

A. INTRODUCTION

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

According to the 2001 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when the action would exceed preliminary thresholds in any one of the following areas of technical analysis: land use, urban design, visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomic conditions, traffic, or noise. An assessment is also appropriate when the action would have moderate effects on several of the aforementioned areas. Potential effects on neighborhood character may include:

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

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

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

This chapter's impact analysis focuses primarily on changes to neighborhood character resulting from changes in the technical areas discussed above, since changes in these technical areas are most likely to result in changes to neighborhood character. The study area surrounding the project site includes the neighborhoods of Cobble Hill and the Columbia Street waterfront, Brooklyn Heights, D.U.M.B.O., and Vinegar Hill.

The proposed project would introduce a large park that would provide recreational opportunities and public access to the entire waterfront stretching from Atlantic Avenue to Jay Street. The new park and the residential and commercial development associated with it would alter the project site's land use and urban design characteristics and result in increases in traffic, pedestrian activity, and noise levels. However, these changes overall would not be significantly adverse with respect to neighborhood character; indeed, the proposed project is expected to have a positive effect on neighborhood character. The project site, much of which is now isolated and underutilized, would be enlivened with recreational amenities, retail uses, and residential buildings that would draw visitors to the area. The character of the surrounding neighborhoods would be improved by the new recreational opportunities and waterfront access that would be provided by the proposed park.

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project site comprises the East River waterfront area from Pier 6 at the foot of Atlantic Avenue to just north of the Manhattan Bridge. The site currently contains a mix of warehousing, storage, open space and recreation, commercial, and entertainment uses. Other uses include vacant structures and areas, surface parking, and a building used by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

From Atlantic Avenue to Old Fulton Street, a stretch of more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile, there is currently no public access to the waterfront. This portion of the project site is isolated, as the elevated Brooklyn-Queens Expressway cuts it off from the adjacent neighborhoods. Because the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and the limited number of intersection points restrict access to the area, the portion of the project site between Atlantic Avenue and Old Fulton Street has very little street life. Street trees are few and there is no street furniture. This area, which includes six concrete piers, has a flat topography and offers striking views of Lower Manhattan, the harbor and the East River, and Governor's Island. However, the public has not had access to the piers for decades and they are physically and visually separated by a high fence.

Pier 6, at the western end of Atlantic Avenue, contains a vacant piershed, and the adjoining upland area includes several covered storage huts as well as open storage areas. In the upland area between Piers 5 and 6 is a 12-story vacant building at 360 Furman Street formerly used by the Jehovah's Witnesses for warehousing and distribution of printed materials. Pier 5 primarily handles imported cocoa, and most of the Pier 5 upland area is used as surface parking. Pier 4 is

an unused pier with a dilapidated rail float bridge. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) has an electrical substation on the upland area adjacent to Pier 4 and a fan plant building just outside the project site at the end of Montague Street. Pier 3 and a storage/garage building on the adjacent upland area are used for the warehousing of building supplies. Pier 2 is vacant except for a U.S. Coast Guard harbor light. Portions of Pier 1 are used for warehousing. Along Furman Street, the upland area of Pier 1 includes the vacant National Cold Storage buildings, a large deteriorated structure.

The northern portion of the project site, which extends from Old Fulton Street to Jay Street, is characterized primarily by recreational and retail uses and is more accessible to the adjoining neighborhoods than the southern portion of the site. At the foot of Old Fulton Street is a public pier that includes a 1926 fireboat house; Barge Music, a floating entertainment venue; and the River Café, a restaurant partly housed on a barge. Directly under the Brooklyn Bridge is the Purchase Building, which houses city offices. The area between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges is largely devoted to open space and recreational use. Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park, covering approximately 9 acres, includes lawn areas, a waterfront esplanade, and the historic and currently vacant Empire Stores and Tobacco Warehouse; it extends from the Brooklyn Bridge to about Main Street. In addition, Main Street Park, a recently completed 1.5-acre city park and playground, occupies the waterfront east of Main Street, with additional facilities under construction. A DEP water meter repair facility occupies a small building under the Manhattan Bridge. A portion of the project site north of the Manhattan Bridge is currently used for surface parking.

The project area contains five architectural historic resources. Four of these resources—the Brooklyn Bridge, the Manhattan Bridge, and portions of the Fulton Ferry and D.U.M.B.O. historic districts—also extend outside of the project area into the study area. The former National Cold Storage buildings was determined by New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) to meet eligibility criteria for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places (S/NR) as part of its review of the proposed project. Other noteworthy structures on the project site include the Empire Stores and the Tobacco Inspection Warehouses located on the north side of Water Street.

The study area surrounding the project site is predominantly characterized by residential and mixed residential/industrial use. Immediately south of the project site, the Columbia Street waterfront neighborhood is characterized by a mix of residential and light industrial uses, scattered vacant lots, and working waterfront activities along its western edge. The area is undergoing growth, with new restaurants and art galleries, as well as new residential development. Southeast of the project site is the residential neighborhood of Cobble Hill, a designated New York City historic landmark district. Cobble Hill is predominantly characterized by three- to four-story brick and brownstone row houses, with scattered apartment buildings of five-six stories. Retail uses are concentrated along Atlantic Avenue to the north and Court Street to the east.

To the east of the project site across Furman Street and the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway is the neighborhood of Brooklyn Heights, which is predominantly residential but also contains retail, office, and institutional uses. Most of the neighborhood's tree-lined streets feature 19th century brick and brownstone row houses. There are also a number of larger apartment buildings that date from the first half of the 20th century. The main retail streets in the area are Montague and Court Streets. Nearly all of this neighborhood is part of the landmarked Brooklyn Heights Historic District. The Brooklyn Heights Promenade, which is cantilevered above the Brooklyn-

Brooklyn Bridge Park FEIS

Queens Expressway (and below that, Furman Street) at the western edge of the neighborhood, offers dramatic views of the harbor and the Manhattan skyline. The easternmost part of the Brooklyn Heights area contains office towers and large commercial uses, including a seven-story multiplex movie theater.

The Fulton Ferry neighborhood lies where the foot of Old Fulton Street meets the waterfront. This area is part of the Fulton Ferry Historic District and includes four-story tenement buildings, most of which are vacant on their upper floors and have restaurants or retail uses at the ground floor. The area also includes two service stations and the Eagle Warehouse, a large-scale, red brick storage building built in the 1890s and converted to residential use.

D.U.M.B.O. (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass) is a historically industrial area that has seen rapid mixed-use growth and revitalization in the past two decades. This part of the study area, which includes portions of the D.U.M.B.O. Historic District, is characterized by large-scale warehouse and manufacturing buildings, many of which have been converted to residential use. These include the 12-story, reinforced concrete Clocktower Building at One Main Street, and the 10-story reinforced concrete Sweeney Building on Main and Water Streets. The buildings in this area range in height from 1 to 12 stories and include foundry, manufacturing, storage, and loft buildings. The ground floors of a number of the buildings are occupied by restaurants, bars, galleries, and other retail uses. The D.U.M.B.O. area is becoming an increasingly residential neighborhood, with several residential conversion projects planned, such as at 60-82 Washington Street and 57 Front Street.

The neighborhood of Vinegar Hill, which generally lies east of Jay Street, is predominantly industrial in nature with pockets of residential buildings. Industrial uses include several bulky brick buildings, and a large waterfront parcel containing an electrical switching station owned and operated by Con Edison. Along Front Street are a few three-story brick row houses from the 19th century. There are also several surface parking areas in this part of the study area, including the full block bounded by York, Front, Bridge, and Jay Streets. The Vinegar Hill area is also undergoing some residential conversion projects as well as new construction. Projects include a conversion of an industrial building at 99 Gold Street for residential use. At the southern edge of Vinegar Hill lies a major public housing complex, the New York City Housing Authority's Farragut Houses, which altogether comprises three large blocks of seven-story buildings

The Brooklyn-Queens Expressway runs along much of the eastern edge of the project site over Furman Street and traverses the study area from north to south. The key arterials providing direct access to and from the project site are Atlantic Avenue to the south and Cadman Plaza West/Old Fulton Street to the north. Both arterials are two-way, typically six lanes in width and have interchanges with the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. Atlantic Avenue traverses east-west through the study area and terminates at Furman Street adjacent to the project site. Atlantic Avenue is one of the major arterials traversing Brooklyn carrying substantial traffic destined to the East River Crossings (principally the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges) and has its heaviest volumes just east of the project site. Old Fulton Street, which runs through the study area and into the project site, carries substantial traffic volumes, both as a distribution roadway as well as a conduit between the Brooklyn Bridge and the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway northbound and southbound. Cadman Plaza West, which runs along part of the eastern edge of the study area, provides direct access to and from the Borough Hall area of Downtown Brooklyn via Court Street as well as to the D.U.M.B.O. area. Flatbush Avenue, another main arterial serving the study area, stretches from the Manhattan Bridge in Downtown Brooklyn to the Rockaways and carries heavy traffic volumes within the study area.

In terms of the CEQR criteria, existing noise levels at locations on and adjacent to the project site are relatively high, and are generally in the “marginally unacceptable” and “clearly unacceptable” categories. The high noise levels are due to a combination of existing sources: traffic on nearby streets, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, and the Brooklyn Bridge; traffic and trains on the Manhattan Bridge; aircraft flyovers; and boat traffic on the East River.

With respect to socioeconomic conditions, the project site currently houses no residents. There are three warehousing businesses on Piers 1 through 6. Other businesses on the project site include the River Café and Barge Music, a floating entertainment venue.

C. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT

In the future without the proposed project, no major changes are anticipated for the project site. It is assumed that without approval of the proposed plan and the actions necessary to implement it, a mix of waterfront industry, open space, vacant land and structures would continue to characterize the project site. Large portions of the project area would remain inaccessible to the public. For analysis purposes, it is conservatively assumed that the vacant building at 360 Furman Street, and that absent discretionary land use approvals, would be reoccupied with a light industrial or warehouse use; alternatively, it could be converted to residential use if the property were rezoned. Because of its deteriorated condition, it is expected that the vacant and obsolete former National Cold Storage buildings would be demolished absent the proposed project.

The projects that are planned for construction within the study area by the year 2012 would not be expected to create any substantial changes to the character of the neighborhoods adjacent to the project site. The projects, which consist mostly of new residential buildings and conversions of industrial buildings for residential use, would be consistent with the predominantly residential and mixed-use character of the neighborhoods surrounding the project site.

It is expected that traffic volumes in the study area would increase slightly in the future without the proposed action due to new development within the study area as well as to the creation of a substantial amount of residential, commercial, and retail development outside the study area in Downtown Brooklyn. There would not be a notable increase in noise levels in the future absent the proposed project. Pedestrian activity in the area would remain low.

D. THE FUTURE WITH THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed project would vastly improve the character of the project site by adding a major new waterfront park with passive and active recreational facilities that would replace the vacant land, industrial uses, parking lots, and vacant buildings on the project site. In addition, the proposed project would replace vacant land and buildings with residential and retail uses as well as a hotel. Public access to the waterfront would be provided along the entire ¾-mile, currently inaccessible section of the shoreline south of Old Fulton Street. The proposed park would offer the public unparalleled access to the water, making innovative use of boardwalks, floating bridges, and canals that would wind along the water’s edge. It would also include rolling hills, marshland, and abundant recreational opportunities with multi-purpose playing fields, playgrounds, shaded ball courts, open lawns, and 12 acres of safe paddling waters. The upland area between Piers 2 and 5 would have an elevated and sloped topography that would reduce noise from the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and provide views of the harbor from the uplands. There would be pockets of natural landscape on some of the parkland to attract birds and other

wildlife. Features and amenities that would be incorporated into the proposed park include active recreational facilities (court sports such as basketball, handball, and volleyball on Piers 2 and 3 and field sports such as soccer and field hockey on Pier 5); water recreation areas for kayaking; a marina; bicycle paths and a greenway; civic lawns; and opportunities to access the waterfront at sea level. The entrances to the proposed park would be defined by three urban junctions, located, from south to north, at the foot of Atlantic Avenue, at Fulton Ferry Landing, and in D.U.M.B.O. The proposed project's 1,210 residential units, located in new and existing buildings near the park's entrances, would create a critical mass of residents adjacent to the park. The residents would enliven the park during both daytime and evening hours and contribute to a sense of safety with neighborhood "eyes" on the park. Retail, restaurant, and hotel uses would also add activity to the park. The proposed new buildings would be located so as not to obstruct views of the harbor and the Lower Manhattan skyline from the Brooklyn Heights Promenade and to protect viewsheds from the foot of Atlantic Avenue and Old Fulton Street and from the base of the Manhattan Bridge.

The proposed project would displace the three industrial warehousing businesses currently located on the piers. However, these businesses are not water-dependent uses and therefore can relocate to non-waterfront sites. Furthermore, because of the small number of businesses and their location on sites isolated from the surrounding neighborhoods, they do not contribute substantially to a defining element of neighborhood character.

With the exception of the proposed demolition of the former National Cold Storage buildings, the proposed project would positively affect architectural historic resources, in part by opening up greater views of the Brooklyn Bridge and Manhattan Bridges. The proposed project would also retain the Tobacco Inspection Warehouses in Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park and rehabilitate the Empire Stores into a mixed-use development, restoring an historic building that has been vacant for approximately 50 years. All changes to the building, including the proposed restoration of its exterior and modifications to the interior to accommodate new uses, are being planned in coordination with OPRHP and would be undertaken in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

The removal of the former National Cold Storage buildings would allow better physical access to the proposed park and would create new views of the East River and the Manhattan skyline from the Brooklyn Heights neighborhood to the east of the project site. Furthermore, removal of the building would allow for a pedestrian bridge over Furman Street that would provide an entrance to the park from Squibb Park. Measures to mitigate the adverse impact resulting from the demolition of the buildings would be developed in consultation with OPRHP.

The proposed project would improve the character of the surrounding neighborhoods in the study area by positively redeveloping the vacant and underutilized waterfront. It would dramatically increase access to the waterfront and the amount and quality of open space and recreational opportunities available to residents.

The vehicle trips generated by users of the park and its associated retail, hotel, and residential buildings would result in significant traffic impacts at five intersections along the Cadman Plaza West/Old Fulton Street corridor; at six intersections along the Atlantic Avenue corridor; at four intersections along the Tillary Street corridor; and at the Columbia Street/Brooklyn-Queens Expressway ramps intersection. To address the level of new project-generated traffic demand, mitigation measures would be required, consisting of a combination of signal timing or signal phasing changes to the study area, re-striping of intersection approaches, and parking regulation changes. While two of the significant adverse impacts (Tillary Street at Adams Street and

Cadman Plaza West at the Brooklyn Bridge off-ramp) would remain unmitigated at all peak periods, they are at locations that are already heavily trafficked and overall changes in traffic conditions would not substantially alter the area's character.

If approved by the City of New York, the proposed project would include the closing of Joralemon Street to vehicular traffic at Furman Street, but it would remain open for pedestrians. This closure would minimize park-generated traffic along Joralemon Street. To support the proposed closure, the scenario with Joralemon Street remaining open to vehicular traffic at Furman Street was also examined. Although this scenario would increase vehicle trips along Joralemon Street, it would not result in significant adverse traffic impacts on Joralemon Street. While there would be a new significant adverse impact at Furman Street and Atlantic Avenue in the PM peak hour with Joralemon Street open, mitigation measures at the intersection of Atlantic Avenue at Columbia Street for the proposed action would mitigate the impact at this intersection. Therefore, whether Joralemon Street remains open or is closed, there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character by reason of traffic impacts.

The proposed project would draw a large number of pedestrians to the area, the greatest concentrations of which would likely occur in the vicinity of park entrance locations along Old Fulton Street, Atlantic Avenue, Joralemon Street and Columbia Street. The increased pedestrian activity would not result in significant adverse impacts, as sidewalks would continue to operate at acceptable levels of service. Increased pedestrian activity would enliven areas of the project site that are lacking in street life. As part of the proposed project, a pedestrian bridge would be built over Furman Street and the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, linking the proposed park to the existing Squibb Park, located on the corner of Middagh Street and Columbia Heights. The proposed project would also include the widening of the southwest sidewalk at the Old Fulton Street Ferry Landing. If approved by the New York City Department of Transportation, Joralemon Street would be closed to vehicular traffic at Furman Street but would remain open for pedestrians.

While the existing high ambient levels would result in noise levels in the park above the 55 dBA L₁₀₍₁₎ CEQR criterion for "acceptable" noise conditions, they would be comparable to or less than noise levels in a number of existing parks in New York City that are also located adjacent to heavily trafficked roadways, including Central Park, Riverside Park, Hudson River Park, and Prospect Park. The proposed project would include hills on the uplands between Piers 2 and 5, which would provide notable noise abatement within this section of the park. The hills were designed so as to avoid causing any increases in noise levels along the Brooklyn Heights Promenade and nearby residences due to reflected sound. Increases in noise levels would not be perceptible at locations outside the project site.

In summary, the proposed project would greatly improve the neighborhood character of the project site and the surrounding neighborhoods. The proposed project would introduce a new waterfront park on land that is currently underutilized and inaccessible to the public, providing Brooklyn with the first major park to be constructed in the borough since Prospect Park in the 1860s. The project site would be enlivened with active land uses, including stores, restaurants, and residential buildings, that would draw visitors to the area. The surrounding neighborhoods would benefit from the new recreational opportunities offered by the proposed park. No significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character would result from the proposed project. *