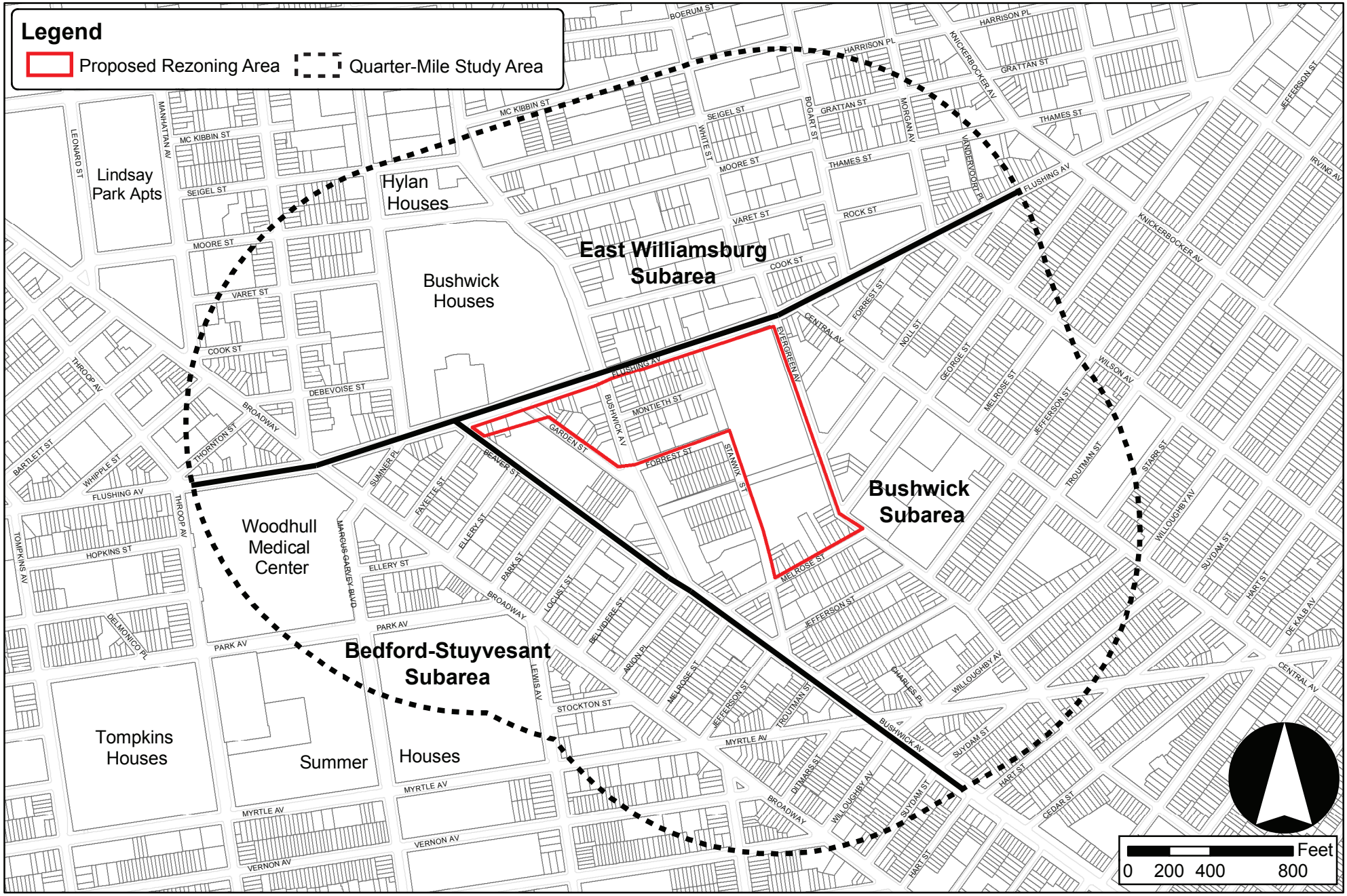
# A. INTRODUCTION

Neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give neighborhoods their distinct "personality." These elements may include a neighborhood's land use, urban design, visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomics, traffic, and/or noise. A neighborhood character assessment under CEQR considers how elements of the natural and built environment combine to create the context and feeling of a neighborhood and how a proposed action may affect that context and feeling. Thus, to determine a project's effects on neighborhood character, a neighborhood's contributing elements are considered together.

An assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when a proposed action has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any of several technical areas that are assessed separately in other EIS sections, or when the project may have moderate effects on several of the elements that define a neighborhood's character. The relevant technical areas are Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy; Socioeconomic Conditions; Open Space; Shadows; Historic and Cultural Resources; Urban Design and Visual Resources; Transportation; and Noise. A significant impact identified in one of these technical areas is not automatically equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character. Rather, it serves as an indication that neighborhood character should be examined.

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the Proposed Action includes zoning map and zoning text amendments affecting five full blocks and a portion of one block and a change in the official City map to map two new street segments in the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn Community District 4 requested by Forrest Lots, LLC. The proposed rezoning action affects the area bounded by Flushing Avenue on the north and Melrose Street and Forrest Street on the south, between Evergreen Avenue and Garden, Stanwix, and Beaver Streets (see Figure 14-1). A reasonable worst-case development scenario (RWCDS) for development associated with the Proposed Action has been identified. For environmental assessment purposes, projected developments, this environmental review will consider the reasonable RWCDS for the four applicant controlled projected development sites. Therefore, under the RWCDS, the Applicant's sites would result in a net increase of 54,182 square feet of local retail and 977 dwelling units, 195 of which are expected to be affordable to low-to-moderate-income households in accordance with the Inclusionary Housing Program. With the adoption of the Proposed Action, the proposed development is expected to be completed and occupied by 2016.

Four additional projected developments sites besides the applicant's proposed development within the proposed rezoning area that could result in up to 99 dwelling units, of which twenty would be affordable, per the Inclusionary Housing regulations, and 27,609 square feet of ground floor retail on Block 3152, Lots 36, 37, 38, 41, 43; Block 3138, Lots 20, 22, 32; Block 3137, Lot 56. There are also three potential development sites (sites that are also rezoned but which are less likely to be developed), which are discussed in detail in Chapter 1. The other lots in the proposed rezoning area are not expected to be redeveloped as a result of the Proposed Action within the 2016 analysis timeframe. Therefore, overall, the Proposed Action would result in an incremental increase of approximately 1,076 dwelling units, of which 215 would be affordable, per the Inclusionary Housing regulations, and approximately 74,194 square feet of local retail by 2016. As part of the Proposed Action, the portion of Stanwix Street between Montieth Street and Forrest Street and the portion of Noll Street between Stanwix Street and Evergreen Avenue would become mapped streets to complete the street network around the project site and reconnect the




**Rheingold Development Rezoning EIS**

**Figure 14-1**
**Neighborhood Character Study Area**

existing neighborhoods with the proposed development sites.

## B. PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

As described elsewhere in this EIS, the Proposed Action would not cause significant adverse impacts regarding land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; shadows; urban design and visual resources; or noise. The scale of significant adverse impacts to open space and traffic would not affect any defining feature of neighborhood character, nor would a combination of moderately adverse effects affect a neighborhood's defining features. The Proposed Action would therefore not have a significant adverse neighborhood character impact, as discussed below.

## C. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of a neighborhood character preliminary assessment is to determine whether changes expected in specified technical areas may adversely affect a contributing element of neighborhood character. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the assessment should answer the following two questions:

1. What are the defining features of the neighborhood(s)?
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?

The preliminary assessment therefore begins with a description of the existing conditions and defining features of the neighborhoods that comprise study area, followed by an assessment of the potential for the Proposed Action 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. If the assessment results indicate that the anticipated impacts and effects related to those technical areas would not have the potential to adversely affect any defining feature of neighborhood character, then, according to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a detailed analysis is not warranted.

### Study Area

The neighborhood character study area has been delineated in accordance with the CEQR statement that the study area for a preliminary analysis of neighborhood character is typically consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas assessed under CEQR that contribute to the defining elements of the neighborhood. As shown in Figure 14-1, it generally consists of the area within a quarter-mile radius of the proposed rezoning area. The study area boundaries are similar to those used for land use, zoning and public policy and urban design and visual resources, and for the preliminary assessment of socioeconomic conditions and open space, and they encompass the study areas used for shadows, transportation, and noise. The study area is broken up into three separate subareas to facilitate discussion. As shown in Figure 14-1, the East Williamsburg subarea is roughly bounded by Flushing Avenue on the south, Throop and Manhattan Avenues to the west, McKibbin Street to the north, and Vandervoort Place to the east. The Bedford-Stuyvesant subarea is roughly bounded by Suydam Street to the south, Throope Avenue and Marcus Garvey Boulevard to the west, Flushing Avenue to the north, and Bushwick Avenue to the east. The Bushwick subarea is roughly bounded by Hart Street to the south, Bushwick Avenue and Beaver Street to the west, Flushing Avenue to the north, and Wilson Avenue to the east.

# D. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

## Existing Neighborhood Character and Defining Features

### Proposed Rezoning Area

The primary land use of approximately half of the proposed rezoning area is warehouse use. This is due to the large warehouse occupying all of Block 3140 and the smaller warehouse occupying a large portion of Block 3152. The second most prevalent land use in the primary study area is parking and open storage uses, which take up 21 percent of the area. Most of the lots owned by the applicant are occupied by parking/open storage uses. The proposed rezoning area is also composed of approximately eight percent vacant land, six percent residential buildings, and four percent automotive uses. To a lesser degree, the area has scattered commercial, mixed-use, institutional, and industrial uses. A 1.09-acre park is located on Flushing Avenue between Beaver and Green Streets. Wide sidewalks are prevalent in the proposed rezoning area, except for Block 3141 and part of Block 3152. There are no notable visual or natural resources in the area.

### Study Area

As described below, the quarter-mile study area is generally mixed-use with a predominance of residential and light industrial uses. Much of the area is underdeveloped relative to permitted zoning densities, and there is a large supply of vacant and underutilized land, typically used for vehicle and open storage. The study area features an irregular street pattern where differing grids converge, with lots of unique dimensions. Lot and building sizes range from narrow lots with low-rise buildings to large superblocks with high-rise buildings. Nearly every street in the study area is lined with concrete sidewalks, facilitating pedestrian traffic; many streets are also lined with trees and parked cars. Flushing Avenue, Broadway, and Myrtle Avenue are main vehicular thoroughfares traversing the study area, and the J and M elevated subway lines run along Broadway and Myrtle Avenue.

#### *East Williamsburg*

The East Williamsburg subarea is located in the northern section of the study area. East of Bushwick Avenue it is characterized by warehouses, light manufacturing, storage space, parking and vacant uses. West of Bushwick Avenue is predominately occupied by multifamily residential buildings, mixed-use buildings, commercial/office buildings, and institutions. The NYCHA Bushwick Houses consisting of eight buildings of thirteen to twenty stories on a sixteen-acre landscaped superblock. Located immediately to the north are the NYCHA Hylan Houses consisting of one nineteen-story building on a 1.8-acre site. Scattered institutions in the East Williamsburg subarea include the Isaac Remsen School/PS 147 on McKibbin Street, the Fennel Day Care Center on Moore Street, the John Hylan School/PS 257 on Humboldt Street, and the Brooklyn Public Library's Bushwick Branch on Seigel Street and Bushwick Avenue. The Justice Gilbert Ramirez Park, a 1.04-acre open space, is located along the south side of McKibbin Street between White and Bogart Streets.

#### *Bedford-Stuyvesant*

The Bedford-Stuyvesant subarea is located in the southwestern section of the study area. The Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood is characterized by medium density residential, commercial and community facilities in various building types. Institutional uses in Bedford-Stuyvesant include the Woodhull Medical and Mental Health Center located in a large superblock between Flushing Avenue and Park Avenue and the Robert F. Kennedy Day Care Center and Diana Jones Senior Center on Broadway and

Flushing Avenue. Directly south of the medical center are the Sumner Houses, a 22-acre NYCHA residential development with thirteen buildings of seven- to twelve-stories. The residential blocks between Bushwick Avenue and Broadway consist of two- to four-story attached row houses, and detached single and multifamily apartment buildings.

Broadway is a regional commercial corridor developed with buildings ranging from one-story commercial buildings to two- to six-story mixed-use buildings with commercial use on the ground floor and residential use or community facility use on the upper floors. The Bedford-Stuyvesant subarea also includes the elevated J and M subway lines that run along Broadway. Subway stops within the study area include the Flushing Avenue stop at Flushing Avenue and Marcus Garvey Boulevard at the Myrtle Avenue-Broadway stop at Myrtle Avenue and Broadway. Between Bushwick Avenue and Marcus Garvey Boulevard, Myrtle Avenue is the area's most significant east-west commercial street, with medium-density apartment buildings. The southerly blocks are mainly characterized by mixed-use buildings ranging from one- to three-stories with ground floor commercial use and residential use on the upper floors. In addition, there is a complex of industrial buildings at Myrtle Avenue and Throop Avenue and several vacant sites.

There are two parks and one historic resource in the Bedford-Stuyvesant subarea: the 1.09-acre Garden Playground, the L.D.C. of Broadway, and the three building William Uhlmer Brewery complex on Beaver and Locust Streets, an LPC-designated individual landmark. Other visual resources in the subarea include St. Mark's Lutheran Church and School at 626 Bushwick Avenue, Arion Hall at 13 Arion Place, and PS 52 at 330 Ellery Street.

*Bushwick*

The Bushwick subarea in the eastern section of the study area is predominantly occupied by single and multifamily residential, institutional, industrial, parking, and open storage uses. Many blocks have small lots with low-rise residential and industrial buildings. On some streets the streetwall is obstructed by fenced parking in front of buildings. There are also several vacant lots in the Bushwick subarea.

There are several new residential developments with community facility spaces which have been constructed over the past decade on Blocks 3137, 3145, and 3151 immediately south and west of the proposed rezoning area. These include Rheingold Garden Partnership Homes, the Rheingold Garden Housing Trust Fund apartments, the Renaissance Estates Housing Trust Fund apartments, and the Bushwick Gardens. The developments vary between three story multifamily row houses, to six-story apartment buildings. The housing units were developed under the New York City Housing Partnership and Housing Trust Fund programs and many of the units are affordable housing for low- and moderate-income households.

Institutional uses in the Bushwick subarea include the headquarters of NYPD Housing Police Service Area 4 at 25 Central Avenue, the Andrew Jackson School/PS 145 on Noll Street, the Williamsburg Community Church of God at 43 George Street, the former IS 111 building, housing the IS 347 and IS 349 programs, on the block bounded by Troutman and Starr Street and Central and Wilson Avenues, St. Mark's Lutheran Church on Bushwick Avenue and Jefferson Street, and the Early Intervention day care center on Vernon Avenue.

Open spaces located within the Bushwick Subarea include the 2.60-acre Green Central Knoll Park/ Playground, the 1.06-acre Fermi Playground, and the Freedom Triangle. There are large vacant lots located on Melrose and Stanwix Streets and on Troutman Street and Evergreen Avenue. There are no notable visual resources within the Bushwick subarea as it does not contain any significant natural or built features.

The elevated M train line runs along Myrtle Avenue in the Bushwick subarea. The Myrtle Avenue commercial corridor is developed with buildings ranging from one-story commercial buildings to two- to six-story mixed-use attached buildings with commercial use on the ground floor and residential use or community facility use on the upper floors.

## Assessment of Proposed Action's Potential Effects on Neighborhood Character

### *Technical Area Significant Adverse Impacts and Moderate Adverse Effects*

The analysis below presents the potential changes in the technical areas comprising the neighborhood character of the study area. As stated above, this analysis focuses on the potential changes to neighborhood character resulting from changes in Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy; Socioeconomic Conditions; Open Space; Shadows; Urban Design and Visual Resources; Transportation; and Noise. Detailed technical analyses for each of these areas are presented in their respective chapters. As discussed in greater detail in those chapters, environmental and social changes in the areas with respect to neighborhood character are as follows:

#### Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy

As discussed in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," no significant adverse impacts on land use, zoning, or public policy, as defined by the guidelines for determining impact significance set forth in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, are anticipated in the future with the Proposed Action in the primary and secondary study areas. The Proposed Action would not directly displace any land uses so as to adversely affect surrounding land uses, nor would it generate land uses that would be incompatible with land uses, zoning, or public policy in the secondary study area. The Proposed Action would not create land uses or structures that would be incompatible with the underlying zoning, nor would it cause a substantial number of existing structures to become non-conforming. The Proposed Action would not result in land uses that conflict with public policies applicable to the primary or secondary study areas.

The Proposed Action would result in an overall increase in residential and commercial use throughout the primary study area, when compared to conditions in the future without the Proposed Action. The proposed zoning map amendments would allow new residential development at a scale and density that the Applicant considers appropriate for the area, and at the same time continue to permit certain commercial uses along the Flushing, Bushwick and Evergreen Avenue corridors. Also, while the affected area is currently zoned for manufacturing uses, it is located within an area that is largely characterized by residential and retail uses. The affected area contains underutilized lots used for vehicle/open storage, where residential uses are not permitted per the existing zoning. The proposed rezoning would therefore provide opportunities for new affordable and market rate residential development on those underutilized lots. The proposed rezoning action would therefore ensure that the zoning designation more accurately reflects the area's development trends.

Since M1-2 is more compatible with residential uses than M3-1, and the lots adjacent to Block 3140 would be rezoned to allow residential uses, the Applicant believes that rezoning Block 3140 from M3-1 to M1-2 is appropriate. M1 zoning districts often function as buffer zones between residential and heavy manufacturing uses such as those found in M3 zones. M3 zones permit heavy manufacturing uses while M1-2 zones permit light manufacturing and commercial uses. M1-2 districts also permit certain large retail uses, and community facility uses, by City Planning Commission special permit, whereas M3-1 districts do not. In addition, the proposed M1-2 district would be an extension of the existing M1-2 zoning district located just north of the rezoning area, across Flushing Avenue. Uses on Block 3140 (transportation) would conform to the M1 designation. Furthermore, the proposed R6A and R7A districts

would bring into compliance 23 existing, noncompliant residential uses with approximately 172 dwelling units. These dwelling units are located within the M1-2 manufacturing district along Evergreen Avenue, Flushing Avenue, Garden Street, and Bushwick Avenue within the rezoning area.

In addition, to encourage new residential development for all income levels, the Proposed Action would create increased densities though use of the Inclusionary Housing Program (IHP) to expand and enhance future affordable housing development opportunities.

Therefore, the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts on land use, but is expected to have a beneficial effect on the built character, context, and the range of uses in the proposed rezoning area.

## Socioeconomic Conditions

As detailed in Chapter 3, "Socioeconomic Conditions," the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse direct or indirect residential displacement impacts, nor would it result in significant adverse impacts due to direct or indirect business and institutional displacement. Direct displacement as a result of the Proposed Action would be limited to seven businesses located on four of the eight projected development sites, subject to lease terms and agreements between private firms and property owners existing at the time of redevelopment in the With-Action condition. These seven businesses that could be directly displaced conduct a variety of business activities, including automotive, wholesale, warehousing, and retail, and employ an estimated 46 total workers. Moreover, the Proposed Action would not result in the direct displacement of any businesses that provide products or services essential to the local economy that would no longer be available in its trade area. Therefore, the direct business displacement resulting from the Proposed Action would not result in a significant adverse impact, and no changes to neighborhood character can be expected.

## Open Space

As discussed in Chapter 5, "Open Space," the Proposed Action would not have a direct impact on any open space resource in the study area. No open space would be displaced and no significant shadows would be cast on any publically accessible open spaces. The Proposed Action would not affect any particular user group, nor would it introduce a population with any unusual characteristics. The Proposed Action would not increase the amount of publicly accessible open space in the study area, although the proposed contextual zoning districts to be mapped as part of the Proposed Action require that new residential developments provide on-site recreation space for building residents in accordance with the provisions of the Quality Housing program. This on-site recreation space would help to partially offset the increased residential population's additional demand on the study area's open space resources.

In the future with the Proposed Action, the quarter-mile nonresidential study area would remain well-served by passive open spaces, with a ratio of 0.871 acres of passive open space per 1,000 nonresidents. Although the passive open space ratio would decrease by 2.18 percent for nonresidents and by 12.46 percent over No-Action conditions for the total daytime population, the ratios would remain above the city's guideline ratio of 0.15 acres per 1,000 nonresidents, however, it would be slightly below the calculated guidance ratio of 0.381 acres per 1,000 total population (nonresidents and residents). As the passive open space ratio for nonresidents in the With-Action condition would continue to be higher than the NYCDCP guideline measure for adequacy, the study area would continue to be well-served by passive open space, and there would be no significant adverse open space impacts in the nonresidential study area as a result of the Proposed Action.

The residential study area's total open space ratio in the future with the Proposed Action would be 0.411 acres per 1,000 residents, which represents a reduction of approximately 3.97 percent (0.017 acres per

1,000 residents) from No-Action conditions. The active open space ratio in the residential study area would decrease from 0.265 acres per 1,000 residents to 0.255 acres per 1,000 residents in the future with the Proposed Action, a 3.77 percent decrease. The passive open space ratio for residents would decrease from 0.163 acres per 1,000 residents 0.156 acres per 1,000 residents, a 4.29 percent decrease.

The qualitative assessment indicates that the quality and low utilization of a number of the study area open spaces combined with the availability of open spaces outside the study area would somewhat alleviate the burden on open spaces in the future action conditions. However, the rezoning area is located in an area underserved by open space and the decrease of 3.97 percent in the total open space ratio as a result of the Proposed Action is sizeable. Because of this, the Proposed Action would result in a significant adverse open space impact. The significant adverse impact would remain unmitigated, as discussed in Chapter 18, "Unavoidable Adverse Impacts." Possible partial mitigation measures are discussed in Chapter 16, "Mitigation." However, open space is not a critical defining feature of the study area. As such, this significant adverse impact would not affect neighborhood character.

## Shadows

As detailed in Chapter 6, "Shadows," projected and potential development sites resulting from the Proposed Action would cast new shadows at times throughout the year on some of the existing open space in the study area. The open spaces in the study area would not be significantly affected. Although the three open spaces (Green Central Knoll Park, Playground and Pool, and Garden Playground) would be subject to varying amounts of incremental shadows as a result of the Proposed Action, these increments would be not be significant due to their limited extent and/or duration, and other site specific factors. Thus, these shadow impacts would not create significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

## Urban Design and Visual Resources

As discussed in Chapter 7, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts on urban design and visual resources, as defined by the guidelines for determining impact significance set forth in the *CEQR Technical Manual*. The proposed zoning map changes would replace the existing M1-1 and M3-1 zoning districts within the proposed rezoning area with R6A and R7A contextual zoning districts; and designate a C2-4 commercial overlay to be mapped along portions of Stanwix Street, Flushing, Bushwick, and Evergreen Avenues.

The Proposed Action would result in new development exhibiting a built form that is congruous to the distinctive and characteristic existing building types prevalent throughout the study area. Generally, the Proposed Action would establish contextual zoning districts for residential and mixed-use buildings that would maintain the scale and character of the existing Bushwick community while providing appropriate development opportunities. The Proposed Action would preserve the low and mid-rise scale of mid-blocks and avenue frontages with strong built contexts, by creating increases in density with contextual zoning districts targeted to these areas. The proposed zoning changes would also replace an existing manufacturing district in the southeastern portion of the rezoning area with a mixed use district to encourage new mixed use, residential, institutional, and commercial uses. Finally, the Proposed Action would provide support for existing ground floor retail uses by mapping commercial overlays along streets where existing ground floor retail uses exist to encourage the growth of local-scale commercial activity. The Proposed Action would not result in any changes to street pattern, block form, or building arrangement. Therefore, the Proposed Action is not expected to result in any significant adverse impacts to urban design or visual resources in the study area.

Transportation

The character of the study area, like many neighborhoods in New York City, is in part defined by a wide range of travel modes, with high foot traffic on some sidewalks and crosswalks along major retail corridors (although there are also quieter blocks), a mix of auto/taxi/service traffic on the streets, as well as dense and essential transit services, primarily underground in the subway system, but identifiable where the street entry creates nodes of activity. The greatest volume and most visible travel is by foot, with patterns and timing varying for pedestrian activity associated with residents, students, shoppers, and visitors to the area.

The mix of uses projected as part of the RWCDS would add residents and workers to the area. The travel associated with this population would be spread out and distributed throughout the approximate 6-block rezoning area. The travel associated with the additional population generated by the Proposed Action would increase utilization of the area's transportation facilities and in some cases would result in significant traffic impacts, which would be readily mitigable, as discussed below.

As detailed in Chapter 10, "Transportation," the Proposed Action would not have a significant adverse impact on transit or pedestrian conditions or parking availability. The Proposed Action would result in significant adverse traffic impacts. Those impacted intersections are: Noll Street at Bushwick Avenue, Arion Place/Beaver Street at Bushwick Avenue, Melrose Street at Bushwick Avenue, and Forrest Street at Bushwick Avenue. Proposed mitigation measures at all of those intersections, as described in Chapter 16, "Mitigation," would fully mitigate those impacts and result in traffic conditions at least as good as those under future No-Action conditions. There would therefore be no deterioration of traffic conditions at those intersections and thus no possible adverse effect on neighborhood character.

Therefore, while there would be increased transportation activity as a result of the Proposed Action, the resulting conditions would be similar to those seen in the urban neighborhoods defining the study area and would not result in density of activity or service conditions that would be out of character with the surrounding neighborhoods. Thus, the changes in transportation due to the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

Noise

As discussed in Chapter 13, "Noise," the anticipated new development would not elevate ambient noise levels at any existing sensitive noise receptor in the study area. Noise increases as a result of additional traffic that would accompany the RWCDS projected development are expected to be imperceptible in the vast majority of locations throughout the study area. These project-related noise increases are therefore not expected to result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character.

### *Potential to Affect a Defining Feature of the Neighborhood*

If the Proposed Action 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 in relevant technical areas, then a detailed assessment is required to determine whether the Proposed Action may have a significant adverse neighborhood character impact. Of the relevant technical areas specified in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the Proposed Action would not cause significant adverse impacts regarding land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; shadows; urban design and visual resources; or noise. The potential significant adverse impacts on open space and traffic would not affect any defining feature of neighborhood character as the impacts would be fully or partially mitigated. Additionally, moderate adverse effects that would affect such defining features, either singly or in

combination, have also not been identified. The Proposed Action would therefore not have a significant adverse neighborhood character impact.

Thus, based on the results of the preliminary assessment, there is no potential for the Proposed Action to result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.