Chapter 8: Urban Design and Visual Resources

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter relies on the analysis from the *Fresh Kills Park Final Generic Environmental Impact Statement (FGEIS)* and summarizes the conclusions drawn from that analysis. No additional analysis was warranted for this SEIS as it pertains to Chapter 8, "Urban Design and Visual Resources."

The proposed Fresh Kills Park project analyzed in the FGEIS would necessitate alterations to the urban design and streetscape of the Fresh Kills Landfill and would modify views to surrounding locations. However, the project site is not open to the public and views of the site are therefore limited to vantage points from the surrounding areas. Since the project site contains extensive waterfront and is not open to the public, there are currently no public waterfront views from the project site. With the proposed project, the waterfront would be newly open to the public and there would be an extensive landscape enhancement and planting program over the site. For these reasons, the overall effects of the proposed project with respect to urban design and visual resources are expected to be positive.

This chapter has been prepared in accordance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), which requires that State agencies consider the effects of their actions on urban design and visual resources and follows the guidance of the *City Environmental Quality Review* (*CEQR) Technical Manual*. As defined in the manual, urban design components and visual resources determine the "look" of a neighborhood—its physical appearance, including the street pattern, the size and shape of buildings, their arrangement on blocks, streetscape features, natural resources, and noteworthy views that may give an area a distinctive character.

B. METHODOLOGY

In accordance with the *CEQR Technical Manual* and the Final Scope of Work for the FGEIS (August 2006), the analysis considered the effects of the proposed project on the following elements that collectively form the area's urban design and visual resources features:

- *Block Form and Street Pattern.* This urban design feature refers to the shape and arrangement of blocks and surroundings streets, such as a grid pattern with regularly sized, rectangular blocks. These features set street views, define the flow of activity through an area, and create the basic format on which building arrangements can be organized.
- *Building Arrangement.* This term refers to the way that buildings are placed on zoning lots and blocks. The buildings can have small or large footprints, be attached or detached and separated by open uses, and varied in their site plans. This urban design feature helps to convey a sense of the overall form and design of a block or a larger area.
- *Building Bulk, Use, and Type.* Buildings are usually described by these characteristics. A building's bulk is created from an amalgam of characteristics that include its height, length, and width; lot coverage and density; and shape and use of setbacks and other massing

elements. The general use of a building (e.g., residential, manufacturing, commercial office) gives an impression of its appearance and helps to understand its visual and urban design character. Building type refers to a distinctive class of buildings and suggests distinguishing features of a particular building. Examples of building type include: industrial loft, church, gas station, rowhouse.

- *Streetscape Elements.* Streetscape elements are the distinctive physical features that make up a streetscape, such as street walls, building entrances, parking lots, fences, street trees, street furniture, curb cuts, and parking ribbons. These features help define the immediate visual experience of pedestrians.
- *Street Hierarchy*. Streets may be classified as expressways, arterials, boulevards, collector/distributor streets, or local streets, and they may be defined by their width, type of access, and the presence or absence of at-grade pedestrian crossings. Street hierarchy helps convey a sense of the overall form and activity level of a neighborhood.
- *Topography and Natural Features.* Topographic and natural features help define the overall visual character of an area and may include varied ground elevation, rock outcroppings and steep slopes, vegetation, and aquatic features. These components would form the bulk of the urban design analysis in this case.

The analysis also considered the effects of the proposed project on the area's visual resources, which the *CEQR Technical Manual* defines as unique or important public view corridors, vistas, or natural or built features. Visual resources can include waterfront views, public parks, landmark structures or districts, or natural features, such as a river or geologic formations.

As also recommended by the *CEQR Technical Manual*, this analysis evaluates impacts in two areas—the project site and a surrounding study area. The project site is an approximately 2,163-acre parcel of land located on the Arthur Kill waterfront. The study area comprises, roughly, a ½-mile radius around the project site, and includes the Travis, Springfield, and Arden Heights neighborhoods and portions of William T. Davis Wildlife Refuge, Arden Heights Woods, and LaTourette Park. To the west of the project site, the ½-mile study area extends across the Arthur Kill into New Jersey. Urban design resources in this portion of the study area consist almost entirely of warehousing and manufacturing facilities.

C. CONCLUSIONS

PROJECT SITE

The FGEIS concluded that the proposed park would provide a dramatic improvement in the urban design for the project site, through landscaping and creating new upland and wetland habitats, recreational waterfront activities, passive and active athletic facilities and dining and entertainment amenities. Lands along the creeks would be converted from an underutilized waterfront into new or enhanced landscapes supported by regional recreational and entertainment facilities. Expansive views within the project site of attractive and enhanced ecological landscapes would also be created.

In addition, the proposed Fresh Kills Park project would require changes to some building types and forms as well as their arrangement and use on the project site. Although many existing buildings associated with landfill operations would be retained (off-site), such as the leachate treatment plant, the number of on-site structures related to the landfill would be reduced and the context of the area would be greatly enhanced by the addition of park-related structures,

enhanced landscape, and recreational spaces. The buildings to be constructed would be permanent and aesthetically pleasing in contrast with today's utilitarian and industrial structures, and would be primarily sited on Main Creek and Fresh Kills. These structures would house recreational, educational, and entertainment uses, and would greatly expand public access on the site and recreational opportunities available on Staten Island.

The proposed Fresh Kills Park project would also create a public streetscape across the site where currently none exists. The proposed public park roads would include a landscape ribbon, lighting, and pedestrian amenities. New paths and trails would also create cycling and hiking opportunities.

Of additional significance is the ecological enhancement that would occur on site, drastically enhancing not just the environmental but the aesthetic qualities of Fresh Kills. The creation of attractive open spaces would soften the visual intrusion of the landfill's massive infrastructure on the adjacent neighborhoods; new, highly productive ecosystems would enhance the environmental functionality of the site and aesthetics. Overall, no significant adverse impacts would occur on the project site, as proposed uses would provide a dramatic improvement compared to the future condition without the development of the park.

Lastly, the proposed Fresh Kills Park project would be expected to enhance views from the surrounding community to the site and views from the site of the region. Views from the top of landfill sections, or mounds, would be made accessible to the public for the first time. Views along existing and new roads would be designed such that driving through the park is a unique visual experience, with views of dramatic topography and landscapes. Iconic views to the William T. Davis Wildlife Refuge, Blazing Star Historic Shipyard, the Staten Island Greenbelt, and Arden Heights Woods would also be emphasized.

STUDY AREA

Based on the findings of the FGEIS, the uses proposed for Fresh Kills Park would be compatible with and complementary to existing uses in the study area, increasing recreational opportunities for Staten Islanders and New York metro region residents, enlarging valuable natural areas such as the Staten Island Greenbelt, and enhancing the visual quality of the neighborhood. The proposed roads would serve to provide connectivity with this area of Staten Island.

Views from the surrounding neighborhood are expected to be greatly enhanced as the proposed project would attract positive attention and serve as a visual amenity. At final build-out, views from surrounding roads such as Richmond Avenue and Arthur Kill Road would allow casual passersby to become active spectators, eyewitnesses to the dramatic transformation of landfill to lifescape. Views from the entire park perimeter—of both land and water—would be greatly improved with the project. For the study area as a whole, the proposed project would not have any significant adverse impacts on visual resources, as the project would represent a dramatic improvement in the visual character of the project site. It is expected that any visual character impacts associated with commercial wind turbines would be addressed as part of a site specific environmental review.

These conclusions also apply to the SEIS. No adverse urban design or visual resource impacts would result from the proposed East Park roads. ✷