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Neighborhood Character

This chapter considers how the Proposed Actions would affect neighborhood character, which is defined as the elements of the environment that combine to create the context and feeling of a neighborhood.

Introduction

This analysis of neighborhood character follows the guidelines set forth in the *2021 City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*. As defined within the manual, neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give neighborhoods a distinct "personality," including, land use, socioeconomic conditions, community facilities and services, open space resources, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise. Not all these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements. For a proposed project, a neighborhood character assessment under CEQR first identifies the defining features of the neighborhood and then evaluates whether the project has the potential to affect these defining features—either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical analysis areas. Thus, to determine the effects of a proposed project on neighborhood character, the salient features of neighborhood character are considered together. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare and occur under unusual circumstances (for example, development of a new commercial strip in a suburban section of Staten Island could have a significant impact on the neighborhood's character by changing it from a small-scale, quiet residential area to a busier commercial one). Moreover, a significant adverse impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood's character is not automatically equivalent to a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character, but, rather, serves as an indication that neighborhood character should be examined.

This section includes a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character; the assessment was prepared in conformance with the *CEQR Technical Manual* using information from the technical analyses presented in other relevant chapters of this EIS.

Principal Conclusions

The Proposed Project would not result in any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character. The study area has diverse characteristics due to the land use patterns and physical barriers surrounding the Development Site. Defining features of the study area comprise a mix of residential and industrial neighborhoods, sports and entertainment facilities, and natural features. These defining features are buffered from one another by highways and other significant transportation infrastructure.

The Proposed Project as a whole would represent an improvement in neighborhood character, as it would enable the transformation of underutilized parking lots into a unique mixed-use recreational, commercial, and entertainment hub with extensive public park space, landscaping, and other amenities for public recreation, that would be compatible and consistent with the surrounding land uses. While buffered from its surroundings by highways and physical features, the Proposed Project would result in a change in the character of the Development Site that would be more compatible with nearby neighborhoods and planned development projects than the No-Action condition.

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, transportation is one of the technical areas with the potential to affect neighborhood character. The Proposed Project would have an overall beneficial effect with respect to transportation. The Proposed Project would incorporate improvements to the transportation network infrastructure serving the Development Site and its surroundings, that would have beneficial effects on transportation conditions in the study area. These include accessibility improvements to the Mets-Willets Point NYCT No. 7 Train Subway Station, highway access improvements for Grand Central Parkway, and other roadway improvements along Shea Road and Seaver Way. Additionally, the Proposed Project would include improvements to bike and pedestrian infrastructure, including new promenades, pathways, and bike lanes, a new pedestrian bridge over Shea Road, and a new pedestrian/bike bridge. The pedestrian experience along Roosevelt Avenue in particular would be improved with widened sidewalks and new landscaping.

The Proposed Project would result in significant adverse impacts on local and highway traffic, bus, and pedestrians, of which some of the traffic and pedestrian impacts would be unmitigable. There would be no other significant adverse impacts in other technical areas contributing to neighborhood character, nor would any of these other technical areas experience moderate effects (per *CEQR Technical Manual* guidance, effects that are reasonably close to the impact threshold), from the Proposed Project; therefore, a combination of moderate effects would not occur.

While the Proposed Project would lead to increased traffic on nearby highways and result in some significant adverse traffic impacts, this would not change the character of the study area. The arterial highways and highway network found within the study area are designed to and currently carry large numbers of vehicles and would continue to do so in the No-Action condition. The increase in utilization on arterial highways resulting from the Project would not alter the relationship of these highways to their surrounding context and their function in the study area. The anticipated traffic impacts to the local roadway network that would result from the Proposed Project would also not affect neighborhood character. Of the impacts that could not be fully mitigated, local traffic impacts would mainly occur on busy commercial thoroughfares (as opposed to residential streets), such as

Roosevelt Avenue, which are characterized by high traffic volumes under existing conditions and would continue to do so in the No-Action condition. In particular, by the future analysis year, local traffic conditions would reflect major development projects (Willets Point Phase 1 and Phase 2). Accordingly, traffic congestion along local thoroughfares would be present even without the Proposed Project, due to background development in the No-Action condition that would generate substantial traffic volumes along these primary streets serving the local network. As such, traffic impacts on these intersections during one or more peak periods would not constitute changes in neighborhood character compared to the future No-Action condition.

The anticipated bus line capacity impacts to the Q48 route would be mitigated by increasing service frequency. Pedestrian impacts to between one and nine elements (depending on peak hour) are anticipated to occur; however, given the existing and anticipated future character of the study area, pedestrian conditions are not a defining feature of its character.

Methodology

As indicated above, a neighborhood character assessment is generally needed, per the *CEQR Technical Manual*, when a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in certain technical areas (land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; community facilities and services; open space; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; shadows; transportation; or noise) or when the project may have moderate effects on several of the elements that define a neighborhood's character. A "moderate" effect is generally defined as an effect considered reasonably close to the significant adverse impact threshold for a particular technical analysis area.

In the absence of an impact on any of the relevant technical areas, a combination of moderate effects to the neighborhood could result in an impact to neighborhood character. A significant impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood's character is not necessarily equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character. Therefore, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally appropriate if a proposed project has the potential to result in any significant adverse impacts in the technical areas listed above. Examples of possible changes in those technical areas that could result in an adverse effect on neighborhood character, should those technical areas be defining features of the neighborhood, are as follows:

- **Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy:** If development resulting from a proposed action would conflict with surrounding uses, conflict with land use policy or other public plans for the area, or change land use character, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Socioeconomic Conditions:** If a proposed action results in direct or indirect displacement or addition of population, employment, or businesses; or substantial differences in population or employment density, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Community Facilities and Services:** If a proposed action would displace or alter a community facility or increased demand on community facilities, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Open Space:** If an action would result in a reduction or displacement of an open space or result in additional population that would place a substantial demand on open space, neighborhood character could be affected.

- **Historic and Cultural Resources:** If a proposed action would result in substantial direct changes to a historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a historic resource, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Urban Design and Visual Resources:** If a proposed action would result in substantially different building form, size, scale, or arrangement; block form, street pattern, or street hierarchy; streetscape elements; or substantial direct changes to a visual feature, such as unique and important public view corridors and vistas, or to public visual access to such a feature, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Shadows:** If a proposed project would cast an incremental shadow on sun-sensitive resources, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Transportation:** If a proposed project would result in a change in traffic patterns or would substantially increase traffic volumes on residential streets, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Noise:** If a proposed action would substantially increase noise levels in an area, neighborhood character could be affected.

A preliminary assessment of neighborhood character determines whether changes expected in other technical analysis areas may affect a defining feature of neighborhood character. As part of a neighborhood character analysis, the defining features of the neighborhood are identified and then a determination is made as to whether a project has the potential to adversely affect these defining features, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas. A neighborhood that has a more varied context is typically able to tolerate greater change without experiencing significant adverse impacts. If the assessment concludes that a proposed project has the potential to adversely affect defining features of a neighborhood, a detailed analysis is undertaken to determine whether the project would result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

The neighborhood character analysis draws from the technical assessments listed above. As recommended in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for the neighborhood character analysis is consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas assessed under CEQR that contribute to the defining elements of the neighborhood. As such, the study area for neighborhood character is consistent with the quarter-mile study area used for the analysis of land use, zoning, and public policy.

The Proposed Actions would result in significant adverse transportation impacts. Therefore, a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character impacts is provided below. The analysis begins with the identification of the defining features of the neighborhood and then assesses whether the Proposed Actions would adversely affect those defining features within the framework of the above technical areas.

Preliminary Assessment

Existing Conditions

Defining Features of the Neighborhood

Development Site and Project Area

The Development Site comprises approximately 78 acres of land bounded by Seaver Way to the east, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Corona Yard to the south, Grand Central Parkway to the west, and Northern Boulevard to the north. The majority of the Development Site is in Flushing Meadows Corona Park; the remainder is within the boundary of the Grand Central Parkway and the mapped boundary of Northern Boulevard. The Project Area extends slightly beyond the Development Site to the north, west, and south (where additional roadway and accessibility improvements would be carried out as part of the Proposed Project).

Roosevelt Avenue is a defining feature of the Development Site. Traversing east to west through the southern part of the Development Site, Roosevelt Avenue is a two-way, four-lane road with wide (18-20-foot) sidewalks on each side. The MTA No. 7 Line runs along a steel viaduct structure spanning the entire width of Roosevelt Avenue, casting the street in shadow. The Mets-Willets Point NYCT No. 7 Train Subway Station is located towards the southeastern corner of the Development Site; it consists of concrete platforms bordered by corrugated metal walls with overhangs that partially shade the platforms. Several structures provide access from the street level to the elevated station.

Aside from several auxiliary MTA buildings located near Roosevelt Avenue and several parking gate attendant structures, there are no buildings located on the Development Site. Surface parking lots constitute the most prominent feature of the Development Site. Approximately 53 of the 78 acres consists of asphalt surface parking lots (7,423 spaces), while the remainder includes roadways and other circulation areas, and the landscaping surrounding these roadways. The surface parking is used only on game days during the baseball season, for commuter parking, and for other park events, including the U.S. Open. Up to 1,795 spaces are designated as paid commuter parking on business days. Otherwise, the vacant asphalt parking is not available to the public and left unused.

North of Roosevelt Avenue, the Development Site consists of surface parking with traffic islands, sidewalks, and landscaped areas. This area is gated, surrounded by a decorative iron fence, and lit by floodlights. The parking lots west of Citi Field were occupied by Shea Stadium and associated parking and circulation space beginning in 1964, until Shea Stadium was replaced by Citi Field in 2009. The only permanent structures in the Development Site north of Roosevelt Avenue are associated with the Mets-Willets Point NYCT No. 7 Train Subway Station. Between the station structure and the main entrance to Citi Field (the Jackie Robinson Rotunda), there is a paved, landscaped pedestrian plaza that provides access to Citi Field and divides the parking lots to its east and west. South of Roosevelt Avenue, apart from several MTA structures and a portion of the Passerelle Bridge adjacent to Mets-Willets Point NYCT No. 7 Train Subway Station, the remainder of the Development Site is occupied by more surface parking lots. There is also a publicly accessible landscaped open area in the southwestern corner of the Development Site between Olmsted Drive and Roosevelt Avenue.

In general, the Development Site is geared towards providing parking and access to large events. Most of the time, the Development Site can be characterized as a vacant area with low levels of activity.

Study Area

As discussed above, the study area for Neighborhood Character is consistent with the quarter-mile study area used for **Chapter 2, Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy**. The quarter-mile study area is generally bounded by Flushing Bay to the north, the Willets Point neighborhood and the Van Wyck Expressway to the east, Flushing Meadows Corona Park to the south, and 111th Street in the Corona neighborhood to the west. As discussed in **Chapter 2, Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy**, the Development Site is uniquely positioned near major highways and elevated transportation infrastructure, natural features, sports and entertainment facilities, and Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

The study area includes portions of two distinct neighborhoods—Corona to the west and Willets Point to the east—each with different and distinct characteristics. The remainder of the land in the study area comprises natural areas (Flushing Bay), open space and recreational areas (Flushing Meadows Corona Park), and transportation infrastructure (the MTA Corona Yard, Grand Central Parkway, Northern Boulevard, and the Whitestone Expressway) and contains relatively few buildings in comparison to a more typical area of New York City.

Transportation infrastructure, particularly elevated infrastructure including highways and rail, takes up a significant portion of the land area within the study area, creating buffers between the Development Site, the Corona and Willets Point neighborhoods, and Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Within the study area, elevated infrastructure noticeably limits sight lines and access points between different neighborhoods. For example, despite the proximity of Corona to the Development Site, access between these two areas (particularly for pedestrians) is significantly limited because there are few places to cross the Grand Central Parkway. The Development Site is separated from Flushing Meadows Corona Park by transportation infrastructure including elevated subway lines, the MTA Corona Yard, the Casey Stengel Bus Depot and the LIRR tracks and Mets-Willets Point LIRR station. While portions of the Development Site border the Willets Point neighborhood to the east, Citi Field separates the majority of the Development Site from Willets Point. Subway and rail stations are centrally located within the study area, largely providing access to events at Citi Field, the USTA Tennis Center, or within Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Other transportation infrastructure in the study area includes parking lots and bus and train depots. In general, the transportation infrastructure divides these neighborhoods from one another.

Defining features of neighborhood character in the study area are discussed in detail below, organized by their geography and physical attributes. Overall, the study area has diverse characteristics and is not defined by one element. The Development Site is mostly separated from the surrounding neighborhoods by several natural and man-made (infrastructure) barriers. The study area is heavily trafficked, with noise levels that are relatively high, reflecting the level of vehicular activity on the adjacent streets, the elevated MTA No. 7 Line, and airplane flights from nearby LaGuardia Airport.

Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Features

As noted above, the study area is uniquely positioned in an area of Queens that is host to a variety of open space, infrastructure, and other non-residential features. In particular, the Development Site is

notable in its proximity to various types of open space, recreational facilities, and natural features. In addition to defining the public use of the area, these features form connections and barriers between developed and inhabited areas surrounding the Development Site. Open spaces or natural areas in the study area are often directly bordered by elevated highways and transportation infrastructure. Flushing Bay and the World's Fair Marina form a natural boundary north of the Development Site, while the path of Flushing Creek where it flows into the bay to the east forms the boundary of Willets Point. Flushing Meadows Corona Park, one of the largest public parks in New York City, forms the southern boundary of the study area. Portions of the park near the Development Site are host to recreational and entertainment uses, such as the United States Tennis Association (USTA) Billie Jean King National Tennis Center (USTA Tennis Center). Citi Field, located directly east of the Development Site, also contributes to the recreational character of the area. The presence of destination entertainment and recreation venues (Citi Field and the USTA Tennis Center), as well as a regional park within the study area, are significant factors in defining the character of the area.

The Flushing Bay waterfront is a defining natural feature of the study area. It is located north of the Development Site, and like other key features of the study area, it is separated from the Development Site and its surroundings by several elevated highways. Within the study area, the Flushing Bay waterfront is a recreational waterfront supporting an active marina (the World's Fair Marina) and event space (the World's Fair Banquet Hall). It is traversed by a public open space, the Malcolm X Promenade, which is a 1.4-mile greenway that runs from LaGuardia Airport to Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Shea Road and Northern Boulevard provide access to the promenade, but the Grand Central Parkway and Northern Boulevard (along with several parking lots serving the marina) largely isolate the promenade from adjacent areas. Flushing Bay is fed by Flushing Creek, which defines the eastern boundary of Willets Point, the neighborhood to the east of Seaver Way/126th Street. In contrast to the Flushing Bay Waterfront, the portion of the creek within the study area is an undeveloped marsh that is crossed by Roosevelt Avenue and the elevated LIRR tracks.

The majority of Flushing Meadows Corona Park is located to the south of the MTA Corona Rail Yard and is a destination park for its open space resources as well as its large-scale entertainment and institutional land uses. The portion of the park that is within the study area encompasses a large share of the USTA Tennis Center. To the west of the USTA Tennis Center is the New York Hall of Science, the parking for which is within the study area. To the east of the USTA Tennis Center and within the study area are public restrooms, public tennis courts, and a miniature golf course. The Olmsted Center, an office complex housing NYC Parks facilities, is also located in the study area. As discussed in **Chapter 7, Historic and Cultural Resources**, Flushing Meadows Corona Park is the former site of the 1939 and 1964 World's Fairs. In the study area, several State- and National Register of Historic Places (S/NR)-eligible historic resources in the Flushing Meadows Corona Park district contribute to the character of the park—including the Mets-Willets Point NYCT No. 7 Train Subway Station and IRT Interlocking Tower, the Passerelle Bridge and Pavilion, and several structures near the main gate of Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

Citi Field is located directly east of the Development Site. Citi Field is a baseball stadium that opened in 2009 and can accommodate up to 42,000 fans. Citi Field replaced Shea Stadium, which opened in 1964 on the western portion of the Development Site, where the Citi Field parking lots are located today. It is the home field of the New York Mets but also hosts a variety of entertainment and sporting events, including award ceremonies and graduations. Events at the open-air stadium are typically held from late March/early April to late September/early October. The presence of both the USTA Tennis Center and Citi Field within the study area means that pedestrian activity, traffic

patterns, crowds, and usage of the surrounding open spaces vary by the amount and type of entertainment programming taking place within these event spaces.

Corona: Dense Low-Rise Residential Blocks

Located west of the Grand Central Parkway, Corona is the only area of existing residential and mixed-use development in the study area. Corona is a demographically diverse neighborhood with a majority-Hispanic population (per the 2020 US Census). Throughout the neighborhood, visible signage can be found in several languages, including Spanish, English, Chinese, and Korean. The neighborhood is largely characterized by dense low-rise and mid-rise development, with several of the larger multi-family buildings clustered along Roosevelt Avenue and to the north of 37th Avenue. With few exceptions, local streets throughout the neighborhood are typically narrow, one-way streets with sidewalks and parking on both sides. Most intersections are unsignalized.

Roosevelt Avenue to the west of 114th Street is a bustling commercial corridor that features restaurants, bars, cafes, stores, and light industrial uses as well as churches, hotels, and residences. The elevated subway tracks over Roosevelt Avenue limit visibility and sunlight, creating a sense of enclosure at the street level. Noise from both traffic and passing trains is significant along Roosevelt Avenue. The intensity of use and development along Roosevelt Avenue make it a central feature of the Corona neighborhood. In general, levels of noise and activity decrease moving farther north and south from Roosevelt Avenue, as the commercial corridor transitions to residential uses.

The blocks immediately north and south of Roosevelt Avenue contain a mix of low- and mid-rise development, with generally larger mixed-use buildings located along the blockfronts facing Roosevelt Avenue. One- and two-family residences are typical farther north and south of Roosevelt Avenue, where the streets have a quieter character with lower levels of activity. With a variety of forms, materials, and architectural styles, these buildings make up the bulk of development in Corona within the study area; they include detached, attached, and semi-detached one- to three-story buildings with modest front yards. It is common for such one-family, two-family, or small multi-family residences to occupy narrow lots along the midblocks, while larger-scale apartment buildings occupy corner lots.

North of 37th Avenue, the character of existing development in Corona transitions from high-lot-coverage, low-rise buildings to lower-lot-coverage, mid-rise residential developments interspersed with small parks and a public school (P.S. 143-Louis Armstrong). There is a noticeable change in elevation, with streets sloping downward to the north and east. In this area, Hinton Park, Louis Armstrong Playground, and landscaped areas surrounding residential developments create a transition from the dense residential neighborhood in the west to the unbuilt areas buffering the parkway and interchange in the east, delineating the eastern boundary of Corona. 114th Street continues this transition throughout the rest of the study area, where it borders residential buildings to the west and a planted strip to the east that separates the street from Grand Central Parkway. 114th Street is also noticeable for its topography; its intersection with Roosevelt is at the top of a steep hill that slopes downward until it reaches a point just north of 37th Avenue.

Willets Point: Automotive Buildings and Active Construction Sites

Located east of Seaver Way, the majority of the Willets Point neighborhood falls within the study area. Several factors lend Willets Point its unique character, including its history, land uses, lack of infrastructure, and relative isolation from other neighborhoods. The neighborhood is also undergoing a significant transition, as described below under **No-Action Condition**.

Willets Point is mainly characterized by auto-related and light industrial development. Auto body repair shops and parts storage are historic uses in the area, and the auto-related businesses that remain in the neighborhood are typically simple metal structures surrounded by surface lots used for the storage of cars and parts. East of Seaver Way, streets are generally unpaved industrial dirt roads without clearly delineated sidewalks or on-street parking. A significant amount of vehicles are parked or stored for parts along the curb. The portion of the Willets Point neighborhood located north of 34th Avenue generally has more stone and brick structures as opposed to open storage lots and sheds. These structures support a mix of auto-related and industrial uses including warehouses and workshops. Paved roads are also more common in this area. Throughout Willets Point, the neighborhood character is not well suited for pedestrian access or any kind of residential use. In fact, there are no known residential uses in the neighborhood. Drainage is a noticeable issue throughout the neighborhood, with significant areas of standing water seen in the roadbed even during dry periods.

As discussed further in detail below, Willets Point is undergoing a significant transformation into a mixed-use neighborhood and entertainment destination. Given the size and scope of this ongoing transformation, a large portion of the neighborhood is currently occupied by construction sites, including much of the area south of 36th Avenue. In the existing conditions, these sites are generally in the grading and/or excavation stages, and no new structures have been constructed yet. The contrast between these construction sites and the remaining industrial and auto-related uses to the north highlight the transitional nature of this neighborhood.

No-Action Condition

Development Site and Project Area

As described in **Chapter 1, Project Description**, in the future without the Proposed Actions (No-Action condition), it is assumed that the Development Site would continue operating under existing conditions; it would remain as a paved parking area for Citi Field under the current lease agreement with the City, and no additional public realm improvements would be made. The surface parking lots currently contain 7,423 parking spaces.

Study Area

In general, while development will occur in the vicinity of the Development Site in the future without the Proposed Actions, the study area will continue to have the diverse characteristics and land uses found in existing conditions. Under the No-Action condition, several new developments and other improvements will be completed within the study area by the 2030 analysis year (see **Appendix A** for a complete list of projects). These include developments under the Willets Point Development Projects and several infrastructure improvements. Given the ongoing redevelopment of Willets Point, it is anticipated that in the future without the Proposed Actions, the character of Willets Point within the study area would be substantially different than under existing conditions—with areas that are now vacant lots or construction sites being replaced by large-scale mixed-use development, as described below. The scale and intensity of planned development within Corona is will be smaller, consisting of two anticipated mid-rise buildings: one residential and one mixed-use residential and community facility. It is anticipated that the character of Corona would remain as in existing conditions. On the whole, the most significant changes affecting neighborhood character in the future without the Proposed Project would occur near the Development Site in Willets Point and near

Citi Field, with the rest of the study area remaining relatively unchanged compared to existing conditions.

As discussed in **Chapter 2, Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy**, Willets Point Phase 1 and 2 will transition the Willets Point peninsula from an industrial area into a mixed-use neighborhood and entertainment destination by 2027. These projects will add a total of 2,500 affordable dwelling units (DUs) as well as hotel, retail, community-facility, and public-school space. There will also be a 500,000 gsf (with 25,000 seats) soccer stadium and 2.77 acres of open space. This development will result in a substantial change in the character of the Willets Point neighborhood in the future without the Proposed Actions, introducing a residential neighborhood and destination entertainment at a currently underutilized site.

City agencies are carrying out several rehabilitations and improvements to open spaces throughout the study area. NYC Parks is planning to undertake improvements to the Candela structures and Malcolm X Promenade intersections at Boat Basin Place, reconstruct the Passerelle Bridge, and reconstruct Pier 1 at the World's Fair Marina. The New York City Department of Design and Construction (NYCDDC) is also planning to rehabilitate the Porpoise Bridge over Flushing Creek within Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. Though these planned projects represent improvements to appearance and structural integrity of open space infrastructure in the study area, they are not likely to noticeably affect neighborhood character.

The MTA plans to reconstruct the Mets-Willets Point LIRR Station starting in 2026. A completion date has not yet been announced, and the build year for this project is unknown. This project would not have a direct effect on neighborhood character.

With-Action Condition

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual,* transportation is one of the technical areas that has the potential to affect neighborhood character. In the future with the Proposed Actions, changes in transportation conditions would not have a negative effect on the defining features of neighborhood character at the Development Site or study area compared to existing conditions, and therefore no significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character would result.

As discussed in **Chapter 14, Transportation**, the Proposed Project would incorporate improvements to the transportation infrastructure serving the Development Site, including accessibility improvements to the Mets-Willets Point NYCT No. 7 Train Subway Station, highway access improvements for Grand Central Parkway, roadway improvements along Shea Road and Seaver Way, and pedestrian and bike infrastructure upgrades. The Proposed Project would result in significant adverse traffic, bus, and pedestrian impacts. The Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse subway impacts. The Proposed Project would include improvements within the area of the Mets-Willets Point NYCT No. 7 Train Subway Station that would strengthen connections to and from the Development Site. As a key benefit of these enhancements, the station would be made fully ADA accessible.

Per *CEQR Technical Manual* guidance, a significant adverse impact in one of the technical areas that are components of neighborhood character does not necessarily indicate that a significant adverse neighborhood character impact would occur; rather, it serves as an indication that neighborhood character should be examined. Mitigation measures were identified for many of the transportation impacts, as discussed in **Chapter 21, Mitigation**. It is anticipated that the bus impacts resulting from the Proposed Project would be mitigated. Even though several unmitigated impacts would result

with respect to local traffic, highway traffic, and pedestrians, these impacts on their own would not represent a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character, as discussed below.

Potential to Affect the Defining Features of the Neighborhood

Per *CEQR Technical Manual* guidance, after the defining features of a neighborhood are identified, the potential for a project 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, should be examined. For example, a project may affect a defining neighborhood feature if a significant adverse shadow impact was identified on sunlight sensitive features of an historic building or park and that resource was determined to be central to a neighborhood's character. A combination of moderate effects that could affect defining features may occur, for example, with a proposal for a large office complex in an area characterized by quiet residential streets with limited pedestrian and vehicular traffic, resulting in an increase in traffic and pedestrian activity on local streets to the extent that the character of the area may be significantly altered.

Significant adverse transportation impacts were identified in the areas of local and highway traffic, bus, and pedestrians. While the Proposed Project would lead to increased traffic on nearby highways and thus result in significant adverse traffic impacts, this would not change the character of the various neighborhoods in the study area that are bordered by these highways. The adjacent arterial highways, such as the Grand Central Parkway and the Van Wyck and Whitestone Expressways, are characterized by heavy utilization as they are designed to carry large numbers of vehicles. Thus, the identification of significant adverse impacts on the highway network and an increase in utilization on arterial highways would not alter the relationship of these highways to the adjacent neighborhoods. The With-Action analyses represent worst-case scenarios that may not be indicative of what would typically occur during most days over the course of the year. Finally, the Project's roadway improvements would result in benefits to site ingress, egress, and accessibility from the surrounding highways. Therefore, the anticipated highway traffic impacts would not affect the character of the study area.

The Proposed Project would be designed to minimize the routing of traffic generated by the Development Site to local roads in the adjacent neighborhoods by separating Project-generated traffic from the local road network wherever possible. As discussed in detail in **Chapter 14, Transportation**, the proposed roadway improvements would enhance the capacity of roadway and ramp elements providing connections to the regional highway system and regional arterials. The proposed geometric and operational roadway improvements would be designed to keep gameday traffic away from Roosevelt Avenue and other neighborhood surface streets. In addition, the Proposed Project would implement tr<u>ansportation</u>~~avel~~ demand management (TDM) strategies to reduce the share of auto travel by both visitors to the Proposed Project and Mets fans traveling to Citi Field. While traffic impacts would occur, there would also be significant improvements to the functionality of the local roadway network surrounding the Development Site.

Significant adverse traffic impacts on local roadways are anticipated to occur in the study area, the bulk of which would occur along commercial corridors including Northern Boulevard (north and west of the Development Site), Roosevelt Avenue (south of the Development Site), and Shea Road (west of the Development Site). Local traffic network impacts would generally occur along these busy commercial corridors as opposed to residential streets with lower levels of activity. As discussed in **Chapter 21, Mitigation**, impacts at many of these intersections could be fully or partially mitigated

using methods such as signal timing modifications or installation of new traffic~~,~~ signals. ~~installation, or turning regulations.~~

Unmitigated impacts on local traffic would occur at several locations around the perimeter of the Development Site as well as at various intersections in Corona and Flushing. These impacts would occur primarily along Roosevelt Avenue and Northern Boulevard—streets already experiencing high traffic volumes. Despite additional traffic from the Proposed Project, these impacts would not significantly alter the neighborhood character due to existing and expected future congestion. Additionally, intersections around the Grand Central Parkway and Willets Point, would see impacts due to increased traffic, but these impacts would not affect the defining features of the local neighborhoods because these areas are characterized by high levels of traffic and activity. Therefore, local traffic impacts from the Proposed Project would not cause significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.

The Proposed Project would result in a capacity shortfall for the Q48 bus route; however, it is anticipated that service frequency on the Q48 line would be increased to address its capacity shortfalls, as discussed in **Chapter 21, Mitigation**. Conditions on the Q48 line would not affect the defining features of neighborhood character in the study area.

In general, the Proposed Project would result in improvements to transit, the pedestrian network and the bike path network surrounding the Development Site. The Proposed Project would incorporate improvements to the MTA station that would strengthen connections to and from the Development Site. Specifically, modifications to the station structure would enhance the connection between the Development Site north of Roosevelt Avenue, and the Passerelle structure south of Roosevelt Avenue, thereby enhancing the pedestrian connection from the southern portion of Flushing Meadows Corona Park to the Development Site and the waterfront beyond. As a key benefit of these enhancements, the station would be made fully ADA accessible. Pedestrian and bike infrastructure improvements would include the construction of new promenades and pathways including a protected bike and pedestrian way under the Whitestone Expressway, a new pedestrian bridge over Shea Road, a pedestrian/bike bridge over the highway ramps replacing the existing at-grade crosswalk at the ramp from the westbound Grand Central Parkway to the eastbound Whitestone Expressway, numerous additions and improvements to sidewalks along Shea Road and Roosevelt Avenue, and crosswalks connecting the north and south sides of Roosevelt Avenue. Lighting improvements and a protected zone for bikes and pedestrians along Roosevelt Avenue under the elevated No. 7 Subway tracks would also be included to improve pedestrian experience and safety. The proposed public park space would include bike lanes and pedestrian pathways, further strengthening connections to and from the Development Site.

The Proposed Project would result in significant adverse pedestrian impacts to some sidewalks ~~and~~, crosswalks, and corners in the vicinity of the Development Site, all ~~several~~ of which would be unmitigable significant adverse impacts (at a total of up to two~~hree~~ elements on non-gamedays and nine elements on gamedays). Unmitigable impacts to crosswalks and corners would occur at ~~several intersections along~~the intersection of Roosevelt Avenue and Seaver Way, while unmitigated sidewalk impacts would occur along~~t 126th Street~~Seaver Way and Roosevelt Avenue~~Seaver Way~~. Roosevelt Avenue provides limited access to residential neighborhoods and small businesses, particularly near the Development Site, where it is a pedestrian corridor through vacant uses. In this location, it does not provide visual interest or experience year-round activity, and these impacts would not represent a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. Despite the anticipated pedestrian impacts, the Proposed Project would result in an overall improvement in the pedestrian conditions along

Roosevelt Avenue, particularly given the proposed addition and enhancement of crosswalks connecting the north and south sides of Roosevelt Avenue, the significant widening of sidewalks, and the addition of streetscape landscaping and new open space. Overall pedestrian conditions along ~~126th Street~~Seaver Way and ~~Seaver Way~~Roosevelt Avenue would also benefit from the proposed improvements described above, given the addition of new pedestrian connections throughout the development site. As such, impacts to pedestrian elements would not represent a significant adverse impact with respect to neighborhood character.

As discussed above, the *CEQR Technical Manual* states that even if a project does not have the potential to result in a significant adverse impact in a certain technical area, the project may have the potential to result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that cumulatively may affect neighborhood character. A moderate effect is generally defined as an effect considered reasonably close to the significant adverse impact threshold for a particular technical analysis area. Based on the analyses in **Chapter 2, Land Use, Zoning and Public Policy, Chapter 3, Socioeconomic Conditions, Chapter 4, Community Facilites, Chapter 5, Open Space, Chapter 6, Shadows, Chapter 7, Historic and Cultural Resources, Chapter 8, Urban Design and Visual Resources, and Chapter 17, Noise**, the Proposed Project would not result in moderate effects in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; community facilities; open space; historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources; shadows; or noise as defined by CEQR guidelines. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not have the potential to result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that cumulatively may affect neighborhood character.

Although the Proposed Project would constitute a substantial change, rather than resulting in a significant adverse impact, this change would instead result in an improvement in neighborhood character, specifically at the Development Site and its immediate surroundings. In its existing state, which would continue in the future absent the Proposed Project, the Development Site would be occupied by underutilized parking lots which do not make a positive contribution to the character of the Development Site and its surroundings. The surface parking surrounding Citi Field is used only on game days during baseball season, for other private events held at Citi Field, and for certain other scheduled events in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, including the U.S. Open. Apart from some space designated for commuter parking on business days, the approximately 53 acres of vacant asphalt parking is not available to the public and is left unused. As a result, the utility of the site to the local community is limited, as is its contribution to the character of the surrounding neighborhoods.

The Proposed Project would transform these underutilized parking lots into a unique mixed-use recreational, commercial, and entertainment hub with extensive public park space with landscaping and other amenities for public recreation, promoting economic development and creating thousands of quality jobs for area residents. In conjunction with the planned Willets Point redevelopment to the east, the land uses included in the Proposed Project would contribute to a continuing transformation of the neighborhood linking Corona to Willets Point. The proposed commercial, recreational, and entertainment uses would complement the new Willets Point mixed-use neighborhood under development, creating a more active and walkable streetscape in an area that would otherwise be dominated by inaccessible paved areas. The proposed mixed-use commercial, recreational and entertainment land uses would be compatible with the commercial buildings along Roosevelt Avenue, particularly the 114th Street commercial corridor. The proposed 20 acres of public park space on the Development Site would also be consistent with the surrounding open space uses, a defining features of the neighborhood.

The Proposed Project would include significant public realm and infrastructure improvements throughout the Development Site, including at least 20 acres of new public park space, transit and pedestrian improvements including accessibility upgrades, and roadway improvements. The proposed public open space would help to integrate the Development Site with the waterfront to the north and Flushing Meadows Corona Park to the south, both of which would otherwise be disconnected from the site and relatively inaccessible. The replacement of impermeable surface parking with a mix of at-grade landscaped open space as well as photovoltaic panels and softscape on top of floodplain-compliant structures would help reduce stormwater runoff and improve the site's resiliency by enhancing biodiversity and lessening the heat-island effect. The proposed realignment of roadways, traffic management measures, and improvements to waterfront pathways would enhance connections to the surrounding neighborhoods and other resources.

Based on the foregoing analysis, the Proposed Project would not cause a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.