

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses the potential for the proposed project to impact neighborhood character. Neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give a neighborhood its distinct “personality.” These elements may include a neighborhood’s land use, urban design and visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomics, transportation, and noise. Not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements. According to the 2014 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare and occur under unusual circumstances in which, in the absence of an impact in any of the relevant technical areas, a combination of moderate effects to the neighborhood would result in an impact to neighborhood character. Moreover, a significant impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood’s character is not automatically equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character.

As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” the proposed actions would facilitate new commercial development and the associated circulation improvements at 534 South Avenue in the Mariners Harbor neighborhood of Staten Island. The 28.3-acre project site is bounded by Forest Avenue and Wemple Street (which is mapped but not built) to the north, South Avenue to the east, Amador Street (which is mapped but not built) to the south, and Morrow Street (which is partially built and partially unbuilt) to the west. The proposed project would also result in development on a portion of the New York State Department of Conservation (NYSDEC)’s freshwater wetland adjacent area (FWAA) and isolated U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) wetland areas.

As detailed in previous chapters, the proposed project would result in significant adverse impacts in one of the technical areas that contribute to neighborhood character—transportation.

For each of the key technical areas related to neighborhood character, this chapter describes existing conditions, the No Action condition, and the With Action condition. In addition, in accordance with the guidance of the *CEQR Technical Manual*, this analysis considers the potential for the proposed project to affect neighborhood character through a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas.

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

The preliminary assessment of neighborhood character presented in this chapter concludes that the proposed project would not result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character. The neighborhood character of the study area is defined by a few key components, including its mix of land uses and its proximity to major roadways, particularly Forest Avenue and South Avenue, which are access routes to the regional highways in the area (the Staten Island Expressway [I-278] and Route 440). Since the increased traffic resulting from the proposed

project would impact intersections along these major roadways that carry high volumes of traffic, these significant adverse traffic impacts would not represent a significant change to the existing neighborhood character. The proposed project would result in limited effects in other technical areas related to neighborhood character which, when considered cumulatively, would not have a significant adverse impact to the area's neighborhood character. Overall, the proposed project would be consistent with the study area's neighborhood character, and would provide both local retail facilities to serve the nearby residential area as well as larger scale retail (such as the warehouse wholesale store and large-scale grocery store) that attract shoppers from a wider area.

B. METHODOLOGY

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an analysis of neighborhood character is warranted when a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any one of the relevant technical areas that contribute to the defining elements of the neighborhood (presented below) or when the project may have moderate effects on several of those elements. The analysis of neighborhood character begins with a preliminary assessment to determine whether changes expected in other technical areas may affect an element that contributes to neighborhood character. The assessment should also identify the defining features of the neighborhood, and assess whether the project has the potential to affect these defining features, either through the potential for significant adverse impacts or a combination of moderate effects. Potential effects on neighborhood character may include:

- Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy
- Socioeconomic Conditions
- Open Space
- Shadows
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Urban Design and Visual Resources
- Transportation
- Noise

As described in the screening assessments provided in Chapter 14, "Screening Assessments," the proposed project would not have the potential to affect socioeconomic conditions, open space, shadows, or urban design and visual resources, and following *CEQR Technical Manual* guidelines, detailed analyses are not warranted in these areas. Therefore, this assessment considers only those elements defining the character of the area that would be potentially affected by the proposed project, as analyzed in the previous chapters of this EIS: land use, historic resources, transportation, and noise.

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a project can also have a combination of moderate effects to several elements that cumulatively may affect neighborhood character. Therefore, this analysis also evaluates the potential for the proposed project to affect neighborhood character through a combination of effects.

STUDY AREA

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. Therefore, the study area for this analysis reflects the study area for the analysis of land use, zoning, and public policy, which generally includes areas up to ¼-mile from the project site. As such, the study area for neighborhood character extends up to ¼-mile to include the area generally bounded by Continental Place to the south, the Staten Island Expressway to the south, Amity Place to the east, and the intersection of Forest Avenue and Goethals Road North to the west.

C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

Following *CEQR Technical Manual* guidelines, the preliminary assessment of neighborhood character: (1) identifies the defining features of the project site's neighborhood; and (2) assesses whether the proposed project has the potential to affect the defining features of the neighborhood, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The neighborhood character of the study area is defined by a few key components, including its mix of land uses (primarily commercial uses, with low-density residential development in the area east of South Avenue, a medical facility to the north of the project site, and a large amount of undeveloped land), and its proximity to major roadways, including the Staten Island Expressway. As discussed in Chapter 3, "Historic and Cultural Resources," there are no architectural resources in the area within a 400-foot radius of the project site. Therefore, historic resources are not a defining feature of the area's neighborhood character. Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 9, "Noise," existing noise levels within the study area are not notably low, but range from low to relatively high reflecting the level of vehicular activity on the adjacent roadways, therefore noise levels are not a defining feature of the area's neighborhood character.

LAND USE

The character of the area is largely defined by its land uses, in particular the variety of land uses and building types located in the area. Commercial and auto-oriented uses are generally located in the area along Forest Avenue, including a Home Depot hardware store located on the northern side of Forest Avenue across from the project site and a multiplex cinema located to the west of the project site across Morrow Street. Low-density residential areas (single- and two-family homes) are generally located east of South Avenue, both adjacent to the project site and in the area to the north of Forest Avenue. One prominent element of the neighborhood that contributes to its character is the large amount of undeveloped land in the area. This includes mapped wetland areas (located on a portion of the project site and the parcels immediately to the south of the project site, as well as around Goethals Pond to the north of Forest Avenue and along the Staten Island Expressway to the south of the project site) and Graniteville Swamp Park, an approximately 9-acre City park located west of the project site along Goethals Road North, which serves as natural area preservation for a portion of the Graniteville Swamp.

TRANSPORTATION

The character of the study area, like that of many neighborhoods in New York City, is in part defined by the levels of pedestrian and vehicular activity that exist. The study area contains major roadways that carry high volumes of traffic, in particular Forest Avenue and South Avenue, which are access routes to the regional highways in the area (the Staten Island Expressway to the south of the study area and Route 440 to the east of the study area). Pedestrian activity in the study area, which is a generally low-density area that is not served by the subway, is relatively low.

THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT

As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” absent the proposed actions, the development site is assumed to be developed with a retail center totaling approximately 228,250 gross square feet (gsf) of space with 736 parking spaces. The No Action development would not require any discretionary approvals, and would be built in substantial accordance with the NYSDEC-approved site plan. As with the proposed project, the No Action development would preserve mapped wetlands and provide a landscaped buffer area and stormwater management area.

In addition, as discussed in Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” several independent background development projects are expected to be completed within the study area by 2019. These projects are generally small-scale commercial developments located along Forest Avenue and single-family homes located in the residential neighborhood to the east of the project site. In addition, a capital project led by the New York City Department of Design and Construction (DDC) is planned at the intersection of Forest Avenue and South Avenue to improve traffic flow at the intersection. The projects expected to be completed in the study area would not significantly alter the study area’s neighborhood character. Rather, the projects, including the No Action development on the project site, would reinforce the mix of land uses and building types that is a defining feature of the study area, particularly the predominantly commercial uses along Forest Avenue. Other defining features of the area’s neighborhood character, including vehicular activity on the area’s major roadways, are not expected to substantially change.

THE FUTURE WITH THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed project would construct a new retail development similar to the No Action development described above, located within the same development footprint set by the NYSDEC-approved site plan. The proposed project would include approximately 226,000 gsf of total commercial space (approximately 2,000 gsf less than the No Action development) and 838 accessory parking spaces (approximately 100 spaces more than the No Action development). The retail center would include an approximately 92,000-gsf Use Group (UG) 10A warehouse wholesale store and an approximately 67,000-gsf UG 6 supermarket, which would be permitted under the proposed special permit allowing for individual retail tenants with more than 10,000 zoning square feet (zsf) of space. The proposed project would also include the realignment of the intersection of Morrow Street and Forest Avenue, facilitated by the proposed mapping action, to utilize an existing traffic light as the primary access to the retail development from Forest Avenue. Access to the retail development would also be provided by a two-way, right-in/right-out only access from Forest Avenue to the east of the main entrance at Morrow Street, which would not be signalized, and by a third vehicular entrance at South Avenue; the applicant is proposing that the South Avenue entrance would be signalized. In accordance with the

NYSDEC-approved site plan, the proposed project would preserve mapped wetlands and provide a landscaped buffer area and stormwater management area.

In addition, the proposed mapping action would de-map unbuilt streets, located both within the project site and extending beyond the project site to the south, to rationalize the City map by removing mapped but unbuilt streets from mapped wetland areas.

While the proposed project result in the redevelopment of vacant land on the project site with a new retail center, it would not represent a change in land use as compared to the No Action condition, as the No Action development would include a similar retail center. The proposed retail center would be consistent with the other commercial uses located in the area along Forest Avenue, therefore, the proposed project would not have the potential to affect the land uses which are a defining feature of the area's neighborhood character.

The proposed project would be located along two of the major roadways (Forest Avenue and South Avenue) that define the area's character. In the area of traffic, conditions were evaluated at 10 intersections for the weekday midday, PM, and Saturday peak hours. In the 2019 With Action condition, there would be the potential for significant adverse traffic impacts at four intersections in the weekday PM peak hour and at seven intersections in the Saturday peak hour. The impacted intersections would all be located along Forest Avenue and South Avenue, which, as previously discussed, are major roadways carrying high volumes of traffic that partly define the neighborhood character of the area. As detailed in Chapter 13, "Mitigation," locations where significant adverse traffic impacts are predicted to occur could be fully mitigated with the implementation of standard traffic mitigation measures (e.g., signal timing changes and lane restriping). Therefore, the increased traffic resulting from the proposed project would not represent a significant change to the existing neighborhood character.

CONSIDERATION OF MODERATE EFFECTS

The *CEQR Technical Manual* states that even if a project does not have the potential to result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character in a certain technical area, the project may result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that may cumulatively affect an area's neighborhood character. A moderate effect is generally defined as an effect considered reasonably close to a significant adverse impact threshold for a particular technical area; if moderate effects are identified in two or more technical areas, an assessment of the cumulative effects is warranted. As described throughout this EIS, while the proposed project would result in significant adverse traffic impacts, it would not result in adverse effects that are reasonably close to significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; shadows; or noise. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in moderate effects in two or more technical areas. The identified potential significant adverse traffic impacts, as noted above, could be fully mitigated and would not represent a significant change to the existing neighborhood character. When considered together with the minor effects in the other technical area categories, these traffic effects resulting from the proposed project would not constitute a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character.

CONCLUSION

This preliminary assessment identified no potential significant adverse impacts to the study area's neighborhood character resulting from the proposed actions. Therefore, a detailed neighborhood character analysis is not necessary. Overall, development resulting from the

South Avenue Retail Development

proposed actions would be consistent with the study area's neighborhood character, which is largely defined by the commercial uses located along Forest Avenue, and would provide both local retail facilities to serve the nearby residential area as well as larger scale retail (such as the warehouse wholesale store and large-scale grocery store) that attract shoppers from a wider area.*