

3.3 NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

The proposed project would create a new school campus containing one IS/HS and one high school with a total of 1,900 students. A total of approximately 170 teachers, full-time non-teaching staff, and part-time staff would work at the two schools. The design for the campus features the two schools consolidated within a single structure, which allows the greatest amount of outdoor recreation space. In addition, the schools are five stories tall, with each school having individual stairwells, toilet facilities, and corridor systems, but they will share custodial facilities, a centralized kitchen, a dining area, and a 754-seat auditorium.

Other sections of this document discuss in more detail the existing land use patterns, zoning regulations, visual character, public facilities and services, public open spaces, and cultural resources located in the vicinity of the project site. Those sections also evaluate how the proposed project would affect each of those individual impact areas. Inasmuch as these impact areas can be grouped under the common heading of “Neighborhood Character,” the following section summarizes the existing character of the area surrounding the project site and reviews how it would change in the future both with and without the proposed project. This section represents a synthetic and qualitative discussion of the issues that are presented in Sections 3.1 through 3.6.

3.3.1 Existing Conditions

Between 1980 and 1990, New York City and Queens gained 3.5 percent and 3.2 percent of their respective populations. In comparison, during the same period, Queens Community District #6 lost 4.7 percent of its population. The population of the city and Queens increased this gain from 1990 to 2000 – growing by 9.4 percent and 14.2 percent, respectively – the population of Community District #6 increased by 8.4 percent. In addition, the district’s total number of housing units grew modestly during that time, from 54,588 to 55,483. Since 1990, the district’s population appears to have been growing rapidly, primarily due to increasing numbers of immigrants, especially from Russia and Central Asia.

While Community District #6 contains a broad range of low-, mid-, and high-density housing types, low-density residences predominate in the areas nearest the project site. The residential blocks located east of the site, between Union Turnpike and Metropolitan Avenue, contain well-kept detached two-story houses. Since most of these residences were developed concurrently in the 1910s and 1920s, they present a consistent visual character, which is complemented by the presence of mature street trees. As is typical in low density residential neighborhoods, these are generally quiet blocks. The Department of

Transportation garage and truck facility, located on Sybilla Street, is an anomaly in this otherwise residential district.

The trestle crossing Metropolitan Avenue (formerly used by the LIRR's Rockaway Beach line) divides the local stores and services located to the east from the heavier commercial uses to the west. East of the trestle, Metropolitan Avenue is lined with establishments oriented toward the local residents (e.g., supermarket, library, and restaurants); while to the west, more industrial uses, such as an auto repair/detailing facility, prevail. The superblock on which the project site is located has historically contained industrial uses. However, much of the block now contains large-scale commercial businesses. The superblock is atypical in that it contains relatively large, unsubdivided lots within a few hundred feet of well-developed, well-established residential districts to the north, east, and west.

The site itself is wooded, overgrown, and bordered by a chain-link fence. Currently, it can only be accessed by the gate on the corner of 69th Avenue and Sybilla Street. Sybilla Street and 69th Avenue are both quiet, residential, tree-lined, side streets off the much busier and commercial Metropolitan Avenue. These streets, and the others in the immediate neighborhood, are lined with uniform rows of two- to two-and-a-half story single- and two-family homes. The houses have small front and rear yards, detached wood garages, and are divided from each other by small driveways. Parked cars line the streets and there is little vehicular traffic.

The Remsen Cemetery – a New York City Landmark – is the only historic or archaeological resource in the immediate vicinity of the project site; it is located approximately one block west and one block north of the project site's Metropolitan Avenue frontage. Although the small cemetery dates back to the mid-18th century, the residential uses that surround it all date from the 20th century.

3.3.2 The Future Without the Project

While there are no alternative plans if the proposed school is not built, the site would likely remain vacant. The construction of the shopping center at 90-30 Metropolitan Avenue would affect the neighborhood's character through increase vehicular traffic. Because of the nature of that development, it is expected to increase traffic on Metropolitan Avenue and Woodhaven Boulevard, as well as Trotting Course Lane. Although it would be located near the project site, it would be located on the other side of the LIRR berm, which constitutes a significant barrier between the properties. Therefore, the shopping center is not expected to result in substantial changes to the character of the project site or the residential blocks to the east.

3.3.3 Probable Impacts of the Proposed Project

The proposed project would create two schools that would support the existing residential community to the east. Schools are generally compatible with and complementary to residential areas, but any development of the scale which is planned could affect the adjoining residential neighborhood. Based on the current design plans for the Campus, the school building would be located in the southeast corner of the site at a distance from the residences, and landscaping or other buffers will be used to screen the campus from the rear yards of those houses. Access to the site, as well as staff parking, will be permitted along the proposed school's internal roadway loop. The outdoor recreation areas, including an athletic field and tennis courts, will be located to the north of school structure, with a small park area to the south (see **Figure 4**).