

**A. INTRODUCTION**

Neighborhood character is an amalgam of the many components that give an area its distinctive personality. These components include land use; street layout; scale, type, and style of development; historic features; patterns and volumes of traffic; noise levels; and other physical or social characteristics that help define a community. However, not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few determining elements. This chapter examines neighborhood character on the project site and in the adjacent neighborhoods, and the effects of the proposed project on that character.

**PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS**

The analysis in this chapter concludes that the proposed project would change the character of the project site, and for the better. Although the proposed development would be at a density that is new to the area, the density and land uses of Phase I would be compatible with and serve as the southern gateway to Downtown Brooklyn. The Phase II development, virtually entirely residential, would be at a scale greater than, but comparable to, the high-rise residential development in the Atlantic Terminal Urban Renewal Area (ATURA), north of Atlantic Avenue. The proposed project would further City policies dating back to this 1960s ATURA plan, transforming the area from a relic of a by-gone industrial and manufacturing era.

The proposed project would be a fulfillment of long-sought improvement in this area. The project site has resisted development due to the challenges of platforming and developing over the Vanderbilt Yard (rail yard). This is reflected in the site's blighted conditions. As a result of the proposed project, the project site would no longer be an isolated area with a mixture of vacant properties, underutilized manufacturing and small commercial buildings, residential units in various states of repair, and an open rail yard. The new development would offer substantial publicly accessible open space, including open areas that would allow people to cross through the site and would connect, for the first time in a century, the neighborhoods north of Atlantic Avenue with Prospect Heights, to the south.

The project site, as it now stands, does not contain any of the community character that defines the surrounding neighborhoods. The change in character on the project site would not alter the basic character of the surrounding neighborhoods, whose defining elements are located at some distance from the project site and are protected by zoning and historic district designations. However, the proposed project would affect the character of those areas immediately surrounding the site. The greatest change would occur on Dean Street between Flatbush and Vanderbilt Avenues, which forms the southern border of the project site and is at the northern edge of Prospect Heights. The character of Dean Street would change from a nondescript, but quiet, mixed-use former industrial street to an active street with a mix of uses. Because Dean Street does not possess the attributes and character of the stable residential districts more readily identifiable within the Prospect Heights neighborhood to the south, this change would not affect

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the historic residential areas of Prospect Heights, and it would create a high-density, urban, largely residential character on Dean Street.

These changes would not come without localized adverse neighborhood character impacts in the areas closest to the project site. These include changes in character for residential rowhouses facing Site 5, within sight of the arena's brightly lit signs, and across from the arena loading docks on Dean Street, as well as a deterioration in the character of traffic flow on Bergen Street in Prospect Heights.

The project would be visible in the skyline from portions of several of the adjacent residential neighborhoods. However, this would be perceived as middle-distance or background conditions, and would not affect the character of the neighborhoods' cores, all of which would also be protected from changes in land use and density by underlying zoning and the regulations of their historic districts. The dense mix of commercial, entertainment, residential, and open space uses proposed for the project site would advance the goals of the Special Downtown Brooklyn District.

The overarching goal of the proposed project is to transform the character of the project site from an underutilized and blighted area into a vibrant mixed-use community that would include a state-of-the-art arena, affordable and market-rate housing, first-class office space, publicly accessible open space, local retail and community services, a possible hotel, and an improved rail yard. The proposed project would meet this goal as follows:

- Significantly change the project site from a blighted area into a high-density neighborhood with a mix of residential, commercial, entertainment, cultural, and open space uses, served by Brooklyn's largest transportation hub;
- Develop a destination use (the arena) thereby creating a center of pedestrian activity desirable in higher-density commercial areas;
- Reconfigure, renovate, and platform over the existing rail yard, which has long been a blighting influence in the immediate area, thereby eliminating the physical and visual barrier that separates the neighborhoods of Boerum Hill, Fort Greene, Prospect Heights, and Park Slope;
- Create a new Brooklyn skyline with architecturally distinctive buildings;
- Create an active streetscape where none currently exists;
- Provide a substantial cohesively designed open space to serve and connect the surrounding neighborhoods; and
- Change the land use patterns on the project site to permit commercial and residential uses consistent with the surrounding neighborhoods, with higher-density uses to the north and west closer to Downtown Brooklyn, stepping down to a lower density adjacent to the residential areas to the south.

The proposed project would significantly change the character of the project site. Overall, the change, although it would be dramatic and would generate several localized adverse impacts on neighborhood character, would not have a significant adverse neighborhood character impact.

## B. METHODOLOGY

### STUDY AREAS

The analysis of neighborhood character is addressed in two geographical areas: the project site and the adjacent neighborhoods (see Figure 16-1). The neighborhood character study area is generally defined as the area ½ mile from the boundaries of the project site and includes neighborhoods adjacent to the project site. A larger and secondary study area, encompassing the area approximately ¾ mile to one mile from the project site, was not considered necessary for the neighborhood character analysis because this area is too distant from the project site to contribute to the existing neighborhood character. Chapter 3, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy” concludes that the proposed project would have no significant adverse impact on land use patterns in this wider area, as it is too far from neighborhoods in this area to exert much influence on them.

### SCREENING FOR NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER COMPONENTS

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 and visual resources, cultural resources, socioeconomic conditions, traffic and pedestrians, or noise. The proposed project, which contemplates major changes in land use and density on the project site, would substantially affect all of these components of neighborhood character, as follows:

- *Land Use.* Development resulting from the proposed actions would have the potential to change neighborhood character when it introduces a new, incompatible land use, conflicts with land use policy or other public plans for the area, changes land use character, or causes 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.
- *Cultural Resources.* According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, 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 cause 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: substantial changes in level of service (LOS); 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. 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, as defined by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) external noise exposure standards.

This chapter's impact analysis focuses primarily on changes to neighborhood character resulting from changes in the technical areas discussed above (with the exception of Socioeconomic Conditions), since changes in these technical areas are most likely to result in changes to neighborhood character. The impact of socioeconomic conditions on neighborhood character is not analyzed here, because the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts in any of the areas analyzed in that chapter (see Chapter 4, "Socioeconomic Conditions"). The *CEQR Technical Manual* states that several moderate changes, none of which rises to the level of a significant impact, could combine to create a significant impact on neighborhood character. In the case of the proposed project, however, the alteration of neighborhood character resulting from the development of the arena, the transit improvements, and the development of new residential and commercial buildings and open space would be widespread and substantial. Therefore, a search for moderate changes that could combine to change neighborhood character was not deemed necessary.

As discussed in Chapter 2, "Procedural Analytical Framework," the proposed project would allow for a variation in the program to permit commercial uses to substitute for the hotel and residential uses in three of the buildings constructed during Phase I. Given that all other aspects of the proposed project are similar, including the total development square footage, building envelopes, and the location of the proposed buildings on the project site, both variations would have generally the same effects on neighborhood character, and so they are not distinguished in the analysis below.

## C. EXISTING CONDITIONS

### PROJECT SITE

The approximately 22-acre project site sits at a major crossroads and at the junction of several distinct and vibrant neighborhoods. The character of the site is defined by the presence of the below-grade open-air rail yard on the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) Atlantic Branch that stretches across most of three long blocks on the eastern portion of the project site, as well as the site's location at the intersection of two of the borough's busiest traffic corridors—Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues. The below-grade rail yard, which extends roughly between 5th and Vanderbilt Avenues, creates a nearly ½-mile physical break in the urban fabric of the area, and functions as a visual and physical barrier between the redeveloped areas to the north of Atlantic Avenue and the established neighborhoods to the south. Since the majority of the rail yard is below grade and surrounded by a chain link fence at street level, it has an isolated appearance and the surrounding streets and sidewalks are uninviting and lightly used by pedestrians. There are overgrown weeds and garbage

along the fence that encloses the rail yard at Pacific Street and Atlantic, Carlton, and 6th Avenues, giving the surrounding streets an unkempt appearance. The project site itself still reflects its early industrial character—now underutilized—and remains a blighted area on the edge of the more desirable and stable surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Although the project site sits at a major crossroads and across the street from a major transportation hub, it contains virtually none of the neighborhood characteristics or vitality of Boerum Hill, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Prospect Heights, and Park Slope, and in fact creates a barrier between these neighborhoods. Unlike areas to the north and west which contain bustling shops and restaurants, walking eastward along Atlantic Avenue from Flatbush Avenue results in one short and three long blocks containing virtually nothing but industrial buildings and a long wall, its featureless monotony broken only by two storage buildings, a vacant lot, and a gas station. These uses stand in stark contrast to the character of much of the surrounding area, which includes uses more typical of viable urban neighborhoods, including medium- to high-density residential and commercial development to the north.

The project site poses a visual and physical barrier between the residential neighborhoods of Fort Greene and Clinton Hill to the north, and Prospect Heights to the south. While the project site frontage is over ½ mile long along Atlantic Avenue, there are only three ways to traverse the site from north to south, two of which are the uninviting and characterless 6th Avenue and Carlton Avenue bridges over the rail yard. Although there are a few industrial structures located at the street level, for the most part these blocks appear undeveloped and generally have an empty, abandoned appearance. The project site is devoid of any pedestrian activity, especially when compared with the adjacent residential areas and the commercial centers located on the northeast corner of the Atlantic Avenue and Flatbush Avenue intersection, just north of the project site.

Access between the neighborhoods surrounding the project site is further inhibited by the project site's location at the intersection of Flatbush and Atlantic Avenues. These two thoroughfares demarcate three distinct street grid patterns that converge at the project site, with long east-west oriented blocks located to the south of Atlantic Avenue and west of Flatbush Avenue, and north-south oriented blocks located to the north of Atlantic Avenue. As a result, streets within the project site do not align with those to the north of Atlantic Avenue and west of Flatbush Avenue. The blocks on the western end of the project site are irregularly shaped and generally smaller than adjacent blocks. These irregular shapes, combined with the blighted and underutilized conditions (including buildings in various states of disrepair whose structures conform to these block patterns), highlight the haphazard and desolate character of the project site when compared with the more planned and uniform character of the surrounding neighborhoods, whether residential or commercial.

While two buildings on the project site have been identified by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (ORPHP) as having historical significance, they are former industrial buildings (in various states of disrepair) that are too widely separated to create any sense of character. The southern blocks of the project site along Dean Street contain a mix of residential and industrial buildings. This mix of uses differs greatly from the consistent nature of the adjacent residential and commercial neighborhoods. The lack of street trees and a coherent urban form further separates the project site from the surrounding neighborhoods.

The project site also consists of portions of intervening streets: 5th Avenue between Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues; Pacific Street between Flatbush and 6th Avenues on the western end of the project site; and Pacific Street between Vanderbilt and Carlton Avenues on the eastern end of the site. These sections of Pacific Street are not highly trafficked and are lined with parked cars,

delivery vans, and small trucks; a moderate amount of traffic utilizes this section of 5th Avenue. Most of the noise affecting the project site is from vehicular traffic along Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues, typical of areas adjacent to high volumes of traffic. The noise associated with the rail yard is not a defining aspect of the character of the project site.

### **ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS**

In contrast to the underutilization that characterizes much of the project site, the surrounding area includes portions of several distinct and vibrant neighborhoods containing well-defined building types, streetscapes and densities, including Boerum Hill, Downtown Brooklyn, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Prospect Heights, and Park Slope. However, the character of these neighborhoods changes as they approach the project site. The areas closer to the project site lack the cohesive character of the cores of their neighborhoods, indicative of the transitional character of these areas. The convergence of the different street grids at this location creates irregularly shaped blocks with atypical building designs in an area defined by a mixture of building and housing types set against a number of highly trafficked thoroughfares with noise levels consistent with this type of (traffic) activity.

The adjacent neighborhoods are delineated by the major streets that traverse this area and are characterized by the predominant land use found within them. Many of the major thoroughfares intersect each other at odd angles. With the exception of Downtown Brooklyn and the area of Fort Greene, just north of the project site, the character of the well-established surrounding neighborhoods is overwhelmingly residential, with local commercial uses found along the major avenues. Sizable portions of these residential neighborhoods are mapped as historic districts, preserving the scale and feeling of the existing (and historic) buildings, but at the same time limiting the potential for expansion and redevelopment. Changes in these neighborhoods typically occur along their edges, most often along major streets and avenues. The character of these adjacent neighborhoods is discussed below.

#### *BOERUM HILL*

The Boerum Hill neighborhood is located just west of the project site and adjacent to and south of Downtown Brooklyn. The character of Boerum Hill, expressed by the predominance of particular land uses within this mixed-use neighborhood, is defined by a number of factors, including the major avenues that run through and define its borders and the character influence of adjacent areas.

Atlantic Avenue is the major thoroughfare of Boerum Hill and serves as the main connector between central Brooklyn and the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE), located approximately one mile west of 4th Avenue. The buildings along Atlantic Avenue are generally low-scale (three to five stories) with street-level retail and residential uses on the upper floors. This strip is known for its concentration of Middle Eastern establishments and antique shops and high levels of pedestrian activity. The character of Boerum Hill north of Atlantic Avenue, while mostly residential, is heavily influenced by Downtown Brooklyn. Residential and commercial redevelopment of former surface parking lots, built to a scale that bridges the difference in density between the two adjoining neighborhoods, is occurring along Schermerhorn Street.

Parallel to and south of Atlantic Avenue are quiet tree-lined streets characterized by three- and four-story brownstones or brick-faced rowhouses on small individual lots. The approximately four-block Boerum Hill Historic District preserves the consistent low-scale residential character

of this neighborhood west of Nevins Street (two blocks west of the project site) and south of Atlantic Avenue.

The character of Boerum Hill changes to the south and east. Larger public residential developments, some as tall as 20 stories, along the southern edge of the neighborhood near the Gowanus industrial area, replace the smaller scale residential uses found in the historic district. The blocks between Nevins Street and 4th Avenue and south of Atlantic Avenue (and closer to the project site) contain a mix of uses lacking the cohesive theme found in the predominantly residential areas to the west. Buildings in this area include larger-scale institutional facilities and low-density industrial uses such as auto-repair shops and storage/warehouse facilities, interspersed with low-scale residential buildings. There are fewer street trees in this section of the Boerum Hill neighborhood, and the residential buildings in this area are not as well preserved as those located within the Boerum Hill Historic District.

Boerum Hill along 4th Avenue, its eastern boundary, is in transition. New residential and commercial development, consisting of taller apartment buildings, is occurring as a result of the City's recent upzoning along this corridor.

Outside of its major traffic corridors—Atlantic, 3rd, and 4th Avenues—the streets in Boerum Hill are relatively narrow and do not carry large volumes of traffic. This is a mostly quiet neighborhood, with noise typically occurring along its major traffic routes identified above. A high percentage of vehicles along the less trafficked 3rd Avenue are trucks traveling between Downtown Brooklyn and the Gowanus industrial area to the south.

#### *DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN*

Downtown Brooklyn, as a neighborhood and Central Business District (CBD), lies generally in the area between the two major streets leading to the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, Adams Street and Flatbush Avenue, respectively, extending as far south as Atlantic Avenue. Thus, this area is, and is intended to be, predominantly commercial, and the land uses in this area reflect the higher-density character of Downtown Brooklyn's commercial core, which comprises a variety of commercial office buildings, courthouses and government buildings, educational facilities/major academic and cultural institutions, residential buildings, and retail stores.

The mixed-use character of the portion of Downtown Brooklyn closer to the project site is evident. Although built to a lower density and scale than the recent higher-density development associated with MetroTech to the north, the character of this area is mostly commercial with a mix of institutional, cultural, and a small amount of residential uses. Given the predominance of irregularly shaped blocks formed by the intersecting diagonal streets, through traffic routes are limited. With the exception of Flatbush Avenue, Atlantic Avenue, and Adams Street, the streets in Downtown Brooklyn are smaller and less trafficked than would be expected for an area with such a concentration of commercial uses. However, this affords Downtown Brooklyn the opportunity for its central streets to be more pedestrian and transit-oriented, as exhibited by the heavily utilized Fulton Street mall and its adjacent low-scale commercial buildings.

In addition to its commercial use, the character of Downtown Brooklyn is defined by its cultural uses, most notably the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM). The recent successes of BAM have allowed this cultural institution to expand its influence within Downtown Brooklyn, where it now operates a number of new and renovated buildings. BAM is the core of the small mixed-use BAM Historic District, which, in addition to a well-preserved area of low-scale residential

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rowhouses adjacent to the CBD, includes the Williamburgh Savings Bank Building, the tallest building in Brooklyn.

Unlike the primarily residential neighborhoods that border the project site, large portions of Downtown Brooklyn are not mapped historic districts (with the exception of the BAM Historic District, identified above). However, with the support of public land use policy, Downtown Brooklyn has experienced recent redevelopment immediately adjacent to the project site. The Atlantic Terminal/Bank of New York Tower, which opened in July 2004, is located adjacent to the project site on the northeast corner of Flatbush and Atlantic Avenues. It comprises a 300-foot-tall office tower atop a four-story retail complex above the LIRR Atlantic Terminal. Street-level activity is heavy at this location.

### *FORT GREENE*

Fort Greene is known for its quiet tree-lined streets, continuous blocks of brownstones, and the 30-acre park that bears its name. Most of Fort Greene north of Fulton Street falls within the Fort Greene Historic District. This neighborhood contains a rare concentration of architecturally distinguished 19th-century townhouses, together with compatible church buildings, commercial buildings, and institutional and apartment buildings. A growing number of restaurants and boutiques are interspersed with neighborhood-oriented retail located along Lafayette and DeKalb Avenues.

The portion of the Fort Greene neighborhood within the immediate vicinity of the project site is substantially different from the areas farther north. Most of the area between Atlantic Avenue and Fulton Street is located within ATURA (described in Chapter 3, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy”), and has been redeveloped over the past 30 years with a mix of large-scale residential and commercial uses, as well as smaller-scale residential rowhouses. Most of the housing in this area is publicly subsidized. The blocks adjacent to the project site include the Atlantic Center Mall (across the street from the highly visible Atlantic Terminal/Bank of New York Tower), three blocks of three-story rowhouses (new construction), the recently opened South Oxford Park, and the 31-story Atlantic Terminal Houses. The buildings and uses in this area contrast with the predominantly residential, tree-lined streets located north of Fulton Street.

The street grid of the Fort Greene neighborhood faces northwest, and therefore intersects Atlantic Avenue at a slight angle.

### *CLINTON HILL*

The neighborhood character of Clinton Hill is very similar to that of Fort Greene, its neighbor to the west. As in Fort Greene, most of this residential neighborhood north of Fulton Street is protected by a historic district designation (the Clinton Hill Historic District). While the overall characters of these two neighborhoods are comparable, their architectural styles differ. This primarily residential neighborhood has undergone many periods of development and redevelopment and is noted for its varied architectural character. Much of the neighborhood that falls within the historic district is characterized by a mix of 19th century free-standing residential mansions and long rows of Italianate brick or brownstone houses dating from the 1860s. Fulton Street is a major commercial corridor where recently opened restaurants, boutiques, and lounges coexist with older retail and service establishments and (increasingly uncommon) vacant storefronts.

The portion of the Clinton Hill neighborhood immediately adjacent to the project site is an area in transition. The neighborhood along Atlantic Avenue between Clermont and Washington

Avenues is home to a number of current and former light industrial buildings, more similar in character to the uses along Atlantic Avenue than to the predominantly residential areas to the north. This area has a greater variety of building types and sizes, including multi-story residential apartment buildings, churches, and warehouses.

Clinton Hill shares the same street grid as Fort Greene.

### *PROSPECT HEIGHTS*

The neighborhood character of Prospect Heights varies widely. As in the other adjacent residential neighborhoods, a portion of this neighborhood is preserved in a historic district (the Prospect Heights Historic District). Residential uses in this district, and most of the neighborhood south of St. Mark's Avenue and west of Washington Avenue, are found on quiet tree-lined streets characterized by uninterrupted rows of attached two- to four-story rowhouses faced in brick and brownstone that are typically set back from the street and allow for a small front garden. The residential character of Prospect Heights outside of the boundaries of the historic district is more varied. Taller residential buildings, some as high as 15 stories, are located along Grand Army Plaza and Eastern Parkway, offering residents of these buildings superior views of Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, similar to the type of development found along Central Park West in Manhattan. The residential areas east of Washington Avenue are varied and lack any cohesive theme when compared with the other residential areas in this neighborhood.

As in the other neighborhoods in the study area, commercial uses—and thereby higher pedestrian volumes and activity—are found along the avenues that border and traverse the neighborhood. Prospect Heights has a number of such avenues, including Flatbush, Vanderbilt, and Washington Avenues. Although Flatbush Avenue is the most established commercial corridor of the three and generates the most activity (it also borders Park Slope), the numbers of retail establishments on both Vanderbilt and Washington Avenues are increasing. The major thoroughfares that border this neighborhood to the north (Atlantic Avenue) and south (Eastern Parkway) have very few commercial uses, and pedestrian volumes are light. However, pedestrian traffic crossing Eastern Parkway to visit the open space and cultural institutions to the south (Prospect Park, the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, and the Brooklyn Central Library) is heavy, especially during the warmer months, defining a neighborhood oriented toward Brooklyn's largest and most popular park. Pedestrian traffic crossing Atlantic Avenue (and the project site) to the Fort Greene and Clinton Hill neighborhoods to the north is minimal. The major north-south streets of Prospect Heights intersect Atlantic Avenue at a right angle; however, neither Flatbush nor Washington Avenues conforms to this grid.

Atlantic Avenue to the east of the project site, which acts as the northern border of Prospect Heights, is lined with auto-related and other light manufacturing uses. This light manufacturing area, which lies mostly south of Atlantic Avenue and up to four blocks deep in some areas, contains a mix of low-density industrial uses interspersed with recent residential redevelopment, indicative of the transitional character of this corridor. These uses located along Pacific and Dean Streets and the southern boundary of the project site, in addition to the rail yard, have prevented the northernmost areas in Prospect Heights from achieving the residential character possessed by areas farther south.

*PARK SLOPE*

The Park Slope neighborhood is defined by rows of three- and four-story brick and brownstone residential buildings that form uninterrupted street walls along the east-west streets. The residential buildings have a variety of decorative features, and the streets are lined with mature trees. The residential character of this neighborhood has been preserved by the Park Slope Historic District, which covers most of the area south of Flatbush Avenue and east of 6th Avenue. Taller residential apartment buildings are located closer to Flatbush Avenue and near Grand Army Plaza, mirroring the taller buildings in the adjacent Prospect Heights neighborhood and framing the oval at the main entrance to Prospect Park.

In addition to being known for its blocks of brownstones and historic churches, Park Slope is also defined by Prospect Park, which marks the eastern border of this neighborhood. Prospect Park is the borough's largest park, with 585 acres of lawns, natural areas, and playing fields. Pedestrian activity is heavy at the main entrance to Prospect Park (Grand Army Plaza) during warmer months.

Flatbush, 5th and 7th Avenues are the primary commercial corridors in this neighborhood, where commercial uses are located on the lower levels of three- to four-story buildings (6th and 8th Avenues are tree-lined and primarily residential in nature). Pedestrian volumes are particularly heavy along Flatbush and 7th Avenues during prime shopping hours. Newer retail uses on these avenues, such as bistros and restaurants, spas and hair salons, and home furnishings boutiques are interspersed with the older, more-established neighborhood retail such as delis, laundry facilities, and dry cleaners.

The portion of Park Slope adjacent to the project site is a more transitional area, with a mix of residential, commercial, industrial, community facility, and parking uses located on the blocks closest to the project site. The transitional nature of the edge of the Park Slope neighborhood is most evident on the block just south of Site 5 and west of the arena block; this block contains a few fragmented series of low-scale rowhouses and a medium-sized apartment building interspersed with industrial (auto repair garage) and parking facilities and low-scale commercial and office uses lining Flatbush Avenue. The project site is also adjacent to two of the main commercial corridors in the neighborhood, including Flatbush and 5th Avenues, as well as 4th Avenue, a major arterial that defines Park Slope's western boundary. The overall character of this area contrasts greatly with the residential core of the Park Slope neighborhood, which is located farther to the south.

The Park Slope street grid differs from the grid of Prospect Heights to the north, resulting in a number of small triangular pocket parks and seating areas along Flatbush Avenue.

**D. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT—2010**

In the future without the proposed project, the long-term demand for office, retail and residential development in Brooklyn is expected to continue. However, given the blighted conditions, the low-density industrial zoning regulations, and the unappealing aspect of the open rail yard, the project site is not expected to experience substantial change in the future without the proposed project by 2010. Development of new residential and commercial uses is expected to continue between now and 2010 in the areas outside of the project site. By 2010, a number of privately and publicly sponsored development projects that are now proposed or in construction would be completed (see Table 2-1 in Chapter 2, "Analytical and Procedural Framework").

## PROJECT SITE

The buildings on the project site have remained relatively unchanged and underutilized, even while development has occurred to the north and west. This is not expected to substantially change in the future without the proposed project because of the existence of the open rail yard and the current zoning regulations which would prohibit such change. The character of the project site would remain blighted and continue to be inconsistent with the character of the surrounding area. Although some of the previously tenanted residential and commercial buildings would be expected to be reoccupied in the future without the proposed project and some warehouse and industrial buildings may be converted to residential use, these actions would have minimal effect on neighborhood character. The open rail yard would remain, occupying approximately 9 of the project site's 22 acres, and its presence would continue to have a blighting influence on the immediately adjacent areas. The project site would continue to have a mixture of vacant properties, underutilized manufacturing and small commercial buildings, and residential units in various states of repair. Pedestrian activity in and around the project site would remain low, in stark contrast to the activities in the areas adjacent to and north of the project site.

Traffic within and around the project site would increase as a result of other development in the future without the proposed project, resulting in more congested conditions. Noise levels within and around the project site would likely remain unchanged.

## ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS

### *OVERVIEW*

Several large residential development projects are proposed in the adjacent neighborhoods by 2010, reflecting the strong demand for residential development in each of the neighborhoods surrounding the project site. These projects are, in effect, a continuation of recent development trends and patterns in the area. They would be consistent with the predominantly residential and commercial character of the neighborhoods surrounding the project site. It is expected that traffic and noise levels in the adjacent neighborhoods would only increase minimally in the future without the proposed project.

### *BOERUM HILL*

Redevelopment is expected in the Boerum Hill neighborhood by 2010. Much of this will take place in the Schermerhorn-Pacific Urban Renewal Area, located along this neighborhood's northern border with Downtown Brooklyn between Schermerhorn Street and Atlantic Avenue. Consistent with the goals of the Special Downtown Brooklyn District (see discussion below under "Future Without the Proposed Project—2016"), this development would bridge the higher-density character of Downtown Brooklyn to the lower-density character of Boerum Hill. Development along this corridor includes the 14 Townhouses development (14 three-story townhouses located along State Street and a taller 135-unit residential building with ground floor retail uses located along Schermerhorn Street), a 72-unit development at 557 Atlantic Avenue just west of 4th Avenue, and a 21-unit residential building at the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Nevins Street. A 20-unit development is under construction on Warren Street between 3rd and 4th Avenues. Taken together, these projects strengthen the residential character of Boerum Hill.

*DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN*

Several large developments are expected to be completed in Downtown Brooklyn by 2010. The most notable is the residential conversion of the landmark Willamsburgh Savings Bank Building at 1 Hanson Place. Once the focal point of what was to become the commercial center of Brooklyn and currently the borough's tallest building, the Willamsburgh Savings Bank Building is being converted from an office building to 189 luxury condominiums, with retail on the ground floor and dentist offices on some of the floors above. Two other developments expected to be complete in 2010 include a 430,000-square-foot residential building at 80 DeKalb Avenue between Hudson Avenue and Rockwell Place and a 140-unit development at Fulton Street and Rockwell Place, just west of Fort Greene. These developments signal a growing residential trend in the character of Downtown Brooklyn, especially at its borders with the more stable residential neighborhoods on all sides.

*FORT GREENE*

Three residential developments are planned in Fort Greene by 2010, each along the edges of this strongly identified residential neighborhood. Two medium-sized residential developments would be located along Fulton Street near Ashland Place and St. Felix Street in the transitional area of this neighborhood (much of this area includes parking lots serving the commercial and institutional uses in Downtown Brooklyn) adjacent to Downtown Brooklyn. The third project, located on Atlantic Avenue between South Portland Avenue and South Oxford Street, would include 80 residential units and street level retail. These projects represent higher-density uses outside of the neighborhood preserved by the historic district.

*CLINTON HILL*

Only one development project, a 30-unit mixed-use development on Clinton Avenue between Fulton Street and Atlantic Avenue, is proposed for the Clinton Hill neighborhood. A new 688-seat K through Grade 8 charter school is expected to open in a converted 80,000-square-foot industrial building at 510 Waverly Avenue between Fulton Street and Atlantic Avenue, one block north and east of the project site. As discussed in "Existing Conditions" above, properties in this section of Clinton Hill are transitioning to more residential and residential-compatible uses. Thus, the residential character of Clinton Hill is not expected to change by 2010 in the future without the proposed project.

*PROSPECT HEIGHTS*

Two new residential developments are planned in the Prospect Heights neighborhood: the Washington, a residential development with 39 dwelling units is planned for Underhill Avenue between Pacific and Dean Streets; and a 200-unit residential building at 17 Eastern Parkway across from Grand Army Plaza. These projects will further strengthen the residential character of Prospect Heights.

*PARK SLOPE*

There are currently no known development projects planned for this neighborhood by 2010. Thus, in the future without the project, the character of this very strong residential neighborhood is expected to remain unchanged.

## **E. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT—2010**

### **OVERVIEW**

Phase I development on the project site (west of 6th Avenue) would be fully constructed and operational by 2010. The western end of the project site and the surrounding streetscape would be enlivened by the proposed project. The arena, by then midway through its first season of hosting professional basketball games and other events, would be open to the public, creating a civic destination at a prominent point in Downtown Brooklyn. The proposed project would significantly change the neighborhood character on the western end of the project site, from an uninviting and underutilized streetscape to a center of activity. This heightened level of activity would not be out of character with Brooklyn's largest transit hub in a location adjacent to the life and vitality of Downtown Brooklyn.

On the eastern end of the project site, the existing dilapidated buildings would be demolished and the rail yard would be reconstructed and reconfigured in preparation of the construction of a platform to support the Phase II development, which, when complete in 2016, would serve to connect the neighborhoods north and south of the project site long separated by the rail yard in its former configuration.

In 2010, the impact of the proposed project on neighborhood character would be felt most on the areas immediately adjacent to the project site and the Atlantic Terminal transportation hub. The energy created by the arena and the associated high density of residential and commercial uses would emanate out from the project site along the major traffic and pedestrian corridors. The Phase I development, in addition to creating a focal point for this part of Brooklyn, would continue the commercial uses along Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues onto the project site. The proposed project would have minimal impact on the overall character of the surrounding residential neighborhoods, as the cores of these neighborhoods are beyond the proposed project's influence, but it would affect the portions of the neighborhoods adjacent to the project site.

### **PROJECT SITE**

By 2010, the project site would begin to change visibly and functionally, exhibiting the first stages of an overall master plan to change the project site into a high-density neighborhood with a mix of residential, commercial, cultural, and open space uses. Development on the arena block would introduce a new urban form to the neighborhood and would change the street system and block formation through the closure of 5th Avenue between Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues and Pacific Street between Flatbush and 6th Avenues. The different uses on the project site would work in concert, having different times of peak activity levels and creating activity throughout the day and evening.

The proposed project would create a new neighborhood context along the Atlantic Avenue and Flatbush Avenue corridors, two of the principal and widest routes through the borough. The western end the project site would contain the most intense uses. The arena, which is expected to host approximately 225 events per year, would be one of the first components of the proposed project to be open to the public and in operation. The main entrances to the arena would be located along Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues, taking advantage of the prominence of this location at Brooklyn's crossroads.

The arena would be a compatible use with the cultural, entertainment, academic, and high-density commercial uses already located in Downtown Brooklyn, adding uses compatible with

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that neighborhood. Development on the project site would increase pedestrian activity along the adjacent commercial areas abutting Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues to north, south, and west. The street levels of the buildings on the arena block and Site 5 are expected to be highly transparent and lined with local retail, including potential restaurant uses, continuing the strong Atlantic Avenue and Flatbush Avenue retail corridors to the west and south, respectively, onto the project site. Unlike most arena facilities, where activity is hidden from the outside, the proposed project would seek to provide some visual connection to the indoor activity, in some sense expanding this activity onto the streetscape as well.

The arena would be framed by four tall mixed-use buildings. The proposed project's tallest building, the 620-foot Building 1, would be located at the southeast corner of the intersection of Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues, highlighting the importance of this point in Brooklyn by its height and distinctive architecture and replacing the Williamsburgh Savings Bank Building as the tallest building in Brooklyn. The other buildings on the arena block would range in height from 219 to 511 feet; Site 5 would be 247 feet tall. Buildings on the arena block and Site 5 would become prominent visual features, altering the Brooklyn skyline and serving as wayfinders. The proposed project would frame views of the Williamsburgh Savings Bank Building from the north from that of a tower against the sky to one of a group of towers in the skyline.

The arena itself would be 150 feet tall, much lower than its adjacent buildings. However, it would be highly visible on the project site. There would be large illuminated and non-illuminated signs along portions of the Flatbush and Atlantic Avenue façades closest to their intersection. These signs would identify the entertainment and sports use of this building (especially at night) and would reinforce the commercial character of Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues on these blockfronts.

As discussed above, the intense uses and the related increase in streetscape activity would result in a larger number of pedestrians on the project site. In general, the highest numbers of new pedestrians would typically occur during the periods preceding arena events, generally weekday evenings around 7 PM and Saturdays around 1 PM. Although the proposed Urban Room subway entrance would allow subway riders en route to and from the project site to access the subway without crossing Atlantic Avenue at grade, substantial numbers of new pedestrians would still use crosswalks on Atlantic Avenue to access bus stops, off-site parking facilities, LIRR, and the Atlantic Terminal/Bank of New York Tower and the Atlantic Center commercial buildings. An increase in pedestrian volumes is also anticipated along Dean Street on the southern boundary of the project site as a portion of arena parking is located along Dean Street between Carlton and Vanderbilt Avenues. The sidewalks adjacent to the arena block would be wide enough to accommodate the anticipated large volumes of patrons expected for arena events; and publicly accessible amenities, such as the Urban Room with its below-grade connection to the subway and public plazas along Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues, would be situated around the outside of the arena, creating a welcoming and interactive pedestrian experience.

The increase in activity on the project site would increase traffic. In addition, the proposed project would result in street closures which would divert traffic from the closed portions of 5th Avenue and Pacific Street as described above. Traffic, primarily associated with the arena, would result in unmitigated impacts at the Atlantic Avenue intersections at South Portland, Carlton, and Vanderbilt Avenues on Saturdays before and after events. The Atlantic Avenue movements at the intersection of Atlantic and Vanderbilt Avenues would experience unmitigated impacts during all but one analysis time period, indicating that all of the project components would contribute to these particular impacts. However, Atlantic Avenue is known as a heavily

trafficked corridor, so that additional volumes on this street would not significantly affect the character of this major thoroughfare.

The proposed project would result in an increase in noise on the project site, both from activity on the project site and from project-generated traffic along roadways adjacent to the project site. In 2010, noise level increases along Dean Street would exceed the *CEQR Technical Manual* impact criteria, thus resulting in a localized noise impact. In general, while there would be some additional localized noise impacts as a result of additional vehicles on streets that are currently lightly traveled, the character of those streets, such as Dean Street, is not defined by traffic levels and additional traffic would not, in and of itself, redefine its character. The noise levels along the Dean Street corridor would fall within a range that is common in many residential areas in the city.

Cumulative effects of Phase I operations and Phase II construction are discussed in Chapter 17, “Construction Impacts.”

## **ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS**

### *OVERVIEW*

In 2010, the probable impact of the proposed project on neighborhood character in the surrounding neighborhoods is expected to be largely beneficial. Issues associated with the proposed project as they relate to neighborhood character focus on the compatibility of the new land uses with those already established and the effect on neighborhood character by introducing uncharacteristically dense development on the project site.

As the presence of the rail yard has historically detracted from the neighborhood character of the areas immediately surrounding the project site, replacing this facility with a mix of uses more compatible with the predominant residential and commercial uses in the adjacent areas could affect the character of the transitional areas immediately adjacent to the project site. Adjacent areas most likely to be affected by the proposed project are within the Dean Street corridor bordering the project site in Prospect Heights to its south and areas adjacent to Site 5. Given the strong residential character—supported by zoning and historic district designations—in the surrounding neighborhoods, the ability of the proposed project to alter the character of these neighborhoods would be minimal as discussed below. The proposed project would strengthen the commercial and mixed-use character of Brooklyn’s commercial core by locating high-density uses at the gateway to Downtown Brooklyn and fostering high levels of activity in an area well-suited for such character.

### *BOERUM HILL*

The proposed project would not result in a significant adverse impact on the neighborhood character of Boerum Hill. The low-density residential character that defines this neighborhood is well established and protected from changes in land use and density by underlying zoning and the Boerum Hill Historic District. The character of Boerum Hill is expected to change in the future without the project primarily along its northern (along State and Schermerhorn Streets) and eastern (along 4th Avenue) edges. The proposed project would be compatible with this character change, which would include redevelopment of underutilized sites with a mix of moderately dense residential and commercial uses, and so the proposed project would not have a significant adverse neighborhood character impact in this area.

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The tall buildings, primarily on Site 5, would be partially visible in the skyline from locations within the Boerum Hill neighborhood. These would clearly represent a new and different type of development, but they would be distant from the core of the neighborhood and most visible in the transition area in the blocks to the west of the project site. The arena signage, which would not rise above 90 feet, would not be visible from vantage points within Boerum Hill. The change in visual resources from the project would not result in a significant adverse neighborhood character impact.

The locations in Boerum Hill that would experience additional unmitigated traffic impacts from the Phase I project, which would be primarily along Atlantic and 4th Avenues and one location on 3rd Avenue, are wide streets subject to heavy commercial traffic. Therefore, project traffic increases would not affect neighborhood character in Boerum Hill. The proposed project would have no noise impacts in Boerum Hill, and thus there would be no neighborhood character impact associated with noise.

Overall, the proposed project would not create a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character in the Boerum Hill neighborhood.

### *DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN*

Development on the project site would complement the character of Downtown Brooklyn. The arena and the proposed project's other high-density uses, built to a scale similar to the scale of uses to the north and west would create a new destination, compatible with the existing and future commercial, academic, entertainment, and cultural uses along Flatbush Avenue. The project buildings would be clearly visible from Downtown Brooklyn, along Flatbush Avenue, as would the bright signs on the arena itself, signaling the presence of commercial, residential and entertainment/sports uses, all of which would be compatible with the character of Downtown Brooklyn.

The Phase I development would support the goals of the Special Downtown Brooklyn District and be compatible with the development expected in the future without the project. As such, the proposed project would have a positive effect on the neighborhood character of Downtown Brooklyn.

The project would increase traffic along Flatbush Avenue, causing unmitigated impacts at two intersections, one in the evening peak, the other associated with a Saturday arena event. However, Flatbush Avenue is one of Brooklyn's main thoroughfares, and it is subject to heavy traffic throughout the day. The addition of proposed project traffic would not substantially detract from its character. Traffic increases from the proposed project would not be enough to alter the noise characteristics of the area.

In conclusion, the Phase I project would not have a significant adverse neighborhood character impact on Downtown Brooklyn. Its effect would be positive.

### *FORT GREENE*

The impact of the proposed project on the neighborhood character in the Fort Greene would be minimal. The areas closest to the project site were recently developed as part of ATURA, and the neighborhood farther north is protected from changes in land use and density by underlying zoning and the Fort Greene Historic District. The project's buildings would be visible in the skyline from the neighborhood, and the arena's brightly lit signs would be noticeable to a few of the residences across Atlantic Avenue. However, Atlantic Avenue, approximately 90 feet wide in this location, is Fort Greene's neighborhood boundary. This visibility would not significantly alter neighborhood character along the southern edge of Fort Greene. The skyline changes would also be perceptible

in the heart of Fort Greene, but they would read as middle-distance to background conditions, and would not change the quiet atmosphere of the neighborhood's tree-lined streets.

Unmitigated traffic impacts would be limited to Atlantic Avenue in this neighborhood (similar to the project site). Such effects would not change the character of the avenue, which is now characterized by heavy commercial traffic. No noise impacts are predicted for this area. Thus, the proposed project would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character in Fort Greene.

#### *CLINTON HILL*

No significant adverse impacts to the neighborhood character of Clinton Hill would occur as a result of the proposed project. This neighborhood is not close to the Phase I development and would not be affected by the proposed project in 2010.

#### *PROSPECT HEIGHTS*

In terms of geographic location, Prospect Heights is the neighborhood most closely associated with the proposed project. The character of Prospect Heights immediately adjacent to the project site is affected by the blighting influence of the rail yard. This area, referred to as the Dean Street corridor, contains a mix of low-density industrial uses interspersed with recent residential redevelopment, which creates a transitional and unorganized character in the corridor. This is in substantial contrast to the stable residential neighborhood character in the core of Prospect Heights to the south, which, similar to the other adjacent neighborhoods, is protected from changes in land use and density by underlying zoning and historic district regulations and would not be affected by development on the project site.

The proposed project would substantially change the neighborhood character along the Dean Street corridor, replacing a blighted, underutilized condition lacking a coherent character, with an active mixed-use development, including residential, retail, office, possible hotel, and arena use. While these changes would have a positive visual effect, they would also increase pedestrian activity and vehicular traffic on Dean Street, a quiet street. Noise levels would increase enough to cause a significant noise impact, and more important for neighborhood character, the characteristics of the noise levels in the New York City Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) noise guidance would go from "marginally acceptable" to "marginally unacceptable."

The large scale of the development on the north side of the street in the Phase I portion of the project site would be completely new to Dean Street and would significantly change its character. As discussed in Chapter 3, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," the few residences on the south side of Dean Street across from the arena block would also experience localized impacts due to the arena's loading entrances located along this block. New project-generated traffic volumes would result in significant impacts, which could not be mitigated, at the Dean Street intersections with 6th, Carlton, and Vanderbilt Avenues. In addition, before and after events at the arena, levels of service on Dean Street would increase by more than one level (e.g., from LOS C to E, or LOS C to F). Pedestrian volumes would increase notably, especially prior to and immediately following arena events, as a large portion of the arena parking would be located along Dean Street between Carlton and Vanderbilt Avenues. The additional traffic would lead to additional noise, and analyzed noise levels due to project-generated traffic would exceed *CEQR Technical Manual* impact criteria at a number of locations along Dean Street (see Chapter 15, "Noise"). Although the proposed project would result in a change in character along the Dean Street corridor from a quiet

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to an active street, the effect of the proposed project would be localized to this mixed-use corridor and would not extend beyond this transitional area of Prospect Heights. Thus, these localized adverse effects along Dean Street would not be considered significant adverse impacts on the overall neighborhood character of Prospect Heights.

Bergen Street, one block south of Dean Street and more characteristic of the core neighborhood, would experience similar changes in traffic conditions, with noticeable deteriorations in levels of service. However, because this would be the only change on the street, and would not occur throughout the neighborhood, this too is considered a localized adverse neighborhood character impact.

Like the other adjacent neighborhoods, the Phase I buildings would be visible in the skyline from some locations in the core of the Prospect Heights neighborhood. (The brightly lit signs on the arena would not be visible anywhere in this neighborhood.) Although the buildings would be noticeable in the skyline, they would be perceived as middle-distance to background conditions and would not affect the visual character of the long, tree-lined blocks in the core of the neighborhood. The proposed project is also expected to increase pedestrian and vehicular traffic in this neighborhood, particularly along Flatbush Avenue. Flatbush Avenue is already known for this type of activity; thus, its character would also not change significantly as a result of the proposed project.

As discussed above, the proposed project would have localized adverse impacts in several locations close to the project site in Prospect Heights. These affected locations would be clustered in a small area adjacent to the project site. Even when considered together, they would not affect the character of the Prospect Heights neighborhood. Therefore, the proposed project would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character in Prospect Heights.

### *PARK SLOPE*

The majority of the project's Phase I development, although it would be visible within portions of the Park Slope neighborhood, would be separated from the neighborhood by Flatbush Avenue, which is a major, heavily trafficked corridor. It would not engender land use changes or changes in density in this community, which is protected by low-density zoning and, in many places, historic district designation. The character of the area closer to the project site, where recent upzoning on 4th Avenue is expected to lead to higher-density development, would be compatible with the character of the proposed project.

Although the core of the neighborhood is several blocks south of the project site, the northern portion of the neighborhood abuts it. In particular, Site 5, which is slated to have a large residential or commercial building, with retail on the lower floors, is located at the northernmost point of Park Slope. Although this building would relate well to Downtown Brooklyn to its north, it would be of a scale and density new to Pacific Street on its southern face. This building, its scale and the intensity of activity it would engender, would create a localized adverse impact in neighborhood character for the rowhouses along Pacific Street between Flatbush and 4th Avenues. A few of the small residential buildings facing Flatbush Avenue would have a clear view of the brightly-lit signs on the arena; this visibility is incompatible with the residential uses in this transitional area. In addition, these few small residential buildings would be located within 200 feet of the arena, which is noted as a localized adverse land use impact.

Two locations on 5th Avenue in Park Slope near the project site would experience unmitigated traffic impacts before and after Saturday events at the arena. This would constitute a localized

neighborhood character impact. Although the project traffic would cause a perceptible increase in noise levels at Flatbush Avenue and Dean Street on the edge of Park Slope, the DEP noise characterization would not change in this location, and so the adverse noise impact would not alter neighborhood character.

In conclusion, the effects of the proposed project on neighborhood character in Park Slope would be limited to the transition area closest to the site and on the perimeter of the Park Slope neighborhood, and these would not create a significant adverse impact on the overall neighborhood character in Park Slope.

## **F. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT—2016**

By 2016 without the proposed project, the long-term demand for office, retail and residential development in Brooklyn is expected to continue. However, given the blighted conditions, the industrial zoning regulations, and the unappealing aspect of the open rail yard, the project site is not likely to experience substantial change beyond the possible limited retenancing anticipated for 2010. Development of new residential and commercial uses is expected to continue between 2010 and 2016 in the areas outside of the project site, particularly in Downtown Brooklyn (see Table 2-1 in Chapter 2, “Analytical and Procedural Framework”).

### **PROJECT SITE**

The project site is not anticipated to experience substantial change in the future without the proposed project by 2016 due to the existence of the open rail yard and the low-density industrial zoning regulations. While some of the more intact buildings vacated through buyouts by the project sponsors could be reoccupied in the future without the proposed project by 2010, no additional conversion or retenancing activity is expected to take place between 2010 and 2016. In the future without the proposed project, the below-grade rail yard is expected to remain open and undeveloped, and would continue to dominate the character of the project site. The project site would continue to have a mixture of vacant sites, undertulized manufacturing and commercial buildings, and residential units in various state of disrepair. Thus, the project site would continue to pose a barrier to development and hinder connections between the surrounding neighborhoods. No appreciable change in character on the project site is anticipated.

In the future without the proposed project, anticipated development in the surrounding neighborhoods would result in an increase in traffic on the street network adjacent to the project site. Increases in traffic are expected along Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues due primarily to development anticipated as a result of the Downtown Brooklyn Development Plan. However, due to underutilized conditions on the project site and limited connections to areas to the north, pedestrian activity within and around the project site would remain low, in stark contrast to the surrounding area. Noise levels would not change appreciably over those predicted for 2010.

### **ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS**

#### *OVERVIEW*

By 2016, a mix of office, academic, cultural, residential, and retail uses is anticipated to be developed in Downtown Brooklyn as a result of the recent Downtown Brooklyn Development Plan. With the exception of Downtown Brooklyn, the character of the surrounding neighborhoods is not expected to change substantially; current trends of residential construction

and redevelopment in areas outside of historic districts and areas set aside for such development by recent public policy initiatives (i.e., 4th Avenue upzoning) would continue. Traffic is expected to increase along Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues primarily as a result of development anticipated in Downtown Brooklyn. (The discussion below addresses only those neighborhoods where a change in character is anticipated.)

#### *DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN*

Downtown Brooklyn is expected to experience substantial growth by 2016. High-density commercial office buildings are anticipated in the northern part of this neighborhood, closer to and more like MetroTech. Within ½ mile of the project site, these projects would be primarily residential or cultural, more reflective of their adjacent uses.

Two medium-density residential buildings, with commercial uses on the street level, are planned just north of Schermerhorn Street within this transitional area between Downtown Brooklyn and Boerum Hill. These buildings are designed to bridge the scale and density differences between these two adjoining neighborhoods.

Two planned developments, associated with BAM and the proposed BAM Cultural District, are anticipated along Flatbush Avenue near Lafayette Avenue. These developments would convert existing parking lots and other underutilized property in the transitional area between Downtown Brooklyn and Fort Greene into signature cultural buildings. These BAM-related projects include the development of a Visual and Performing Arts Library designed by Enrique Norten and the Gehry-designed 299-seat theater for the Theatre for a New Audience, both located on the triangular block bounded by Ashland Place and Lafayette and Flatbush Avenues. The second, a mixed-use development with residential, retail, parking, and cultural event space including a theater and museum/gallery, would be located one block north. These developments would enhance the cultural character that already exists in this part of Downtown Brooklyn, and create pedestrian activity and energy to this area.

The increase in development would also result in an increase in traffic (and its related noise), mostly along Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues. However, these corridors are known for these conditions and additional volumes would not significantly affect their character.

#### *FORT GREENE*

The southern edge of Fort Greene could be transformed by the construction of a large mixed-use development set atop the existing Atlantic Center Mall on the northeast corner of Atlantic Avenue and Fort Greene Place. This development would include 850,000 square feet of residential and 550,000 square feet of commercial space (in addition to the existing 395,000 square feet of the Atlantic Terminal Mall). This development, which would complement the Atlantic Terminal/Bank of New York Tower development to the west, would strengthen the commercial character of Atlantic Avenue in this location, would reinforce this site's connection to Downtown Brooklyn, and would advance the transit-oriented nature of this immediate area.

## **G. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT—2016**

### **OVERVIEW**

By 2016, it is anticipated that the proposed project would be fully constructed and operational, with Phase II adding 11 new residential buildings with street-level retail, new community

facilities, and public open space to the Phase I development, completing the development of ATURA and the revitalization of this blighted area. The components of the proposed project would work in concert, locating the higher-density mix of residential, commercial, and entertainment uses to the west, where they would be more readily served by the Atlantic Terminal transportation hub and have a stronger link to the commercial, entertainment, and cultural uses that characterize Downtown Brooklyn, and locating the predominantly residential uses to the east, where they would be most compatible with the character of the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

The rail yard, long a blighting influence on and a major contributor to the character in the immediate area, would be covered by a platform supporting a series of residential buildings and a minimum of seven acres of publicly accessible open space. This open space would serve an area underserved by such resources and would provide a number of connections between the neighborhoods to the north and the south, formerly separated by the rail yard in its earlier configuration.

In 2016, the effect of the proposed project on neighborhood character would be most felt on the areas on and immediately adjacent to the project site. As discussed in “Probable Impacts of the Proposed Project—2010,” the activity generated by the arena and the associated high density of residential and commercial uses on the western end of the proposed site would be evident along the major traffic and pedestrian corridors. As discussed below, the proposed project would have minimal impact on the character of the surrounding residential neighborhoods, as the cores of these neighborhoods are beyond the proposed project’s influence, but it would have some localized adverse effects on those portions of the neighborhoods adjacent to the project site.

## **PROJECT SITE**

By 2016, the proposed project would be completed, creating a high-density neighborhood with a mix of residential, commercial, entertainment, cultural, and open space uses. Through the closing of streets, the proposed project would introduce a new urban form to the area and change the street system and block formation. To the west, the three blocks (Blocks 1118, 1119, and 1127) at the southeast corner of the Atlantic Avenue and Flatbush Avenue intersection would be combined through the closure of 5th Avenue between Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues and Pacific Street between Flatbush and 6th Avenues to form one block large enough to house the arena. The blocks at the eastern end of the site (Blocks 1121 and 1129) would also be combined by the closure of Pacific Street between Carlton and Vanderbilt Avenues to create a large, unified, publicly accessible open space.

The proposed project would create a new neighborhood context along the Atlantic Avenue and Flatbush Avenue corridors in keeping with the stature of these corridors as two of the principal (and widest) routes through the borough and would introduce buildings of a size and design never before seen in Brooklyn. As discussed in “Future Without the Proposed Project—2010” above, the western end of the project site would contain the most intense uses. To the east, the proposed project would establish a strong residential/commercial presence along Atlantic Avenue; and while Phase II development would be built to a substantially greater scale than many of the adjacent uses, taller buildings would be placed on Atlantic Avenue, where they would be of comparable height and scale to the taller buildings north of Atlantic Avenue; shorter street walls would face towards the lower-density neighborhoods to the south and east of the site. However, the streetwalls of these shorter buildings would in general be considerably taller

than those to the south. The height of the streetwalls would be similar to the Newwalk Building on Pacific Street immediately south of the project site.

The different uses on the project site would be located where they would be most compatible with adjacent uses off-site, thereby adopting the character of these immediate areas onto the project site. The arena would be located at the prime intersection of Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues, highlighting and further defining this unique location at Brooklyn's crossroads with a unique use, compatible with the cultural, academic, and high-density commercial uses already located in the already expanding Downtown Brooklyn. Similarly, the strong residential character of the buildings on the eastern end of the project would be compatible with and complement the residential neighborhoods to the north (Fort Greene and Clinton Hill) and south (Prospect Heights). In addition, the different uses on the project site would work in concert, having different times of peak activity levels to create a vibrant streetscape throughout the day and evening.

While the proposed project would have localized effects on land use, the proposed project would greatly improve the streetscape in and around the project site. Pedestrian activity would be focused along the major streets that border and traverse the project site. Commercial uses in the form of street level retail would be located along these streets, strengthening the commercial character of these north-south avenues. This retail use would be comparable in size and scope of retail establishments already present in the surrounding neighborhoods. In addition, the proposed open space would extend from Atlantic Avenue from the terminus of each of the neighborhood streets to the north, linking the site to the area to the north both visually, through the creation of landscaped view corridors, and functionally, through the introduction of walking paths at each of these points (see Chapter 6, "Open Space and Recreational Facilities" for expanded description).

The larger buildings and the most active uses would surround the transit hub at the crossroads of Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues. Upon completion, the proposed project would greatly alter the Brooklyn skyline with the addition of 17 uniquely shaped buildings that would be markedly different in height, form, and massing from most buildings in the surrounding area. The proposed project's buildings on the western end of the project site would frame views of the Williamsburgh Savings Bank Building from the north from that of a tower against the sky to one of a group of towers in the skyline. While the heights would vary from building to building, with lower buildings interspersed between higher ones, there would be a general trend of higher buildings to the west and lower buildings to the east in recognition of these lower-density uses to the east and south.

As discussed above, the intense uses and their related increase in street activity would increase the number of pedestrians on the project site. In general, the greatest number of new pedestrians would typically be present during the periods immediately preceding arena events. Although the proposed Urban Room subway entrance would relieve some at-grade pedestrian traffic, substantial numbers of new pedestrians would still use crosswalks on Atlantic Avenue to access destinations on both sides of this street. All analyzed sidewalks and corner areas would operate at acceptable levels of service in all analyzed peak hours. The sidewalks adjacent to the arena block would be wide enough to accommodate the anticipated large volumes of patrons expected for arena events; and publicly accessible amenities, such as the Urban Room with its below-grade connection to the subway, and public plazas along Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues would be situated around the outside of the arena creating a friendly and interactive pedestrian experience. Thus, although the character of the streets and sidewalks would change through sizable intensification of pedestrian activity, pedestrian congestion would not occur. Thus, this change in character, although substantial, would not be adverse.

The increase in activity on the project site would lead to an increase in traffic. In addition, the proposed project would close portions of 5th Avenue and Pacific Street, which would divert traffic. New project-generated traffic volumes would create significant traffic impacts that could not be mitigated at the Atlantic Avenue intersections with every street between Fort Greene Place and Vanderbilt Avenue, with the exception of Cumberland Street. However, Atlantic Avenue is known as a heavily trafficked corridor and additional volumes on this street would not significantly affect the character of this major thoroughfare.

The proposed project would increase noise on and emanating from the project site, both from activity on the project site and from project-generated traffic along roadways adjacent to the project site. In 2016, noise level increases along Dean Street would exceed the *CEQR Technical Manual* impact criteria, thus resulting in a localized noise impacts, affecting neighborhood character. In general, while there would be some additional localized noise due to additional vehicles on streets that are currently lightly traveled, the character of Dean Street is not defined by traffic levels, and additional traffic would not, in and of itself, redefine its character. The noise levels along the Dean Street corridor would fall within the range not uncommon for residential areas throughout the city.

## **ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS**

### *OVERVIEW*

In 2016, the proposed project would not significantly adversely affect the overall character of the surrounding adjacent neighborhoods. Issues associated with the proposed project as they relate to neighborhood character focus on the compatibility of the new land uses with those already established and the effect on neighborhood character of introducing uncharacteristically dense development on the project site.

As the presence of the rail yard has historically detracted from the neighborhood character of the areas immediately surrounding the project site, replacing this facility with a mix of uses more compatible with the predominant residential and commercial uses in the adjacent areas would affect the character of adjacent areas, but not significantly alter the character of these neighborhoods beyond these transitional areas. Areas most likely to be influenced by Phase II of the proposed project include the Dean Street corridor bordering the project site in Prospect Heights to its south and the primarily manufacturing district to the east of Vanderbilt Avenue along Atlantic Avenue.

Given the strong residential character—supported by underlying zoning and historic district designations—of the adjacent neighborhoods, the ability of the proposed project to alter the essential character of these neighborhoods would be minimal as discussed below. At the western end, the proposed project would reflect the commercial and mixed-use character of Brooklyn’s commercial core. To the east, the predominantly residential character created on the project site would complement the current residential uses and provide for much desired connections, through the proposed project’s open space component, between the adjacent neighborhoods to the north and south.

### *BOERUM HILL*

The Phase II development in 2016 would be distant from the Boerum Hill neighborhood, thus having no effect on its neighborhood character. The project’s effect on this neighborhood would arise from the Phase I portion of the development. As noted above, in the discussion of probable

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impacts in 2010, the proposed project would not create a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character in Boerum Hill, because the low-density character that defines this neighborhood is well-established and protected from changes in land use and density by underlying zoning and the Boerum Hill Historic District. Traffic impacts in this neighborhood would be generally limited to Atlantic Avenue, which is already heavily trafficked, so that traffic increases would not affect neighborhood character, and there would be no noise impacts from the proposed project in this neighborhood.

### *DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN*

Like Boerum Hill, Downtown Brooklyn would be most influenced by the Phase I development. The Phase II development on the project site would be farther away. As noted above, the development on the western end of the project site would complement Downtown Brooklyn. The arena and the proposed project's other high-density uses, built to a scale similar to the scale of uses to the north and west would create a new destination, complementing the existing and future commercial, entertainment, academic, and cultural uses along Flatbush Avenue. As such, the proposed project would have a positive effect on the neighborhood character of Downtown Brooklyn.

### *FORT GREENE*

The impact of the proposed project on the neighborhood character in Fort Greene would be largely beneficial. The areas closest to the project site were recently developed as part of ATURA, and the neighborhood farther north is protected from changes in land use and density by the underlying zoning and the Fort Greene Historic District. The scale of the proposed project would be somewhat greater than the public high-rise residential developments in the ATURA section of Fort Greene, and it would be substantially greater than the enclave of three-story rowhouses built by the New York City Housing Partnership. The mix of low- and high-rise affordable housing that characterizes the ATURA section of Fort Greene would not be overwhelmed by the proposed project's residential buildings across Atlantic Avenue. The proposed open space on the eastern end of the project site would have the effect of drawing the southern portion of this neighborhood southward, creating a connection with the Prospect Heights neighborhood once separated by the rail yard. Taken together, development on both sides would promote balance along Atlantic Avenue, which at one time lacked character on both sides, and make this thoroughfare a more vibrant boulevard rather than the uninviting highway-like street it is.

Although the core of the neighborhood is relatively far from the project site, the Phase II development would be visible in the skyline from portions of the core area and from parts Fort Greene Park. This change, however, would be read as middle-distance or background conditions, and it would not significantly affect the essential neighborhood character of Fort Greene.

The conclusion as to traffic and noise would be the same for 2016 as for 2010: traffic impacts would not alter the character of Atlantic Avenue, so these aspects of the proposed project would not alter the character of the Fort Greene neighborhood. As a result, the proposed project would not have any significant adverse neighborhood character impacts on Fort Greene.

### *CLINTON HILL*

No significant adverse impacts to the neighborhood character of Clinton Hill would occur as a result of the proposed project. This neighborhood is located on Atlantic Avenue across from the very edge of the eastern end of the project site. Similar to Fort Greene, its neighbor to the west, the core of the Clinton Hill neighborhood is located beyond the influence of the high-density use

and character associated with the proposed project. Although the proposed project's easterly residential buildings would be visible from the core of the neighborhood, this change in the skyline would not affect the character of Clinton Hill's tree-lined streets and historic rowhouses.

The removal of the rail yard as the dominant use on the project site, in addition to the proposed open space, would strengthen the character of the more transitional part of Clinton Hill near Atlantic Avenue, drawing its focus southward. Like the findings for Fort Greene, the traffic impacts would not alter the character of Atlantic Avenue, and no noise impacts have been predicted. The proposed project would not have any significant adverse neighborhood character impacts on Clinton Hill.

### *PROSPECT HEIGHTS*

Prospect Heights is the neighborhood most closely associated with and most likely to be affected by the proposed project. By 2016, the project site would be completely redeveloped with a mix of uses and densities. Similar to the characteristics of the other surrounding neighborhoods, the core of Prospect Heights, protected from changes in land use and density by underlying zoning and its historic district, is located farther south and beyond the reach of influence exerted by development on the project site.

The area of Prospect Heights immediately adjacent to and south of the project site, the Dean Street corridor, is transitional and unorganized in nature, much different in character from that of the larger neighborhood to the south. Although quiet, due to the lack of activity along its streets, this corridor does not resemble the tree-lined streets typically characteristic of brownstone Brooklyn. The development on the arena block (completed by 2010) would introduce a level of activity and scale never before seen in this neighborhood, and the residential development completed by 2016 would complete this trend. The character along the Dean Street corridor would change dramatically and would experience increases in pedestrian activity, vehicular traffic, and noise levels.

As identified in Chapter 3, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," the residences on the south side of Dean Street across from the arena block would also experience localized impacts from the arena's loading entrances located along this block. New project-generated traffic volumes would result in significant impacts, which could not be mitigated, at the Dean Street intersections with 6th, Carlton, and Vanderbilt Avenues. Pedestrian volumes would increase along this corridor as well, drawn to the project site's open space component and parking facilities. The additional traffic would lead to additional noise, and noise increases from project-generated traffic would exceed *CEQR Technical Manual* impact criteria at a number of locations along Dean Street (see Chapter 15, "Noise"). The change in character along the Dean Street corridor would be from a nondescript, but quiet, mixed-use former industrial street, to an urban, predominantly residential corridor, with high density commercial and entertainment uses on the western edge. Because this change would not affect the historic residential areas of Prospect Heights, and would rather improve the character of the Dean Street corridor, the change, although dramatic, would not be considered a significant adverse neighborhood character impact.

Bergen Street, one block south of Dean Street and more characteristic of the core neighborhood, would experience similar changes in traffic conditions, with notable deteriorations in levels of service. However, because this would be the only change on the street, and would not occur throughout the neighborhood, this, too, is considered a localized adverse neighborhood character impact.

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The proposed project is also expected to increase pedestrian and vehicular traffic in the portion of Prospect Heights along Flatbush and Vanderbilt Avenues. As these avenues are primarily commercial corridors intended to handle such activity, the character of these streets would not change significantly as a result of the proposed project. The proposed project would not have a significant adverse neighborhood character impact on Prospect Heights.

### *PARK SLOPE*

The proposed project would not result in a significant adverse impact on the neighborhood character of the Park Slope. As discussed in “Probable Impacts of the Proposed Project—2010” above, the influence exerted by the most active and intense uses on the western end of the project site, the uses considered most at odds with the low-scale residential character of this thriving neighborhood, would not reach, and therefore not affect, the source of this neighborhood’s character. The residential character created on the eastern end of the project site, farther from Park Slope, would be far from and thus would have a minimal effect on the character of this neighborhood.

As in Phase I, the full proposed project is also expected to increase pedestrian and vehicular traffic in Park Slope, particularly along Flatbush and 4th Avenues which border this neighborhood to the north and west, respectively. However, these major avenues are already known for and suited for this type of activity; therefore, the character of these streetscapes would also not change significantly as a result of the proposed project. Therefore, the proposed project would not have any significant adverse neighborhood character impacts on Park Slope. \*