of roadways is located north of the site, and the Shore (Belt) Parkway runs parallel to Seaview Avenue south of the project site. Gateway Center, a large commercial complex, is located west of the project site (west of Erskine Street).

Primary east-west corridors include the following:

- Flatlands Avenue is a minor arterial located one block north of the project site that runs east-west from Flatbush Avenue to Fountain Avenue, connecting Flatlands, Canarsie, and East New York. Within the study area, Flatlands Avenue is generally 80 feet wide with a median and operates with two moving travel lanes, a left-turn lane at selected intersections, and a curbside parking lane in each direction.
- Linden Boulevard (SR 27) is a principal arterial that runs parallel to, and four blocks north of, Flatlands Avenue. Linden Boulevard runs east-west, connecting with Caton Avenue, from Ocean Parkway to Conduit Avenue. It is generally 140 feet wide, providing two service road lanes, curbside parking, and three mainline travel lanes per direction, with dedicated left-turn lanes at intersections. The presence of a raised center median limits north-south through movements across Linden Boulevard.
- The Shore Parkway (SR 907C) is a principal arterial expressway that is part of the Belt Parkway system. The Belt Parkway begins at the Gowanus Expressway in the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn, running along the southern edge of Brooklyn and Queens, to connect to the Cross Island Parkway. The Erskine Street diamond interchange connects the project site to the Shore Parkway, with both east and westbound on- and off-ramps.

Primary north-south corridors include Fountain Avenue, which is a major collector roadway that runs north-south from Seaview Avenue to Atlantic Avenue. It is an 80-foot-wide, two-way street, with two travel lanes and curbside parking in each direction. It connects the project site to Linden Boulevard.

Truck Routes

Through truck routes nearest to the study area have been designated along Atlantic Avenue and North and South Conduit boulevards. Local truck routes are designated routes for trucks that are intended for the purpose of delivery, loading, or providing service within Brooklyn. Generally, trucks must travel on local truck routes to reach the intersection nearest their destinations. Designated local truck routes in the study area are along Linden Boulevard and Fountain Avenue. All commercial vehicles are prohibited on the Shore Parkway.

Traffic Conditions

Traffic volumes vary through the study area during the peak hours. The highest traffic volumes are carried on Linden Boulevard, with approximately 800 eastbound and 1,500 westbound vehicles per hour (“vph”) in the AM peak hour, 1,000 eastbound and westbound vph in the midday peak hour, and 1,500 eastbound and 1,300 westbound vph in the PM peak hour. Flatlands Avenue processes nearly 1,900 vehicles in the PM peak hour west of Schenck Avenue. A significant number of these vehicles are

entering/exiting the Vandalia Avenue connection to the Gateway Center area. Between Schenck and Fountain avenues, the through volume on Flatlands Avenue is reduced to approximately 650 vph. The Erskine Street interchanges with the Shore Parkway carry approximately 1,000 vph in the AM peak hour and 1,800 vph during the midday and PM peak hours.

Bicycle Lanes

A protected bicycle path is located along Gateway Drive from Vandalia Avenue to Erskine Street, with a bicycle lane along Vandalia Avenue connecting the path to Flatlands Avenue and along Erskine Street connecting to the bicycle path along the Shore Parkway. New York City Department of Transportation (“NYCDOT”) has identified a potential future bicycle route along Cozine Avenue and a portion of Fountain Avenue.

Transit (Bus)

The study area is served by a total of four Metropolitan Transportation Authority (“MTA”) local bus routes—the B13, B83, and B84, operated by New York City Transit (“NYCT”), and the Q8, operated by MTA Bus. The NYCT bus routes serve the project site and provide subway connections as follows:

- The B13 runs from the Gateway Center along Seaview and Fountain Avenues adjacent to the site and connects Spring Creek to East New York and Bushwick via Queens. The B13 also provides transfer connections to the A and C subway lines at Euclid Avenue Station, the J and Z lines at the Crescent Street Station, the L line at the DeKalb Avenue Station, and the M line at Fresh Pond Road.
- The B83 runs from the Gateway Center and connects Spring Creek and East New York via the Shore Parkway. The B83 provides subway transfer connections to the 3 line at Pennsylvania Avenue Station, the C line at the Liberty Avenue Station, and the A, C, J, L, and Z lines at the Broadway Junction Station.
- The B84 connects Spring Creek and East New York via Fountain and Flatlands avenues. The B84 provides subway connections to the 3 line at the New Lots Avenue Station.
- The MTA Bus local route is the Q8, which circles the project site block and runs from the Gateway Center to Jamaica. The Q8 bus route also provides subway connections to the A and C lines at the Euclid Avenue Station.

Crosswalks and Corner Areas

The north and west crosswalk at Erskine Street and Gateway Drive is primarily used to access the B83 bus stop nearest to the project site. Eastbound B83 service towards the project site drops off alighting passengers on Gateway Drive west of Erskine Street, so that the walk portion of transit trips to the project site would use the north (16-foot-wide) crosswalk. Westbound B83 service away from the project site picks up boarding passengers on Erskine Street south of Gateway Drive, and walk portions of

transit trips leaving the site would use the north and west (13-foot-wide) crosswalks. Existing pedestrian use at these crosswalks is low.

All three crosswalks have been analyzed at the intersection of Vandalia and Fountain avenues, which provide access to the B13 and Q8 bus service. The north and south crosswalks are twelve feet wide, and the west crosswalk is 13 feet wide. Existing pedestrian use at these crosswalks is low. All analyzed crosswalks operate at an uncongested level of service (“LOS”) A in the weekday AM, midday, and PM peak hours.

The southwest corner area at the intersection of Vandalia and Fountain avenues has been analyzed, as it currently provides access to the southbound B13, B84, and Q8 stop located near the driveway of 888 Fountain Avenue and the northbound B13, B84, and Q8 stop located on eastbound Vandalia Avenue. The corner reservoir area is 15 feet by 20 feet, with a twelve-foot corner radius. The current pedestrian use is low, and the area operates at LOS A in the weekday AM, midday, and PM peak hours.

Noise

The proposed action is located in an area that is exposed to numerous sources of noise. These sources include vehicular traffic from local streets, airplanes taking off and landing at the nearby John F. Kennedy International Airport (“JFK Airport”), and highway noise from the Belt Parkway situated to the south of the two development parcels. The dominant source of neighborhood noise comes from local vehicular traffic and aircraft noise. The principal traffic corridors in the vicinity of the proposed action include Fountain Avenue, Seaview Avenue, Erskine Street and Vandalia Avenue. Of these traffic routes, the northern portions of Fountain Avenue and Seaview Avenue are the noisiest, as volumes along these roadways tend to be the greatest. Because of the proximity of the project site to JFK Airport and the frequency of airplane flyovers, noise from air traffic represents a substantial portion of the normal background noise experienced by neighborhood residents.

ASSESSMENT OF THE POTENTIAL FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION TO AFFECT THE DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Land Use and Open Space

As described in Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” the proposed action would, in effect, represent a marginal continuation of the physical extent of the recently established residential and commercial neighborhood comprising the FCURA. The proposed action would result in no significant adverse impacts to land use or open space (see Chapter 5, “Open Space,”), either directly or indirectly, nor would it be expected to induce new development in the area (see Chapter 25, “Growth-Inducing Aspects of the Proposed Action”); therefore, no significant adverse impact to neighborhood character

would result with the proposed action insofar as land use and open space are key components of neighborhood character.

Socioeconomic Conditions

As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” and Chapter 3, “Socioeconomic Conditions,” the proposed action would introduce needed affordable housing to New York City and would be consistent with the similar goals of the FCURA. Therefore, the proposed action would not result in any significant adverse impact to neighborhood character in terms of socioeconomic conditions.

Historic and Cultural Resources

As described in Chapter 7, “Historic and Cultural Resources,” there are no designated historic resources in the vicinity of the project site, as almost the entirety of the neighborhood has been developed since the 1990s. Therefore, the proposed action would not result in any effect on neighborhood character as a result of significant adverse impacts to historic or cultural resources.

Urban Design and Visual Resources

As reported in Chapter 8, “Urban Design and Visual Resources,” the proposed action would be consistent with the urban design of the area and would not result in significant adverse impacts either to urban design or visual resources. The proposed action would complete the Vandalia Avenue streetscape along the northern portion of the project site, and it would introduce new commercial frontages on the sidewalks surrounding the project site, which would be expected to enliven the pedestrian experience along those sidewalks. Therefore, the proposed action would be expected to improve the character of the neighborhood in terms of urban design.

Traffic, Transit and Pedestrian Safety

Traffic Conditions

As reported in Chapter 14, “Transportation,” the majority of the intersections in the project study area would operate at acceptable levels during the AM, midday, and PM peak analysis hours with implementation of the proposed action – with overall operations at LOS C or better. However, the traffic impact analysis indicates the potential for significant adverse impacts at four intersections during one or more analyzed peak hours. Significant adverse impacts have been identified for one lane group in the weekday AM peak hour, one lane group in the weekday midday peak hour, three lane groups in the weekday PM peak hour, and four lane groups in the Saturday peak hour. As described in Chapter 23, “Mitigation Measures,” these impacts could be fully mitigated through the modification of traffic signal phasing and/or timing at the respective intersections. Therefore, the proposed action would not

result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character as a result of significant adverse impacts to traffic.

Bicycle Lanes

The proposed action would not directly affect any existing or planned bicycle lane in the neighborhood.

Transit (Bus)

As reported in Chapter 14, "Transportation," the proposed action would generate a total of approximately 756 and 1,001 incremental bus trips on these routes during the weekday AM and PM peak hours, respectively. In the future with the proposed action, there would be a capacity shortfall of 48 passenger spaces on the northbound B13 service, 131 passenger spaces on the northbound B83 service, and three passengers on the eastbound Q8 in the AM peak hour. The PM peak hour would experience a capacity shortfall of 517 passenger spaces on the southbound B83 service. Therefore, the northbound B13 and B83 routes and eastbound Q8 in the AM peak hour, and the southbound B83 route in the PM peak hour, would be significantly impacted based on *CEQR Technical Manual* criteria. As discussed in Chapter 23, "Mitigation Measures," the significant adverse impact to these bus services could be fully mitigated by the addition of five standard buses in the AM peak hour and ten standard buses in the PM peak hour. The general policy of the MTA-NYCT is to provide additional bus service where demand warrants, taking into account financial and operational constraints.

Crosswalks and Corner Areas

All crosswalks and corner areas would continue to operate at acceptable LOS with the proposed action, and there would be no significant adverse impacts.

Noise

As described in Chapter 17, "Noise," the proposed action would not result in significant adverse impacts related to mobile or stationary source noise. None of the studied locations would experience perceptible increases to exterior noise levels related to increases in traffic volumes. The maximum increase in the With Action noise level compared to the No Action noise level would be only 1.4 dBA. In addition, loud stationary noise sources were not identified within the project study area, and all project-related mechanical systems would adhere to the requirements contained within the revised 2005 New York City Noise Code. Further, as the proposed action would incorporate sufficient window-wall attenuation requirements, pursuant to the project's Restrictive Declaration, no significant adverse interior noise impacts would occur with the proposed action. Therefore, the proposed action would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character as a result of noise effects.