

19.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the effects of the Proposed Actions on neighborhood character. As defined in the 2014 *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, urban design, visual resources, historic and cultural resources, open space, socioeconomic conditions, traffic, and/or noise. However, not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its character from a few determining elements.

19.1 PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

As described below in Section 19.3.1, “Defining Features of the Neighborhood,” the study area has diverse characteristics owing to the varied land uses in the vicinity of the project site. Defining features include the following:

- The quiet, residential nature of the built environment.
- The presence of extensive natural areas in Conference House Park, in other parks and privately owned parcels, at the waterfront, and within the waters of Raritan Bay and the Arthur Kill.
- The close interweaving of the community and its natural environment, including upland and wetland areas and the surrounding water bodies.

The Proposed Actions would result in the development of new resiliency, educational, and recreational infrastructure in Tottenville, and would complement and build on the existing character of the Tottenville neighborhood in numerous ways:

- The Shoreline Project and new programming associated with the proposed Water Hub would generate minimal incremental traffic, transit, or pedestrian trips and would not lead to a significant change in the quiet, residential character of the neighborhood.
- The linear components of the Shoreline Project system (earthen berm, hybrid dune/revetment, eco-revetments, raised edge, and overlooks at the transition nodes) would be consistent with natural features already present in Conference House Park. Plantings of native vegetation would complement existing natural features, and access and views to the waterfront would be preserved. Beaches in the neighborhood would be stabilized and, in some areas, grow as a result of these interventions, protecting these existing features from the ongoing erosion that is currently occurring.
- Components of the Proposed Actions have been designed to reinforce the existing relationship between the community and natural areas. A comprehensive trail system for the park would be provided, linking its key elements to the community. The proposed Water Hub would reinforce the community’s strong relationship with the natural environment and

with Raritan Bay in particular and provide opportunities to learn about the environment and history of the Park and Tottenville. Programming would complement the existing nature-focused activities and events in Conference House Park.

- In addition to being compatible with, complementing, and enhancing neighborhood character as described in the preceding bullets, the resiliency improvements at the heart of the Proposed Actions would protect the existing character of the neighborhood by reducing shoreline erosion and wave action, thereby reducing risk to Conference House Park and the neighborhood as a whole.

Taking into consideration the effects of these Proposed Actions on the contributing features of neighborhood character in Tottenville, Alternative 2 would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. Rather, it would have a positive impact, reinforcing and protecting the character-defining features of the neighborhood.

The elements of Alternative 3 would affect neighborhood character in much the same way as they would under Alternative 2, although the positive interplay between these elements and the shoreline protection system would be lacking. Like Alternative 2, Alternative 3 would have a positive impact on neighborhood character.

The elements of Alternative 4 would affect neighborhood character in much the same way as they would under Alternative 2, although the positive interplay with the proposed breakwaters, Water Hub and associated landscape enhancements would be lacking. Like Alternative 2, Alternative 4 would have a positive impact on neighborhood character.

19.2 METHODOLOGY

The *CEQR Technical Manual* states that 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. Even if a project does not have the potential to result in a significant adverse impact in any of the technical areas listed above, an assessment may be required if the 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 described in the relevant chapters of this environmental impact statement (EIS), the Proposed Actions would not result in significant adverse impacts in any of the areas listed above. However, the nature of the project makes it prudent to conduct a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character impacts, which is provided below.

The study area for the preliminary analysis encompasses the area of direct effect from the Proposed Actions as well as the larger area of indirect effect that would have the potential to experience storm damage risk reduction with the implementation of the Proposed Actions. The area of indirect effect also includes the area that would benefit most from the enhanced amenities along the Tottenville waterfront. As a major arterial street, Hylan Boulevard forms a natural boundary for this area. The study area boundary also includes the full extent of Conference House Park. The neighborhood character study area is located along approximately two miles of Staten Island’s South Shore waterfront from the Arthur Kill shoreline in the west to Richard Avenue in the east, and extending inland to Hylan Boulevard.

19.3 PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

19.3.1 DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The Proposed Actions would be undertaken in the Tottenville section of Staten Island, along the neighborhood's southern shoreline and offshore within the waters of Raritan Bay. Tottenville is located at the southwestern tip of Staten Island, and is the southernmost neighborhood in New York City and State. It is bounded by water on three sides, with the Arthur Kill to the west and north and Raritan Bay to the south. The study area is located in the southwestern corner of Tottenville where these waterways meet. Defining features of neighborhood character in the study area include the quiet, residential nature of the built environment; the presence of natural areas (as well as historic resources) in Conference House Park, in other parks and privately owned parcels, at the waterfront, and within the waters of Raritan Bay and the Arthur Kill; and the close interweaving of the community and its natural environment, including upland and wetland areas and the surrounding water bodies.

DEFINING FEATURE: QUIET, RESIDENTIAL BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment of the study area reflects a classically suburban, family-oriented, residential community. Buildings in the neighborhood are characterized by single-family detached and attached houses, while the urban design of the study area consists largely of rectangular blocks arranged in a grid, some portions of which are broken up by private streets and large wooded tracts. Most study area streets provide two-way local access, are equipped with sidewalks and on-street parking, and are lined with closely spaced houses, leading to a classic suburban feel. Certain streets in the area east of Sprague Avenue, such as Joline, Bedell, and Page Avenues, traverse wooded areas and therefore have a more rural feel and lack sidewalks. The only major arterials in the neighborhood are Page Avenue, which provides access northwest to areas along the West Shore and to New Jersey, and Hylan Boulevard, a major thoroughfare connecting the study area to neighborhoods northeast along Staten Island's South Shore. Recreational facilities in the study area also contribute to the residential, family-oriented feel of the neighborhood; these include the Tottenville Pool, a NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) facility; the South Shore Swimming Club, a membership-based pool club; and the South Shore Babe Ruth League, which runs two baseball fields as part of a youth league program. Commercial facilities in the study area include an early learning center, a dentist office, and a gas station; these local retail and service uses are typical of predominantly residential neighborhoods. Noise levels in the study area are relatively low and reflect the low level of vehicular activity on study area roadways. Bus routes serving the study area travel exclusively on Hylan Boulevard, thereby helping maintain the low level of activity on local streets. Along the waterfront, wave action is an additional source of noise; noise levels remain acceptable where wave action is audible. Together, all of these characteristics contribute to the quiet, residential character to the neighborhood.

DEFINING FEATURE: PRESENCE OF NATURAL AREAS

The neighborhood character study area contains a wide variety of natural areas. Conference House Park is a 265-acre park under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks. The western portion of the park contains numerous amenities and attractions, including grassy and densely wooded areas, historic architectural resources, a playground, visitors center, walking and biking paths, hiking trails, and the "South Pole" marking the southernmost point of New York State. Extensive

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natural areas make up the rest of the park, including large tracts of maritime forest, creeks and ponds, bluffs, coastal wetlands, and beaches lining the shore. Conference House Park Preserve, which includes Conference House Park and the nearby Hybrid Oak Woods Park, is a NYC Parks designated “forever wild” preserve. The Forever Wild Program is an initiative of NYC Parks to protect and preserve the most ecologically valuable lands within the five boroughs and give New Yorkers and visitors the chance to walk in the woods, paddle a stream, and observe wildlife.

In addition to Conference House Park, several park uses present in the eastern portion of the study area contain large natural areas. Between Sprague and Page Avenues are a number of heavily forested parcels, including several privately owned lots as well as Hybrid Oak Woods Park, which consists of woodlands in their natural state and does not have any developed park facilities. East of Page Avenue, the study area contains extensive wooded lands in public ownership, including additional areas of Conference House Park, as well as the State-owned Butler Manor Woods—a component of the Mount Loretto Unique Area—which contains hiking trails. Even more extensive than the land-based natural areas in the study area are the waters of Raritan Bay and the Arthur Kill, which surround the study area to the west and south. Taken together, these natural areas are a defining feature of the neighborhood.

DEFINING FEATURE: INTERWEAVING OF COMMUNITY AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The third defining feature of the neighborhood rests in the intimate connections between the two previous defining features, which leads to an interweaving of the community and its natural environment. No residence in the study area is more than three blocks away from one of the neighborhood’s natural areas, and nearly every street vista terminates at a woodland or waterfront area.

Connections to nature are available throughout the study area, including the extensive networks of paths and trails in Conference House Park, Butler Manor Woods, and along the waterfront. Many of these trails begin just across the street from residences. Direct waterfront/beach access is also available from local streets. A number of organized programs build on this proximity to nature to provide connections to the natural environment in the study area. Events and organized activities offered at Conference House Park include a number of nature-focused programs, including volunteer programs such as tree plantings and cleanups, beach walks, birding talks and walks, outdoor drawing workshops, and citizen science programs. Kayaking and fishing activities extend these connections to the waterways that surround the neighborhood. Due to the diverse programming offered at Conference House Park and varied selection of amenities such as historic houses, the park is an asset to the Tottenville community and Staten Island as a whole.

Expansive views across New York Harbor toward New Jersey, Brooklyn, the Rockaways, and the open waters of the Atlantic Ocean lend a distinct waterfront character to areas along the shoreline and provide a strong visual connection to the natural world which extends inland several blocks from the waterfront. The sound of wave action reinforces this connection. Taken together, the abundant physical and programmatic connections between the community and the natural world constitute a defining characteristic of neighborhood character.

19.3.2 POTENTIAL TO AFFECT DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

ALTERNATIVE 1—NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The No Action alternative assumes that no new structural risk reduction projects or marine habitat restoration projects will be implemented in the project area. This alternative also assumes that current trends with respect to coastal conditions at Tottenville—i.e., relating to erosion, wave action, ecosystems, and water quality—will continue. The No Action alternative also presumes that existing strategies to educate New Yorkers and the general public on the risks posed by climate change will remain the same in the study area.

While the No Action alternative would not result in adverse effects to neighborhood character, it would also do nothing to prevent further damage from wave action and erosion, nor would it provide any social resiliency improvements to the neighborhood.

ALTERNATIVE 2 (PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE)—THE LAYERED TOTTENVILLE SHORELINE RESILIENCY STRATEGY: LIVING BREAKWATERS AND TOTTENVILLE SHORELINE PROTECTION PROJECT (LAYERED STRATEGY)

As described in Chapter 1, “Purpose and Need and Alternatives,” the Layered Strategy consists of the implementation of two individual projects: the Living Breakwaters Project and the Tottenville Shoreline Protection Project.

The primary component of the Breakwaters Project would be an ecologically enhanced breakwater system that would provide coastal risk reduction by reducing wave energy at the shoreline, and reducing or reversing shoreline erosion. The breakwater system would increase habitat diversity by providing a combination of exposed, intertidal, and subtidal reef habitat, including “reef streets” (pockets of habitat complexity within the structure). Another key project element is a proposed community Water Hub that would provide a physical space for access to the waterfront, orientation, education, information on shoreline resiliency, and community gathering space. The Water Hub would provide space and programming to engage students in waterfront education, citizen’s science, oyster restoration and reef building, and cultivating long-term estuary stewardship. Programming would educate residents about the coastal environment (including providing information on the proposed projects and how they work to reduce risk and enhance ecosystems), with its risks and benefits, and foster awareness, preparedness, and stewardship within the community. As described in Chapter 1, “Purpose and Need and Alternatives,” there are three potential locations for the proposed Water Hub. Potential Location 1 would be in the vicinity of the southern terminus of Page Avenue (involving the construction of a new structure). Potential Location 2 would be in the north-western portion of Conference House Park (involving the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of an existing NYC Parks building). Direct water access from shore would be provided near the Water Hub site, including an accessory boat launch. Potential Location 3 would involve a “floating” Water Hub—a vessel operated by a non-profit organization. The vessel would visit the breakwater project area periodically for education and monitoring and would be docked at existing facilities in the City. If located at either Potential Locations 2 or 3, wayfinding, interpretive signage, and monitoring locations would be integrated along the length of the shoreline as part of the Water Hub’s educational programming. Lastly, the project would include a one-time addition of new sand for shoreline restoration along approximately 806 feet of shoreline between Manhattan Street and Loretto Street to build up a particularly narrow, eroded section of the beach.

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The Shoreline Project would consist of a series of shoreline risk reduction measures, including an earthen berm, a hybrid dune/revetment system, eco-revetments (one section between Brighton Street and Manhattan Street, and one section between Loretto Street and Sprague Avenue), and a raised edge (revetment with trail), along with wetland enhancement, and native coastal plant species, from approximately Carteret Street to Page Avenue. From Carteret Street to Brighton Street, within a wooded area of Conference House Park, the system would include a raised earthen berm that would be set back in the forest, leaving an expansive area of woodland in front of it with expansive waterfront views. The berm would be planted with native vegetation. At Brighton Street, the berm would tie into an eco-revetment which would tie into an armor core hybrid dune/revetment system at Manhattan Street. At approximately Loretto Street the beach narrows, leaving no space for a hybrid dune/revetment, and thus the proposed dune/revetment system would transition to a stone eco-revetment along Surf Avenue. This section of eco-revetment would be constructed with stepped planters, and potentially stepped seating and ADA accessible overlooks. At approximately Sprague Avenue, the proposed eco-revetment would tie into the raised edge—a stretch of revetment and trail—which would continue to the project's terminus, near Page Avenue. Running along and adjacent to these elements, the project would provide an interconnected, seamless, and ADA accessible waterfront trail along the shoreline, connecting the Shoreline Project elements to the existing Conference House Park trail system. Finally, habitat enhancements would be included with the project, including wetland improvements (both functional and aesthetic); shoreline plantings; and green infrastructure.

Alternative 2 would not adversely impact the quiet, residential nature of the built environment. All on-shore project elements would be constructed on City parkland and street rights-of-way which are already publicly accessible. Activities at the proposed Water Hub (if located on-shore) are expected to be sporadic and spread out among different days of the week and times of day, and most events would not draw many patrons. Additionally, it is expected that patrons of these activities would arrive by either private automobiles or school buses, and patrons would park at the Water Hub site without needing to walk along nearby streets and sidewalks. The Water Hub, Shoreline Project and new programming included in Alternative 2 are not expected to generate incremental traffic, transit, or pedestrian trips that would exceed *CEQR Technical Manual* thresholds. Likewise, noise from sporadic programming events and the limited additional traffic generated by Alternative 2 would not lead to a significant change in the noise levels in the project area. Alternative 2 could result in the rehabilitation and adaptive use of either the historic Henry Hogg Biddle House or the historic Rutan-Beckett House for the proposed Water Hub programming; if either of these options is chosen, the selected historic building would be rehabilitated and adaptively reused, and no adverse effects are anticipated. None of the other historic resources in the project area would be affected.

Alternative 2 would not adversely impact the presence of natural areas in Conference House Park, in other parks and privately owned parcels, along the waterfront, and within the waters of Raritan Bay and the Arthur Kill. The linear components of the Shoreline Project system (earthen berm, hybrid dune/revetment, eco-revetments, raised edge, and gathering spaces at the transition nodes) would be consistent with existing natural areas present in the park. The earthen berm, planted with native vegetation, would complement the surrounding maritime forest and has been sited to preserve as many existing trees as possible. The hybrid dune/revetment would replace an existing, temporary dune constructed in the wake of Superstorm Sandy; it would complement the public beach along which it runs and be planted with native shoreline vegetation. New plantings and habitat enhancements proposed along the length of the Shoreline Project would improve the ecological function and aesthetics of the park and are intended to lead to a more

enjoyable natural environment. Beaches in the neighborhood would stabilize and, in some areas, grow as a result of these interventions. Improvements to upland and in-water habitat and water quality would enhance the natural environment and recreational opportunities along the waterfront.

Lastly, Alternative 2 would not adversely impact the close interweaving character of the community and its natural environment. Rather, components of the Proposed Actions have been designed to reinforce the existing relationship between the community and natural areas. The design of linear elements of the Shoreline Project system (earthen berm, hybrid dune/revetment, eco-revetments, raised edge, and gathering spaces at the transition nodes) is sensitive to these connections. The earthen berm has been sited to retain existing views of the harbor from within the woodland area; the gathering spaces at the transition nodes, eco-revetments, and raised edge are similarly compatible with the public beaches of Conference House Park and would preserve beach access and views to the water from adjacent shoreline areas. The proposed trail would tie together the wooded western sections of the park and the beaches in the project area, providing a comprehensive trail system that would link all the park's key elements and uses to existing trail access points. The proposed Water Hub elements would link the community to the new breakwaters and, more generally, to Raritan Bay. New recreational, educational, and social resiliency programming would complement the existing activities and events in Conference House Park and would benefit local residents, especially students. The new outlooks and physical access to the water provided by the accessory boat launch and seasonal floating dock proposed with the on-shore Water Hub, along with other improvements to waterfront access provided as part of Alternative 2, would reinforce the existing waterfront character of the neighborhood, and would respond to the post-Superstorm Sandy desire in the community (expressed in public outreach conducted as part of the planning process for the Proposed Actions) to protect, maintain, and increase access to Tottenville's public waterfront. While certain views from nearby study area streets would be changed with the addition of the proposed Shoreline Project components and Water Hub, none of these view changes would substantially affect the visual connections between built and natural areas of the neighborhood.

Overall, Alternative 2 would reduce shoreline erosion and wave action, with the goal of reducing risk to Conference House Park and the neighborhood as a whole. Alternative 2 would not result in adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy, socioeconomic conditions, urban design and visual resources, open space, historic and cultural resources, shadows, transportation or noise, nor would they result in moderate effects in these areas as defined by *CEQR Technical Manual* guidelines. Therefore, Alternative 2 would not have the potential to result in a combination of moderate effects that cumulatively affect neighborhood character. Alternative 2 would preserve, reinforce and strengthen elements of the neighborhood that contribute to its character, leading to a positive impact on neighborhood character.

ALTERNATIVE 3—BREAKWATERS WITHOUT SHORELINE PROTECTION SYSTEM

Alternative 3 considers conditions with the proposed breakwaters in place (including the proposed on-shore community Water Hub, proposed shoreline restoration and associated landscape elements), but without a proposed shoreline protection system between approximately Carteret Street and Page Avenue.

The elements of Alternative 3 would affect neighborhood character in much the same way as they would under Alternative 2, although the positive interplay between these elements and the

shoreline protection system would be lacking. Like Alternative 2, Alternative 3 would have a positive impact on neighborhood character.

ALTERNATIVE 4—SHORELINE PROTECTION SYSTEM WITHOUT BREAKWATERS

Alternative 4 considers conditions with the proposed shoreline protection system in place, but without the proposed breakwaters, shoreline restoration, Water Hub and associated landscape elements. The elements of Alternative 4 would affect neighborhood character in much the same way as they would under Alternative 2, although the positive interplay with the proposed breakwaters, Water Hub, and associated landscape enhancements would be lacking. Like Alternative 2, Alternative 4 would have a positive impact on neighborhood character.

19.4 MINIMIZATION AND MITIGATION OF IMPACTS

The Proposed Actions would not result in significant adverse effects to neighborhood character in the study area. Therefore, no mitigation with respect to neighborhood character is required. *