

CHAPTER 4.B

# LAND USE, COMMUNITY FACILITIES, PUBLIC POLICY, AND ZONING

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## A. INTRODUCTION

The Rockaway Peninsula extends west from the southwesternmost point in Nassau County, serving as a barrier peninsula separating Jamaica Bay to the north and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. Encompassing almost eight square miles of land and a number of distinct communities, the Rockaway Peninsula has been divided into five subareas for the purposes of analysis in this section. These subareas are, from west to east: Western Rockaways, Neponsit/Belle Harbor, Seaside/Hammels, Somerville/Arverne/Edgemere, and Far Rockaway (see Figure 4.B-1).

This section provides a general overview of the land use and demographic make-up of each subarea, followed by a detailed discussion of predominant land uses, environment types, zoning, and central nodes of activity on the peninsula.

Based on information reported by the U.S. Census, the residential population of the Rockaway Peninsula was 104,108 in 2000, about half of whom lived in Far Rockaway. The 1990 census figures estimated the total residential population of 98,263. According to 1990 Census figures (the last year for which detailed age information is available), approximately 11 percent of the peninsula's residents were under seven years old, 16 percent were seven to seventeen, and 17 percent were sixty-five or older. Since the 2000 census results by age breakdown are not available yet, the 1990 census age breakdowns and population estimates are provided in the discussions below.

## WESTERN ROCKAWAYS

The Western Rockaways study area encompasses all land on the peninsula west of Beach 149th Street and is bordered on the south by the Atlantic Ocean and on the north by Rockaway Inlet, with Rockaway Point on its western end. The area includes two private (gated) residential communities, Breezy Point and Roxbury, which are composed primarily of 2-story, single-family homes set on small lots with small front and sometimes rear yards. Most of the land outside these communities is occupied by two public open spaces: Fort Tilden and Jacob Riis Park, the latter of which draws thousands of visitors each summer weekend. The main road through this area is the east-west running Rockaway Point Boulevard/Fort Tilden Avenue, which connects Breezy Point at its western end to the Marine Parkway Bridge. This area will not be subject to this program, because the area includes land owned by the Federal government and the Breezy Point community already employs a mosquito control program. However, the study area is included in order to describe and characterize the Rockaway Peninsula.

Based on information reported by the U.S. Census, the residential population of the Rockaways west of Beach 149th Street was 4,048 in 1990. Approximately 6 percent of these residents were under

seven years old, 10 percent were seven to seventeen, and 26 percent were sixty-five or older (the highest percentage of any subarea on the Rockaway Peninsula).

### **NEPONSIT/BELLE HARBOR**

This study area encompasses the peninsula between Beach 149th and Beach 116th Streets. It includes the residential communities of Neponsit, Belle Harbor, and part of Rockaway Park, with Rockaway Beach and the Atlantic Ocean on its southern side and Rockaway Inlet/Beach Channel on its northern side (see Figure 4.B-2). Other than some small playgrounds, vacant parcels, a block-long commercial strip, and three small schools, the vast majority of land in this area is devoted to residential use.

Based on information reported by the U.S. Census, the residential population of this Representative Area was 12,755 in 1990. Approximately 9 percent of these residents were under seven years old, 11 percent were seven to seventeen, and 20 percent were sixty-five or older.

### **SEASIDE/HAMMELS**

The Seaside/Hammels study area runs from Beach 116th Street to Beach 74th Street, including the Seaside community west of the Cross Bay Veterans Memorial Bridge and the Hammels Community to its east (see Figure 4.B-3). Seaside/Hammels is less residential than Neponsit/Belle Harbor to its west, with significant areas devoted to industrial uses (elevated subway viaduct, gas/electric utility property) and institutional uses (Beach Channel High School Campus, a number of senior centers/nursing homes along Rockaway Beach near 113th Street), as well as a fair amount of vacant land. The majority of its parcels are still, however, residential.

Based on information reported by the U.S. Census, the residential population of this Representative Area was 14,664 in 1990. Approximately 8 percent of these residents were under seven years old, 15 percent were seven to seventeen, and 22 percent were sixty-five or older.

### **SOMERVILLE/ARVERNE/EDGEMERE**

This study area runs from Beach 74th Street to approximately Beach 38th Street, encompassing land between the Atlantic Ocean and Grass Haddock Channel (in Jamaica Bay) (see Figure 4.B-4). This area, a portion of which is described in greater detail in the *Edgemere/Far Rockaway* sections of Chapter 3.B, "Land Use, Community Facilities, Public Policy, and Zoning," is predominantly in residential use, with significant areas of vacant land and lots. In addition to Rockaway Beach, large open spaces in this area include the Dubois Point Wildlife Sanctuary (which has been identified as a prime mosquito breeding ground) and the former Edgemere Landfill, both of which border Jamaica Bay. Only a few blocks in the Somerville community contain no vacant lots, with the majority of blocks in the area partly or wholly vacant.

Based on information reported by the U.S. Census, the residential population of this Representative Area was 21,385 in 1990. This study area has the youngest population on the peninsula, with approximately 14 percent of its residents under seven years old and 21 percent seven to seventeen. Ten percent of residents were sixty-five or older in 1990.

### **FAR ROCKAWAY**

This study area is defined roughly by Mott Basin to the north, the Atlantic Ocean to the south, Beach 44th Street to the west, and the Nassau County border to the east (see Figure 4.B-5). The northern and southern edges of the study area are covered by Bayswater Point State Park and Rockaway Beach, respectively. Vacant areas, composed mostly of entire vacant blocks, are concentrated in two locations: in the southwest between the Atlantic Ocean and Seagirt Boulevard, and in the southeast

around Seagirt Boulevard and a large multi-storied apartment building on the beachfront. In addition, the area contains several different styles of residential architecture ranging from 1-story detached houses with front and back yards on large lots to 25-story apartment buildings along the ocean waterfront. In between there are 2-family attached houses with smaller yards and 6-story apartment buildings scattered throughout the area. There is a commercial and retail strip that nearly bisects the study area with institutional uses concentrated near this area as well. Additional institutional uses, such as nursing homes, schools, and health facilities, were spread throughout the study area.

Based on information reported by the U.S. Census, the residential population of this Representative Area was 45,411 in 1990. Approximately 11 percent of these residents were under seven years old, 17 percent were seven to seventeen, and 17 percent were sixty-five or older.

## **B. EXISTING CONDITIONS**

### **LAND USES/ENVIRONMENT TYPES**

#### **Residential Types**

The Rockaway Peninsula is, overall, a residential area. It contains housing from its border with Nassau County on the east to close to Rockaway Point on the west. Residential uses in the Rockaway Peninsula range from single-family homes on larger lots with both front and back yards to 13-story and taller apartment buildings. While the predominant housing type is the single-family detached or semi-attached home, the peninsula contains at least a few examples of most styles in between the detached home and apartment tower. There are multi-family, semi-attached and attached houses on smaller lots with back yards located throughout the study area. There are also 3-story to 6-story apartment buildings, some with balconies and most with surrounding open spaces.

Public housing complexes, often composed of clusters of mid- to high-rise apartment buildings, are present in Arverne, Edgemere, and Far Rockaway. The largest of the apartment towers are concentrated along the beachfront properties, south of Rockaway Beach Boulevard/Seagirt Boulevard. These rectangular, often 13-story, apartment buildings line the southern edge of the peninsula from Beach 108th Street on the west all the way to the Queens-Nassau border on the east. Single-family homes are spread throughout the peninsula, with the largest clusters in Neponsit/Belle Harbor and the northern portion of Far Rockaway (known as Bayswater).

#### **Community Facilities and Institutional Uses**

The Rockaway Peninsula contains a large number of community facilities geared towards older residents—senior centers, nursing homes, adult care facilities, and hospitals. This correlates to the area's relatively large percentage of seniors (17 percent overall in the peninsula and more than 20 percent west of Somerville, compared to 13 percent citywide). Community facilities catering to seniors include the Belle Harbor Manor, Chai, and Gloria's senior homes in Belle Harbor; a large cluster of nursing homes along the beach in western Seaside; the Horizon Care Center and Resort Nursing Home in Somerville; Peninsula Hospital and Rockaway Care Center in Edgemere; and the Far Rockaway Nursing Home, West Lawrence Care Center and a number of other smaller senior centers and nursing homes, as well as St. John's Episcopal Hospital, all in Far Rockaway.

In addition to the many religious facilities and senior facilities on the peninsula, there are nine primary, three intermediate, and two high schools in the area. There are also several pre-schools and parochial/private/Yeshiva schools. Almost all of the public primary and intermediate schools have an associated outdoor playground, usually a paved area with handball and/or basketball courts. Beach Channel High School is set on a larger campus, with a football field and track, while Far Rockaway

High School is surrounded with smaller but substantial athletic facilities, including tennis courts and a football field.

### **Commercial Uses**

With the exception of portions of Far Rockaway and small areas of Hammels and Seaside, the peninsula does not contain a large concentration of retail or other types of commercial uses. There are few restaurants on the peninsula and no establishments with substantial outdoor seating areas. Furthermore, field surveys identified no outdoor food markets or vegetable stands on the peninsula. Almost all of the retail on the peninsula is located along five or so streets: Beach Channel Drive and Rockaway Beach Boulevard (which run most of the length of the peninsula), Beach 129th Street in Belle Harbor, Beach 116th Street in Seaside, and Beach 20th Street and Mott Avenue in Far Rockaway.

The main commercial area in Far Rockaway forms a hub around the busy intersection of Mott Avenue and Beach 20th Street. Ground-floor storefronts line the streets in the area with a mix of 1- and multi-storied buildings. For the most part, the buildings in this area rise 3 stories at the most. A few buildings contain apartments above, but for the most part the structures are only used for commercial and retail activities. Commercial establishments are primarily neighborhood services, such as banks, laundromats, barbers and hair salons, fast food establishments, and auto service-related uses.

West of Far Rockaway, each neighborhood has a retail strip, mostly containing small, local retailers. Hammels and Seaside, however, both contain small strip malls with chain stores and supermarkets such as CVS, Waldbaums, and Key Food. These strip malls are located on the peninsula's arterials: Beach Channel Drive and Rockaway Beach Boulevard.

### **Parks and Publicly Accessible Open Spaces**

The Rockaways contain several different types of publicly accessible open spaces: large parks like Jacob Riis Park, Rockaway Beach, Bayswater Point State Park, and the Dubos Point Wildlife Refuge; smaller, neighborhood parks and playgrounds; school playgrounds; and small sitting areas.

Bayswater Point State Park, which forms a boundary between the residences in Far Rockaway and the waters of the Norton and Mott Basins, provides unpaved pathways and natural overgrowth, for area wildlife and waterfowl. The Dubos Point Wildlife Sanctuary is a similarly overgrown area used not so much as a public open space, but rather, as a natural wildlife area.

Aside from the peninsula's large parks and open spaces, its neighborhood parks are much the same as neighborhood parks throughout the City: they often occupy less than one full City block; are usually at least partially paved; contain either basketball or handball courts, or both; have some benches or other sitting areas; and are used most heavily during the summer months. Public elementary and intermediate schools often have associated paved playgrounds that are considered City parks and maintained by the parks department. These playgrounds are, naturally, used most heavily during school hours in the spring and fall.

#### ***Jacob Riis Park***

Part of the Gateway National Recreation Area, the approximately 225-acre Jacob Riis Park covers almost the entire width of the peninsula between the Neponsit community and Fort Tilden, just south of the Marine Parkway Bridge. The park features one mile of beach and boardwalk, a pitch and putt golf course, and a public pool. The park also offers facilities for softball, baseball, football, rugby,

paddleball, and handball. In addition to its many facilities, a major feature of the park is its 7,000-car parking lot, which accommodates the approximately 30,000 visitors to the park each weekend.

### ***Rockaway Beach***

Rockaway Beach runs the entire length of the Rockaways along the Atlantic Ocean from Beach 3rd Street, just west of the Queens/Nassau border, to Jacob Riis Park. From Beach 3rd Street to Beach 126th Street, the Rockaway Boardwalk marks the separation between the beach and the neighborhoods to the north. While not heavily used during most times of the year, in the summer months, the boardwalk and beach both experience a fair amount of outdoor activity by residents and visitors of all ages.

### **Industrial Uses**

The peninsula does not contain many large industrial uses, and those that do exist are concentrated in two places. In the Bayswater neighborhood a power plant run by Keyspan Energy is located at Bay 25th Street along Mott Avenue and covers a large lot adjacent to the Mott Basin. The second large industrial area is located in the Seaside Community, between Beach Channel Drive and Rockaway Beach Boulevard. It contains a gas/electric utility station and the Rockaway Water Pollution Control Plant. In addition to these two industrial areas, NYCT “A” subway line runs above Rockaway Freeway on elevated tracks from Mott Avenue in Far Rockaway to Beach 116<sup>th</sup> Street in Rockaway Park/Seaside. A spur of the Long Island Railroad also runs at-grade through the northeastern portion of Far Rockaway.

## **SUMMARY OF OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES**

Years ago, the Rockaway Peninsula was a prime summertime destination, drawing large crowds to its beaches and beachfront bungalows in the summer months. Now, many summer homes and cottages have become vacant lots, and the influx of summer residents has, to some extent, subsided. However, Rockaway Beach and the boardwalk are still active in the summer months, albeit with local residents more than seasonal visitors, and Jacob Riis Park still draws large crowds from throughout the City and beyond.

While these open spaces are the biggest attractions to residents, the peninsula’s smaller parks and playgrounds also attract many younger children and older adults. Street-level activity is not very high in the western neighborhoods of the Rockaways—Neponsit, Belle Harbor, Seaside. However, activity on the streets in neighborhoods toward the east—Arverne, Edgemere, Far Rockaway—is noticeably higher. Teenagers and young adults can be found walking or standing on sidewalks or riding bikes on streets in many parts of the Eastern Rockaways. Many days, activity on the streets and sidewalks far outweighs activity in the area’s formal open spaces: its parks and playgrounds.

## **ZONING AND PUBLIC POLICY**

Land uses in the Rockaway Peninsula reflect the underlying zoning, which permits predominantly low- to mid-density residential uses (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6). While some small portions of the peninsula are zoned to allow light-industrial (M1) and moderate-industrial (M2) uses, most of the peninsula is zoned for residential uses. The highest density, R6 residential zoning districts (maximum FAR of 2.43) are mapped along the southern edge of the peninsula, from Seaside to Far Rockaway. West of Seaside, R1 to R4 districts predominate, allowing lower-density residential development with maximum FARs generally less than 1.0. With the exception of a number of small areas covered by commercial zones, most of the retail establishments on the peninsula are located on blocks zoned residential with either a C1-2 or C2-2 commercial overlay. These overlays allow maximum

commercial FARs of 1.0 or 2.0, depending on the underlying residence districts (effectively eliminating the possibility of larger office construction on most of the peninsula).

### **C. FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTION**

In the future without the *Mosquito Population Control Program in the Rockaways*, the predominant land uses in some areas of the Rockaway peninsula may change due to development currently underway or proposed for the near future. For instance, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development has recently issued a request for proposals to develop an approximately 40-block-long area in Arverne and Edgemere. This area, which extends from Beach 81st to Beach 32nd Streets and from the Rockaway Boardwalk to the elevated train line, would be developed with a mix of housing (anywhere from 1,500 to over 4,000 units), retail space, and a protected natural area/open space. A separate proposal calls for the construction of approximately 700 units of public housing north of the elevated subway line in Edgemere. This and other projects should increase the proportion of land devoted to residential use and decrease somewhat the proportion of vacant land on the peninsula.

In the future without the *Mosquito Population Control Program in the Rockaways*, the New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) would continue its *Routine Program* to control mosquito breeding while enhancing existing disease surveillance and public and medical provider education activities. While this *Routine Program* would continue regardless of the *Mosquito Population Control Program in the Rockaways*, the presence of aggressive biting mosquitoes is nonetheless likely to be much greater in the future without the *Mosquito Population Control Program in the Rockaways*. However, programs like the United States Army Corps of Engineers proposed habitat restoration in Bayswater State Park, Dubos Point, and Brant Point may help to significantly reduce mosquito generation in these areas. While large numbers of biting mosquitoes are not likely to change land uses on the peninsula, they would prevent the full use and enjoyment of outdoor spaces for much of the summer, especially at dawn and dusk, when biting mosquitoes are most active.

### **D. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

The NYCDOH *Mosquito Population Control Program in the Rockaways* consists of four components: Mosquito Surveillance, Mosquito Prevention and Control, Education and Outreach, and Research and Evaluation. Of these four components, only some parts of the Mosquito Prevention and Control efforts—such as adulticide application—have the potential for adverse impacts on the use of land.

The application of adulticides under the proposed *Mosquito Population Control Program in the Rockaways* is not expected to directly change the use of land within the study areas. However, like the citywide application program, it may cause some spaces normally open to public use to be closed immediately before, during, and shortly after application. This would be considered a direct short-term impact to that use.

The EIS conservatively assumes that up to six applications could occur in Rockaways from the end of June through September (up to two per month). As in the case of the citywide virus-control application (i.e., *Mosquito-Borne Disease Control Plan*), use of outdoor areas would be diminished during the times of application and, most likely, in the hours immediately before and after application occurs. This analysis focuses on these instances, examining the direct impacts of land use closures during these periods. In sum, the effects of the application on land use are not expected to be significantly greater than the No Action condition. That is, the public's reduced use of outdoor areas as a result of elevated levels of aggressive biting mosquitoes would be similar to, and may exceed, the

public's reduced use of outdoor spaces for the short time duration when adulticide applications are performed. G

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