

## 3.4 NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

### INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when an action would result in significant impacts in other technical areas, such as: 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 also may be appropriate when the action would have moderate effects on several of the aforementioned areas.

While significant traffic impacts are predicted at certain intersections, these impacts would not be expected to alter neighborhood character. As described in Chapter 3.3, “Transportation,” the adverse traffic impacts attributable to the proposed action would not be characteristically dissimilar from future conditions without the proposed action. Those particular intersections where traffic impacts are predicted are already characterized by poor traffic conditions, as would continue to be the case in the future either with or without the proposed action (see Chapter 3.7, “Unavoidable Adverse Impacts”). Therefore, these significant adverse traffic-related impacts would not substantially alter this aspect of neighborhood character.

There may be a combination of moderate effects on other areas that comprise neighborhood character (land use, urban design and visual resources, open space, historic and cultural resources, socioeconomic conditions, traffic and noise) but these effects would not combine to result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character. Rather, neighborhood character would be improved as the pedestrian experience of the Webster Avenue corridor would be enhanced, and the neighborhood character enjoyed by residents of Bedford Park and Norwood would be maintained.

#### 3.4.1 PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

##### Defining Features

The rezoning area is not, as a whole, characterized by heavy traffic volumes or poor levels of traffic service. Rather, those roadways that are regional collector roadways, such as Webster Avenue and East Fordham Road, carry higher traffic volumes than local streets traversing the residential neighborhoods of Norwood and Bedford Park. Certain intersections have poor levels of service under existing conditions, such as the intersections of Webster Avenue with East Fordham Road and with Bedford Park Boulevard further north. These traffic conditions, however, are not defining features of the rezoning area. Only the combination of high pedestrian volumes and traffic volumes at the East Fordham Road and Webster Avenue intersection creates a localized neighborhood character attribute: this intersection at the southern edge of the rezoning area provides pedestrian linkage to transit access, adjacent public open spaces, Fordham University Rose Hill Campus, and dense commercial development, which combined

with high levels of traffic activity, imbue the immediate streetscape with a particularly vibrant character.

### Webster Avenue Corridor

The Webster Avenue corridor is currently occupied by commercial, residential, and mixed-use buildings, community facilities, warehouse/industrial, storage lots/salvage yards, vacant lots, and parking facilities. Pedestrian activity along Webster Avenue is limited primarily to the southern end, around the intersections of East Fordham Road with Webster Avenue. Generally, however, the Webster Avenue corridor, in particular, is oriented toward automobiles; rather than providing commercial destinations or residential uses, it remains a somewhat unattractive corridor (see Figure 3.4-1).

The Webster Avenue corridor differs from the broader CD 7 and CD 12 residential land use patterns, including the Bedford Park and Norwood neighborhoods west of Webster Avenue in CD 7. The Webster Avenue corridor hosts commercial uses, including automotive-related uses, vacant land and parking. The Metro-North Railroad Harlem line runs east of and parallel to Webster Avenue. Unlike the residential neighborhoods of Bedford Park and Norwood, which typify CD 7, Webster Avenue in the rezoning area is lined with a notable concentration of light industrial uses, commercial uses, vacant land and parking, and the just to the east Metro-North Railroad Harlem line. The buildings hosting many these light-industrial uses are single-story. There are also numerous un-built lots, either used for parking or which remain vacant.

Due both to the typically limited height of buildings and also to the numerous un-built lots, a sense of “openness” pervades some segments of the Webster Avenue streetscape in the rezoning area. Further, due to the overwhelming presence of automotive-oriented uses, in lieu of retail and residential uses, pedestrian activity is scant, except at the southern end of the rezoning area, near Fordham Plaza, and around P.S. 20, and north of Mosholu Parkway, which accounts for higher levels of pedestrian activity in its vicinity before and after classes. The limited pedestrian presence contrasts with the more active streetscapes of Fordham Plaza just south of the rezoning area, and even with East 204<sup>th</sup> Street west of Webster Avenue, which is lined with local commercial. The Webster Avenue corridor not only lacks similar pedestrian volumes but also lacks pedestrian amenities and similar concentrations of sidewalk-oriented retail activity.



**Legend**

- Webster Avenue Rezoning Area
- 1/4-Mile Radius around Webster Avenue Corridor
- Bronx Community District Boundaries

*Figure 3.4-1: Neighborhood Character*

*Webster Avenue Rezoning*

*NYC Department of City Planning*

As a result of this limited pedestrian activity, some areas of otherwise good urban design may seem particularly unattractive to pedestrians. For example, the east end of East 204<sup>th</sup> Street does not simply dead-end east of Webster Avenue—upon reaching the Metro-North Railroad right-of-way—as do most east-west streets between Webster Avenue and the Metro-North Railroad Harlem line. Instead, East 204<sup>th</sup> Street reaches an attractively landscaped pedestrian circle from which the pedestrian may overlook the Bronx Park and descend stairs (not visible from the streetscape) to cross over the Metro-North Railroad right-of-way and into Bronx Park. Bronx Park is an exceptional open space resource, but access to it from the rezoning area is limited to only a few locations, East 204<sup>th</sup> Street being one; the lack of street-level surveillance of pedestrian activities, however, due to the general lack of streetscape activity, may leave the pedestrian feeling wary of the environment and apt to avoid use of this access point to Bronx Park and its resources.

#### Bedford Park and Norwood Neighborhoods

While other sections of the Bronx witnessed a near complete disappearance of one- and two-family detached homes earlier in the century, the Bedford Park and Norwood structural landscape changed only partially. Remaining within these neighborhoods were pockets of lower-density detached and rowhouses, reflecting the character of an earlier era. As the population's ethnic and economic base changed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the development character of both Bedford Park and Norwood remained intact.

Today, the neighborhoods of Bedford Park and Norwood contain a mixture of detached one- to two-family homes, and five- to seven-story pre-World War II apartment buildings typically found in the more densely populated areas of the Bronx. These neighborhoods include streets dominated by six-story apartment buildings of repeating design: brick construction, similar window arrangement, similar parapet designs, street-side fire escapes, and no setbacks or yards. In addition, there are also streetscapes exclusively comprising three-story Queen Anne style rowhouses, and other streetscapes of single family detached housing, with yards and landscaping.

Most neighborhood commercial uses within the rezoning area are located along East 204<sup>th</sup> Street, just north of Mosholu Parkway in Norwood, though there also a few local commercial establishments along Bedford Park Boulevard in Bedford Park and along Jerome Avenue.

Van Cortlandt Park is situated north of the rezoning area, at the northwestern edge of Norwood. Like the Bronx Park to the east of the rezoning area, Van Cortlandt Park is a prominent open space and positive attribute to the neighborhoods that surround it.

### **Potential to Affect Defining Features**

Based on the results of the preliminary assessment, there is no potential for the proposed action to result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character. As noted, the intersection of Webster Avenue with East Fordham Road is the core of an especially vibrant streetscape, owing largely to the high pedestrian volumes. The intersection, which is already characterized by high levels of traffic, would not be altered in character as a result of the unmitigatable traffic impacts. Lower levels of service at this intersection are anticipated in the future without the proposed action and so similar levels of service would likely not be perceptible to the pedestrian who experiences the vibrant streetscape. Traffic volume increases elsewhere in the rezoning area at the intersection of Bedford Park Boulevard and Webster Avenue would not change the character of the immediate streetscape. Moreover, these unmitigated traffic impacts would not combine with other conditions to affect neighborhood character.

Additionally, there may be a combination of moderate effects on other areas that comprise neighborhood character (land use, urban design and visual resources, open space, historic and cultural resources, socioeconomic conditions) but these effects would not combine to result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character. Rather, neighborhood character would be improved as the pedestrian experience of the Webster Avenue corridor would be enhanced, and the neighborhood character enjoyed by residents of Bedford Park and Norwood would be maintained.