A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the effects of the Proposed Action on neighborhood character. 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 and visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomics, traffic, and noise. Not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements. According to the *City Environmental Quality Review* (CEQR) *Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare and occur under unusual circumstances in which, in the absence of an 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 impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood's character is not automatically equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character.

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the Proposed Action will facilitate a new approximately 2,189,068 gross square foot (gsf) mixed-use development (the "proposed project") on approximately 377,726 sf of lot area (the "project site"). The proposed project would be comprised of approximately 1,689 dwelling units (approximately 1,689,416 gsf of residential floor area), of which 295 dwelling units would be affordable; approximately 109,470 gsf of local retail space, including an approximately 25,000 gsf supermarket; a site for an elementary school with approximately 456 seats (K-5); approximately 900 accessory parking spaces; and approximately 83,846 sf of publicly accessible open space. The anticipated Build Year is 2023.

As detailed in previous chapters, the Proposed Action would result in significant adverse impacts in three of the technical areas that contribute to neighborhood character—open space, noise, and transportation, as well as a potential pedestrian wind (urban design) impact. No significant adverse land use, zoning, and public policy, socioeconomic conditions, shadows, or historic and cultural resources impacts are anticipated.

For each of the key technical areas related to neighborhood character, this chapter describes existing conditions, future conditions without the Proposed Action (the No-Action condition), and conditions with the Proposed Action (the With-Action condition). In addition, in accordance with the guidelines of the *CEQR Technical Manual*, this analysis considers the potential for the Proposed Action to affect neighborhood character though a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas.

B. PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

Based on the methodology of the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a preliminary assessment of the Proposed Action's effects on neighborhood character was conducted to determine the need for a detailed analysis. As described elsewhere in this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), of the relevant technical areas specified in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts on land use, zoning, and public policy, socioeconomic conditions, shadows, or historic and cultural resources. The scale of significant adverse impacts to open space, noise, transportation,

pedestrian wind would not affect any defining features of neighborhood character, nor would a combination of moderately adverse effects affect the neighborhood's defining features. The proposed project would be consistent with existing trends and would facilitate new mixed-use development, waterfront open space, and improved neighborhood circulation. 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, and further analysis is not warranted.

C. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of a neighborhood character preliminary assessment is to determine whether changes expected in other technical areas may affect an element that contributes to 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); and (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? According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a "moderate" effect is generally defined as an effect considered reasonably close to the significant impact threshold for a particular technical analysis area.

The preliminary assessment therefore begins with a description of the existing conditions and defining features of the neighborhood that comprise the 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 features of neighborhood character, then, according to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a detailed analysis is not warranted.

As recommended in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for a preliminary analysis of neighborhood character is typically consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas that contribute to the defining elements of the neighborhood.

D. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

Existing Neighborhood Character and Defining Features

The neighborhood character of the study area is defined by a few key components, including its mix of uses and urban design, as well as it waterfront location on the Halletts Point Peninsula.

As described in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy" the project site neighborhood is defined by a mix of uses, including low-rise one- and two-family homes constructed in the first half of the 20th century, large multi-family developments (including the New York City Housing Authority [NYCHA] Astoria Houses along 27th Avenue and Shore Towers at the northern terminus of 9th Street) constructed in the second half of the 20th century, waterfront industrial, light manufacturing, and storage uses, and vacant land. Many of the vacant parcels are currently used for additional vehicle/open storage. As described in Chapter 2, "Socioeconomic Conditions," the neighborhood residential housing stock includes a substantial amount of affordable housing (largely attributable to the Astoria Houses), as well as market-rate residential uses, consistent with recent trends in the study area toward the transformation of former industrial areas to higher-density residential and commercial uses. Commercial and retail uses are less prominent in the neighborhood, but a number of residential buildings along 14th Street have ground

floor retail or commercial uses; some commercial uses are located along Astoria Boulevard. In general, the area has limited neighborhood retail services available to support the existing local population.

The mixed-use character of the neighborhood is also reflected in the existing urban design characteristics of the neighborhood. As described in Chapter 8, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," while street trees and streetscape elements are present in certain areas of the neighborhood, these improvements are often in stark contrast with nearby unbuilt and/or unimproved street segments and deteriorating sidewalks adjacent to industrial uses. While a substantial amount of open space is located within the study area (see Chapter 5, "Open Space"), including the 59.96-acre Astoria Park to the northeast of the project site, the existing open spaces are not well connected, due both to the varied conditions of pedestrian thoroughfares and the presence of several dead-end streets.

Due to the presence of several industrial uses in the neighborhood, a high percentage of existing vehicular traffic is comprised of heavy trucks and buses; a portion of the project site is currently used as school bus storage. As described in Chapter 13, "Transportation," the existing area street network is characterized by a mix of rather narrow one-way streets, often carrying one or two lanes of moving traffic, as well as two-way higher capacity roadways characterized by moderate to moderately congested conditions during peak travel times (including 27th Avenue and Vernon and Astoria Boulevards). The existing traffic conditions and street network are varied throughout the study area and are not defining features of the neighborhood.

As discussed in Chapter 16, "Noise," the existing heavy vehicles and open air industrial uses contribute to high noise levels in certain areas of the neighborhood. In portions of the neighborhood located farther inland, where industrial uses are less present, existing traffic is predominantly comprised of private autos, and mobile sources (vehicular traffic) are the primary source of ambient noise levels. In general, noise levels are moderate to relatively high and reflect the level of activity present on adjacent roadways and industrial parcels. The existing noise levels are not defining features of the neighborhood.

The project site and surrounding neighborhood are also defined by their location on the Halletts Point peninsula. While no visual resources are located on the project site, prominent views of the Manhattan skyline, Roosevelt Island, Randall's/Ward's Island, and the Hell Gate and Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) Bridges are provided from portions of the neighborhood. However, access to the waterfront, and therefore, access to these significant view corridors are limited to the waterfront open space and residential parcels; the substantial amount of light-industrial uses on the Halletts Point Peninsula, despite the influx of new residents and uses in the surrounding neighborhood, limits public access to the waterfront.

Due to the diverse neighborhood features, including the variety of land uses and associated urban design, traffic, and noise characteristics, no one defining feature would be considered critical to the character of the neighborhood. Rather, the various localized features pertaining to land use and urban design tend to characterize the overall neighborhood of the project site and study area.

Future without the Proposed Action (No-Action Condition)

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," absent the Proposed Action, the project site would not be rezoned. For analysis purposes, it is expected that the existing approximately 194,700 sf of light industrial and warehousing uses on the project site's waterfront parcels would remain. It is assumed that the upland portions of the project site would be redeveloped on an as-of-right basis with approximately 166 residential and approximately 83 accessory parking spaces. In conjunction with this as-of-right residential development, it is assumed that portions of the unbuilt segment of 8th Street to the south of 26th Avenue and/or portions the unimproved segment of 26th Avenue would be built-out in order to satisfy New York City Department of Buildings (DOB) street frontage requirements.

It should also be noted that the neighborhood is expected to experience an ongoing trend toward the development of new residential, retail, and community facility uses and publicly accessible open space in place of underutilized industrial uses and vacant land. In total, approximately 2,761 new housing units and 80 new community facility beds (6,541 new residents), 82,093 gsf of retail space, and 1,459 accessory parking spaces are anticipated within a quarter-mile of the project site by 2023. (refer to Table 2-4 and Figure 2-5 in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy).

Many of these No-Action projects will introduce residential and retail uses, most notably, the Halletts Point project, which is in close proximity to the project site and is assumed to be completed by 2022. Halletts Point, as approved, will transform eight lots (totaling 2.73 million sf and 2.35 acres of open space) on the north and northwestern portion of the Halletts Point peninsula, on the waterfront blocks west of 1st Street and the NYCHA Astoria Houses property, into a mixed-use, predominantly residential development. The proposed buildings would range in height from 13 to 31 stories (130 to 310 feet) with low- to mid-rise bases with a minimum of four stories ranging from 40 to 80 feet in height. In total, the project is expected to add more than 2,500 residential units (both market rate and affordable), retail (including a supermarket), parking, and publicly accessible open space to the neighborhood. Several smaller residential and community facility projects are also anticipated in the future without the Proposed Action interspersed around the study area.

Combined these No-Action developments will result in changes to the various elements that comprise the neighborhood's character. Existing low-rise industrial, manufacturing, and storage uses will be replaced with high-rise waterfront residential development and smaller residential and commercial facility projects further inland. These changes in land use would be consistent with recent trends in the study area toward the transformation of former industrial areas to higher-density residential and commercial uses. The associated increase in the neighborhood's residential population would similarly be consistent with existing trends in the neighborhood. In addition, the waterfront will become more publicly accessible, due to the development of the Halletts Point project and its associated waterfront esplanade and upland connections. While the anticipated No-Action developments would also cast new shadows on existing area open spaces, these incremental shadows would not significantly alter the character of the neighborhood.

The area No-Action developments are also expected to alter the traffic and noise conditions in the area; vehicle volumes on the Halletts Point peninsula are expected to increase substantially, as compared to existing conditions, and the peninsula will become better connected to the inland street network through the connection of Astoria Boulevard between 1st and 8th Streets. In addition, noise levels in the area would increase as a result of the increased traffic.

Future with the Proposed Action (With-Action Condition)

In the future with the Proposed Action, the Applicant would develop five mixed-use predominantly residential buildings on the project site. On the waterfront parcel, three residential towers ranging in height from 120 to 320 feet, with low- to mid-rise (four- to ten-story) residential, retail, and parking bases are proposed. On the upland parcels, the proposed project would include residential, retail, parking, and community facility uses in low- to mid-rise buildings with maximum heights of 80 to 90 feet. In total, the proposed buildings would comprise approximately 1,689 dwelling units (approximately 1,689,416 gsf of residential floor area), of which 295 dwelling units would be affordable; approximately 109,470 gsf of local retail space, including an approximately 25,000 gsf supermarket; a site for an elementary school with approximately 456 seats (K-5); and approximately 900 accessory parking spaces.

The proposed project would also include approximately 83,846 sf (1.92 acres) of publicly accessible open space, including a waterfront esplanade with two new upland connections to 8th and 4th Streets. In addition, the currently unimproved and inaccessible portion of 26th Avenue, an extension of 4th Street from 26th Avenue to the waterfront, and a waterfront public access easement between 4th and 9th Streets would be built-out in conjunction with the proposed project.

Technical Areas 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, due to the diverse neighborhood features, including the variety of land uses and associated urban design, traffic, and noise characteristics, no one defining feature would be considered critical to the character of the neighborhood. The analysis below focuses on the potential changes to neighborhood character resulting from changes in land use, zoning, and public policy, socioeconomic conditions, open space, shadows, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, transportation, and noise.

Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy

As described 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. 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 policies in the 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.

While the Proposed Action would result in a reduction in the total amount of industrial uses in the neighborhood, the project site is located within an area that is mixed-use in nature and is not defined by its industrial uses. Furthermore, industrial uses outside of the project site would not be affected by the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would be in keeping with existing trends in the neighborhood toward the transformation of former industrial areas to higher-density residential and commercial uses, and would therefore ensure that the zoning designation more accurately reflects the area's development trends. In addition, the Proposed Action would introduce 109,470 gsf of ground floor retail, which would address the current deficiency in retail uses to serve the existing and future neighborhood residential population. The proposed retail spaces would be designed to meet community needs and would be consistent with existing trends in the neighborhood.

The Proposed Action would result in a mixed-use development consistent with the mix of uses in the neighborhood. As such, changes to the project site's existing land uses facilitated by the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

Socioeconomic Conditions

As described in Chapter 3, "Socioeconomic Conditions," the Proposed Action and resultant proposed project would not result in significant adverse socioeconomic impacts. The Proposed Action and resultant proposed project would introduce approximately 1,689 residential units (net of 1,523 units) to the study area, of which 295 would be developed as affordable housing. The mix of affordable and market rate units in the proposed project's residential component would also be in keeping with the mix of residential units currently in the neighborhood. Furthermore, the increase in the neighborhood's residential

population would be in keeping with existing trend toward higher-density residential development in northwestern Queens. While the population that would be introduced by the Proposed Action could include a larger proportion of households with higher incomes, as compared to the existing study area population, there is already a very strong existing trend in the study area toward residential development and the influx of a more affluent population, which is anticipated to accelerate in the future without the Proposed Action.

In addition, as discussed in Chapter 3, "Socioeconomic Conditions," the Proposed Action would not result in a trend towards secondary business displacement. While the proposed project's uses would be a substantial addition to the study area, they would not be new types of uses within the study area, and therefore would not introduce a new trend that could alter economic patterns. The study area is already experiencing a trend toward increased residential development, adding to the demand for neighborhood retail and services. Existing industrial uses are expected to continue to experience increased rents and indirect displacement pressures due to this trend irrespective of the Proposed Action. The proposed project's retail would serve existing residents and would accommodate future consumer demand introduced by residents of planned developments and the proposed project.

As such, the Proposed Action would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character as a result of changes to the area's socioeconomic conditions.

Open Space

As described in Chapter 5, "Open Space," the Proposed Action would not have a direct impact on open space resources in the area; no open spaces would be displaced and no significant shadows would be cast on any publicly accessible open spaces. In addition, the Proposed Action would increase the amount of publicly accessible open space, through the development of 1.92 acres of open space, including both active and passive features on the project site. However, the Proposed Action would result in a reduction in the study area's open space ratios, and would result in a significant adverse impact to active open space. As the passive and total open space ratios for residents would remain higher than the City's optimal planning goals in the future With-Action condition, there would be no significant adverse total or passive open space impacts as a result of the Proposed Action.

However, the Proposed Action would enhance neighborhood character by improving accessibility to area open space resources. As previously stated, while a substantial amount of open space is located within the study area, the existing open spaces are not well connected, due both to the varied conditions of pedestrian thoroughfares and the presence of several dead-end streets. The proposed project's open space, including the waterfront open space and the proposed 8th Street Mews, as well as the proposed street network improvements would increase connectivity and thereby increase the accessibility and utility of existing open spaces. In addition, as described in greater detail in Chapter 20, "Mitigation," potential mitigation measures to partially mitigate the active open space impact (such as creating new open space within the study area; funding for improvements, renovation, or maintenance at existing local parks; or improving existing open spaces to increase their utility or capacity to meet identified open space needs in the area) will be explored by the Applicant between the Draft EIS (DEIS) and Final EIS (FEIS). Therefore, although the Proposed Action would result in an active open space impact, the improvements to waterfront open space access in the study area under future With-Action conditions, the Proposed Action's open space impact would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.

Shadows

As described in Chapter 6, "Shadows," the proposed project would cast incremental shadows on Whitey Ford Field on May 6/August 6 and June 21, Astoria Park on December 21, and the East River on March 21/September 21, May 6/August 6, June 21, and December 21. On all analysis days, project-generated incremental shadows would not be large enough in extent or long enough in duration to result in significant adverse shadow impacts. Project generated shadows would not affect the utilization or enjoyment of any resources and all open spaces would continue to receive a minimum of four hours of direct sunlight throughout the growing season. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a significant adverse shadows impact on any nearby sunlight-sensitive resources, and no significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character due to the proposed project's incremental shadows are anticipated.

Historic and Cultural Resources

Based on consultation with LPC it was determined that there are no designated or potential architectural resources within, or in close proximity of, the project site (see Chapter 7, "Historic and Cultural Resources"). As the Proposed Action would not result in direct changes to a historic resource or changes to public views of a resource and would not result in significant adverse impacts on historic and cultural resources, the Proposed Action does not have the potential to affect neighborhood character due to changes to historic and cultural resources.

Urban Design and Visual Resources

As described in Chapter 8, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," the proposed project would replace vacant parcels and industrial manufacturing uses with high-rise mixed-use development, consistent with existing trends in the neighborhood toward the transformation of former industrial areas to higher-density residential and commercial uses. By focusing the majority of the bulk on the waterfront, the lower height of the inland structures would be more consistent with the surrounding built context, and therefore would not represent a significant adverse urban design impact. As described above, residential uses in the neighborhood represent a mix of low- to high-rise single and multi-family residential buildings, and the proposed project's residential uses, including low- to mid-rise townhomes along the 8th Street Mews and residential towers on the waterfront would be consistent with the range of existing and anticipated future residential uses in the neighborhood.

In addition, the proposed waterfront open space would facilitate connections to adjacent existing and proposed open space resources, improve the streetscape, and open up currently inaccessible view corridors to the public, enhancing the neighborhood's waterfront location; the proposed project would not obstruct views to visual resources in the study area. The Proposed Action would also provide public access to the proposed project and the waterfront by mapping an extension of 4th Street, demapping and building out an unbuilt portion of 8th Street for pedestrian use, and providing access to 9th Street by building out a currently inaccessible portion of 26th Avenue. The resultant improved circulation would better connect the Halletts Point peninsula's anticipated future residential and retail developments with similar existing land uses located further inland.

While the Proposed Action could result in potential pedestrian wind impacts at the northeast corner of Building 3, as described in Chapter 8, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," due to the massing and orientation of adjacent Shore Towers, and its exposure to the prevailing northwest winds, accelerated wind conditions likely already exist at this location under existing conditions. As such, any building form on the Building 3 site would be faced with similar pre-existing wind conditions and would require special design considerations. Such considerations have been addressed in a positive way in the proposed

Building 3 design, which situates the building's tower to the northeast, away from the existing winds near Shore Towers.

As such, while the Proposed Action could result in potential pedestrian wind impacts, overall, the proposed project is expected to have a beneficial effect on neighborhood character.

Transportation

The traffic impact analysis indicated that there would be a potential for significant adverse impacts at 20 intersections during the weekday AM peak hour, nine intersections during the weekday midday peak hour, and 16 intersections during the weekday PM peak hour (see Chapter 13, "Transportation"). In addition, the results of the transit impact analysis indicate that: (1) the Q103 route would experience significant adverse impacts in the southbound direction during both the weekday AM and PM peak hours, as well as in the northbound direction during the PM peak hour; and (2) the 30th Avenue (N and Q line) Station's northbound fare array and northwest street stair would experience significant adverse impacts in the weekday AM and PM peak hours, respectively. No significant adverse pedestrian impacts are anticipated in the future With-Action condition. As described in Chapter 20, "Mitigation," most of the traffic, bus line haul, and subway station element impacts could be fully or partially mitigated, although some unmitigated traffic impacts would remain.

Of the intersections that would remain unmitigated, most of them would operate under congested conditions in the future without the Proposed Action. As such, the traffic impacts associated with the Proposed Action would not be expected to result in substantial changes to neighborhood character. Moreover, as described above, the study area's traffic conditions are not a defining feature of the neighborhood character of the area; the neighborhood includes both narrow one-way streets, often carrying one or two lanes of moving traffic and two-way higher capacity roadways characterized by moderate to moderately congested conditions during peak travel times.

Therefore, the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character due to significant adverse transportation impacts.

Noise

As stated in Chapter 16, "Noise," the Proposed Action would result in a noticeable increase in noise levels in exceedance of the CEQR noise impact criteria at the intersection of 26th Avenue and 4th Street during the weekday AM and midday peak hours as a result of the proposed road network changes and incremental traffic generated by the proposed project and, therefore, would result in a significant adverse mobile source noise impact at this location. However, the resultant With-Action L_{eq} levels would remain "marginally unacceptable" as under existing conditions, and noise levels during these peak hours would be less than the maximum existing noise levels at this location. Therefore, nearby existing sensitive receptors would not be exposed to noise levels greater than those currently experienced at this location. While the projected noise levels at the proposed project's open space areas could be greater than the 55 dBA L_{10} CEQR guideline, it would be comparable to other parks around New York City and would not constitute a significant adverse noise impact.

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, for a project to affect neighborhood character in regard to noise, it would need to result in a significant adverse noise impact and a change in acceptability category. As described above, while a significant adverse noise impacts was identified at the intersection of 26th Avenue and 4th Street, the resultant With-Action L_{eq} levels would remain "marginally unacceptable" as under existing conditions. In addition, noise is not a defining feature of the neighborhood. Future With-

Action condition noise levels would be comparable to other areas of the neighborhood and would not alter neighborhood character as a result.

Potential to Affect a Defining Feature of the Neighborhood

As stated in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, if a proposed project would have the potential to affect the defining features of the neighborhood, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas, then a detailed assessment is required to determine whether the proposed project 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, or historic and cultural resources. The potential significant adverse impacts on open space, noise, transportation, and pedestrian winds would not affect any defining feature of neighborhood character as most of the significant adverse impacts could be fully or partially mitigated. Furthermore, it is anticipated that many of those intersections that could not be mitigated will operate under congested conditions absent the Proposed Action. Moderate effects of the Proposed Action in the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood's character would not, either singly or in combination, result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. Overall, the Proposed Action would be consistent with existing trends and would facilitate new mixed-use development, waterfront open space, and improved neighborhood circulation.

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, and further analysis is not warranted.