Chapter 19: NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

19.1 Introduction

The *New York City Environmental Quality Review ("CEQR") Technical Manual* defines neighborhood character as an amalgam of various elements attributable to the built and natural environment that give neighborhoods their distinct "personality." Particular elements of a neighborhood that contribute to a distinct personality, and which are the subject of study in various technical areas described in this Environmental Impact Statement ("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 Project would result in no unmitigated significant adverse impacts related to 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 in an increased delay at certain signalized intersections in the area, four of the ten intersections identified could be fully mitigated; six would remain unmitigated. For transit, significant adverse impacts (subway user congestion) have been identified during the AM peak hour to two stairs serving the Euclid Avenue subway station (A and C lines): street stair S1, on the southeast corner of Euclid Avenue at Pitkin Avenue, and platform stair P6.

These impacts could be fully mitigated through stair widenings, which would be subject to consultation with New York City Transit ("NYCT"). However, if the subway operator, NYCT deems the stair widenings infeasible or impractical, they would remain unmitigated. As described in Chapter 23, "Mitigation," identified significant adverse impacts to Metropolitan Transportation Authority ("MTA") bus routes could be fully mitigated if MTA and its operating entities (NYCT and MTA Bus) decide that it is feasible to do so. Overall, the Proposed Project would not significantly adversely affect neighborhood character. Rather, as described in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," the Proposed Project 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 Project would introduce needed affordable housing to New York City and would be consistent with the similar goals of the FCURA. Therefore, the Proposed Project 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 II residential development that is currently underway. The Project Site is located on an irregularly-shaped 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. In the absence of the Proposed Actions, no "as-of-right" development is anticipated on the Project Site. Therefore, this EIS assumes that the physical condition of the Project Site in 2030 without the Proposed Actions generally

would resemble existing conditions (e.g., conditions in 2020) but vacated (i.e., "mothballed") and hosting no activity.[1]

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 Fountain Avenue Project, which will provide approximately 1,169 units of affordable housing (of which approximately 200 will be dedicated to low-income senior citizens and approximately 234 units will be designated as supportive housing) and up to approximately 122,500 square feet ("sf") of commercial space, is under construction and is located on two separate parcels directly to the north and southwest of the Project Site. When completed in 2021 the Fountain Avenue Project will add to both the residential and commercial character of the neighborhood with its new residences and ground-floor retail.

The land to the east, south, and southwest of the Project Site comprises the extensive Spring Creek Park, part of which (to the east and south of the Project Site) is currently inaccessible to the public and will remain so in the future without the Proposed Actions. The portion of Spring Creek Park located southwest of the Project Site is publicly-accessible and comprises approximately 31.2 acres of open space including: paved bicycle and pedestrian paths; a cricket field with bleacher seating; comfort station; benches; large grassy areas; and natural resources overlooks (with educational exhibits and seating). Together, these residential and commercial land uses and open space conditions surrounding the Project Site contribute most substantially to the character of the neighborhood.

Shirley Chisholm State Park—the state's newest and largest public park in the City—is located to the south and southwest of the Project Site just beyond Shore Parkway. The approximately 407-acre park is publicly-accessible via walking trails that extend from Fountain Avenue and Seaview Avenue, and features naturalized vegetation and views of Jamaica Bay.

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 affected by the implementation of the FCURP, which has introduced the large

[1] Although the BDC no longer treats or houses patients on-site, approximately 225 OPWDD administrative staff remain on site in 2021 within three buildings, two that are still used for office space and one as a power plant; however, it is anticipated that the workers within the office buildings will be relocated to facilities within the Fountain Avenue Project in Spring 2021, unrelated to the Proposed Actions. A certain number of staff will remain on site maintaining the physical plant and providing security to the site. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the traffic volumes generated by OPWDD administrative staff on surrounding streets would be approximately the same in the No Action conditions as in existing conditions. The Project Site itself is expected to be fully vacated and unused by 2030.

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. The blocks will be fully built-out with the completion of the Gateway Estates II residential development in the future without the Proposed Actions. The residential streetscapes are designed and constructed with consistency in bulk, building height, and setback. The Gateway Center 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 and publicly-accessible portions.

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 approximately 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 approximately 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 approximately 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 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 900 eastbound and approximately 2,200 westbound vehicles per hour ("vph") in the AM peak hour, between approximately 1,000 and approximately 1,200 vph per direction in the weekday and Saturday midday peak hours, and approximately 1,900 eastbound and approximately 1,500 westbound vph in the PM peak hour. Flatlands Avenue processes nearly 1,800 vehicles in the PM peak hour west of Schenck Avenue. Many of these vehicles are entering/exiting the Vandalia Avenue connection to the Gateway Center shopping area. East of Schenck Avenues, the through volume on Flatlands Avenue decreases to approximately 700 vph. The Erskine Street diamond interchange with the Shore Parkway carries a two-way volume of approximately 1,300 vph in the AM

peak hour, approximately 1,800 to 1,900 vph during the weekday midday and PM peak hours, and more than 2,600 vph during the Saturday midday peak hour into and out of the study area. Traffic volumes along Erskine Street to the west of the Project Site follow a similar pattern, processing a two-way volume of approximately 600 vph in the AM peak hour, approximately 1,000 to 1,100 vph during the weekday midday and PM peak hours, and more than 1,600 vph during the Saturday midday peak hour. Fountain Avenue east of the Project Site carries lower volumes, a two-way volume total between approximately 500 and approximately 600 vph in each peak hour.

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. There is also a newly-constructed protected bicycle path along Fountain Avenue, connecting bicycle routes on Pitkin, Blake, Dumont, and Loring avenues to the Jamaica Bay Greenway south of the Project Site.

Transit (Bus)

The study area is served by a total of four MTA local bus routes—the B13, B83, and B84, operated by 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.

Transit (Subway)

There are four primary NYCT subway stations in relatively close proximity to the Project Site that are expected to be used by the new trips generated from the Proposed Project. The preferred stations for subway trips generated by the Proposed Project are the Euclid Avenue (A and C Trains), followed by the Pennsylvania Avenue (3 Train), Crescent Street (J and Z Trains) and New Lots Avenue (3 Train) stations.

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 (approximately 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 (approximately 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 approximately twelve feet wide, and the west crosswalk is approximately 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 approximately 15 feet by 20 feet, with an approximately 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 Project would be 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 Project Site 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.

19.4 Assessment of the Potential for the Proposed Actions 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 Project would, in effect, represent a continuation of the physical extent of the recently established residential and commercial neighborhood comprising the FCURA. Together with the Fountain Avenue project, which is currently under construction, the Proposed Project would represent the redevelopment of most of the former BDC campus. The Proposed Project 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 Actions"); therefore, no significant adverse impact to neighborhood character would result with the Proposed Project insofar as land use and open space are key components of neighborhood character. Rather, the redevelopment of the former BDC campus would supplement and continue the land use pattern of the surrounding neighborhood, providing improved neighborhood connectivity to the large Shirley Chisolm State Park. Therefore, the changes to land use would represent an improvement to neighborhood character.

Socioeconomic Conditions

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," and Chapter 3, "Socioeconomic Conditions," the Proposed Project would introduce needed affordable housing to New York City and would be consistent with the similar goals of the FCURA. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not result in any significant adverse impact to neighborhood character in terms of socioeconomic conditions. Rather, the Proposed Project would further the redevelopment of the former BDC campus as part of a broad neighborhood that has been developed to provide affordable housing and important neighborhood amenities. As part of New York State's Vital Brooklyn Initiative, new community services introduced by the Proposed Project, including a One Brooklyn Health Clinic, a senior center, a community center, a supermarket, and neighborhood-oriented retail, would be directly supportive of the population at the Project Site and in the surrounding neighborhoods. The amenities that the Proposed Project would provide the

neighborhood directly serve the distinct needs of the residents introduced by the Proposed Project and who have already made the surrounding neighborhood home; therefore, the Proposed Project would represent an improvement to neighborhood character.

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 Project 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 Project would be consistent with the urban design of the surrounding area and would not result in significant adverse impacts either to urban design or visual resources. The bulk, height, and streetwall associated with the new construction would contribute to the form of the residential streetscapes north and west of the Project Site in a way that resembles other parts of Brooklyn, where apartment buildings appear among relatively uniform residential streets of two- and three-story rowhouses. Further, the Proposed Project would integrate new public streets and walkways through the Project Site, thereby better integrating the former BDC campus block with the surrounding neighborhood. In addition, the Proposed Project would result in improved streetscape conditions on Fountain Avenue, Seaview Avenue, and Erskine Street in particular, in comparison to the current concrete wall surrounding the former BDC campus. Therefore, the improvements to urban design and visual resources would represent an improvement to neighborhood character.

Traffic, Transit, and Pedestrian Safety

Traffic Conditions

As reported in Chapter 14, "Transportation," the majority of the intersections in the Proposed Project study area would operate at acceptable levels during the AM, midday, and PM, and Saturday midday peak analysis hours – with overall operations at LOS C or better. However, the traffic impact analysis indicates the potential for significant adverse impacts at ten intersections during one or more analyzed peak hours. As described in Chapter 23, "Mitigation Measures," many of these impacts could be mitigated through the implementation of traffic engineering improvements, including modification of traffic signal phasing/timing and/or intersection approach lane reconfiguration. Traffic impacts at six intersections could not be mitigated and would remain unmitigated. Despite this, the Proposed Project would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character as a result of significant adverse impacts to traffic.

Bicycle Lanes

The Proposed Project would not directly affect any existing or planned bicycle lane in the neighborhood.

Transit (Bus)

As reported in Chapter 14, "Transportation," the Proposed Project would generate a total of approximately 1,206, 914, 1,235, and 1,326 incremental bus trips on the B13, B83, B84, and Q8 bus routes during the weekday AM, midday, PM and Saturday midday peak hours, respectively. In the future with the Proposed Actions, there would be a capacity shortfall for the B13, B83, and Q8 bus routes during the weekday AM, PM, and Saturday midday peak hours. As a result, each of the bus routes would experience a significant adverse impact based on *CEQR Technical Manual* criteria, except for the westbound Q8 during the AM peak hour and eastbound Q8 during the PM peak hour. As discussed in Chapter 23, "Mitigation Measures," the significant adverse impact to these bus services could be fully mitigated by the addition of approximately 18 standard buses in the AM peak hour, approximately 16 standard buses in the PM peak hour, and approximately 19 standard buses in the Saturday midday peak hour (assuming additional buses have been added to accommodate ridership growth anticipated in the No Action condition). The general policy of NYCT is to provide additional bus service where demand warrants, taking into account financial and operational constraints.

Transit (Subway)

All subway lines would continue to operate below the guideline capacity in the peak direction at the maximum load point during the weekday peak hours in the future with the Proposed Actions; therefore, significant adverse impacts to subway line haul conditions are not anticipated based on *CEQR Technical Manual* criteria during these weekday time periods. The A and C lines would operate over guideline capacity during the Saturday midday peak hour; however, this would not be considered a significant impact as the Proposed Project is expected to generate an incremental increase averaging three or fewer riders per subway car. This is based on the general assumption that when subways are at or above practical capacity, the addition of even five or more riders per car is perceptible. A passenger volume addition of less than five riders per car is not perceptible and is not considered a significant impact. The increased ridership, however, would result in two significant adverse impacts to one of the subway stations, the Euclid Avenue Station. Street stair S1 on the southeast corner of Euclid Avenue at Pitkin Avenue and platform stair P6 during the AM peak hour have been identified and could be fully mitigated through stair widenings, which would be subject to consultation with NYCT. However, if NYCT deems the stair widenings infeasible or impractical, they would remain unmitigated. If such mitigation can be provided the Proposed Project would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character as a result of significant adverse impacts to transit. However, if such mitigation (i.e., the subway station stair widenings identified above) is not implemented, it would not on its own result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character but would rather be a factor to consider in the

overall assessment of neighborhood character and must be considered within the full context of the Proposed Project.

Crosswalks and Corner Areas

As described in Chapter 14, "Transportation," the Proposed Project would result in significant adverse pedestrian impacts at two locations, the east and south crosswalks at the intersection of Erskine Street and Vandalia Avenue. The east crosswalk would deteriorate to LOS E during the weekday midday peak hour and to LOS D during the weekday PM and Saturday midday peak hours. The south crosswalk would deteriorate to LOS D during the weekday midday peak hour. As discussed in Chapter 23, "Mitigation Measures," widening the east crosswalk by approximately four feet to a total width of approximately 14'-3" and widening the south crosswalk by approximately 2'-8" to a total width of approximately 15 feet would mitigate the impact for both crosswalks during all affected peak hours. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character as a result of significant adverse impacts to crosswalks or corner areas.

Noise

As described in Chapter 17, "Noise," the Proposed Project 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 approximately 2.9 dBA. In addition, loud stationary noise sources were not identified within the 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 Project would incorporate sufficient window-wall attenuation requirements, no significant adverse interior noise impacts would occur with the Proposed Project. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character as a result of noise effects.

CONCLUSION

The Proposed Project would result in no significant adverse impacts to land use, open space, socioeconomic conditions, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, and noise. Adverse impacts related to pedestrian conditions and four traffic intersections could be fully avoided with the implementation of proper mitigation measures; however, traffic impacts at six intersections would remain unmitigated. Additionally, significant adverse impacts have been identified at two stair locations in the Euclid Avenue subway station, for which mitigation measures have been identified; however, if mitigation measures are deemed impractical by Empire State Development ("ESD") in consultation with NYCT, the stair impacts may prove to be an unavoidable adverse impact. Unmitigated impacts must be considered within the full context of the Proposed Project and its potential impacts to

neighborhood character. As previously discussed, the Proposed Project would represent the full redevelopment of the former BDC campus as part of a broad neighborhood that has been developed to provide affordable housing and important neighborhood amenities, including a One Brooklyn Health Clinic, a senior center, a community center, a supermarket, and neighborhood-oriented retail. The redevelopment of the former BDC campus would supplement and continue the land use pattern of the surrounding neighborhood, providing improved neighborhood connectivity to Shirley Chisolm State Park. New public streets and walkways through the Project Site would better integrate the former BDC campus block with the surrounding neighborhood. Given these considerations, the Proposed Project would not significantly adversely affect neighborhood character overall. Rather, it would result in a positive contribution to neighborhood character by furthering the redevelopment of the former BDC campus and integrating the currently underutilized area with the surrounding neighborhood.