10 NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

10.1 Introduction

This section assesses the Proposed Actions' potential effects on neighborhood character. As defined in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give a neighborhood its distinct "personality." These elements may include a neighborhood's land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise conditions; however, not all of these elements contribute to neighborhood character in all cases. For a proposed project or action, a neighborhood character assessment pursuant to CEQR should first identify the defining features of the neighborhood and then evaluate whether the project or action has the potential to adversely affect one or more of these defining features. A project has the potential to affect a neighborhood's character by a combination of moderate effects or significant adverse impacts to any of the defining features of the neighborhood. Therefore, to determine the effects of a proposed action on neighborhood character, the relevant features of neighborhood character are considered cumulatively. In addition, a significant impact identified in one of the technical areas that may contribute 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.

The Project Area comprises two projected development sites. Projected Development Site 1 comprises Block 13, Lots 82, 92, and 100, and the panhandle portion (the area within 185 feet of Stuyvesant Place) of the Castleton lot (Lot 8). Projected Development Site 1 is vacant with scattered vegetation, except for the remnants of building foundation on Lot 82. Projected Development Site 2 is not owned by the Applicant and comprises Block 13, Lots 68, 71, and 73.

10.2 Principal Conclusions

Overall, the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood's character would not, either individually or in combination, result in moderate adverse impacts on neighborhood character. As stated in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, if a proposed project would have 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, then a detailed assessment is required to determine whether a significant adverse neighborhood character impact would occur. The Proposed Actions would not cause significant adverse impacts to land use, zoning, and public policy, socioeconomic conditions, shadows, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, or noise. The Proposed Actions have the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of open space and transportation.

While the Proposed Actions would decrease the open space ratio (OSR) – the availability of open space per 1,000 residents – the Proposed Actions would not directly affect any open space resources or change the character of the Study Area's open space resources. The Proposed Actions would facilitate the introduction of a new publicly-accessible private open space into the Study Area.

While the Proposed Actions would generate additional trips in the Study Area, the Proposed Actions would not significantly alter the transportation character of the Study Area, and Richmond Terrace would continue to be the principal vehicular route through the Study Area. Other streets would continue to function as local and collector streets. The Proposed Actions would introduce additional pedestrian trips, thereby further activating the immediate area with additional pedestrian activity and providing new opportunities for local commercial establishments to capture passing trade.

The neighborhood character is diverse in terms of building types, uses, and scales, and has a varied neighborhood character, with a variety of building heights and forms contributing to the St. George skyline along the waterfront. Therefore, based on the results of the preliminary assessment, there is no potential for the Proposed Actions to result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character, and further analysis is not warranted.

10.3 Methodology

An assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when a proposed action has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts to the technical areas listed above. A preliminary neighborhood character assessment determines whether anticipated impacts in identified technical areas may adversely impact a defining feature of the neighborhood. The preliminary assessment first identifies the defining features and then evaluates whether the proposed project or action has the potential to adversely impact those defining features, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact in a single relevant technical area or a combination of moderate effects in the relevant technical areas. A "moderate" effect is generally defined as being reasonably close to the significant adverse impact threshold for a particular technical analysis area.

The key elements that define neighborhood character, and their relationships to one another, form the basis of determining impact significance. In general, the more uniform and consistent the existing neighborhood character, the more sensitive it is to change. A neighborhood that has a varied context typically is able to tolerate greater change without experiencing significant impacts. If there is no potential for the proposed project or action to affect the defining features of neighborhood character, a detailed assessment is not warranted.

Study Area

The Project Area is bound by Richmond Terrace to the east, Hamilton Avenue to the south, a distance of 185 feet west of Stuyvesant Place and Richmond Terrace to the south and west, and Nicholas Street to the west. The Project Area is northwest of the Richmond County Bank

Ballpark and directly across from the dormant NY Wheel site on the north side of Richmond Terrace.

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character is typically consistent with the study areas in other relevant technical areas assessed, such as land use and urban design. Thus the neighborhood character Study Area is a 400-foot radius around the Project Area.

10.4 Existing Conditions

The Study Area is characterized as an urban hillside area near the St. George waterfront. The change in topography between the waterfront areas and the upland areas in the west allow for views along the street pattern across Upper Bay to the Manhattan, Brooklyn, and New Jersey skylines. The St. George neighborhood is the civic center of Staten Island, and a major transportation hub as a transfer point between the Staten Island Ferry, Staten Island Railway, and buses. The neighborhood is experiencing targeted infill development with recent planned developments such as Empire Outlets, Lighthouse Point, and NY Wheel.

The principal vehicular route through the Study Area is Richmond Terrace, a significant east-west street along Staten Island's North Shore that runs generally parallel to the Kill Van Kull from St. George to Howland Hook. Areas to the north and east of Richmond Terrace are waterfront areas improved with semi-private developments (private developments that have publicly accessible areas) fronting a waterfront esplanade. Streets that intersect Richmond Terrace provide connections farther upland and allow for view corridors across Upper Bay. Stuyvesant Place and St. Marks Place generally follow the topography of the area.

The waterfront area is defined by Richmond County Ballpark and the St. George Waterfront Esplanade, both of which provide sweeping views across Upper Bay towards the Manhattan, Brooklyn, and New Jersey skylines.

Stuyvesant Place is the main civic street of St. George and fronts Borough Hall, the Richmond County Clerk's offices, the Department of Small Business Service's Workforce 1 Career Center, and the Staten Island Museum. Local retail options are also available on Stuyvesant Place, contributing to its active street character. Stuyvesant Place is anchored at its southern termination at Bay Street by Barrett Triangle and Baker Square, two public open spaces providing passive recreational opportunities.

The built environment within the Study Area includes low- to medium-density residential buildings. The Castleton Park Apartments are the tallest buildings in the Study Area at 20-stories each. The Castleton Park Apartments are farther upland from the Project Area and are sited on some of the most elevated portions of the Study Area. Because the two towers are the tallest buildings in the Study Area and are sited farther upland, the Castleton Park Apartments are some of the most prominent structures visible along the St. George skyline.

The uses in the Study Area include a mix of residential, commercial, and parking uses. The area to the north is predominantly residential with one- and two-family residences as well as multifamily walkup residences. To the east of the Project Area is the NY Wheel, which is a dormant construction site improved with a parking garage and open space along the waterfront. The area to the west is predominantly residential with one-and two-family residences and multifamily elevator residences. Curtis High School, the only community facility use in the western portion of the Study Area, is a large public high school, and the building is a historic resource (LPC-designated landmark and building eligible for listing on the State and National registers of historic places (S/NR)). To the south are residential, open parking facilities, and public facilities such as the Staten Island Family Court and the New York Police

Department 120th Precinct, both of which are LPC-designated landmarks and eligible for listing on the S/NR.

10.5 Assessment

Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy

The Proposed Actions would facilitate the construction of four mixed-use buildings on two development sites. Projected Development Site 1, which is owned by the Applicant, would be developed with three buildings (Building 1 on Lot 100, Building 2 on Lot 92, and Building 3 on Lot 82) containing ground floor retail and residential space above. A privately-owned, publicly accessible open space would be developed on Lot 100. Including bulkheads, the buildings would rise to heights of 298 feet, 270 feet, and 157 feet, respectively. The open space on Lot 100 would anchor the northwest corner of the intersection between Stuyvesant Place and Hamilton Avenue. This open space would introduce new passive recreational space near the northern terminus of Stuyvesant Place, similar to how Baker Square and Barrett Triangle are passive open spaces near the street's southern terminus.

Projected Development Site 2 is not owned by the Applicant but could reasonably be developed with the Proposed Actions. The Reasonable Worst Case Development Scenario established this site would be developed with a 205-foot (185-foot plus 20-foot bulkhead) mixed-use building with ground floor retail and residential space above. The building would be built to the street and provide active frontage along Richmond Terrace.

Overall, the development facilitated by the Proposed Actions would be similar to the surrounding land uses and would provide mixed-use development with active street frontage along Richmond Terrace. Additionally, the Proposed Development would be constructed on a stretch of Richmond Terrace – the main street through the Study Area – that is mostly vacant. At 298 feet tall, Building 1 would be the tallest building in the Study Area, however, with the change in topography between Richmond Terrace and the Castleton Park Apartments farther upland, the proposed buildings would appear to be developed to a height similar to the neighboring Castleton Park Apartments. Compared to the Castleton Park Apartments, the Proposed Actions would facilitate more slender towers, consistent with the design objectives in the Special St. George District. The slender towers would obstruct some private views (views that are not accessible to be public) from Castleton Park Apartments across Upper Bay.

The proposed zoning map amendment would establish the first R7 district in Staten Island along a wide street and in one of the most transit-rich areas of the borough. The proposed zoning text amendment to Appendix F would establish the Project Area as a Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) area. The proposed City Planning Commission (CPC) Special Permit would also permit taller buildings and a site plan that provides active ground floor frontage, a new privately owned, publicly accessible open space, private open areas, and slender towers. The zoning actions would support the goals of the Special St. George District and respond to St. George's transportation connections to Manhattan and across Staten Island. The Proposed Actions would facilitate the development of four mixed-use buildings that would provide housing, including affordable options, and activate Richmond Terrace with retail space consistent with goals of multiple public policies such as North Shore 2030, OneNYC 2050, and Housing 2.0.

Based on this information, the Proposed Actions would not result in any significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character in the area of land use, zoning, and public policy.

Socioeconomic Conditions

The mixed-use residential and commercial buildings proposed in the With-Action Condition would not result in the direct or indirect displacement of existing businesses. The Reasonable Worst-Case Development Scenario for this project established that the Proposed Actions would facilitate development on two development sites. Development on Projected Development Site 2 would result in the direct displacement of two two-family residences, or approximately 10 residents. The Proposed Actions would not displace 500 or more residents that the *CEQR Technical Manual* guidelines indicate would warrant a direct residential displacement assessment.

The Proposed Actions would result in 726 incremental dwelling units, and a detailed indirect residential displacement assessment was warranted. The Proposed Actions would result in both affordable and market rate housing options. New households are expected to have higher annual incomes than both the average and median incomes of the Study Area population. Additionally, the incremental increase of 726 dwelling units would result in more than a ten percent increase in Socioeconomic Conditions Study Area (2010 Census Tracts 3, 7, 9, and 11) population over the No-Action Condition.

The median asking rents have fluctuated in the St. George and Stapleton neighborhoods between 2015 and 2019. From 2018 to 2019, median asking rents have increased in both the St. George and Stapleton neighborhoods. The Study Area experienced a decline in asking rents in 2018 compared to rents from 2015. The uptick in median asking rents in 2016 and 2017 was likely attributable to one new development (Urby) and is not indicative of increasing rents near or in smaller portions of the Study Area. A short-term trend in increasing rents is observable from 2018, likely due to new market rate development and those that would be facilitated by the Proposed Actions. This trend would likely continue with the identified No-Build developments in the Study Area and the Proposed Actions would have a stabilizing effect on the housing market by allowing new housing and investment opportunities within the Project Area. As a result, the Proposed Actions do not have the potential to accelerate an existing trend.

The Proposed Actions would facilitate development on a vacant portion of one block in one of the most urbanized neighborhoods on Staten Island. The Study Area would continue to remain a mixed-use residential and commercial neighborhood. The Proposed Actions would require a minimum of 20 percent of new residences be affordable housing units, consistent with the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing program. The effects of unregulated housing resulting from the Proposed Actions would be eased by the provision of affordable housing for a preexisting population vulnerable to indirect residential displacement. Based on this information, the Proposed Actions would not result in a significant adverse neighborhood character impact in the area of socioeconomics conditions.

Open Space

The Proposed Actions would facilitate development of four buildings resulting in a net increase of 1,822 residents within the 0.50-mile Study Area. The 16.61 acres of No-Action open space in the Study Area would be comprised of 11.67 acres for passive use and approximately 4.94 acres for active use. The Study Area's No-Action residential open space ratio (OSR) would be 1.26 acres per 1,000 residents, with a passive OSR of 0.88 and an active OSR of 0.37.

In the With-Action Condition, the Open Space Study Area would have an OSR of 1.12. The OSR would be below the citywide community district median of 1.5 acres of total open space. The Study Area would have a passive OSR of 0.79 acres per 1,000 residents, more than 1.5 times

the planning goal of 0.5 acres per 1,000 residents, and an active OSR of 0.33 acres per 1,000 residents. Like the existing and No-Action conditions, the active OSR would be below the planning goal of 2.0 acres of active open space per 1,000 residents.

The overall OSR would decrease by more than 10 percent between the No-Action and With-Action Conditions and would result in a significant adverse open space impact in the area of active open space. Steep topography and limited area make the development of active recreation impractical on the development sites. Mitigations would be identified between the Draft and Final EIS to mitigate the impact to maximum extent practicable.

Because the Proposed Actions would introduce a new publicly-accessible open space and the passive space OSR would remain more than 1.5 times the City's goal of 0.5 acres of passive space per 1,000 residents, the Proposed Actions would not result in a significant adverse open space impact in the area of passive open space. The Applicant and other nearby recent or on-going developments (such as Empire Outlets and Lighthouse Point) would provide new, high quality open spaces available for public use. The Study Area has a variety of open spaces with programming available for a variety of age groups and users, while planned projects such as the Tompkinsville Esplanade and future phases of the Stapleton Waterfront (destination open space resources) would provide additional passive and active open resources accessible from the Project Area.

While the Proposed Actions would decrease the open space acreage per 1,000 residents, the Proposed Actions would not directly impact any open space resources or significantly alter the built character of nearby open space resources. The Study Area is currently deficient of active open space, which would continue in the No-Action and With-Action conditions.

Based on this information, the Proposed Actions would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character as a result of availability and utilization of open space resources.

Shadows

The Proposed Actions would facilitate the development of four buildings up to 298 feet tall. The detailed shadow assessment shows that incremental shadow has the potential to be cast on the St. George Waterfront Esplanade on the December 21 and March 21 CEQR analysis days. During times of project-generated shadow on the esplanade, bench seating or recreational facilities would continue to be available in sunlit areas in the immediate area. The December 21 analysis day is representative of cold-weather conditions, when demand for open space is lower than warmer months. No project-generated shadow would be cast on this resource on the May 6 or June 21 analysis days, which are representative of warm-weather conditions and peak usage. The incremental shadow therefore would not significantly affect the character of the St. George Waterfront Esplanade, which would continue to be a waterfront open space providing sweeping views of Upper Bay and the Manhattan, Brooklyn, and New Jersey skylines. Accordingly, the Proposed Actions do not have the potential to result in a significant adverse neighborhood character impact in the area of shadows, and no further analysis is warranted.

Historic and Cultural Resources

As part of the historic and cultural resources assessment, a request was sent to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) for comment on the architectural and archaeological significance of the Project Area. LPC confirmed that there are no architectural or archaeological resources on the Project Area and there would be no potential to result in

significant adverse impacts to archaeological resources or eligible and/or designated architectural resources. Additionally, project-generated construction would occur at least 90 feet from any architectural historic resource. The Proposed Actions would alter the viewing context of some historic resources in the Historic and Cultural Resources Study Area (such as the Staten Island Family Courthouse) by introducing new buildings that would be visible in the background of views towards the nearby historic resources; these contextual changes are typical of new development in urban areas such as St. George and would not be significant per CEQR. Based on this information, the Proposed Actions would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character as a result of changes to the area's historic and cultural resources.

Urban Design and Visual Resources

Four mixed-use buildings would be developed in the With-Action Condition on vacant lots and on two lots that each contain a two-family residence. While the Project Area's hillside has already been compromised by the Castleton Park Apartments development, the Proposed Actions would facilitate the development of a variety of building setbacks and design details that would respect the hillside and provide visual interest along a "Commercial Street" in the Special St. George District. At the street level, there would be active ground floor uses with glazing to activate the street. The applicant's privately owned, publicly accessible open space would anchor the northern end of Stuyvesant Place similar to how Baker Square and Barrett Triangle anchor the southern termination of Stuyvesant Place. The architectural and urban design elements would introduce additional visual variety to the Project Site and enhance current urban design conditions with high quality architecture and modern construction materials.

The Proposed Actions would also facilitate street widening along Projected Development Site 1's frontage along Stuyvesant Place, and sidewalk widening along its Hamilton Avenue frontage. New developments will be required to coordinate with both the Department of Buildings and the Department of Transportation as part of the Builder's Pavement Plan process, which would improve sidewalk conditions along the street frontages of each development site.

The Proposed Development has the potential to change the context of some views of the Upper New York Bay that exist across from the Development Site. However, because of the hillside landscape of the St. George, views in other areas of St. George across the Upper Bay would continue to be available from many locations within the Study Area. The Proposed Actions would not obstruct view corridors along the street network, including along Nicholas Street or Hamilton Avenue.

Based on this information, the Proposed Actions would not result in any significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character in relation to urban design and visual resources.

Transportation

The Proposed Actions would not modify the existing patterns of vehicular traffic through the Study Area. While new development would generate additional vehicular traffic, traffic would use existing vehicular routes to access the development sites. Richmond Terrace would continue to function as the primary street through the Study Area. Stuyvesant Place would continue to function as a local street lined with civic uses and supportive retail. The Proposed Actions do not involve mapping new streets, changing street directions, or other changes to transportation that have the potential to significantly change movement patterns through the Study Area, and would not significantly modify the neighborhood's transportation character.

The Proposed Actions have the potential to result in a significant adverse transportation impact, and may warrant changes to traffic controls or geometry due to project-generated traffic volumes. The transportation impacts would be mitigated to the greatest extent practicable.

The Proposed Actions would assist to further activate Richmond Terrace – the principal transportation route through the Study Area – with additional pedestrian traffic. This additional pedestrian traffic would further activate the immediate area and provide new opportunities for local commercial establishments to capture passing trade. New local retail uses would be expected to draw residents and other pedestrians from the surrounding area, consistent with the goals of North Shore 2030 and the Special St. George District.

Noise

Based on site observations, traffic is the main contributor to ambient noise levels within around the Project Area. The rear of the development sites faces the Castleton Park Apartments, which has an open plaza above an enclosed parking garage. Additional noise generators include playground equipment at the Castleton Park Apartments and horns from existing nautical operations in Upper Bay.

The Proposed Actions would introduce four residential buildings with ground floor retail space. These four buildings would not introduce new noise sources atypical of new mixed development with residential uses above ground floor retail. With the proposed (E)-Designation for noise, sensitive receptors in the four buildings would achieve an acceptable interior noise environment. Project-generated traffic would travel along the existing street network, and would not significantly alter traffic circulation patterns or result in a doubling of passenger car-equivalents on any street. Therefore, the Proposed Actions do not have the potential to result in a significant adverse neighborhood character impact in the area of noise.