

**A. INTRODUCTION**

According to the 2012 *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, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise. Not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements.

The USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center (NTC) Strategic Vision (the proposed project) would result in a series of improvements on the project site, as described in Chapter 1, “Project Description.” This analysis considers the impacts of the proposed project on the neighborhood character of the project site and the surrounding area, and relies on the analyses of the components of neighborhood character (i.e., land use, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) as analyzed elsewhere in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

**PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS**

Overall, the proposed project would not substantially change the character of the neighborhood. The project site and study area are defined in part by the open space and recreational resources of Flushing Meadows Corona Park, large-scale event uses, and major transportation uses. The proposed project would not affect this essential character, but rather would provide improvements to the existing NTC and result in the surrender of 1.56 acres of land that is currently within USTA’s alienation and lease boundary, for active and passive recreational uses, ~~as well as park land improvements elsewhere in the park for the benefit of the public.~~ With the exception of transportation, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts on any of the technical areas that could impact neighborhood character (including land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, and noise). However the significant adverse transportation impact would only occur during the peak periods of the US Open, and would be effectively managed by the traffic management program currently in place. Therefore, this impact would not adversely affect neighborhood character. In addition, the proposed project would not be expected to result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that could cumulatively impact neighborhood character. Overall, the proposed project would not substantially change the character of the neighborhood.

**B. METHODOLOGY**

An analysis of neighborhood character begins by determining whether a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any relevant technical area (land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual

resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) or if a project would result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that could cumulatively impact neighborhood character. If the answer is yes, a preliminary assessment is undertaken; the preliminary assessment first identifies the defining features of the neighborhood, and then assesses whether the project has the potential to impact these defining features, either through the potential for significant adverse impacts or a combination of moderate effects. If the preliminary assessment concludes that the proposed project has the potential to affect defining features of a neighborhood, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character may be appropriate. If needed, the detailed assessment would use the information from the preliminary assessment as a baseline and then project and compare the future No-Action and With Action conditions.

As described in the relevant chapters of this DEIS, with the exception of transportation, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; open space; shadows; historic and cultural resources; urban design; or noise. In addition, as the proposed project could result in moderate effects in these categories, a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character impacts from the proposed project is provided below. The preliminary assessment describes the defining features of the neighborhood and then assesses the potential for the proposed project to impact these defining features. The preliminary assessment concludes that a detailed assessment is not warranted.

## **C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT**

### **DEFINING FEATURES**

#### *PROJECT SITE*

The character of the project site is defined by its use as a major recreational facility that hosts the US Open over a two-week period and is open to the public 11 months of the year. Tennis facilities on the project site include three stadiums (Arthur Ashe Stadium, Louis Armstrong Stadium, and Grandstand Stadium), a micro-stadium (Court 17), and tennis courts. Two of the stadiums (Grandstand Stadium and Louis Armstrong Stadium) were built for the 1964-1965 World's Fair Singer Bowl, while the largest stadium on the site (Arthur Ashe Stadium) opened in 1997. The project site also includes ancillary buildings, including the Indoor Training Center, kiosks for retail, food and beverage, and informational uses during the US Open, and the broadcast center, which consists of temporary trailers. The site also includes landscaped areas and pedestrian plazas. Trees, landscaping, and seating are found throughout the site, as well as two surface parking lots.

The US Open, the USTA's flagship event, is hosted at the NTC during a two-week period around the beginning of September. One of the sport's four Grand Slam championship tennis tournaments, the US Open is attended by approximately 700,000 spectators and is broadcast worldwide. For the remaining 11 months of the year, the NTC is open to the public for indoor and outdoor tennis. More than 100,000 participants of all ages, the majority of whom are from the local Queens community, participate in hundreds of community tennis programs at the NTC each year. The NTC is home court for more than 70 New York City high schools and colleges and a number of diverse organizations seeking a place to play tennis or host tournaments. USTA offers court rentals to the public at rates calculated under USTA's lease with the City (see Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy" for more information).

*STUDY AREA*

The ¼-mile study area surrounding the project site is defined primarily by large-scale event uses, major transportation uses, the open space and recreational resources of Flushing Meadows Corona Park, and a small portion of the residential neighborhood of North Corona.

Major events held within the study area include the US Open, baseball games at Citi Field, and various sporting and cultural events that are held in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, ranging from triathlon races to the Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival. Visitors are brought to these events in part through several large-scale transportation infrastructure resources, including: the Mets-Willets Point Station on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) 7 subway line; the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR), which also has a stop in Flushing Meadows Corona Park that services Citi Field on game days and the NTC during the US Open; and major highways, such as the Long Island Expressway, Van Wyck Expressway, and the Grand Central Parkway, which connects the NTC to LaGuardia Airport, located about 1.5 miles to the northwest of the study area. The area north of the NTC contains the MTA Corona Rail Yard, which is used for storage and maintenance of the 7 line subway trains, and is approximately 23 acres in size.

Most of the study area is within Flushing Meadows Corona Park, a recreational and cultural destination for Queens residents and visitors from throughout the New York metropolitan area. The park covers nearly 900 acres and is under the jurisdiction of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). Within the park to the north of the NTC across Roosevelt Avenue and the MTA Corona Rail Yard is Citi Field, the baseball stadium for the New York Mets, which opened in 2009 and contains 42,000 seats. East of the NTC, Flushing Meadows Corona Park contains a pitch and putt golf center, and a large area available for passive and active recreation, with trees, pathways, and sitting areas. South of the NTC is the core of the former World's Fair grounds, which includes a series of classical promenades planted with mature trees centered on the Unisphere. In this area to the west of the Unisphere is the New York City Pavilion building, which was built for the 1939-1940 World's Fair and today houses the Queens Museum of Art. The western portion of the study area includes several park facilities including the Queens Zoo, New York Hall of Science, and Terrace in the Park. Other facilities within the park that are outside of the ¼-mile study area include an ice rink and natatorium facility, and a recreation center.

The northwest corner of the study area includes a small section of North Corona, a predominantly residential neighborhood that also contains some supporting commercial and light industrial uses, such as grocery stores, delis, and automotive businesses, which are primarily located on Roosevelt Avenue.

Overall, the study area is shaped by the legacy of the World's Fairs that were held in 1939-1940 and 1964-1965. To this day, major event uses continue to be a defining feature of the area, due in part to the US Open, Mets baseball games, and the various community events that are held in Flushing Meadows Corona Park. The neighborhood character is also affected by large-scale transportation facilities, including nearby highways, the subway, LIRR, and Corona Rail Yard. By contrast, a small portion of the study area, in North Corona, is residential in character. The combination of these defining and supporting features contributes to a distinctive neighborhood character.

**POTENTIAL TO AFFECT THE DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD**

As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” the NTC Strategic Vision would result in a number of physical improvements and alterations to the facility. Overall, the proposed project would add 0.94 acres to the NTC site, including 0.68 acres of park land that would be alienated, and 0.26 acres of previously alienated park land associated with the connector road that is outside the current lease. Outside of the NTC, the relocated connector road would be built on an approximately 0.3-acre area. The principal elements of the proposed project are summarized below in **Table 15-1**.

**Table 15-1**  
**NTC Strategic Vision: List of Proposed Improvements**

Map No. <sup>1</sup>	Name	Description
<b><i>Stadium Improvements and New Construction</i></b>		
1	Grandstand Stadium (Stadium 3)	Demolition of existing 6,000 seat stadium and replacement with 8,000 seat stadium in southwest corner of NTC site
2	Louis Armstrong Stadium (Stadium 2)	Demolition of existing 10,500 seat stadium and replacement with 15,000 seat stadium in place
3	Arthur Ashe Stadium (Stadium 1)	Renovation and expansion to include 90,000-gsf administrative/operational space; and canopy above center court
<b><i>Tournament Court Modifications</i></b>		
4	Northwest tournament courts	Replacement of existing courts with five practice courts, three tournament courts, and viewing platform
5	Southerly tournament courts	Relocation of existing courts 30 to 50 feet to the south
<b><i>Ancillary Building Construction</i></b>		
6	New administrative and retail building	Construction of new 80,000-gsf administrative and retail building, including four tennis courts on its roof, on former site of relocated Grandstand Stadium
<b><i>Parking and Transportation Improvements</i></b>		
7	New Parking Garage A	Construction of new 423-space, 2-level garage, including a 6,500-sf transportation center.
8	New Parking Garage B	Construction of new 270-space, 3-level garage
9	Relocated connector road and related improvements	Relocation of connector road and sidewalks to new location south of United Nations Avenue North near Queens Museum of Art parking lot
<b><i>Pedestrian Enhancements</i></b>		
10	Arthur Ashe Concourse	Expand existing concourse by 11,000-sf
11	New walkway	Construction of new walkway connecting the new Stadium 3 and Court 17
<b>Notes:</b> <sup>1</sup> See Figure 1-4 for the location of these elements under existing conditions. See Figure 1-5 for their proposed future location.		
<b>Source:</b> USTA		

In addition, a portion of USTA’s currently alienated and leased land would be surrendered. The land that would be surrendered is comprised of two parcels totaling more than 1.56 acres, located east of David Dinkins Circle. This land will be returned to Flushing Meadow Corona Park for active and passive recreational use. The parcels include 0.75 acres of landscaped areas accessible to the public, and five tennis courts. USTA would maintain and repair the five courts,

at it has done in the past, and would have usage during the US Open and, possibly, other major tennis events.

Additional park improvement projects will be undertaken for members of the public who utilize the benefit of the general public within Flushing Meadows Corona Park. As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description” (and shown on Figure 1-7), these improvements potentially include: renovation of existing soccer fields; development of a new comfort station; development of new picnic and barbeque areas; and vehicular, pedestrian, landscape, and drainage upgrades.

The proposed project would have the potential to affect the defining features of the neighborhood as follows:

#### *LAND USE*

The proposed project would result in modest changes in the land uses located on the project site. The locations of the various uses would be reconfigured and there would be a net increase in stadium space, retail and operational uses, and parking facilities. Notably, the existing Grandstand Stadium (Stadium 3) would be relocated to the southwest corner of the site, in: a 1.21-acre teardrop-shaped landscaped area with trees that is within NTC’s current lease; a small portion of the 0.68-acre alienation area; and in the 0.26-acre site of the current connector roadway, which would be added to NTC’s lease. Two new parking garages of up to 40 feet in height would be built on land facing Meridian Road that is currently in use as surface parking lots. These incremental increases in height and bulk would be modest relative to the overall facility, and visual improvements along the proposed NTC fence line would minimize the prominence of the new structures. As the types of uses would be the same as currently exist in the project site and in the study area, they would continue to be consistent with surrounding open space, transportation, and residential uses. While the proposed project would result in the alienation of small areas of park land, visual improvements would be implemented along the proposed NTC fence line that would improve the NTC’s context with the park, and replacement park land improvements would be provided ~~elsewhere in Flushing Meadows Corona Park~~, as noted above. The areas outside of the current lease area that would be affected by the expansion are relatively small and would affect a small number of users. The relocated connector road would link Meridian Road to United Nations Avenue North, and maintain access to the viaduct over the Grand Central Parkway. The replacement connector road and sidewalks would ensure that access to the park would not be adversely affected by this component of the proposed project.

Overall, the changes in land use associated with the proposed project would be in keeping with the neighborhood character of the project site and study area. As noted above, the character of the project site is defined by its use as a major recreational campus. Under the proposed project, the site would continue to host the US Open and community tennis programming, while site improvements would enhance the visitor and user experience during both the US Open and non-US Open periods. The neighborhood character of the study area is defined in part by large-scale event and transportation uses, as well as its location within Flushing Meadows Corona Park. The proposed project would not affect this essential character, but rather would provide improvements to the NTC, and approximately 1.56 acres of land that is currently within USTA’s alienation and lease boundaries would be returned to Flushing Meadow Corona Park for active and passive recreational use ~~as well as park land improvements elsewhere in the park for the benefit of the public~~. Overall, the proposed project would be expected to improve the neighborhood character of the project site and study area by improving the facilities, circulation, landscaping, and public spaces of the NTC. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in

## USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center Strategic Vision

---

significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character due to changes in land use, zoning, and public policy.

### *OPEN SPACE*

Flushing Meadows Corona Park is a defining element to the study area's neighborhood character. The proposed project would result in improvements to landscaping, circulation, and amenities at the NTC that would be provided for the US Open and the general public. The proposed project would affect areas outside of the current NTC fence line, including the landscaped teardrop area, where the new Stadium 3 would be constructed. The areas outside of the current NTC fence line that would be directly affected by the proposed project are lightly used, primarily for walking, running, and bicycling on the perimeter paths. Displacement or relocation of these activities would not be expected to have a notable effect on park users or create a strain on nearby sections of Flushing Meadows Corona Park (see Chapter 3, "Open Space and Recreational Resources"). Park users would continue to have access to nearby sidewalks or pathways in other adjacent areas of the park for walking, running, and bicycling, and replacement walkways would be provided under the proposed project. Nearby sections of the park could easily accommodate the passive recreation activities that may be displaced from the affected areas. The 0.68-acre area that would be alienated would become part of the NTC, a public tennis recreational facility that is open to the public, outside of the US Open. The 0.94 acres that would be added to the NTC represent approximately 0.10 percent of the overall nearly 900-acre Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Approximately 1.56 acres of land that is currently within USTA's alienation and lease boundaries would be returned to Flushing Meadow Corona Park for active and passive recreational use. The additional 10,000 daily spectators anticipated during the US Open as a result of the proposed project would not have any significant adverse impacts on the park, given the temporary nature of the two-week event.

Construction of the proposed project ~~would affect~~ ~~would also require removal of trees~~ both outside the existing fence line, including United Nations Avenue North, and various locations inside the NTC site including in the vicinity of the practice courts, parking lot A, northwest corner of Arthur Ashe Stadium, west of parking lot B, west side of the Grandstand Stadium, proposed Grandstand Stadium relocation site, and a small number in the Food Village. Tree replacement would be conducted in conformance with DPR requirements. ~~Approximately 349 422 trees would be affected, two of which are dead, removed which would be transplanted to the extent practicable.~~ USTA is working with DPR's Forestry Division to minimize the number of trees that would be removed and not replanted and has currently identified approximately 45 of the 347 living trees that would be replanted in place or transplanted. The other approximately 302 affected trees are being evaluated. Under a worst case scenario those approximately 302 trees would be removed and not replanted. However, some of these trees are expected to be determined by DPR to be suitable for transplant. Trees that could not be transplanted would be replaced pursuant to City regulations. The new NTC boundaries would include trees and other landscaping features that would minimize the visual presence of the campus, including the proposed Stadium 3 and two parking garages. In addition to the improvement of the NTC, certain additional improvements will be undertaken for members of the public who utilize the benefit of the general public within Flushing Meadows Corona Park, as described above and in Chapter 1, "Project Description."

Overall, the proposed project would be beneficial to neighborhood character due to the improvements in Flushing Meadows Corona Park that would be provided within the NTC, along

the boundaries of the NTC, and throughout the park. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character relating to open space.

#### *HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES*

The historic features of Flushing Meadows Corona Park are a contributing element to the neighborhood character of the study area. As there are no historic resources within the NTC, historic and cultural features are not a component of the character of the project site.

The study area is located within Flushing Meadows Corona Park, which was the location of two World's Fairs, in 1939-1940 and 1964-1965. Architectural resources within and just outside of the study area include the New York City Building (now the Queens Museum of Art), the Passerelle Building, the Unisphere, the Pavilion (now the Aviary at the Queens Zoo), and the Hall of Science. Located just south of NTC's South Gate is a statue titled Freedom of the Human Spirit (S/NR-eligible). As described in Chapter 5, "Historic and Cultural Resources," the proposed project would not result in ground disturbance to archaeologically sensitive areas or adversely affect the context of nearby architectural resources. The proposed project would result in construction activities within 90 feet of the Freedom of the Human Spirit sculpture and the Passerelle Building. Therefore, to avoid potential inadvertent construction-related impacts to these resources during project demolition and construction activities, the proposed project would comply with applicable New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) and New York City Department of Buildings (DOB) guidelines, including the preparation of a Construction Protection Plan (CPP) that would be prepared prior to construction activities and submitted to LPC for review and approval. None of the other architectural resources in the study area are close enough to experience direct, physical impacts from construction of the proposed project.

In addition to the improvement of the NTC, certain additional improvements will be undertaken for members of the public who utilize the benefit of the general public within Flushing Meadows Corona Park. It is not expected that any of the potential park improvement projects would affect any historic resources within the park. However, if improvement projects are planned near historic resources, measures would be undertaken to prevent inadvertent construction-related impacts to such resources, including compliance with LPC and DOB guidelines, as described above.

Due to these factors, the proposed project would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character due to historic resources.

#### *URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES*

The urban design and visual resources of the project site and study area contribute to their neighborhood character. The proposed project would substantially improve the circulation, landscaping, and visitor amenities within the NTC site, and thus would enhance the pedestrian experience within the project site. The height of several structures—and the total bulk of structures—on the NTC site would increase in the future with the proposed project; the most notable elements would include: two new parking garages that would be built on existing surface parking lots in the northeast and northwest corners of the site, along Meridian Road; and the relocated Grandstand Stadium (Stadium 3) that would be built in the southwest corner of the site. These incremental increases in height and bulk would be modest relative to the existing facilities, and would not be inconsistent with the surrounding park land context. The NTC is already highly visible in this section of the park, and the trees and other landscaping to be provided along the site's perimeter, including adjacent to Stadium 3 along United Nations

Avenue North and adjacent to Parking Garage B and the Passerelle Building, would serve to moderate the visual presence of the new site elements from most locations. The proposed project would not alter the visual character of the surrounding area, except to make certain sections of the NTC site more prominent in directly adjacent views. With the exception of the modest change to park land acreage, the elimination of one lane of the three-lane United Nations Avenue North, and the relocated connector roadway, the proposed project would not result in any changes to natural features, open spaces, or streets in the study area.

Therefore, the proposed project would be consistent with the existing urban design characteristics of the study area and would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character resulting from urban design and visual resources.

### *SHADOWS*

As discussed in Chapter 4, “Shadows,” the proposed project would not result in significant adverse shadows impacts. The proposed project could result in new shadows on four small areas adjacent to the project site within Flushing Meadows Corona Park. However, three of the four areas are lightly used, primarily for walking, running and bicycling, and any new shadows would not be substantial enough to significantly impact the park or its users. The fourth area, a plaza located near the Passerelle Building, is well-used by the visitors and staff of DPR’s Parks Academy. However, only a small portion of this plaza would be affected by the new shadow, and even this small area would receive direct sun for most of the remaining day in those seasons due to the lack of structures to the south and east. Since these areas are not defining features of the neighborhood with respect to uniqueness or overall characterization of the area, the proposed project would not create a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character resulting from shadows.

### *TRANSPORTATION*

As discussed in Chapter 10, “Transportation,” the proposed project would result in temporary significant adverse transportation impacts during the event’s peak periods, which would be effectively managed by the traffic management program currently in place. The proposed project would result in a greater number of vehicular and public transit trips to the US Open, which would be distributed over the large transportation network, the proximity and direct access to the local highway network from the project site, the capacity of the Mets-Willets Point subway station and the special event management program implemented by the New York City Police Department (NYPD), especially along College Point Boulevard.

Although the projected increase in vehicle trips exiting the US Open at the conclusion of the daytime session is anticipated to lengthen the travel time for departing patrons, these delays would largely be confined within Flushing Meadows Corona Park and to the Long Island Expressway. As noted above, a defining characteristic of the study area is the major large-scale event uses that historically and currently take place. As the study area already experiences high volumes of visitors at certain times due to these major events, the proposed project would not affect the essential character of the study area. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character with respect to transportation.

### *NOISE*

While noise levels in the study area would increase in the future With Action condition—due to increased traffic and building mechanical equipment associated with the proposed project—the



magnitude of the increase would be generally imperceptible to most listeners and below the CEQR threshold for a significant adverse noise impact. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character with respect to noise.

**CONCLUSION OF PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT**

Overall, the proposed project would not substantially change the character of the neighborhood. With the exception of transportation, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts on any of the technical areas that could impact neighborhood character (including land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, and noise). However, the significant adverse impact would only occur during the peak periods of the US Open and would be effectively managed by the traffic management program currently in place. Therefore, this impact would not adversely affect neighborhood character. In addition the proposed project would not be expected to result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that could cumulatively impact neighborhood character. Therefore the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character. \*