

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the effects of the proposed project on neighborhood character. As defined in the *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual* (January 2012 edition), neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give neighborhoods their distinct “personality.” These elements may include a neighborhood’s land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation, 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.

This chapter considers the effects of the proposed project on the neighborhood character of the study area, and relies on the analyses of the components of neighborhood character (i.e., land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) as analyzed elsewhere in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). As detailed in this chapter, the proposed project would substantially transform the character of the project sites and their relation to the larger area; however, these changes would not be considered adverse. Instead, the proposed project would convert large surface parking lots located on prime waterfront property into a vibrant mixed-use area, would enhance the area as an attractive gateway to Staten Island, and would help to revive the civic hub of the St. George neighborhood and Staten Island with an enhanced sense of place.

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

The study area can be described by a diverse set of elements, including its mix of transportation, open space, and institutional uses, the Richmond County Bank Ballpark (the Stadium), and its location on the waterfront offering views of the New York Harbor. No one defining feature would be considered critical to the character of the neighborhood. Rather, the various localized features contribute to it. Overall, the proposed project would result in a positive effect on the neighborhood character in the study area. The proposed project would enhance the area as an attractive gateway to Staten Island. The project sites would be more inviting and appealing to visit with new landscaping as well as passive and active open space. The proposed project would improve connectivity between the waterfront and the upland areas, which would be beneficial to the neighborhood. The proposed project would not create a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. To the contrary, neighborhood character would be improved by replacing large surface parking lots with new active, mixed-use development.

B. METHODOLOGY

An analysis of neighborhood character begins by determining whether a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any technical area (land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) or if a project would result in a combination of moderate effects to

several elements that could cumulatively impact neighborhood character. If the answer is yes, a preliminary assessment is undertaken; the preliminary assessment first identifies the defining features of the neighborhood, and then assesses whether the project has the potential to impact these defining features, either through the potential for significant adverse impacts or a combination of moderate effects. If the preliminary assessment concludes that a proposed project has the potential to affect defining features of a neighborhood, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character is undertaken. The detailed assessment uses information from the preliminary assessment as a baseline and the future No-Action and future With-Action conditions are then projected and compared to determine whether a project would result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. This assessment considers the incremental changes associated with the proposed project, compared with the No-Action condition for the 2016 Build year, in each relevant technical area.

As described in the relevant chapters of this EIS, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; shadows; historic and cultural resources; urban design; or noise. However, the proposed project would result in potential significant adverse impacts in transportation. Therefore, a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character impacts from the proposed project is provided below. The preliminary assessment describes the defining features of the neighborhood and then assesses the potential for the proposed project to impact these defining features. The preliminary assessment is followed by a detailed assessment which considers whether the proposed project would result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER COMPONENTS

As discussed above, the components of neighborhood character include land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise.

STUDY AREA

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

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare and it would be under unusual circumstances that, 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. Rather, it serves as an indication that neighborhood character may be significantly affected.

C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

DEFINING FEATURES

The surrounding neighborhood is generally defined by the prominent transportation and institutional uses. Adjacent to the South Site is the Staten Island Ferry St. George Terminal (Ferry Terminal), which is the transit hub for the Staten Island Ferry, the Staten Island Railway, and New York City Transit bus lines. In addition to the concentration of transportation uses, the neighborhood is also defined by the concentration of public facilities and institutions, including Staten Island Borough Hall, the Richmond County Supreme Court building, the Staten Island Family Court building, the St. George Post Office, the St. George Library Center (a branch of the New York Public Library), the Staten Island Museum, and the 120th Precinct of the New York Police Department. A new facility for the Richmond County Supreme Court, located on a parcel bordered by Central Avenue, Hyatt Street, and Bay Street, is currently under construction and is expected to be completed in 2013.

In addition to the presence of transportation and institutional uses, another defining feature of the study area is the Stadium, the home of the Staten Island Yankees minor league baseball team. The Stadium attracts visitors to Staten Island during the baseball season.

Open space is another defining feature of the neighborhood. North of the project sites is the North Shore Waterfront Esplanade, which has walking and running paths, circuit fitness equipment, several benches and picnic areas, and the 9/11 Postcards Memorial. South of the project sites is the North Shore Esplanade, which is a promenade running along the north side of Richmond Terrace between Nicholas Street and St. Peter's Place overlooking the North Shore Waterfront Esplanade and the Upper New York Bay. The park features benches and planted trees.

The neighborhood is also defined by its location on the waterfront. Despite their location on the waterfront, the project sites and the waterfront are currently separated from the remainder of the study area by Richmond Terrace—a wide, tree-lined boulevard with a raised central median—and its abutting retaining wall, which is topped by a metal fence. The height of the wall varies from 20 to 35 feet above the grade of the project sites. The grade change at Richmond Terrace, as well as the web of transportation infrastructure leading to the Ferry Terminal, serves to limit pedestrian circulation between the waterfront and the upland St. George neighborhood.

At night, the project sites are visible within a typical urban waterfront in terms of views from Richmond Terrace, the Ferry Terminal and approaching ferries, and from the North Shore Waterfront Esplanade and the area surrounding the Stadium. The parking lots on the project sites are lighted by tall floodlights, the Ferry Terminal and the Postcards 9/11 Memorial are lit, and the Stadium has periodic night games during the baseball season.

Overall, the study area can be described by a diverse set of elements, including its mix of transportation, open space, and institutional uses, the Stadium, and its location on the waterfront. No one defining feature would be considered critical to the character of the neighborhood. Rather, the various localized features contribute to it.

POTENTIAL TO AFFECT THE DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The proposed project would result in a 340,000-gross square-foot (gsf) retail outlet center, a 130,000-gsf hotel, a 20,000-gsf catering facility, and approximately 1,250 public and accessory

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parking spaces on the South Site, and the Observation Wheel, a 120,000-gsf Wheel Terminal Building with various commercial, retail (including merchandising and restaurants), exhibition space, theater space, accessory uses and approximately 950 public and accessory parking spaces and 12 bus spaces on the North Site. The North Site development would incorporate a green roof design that would provide publicly accessible landscaped active and passive open space that would begin at Richmond Terrace, spanning the parking structure and Wheel Terminal Building beneath it and offering residents and visitors of Staten Island a new open space with vistas of New York Harbor. In addition, a waterborne transit landing may also be pursued as a third project component independent of the proposed North Site and South Site developments. The potential waterborne transit landing would be located adjacent to the Stadium at the end of the Wall Street Ramp.

The proposed project would have the potential to affect the defining features of the neighborhood as follows:

- **Land Use.** The proposed project would replace surface parking lots with a new mixed use development that would include an observation wheel, retail and commercial uses, theater and exhibition space, public and accessory parking, hotel, and a catering facility.
- **Socioeconomic Conditions.** The proposed project would introduce new businesses and visitors to the project sites.
- **Open Space.** The proposed project would introduce a new worker population that would use open space developed as part of the proposed project and existing open spaces within the study area.
- **Shadows.** The introduction of a 625-foot-tall Observation Wheel on the North Site would cast shadows in the immediate vicinity of the project sites.
- **Historic and Cultural Resources.** While there are no known or potential architectural resources located on the project sites, there are 12 known architectural resources and several potential architectural resources in the 400-foot study area. These known and potential resources contribute to the area's existing neighborhood character.
- **Urban Design and Visual Resources.** The proposed project would develop new buildings and structures, as well as new publicly-accessible passive and active open space, where surface parking lots currently exist. The proposed project would make noticeable alterations to view corridors and the streetscape of the surrounding area. At night, the proposed project would also be lighted to varying degrees, depending on the season and the scheduling of events, and would be visible within a context of nighttime views across the Harbor from Lower Manhattan and portions of the waterfronts of Brooklyn and New Jersey.
- **Transportation.** The proposed project would introduce a new visitor and worker population that would increase activity—both pedestrian and vehicular—at the project sites and in the surrounding neighborhood.
- **Noise.** The proposed project would increase vehicular activity at the project sites. In addition, noise would be generated by the proposed Observation Wheel. Therefore, the proposed project would potentially result in increased noise levels in the surrounding neighborhood.

As noted above, the study area can be described by a diverse set of elements, including its mix of transportation, open space, and institutional uses, the Stadium, and its location on the waterfront. As detailed in other chapters of this EIS, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, shadows, historic

resources, urban design and visual resources, or noise. However, the proposed project would result in significant adverse impacts in transportation. Since the proposed project has the potential to affect contributing elements of the character of the area, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character is warranted and is presented in the next section.

D. DETAILED ASSESSMENT

As per the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character builds upon the preliminary assessment to project future No-Action and With-Action conditions in order to determine whether the proposed project would result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts.

FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT

In the No-Action condition, the project sites would remain surface public parking lots for the Ferry Terminal and the Stadium. There would also be no changes to the potential waterborne transit landing site, which would remain a pier with seating areas.

As described in Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” there are a number of development projects within and adjacent to the ¼-mile study area that are expected to be completed by 2016. These include the redevelopment of a portion of the U.S. Lighthouse Service Depot with retail use; the completion of the new Richmond County Supreme Court; and several residential and mixed-use (residential and commercial/community facility) projects. A number of the development projects are located on waterfront property, a reflection of the shift from manufacturing and transportation infrastructure uses on the waterfront toward more attractive space for residents and visitors. At approximately 18 stories plus a penthouse, the Liberty Towers development will be taller than most of the buildings in this portion of Richmond Terrace, but will be similar in height to the 20-story Castleton Park apartment buildings upland on the same block. The new facility for the Richmond County Supreme Court will be approximately four stories tall, and thus will not be significantly different in scale than the existing buildings in the surrounding area.

THE FUTURE WITH THE PROPOSED PROJECT

As discussed above under “Preliminary Assessment,” the proposed project could affect defining characteristics of the study area. This section analyzes the probable impacts of the proposed project on these defining characteristics with regard to each relevant technical area for the 2016 build year.

LAND USE, ZONING, AND PUBLIC POLICY

As discussed in Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” the proposed project would redevelop the North Site and South Site with land uses that are compatible with the surrounding area and enhance the area’s status as a civic center and gateway to Staten Island. The proposed project would introduce a major destination attraction that would replace surface parking lots on prime waterfront property, and would further the process of redeveloping St. George’s former industrial waterfront with public amenities that began with the construction of the Stadium and the North Shore Waterfront Esplanade. The proposed parking structures on both the North Site and South Site would accommodate users of the facilities in the area: commuters, Stadium visitors on game days, and visitors to the waterfront and the proposed project’s attractions.

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Additionally, the design of the proposed project, which includes a deck over the railroad right-of-way that separates the project sites and Richmond Terrace, rooftop open space, and pedestrian pathways, would significantly improve connections between the waterfront and the surrounding neighborhood. Furthermore, a potential waterborne transit landing would conform to the transportation-related uses located adjacent to the project sites. With the proposed project, a zoning map amendment, a zoning text amendment, and special permits pursuant to the amended text would be required. The Special St. George District text would be modified to add a new North Waterfront Subdistrict that would include the North Site and South Site, the Ferry Terminal and the Stadium sites. The proposed Special St. George District's new North Waterfront Subdistrict would facilitate the development of the retail outlet center, hotel, and catering facility on the South Site and the Observation Wheel, Wheel Terminal Building, and parking structure on the North Site. These actions would be limited and specific to the above listed sites and would not result in potential changes in the broader area. The proposed project would make the project sites more inviting and appealing to visit, which would be beneficial to the character of the neighborhood.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

As discussed in Chapter 3, "Socioeconomic Conditions," the proposed Observation Wheel and retail outlet center would draw new visitors and consumer expenditure potential to the study area, which in turn could lead to an increase in commercial property values and rents at some locations. While additional visitation to the study area is not expected to alter the commercial office market in the study area, some retail and industrial property owners may seek to locate new commercial tenants in order to capitalize on the change in market conditions. However, the potential for business displacement due to increased rents is limited, and would not adversely affect neighborhood conditions. Rather, project-generated visitation could lead to decreases in retail vacancy rates within the study area and a broader retail offering. Local area demand for neighborhood goods and services would continue to be met by businesses within and immediately surrounding the study area.

While the possibility of some limited indirect business displacement due to competition could not be ruled out, any displacement that might occur would not jeopardize the viability of any neighborhood retail strips, and would not result in adverse changes to neighborhood character. The proposed project would introduce new workers and visitors to the area. The combination of new workers and visitors would increase foot traffic and increase retail demand, benefitting existing retail in the surrounding area. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character due to socioeconomic conditions.

OPEN SPACE

The open space in the study area is a defining element of the neighborhood. By creating new public open space and activating an area currently used for parking, the proposed project represents an improvement to open space resources in the area. The open space on the North Site and South Site would be easily accessible from the Staten Island Ferry and would complement the open space along the North Shore Waterfront Esplanade. This open space would provide additional passive and active open space resources for the study area population, which would be beneficial to the neighborhood. Further, the proposed development on the North Site and South Site would also benefit the neighborhood by providing pedestrian connections between the waterfront and the St. George civic center.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

As discussed in Chapter 7, “Historic Resources,” there are 12 known architectural resources and several potential architectural resources in the 400-foot study area. These known and potential resources contribute to the area’s existing neighborhood character. The known resources include: the St. George/New Brighton Historic District; Staten Island Family Courthouse; 120th Police Precinct; Richmond County Courthouse; Staten Island Borough Hall; Staten Island Light-House Depot; Curtis High School; New York Public Library, St. George Branch; Saint George Theater and Building; Staten Island Federal Office Building; Staten Island Museum; and the Staten Island Savings Bank. The proposed project would be most notable from Richmond Terrace—given the roadway’s wide width and adjacency to the project sites—and the proposed project would represent a significant change to the context of the architectural resources on the inland side of Richmond Terrace. The scale of the proposed Observation Wheel would be much greater than any of the existing structures within this portion of the study area. However, the proposed project would not be anticipated to significantly alter the visual prominence of these architectural resources. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character due to historic and cultural resources.

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

In the future with the proposed project, the pedestrian experience of the project sites would change considerably; however, as described in Chapter 8, “Urban Design and Visual Resources,” the changes associated with the proposed project would not meet the *CEQR Technical Manual* threshold for a significant adverse urban design impact. Rather, the proposed project would develop new buildings and structures, as well as new publicly accessible open space, where none currently exist. Compared to the surface parking lots that would continue to exist in the No-Action condition, the proposed Observation Wheel, retail, commercial, hotel, catering facility, and theater and exhibition space uses would be more active and would enhance the pedestrian experience of these sites. The proposed project also would provide enhanced connections between the waterfront and the upland areas. Greater levels of pedestrian activity generated by the proposed uses on the sites would make the project area more inviting and appealing to visit, which would be beneficial to the character of the neighborhood.

While the proposed project would develop a tall structure on a portion of the North Site, this structure (the Observation Wheel) would have an open framework, and the structures to be developed on the South Site would be low in scale. In comparison to the No-Action condition, the proposed project would notably alter the visual character of the surrounding study area; however, the change is not anticipated to be significantly adverse. The character is already changing through the various buildings currently under construction, which include tall buildings along Richmond Terrace. The visibility of the Observation Wheel in surrounding views would be variable, based on intervening buildings, street trees and other landscaping and vegetation, as well as the screening effects of distance and the Wheel’s light-colored metalwork. Because of its open framework, the Observation Wheel would have less of a visual presence than a built structure of the same size. Overall, the Observation Wheel would be a unique, but not incompatible visual element within the setting of the study area’s visual resources. The proposed development is intended to become a notable element of, and enhancement to, the urban design and visual character of the Richmond Terrace corridor between Bay and Nicholas Streets.

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As discussed above, at night, the project sites are visible within a typical urban waterfront in terms of views from Richmond Terrace, the Ferry Terminal and approaching ferries, and from the North Shore Waterfront Esplanade and the area surrounding the Stadium. As noted above, the parking lots on the project sites are lighted by tall floodlights, the Ferry Terminal and the Postcards 9/11 Memorial are lit, and the Stadium is lit for night games during the baseball season. In the future with the proposed project, the Observation Wheel would be lighted to varying degrees, depending on the season and the scheduling of events, and would be visible within a context of nighttime views across the Harbor from Lower Manhattan and portions of the waterfronts of Brooklyn and New Jersey. Lighting elements currently envisioned for the North Site include LED lighting on the capsules, the rim, and on 72 cable spokes (or similar hub-to-rim catenaries) of the Observation Wheel; lighting on the reflecting pond under the Observation Wheel, on the paths on the green roof, and surrounding the terminal and parking structure; and possibly fireworks displays. The lighting strategy would be highly directional and would shield the upland neighborhoods from direct lighting and to avoid sky glow. On the South Site, it is currently envisioned that the hotel and landscaping would be accented by uplighting; lighting would also be provided on storefronts, building façades, and imbedded within the landscaping. The elevations of the buildings would have signage that would be illuminated to identify the retail center, the hotel, the catering facility, and possibly individual tenants. Connective pathways between corridors would be highlighted to assist with wayfinding, and lighting from facades, soffits, and other building elements would be intended to give the site an iconic character. As the lighting strategy on the North Site and South Site would be highly directional and would shield the upland neighborhoods from direct lighting, it is not expected that the proposed project would result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character due to nighttime lighting.

Overall, the proposed project would enhance the pedestrian's experience of the project sites and improve the urban design of the project sites by replacing surface parking lots with new active, mixed-use developments, which would be beneficial to the character of the neighborhood.

SHADOWS

As discussed in Chapter 6, "Shadows," the proposed project would create new incremental shadow on open space, natural, and cultural resources; but the analysis concluded that the proposed project would not result in significant adverse shadows impacts. While there would be no significant adverse shadows impacts, shadows from either the North Site or South Site would be cast on portions of the North Shore Waterfront Esplanade and the Upper New York Bay in all seasons. The North Shore Esplanade would also be affected by incremental shadow for short durations of time in the early mornings of the March 21/September 21 and May 6/August 6 analysis days. One cultural resource, 93 St. Marks Place, would receive a brief amount of incremental shadow from the proposed project in the very beginning of the May 6/August 6 analysis day. The proposed project would not result in significant adverse shadow impacts, and would not adversely affect neighborhood character.

TRANSPORTATION

As discussed in Chapter 14, "Transportation," the proposed project would result in significant adverse traffic impacts at 16 locations during one or more of the analyzed peak periods. As discussed in Chapter 22, "Mitigation Measures," mitigation measures have been identified to include lane restriping and/or signal timing changes. These measures would mitigate all of the adversely impacted locations with the exception of the impact at the Richmond Terrace and

Staten Island Ferry Viaduct (cars), Richmond Terrace and Staten Island Ferry Viaduct (buses), and the Richmond Terrace and Hamilton Avenue intersection. While the proposed mitigation measures would be noticeable, it is not expected that they would adversely affect the character of the neighborhood.

NOISE

While noise levels in the study area would increase in the future with the proposed project, the magnitude of the increases would be barely perceptible to most listeners and below the *CEQR Technical Manual* threshold for a significant adverse noise impact. At open space locations (i.e., North Shore Waterfront Esplanade), the proposed project would exacerbate existing noise levels, which currently exceed the *CEQR Technical Manual* noise exposure guidelines. However, noise levels would remain comparable to noise levels of other open spaces in this area; therefore, the change is not considered a significant adverse impact. The Wheel's drive system would be designed to meet the maximum permitted sound levels of the New York City Noise Control Code and the City of New York's Zoning Resolution Section 42-213. Therefore, the Wheel's drive system would not result in any significant adverse noise impacts, and would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character. Finally, at specific locations (the west facing facades of the North and South Sites), the proposed project would include acoustically rated windows and an alternate means of ventilation. By adhering to these design requirements, the proposed project would provide sufficient attenuation to achieve the CEQR interior noise level requirements. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character with respect to noise in the With-Action condition.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the proposed project would result in a positive effect on the neighborhood character in the study area. The proposed project would enhance the area as an attractive gateway to Staten Island, and would help to revive the civic hub of the St. George neighborhood and provide Staten Island with an enhanced sense of place. The proposed project would enhance connectivity between the waterfront and the upland areas, which would be beneficial to the neighborhood. The project sites would be more inviting and appealing to visit with new landscaping as well as passive and active open space. With regard to transportation, the proposed project would increase levels of vehicular and pedestrian activity. While some significant adverse traffic impacts would require mitigation, the increased activity from the proposed project would not have a significant adverse effect on neighborhood character in the 2016 analysis year. The combined effect of changes to the defining elements would not create a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. To the contrary, neighborhood character would be improved by replacing large surface parking lots with new active, mixed-use development. *