

# Seaside Park and Community Arts Center

## Chapter 3: Open Space

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### A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses the potential for the proposed project to have a direct impact resulting from the elimination or alteration of open space and/or an indirect impact resulting from overtaxing available open space. As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” the proposed project would result in changes to the planned approximately 1.41-acre neighborhood park (“Highland View Park”) that was envisioned to occupy the western portion of the project area and include both active and passive recreational amenities as part of the 2009 Coney Island Rezoning. The proposed project would involve the development of approximately 2.41 acres of publicly accessible open space on the development site, which would include an approximately 5,100-seat amphitheater as well as both active and passive recreational amenities. An evaluation of potential direct open space impacts at the development site is provided in this chapter.

### B. PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

Although the proposed project would result in changes to the planned Highland View Park, it would not diminish or eliminate any acreage of this planned open space resource, or reduce its utilization or aesthetic value. In fact, the proposed project would provide the project area with an additional 1.14 acres of publicly accessible open space and would provide comparable or better amenities and facilities than would have otherwise been provided. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a significant adverse direct impact with regard to open space.

### C. METHODOLOGY

An open space assessment is necessary when a proposed action could potentially have a direct or indirect effect on open space resources in an area. According to the *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, a direct impact physically changes, diminishes, or eliminates an open space, or reduces its utilization or aesthetic value. An indirect effect occurs when the population generated by a proposed project or action could noticeably diminish the capacity of an area’s open space to serve the future populations. According to the guidelines established in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a project that would add more than 200 residents or 500 employees, or a similar substantial number of other users to an area, is typically assessed for any potential indirect effects on open space.

The proposed project would temporarily increase the number of employees and visitors at the site when there is an event taking place at the amphitheater, primarily during evenings in the summer concert season (May to October). Although the proposed project would also involve the operation of a year-round indoor entertainment, banquet, and restaurant facility at the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building, these activities are not expected to significantly increase the number of visitors or employees to the area. As the increase in event attendees and worker population would be a temporary occurrence associated with any given event and would be specifically associated with the proposed project, it would

not place additional demand on existing open space resources in the surrounding area. Therefore, the proposed project would not trigger the CEQR threshold for analysis of indirect open space impacts. However, as the proposed project would result in changes to the planned Highland View Park, an assessment of the proposed project's potential for direct impacts on open space is warranted and is provided below.

## **D. EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The project area includes all lots that would be affected by the proposed zoning map amendment, including the development site, as well as Lots 79 and 81 on Block 7071 (a.k.a. "outparcels"), which are located immediately to the northwest of the development site. The development site is generally bounded by the Riegelmann Boardwalk to the south, West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street to the west, West 21<sup>st</sup> Street to the east, and properties fronting Surf Avenue to the north. The development site is an assemblage of ten tax lots on Block 7071 (Lots 27, 28, 30, 32, 34, 76, 130, 142, 226, and 231), as well as the beds of Highland View Avenue and a portion of West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street (approved for demapping in 2009 Coney Island Rezoning), and covers an aggregate lot area of approximately 130,404 sf (3.0 acres). A western approximately 1.41 acre portion of the project area (including outparcels) was identified in the 2009 Coney Island Rezoning as the site of future open space (Highland View Park). As seen in Figure 3-1, the area is currently occupied by vehicle storage (Lots 27, 28, 30, 32, 34, and 76), a decommissioned community garden (Lot 142)<sup>1</sup>, paved lots (Lots 79 and 81), vacant unimproved land (Lots 226 and 231), and paved streets.

Part of the Coney Island Beach and Riegelmann Boardwalk are immediately adjacent to the project area. These open spaces total approximately 399.2 acres (250 acres of which are underwater) and are considered a destination park by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). The park includes the world famous Coney Island/Riegelmann Boardwalk as well as a large sandy beach facing the Atlantic Ocean. Facilities on the beach include several playgrounds, water fountains and restroom facilities, seating areas, as well as the Boardwalk and Steeplechase Pier. The beach has both active and passive uses. Park visitors can use the beach as a place of relaxation or as an active space – a place for volleyball games or swimming. Coney Island is world famous for the amusements located there. These include, but are not limited to the former site of Astroland and the Cyclone Roller Coaster.

## **E. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT (NO-ACTION)**

As discussed in Chapter 1, "Project Description," and Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," in the future without the proposed project, it is estimated that approximately 223,118 sf (223 DUs) of residential floor area, 93,978 sf of commercial space, and 1.27 acres of publicly accessible open space would be added to the development site. All residential and commercial development would occur on the eastern portion of the development site (Lots 130, 142), while the western portion would be developed as Highland View Park. In the future without the proposed project, the outparcels would not be incorporated into the open space and the park would total approximately 1.27 acres. While the programming of the park had not been finalized in the 2009 *Coney Island Rezoning FEIS*, for analysis purposes, it was expected that the park would be publicly accessible and would include a mix of neighborhood-oriented passive and active elements. Overall, based on the 2009 FEIS, it is assumed that

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<sup>1</sup> Although the community garden is decommissioned, field observations indicate that it is currently being used for gardening purposes.



The decommissioned community garden (Lot 142)



Intersection of West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and Highland View Avenue



Vacant land (Lots 226, 231) on the western portion of site



Paved parking lots (Outparcel Lots 79, 81)

approximately 80 percent, or 1.0 acres, would be dedicated to active recreational use, while the remaining 0.27 acres would be for passive use.

## **F. THE FUTURE WITH THE PROPOSED PROJECT (WITH-ACTION)**

As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” in the future with the proposed project, the development site would be developed with approximately 60,000 sf of commercial space and 2.41 acres of publicly accessible open space that would include a 5,100 seat amphitheater. All commercial development would take place in the form of restoration and adaptive reuse of the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building (Lot 130), while the area to the west would be developed as open space. The proposed public open space and amphitheater would occupy approximately 105,004 sf (2.41 acres) along the Riegelmann Boardwalk at Coney Island.

The publicly accessible open space on the development site would include a play garden located at the northwest corner of the development site, with playground amenities such as “The Cosmo Climber”, among others. Between the plaza and seating stairs at the eastern portion of the development site, and the play garden to the west, would be a lushly landscaped lawn bowl with perimeter plantings, which would serve as a place for lawn seating and passive recreation. The park would also feature a planted entry garden with native planting and bench seating at the southwestern portion of the development site. On concert days, approximately 90 percent (2.2 acres) of the proposed park is expected to be used for passive recreational use, while the remaining 0.21 acres would be for active use. On non-concert days and during the off-season, the proposed park would generally serve as a passive recreation space for smaller events such as cultural performances, school graduations, and fairs. However, the new public open space and amphitheater would also feature removable seating and could be used for more active recreational uses. Each of the open space components is described below and shown in Figure 3-2.

Visitors entering at either of the two entrances along the southern terminus of West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street would experience a seven-foot grade change raising them to the elevation of the adjacent Riegelmann Boardwalk. The proposed winding routes would facilitate an accessible slope and create an opportunity for small scale seating areas within a shaded garden setting, which would convey the feel of a “neighborhood park” along the Riegelmann Boardwalk. At the top of the rise from West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, an intimate seating node would signal the joining of a larger walkway from Riegelmann Boardwalk to the end of West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, flanked with benches and shade trees. From its western edge a play space and second seating node would be perched high on the grade and surrounded by low shrubs and high-limbed trees providing the public with a sense of intimacy while maintaining ample sightlines for security.

To the east of the garden walk, another wide path would bring visitors to the base of a 9,000-square foot lawn sloping gently southward to a crest 10 feet above the Riegelmann Boardwalk. Ringed with high-limbed trees and capped with a small plaza, the lawn would offer a community-oriented recreational space that also borrows spectacular elevated views of the Coney Island beach (see Figures 3-3 and 3-4). From the perched plaza a stepped path would angle southwest back down to the Riegelmann Boardwalk and public restroom facilities. From the high point of the development site, paved terraces step down eastward to the edge of a wide pedestrian corridor, which would create a direct connection along the axis of West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street to the Riegelmann Boardwalk (see Figure 3-5). The proposed rise from West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street through the amphitheater site to the boardwalk would seamlessly connect the public both physically and visually to the beachfront.



Source: GKV Architects, PC & MVVA, Inc. Landscape Architects

Seaside Park and Community Arts Center

Figure 3-2  
Illustrative Open Space Plan



Source: GKV Architects, PC & MVVA, Inc. Landscape Architects

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Crossing the central thruway, a large paved space would slope down to a stage built into the western façade of the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building. Along with the paved terraces, this space would hold movable seating for up to 5,100 patrons during organized events and support a wide range of community programming at other times. Two smaller banks of seat terraces to the north and south, wrapped in landscaping, would accommodate over 23,000 square feet of flexible open area, creating ideal conditions for community-oriented events, including farmers' markets, school graduations and festivals. A large tensile roof and support trusses, installed and removed seasonally, would protect visitors and spectators from rain and extreme sun (see Figure 3-5). During concerts, the proposed amphitheater would also feature a number of sound reduction features, including a deployable sound curtain on the northwest side, backing sound baffles on the inside of the roof canopy, and a deployable canopy extension and sound curtains on the western side. These sound reduction features would be temporary and would only be deployed immediately before concerts and subsequently removed.

During the summer months (approximately May to October), it is anticipated that the proposed amphitheater would host approximately 30 to 35 paid concert events and 10 to 15 free concert events on both weekdays and weekends. The amphitheater would be fully accessible to the public year-round, with the exception of during ticketed events. A temporary event screening perimeter around the seating area would be set up during ticketed events, with gated entry. This would allow for appropriate security or crowd-control measures during ticketed or other larger events, and facilitate management of access to the facility during such events. During the off-season, the amphitheater would be used for recreational uses. Figure 3-6 illustrates the proposed off-season and in-season operating plans.

Exiting the main event space, the public may retrace their steps through the lawn and garden walk or follow the central pedestrian corridor to the Riegelmann Boardwalk or to West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, past a planted landform that will serve as a buffer between the loading dock at the north of the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building loading dock. Access to restroom facilities located within the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building's basement will be provided at the southeast corner of the development site. Turning south, a stair leads up to the Riegelmann Boardwalk to the box office and public queuing area.

## **Assessment**

Compared to the No-Action scenario, the proposed project would result in the loss of residential and retail space, an increase in publicly accessible open space, and the addition of an amphitheater. The incremental (net) change of land uses that would result from the proposed project is a decrease of 223,000 sf (approximately 223 DUs) of residential, 33,978 sf of local retail, the addition of 1.14 acres of publicly accessible open space, and the addition of an approximately 5,100-seat amphitheater.

Compared to the No-Action scenario, the proposed project would result in the addition of 1.14 acres of open space to the project area. While this additional acreage would be provided in the form of an amphitheater, it would be publicly accessible year round, with the exception of when a ticketed event is in progress. As discussed above, a temporary event screening perimeter around the seating area would be set up during ticketed events with gated entry. This would allow the amphitheater to have a defined perimeter during concert events, which would allow other areas of the park to be used while events are taking place. Therefore, the proposed project would result in a net increase of publicly accessible open space in the area and would maximize utilization for other park users.

The proposed project would result in the development of an open space intended primarily for passive use. On concert days, the proposed park and amphitheater would be dedicated to approximately 90 percent (2.2 acres) passive and 10 percent (0.21 acres) active uses, compared to approximately 20



Source: GKV Architects, PC & MVVA, Inc. Landscape Architects

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**View of West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street Throughway – On Season Event**

**Figure 3-5**



Source: GKV Architects, PC & MVVA, Inc. Landscape Architects

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percent (0.27 acres) passive and 80 percent (1.0 acres) active uses in the No-Action scenario. However, on non-concert days, seating could be removed from the proposed amphitheater's paved plaza and used for active recreational use. Similarly, during the off-season, the paved seating area could be transformed for recreational uses. Therefore, the proposed park and amphitheater would be used for both passive and active recreational activities throughout the year.

The proposed project would also result in the development of a high-quality recreational facility that would have features and amenities comparable to or better than the open space anticipated in the future without the proposed project (Highland View Park). The proposed park would feature gardens, landscaping, play equipment, and restrooms in addition to a performance venue for concerts and community-oriented events such as farmers' markets, school graduations, and festivals. Thus, compared to the No-Action scenario, the proposed project would improve the overall quality of recreational opportunities in the project area.

Therefore, although the proposed project would differ from the planned Highland View Park envisioned in the 2009 Coney Island Rezoning, it would not diminish or eliminate any acreage of this open space resource, or reduce its utilization or aesthetic value. In fact, the proposed project would provide the project area with a greater amount of publicly accessible open space and would provide comparable or better amenities and facilities than would have otherwise been provided. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a significant adverse direct impact with regard to open space.