A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses the RWCDS With-Action scenario's potential effects on neighborhood character. As defined in the 2014 *City Environmental Quality Review (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, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation, and/or noise conditions; but not all of these elements contribute to neighborhood character in all cases. For a proposed project, a neighborhood character assessment under CEQR first identifies the defining features of the neighborhood and then evaluates whether the project has the potential to affect these defining features, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical analysis areas. Thus, to determine the effects of a proposed project on neighborhood character, the salient features of neighborhood character are considered together. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare, and it would be unusual that, in the absence of a significant adverse 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 adverse impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood's character is not automatically equivalent to a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character, but, rather, serves as an indication that neighborhood character should be examined.

As outlined in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the proposed action would include zoning map and text amendments to facilitate redevelopment of the two-block project area owned by the applicant. The RWCDS With-Action scenario for the proposed action consists of approximately 1,147 dwelling units (DUs), of which approximately 344 DUs would be affordable housing DUs (30 percent of the total); 64,807 gross square feet (gsf) of local retail space; approximately 128,128 gsf of parking space, consisting of 427 spaces, as required by zoning; and approximately 26,000 sf of publicly-accessible open space. A legal instrument, such as a Restrictive Declaration, would be adopted as part of the proposed action. It would bind the project area to providing and maintaining the 26,000 sf of privately-owned publicly-accessible open space as a condition for the change in use, as detailed in plans included with the application. As it would dedicate the location of the open space, the building footprint would be limited to areas outside the open space area and applicable zoning restrictions. As the project area is vacant, apart from temporary equipment/vehicle storage and is assumed to remain vacant under RWCDS No-Action conditions, the project increment for the project area is identical to the development program for RWCDS With-Action conditions. The build year for the proposed action is 2019.

This chapter includes a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character, which was prepared in conformance with the *CEQR Technical Manual*. This chapter describes the defining features of the existing neighborhood character and considers the potential effects of the RWCDS With-

Action scenario on these defining features. This assessment relies on the technical analyses presented in other chapters of this EIS.

B. PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

The proposed action is not expected to result in significant adverse effects related to neighborhood character. The proposed action would facilitate the development of apartment buildings with ground floor retail uses and upper floor residences on two blocks that currently do not contain any permanent structures and are vacant apart from temporary vehicle and equipment storage uses. For analysis purposes, it is assumed the project area would remain vacant. As such, the action-generated development would complement the area's trend of predominantly residential development and neighborhood commercial and community facilities replacing vacant and underutilized industrial properties that has occurred in recent years and is projected to continue under No-Action conditions. Likewise, the rezoning of the project area would be similar to other recent rezonings to the east and west intended to facilitate new mixed-use development. Unlike large-scale mid-twentieth century tower-in-a-park developments found in parts of the study area, these more recent developments have generally been high lot coverage streetwall buildings reintroducing development more contextual with earlier development history. The RWCDS With-Action scenario's market rate housing would introduce a residential population whose average income would be higher than the overall average income in the socioeconomic conditions study area, but similar to the average income of the new population expected to reside in the area's market rate housing in the future without the proposed action. The affordable housing units added by the RWCDS With-Action scenario would maintain a diverse demographic composition within the study area and would complement existing rent-protected units and affordable housing that is expected to be constructed at other sites under No-Action conditions. The proposed action would also provide a publicly-accessible open space in an area where there has not been a commensurate growth in such resources comparable to the new residential development.

A preliminary assessment of the effects of the proposed action, identified that the neighborhood character study area is defined by a few key components, including its mix of land uses, building types, and the aforementioned land use and socioeconomic trends; varying street patterns; and its location in an urbanized area with subway stations. As described elsewhere in this EIS, the RWCDS With-Action scenario would not result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; historic and cultural resources; shadows; urban design and visual resources; or noise. The action-generated significant adverse transportation impacts would not affect any defining feature of neighborhood character. In addition, a combination of moderate effects of the proposed action would not create a significant adverse neighborhood character impact.

C. METHODOLOGY

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any of the following technical areas: land use; socioeconomic conditions; open space; historic and

cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; shadows; transportation; or noise. The *CEQR Technical Manual* states that, even if a proposed project does not have the potential to result in a significant adverse impact in any specific technical area(s), an assessment of neighborhood character may be required if the project would result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that may cumulatively affect neighborhood character. A "moderate" effect is generally defined as an effect considered reasonably close to the significant adverse impact threshold for a particular technical analysis area.

A preliminary assessment of neighborhood character determines whether changes expected in other technical analysis areas may affect a defining feature of neighborhood character. 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 context, the more sensitive it is to change. A neighborhood that has a more varied context is typically able to tolerate greater change without experiencing significant adverse impacts. If there is no potential for the proposed project to affect the defining features of neighborhood character, a detailed assessment is not warranted.

Study Area

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character is typically consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas assessed under CEQR that contribute to the defining features of the neighborhood. Therefore, the study area for this analysis is the same as that used for the analysis of land use, zoning, and public policy, which extends a quarter-mile from the project area boundaries, but for analysis purposes has been modified and expanded as appropriate to include entire blocks. As noted in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," As shown in Figures 2-1 and 2-2, the land use study area encompasses southeastern Williamsburg and northern Bedford-Stuyvesant, extending as far west as Bedford Avenue, as far south as Myrtle Avenue, as far east as Broadway and Marcus Garvey Boulevard, and as far north as Montrose Avenue, aka New Montrose Avenue. This area possesses a heterogeneous mix of land uses including residential, institutional, commercial, and industrial. There are also a significant number of vacant and underutilized properties.

D. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

Defining Features

The neighborhood character of the study area is defined by a few key components, including its wide variety of land uses and building types, an ongoing trend toward residential uses on formerly vacant and underutilized commercial and industrial properties, its interface of different street patterns, including rectilinear grids, diagonal streets, and superblocks, and its public transportation nodes with multiple subway stations along two separate corridors.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the project area blocks have been vacant in recent years, though the Southern Block is currently striped with parking spaces and it is currently being used for temporary parking/vehicle storage for construction equipment and supplies and the Northern Block is

currently used as temporary equipment/vehicle storage. The project area is trapezoidal-shaped as Union Avenue has a diagonal alignment relative to the other streets bounding the project area blocks.

Predominant land uses within the study area include residential, institutional, commercial, and industrial uses; many of the area's public facilities serve residents of study area and surrounding communities. These institutional uses are spread throughout the study area without any distinct concentrations along major thoroughfares. The parts of the study area located east of Broadway and south of Flushing Avenue include a concentration of large scale uses on superblocks; these predominantly consist of multi-family elevator residential uses in midrise and high-rise towers, low coverage lots with substantial open spaces and surface parking (tower-in-a-park configurations), but also include Woodhull Medical Center and Sternberg Park. As a contrast, blocks in the center of the study area have a more fine grain character with more diverse uses and a higher proportion of smaller lot sizes. These include detached low-rise residences and mid-rise apartment buildings. Commercial uses are concentrated along portions of Broadway and Flushing Avenue. Industrial uses are scattered throughout the study area with a particular concentration directly east and south of the project area. There is also a considerable amount of vacancy throughout the study area, including vacant lots and partially and fully vacant buildings. The street grid is generally rectilinear throughout the study area, albeit with some diagonal streets and the aforementioned superblocks. However, the alignment of street grid blocks varies in different parts of the study area, with one pattern predominant south of Flushing Avenue and east of Broadway and a different pattern north of Flushing Avenue and west of Broadway.

The area's long time major industrial employer, Pfizer, Inc., which had been present in the area since 1849 when it was established at the corner of Bartlett Street and Harrison Avenue, gradually decreased its presence over the past several decades until finally ceasing all local operations in 2008. The project area blocks were formerly used by Pfizer, and buildings on the site were demolished gradually over a number of years; clearance of buildings on the Northern Block began in the 1950s and was completed by 1991 and on the Southern Block, after Pfizer operations ceased there in 1989, demolition was completed by the mid-1990s. Former Pfizer buildings in the area include 630 Flushing Avenue, the main plant building now occupied by various commercial and light industrial tenants, and the former Pfizer laboratory building now occupied by a public charter school.

As discussed in Chapter 3, "Socioeconomic Conditions," the study area is a predominantly low-income area, However, the median household income has been growing at a much faster rate in the study area (11.6 percent) than in Brooklyn (2.8 percent), while it has actually decreased in New York City as a whole. The lower median household income in the study area is likely at least partially attributable to the concentration of a number of publicly assisted housing complexes, accounting for approximately 27 percent of all housing units within the study area. In addition, there are a number of other subsidized or rent-regulated housing developments in the study area. The housing stock within the study area has grown considerably and the area has increasing become a more desirable residential area with a diversified housing stock. Between 2000 and 2014, more than 4,400 housing units were added to the study area for an increase of approximately 25 percent, a higher rate than experienced in Brooklyn (8.8 percent) and New York City (6.5 percent) as a whole. There is an existing trend toward more costly market rate housing in the study area in

both the Williamsburg and Bedford-Stuyvesant portions of the study area, with higher market rate rents in the former but greater proportional increase since 2010 in the latter (refer to Chapter 3 for details). As such, a defining feature of the study area is its socioeconomic heterogeneity, with both lower income households and those of higher income, particularly in newer market rate housing.

There are a number of parks located within and in close proximity to project area as discussed in Chapter 5, "Open Space". These are generally consist of playgrounds and small open spaces providing passive recreation, including Arlington Square, PS 168 Playground (aka Bartlett Playground), and De Hostos Playground. There are a number of other parks throughout the study area, however open space is not a defining feature of the neighborhood's character. Likewise, as this is a highly-urbanized area, there are no significant natural features.

Historic and cultural resources are not a defining feature of the study area; as noted in Chapter 7, "Historic and Cultural Resources," there are no architectural or archaeological resources in the project area or within a 400-foot radius.

As discussed in Chapter 8, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," the study area is comprised of several different, intersecting street grid patterns, as it overlaps parts of different neighborhoods each with its own distinct street layout and orientation. Building use, type, and bulk characteristics vary widely across the study area. On the blocks west of the project area includes small house lots on some blocks where residential uses predominate but also includes several blocks with large lot institutional properties; the blocks north of the project area are mostly occupied by large lot residential and commercial buildings, including high rise tower-in-a-park buildings; the blocks east, northeast, and southeast of the project area, known as the Broadway Triangle, feature a variety of high-lot coverage, streetwall buildings at a fine grain scale including low-rise rowhouses, midrise apartment buildings, and industrial and commercial buildings, but with a number of vacant lots interrupting the continuity of the built environment and the area also includes larger neighborhood institutional uses; and the blocks south of the project area contain a range of both large superblock midrise residential and non-residential land uses and low-rise residential and mixed-use buildings on smaller lots.

There are no significant visual resources in the study area. This is due in part to the elevated subway line which extends above Broadway and large residential complexes on superblocks, which block distant views. In addition, the differing orientations of the street grid patterns found in the study area limits the visual corridors formed by public streets. Overall, there are few views of notable features, apart from those on public streets immediately adjacent to buildings with some prominent architectural elements such as All Saints Roman Catholic Church and the Marcy Avenue Armory, which are dispersed across the study area.

The character of the study area, like that of many neighborhoods in New York City, is, in part, defined by the levels of vehicular activity that exist. As is typical of rectilinear street networks with diagonal arterials, vehicular traffic flows are generally higher on the wider avenues that are spaced further apart than the narrow, more closely spaced streets. Pedestrian volumes are relatively moderate in the study area, but concentrated around subway station entrances that function as activity nexuses.

As noted in Chapter 15, "Noise," based on field measurements and noise monitoring, noise levels in the vicinity of the project area vary, with higher ambient noise levels along the wider avenues (falling within the "Marginally Unacceptable" noise exposure categories) and lower ambient noise levels on midblock narrow street locations (falling within the CEQR the "Acceptable" and "Marginally Acceptable" noise exposure categories). The highest recorded noise levels are at the Union Avenue/Flushing Avenue/Marcy Street/Gerry Street intersection adjoining the southwest corner of the project area (falling within the CEQR "Marginally Unacceptable (II)" noise exposure category, with slightly lower noise levels at the Harrison and Wallabout avenues intersection (falling within the CEQR "Marginally Unacceptable (I)" noise exposure category). These noise levels are typical of many neighborhoods in New York City and are not a defining feature of the neighborhood.

Assessment of the Potential to Affect the Defining Features of the Neighborhood

The sections below discuss potential changes resulting from the RWCDS/With-Action scenario in the following technical areas that are considered in the neighborhood character assessment pursuant to the *CEQR Technical Manual*: land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; shadows; transportation; and noise. The assessment uses the findings from the respective chapters of this EIS to identify whether the proposed action would result in any significant adverse impacts or moderate adverse effects in these technical areas and whether any such changes would have the potential to affect the defining features of neighborhood character. As described below, defining features of the study area neighborhood would not be affected either through the potential of any significant adverse impacts or a combination of moderate effects in these technical areas.

Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to potential effects of the RWCDS With-Action scenario on land use, zoning, and public policy, either singularly or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter. As noted in Chapter 2, no significant adverse impacts related to land use, zoning, or public policy would occur in the future with the proposed action. Furthermore, the redevelopment of the project area blocks, which currently do not include any structures or permanent uses, with apartment buildings containing ground floor retail and upper floor residences, would not create any incompatibilities with the area's variegated land use pattern. Rather, the action-generated development would complement the trend of predominantly residential development and neighborhood commercial and community facilities replacing vacant and underutilized industrial properties that has occurred in recent years and is projected to continue under No-Action conditions. Likewise, the rezoning of the project area would be similar to other recent rezonings to the east and west intended to facilitate new mixed-use development. The designation of the project area as a MIHA would providing for the mandatory inclusion of new affordable housing as part of the RWCDS With-Action scenario, consistent with the intent of MIH to facilitate the creation of new permanently affordable housing when land use actions create significant new housing potential.

Socioeconomic Conditions

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to potential effects of the RWCDS With-Action scenario on socioeconomic conditions, either singularly or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter. As discussed in Chapter 3, the RWCDS With-Action scenario would not result in significant adverse socioeconomic impacts.

As noted above, although the study area retains a significant amount of rent-protected housing occupied by lower-income households, there is a trend toward more costly market-rate housing beyond what is affordable to low- to middle-income households. This trend, which has been underway for a number of years, is expected to continue in the future without the proposed action. The RWCDS With-Action scenario's market rate housing would introduce a residential population whose average income would be higher than the overall average income in the socioeconomic conditions study area, but similar to the average income of the new population expected to reside in the area's market rate housing in the future without the proposed action. The affordable housing units added by the proposed action to the existing rent-controlled and rent-stabilized units would maintain a diverse demographic composition within the study area. The RWCDS With-Action scenario would complement existing rent-protected units and affordable housing that is expected to be constructed at other sites under No-Action conditions. In addition, the ground floor local retail generated by the RWCDS With-Action scenario, which would serve residents of the project area and surrounding community, would not significantly alter established commercial businesses and markets in the area.

Open Space

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to potential effects of the RWCDS With-Action scenario on open space, either singularly or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter. The RWCDS With-Action scenario would not have a direct impact on any open space resources in the study area. No open space would be displaced, and no significant shadows would be cast on any publicly accessible open spaces to a degree that would affect their utilization. The RWCDS With-Action scenario would not affect any particular user group, nor would it introduce a population with any unusual characteristics.

As described in Chapter 5, "Open Space," the RWCDS With-Action scenario would not result in a significant adverse impact on open space. While open space is not a defining feature of the neighborhood, as noted above, the RWCDS With-Action scenario would introduce a new 0.60-acre publicly accessible open space in the project area, thereby increasing the open space supply in an area with a growing residential population but where there has not been a commensurate growth in publicly-accessible open space. The effects of the RWCDS With-Action scenario on public open space would be ameliorated by the provision of the action-generated publicly-accessible open space. In addition, while the study area would continue to have open space ratios below the Citywide median, other qualitative considerations not accounted for in the quantitative analysis provided in Chapter 5 partly offset the study area's low open space ratios. These include the availability of 12 additional public open space resources located outside but in close proximity

to the study area and the presence of private open space resources that are available to some residents. Open spaces located outside, but in close proximity to the open space study area boundary include the 7.82-acre Herbert Von King Park, the 1.82-acre Taafe Playground, and other smaller facilities. Private open space resources within the study area include seven community gardens, the Beginning With Children charter school running track and playground, and open space and recreational facilities at the Lindsay Park apartment complex. The action-generated buildings would provide private recreational facilities for building residents as required by the Quality Housing Program zoning regulations.

Shadows

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to potential shadow effects of the RWCDS With-Action scenario, either singularly or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter. As discussed in Chapter 6, "Shadows," the incremental shadows from RWCDS With-Action scenario would result in incremental shadow coverage on two area open space resources, De Hostos Playground (associated with IS 318) and the Union/Marcy Avenue Greenstreet (a landscaped area with seating located in the mapped street right-of-way separating the two streets as they converge between Wallabout Street and Gerry Street/Flushing Avenue). These action-generated shadows would not significantly affect the utilization or enjoyment of any sunlight-sensitive resources, and all open spaces would continue to receive a minimum of four to six hours of direct sunlight throughout the growing season. In addition, as noted above, open space resources are not a defining character of the neighborhood.

Historic and Cultural Resources

The RWCDS With-Action scenario would not adversely affect the neighborhood's defining historic and cultural resources, either singularly or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter. As discussed in Chapter 7, there are no architectural or archaeological resources of concern on or within the vicinity of the project area. The NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission advises that the proposed action would not result in any significant adverse historic and cultural resources impacts.

Urban Design and Visual Resources

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to potential effects of the RWCDS With-Action scenario on urban design and visual resources, either singularly or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter. As described in Chapter 8, the RWCDS With-Action scenario would not result in a significant adverse impact on urban design or visual resources. Compared to the future without the proposed action, the project area would be activated with new streetwall buildings and publicly-accessible open space, enlivening the pedestrian experience of the area.

The RWCDS With-Action scenario would enhance the urban design character of the neighborhood, building upon the area's position as an urban community well-served by transit and at the intersection of three vibrant neighborhoods, i.e., Williamsburg, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and

Bushwick. With the redevelopment of two vacant blocks with new active uses, the proposed action would provide a more connected urban fabric. The publicly-accessible open space would also reduce the overall mass of the buildings, breaking the blocks into three distinct sections, i.e., buildings along the avenues separated by the central open space forming a midblock plaza corridor. The resulting partial block footprints of contiguous buildings, together with the varied streetwall and overall building heights that would be controlled by the project area's split zoning district conditions, would provide a scale more similar to the neighborhood's variegated mix of buildings sizes and heights, as compared to a more typical full block development with buildings of uniform volumes.

Transportation

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to potential effects of the RWCDS With-Action scenario on transportation, either singularly or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter. As described in Chapter 12, "Transportation," the RWCDS With-Action scenario would result in significant adverse traffic impacts, but would not result in significant adverse parking, transit, and pedestrian impacts. As discussed in Chapter 20, "Mitigation," the significant adverse traffic impacts could be fully mitigated.

As noted above, the character of the study area, like that of many neighborhoods in New York City, is, in part, defined by the levels of vehicular activity that exist, with traffic volumes typical of urban areas on arterials roadways such as Flushing, Union, and Harrison avenues. Given this existing heavily trafficked condition, the introduction of new vehicle trips, despite the anticipated impacts that are disclosed in Chapter 12, would not represent a significant adverse impact on the character of the neighborhood. While the RWCDS With-Action scenario would also increase pedestrian volumes on street in the vicinity of the project area, as noted in Chapter 12 existing pedestrian activity in generally light reflecting the vacant condition of the project area.

Noise

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to potential noise effects of the RWCDS With-Action scenario, either singularly or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter. As described in Chapter 15, the RWCDS With-Action scenario would not result in significant adverse noise impacts.

Noise level increases in proximity to the project area in the future with the Proposed Project would not be perceptible, with a maximum 1.8-dBA increase in L_{eq} value anticipated (refer to Chapter 15). The highest noise levels would continue to be experienced to the southwest of the project area, at the multi-leg intersection of Flushing, Marcy, and Union avenues and Gerry Street, as under existing conditions. The noise levels in proximity to the project area are typical of many neighborhoods in New York City and would remain so in the With-Action condition; noise is not a defining feature of the neighborhood, and the incremental increase in noise levels resulting from the RWCDS With-Action condition would not constitute a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.