

**A. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter considers the effects of the Proposed Project on neighborhood character. According to the *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, neighborhood character is combination of elements that give a neighborhood its distinct “personality.” These elements typically include land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise, although not all of these elements affecting neighborhood character are appropriate in all cases.

As described in greater detail in Chapter 1, “Projection Description,” the Proposed Project is a commercial center with associated parking, open space, and street and infrastructure improvements. This analysis therefore considers the impacts of the Proposed Project on the neighborhood character of the study area, and relies in part on the analyses of the components of neighborhood character as analyzed elsewhere in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

**PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS**

As detailed below, the Proposed Project would not substantially change the character of the neighborhood. The Proposed Project would not result in any significant adverse impacts on land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; historic architectural features; shadows; and urban design and visual resources. Although the Proposed Project would result in significant adverse traffic impacts, many of these impacts could be fully mitigated with standard mitigation measures, including signal timing/phasing and lane restriping changes. While there would also be unmitigated significant adverse traffic impacts, these impacts would occur along primarily commercial corridors where traffic is already associated with shoppers and other visitors; therefore, the unmitigated impacts resulting from an increase in visitors to the Proposed Project would not be expected to noticeably alter the character of these corridors. The Proposed Project would result in a noise level increase during the Saturday MD peak period that would exceed the threshold for an impact for residential uses. However, there are currently no residential uses near receptor location 4, and the M1-1 zoning designation precludes future residential development. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not result in significant noise increases such that it would alter the character of the area. Nor would the Proposed Project result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that could cumulatively impact neighborhood character. It is therefore concluded the Proposed Project is consistent with the existing character of the neighborhood and would not result in any significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

**B. METHODOLOGY**

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an analysis of neighborhood character begins by determining whether a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any relevant technical area (land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and

cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) or if a project would result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that could cumulatively impact neighborhood character. If the answer is yes, a preliminary assessment is undertaken; the preliminary assessment first identifies the defining features of the neighborhood that comprises the study area, followed by an assessment of the potential for the proposed project to affect the defining features of the neighborhood, either through the potential for significant adverse impacts or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas. If the preliminary assessment concludes that the proposed project has the potential to affect defining features of a neighborhood, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character may be warranted. If needed, the detailed assessment would use the information from the preliminary assessment as a baseline and then project and compare the future No Action and With Action conditions.

Since the EIS includes analyses of several environmental impact categories that are relevant to neighborhood character (i.e., land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, urban design and visual resources, transportation, and noise), a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character has been prepared. The preliminary assessment describes the defining features of the neighborhood and then assesses the potential for the proposed project to impact these defining features.

## **C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT**

### **DEFINING FEATURES**

As stated in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for a preliminary analysis of neighborhood character is typically consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas that contribute to the defining elements of the neighborhood. Therefore, the study area for this analysis is consistent with Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” which includes areas up to a ¼-mile from the Project Site. The character of the study area is primarily defined by substantial transportation infrastructure, commercial and light industrial uses, and vacant/undeveloped land.

Transportation infrastructure includes the Outerbridge Crossing (which is designated I-440), an elevated highway immediately to the north of the Project Site that spans the Arthur Kill, connecting to New Jersey. East of the study area, the Outerbridge Crossing connects to the West Shore Expressway (the continuation of I-440) and Drumgoole Road. Staten Island Rail Road (SIRR) tracks are located in the southern portion of the study area, to the north of the predominantly residential Tottenville neighborhood, which is located outside of the study area.

Commercial uses (e.g., shopping centers such as Outerbridge Plaza, Richmond Valley Atrium, and Major League Plaza) and light industrial uses (e.g., beverage distribution) are present along Arthur Kill Road. Additional commercial uses are found along ar South Bridge Street, including local shopping and auto related uses, and along Page Avenue, where there is a concentration of retail uses that serve the neighborhood. There are also a few residential uses located on the eastern side of Arthur Kill Road to the south of the shopping centers and north of Richmond Valley Road (both homes are located within a manufacturing zoning district [M1-1] and were built prior to the introduction of zoning; therefore, they are existing non-conforming uses).

The remainder of the study area is predominantly undeveloped or vacant land, particularly along the portion of Arthur Kill Road located north of the Outerbridge Crossing. Here, the only

developed parcels are a warehouse facility and gun club. Similarly, the area south of the Project Site along Mill Creek includes vacant and undeveloped lands and contains mapped wetlands with development restrictions that are protected from development.

### **POTENTIAL TO AFFECT THE DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD**

The *CEQR Technical Manual* recommends that, after the defining features of a neighborhood are identified, the potential for the project to affect the defining features of the neighborhood should be examined, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas.

The Proposed Project, as described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” would result in an approximately 589,619-gsf commercial center, associated accessory parking, waterfront open space, street and infrastructure improvements, and wetland protection and enhancement. The Proposed Project would be constructed on land that is currently vacant (with the exception of the unoccupied residential building on Lot 6).

The following sections discuss potential changes resulting from the Proposed Project in the remaining technical areas that are considered in a neighborhood character assessment under CEQR:

#### *LAND USE, ZONING, AND PUBLIC POLICY*

The Proposed Project would not result in any significant adverse impacts to land use, zoning, and public policy, as described in Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy.” The Proposed Project would redevelop the Project Site with a commercial center containing destination and smaller scale retail, supermarket, restaurant, cinema, and small office use, as well as 1,721 accessory parking spaces. The northern portion of Project Site would provide a 6.84-acre preserved area with restored natural habitat and the Proposed Project would also provide approximately 3.29 acres of waterfront open space along the Arthur Kill waterfront. The Proposed Project would be compatible in use and scale with the surrounding area along Arthur Kill Road, Richmond Valley Road, and Page Avenue which are all commercial corridors that connect with the West Shore Expressway interchange leading to the Outerbridge Crossing. There is also substantial underutilized and vacant land in this area, including the Project Site (see Figure 2-1), which is zoned for more intensive uses that allow commercial redevelopment. Overall, changes to study area land use with the Proposed Project would not adversely impact the existing character of the neighborhood and would be consistent with land use trends that show this area developing its vacant land and redeveloping underutilized properties to create a new economic center for Staten Island. Thus, the Proposed Project would be similar to commercial redevelopment trends and supportive of the neighborhood character and trends.

#### *SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS*

As described in Chapter 3, “Socioeconomic Conditions,” the Proposed Project would provide substantial new retail space to the Project Site, which is consistent with economic patterns and trends for the area. Additionally, the Proposed Project would not capture retail sales in the Primary Trade Area in Shoppers’ Goods, Grocery Stores, or Eating and Drinking Establishments to the extent that the market for such goods would be saturated or there would be any significant indirect business displacement due to increased rents or retail market saturation, nor would there be any effects on a specific industry or category of business that would result in any impacts on neighborhood character. The Proposed Project would not affect the economic viability of any

industry or business that would impact neighborhood character. Finally, although there is a single-family home that is owned by the Applicant on the Project Site, it is unoccupied; thus, the Proposed Project would not cause any direct residential displacement and the structure would be reused and has been integrated into the Proposed Project. In sum, the economic activities with the Proposed Project would not adversely impact the defining socioeconomic features of the neighborhood and would add a new economic an employment center in the neighborhood without adversely impacting existing businesses that also serve the neighborhood.

#### *OPEN SPACE*

The Proposed Project would not result in any significant adverse open space impacts. As discussed in Chapter 4, “Open Space,” the ¼-mile area surrounding the Project Site does not have any publicly accessible open space resources. However, the Proposed Project would provide 3.29 acres of new waterfront open spaces with passive recreational opportunities and natural areas. With this proposed open space the added worker population introduced by the Proposed Project would not overburden any existing open space resources and the Proposed Project would not result in any significant adverse impacts on neighborhood open spaces. Rather, the Proposed Project would create new waterfront open space resources for the neighborhood, which would be accesible to local residents and workers in the surrounding neighborhood.

#### *HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES*

As described in Chapter 6, “Historic and Cultural Resources,” the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts on architectural resources.

Based on the archaeological investigations performed to date, it has been determined that the Proposed Project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts due to the presence of archaeological resources dating from both the prehistoric and historic periods. Therefore, a mitigation plan for additional investigations and data recovery will be developed to avoid impacts to these resources (see Chapter 6, “Historic and Cultural Resources,” and Chapter 20 “Mitigation”).

Additionally, the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse direct impacts on architectural resources in the study area. Although the Outerbridge Crossing is adjacent to the Project Site, an approximately 200-foot vegetated buffer—which corresponds to the distance between the bridge and existing adjacent commercial development east of the Project Site—comprising existing vegetation and four wetland mitigation ponds is proposed between the north edge of the Proposed Project footprint and the south edge of the Outerbridge Crossing. Therefore, only construction of the wetland mitigation ponds would occur within 90 feet of the resource. To avoid any potential inadvertent construction-related impacts on this architectural resource, a Construction Protection Plan (CPP) would be developed in consultation with SHPO and PANYNJ and would be implemented by a professional engineer prior to any excavation of the Project Site.

Public views of the truss, ramp, and bridge supports of the Outerbridge Crossing would remain visible from Arthur Kill Road and from the proposed new waterfront open space. Maintenance of the existing vegetated buffer south of the Outerbridge Crossing would help preserve views of the bridge from Arthur Kill Road. The Proposed Project would not isolate this architectural resource from its setting, or alter its relationship to the streetscape. The Proposed Project also would not introduce an incompatible visual, audible, or atmospheric element to this architectural

resource's setting, and would not introduce shadows over a historic landscape or an architectural resource with sun-sensitive features that contribute to that resource's significance. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse indirect impacts on architectural resources in the study area.

### *SHADOWS*

With the Proposed Project, all shadows would fall within the Project Site and the Proposed Project would not result in any impacts on public open spaces or historic features that would result in any impacts on neighborhood character.

### *URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES*

#### *Urban Design*

The Proposed Project would replace underutilized wooded parcels with a number of commercial spaces containing primarily commercial uses; the commercial spaces would generally have large, long, and relatively narrow floorplates that would be oriented north-south on the Project Site (with the exception of two commercial spaces that would be arranged in an east-west configuration at the south end of the Project Site). Though the commercial spaces would have large floorplates, the size of existing building footprints vary considerably in the study area, with the shopping center developments on the east side of Arthur Kill Road containing groupings of interconnected buildings that generate large narrow footprints, like those of the Proposed Project.

The proposed maximum height of the development, at 96, would be taller than the height of the existing buildings in the study area; however, as has been described above, the slope downward within the Project Site from east to west and the setback from Arthur Kill Road with intervening structures would reduce the perceived height of the proposed taller structural elements from the pedestrian perspective along Arthur Kill Road and from the surrounding area.

The proposed entry plaza and pedestrian walkway, as well as the new sidewalks on Arthur Kill Road and Richmond Valley Road, would provide a positive urban design feature in the study area, which currently has few pedestrian amenities.

The Proposed Project would result in a commercial development in an area where numerous retail and shopping centers already exist. As much of the Proposed Project would be set back behind existing commercial and light industrial buildings on Arthur Kill Road, the Proposed Project would not result in any substantive change in the streetscape of the neighborhood or noticeably conflict with the scale of buildings from the pedestrian perspective. The Proposed Project has also been designed to respect the waterfront setting, consisting of longer and lower commercial spaces instead of buildings with smaller footprints and greater heights along the waterfront, and with green roofs that would have an undulating design to reference the surrounding landscape and waterfront location.

Because the Proposed Project would not adversely impact either the urban design or visual character features that contribute to the neighborhood or the local pedestrian experience and would open the waterfront to the community, it would not result in any adverse impacts to neighborhood character.

### *Visual Resources*

Although the Proposed Project would introduce new commercial, entertainment, and open space uses on the Project Site, it would not adversely impact views along Arthur Kill Road, and new public views of the Arthur Kill and Outerbridge Crossing would be created by the new public sidewalks and pedestrian paths that would connect Arthur Kill Road to the waterfront open space. The Cole House would remain on site as a free-standing structure with its principal landscaping elements (front lawn, wall, and large sycamore tree). Overall, the Proposed Project would have no significant adverse impacts on urban design or visual resources, or the pedestrian experience of these characteristics of the built and natural environment, and therefore changes to urban design and visual resources associated with the Proposed Project would not adversely impact neighborhood character.

### *TRANSPORTATION*

As described in Chapter 12, “Transportation,” traffic conditions were evaluated at 20 intersections for the weekday AM, midday, PM, and Saturday peak hours. In the 2019 With Action (the Proposed Project) condition, there would be the potential for significant adverse traffic impacts at 10 intersections during the weekday AM peak hour, 12 intersections during the weekday midday peak hour, 15 intersections during the weekday PM peak hour, and 15 intersections during the Saturday peak hour. As described in Chapter 20, “Mitigation,” all of the significant adverse traffic impacts identified under the proposed project—except for the significant adverse impacts at eight intersections (Arthur Kill Road at North Bridge Street, Arthur Kill Road at Richmond Valley Road, Page Avenue at Richmond Valley Road, Boscombe Avenue at the Route 440 Ramps, Amboy Road at Page Avenue, Page Avenue at Hylan Boulevard, North Bridge Street at the 440 westbound off-ramp, and Arthur Kill Road at South Bridge Street) during one or more analysis peak hours—could be fully mitigated with standard mitigation measures, including signal timing/phasing and lane restriping changes. At two of these intersections, improvement measures were recommended to partially mitigate the projected impacts at one or more of the impacted movements.

While the Proposed Project would result in unmitigated significant adverse impacts at eight intersections, these intersections are all located along the commercial corridors in the area (Arthur Kill Road, Page Avenue, and Veterans Road West). These corridors generally contain auto-oriented commercial facilities that feature large parking lots with buildings set back from the roadway. As the traffic along these corridors is already primarily associated with shoppers and other visitors to the commercial facilities in the area, the unmitigated significant adverse traffic impacts resulting from an increase in visitors to the Proposed Project would not be expected to noticeably alter the character of these corridors. Notably, none of the unmitigated significant adverse impacts would occur in residential communities, but rather along the commercial corridors like Arthur Kill Road, Richmond Valley Road, and Page Avenue.

Therefore, the unmitigated significant adverse traffic impacts would not result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character.

### *NOISE*

The Proposed Actions would not result in significant adverse impacts to noise. The Proposed Project includes an (E) designation (E-443) for the Project Site related to noise to ensure that no significant adverse impacts related to noise occur.

A mobile source noise analysis concluded that, with the Proposed Project, there would be a noise level increase of up to 3.1 dBA at receptor site 4, located on Richmond Valley Road (east of the Project Site). At all other noise receptor sites, the predicted noise level increases resulting from the Proposed Project would be no greater than 1.2 dBA, which is considered imperceptible and not significant according to *CEQR Technical Manual* noise impact criteria. This noise level increase is projected during the Saturday MD peak period and exceeds the threshold for an impact for residential uses. However, there are currently no residential uses near receptor location 4, and the M1-1 zoning designation precludes future residential development. As such, no significant adverse impact would occur at this location. During the weekday MD and PM peak periods, noise level increases are predicted to be no greater than 2.3 dBA and would there not be a significant adverse noise impact at this location or other locations in the study area.

A building attenuation analysis for the interior of the Proposed Project building concluded that to ensure interior noise levels that meet CEQR interior noise level requirements, up to 30 dBA of building attenuation would be required. The attenuation requirements would be included in Noise (E) designation E-443. To implement these attenuation requirements an (E) designation for noise would be applied to the Proposed Project specifying 30 dBA of window/wall attenuation. With the prescribed levels of building attenuation, the Proposed Project would not result in any significant adverse impact with respect to interior noise levels at the Project Site.

#### **CONCLUSION OF PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT**

The Proposed Project would not substantially change the character of the neighborhood. As discussed in greater detail above, the Proposed Project would not result in any significant adverse impacts in the defining element of the neighborhood. While the Proposed Project would generate substantial vehicles on local roads that would increase traffic volumes, it is expected that traffic mitigation measures at the impacted interseptions can address many of the anticipated traffic impacts. The unmitigated significant adverse traffic impacts that are projected would be primarily commercial corridors like Arthur Kill Road, Richmond Valley Road, and Page Avenue, which already have commercial or manufacturing zoning and land use concentrations and where vehicular traffic is already associated with commercial activities and travel patterns that include employees, neighborhood shoppers, and visitors; therefore, the unmitigated impacts resulting from the increase in street traffic with the Proposed Project would not impact the character of these commercial corridors and changes resulting from the Proposed Project would be similar to the economic development trends and objectives for this part of western Staten Island. The Proposed Project would not result in significant noise increases such that it would alter neighborhood character. Potential archaeology impacts would also be avoided through the implementation of mitigation measures. In sum, the Proposed Project would not result in a combination of significant adverse impacts or moderate effects to neighborhood elements that would cumulatively impact neighborhood character. \*