

A. INTRODUCTION

This section considers the potential of the Willets Point Development Plan to affect architectural and archaeological resources in the Willets Point Development District, as well as in the surrounding area. The District is an approximately 61-acre site bounded by the Van Wyck Expressway and an undeveloped parcel owned by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) to the east, Roosevelt Avenue to the south, 126th Street to the west, and Northern Boulevard to the north.

Based on potential effects due to on-site construction activities, and to account for visual or contextual impacts, the study area is defined as extending 400 feet from the District (see Figure 8-1). Within the study area, the historic resources that were considered comprise properties listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places (S/NR) or determined eligible for such listing; National Historic Landmarks (NHLs), New York City Landmarks (NYCLs) and Historic Districts, and properties determined eligible for landmark status.

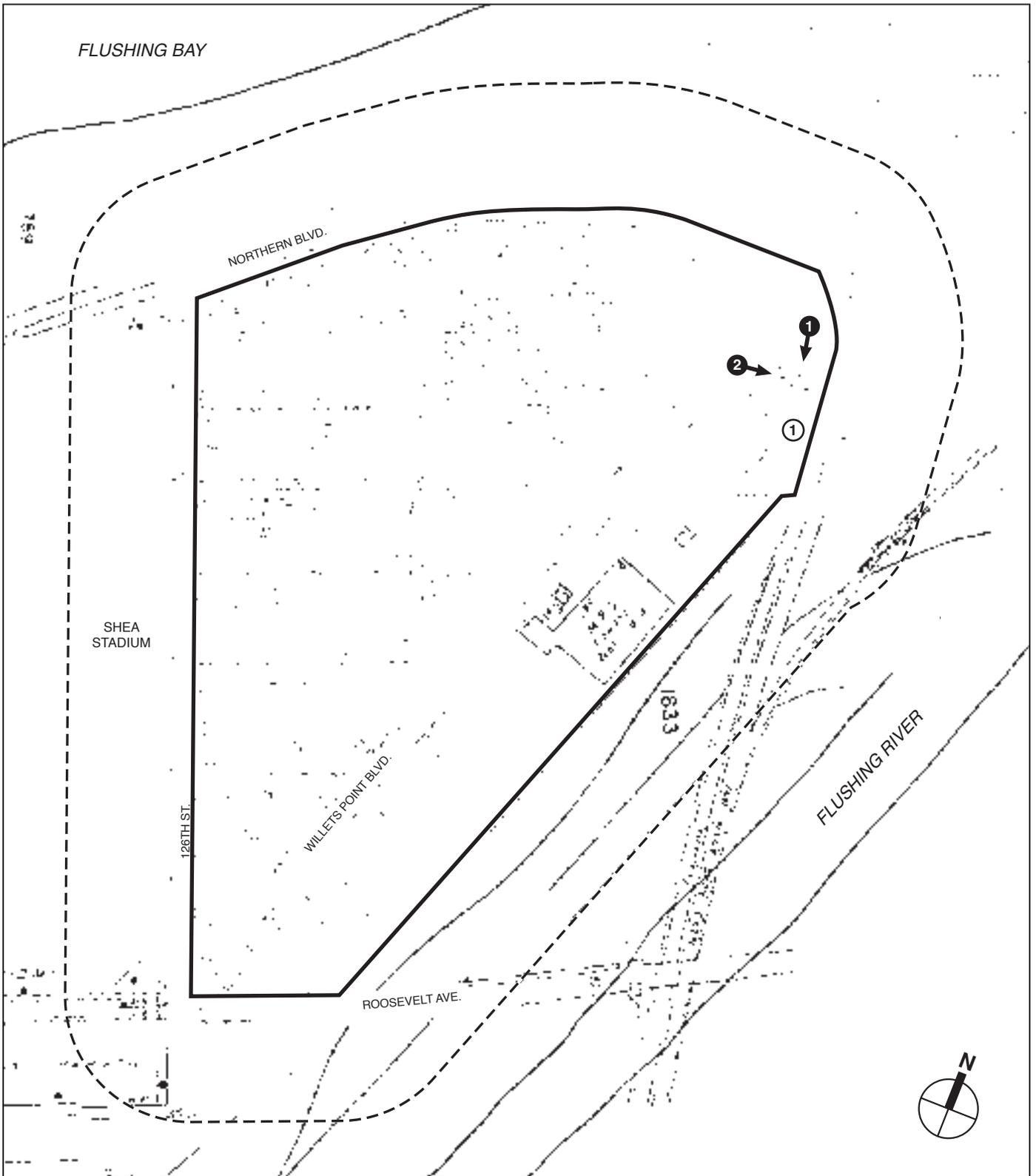
Architectural resources that are listed on the National Register or that have been found eligible for listing are given a measure of protection from the effects of federally sponsored or assisted projects under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Although preservation is not mandated, federal agencies must attempt to avoid adverse impacts on such resources through a notice, review, and consultation process. Properties listed on the State Register are similarly protected against impacts resulting from state-sponsored or state-assisted projects under the State Historic Preservation Act. Private property owners using private funds can, however, alter or demolish their properties without such a review process if no State or federal approvals are required for their projects.

In accordance with the approach outlined in Chapter 2, “Procedural and Analytical Framework,” this chapter analyzes the cumulative impact of both the Willets Point Development Plan and the anticipated development on Lots B and D.

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS*ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES*

In a letter dated February 2, 2007, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) determined that the District is not sensitive for archaeological resources.¹ In a letter dated November 19, 2007, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) confirmed that the District is not sensitive for archaeological resources.

¹ See Appendix C, “Historic Resources Correspondence.”



-  Willets Point Development District
-  Area of Potential Effect (400-Foot Perimeter)
-  Photograph View Direction and Reference Number
-  Former Empire Millworks Building (S/NR-eligible)

ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES

In the same letter dated February 2, 2007, LPC determined that the District does not contain any architectural resources.¹ However, OPRHP has determined one building located within the boundaries of the District, the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building, which is now in use by Fodera Foods, to be eligible for listing on the S/NR. Due to site planning goals and engineering concerns in the District, including the need to raise the site above the 100-year floodplain level, it is anticipated that all the buildings on the site, including the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building, would be demolished. Demolition of this historic resource would constitute a significant adverse impact on architectural resources. Measures to fully or partially mitigate this adverse impact would be explored, as discussed in Chapter 23, “Mitigation.”

B. HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Willetts Point Development District was originally a part of a swamp located on the banks of the Flushing River. During the mid-19th century, it was primarily used for recreation. However, by the turn of the century, new roads and railroad lines made this once-remote area accessible to cars and trains. Around 1900, the city of Queens leased a large portion of the swamp to a Brooklyn ash removal company. Fishhooks McCarthy, the owner of the company, also acquired the right to dump incineration ashes into the tidal marshland. It is estimated that McCarthy dumped approximately 50 million cubic yards of ash into the swampland between 1906 and 1932. The dumping left the area with a layer of ash 30 feet thick on average, with mountains of ash rising up to 90 feet, an eerie sight that led F. Scott Fitzgerald to declare the area a “valley of ashes” in his novel *The Great Gatsby*. By the early 1930s, residential development had increased in the nearby areas of Corona and Flushing, and with it came increased political opposition to the use of the Willetts Point area for dumping. Subsequently, in 1934 the City cancelled its contract with McCarthy and ceased dumping in the area.

Around the same time, Robert Moses developed his vision of a World’s Fair in New York City and his intention to locate it on the former dumpsite. Soon the ash hills were leveled, the Grand Central Parkway was constructed, and the World’s Fair complex was built. Though the street grid in the project area (including Willetts Point Avenue) was laid out, the District never became a part of the overall World’s Fair complex.

The enormous construction effort required for the World’s Fair, combined with the excellent road and rail access in Willetts Point, lead contractors, heavy manufacturers, and equipment rental businesses to first settle in Willetts Point. Historic maps from the 1940s and 1950s indicated that during this time, Willetts Point started to develop with a mix of auto-related uses located on small lots. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the number of auto-repair and junkyard uses in Willetts Point greatly increased. An aerial photograph from 1974 indicated that the numerous auto repair shops and related businesses covered the majority of the site, earning it the reputation as the “Iron Triangle.”

¹ See Appendix C, “Historic Resources Correspondence.”

C. EXISTING CONDITIONS

ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES

DISTRICT

As described above, the 13-block District is mainly developed with small warehouse and industrial buildings.

As stated above, in a letter dated February 2, 2007, LPC determined that there are no architectural resources in the District. However, as per the 2001 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, a field visit conducted in May 2007 identified one potential resource: the former **Empire Millwork Corporation Building** (see Figure 8-2). In a letter dated June 9th, 2007, LPC determined that the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building was not eligible for NYCL designation.¹ Subsequently, in a letter dated October 15, 2007, OPRHP determined that the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building is eligible for listing on the S/NR.² According to OPRHP's determination, the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building is historically and architecturally significant as an early 20th century commercial and industrial building.

The former Empire Millwork Corporation Building is located at 128-50 Willets Point Boulevard, near the intersection of Willets Point Boulevard and the entrance ramp to Northern Boulevard. The building, built prior to the Van Wyck Expressway and facing Flushing Bay, has a large landscaped lawn in front. It was constructed in 1938 from plans by Sugarman & Berger, Stanford D. Rossin, and Arthur Hamburger. Hamburger, an industrial engineer, was president of Wheeler Engineering Company, which built the building. The building was constructed for the D. Ginsberg and Sons Company, a millwork company which was started in 1921 by Hyman Ginsberg. The company later became the Empire Millwork Corporation and then the Empire National Corporation.

The two-story, Georgian Revival-style building has a symmetrical red brick façade with flanking bays, which terminate with gently curving sections. The front section was originally used as an office space for the company, and the exterior decorations are a reflection of the millwork business. The central bay projects slightly and features a center doorway topped with arched transom windows and a broken pediment. Above the door is a large Palladian window with a circular clock under the central arch. The central bay is topped with a large front gable with a wood denticulated cornice and cornice returns. Small, octagon-shaped windows decorate either side of the central entryway.

The flanking sections are five bays wide. Each bay has arched wood windows with tracery on the first level and 6-over-6 double-hung wood windows on the upper level. A denticulated cornice line runs the length of the bays. Both bays end with curved sections; these sections have large 12-over-12 double-hung windows separated by double-height wood pilasters. The side bays have small, double-hung and octagon-shaped windows. A short parapet runs along the flanking bays and sides.

¹ See Appendix C, "Historic Resources Correspondence."

² See Appendix C, "Historic Resources Correspondence."



Former Empire Millwork Corporation Building, front facade 1



Former Empire Millwork Corporation Building, view southeast 2

Willets Point Development Plan

The remainder of the building is a two-story warehouse structure which extends back approximately 300 feet. It has large, factory-style, multi-pane glass windows.

There are no other known or potential architectural resources located within the boundaries of the study area.

STUDY AREA

Known Resources

There are no known architectural resources in the 400-foot study area.

Potential Resources

A site visit in May 2007 did not identify any potential architectural resources within 400 feet of the District. Surrounding the District are parking lots for Shea Stadium, and Northern Boulevard, the elevated Van Wyck Expressway, and the Roosevelt Avenue Bridge.

D. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PLAN

As discussed above, it is possible that the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building may be listed on the S/NR. There is one development project in the 400-foot study area: the new Citi Field. Located immediately to the west of the District, across 126th Street, Citi Field will be the new home of the New York Mets baseball team. The new stadium and related development is currently under construction and is scheduled to be completed in 2009. This 44,000-seat stadium will replace the existing 56,000-seat Shea Stadium, located immediately to its west. Along 126th Street, the new stadium will provide ground-floor retail space and Mets executive offices within a four-story building.

E. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PLAN

ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES

DISTRICT

It is anticipated that all of the buildings in the District, including the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building, would be demolished as part of the proposed Plan. The overarching goal of the proposed Plan is to transform a largely underutilized site with substantial environmental degradation into a lively, mixed-use, sustainable community and regional destination. While specific development plans have not been formulated, development in the District would be guided by the Special District regulations and the Willets Point Urban Renewal Plan (URP). One of the key aspects of the Special District regulations and the URP is to allow for flexibility of uses and building locations within the District. Retaining the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building would limit this flexibility.

In addition, retaining the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building would be challenging from a site grading and engineering perspective. The District is below the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 100-year floodplain level of 14 feet above mean sea level (AMSL)¹, and up to seven feet of fill is required in some locations to grade and raise the entire

¹ Referencing National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929 (NGVD29).

District to an elevation of between 14 and 17 feet AMSL. If the City were to provide new infrastructure—including new roadways, sidewalks, and storm and sanitary sewer lines—at the existing grade, potential future development could be subject to flooding on the lower floors. As such, the City plans to raise the District and require that any new development be raised above the 100-year floodplain level. The roadbeds surrounding the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building are located at a level of 10.6 to 13.0 feet AMSL and thus this particular site requires up to 3.4 feet of fill to conform with the proposed grade of the District.

The roadbeds surrounding the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building are located at a level of 10.6 to 13.0 feet AMSL and thus this particular site requires an increase in elevation of between 1.0 and 3.4 feet to conform with the proposed grade of the District. If this site were not raised, it would be significantly more vulnerable to flooding, both because it is below AMSL, and because the surrounding topography would be raised, directing water runoff into lower areas. Raising the grade in a majority of the District while maintaining the existing grade on the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building site would require special engineering measures to protect the building during site preparation and construction to prevent future flooding on the site, and to visually and functionally integrate the building with the rest of the District despite the differences in grade.

Due to these issues, the proposed Plan contemplates demolition of the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building. Demolition of this historic resource would constitute a significant adverse impact on architectural resources. In a letter dated May 30, 2008, OPRHP stated that the demolition of the former Empire Millwork Corporation Building would constitute an adverse impact, and that all alternatives to demolition have not been explored.¹ Measures to fully or partially mitigate this adverse impact have been developed, as discussed in Chapter 23.

LOTS B AND D

As described in Chapter 2, it is anticipated that if the proposed Plan is approved and the District is redeveloped into a new mixed-use community and regional destination, additional development could occur on Citi Field parking lot B (Lot B), located on the northwest corner of Roosevelt Avenue and 126th Street, and on Lot D, a surface parking lot located at the southwest corner of Roosevelt Avenue and 126th Street. Lot B is currently being used as a construction staging area for Citi Field, and Lot D is currently used by commuters, as well as for Mets games and USTA National Tennis Center events. While specific development plans for Lots B and D have not yet been formulated, it is anticipated that Lot B could be developed with a one-story retail structure and a 10-story office building, and Lot D could be developed with a five-level parking garage.

There are no architectural resources located on Lots B or D. Therefore, any development at these sites would not impact architectural resources. Lot B was determined not sensitive for archaeological resources during the environmental review process for the Citi Field project. In a letter dated September 2, 2008, LPC determined that Lot D is not sensitive for archaeological resources. Therefore, no impacts to archaeological resources are anticipated with any development on Lots B or D.

¹ See Appendix C, “Historic Resources Correspondence.”

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NO CONVENTION CENTER SCENARIO

Under this scenario, all of the existing buildings in the District would be demolished, and impacts would be the same as described above under “District.”

STUDY AREA

As there are no architectural resources in the study area, there would be no impacts on architectural resources in the surrounding area with the proposed Plan. *