

3.7 NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

Neighborhood Character is an amalgam of various elements that give neighborhoods their distinct personality such as the existing land uses, urban design, visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomic conditions, traffic, and noise levels found there. The *CEQR Technical Manual* requires an assessment of a project's effect on neighborhood character when the thresholds for the various aspects of the environmental evaluation are exceeded.

3.7.1 Existing Conditions

The study area is characterized by a mix of light industrial, commercial, and residential uses that is bisected by Fourth Avenue, a major arterial roadway that forms a boundary of sorts between the more industrial district to the west and the northern edge of residential Park Slope to the east. West of Fourth Avenue between Douglass, Butler, and Baltic Streets, the streetscape is characterized by 1- and 2-story industrial and commercial uses, including warehouses, auto-body shops, parking facilities, and other transportation uses. The portion of the study area east of Fourth Avenue is primarily residential and includes ground-floor retail uses on the avenues, including a large Key Food Supermarket store and parking lot on Fifth Avenue. On the school block and on the south side of Baltic Street, across from the school, the streets are uniformly lined with contemporary 3-story, single- and multi-family buildings with garages (built in the 1980s). On the north of Butler Street are older 3- and 4-story brick rowhouses. Along Fourth Avenue, newer high-density apartment buildings (usually 10 stories) are interspersed with lower density 3-story residential and mixed use buildings, which illustrate the varied housing stock within the study area.

The main commercial districts are located on Fourth and Fifth Avenues, which have distinctly different characters. Fourth Avenue is one of the borough's major north-south transportation corridors, carrying two moving lanes of traffic separated by a median. Several subway lines run underneath the street, whose nearest stations are located on Pacific Street to the north and Union Street to the south. The character of the development that traditionally lined the roadway was primarily light industrial and, auto-related, and secondarily residential, as it forms the western edge of the Park Slope neighborhood. With the Park Slope rezoning in 2003, the neighborhood character on the avenue has begun to change as new apartment buildings (as tall as 12 stories) are going up. The most prominent one in the study area is the 10-story apartment building across Fourth Avenue from the school. As it is the tallest structure in the immediate vicinity, it is visible from all streets surrounding the site. Other development sites are found nearby, further south on Fourth Avenue, and on Fifth Avenue as well, though Fifth Avenue zoning does not permit the same development scale as Fourth Avenue.

Fifth Avenue, while it is a heavily traveled street, has a more pedestrian-friendly environment. The roadbed is much narrower than Fourth Avenue and the neighborhood character is more uniform, consisting of individual shops, local eateries, grocery stores, and mixed ground-floor commercial and upper-story residential uses.

There is, generally, minimal landscaping in the study area. Street trees are infrequent along Fourth Avenue, though many more are found surrounding the project site and along the residential side streets between Fourth and Fifth Avenues. The Baltic Street Community Garden at PS 133 on the northwest corner of the project site offers visual relief to passers-by and opportunities for gardeners in an area that has few green open space opportunities.

Street trees are common on Fifth Avenue and add to the pedestrian character of this active retail street. On the side streets in the western portion of the study area (west of Fourth Avenue) where light industrial uses are located, the neighborhood orientation is toward vehicular (and not pedestrian) activity; accordingly, few street trees have been planted there.

3.7.2 Future No-Action Conditions

Under Future No-Action Conditions, the proposed new school facility would not be built and the existing PS 133 elementary school would remain as it is on the site. Within the study area, as a result of the 2003 Park Slope rezoning, further high-rise residential development would be expected to be completed and occupied on the west side of Fourth Avenue, in addition to new developments going up south of the study area. These tall apartment buildings would further distinguish the avenue from its adjacent streets, which have a generally low-rise residential character to the east and a low-rise, light-industrial nature to the west. While there are residential developments planned for the adjacent side streets and Fifth Avenue, their scale would be consistent with the surrounding neighborhood, and no significant changes affecting neighborhood character are expected in the future without the action.

3.7.3 Potential Impacts of the Project

The proposed development of an approximately 960-seat Pre-K through Fifth grade school facility on the project site would not be expected to significantly affect the character of the neighborhood, though the proposed building would be approximately 10-20 feet taller and cover more of the site than the existing school. The project site is currently occupied by a school and the development of a larger school facility would not change the land use character of the site nor conflict with the predominantly residential character of the immediate area.

While the proposed project would require the removal of the historically significant school building, and its replacement with a new larger facility, the proposed action would have no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character(s) that define the study area. There is no one uniform neighborhood character here, but rather several: a changing Fourth Avenue corridor; an active industrial character on Fourth Avenue and streets to the west; and a more established residential area to the east, where historic resources are not defining elements of the character of the neighborhood. As part of the SCA's agreement with the OPRHP regarding the new facility, there will likely be design requirements that partially mitigate the loss of the historic structure. In terms of urban design, the proposed massing of the new school building would be compatible with the surrounding built environment as it would establish a streetwall along the developing Fourth Avenue corridor and the schoolyard and community garden would be located on the lower density midblock portion of the site.

Depending on NYCDOT's review and decision regarding adjusting signal timing on Fourth Avenue signal timing to mitigate the proposed project's adverse traffic impacts, they may or may not be fully mitigated. In either case, given the high traffic volumes on Fourth Avenue and its intersections, the character of the neighborhood would not be affected. See Chapter 4.0 for a full description of the possible mitigation measures. Adverse noise impacts resulting from playground activity would be limited to the exterior rear yards of the two residential properties adjoining the eastern boundary of the school property and, therefore, would not affect the overall character of the neighborhood.

Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.