Chapter 4H: Operational Neighborhood Character

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses the potential impacts of Phase II of the Project under the Extended Build-Out Scenario on neighborhood character. The neighborhood character impacts of the prolonged construction under the Extended Build-Out Scenario are addressed in Chapter 3L, "Construction Land Use and Neighborhood Character."

As defined in the *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give neighborhoods their distinct "personality." These elements may include a neighborhood's land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation, and/or noise. The assessment of impacts on neighborhood character allows for consideration of cumulative effects in the relevant technical areas described above. Accordingly, this chapter examines those components of neighborhood character that are analyzed in previous chapters of this SEIS, and determines whether conditions under the Extended Build-Out Scenario would result in any significant adverse neighborhood character impacts not previously disclosed in the 2006 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

Consistent with the 2006 FEIS and 2009 Technical Memorandum, this SEIS analysis finds that while Phase II of the Project would result in localized adverse neighborhood character impacts along Dean Street due to increased activity and significant adverse traffic and pedestrian condition impacts, and along Bergen Street due to significant adverse traffic impacts, these impacts would be highly localized and would not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts. While a delay in construction of Phase II of the Project under the Extended Build-Out Scenario would defer temporarily the benefits of Phase II, the benefits would nevertheless improve the character of the neighborhood when construction is completed. Overall, Phase II of the Project under the Extended Build-Out Scenario would have a beneficial effect on neighborhood character, creating a vibrant mixed use area, improving the streetscape in and around the project site and knitting together the neighborhoods north and south of the rail yard.

B. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS OF PREVIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWS

The 2006 FEIS concluded that the Project would change for the better the character of the project site, and that changes to 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.

The 2006 FEIS indicated that the Project would result in localized adverse neighborhood character impacts in certain areas closest to the project site. In general, areas of localized impact

identified in the 2006 FEIS related to the Phase I development, which is not the subject of this SEIS. However, the 2006 FEIS did identify localized adverse neighborhood character impacts on Dean Street along the southern border of the project site (including the eastern portion, adjacent to the Phase II project site), a street that would change from a nondescript, but quiet, mixed-use (i.e., industrial, commercial and residential) street to an active street with a mix of uses. However, the 2006 FEIS concluded that 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. The core of the Prospect Heights neighborhood is preserved in an 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. Changes in neighborhood character along Dean Street would not affect the historic residential areas of Prospect Heights.

The 2006 FEIS concluded that the changes to the overall character of Dean Street would not be significantly adverse, and that overall the Project would not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts. To the contrary, the 2006 FEIS concluded that Phase II of the Project would further City policies and redevelopment objectives associated with the Atlantic Terminal Urban Renewal Area (ATURA), transforming the project site into a vibrant mixed-use area and knitting together the surrounding neighborhoods which have long been separated by the physical and visual barrier formed by the open rail yard.

C. METHODOLOGY

Based on the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any of the following technical areas: land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; shadows; transportation; or noise. In addition, even if a project does not have the potential to result in a significant adverse impact in any of these technical areas, an assessment may be required if a project would result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that cumulatively may affect neighborhood character. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a "moderate" effect is generally defined as an effect considered reasonably close to the significant adverse impact threshold for a particular technical analysis area.

As outlined in Chapter 2, "Analysis Framework," many of the technical areas listed above would not be adversely affected by the Extended Build-Out Scenario, and therefore are not addressed as part of the SEIS operational analysis. These include: land use, zoning, and public policy; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; and shadows. Chapters 4A, 4C, and 4G examine operational socioeconomic conditions, open space, and noise, respectively, and conclude that the completion of Phase II of the Project at a later date would not have the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any of these technical areas. The Project would also not result in effects considered reasonably close to the significant adverse impact thresholds in those technical areas. Therefore, the Phase II development would not have the potential to result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that cumulatively may affect neighborhood character.

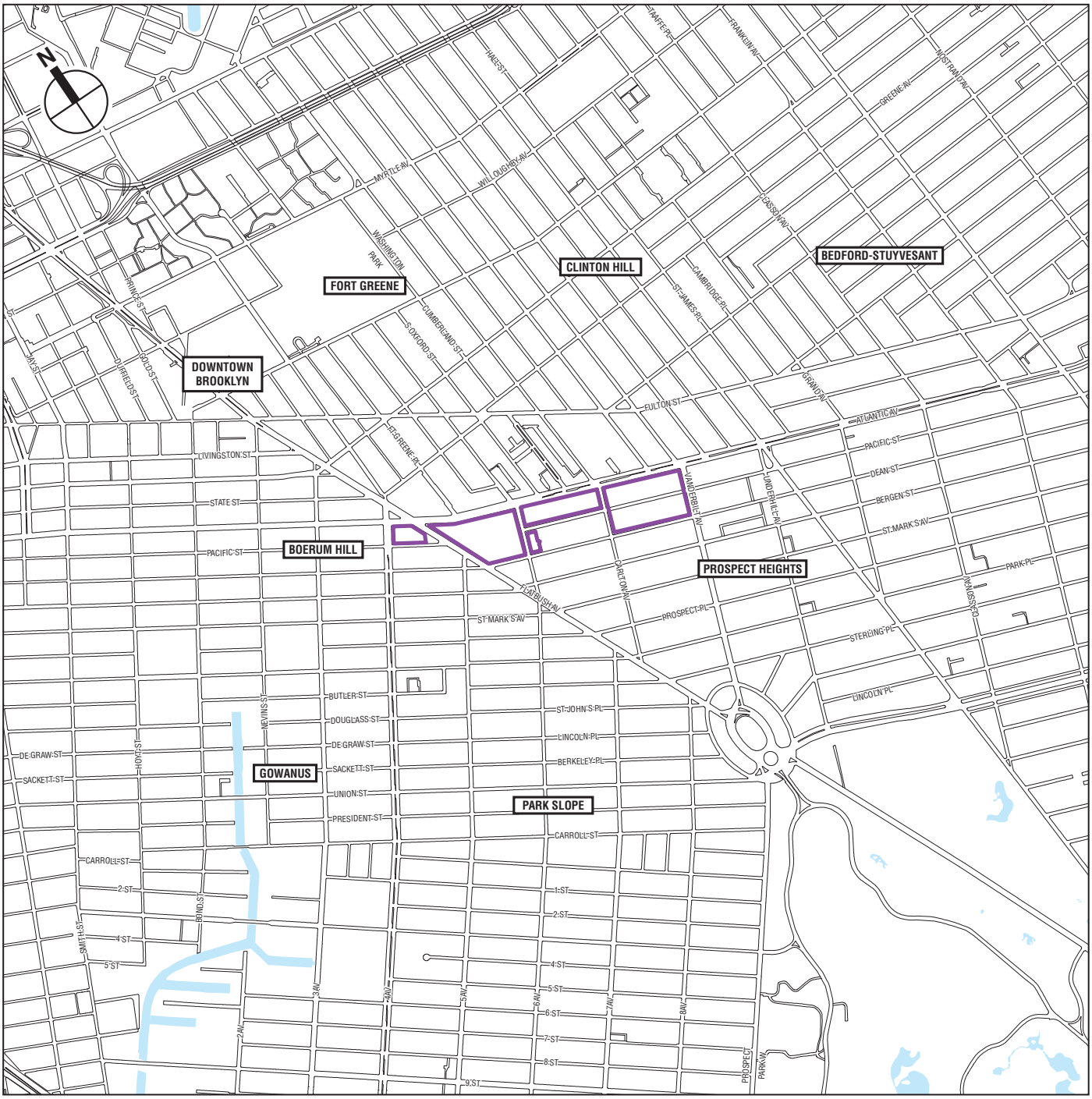
Transportation is the one technical area in which significant adverse impacts were identified. Therefore, the analysis below focuses on transportation impacts and their potential to affect neighborhood character.

D. ASSESSMENT

As described in Chapter 3L, "Construction Land Use and Neighborhood Character," the area surrounding the Phase II project site includes the Phase I project site and the neighborhoods of Boerum Hill, Downtown Brooklyn, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Prospect Heights, Park Slope, and Gowanus (see **Figure 4H-1**). The existing Phase I project site contains the Barclays Center arena, Daily News Plaza, a bicycle parking area, an entrance to the Atlantic Avenue-Barclays Center subway station, and construction and staging areas. Beyond the Phase I project site, Boerum Hill, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Prospect Heights, and Park Slope are predominantly residential neighborhoods that contain a mixture of residential, commercial, community facility/institutional, and some industrial uses. Local retail uses are primarily located on major throughfares including Flatbush Avenue, Seventh Avenue, Fifth Avenue, Fulton Street, and portions of Atlantic Avenue, Vanderbilt Avenue and Washington Avenue. In comparison to the primarily low-rise residential character of the neighborhoods listed above, Downtown Brooklyn contains higher density commercial and residential uses, and Gowanus contains predominantly light industrial and manufacturing uses.

The street network in the traffic study area includes a number of principal arterials carrying heavy volumes of through traffic, as well as minor roadways serving local traffic. As described in Chapter 4D, "Operational Transportation," the principal arterials providing access to the project site are Atlantic Avenue bordering the project site on the north, Flatbush Avenue bordering the Arena block on the west, and 4th Avenue to the west of Flatbush Avenue. These arterials are characterized by heavy volumes of traffic, particularly during peak hours, and noise levels consistent with this type of traffic activity. A number of through and local streets also provide access to and within the project site. Streets that traverse or border the Phase II project site include 6th, Carlton, and Vanderbilt Avenues, and Pacific and Dean Streets. Dean and Bergen Streets function as a one-way east-west couplet on the southern boundary of the project site. There are bike lanes on both Dean and Bergen Streets, and the B65 bus route traverses both streets. The entrance to the Arena's loading dock is located on Dean Street, west of 6th Avenue.

The traffic analysis presented in Chapter 4D, "Operational Transportation," examines the potential for impact at 71 of the 93 intersections analyzed in the 2006 FEIS. The analysis takes into account changes to the traffic network since the 2006 FEIS, changes in baseline conditions, and future background growth due to the extended completion year. Changes to the traffic network that have been implemented in conjunction with development of the Barclays Center Arena include closure of segments of 5th Avenue and Pacific Street on the project site, the conversion of 6th Avenue to two-way operation between Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues, the conversion of Carlton Avenue to two-way operation between Atlantic Avenue and Pacific Street and the provision of lay-by lanes adjacent to the Arena Block. Additional street network changes that are expected to be implemented with full build-out of Phase I, and are accounted for in the baseline condition for the traffic analysis include installation of a lay-by lane along the north side of Pacific Street between Flatbush and 4th Avenues, installation of a lay-by lane along the west side of 6th Avenue between Atlantic Avenue and Pacific Street, and the conversion of Pacific Street from on-way westbound to two-way operation between 6th and Carlton Avenues. In addition, as described in Chapter 4D, "Operational Transportation," the baseline condition for the traffic analysis includes various mitigation measures to address significant adverse impacts



Surrounding Neighborhoods

Figure 4H-1

expected to result from development of Phase I, and street system improvements that the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) and other agencies are implementing unrelated to specific development projects.

Of the 71 intersections analyzed, a total of 57 intersections would have significant adverse impacts in one or more movements in one or more peak hours in the Future With Phase II under the Extended Build-Out Scenario. With implementation of the Project's traffic mitigation plan, unmitigated impacts would remain in one or more peak hours at a total of 10 intersections.

Unmitigated traffic impacts would occur along Atlantic Avenue at the intersections with Boerum Place, 4th Avenue, Flatbush Avenue, 6th Avenue/S. Portland Avenue, Carlton Avenue, and Vanderbilt Avenue. Additional unmitigated traffic impacts would occur at the following intersections: Flatbush Avenue Extension and Willoughby Street; 6th Avenue and Dean Street; Adams Street and Tillary Street; and Boerum Place and Livingston Street. Atlantic Avenue, Flatbush Avenue, and Adams Street/Boerum Place are already heavily trafficked corridors and additional volumes on these streets would not significantly affect the character of these major thoroughfares or result in any significant adverse impacts on the neighborhoods in which unmitigated traffic impacts are anticipated.

Similarly, as described in Chapter 5, "Mitigation," the transportation analysis shows significant adverse impacts related to pedestrian conditions on two crosswalks along the Atlantic Avenue corridor at 6th Avenue adjacent to the project site. However, the resulting conditions would be in keeping with the existing high activity urban nature of Atlantic Avenue which functions as a major retail and commercial corridor, and a pedestrian access route for both the Barclays Center Arena and a major intermodal transit hub. As described in Chapter 5, "Mitigation," all significant impacts to these crosswalks could be fully mitigated through a combination of crosswalk widening and signal timing changes.

Significant adverse traffic impacts along Dean Street would contribute to the change in character of this street segment adjacent to the Phase II development site from a nondescript, but relatively quiet mixed-use (i.e., industrial, commercial, and residential) street, to an urban corridor with higher traffic volumes. Pedestrian volumes would increase along this corridor as well, resulting from the continued transformation of the site from industrial and rail yard use into an active mixed-use residential community with a sizable open space amenity, and this increase would result in significant adverse pedestrian impacts during certain peak periods on the north sidewalk between 6th and Carlton Avenues and two crosswalks along Dean Street at 6th Avenue and at Carlton Avenue. Both crosswalk impacts could be fully mitigated through a combination of crosswalk widening and signal timing changes. Mitigation measures for the significant adverse impacts to the north sidewalk on Dean Street between 6th and Carlton Avenues in weekday PM and Saturday pregame peak hours would likely not be practicable and therefore would remain unmitigated. Because the Phase II development overall would improve the character of the Dean Street corridor, and these changes would not adversely affect the historic residential areas of Prospect Heights, the change would not be considered a significant adverse neighborhood character impact.

Bergen Street would experience similar changes in vehicular traffic conditions; all six of the analyzed intersections along the street would be significantly adversely impacted in one or more peak hours, however all of these impacts could be fully mitigated. Because this would be the only change on the street and would not occur throughout the neighborhood, this is considered a localized adverse neighborhood character impact.

The 2006 FEIS describes a number of positive effects the Project would have on neighborhood character. For example: the Project would replace the rail yard, a visual and physical barrier that detracts from the neighborhood character of areas immediately surrounding the project site, with a mix of uses; it would improve the streetscape in and around the project site; it would provide new connections between adjacent neighborhoods to the north and south, through the Project's Phase II open spaces; and it would create a new neighborhood context along the Atlantic Avenue and Flatbush Avenue corridors. Blocks that would benefit most notably from replacement of the rail yard with Phase II of the Project include Pacific Street between 6th Avenue and Carlton Avenue, Carlton Avenue between Pacific Street and Dean Street, and Dean Street between Carlton Avenue and Vanderbilt Avenue. Upon completion, the Phase II development would create a neighborhood context that better complements and provides an open space amenity for the surrounding blocks. While the Extended Build-Out Scenario would delay the provision of these positive neighborhood conditions compared to the conditions analyzed in the 2006 FEIS, the benefits would still be realized incrementally as Phase II is built out. Chapter 3L, "Construction Land Use and Neighborhood Character," details the effects of prolonged construction on neighborhood character during the construction period under the Extended Build-Out Scenario.

Overall, the completion of the Phase II development at a later date under the Extended Build-Out Scenario would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

COMPARISON OF SEIS FINDINGS AND PREVIOUS FINDINGS

Consistent with previous environmental analyses, this SEIS concludes that operation of Phase II of the Project upon completion under the Extended Build-Out Scenario would not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts. Traffic impacts would vary somewhat from those identified in the 2006 FEIS due to a number of factors such as changes in transportation planning factors, travel characteristics of Arena patrons, and updated No Build projects and baseline traffic count. However, the general location and magnitude of impacts identified in the SEIS and 2006 FEIS are comparable as they relate to the character of neighborhoods surrounding the project site. Unmitigated traffic impacts associated with Phase II development under the Extended Build-Out Scenario, coupled with increases in pedestrian activity, would result in localized neighborhood character impacts along Dean Street and Bergen Street, the one-way east-west couplet on the southern boundary of the project site, but these localized impacts would not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts in the Prospect Heights neighborhood. On the contrary, significant neighborhood character benefits would result upon completion of Phase II of the Project under the Extended Build-Out Scenario, in that it would transform the site into a vibrant mixed use neighborhood with eight acres of open space, improve the streetscape and connect the neighborhoods to the north and south of the rail yard. While a delay in construction would defer these benefits temporarily, the benefits would nevertheless improve the character of the neighborhood when construction is completed. These SEIS findings are consistent with those presented in the 2006 FEIS for neighborhood character. ✷