Chapter 17 : Neighborhood Character

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses the potential for the Proposed Actions to result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character, in conformance to 2014 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual* guidelines. Per Chapter 21, Section 100 of 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, urban design, visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomics, traffic, and/or noise. As prescribed by guidance in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a neighborhood character assessment must consider how elements of the environment combine to create the context and feeling of a neighborhood and how a project may affect that context and feeling. These different elements of neighborhood character are considered together to determine a project's effects on neighborhood character.

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the Applicant is seeking a set of Proposed Actions in the form of discretionary approvals to include zoning map and text amendments, a large-scale general development (LSGD) special permit, a City Map Amendment to re-establish a portion of Beach 52nd Street south of Rockaway Beach Boulevard to reconnect with Rockaway Freeway, and public funding and/or financing from various City and New York State agencies and/or programs related to affordable housing development on the Project Site. The Project Site is situated in Queens Community District 14 (CD 14). The Proposed Actions would facilitate the Proposed Project to consist of an approximately 2,371,000 gross square feet (gsf) development on the Project Site, comprised of 11 buildings with approximately 2,200 income-restricted dwelling units (DUs), of which 1,927 DUs would be income-restricted up to 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI), to include approximately 201 DUs set aside for Affordable Independent Residences for Seniors (AIRS) senior housing, with the remaining 273 DUs restricted to income levels not exceeding 130% of AMI. In addition to the residential DUs, the Proposed Project would include approximately 72,000 gsf of retail space, including a fitness center and a supermarket, approximately 77,000 gsf of community facility space, approximately 24,000 square feet (sf) of publicly-accessible open space, and approximately 973 accessory parking spaces.

II. PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

The Proposed Project would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. Uses in the neighborhood surrounding the Project Site are primarily large-scale publicly-funded housing developments, with sporadic local retail and light industrial and manufacturing facilities closest to the elevated Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) A train line. The Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts on land use, zoning and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources; or shadows.

While the Proposed Actions would have significant adverse impacts related to schools, publicly funded child care, open space, transportation (traffic and pedestrians) and noise, these elements do not define the study area's character and reflect baseline conditions such as high utilization levels in schools and physical condition of transportation infrastructure. Consultation with relevant agencies is ongoing to identify reasonable and feasible mitigation measures that would fully or partially mitigate the significant adverse impacts. In addition, the Proposed Project would provide play areas and passive open space accessible to the public. The combination of the moderate effects from each of the other technical areas would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character. As such, the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

III. METHODOLOGY

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a preliminary analysis of neighborhood character is appropriate if 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.

In conformance with guidance in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a preliminary assessment is used to determine whether changes expected in other technical areas may affect a contributing element of neighborhood character. The *CEQR Technical Manual* states that the preliminary assessment of neighborhood character should answer the following questions:

1. What are the defining features of the neighborhood?
2. Does the project 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 in relevant technical areas?

Consistent with guidance in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the Proposed Project would result in significant adverse impacts related to transportation, therefore the Applicant conducted a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character. The assessment provides a description of the existing conditions and defining features of the neighborhood, and then analyzes whether the probable effects of the Proposed Project would result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

If there is no potential for the Proposed Project or Proposed Actions to affect defining features of neighborhood character to result in a significant adverse impact, then there is no need to conduct a detailed assessment.

IV. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

Defining Features

Project Site

The Project Site is located in the Edgemere neighborhood of Queens along the Rockaway Peninsula, and is comprised of three tax lots: Lot 1 of Block 15842, Lot 1 of Block 15843 (the “North Parcels”), and Lot 1 of Block 15857 (the “South Parcel), which have a total lot area of 409,928 square feet (sf) (approximately 9.34 acres). The North Parcels are bound by Beach Channel Drive to the north, Rockaway Beach Boulevard to the south, Beach 50th Street to the east, and Beach 53rd Street to the west. The South Parcel is bound by Rockaway Beach Boulevard to the north, Beach 52nd Street to the west, Rockaway Freeway to the south, and Lot 7 of Block 15857 to the east. The currently vacant Project Site is primarily located on a superblock that was formerly occupied by a hospital, which represented a use and function that was largely unrelated to surrounding uses.

Study Area

In conformance with the 2014 *CEQR Technical Manual,* the study area for the preliminary analysis of neighborhood character is consistent with Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” and includes areas within a 0.25-mile study area from the Project Site (see **Figure 17-1: Aerial Map**). The study area is generally bounded by Alameda Avenue extending to Norton Avenue to the north of the Project Site, Beach 58th Street to the west, Beach 45th Street to the east, and to the Atlantic Ocean shoreline towards the south.

The built form within the study area is mostly concentrated along narrow streets, running north to south, with Beach Channel Drive and Rockaway Beach Boulevard, classified as wide streets as defined by the Zoning Resolution of the City of New York, running east and west. The neighborhood's streets and developments follow the grid pattern and there are many superblocks with multi-building residential developments.

A defining feature of the study area is the predominantly residential land use, primarily comprised of large-scale public housing.

Residential uses east of the Project Site are comprised almost entirely of one- to two-story detached single-family homes, interspersed with vacant lots. North and west of the Project Site, residential developments have higher density and are primarily characterized by four to nineteen-story multi-family buildings, including the four- to nine-story New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Ocean Bay Apartments, as well as the four- to nineteen-story Arverne View apartment complex towards the southwest. Land uses south of the Project Site along Rockaway Beach Boulevard consist primarily of one-story industrial and/or light manufacturing facilities. Vacant lots, such as the Project Site, are prominent south of Rockaway Beach Boulevard and the MTA elevated train line which runs above Rockaway Freeway. Density and height of the built form are concentrated primarily with the NYCHA residential housing in the study area surrounding the Project Site.

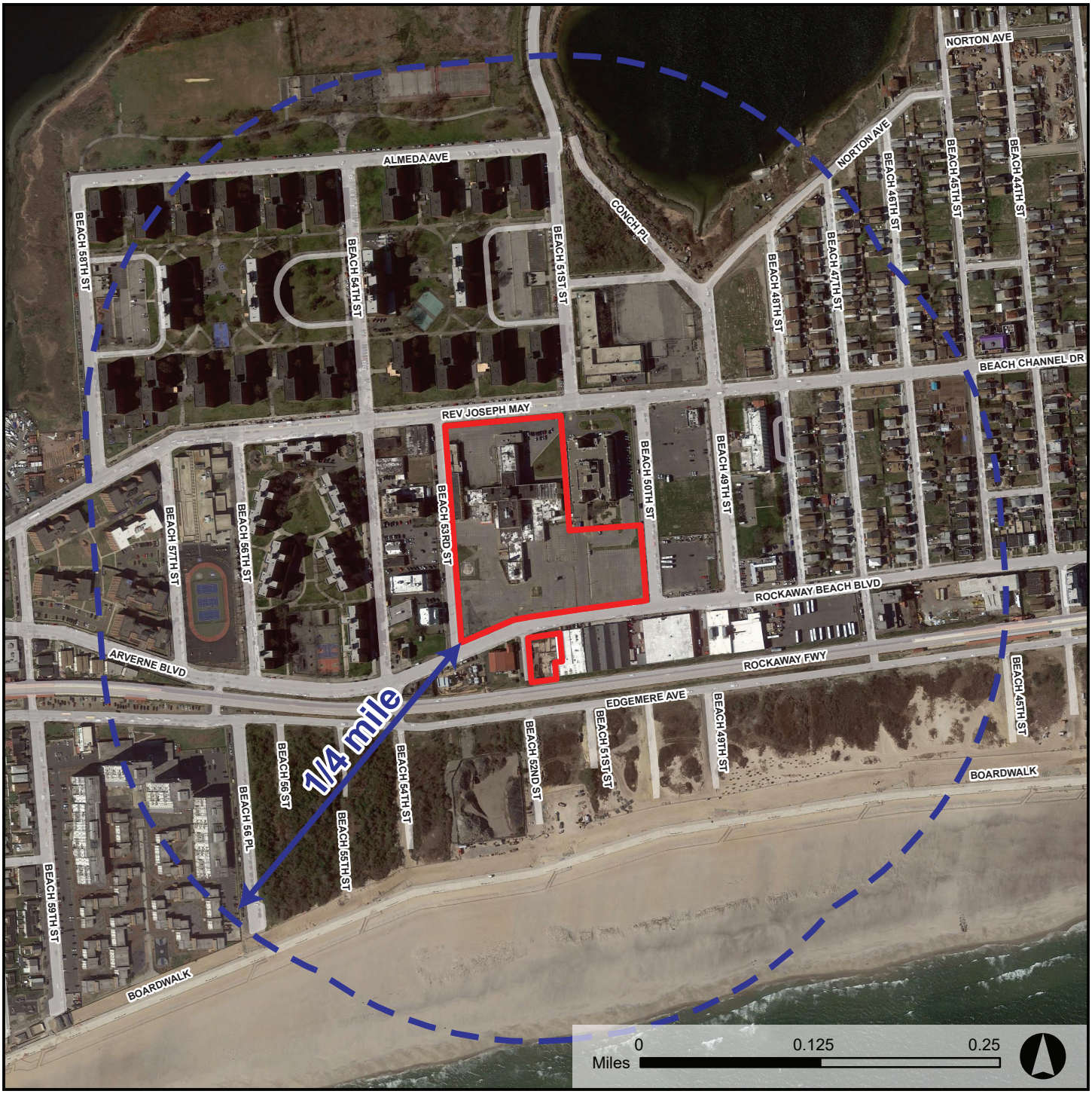
Residential uses in the study area are supported by local community facilities and open space resources. Public facilities and institutional uses in the study area include two public schools: P.S. 105, located to the northeast of the Project Site at 420 Beach 51st Street, and Goldie Maple Academy located to the west of the Project Site at 36-5 Beach 56th Street. Located east of the Project Site is an assisted living facility (Rockaway Care Center), a retirement home (Seaview Manor Home for Adults), and the New York City (NYC) Fire Department (FDNY) Emergency Medical Services Station 47. Religious facilities located to the south of the Project Site include the Solid Rock Seventh Day Adventist Church and Rockaway Islamic Center. A nursing home (Lawrence Nursing Care Center) and public library (Queens Library at Arverne) are located immediately west of the Project Site.

Open space and recreational resources located within the study area include Conch Playground and Rockaway Community Park to the north, Edgemere Urban Renewal Park to the east, Arverne Playground and Cardozo Playground to the west. Natural features in the study area include the dunes south of Rockaway Freeway, the Atlantic Ocean and associated Rockaway Beach and Boardwalk, Jamaica Bay, and the Rockaway Community Park.

A small cluster of industrial uses is located directly adjacent to the east from the South Parcel of the Project Site, south of Rockaway Beach Boulevard. These include a moving and storage warehouse and a hardwood warehouse.

Local businesses are inadequate in addressing the needs of residents. Retail storefronts are found primarily on Beach Channel Drive and Rockaway Beach Boulevard— including fast food establishments located on the corner of Beach 49th Street and Beach Channel Drive, a medical association and medical office on Beach 54th Street between Rockaway Beach Boulevard and Beach Channel Drive, and local retail stores on Rockaway Beach Boulevard between Beach 52nd Street and Beach 54th Street.

Two MTA bus facilities are located east of the Project Site: the John F. Kennedy (JFK) bus depot located on Rockaway Beach Boulevard, between Beach 49th Street and Beach 47th Street, and the Far Rockaway bus depot (primarily a surface parking facility) is located across the Rockaway Beach Boulevard from the MTA bus depot—adjacent to the eastern side of the Project Site along Beach 50th Street.



Source: GoogleEarth Pro

Project Site

0.25-Mile Surrounding Area

AERIAL MAP

Figure 17-1

Potential to Affect the Defining Features of the Neighborhood

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

Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to the potential effects of the Proposed Project on land use, zoning, and public policy, either independently or in conjunction with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed herein.

As described in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," no significant adverse impacts related to land use, zoning, or public policy would occur as a result of the Proposed Actions.

Consistent with large-scale residential use that defines the stud area, the Proposed Project would introduce approximately 2,200 income-restricted DUs to the study area, of which 1,927 DUs would be income-restricted up to 80% of AMI, with approximately 201 DUs set aside for senior housing. As discussed in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," the affordable housing units provided by the Proposed Project would be in accordance with the Mayor's *Housing New York 2.0* (HNY 2.0). Additionally, the Proposed Project would include new retail and community facility space for residents and community members. The new community facility space programmed for medical office use would serve to offset the deficiency of health care services in the study area.

The Project Site is located within the City's Coastal Zone Boundary and subject to review for consistency with the policies of the NYC Waterfront Revitalization Program (WRP). As described in Chapter 2, the WRP consistency assessment determined that the Proposed Project would be promote the City's adopted resiliency policies and WRP.

Socioeconomic Conditions

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to the potential effects of the Proposed Project on socioeconomic conditions, either independently or in conjunction with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed herein. As described in Chapter 3, "Socioeconomic Conditions," the Proposed Project would not result in a significant adverse impact on socioeconomic conditions.

The Proposed Project would introduce approximately 2,200 DUs, of which 1,927 DUs would be affordable at 80% of AMI and the remaining 273 DUs would be income-restricted at up to 130% AMI. The new population generated by the Proposed Project would introduce incomes up to $60,360 for households occupying one-bedroom DUs restricted at 80% AMI, and incomes up to $138,080 for households occupying three-bedroom units restricted at 130% AMI. The Proposed Project would not introduce a trend towards increasing rents and new market rate development that is not already observable in or near the study area resulting from the No-Action developments or No-Action condition on the Project Site.

Open Space

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be significantly affected due to the potential effects of the Proposed Project on open space, either independently or in conjunction with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed herein.

As described in Chapter 5, "Open Space," the residential study area for the open space assessment was based on a 0.5-mile distance from the Project Site and the non-residential study area was based on a 0.25-mile distance from the Project Site. Under existing conditions, the inventory of open space resources

include Rockaway Beach and Boardwalk, Rockaway Community Park, Arverne Playground, Cardozo Playground, and Conch Playground, whose total area was utilized to determine the total publicly-accessible open space serving the population within the residential, or 0.5-mile, study area.

For the residential study area, the active open space ratio (OSR) in the With-Action condition would be 0.70 acres of active open space per 1,000 residents, which would remain below the benchmark of 2.00 acres of active open space per 1,000 residents as in the No-Action condition. The passive OSR in the With-Action condition would be 0.81 acres of passive open space per 1,000 residents, which is greater than the CEQR benchmark of 0.50 acres of passive open space per 1,000 residents.

For the non-residential study area, the With-Action condition would have a passive OSR of 5.91 acres of open space per 1,000 workers, which is greater than the benchmark OSR of 0.15 acres of passive open space per 1,000 workers.

The Proposed Project would result in a significant adverse impact on open space resources should there be a reduction in the OSR by more than five percent. The 12.78% reduction in the active OSR in the residential study area, from 0.80 in the No-Action condition to 0.70 in the With-Action condition, would result in a significant adverse active open space impact. Substantial open space resources located within one mile of Project Site are available to residents in the residential study area. These resources were considered qualitatively since they are either outside of the residential study area or not publicly accessible and do not alter the determination of impact significance pertaining to the adequacy of open space resources in connection with the Proposed Project. However, the increased user population introduced by the Proposed Project to result in a significant adverse impact on open space resources would not result in changes to existing open space resources that would cause significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character. As described in Chapter 20, “Mitigation,” consultation with the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) and New York City Department of Parks and Recreation is ongoing to identify reasonable and feasible measures that would fully or partially mitigate the significant adverse impact on active open space.

Shadows

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to the potential effects of the Proposed Project on shadows, either independently or in conjunction with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed herein. As described in Chapter 6, “Shadows,” the Proposed Project would not result in a significant adverse impact due to shadows on sunlight sensitive resources.

Historic and Cultural Resources

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to the potential effects of the Proposed Project on historic and cultural resources, either independently or in conjunction with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed herein. As described in Chapter 7, “Historic and Cultural Resources,” the Proposed Project would not result in a significant adverse impact to historic and/or cultural resources. The NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) determined that the Project Site does not contain archaeological or architectural resources. Furthermore, LPC confirmed the absence of architectural resources within the 400-foot study area from the Project Site.

Urban Design and Visual Resources

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to the potential effects of the Proposed Project on urban design and visual resources, either independently or in conjunction with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed herein. As described in Chapter 8, “Urban Design and Visual Resources,” the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts on urban design or visual resources.

Though built features in the study area range from mid- to high-rise multi-family housing to bungalow-style single-family homes, the area is largely defined by large-scale housing development. NYCHA housing in the area surrounding the Project Site was built between the 1950s and 1970s and typified by brick mid- to high-rise towers with minimalist architectural features and partial lot coverage. The Ocean Bay Apartments (Bayside) include 24 buildings and range in height between seven and nine stories. The Ocean Bay Apartments (Oceanside) include seven buildings with heights of seven stories. The Beach 41st Street/Beach Channel Drive Houses include five buildings with a height of 13 stories. The Arverne View apartment complex is located approximately four blocks southwest of the Project Site and provides 1,100 DUs across 11 buildings, which range in height from four to 19 stories and have concrete building facades. Blocks include multiple buildings, which are oriented away from the street and are spread across privately-accessible grassy lawns with trees. By contrast, single- and two-family housing tends be bungalow-style and raised with heights of one or two stories.

As described in Chapter 8, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," the Proposed Project would result in built forms and building types that are similar in height but of greater density than buildings that currently exist in the study area. The LSGD special permit would allow for the design of the Proposed Project to respond to the existing built environment, such that the heights of the buildings are scaled up towards the center of the Project Site, with a decrease in height and density along the periphery (i.e. along Beach Channel Drive and Rockaway Beach Boulevard). The arrangement of lower buildings on the periphery of the Project Site would conform with the lower heights of buildings to the east, west, and south of the Project Site along Beach Channel Drive and Rockaway Beach Boulevard. Furthermore, the Proposed Project streetscape would incorporate forms consistent with the Proposed Project's coastal location, incorporate plantings appropriate to the marine climate, soils, and topography of the Rockway Peninsula, provide clear and open site lines, and include curb extensions that would foster a safe and distinct pedestrian experience. The internal street network would act to break up the existing superblock and reorient pedestrians towards the water. The site design would connect to the surrounding neighborhood by extending the existing street grid into the Project Site. New sidewalks on the Project Site would incorporate street trees and landscaped islands. In addition, the Proposed Project would feature several publicly-accessible outdoor plazas with passive features, including the Beach 51st Plaza between Building D and Building E, and two plazas at the northwest and southeast corners of Beach 52nd Street and Peninsula Way. The site design would raise the elevation at the center of the Project Site eight feet above the existing elevation to provide flood resiliency on the Project Site.

Overall, the changes to the Project Site due to the construction of the Proposed Project would serve to enhance the defining features of urban design with the introduction of publicly-accessible plaza and streetscapes, active ground floor retail uses, and improving public access to natural resources surrounding the Project Site to include the dunes south of Rockaway Freeway, the Atlantic Ocean and associated Rockaway Beach and Boardwalk, Jamaica Bay, and the Rockaway Community Park. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts of neighborhood character.

Transportation

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to the potential effects of the Proposed Project on transportation, either independently or in conjunction with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed herein. As described in Chapter 12, "Transportation," there would be significant adverse pedestrian impacts at sidewalks, crosswalks, and corners at the following locations:

- ***Sidewalks***
    - The north sidewalk on the east leg of the intersection of Beach 54th Street and Arverne Boulevard in the Weekday MD, Weekday PM, and Saturday MD peak hours.
    - The south sidewalk on the west leg of Beach 53rd Street and Beach Channel Drive in the Weekday AM, Weekday MD, Weekday PM, and Saturday MD peak hours.

  - The north sidewalk on the east leg of Beach 53rd Street and Rockaway Beach Boulevard in the Weekday AM, Weekday MD, Weekday PM, and Saturday MD peak hours.
  - The west sidewalk on the north leg of Beach 44th Street and Rockaway Freeway in the Weekday PM peak hour.
  - The north sidewalk on the west leg of Beach 56th Street and Arverne Boulevard in the Weekday AM peak hour.

- ***Crosswalks***
  - The south crosswalk at Beach 54th Street and Beach Channel Drive during the Weekday MD, Weekday PM, and Saturday MD peak hours.
  - The north crosswalk at Beach 54th Street and Arverne Boulevard during the Weekday PM and Saturday MD peak hours.

- ***Corners***
  - The southeast corner at Beach 59th Street and Arverne Boulevard during the Weekday AM and Weekday MD peak hours.
  - The northeast corner at Beach 54th Street and Arverne Boulevard during the Weekday PM and Saturday MD peak hours.

There would be sufficient available on-street parking capacity to accommodate the parking demand, and as such there would not be any parking-related significant adverse impacts. In addition, there would be no significant adverse impacts to subway transit associated with the Proposed Project.

With the Proposed Project, there would be significant adverse bus line-haul-related impacts on the Q22 Rockaway Beach Boulevard – Beach Channel Drive bus and the Q52-Select Bus Service (SBS) bus. The Q22 bus would operate above capacity in the westbound direction in the Weekday AM and Weekday PM peak hours, and the Q52 SBS bus would operate above capacity in the northbound direction in the Weekday AM peak hour and in the southbound direction in the Weekday PM peak hour as discussed in Chapter 20, “Mitigation.”

Traffic would increase in the future with the Proposed Actions. A detailed analysis of project-generated traffic impacts would occur 23 at signalized intersections and at 3 unsignalized intersections. Significant adverse traffic impacts would occur at the following intersections:

- ***Signalized***
  - The Proposed Project would result in significant adverse impacts at 22, 16, 18, and 11 signalized intersections during the Weekday AM, Weekday MD, Weekday PM, and Saturday MD peak hours, respectively.

- ***Unsignalized***
  - The Proposed Project would result in significant adverse impacts at 2, 3, 2, and 2 unsignalized intersections during the Weekday AM, Weekday MD, Weekday PM, and Saturday MD peak hours, respectively.

Potential measures identified to fully or partially mitigate the significant adverse impacts are discussed in in Chapter 20, “Mitigation.” The affected transportation elements are not defining features of the neighborhood. Therefore, significant adverse impacts on transportation elements would not significant alter neighborhood character.

Noise

As described in Chapter 15, “Noise,” significant adverse impacts due to traffic-generated noise are anticipated on nearby sensitive receptors during the peak AM and Saturday periods along Beach 53rd Street. In addition, for some sensitive receptors and construction periods, the duration and magnitude of the noise levels due to construction activities would constitute a significant adverse construction-period noise impact. Potential source and path controls to reduce or eliminate significant adverse construction-period noise impacts are discussed in Chapter 20, “Mitigation.” Additional reasonable and feasible mitigation measures to fully or partially mitigate the significant adverse noise impact will be explored in consultation with DCP between the Draft and Final EIS.