# Chapter 15: Neighborhood Character

## A. INTRODUCTION

Neighborhood character is an amalgam of the many factors that combine to give an area its distinctive personality. These components include land use, scale, and type of development, historic features, patterns and volumes of traffic, noise levels, and other physical or social characteristics that help define a community. Not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few determining elements.

According to the *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when the action would exceed preliminary thresholds in any one of the following areas of technical analysis: land use, urban design, visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomic conditions, traffic, or noise. An assessment is also appropriate when the action would have moderate effects on several of the aforementioned areas. Potential effects on neighborhood character may include:

- *Land Use.* When development resulting from the proposed actions would have the potential to change neighborhood character by introducing a new, incompatible land use; conflicting with land use policy or other public plans for the area; changing land use character; or resulting in significant land use impacts.
- *Urban Design and Visual Resources.* In developed areas, urban design changes have the potential to affect neighborhood character by introducing substantially different building bulk, form, size, scale, or arrangement. Urban design changes may also affect block forms, street patterns, or street hierarchies, as well as streetscape elements such as streetwalls, landscaping, and curb cuts. Visual resource changes have the potential to affect neighborhood character by directly changing visual features such as unique and important public view corridors and vistas, or public visual access to such features.
- *Historic Resources.* When an action would result in substantial direct changes to an historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a resource, or when an historic resources analysis identifies a significant impact in this category, there is a potential to affect neighborhood character.
- *Socioeconomic Conditions.* Changes in socioeconomic conditions have the potential to affect neighborhood character when they result in substantial direct or indirect displacement or addition of population, employment, or businesses; or substantial differences in population or employment density.
- *Traffic and Pedestrians.* Changes in traffic and pedestrian conditions can affect neighborhood character in a number of ways. For traffic to have an effect on neighborhood character, it must be a contributing element to the character of the neighborhood (either by its absence or its presence), and it must change substantially as a result of the action. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual,* such substantial traffic changes can include:

changes in level of service (LOS) to C or below; changes in traffic patterns; changes in roadway classifications; changes in vehicle mixes; substantial increases in traffic volumes on residential streets; or significant traffic impacts, as identified in that technical analysis. Regarding pedestrians, when a proposed action would result in substantially different pedestrian activity and circulation, it has the potential to affect neighborhood character.

- *Noise*. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, for an action to affect neighborhood character in regards to noise, it would need to result in a significant adverse noise impact and a change in acceptability category.

This chapter examines neighborhood character in the area surrounding the Brooklyn Bay Center site (the "project site")—up to a ½-mile distance from the project site—and how the proposed development would affect that character. The chapter's impact analysis focuses primarily on changes to neighborhood character resulting from changes in the technical areas discussed above, since changes in these technical areas are most likely to result in changes to neighborhood character.

The proposed actions would allow a new commercial retail building to be built on a site that is currently underutilized, and would provide new waterfront public access to an approximately ¼-mile stretch of the Gravesend Bay shoreline, including an esplanade and other public access areas. The analysis concludes that as a result of the proposed actions, changes to the project site's land use and bulk would occur, as well as increases to traffic activity and increasing competitive pressure on larger supermarkets in the surrounding areas. Overall, these changes would not adversely impact neighborhood character, as discussed below.

### PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

The proposed actions would not significantly adversely affect the combined elements contributing to the neighborhood character of the study area. Mitigation measures would be implemented to mitigate all but one significant adverse traffic impact, as described in Chapter 11, "Transportation," and in Chapter 17, "Mitigation." No other potentially significant adverse impacts would result from the proposed actions. Furthermore, the proposed actions would not result in a combination of moderate effects on the elements contributing to the neighborhood character of the study area. Therefore, the proposed actions would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

## B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project site is located at 1752 Shore Parkway on a waterfront parcel which extends approximately 600 feet into Gravesend Bay, and is situated between the prolongation of 24th Avenue to the north and the prolongation of Bay 37th Street to the south. The project site, which is occupied by a bus storage company, contains a two-story building, one-story storage building, and bus parking lot in the rear of the site. There are two vehicular entrances to the property along Shore Parkway South—one located at the northern end of the project site and a gated entrance at the southern end of the project site. The project site slopes upwards from east to west, toward the waterfront, and a vegetated berm extends along the perimeter of the waterfront.

Shore Parkway North and South are one-lane service roads with parallel parking on each side of Leif Ericson Drive (which is also known as the Belt Parkway), a major east-west highway that begins at the Gowanus Expressway in Bay Ridge and continues generally parallel to the Brooklyn waterfront and through Queens until it reaches the Cross Island Parkway and

Whitestone Bridge. The Belt Parkway is a dominant feature in the study area, separating the primarily commercial and retail uses that line the waterfront from the primarily residential area of Bensonhurst to the north and east of the highway. The Belt Parkway is at-grade in this location, with three lanes of traffic in each direction separated by a concrete median and a low metal barrier. Wide vegetated areas separate the highway from Shore Parkway. A southbound entrance ramp to the Belt Parkway is located approximately 825 feet north of the project site off Shore Parkway South, and a northbound exit ramp from the Belt Parkway to Shore Parkway North (Exit 5) terminates north of the project site at Bay Parkway.

The stretch of waterfront to the north and south of the project site is occupied with several large commercial and retail uses and a variety of other uses. Just north of the project site is a commercial building housing a New York Sports Club fitness center, Samurai Sam teriyaki restaurant, and Rejuvenation, a medical spa; The Harbor Motor Inn, a two-story motel; the Italy 21 furniture store; and Stop & Stor Self Storage. Caesar's Bay Shopping Center is to the north of these uses. This shopping center consists mostly of large, one- and two- story free-standing commercial buildings set far back from the street line, including Modell's Sporting Goods, Best Buy, Kohl's, Strauss Discount Auto, Babies R Us, Toys R Us, Wendy's, and HSBC Bank. Just south of the project site is Bayside Fuel, which includes an oil storage facility that is mostly covered by an earthen berm, and a Mercedes Benz dealership. Further south is the Nellie Bly amusement park located on Shore Parkway South, with a City of New York Department of Sanitation (DSNY) facility containing an inactive marine transfer station and salt storage and garage facilities located to the east and on the waterfront.

Bensonhurst is predominantly a residential area generally bounded by Stillwell Avenue to the west, Kings Highway to the north, New Utrecht Avenue to the west and the Belt Parkway to the southwest. The neighborhood contains a mix of semi-detached and detached homes (that are typically two to four stories), attached rowhouses, and larger mid-rise apartment buildings and institutional uses. Two large institutional uses—the Sephardic Nursing and Rehabilitation Center and the Haym Solomon Home for the Aged—are located north of 24th Avenue. Cropsey Avenue, which runs parallel to Shore Parkway, is the primary thoroughfare and commercial corridor in this area. Cropsey Avenue has two lanes of traffic in each direction separated by a landscaped median. The local residential cross streets in this area are primarily one- and two-way streets with parallel parking, which terminate at Shore Parkway North. Access from the residential area to the commercial and retail establishments south and west of the Belt Parkway near the project site is available via two highway underpasses at Bay Parkway (north of the project site) and 26th Avenue (south of the site).

As described in Chapter 5, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," there are no visual resources or visually interesting view corridors in the study area. Gravesend Bay is not considered to be a visual resource, as there are no public views of the Bay from any of the streets in the study area. Commercial buildings located west of Shore Parkway South block any potential views to this natural feature.

As described in Chapter 11, "Transportation," traffic volumes on streets in the study area are generally at acceptable levels (mid-LOS D or better) during the three traffic analysis hours (weekday midday, weekday PM, and Saturday PM). Some intersections are more heavily trafficked and frequently congested; these include several approaches/lane groups at the following intersections: Benson Avenue at Bay Parkway, Bath Avenue at Bay Parkway, Bay Parkway at Bath Avenue, Cropsey Avenue at Bay Parkway, and Bay Parkway at Cropsey Avenue.

In addition, two study area intersections were identified as high pedestrian/bicycle accident locations: Bay Parkway at Cropsey Avenue and Bay Parkway at 86th Street.

The area is served by public transit. The D subway line has stops on 86th Street at Bay Parkway and 25th Avenue, approximately 0.8 miles and 1.1 miles walking distance from the project site, respectively. The M subway line also stops at 86th Street and Bay Parkway. The B6 bus route runs along Bay Parkway and south/eastbound along Shore Parkway South, providing access to the project site and adjacent uses. Other bus lines serving this section of Bensonhurst include the B82, B64, B3, and B1 routes.

Noise conditions in the area are typical of an urban neighborhood adjacent to well-trafficked roads. As described in greater detail in Chapter 13, "Noise," existing noise levels at the receptor sites are moderate to relatively high and reflect the level of vehicular activity on adjacent streets, with the exception of the receptor located on the project site waterfront, which is moderate to relatively low as a result of adjacent commercial uses and distant noise from the Belt Parkway. Existing noise levels at four receptor sites are in the marginally unacceptable range; existing noise levels at receptor sites where the proposed and existing open spaces are located exceed the CEQR recommended level of 55 dBA $L_{10(1)}$ for outdoor areas requiring serenity and quiet.

## C. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Without the proposed actions, it is assumed that the buildings on the project site will remain occupied with a bus storage facility. It is anticipated that the project site will be maintained in its current condition, and the site will remain inaccessible to the public.

As described in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," in the future without the proposed project the DSNY proposes to replace the existing, inactive marine transfer station (MTS) located on the waterfront site south of 25th Avenue with the Southwest Brooklyn Converted MTS. Once complete, the Southwest Brooklyn Converted MTS would receive and containerize DSNY-managed waste from Brooklyn Community Districts 11, 12, 13, and 15. The waste would be delivered to the site by truck and containerized for transport on barges to disposal facilities located outside of the City. Although the Southwest Brooklyn Converted MTS was originally proposed for completion and operation in 2010, the completion date has been postponed and it is unlikely to be operational by the proposed project's 2013 Build Year. When operational, the Southwest Brooklyn Converted MTS project would result in an increase in truck trips to the site, primarily during the mid-morning, although truck trips to and from this site would be restricted to travel along local truck routes. Technical studies performed as part of the environmental assessment of the project showed that no significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character would result from the reactivation of the waste transfer use on this property (Solid Waste Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement, April 2005).

In addition, two residential projects are planned in the surrounding neighborhood and may be completed by 2013. They include new three-family residences at 2331-2355 Cropsey Avenue containing 21 dwelling units, and a residential conversion project with 103 dwelling units at 2300 Cropsey Avenue. These projects would not alter any natural features, street patterns, or block shapes in the study area. Traffic volumes in the study area would increase somewhat as a result of these projects. Noise levels would be expected to be similar to existing levels.

Overall, these projects these projects would not be expected to result in substantial changes to the character of the project site or study area.

## D. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed actions would alter the land use on the project site by allowing a new approximately 214,000-square-foot commercial retail building and a three-level parking garage to a waterfront site that is currently underutilized. The proposed building is currently anticipated to include a BJ's Wholesale Club, as well as up to three other retail stores that would be located on the second level. The proposed actions would also allow approximately 2.4 acres of public waterfront access area to be created, including an esplanade and other landscaped public access areas, providing new public access to ¼-mile of the Gravesend Bay shoreline and a new amenity to shoppers, workers, and other users in the study area. As part of the proposed development, the project site would be re-graded to level the site to an elevation of approximately +13 feet, the existing waterfront berm would be removed, and the shoreline would be stabilized.

The proposed rezoning and other discretionary actions to allow the project site to be developed with a large-scale retail use (Use Group 6 or 10) would be compatible with and complementary to the existing commercial and retail uses located along the waterfront in the surrounding area. In terms of zoning, the proposed uses would be consistent with the large-scale retail and other commercial uses that have been developed along the waterfront in the study area pursuant to use variances granted by the Board of Standards and Appeals. In addition, the proposed retail uses on the project site would serve the residents of Bensonhurst as well as other Brooklyn neighborhoods.

The proposed actions would not alter any block forms in the study area. The proposed structures would be set back 63 feet from the east property line, which would be in keeping with the arrangement of other medium- and large-scale retail buildings found in the study area to the north of the project site. The eastern portion of the proposed commercial structure would be taller than other commercial structures in the study area; however, this portion of the structure would be shorter than the two large residential buildings on the east side of the Belt Parkway, including the 18-story (153-foot-tall) building on the east side of Shore Parkway North between 24th Avenue and Bay 37th Street. The height of the majority of the proposed development (i.e., the parking garage) would be consistent with that of other commercial structures in the study area west of the Belt Parkway and the project site buildings that would remain in the No Action scenario. While the proposed structures would be bulkier than the other commercial and residential structures in the study area, this bulk would be less readily perceived from the pedestrian perspective because of the screening effects of surrounding buildings and new trees on the project site, and the vegetative screening of the proposed parking garage, and because the building's main public façade is its narrow, eastern façade. The project would enhance the surrounding streetscape by removing fencing, adding a new sidewalk and street trees, screening loading dock uses, and building a new waterfront open space. The proposed actions would not block view corridors or views of any visual resources in the study area, but—unlike the No Action scenario—would create new public views and waterfront access to Gravesend Bay, a natural feature in the study area. Views of this natural feature would be visible from all points along the newly constructed waterfront open space. The construction of the new waterfront open space would offer much-needed green space to the shoppers, workers, and other users in the study area. Further, in comparison to the No Action scenario, the redevelopment of the project site with active uses and new waterfront open space would improve the walkability and vitality of the project site and enhance the pedestrian experience of the project site and study area. Therefore, the proposed actions would not result in any significant adverse impacts on the urban design and visual resources on the project site or in the study area.

As described in Chapter 3, "Socioeconomic Conditions," since the project site does not contain businesses or institutions that would be involuntarily displaced as a result of the proposed actions, no direct business and institutional displacement would occur. The project site does not contain any dwelling units, so the proposed actions would not result in direct residential displacement. Although some existing retail stores and larger supermarkets within the project's local area may experience the competitive pressure generated by the proposed project, these potential competitive effects would be limited, and not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts because the competitive effects would not jeopardize the viability of any local retail corridors that substantially contribute to neighborhood character. Smaller food stores and shopping goods stores are less likely to experience competitive pressure, if any, and neighborhood services stores and eating and drinking places would not be adversely affected. Local residents would continue to shop at existing food stores and shoppers' goods stores for a number of reasons, such as convenience, variety and selection of items, public transit accessibility, and absence of membership fees. Overall, while the possibility of some limited indirect business displacement due to competition cannot be ruled out, any displacement that might occur would not result in potentially significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

Vehicular access and egress at the project site would be provided via Shore Parkway South, along the northern end of the site. Most of the site's remaining Shore Parkway South frontage would be used to accommodate truck delivery operations with a pair of one-way head-in and head-out driveways. On the stretch of Shore Parkway South in front of the project site, there is currently meter parking on the west side and free on-street parking on the east side. Typical utilization of these on-street parking spaces is low because most establishments along Shore Parkway South have adequate on-site parking. Because the site's entering and exiting traffic volumes would be substantial, some curbside treatments are needed to maintain proper traffic flow on the service road. It has been recommended to the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) that all meter parking in front of the project site should be eliminated and replaced with No Standing Anytime regulations, and that on the north side, the same No Standing Anytime regulations be added to the length of the project site plus another 150 feet upstream to the west.

The proposed development would result in significant adverse traffic impacts at five intersections during the weekday midday peak hour, six intersections each during the weekday PM peak hour, and seven intersections during the Saturday PM peak hour. Intersections along Bay Parkway—locations that are already heavily trafficked—providing access to and from the project site are the most affected by project-generated traffic volumes. However, as described in Chapter 17, "Mitigation," mitigation measures would be implemented to fully mitigate all but one potentially significant adverse traffic impact. Mitigation measures include retiming/reconfiguring signal controls to increase green time for congested movements, lane restriping, changing parking regulations, and installing a new traffic signal. As described in Chapter 18, "Unavoidable Adverse Impacts," unmitigated impacts would remain at one intersection, 20th Avenue and 86th Street, for all three peak hours in 2013. This intersection could not be mitigated due to the geometric constraints of the elevated subway line and the desire to retain the metered parking spaces in front of active retail sites.

Parking demand during the weekday and Saturday peak periods would be fully accommodated by the proposed parking garage and the proposed actions are not expected to result in any significant adverse parking impacts.

Most of the pedestrian activity generated by the proposed development would consist of short trips to neighboring retail uses or trips to the nearby bus stops serving the area. As mentioned above under "Existing Conditions," two study area intersections are high pedestrian/bicycle accident locations: 18th Avenue at 86th Street and Bay Parkway at Cropsey Avenue, both of which are located where there would not be any project-generated pedestrian trips. Therefore, the proposed actions would not result in potentially significant adverse safety impacts at these locations. At the intersection of Bay Parkway and Cropsey Avenue, pedestrian and bicycle safety could be improved by the installation of a high-visibility crosswalk on the southbound approach. At the intersection of Bay Parkway and 86th Street, pedestrian and bicycle safety could also be improved by installing high-visibility crosswalks on all approaches. Along with these measures, safety at these locations could be further enhanced with the installation of signs warning turning vehicles to yield to pedestrians and warning pedestrians to wait for pedestrian signals at all crossing locations.

Since all site-related auto trips and taxi pick-ups/drop-offs would be accommodated at the on-site parking garage, only persons arriving by bus or walking from the local neighborhood are anticipated to access the site on foot. The proposed actions would not generate any subway trips and would result in only 17, 16, and 37 person trips by bus during the weekday midday, weekday PM, and Saturday PM peak hours, respectively. Since these project-generated incremental trips are below the CEQR threshold of 200 peak hour transit and pedestrian trips, no quantitative analyses are warranted and the proposed actions are not expected to result in any significant adverse transit impacts. Therefore, the proposed actions would not result in any significant adverse transit- or pedestrian-related impacts on neighborhood character.

The proposed development would result in less than 0.8 dBA increase in noise levels—an imperceptible increase—at four of the receptor locations; the noise levels at these locations would remain in the "marginally unacceptable" category. Noise levels at receptor 4, located at Bay and Shore Parkways where an existing open space is located, would continue to exceed the CEQR recommended level of 55 dBA $L_{10(1)}$ for outdoor areas requiring serenity and quiet. In addition, at some locations within the proposed waterfront open space, noise levels would exceed the CEQR recommended noise level for outdoor areas requiring serenity and quiet. These noise levels would result principally from the noise generated by traffic on the newly created project entrance/exit roadway and the project's parking garage, as well as noise from vehicular traffic on the Belt Parkway and Shore Parkway. There are no practical and feasible mitigation measures that could be implemented to reduce noise levels to below the 55 dBA $L_{10(1)}$ guideline within all areas of the new waterfront open space, since the open space cannot be moved to another location. The location of the proposed retail building and garage between the open space and Shore Parkway South would, however, buffer the open space from the traffic-generated noise to some extent. Although noise levels at some locations in these new open spaces would be above the CEQR guideline noise level, they would be comparable to noise levels in a number of New York City open space areas that are also located adjacent to roadways, including Prospect Park, Fort Greene Park, Hudson River Park, Riverside Park, Bryant Park, and other urban open space areas. Therefore, the noise levels in the proposed actions' new open space areas would not result in a significant noise impact, and the proposed actions would not have any significant noise-related impacts on neighborhood character.

Furthermore, the proposed actions would not result in a combination of moderate effects on the elements contributing to the neighborhood character of the study area. Overall, the proposed actions would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. ✷