Proposed High School 497, Queens
Draft Scope of Work
for a Targeted Environmental Impact Statement

A. INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to Part 617 of the implementing regulations pertaining to Article 8 State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) of the Environmental Conservation Law, the New York City School Construction Authority (SCA) intends to prepare a Targeted Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a new, approximately 801-seat high school (H.S.) facility, currently known as H.S. 497, at 165-18 Hillside Avenue in the Jamaica Hills neighborhood of Queens. This Draft Scope of Work (Draft Scope) outlines the technical areas to be analyzed in the preparation of a Targeted EIS for the proposed H.S. 497.

The proposed new school would serve students in grade levels 9 through 12 and would include 30 seats for students in a District 75 (special education) program. In order to develop the new school facility, the SCA would acquire privately-owned Lots 39, 41, and 49 on Block 9816, for the proposed school site (see **Figure 1-1**). With the proposed project, the existing unoccupied structures on the project site would be demolished and replaced by a new, approximately 119,000 gross-square foot, five-story school building. Based on preliminary plans, SCA would require approval of bulk waivers from the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development to permit the project to proceed. Funding for site acquisition, design, and construction of the proposed school facility would be provided by the New York City Department of Education's (DOE) Five-Year Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2020-2024. It is expected that the new high school would open in September 2026.

B. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PURPOSE AND NEED

Construction of the proposed project would provide additional public school capacity at the high school level for Queens and located within Community School District (CSD) 28. According to the latest DOE school utilization profile for 2019 to 2020, CSD 28 has an enrollment of 12,985 high school students with a target capacity of 10,903. The district is operating at 119 percent of target capacity.

Under DOE's Five-Year Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2020-2024, capital funding is allocated for the creation of a total of 8,164 additional seats at the high school level in Queens to address existing overcrowding and forecast changes in student enrollments, and also to support DOE's policies regarding class-size reduction and transition from the use of transportable classroom units (TCUs).

PROJECT SITE

The new school would occupy Block 9816, Lots 39, 41, and 49 in the Jamaica Hills neighborhood of Queens. The project site is situated amid primarily residential uses, with a concentration of ground-floor retail uses along Hillside Avenue. The site is located on the block bounded by Hillside Avenue to the north, 88th Avenue to the south, Merrick Boulevard to the east and 165th Street to the west (see **Figure 1-1**). The project site is currently occupied by a former funeral parlor, a former office building, and paved parking lot. The proposed project would involve the demolition of the existing site improvements, which are currently vacant

The proposed project is located within an C4-5X commercial district within the Special Downtown Jamaica District. Schools are permitted as-of-right in C4-5X districts.

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed five-story school would be approximately 119,000 gross square feet (gsf). The maximum building height would be approximately 90 feet, including the rooftop bulkhead. The new school would include general education classrooms for 9th through 12th grade, specialized instruction rooms, administrative space, as well as a cafeteria at the cellar level.

An approximately 10,000-square-foot (sf) play yard will be located north of the school along Hillside Avenue. It is anticipated that the main entrance to the school would be located along 88th Avenue. In order to accommodate curbside auto and school bus drop-offs/pick-ups, 88th Avenue between 165th Street and Merrick Boulevard would be converted from one-way eastbound to one-way westbound for vehicular traffic. The school would operate during normal school hours, likely between 8:00 AM and 3:30 PM between September and June.

B. PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK FOR THE TARGETED EIS

The proposed action is subject to environmental review pursuant to SEQR procedures. An Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) and Supplemental Studies was completed on July 26, 2021. The proposed action (classified as an Unlisted Action) may have the potential to result in significant adverse impacts on the environment for selected SEQRA technical areas, which may not be mitigable, thus warranting the preparation of a Targeted EIS. The SCA, as lead agency, has directed that a Targeted EIS be prepared.

The scoping process is intended to focus the Targeted EIS on those issues that are most pertinent to the proposed project. This draft scoping document sets forth the analyses and methodologies that will be utilized to prepare the Targeted EIS. During the period for scoping, anyone interested in reviewing the Draft Scope may do so and provide their comments to the lead agency. Written comments on the Draft Scope will be accepted by the lead agency until the close of business on August 19, 2021. Written comments received will be considered and incorporated as appropriate into a Final Scope of Work. The lead agency will oversee preparation of a Final Scope of Work, which incorporates relevant comments made on the Draft Scope and revises the extent or methodologies of the studies, as appropriate, in response to comments made during scoping. The Draft EIS (DEIS) will be prepared in accordance with the Final Scope of Work for a Targeted EIS.

The Targeted EIS will contain:

- A description of the proposed project and its environmental setting;
- A statement of the environmental impacts of the proposed project, including its short- and long- term effects, and typical associated environmental effects;
- An identification of any significant adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided if the proposed project is completed;
- A discussion of alternatives to the proposed project;
- An identification of any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources that would be involved if the proposed project is built; and
- A description of mitigation measures proposed to avoid or minimize any significant adverse environmental impacts.

The Targeted EIS analyses for the proposed project will be performed for 2026 (the "Build Year"), when the project is expected to be completed and fully operational. For this Build Year, the Targeted EIS will assess the potential for the proposed project to result in any significant adverse impacts by comparing conditions anticipated with the proposed project ("Potential Effects of the Proposed Project") to conditions expected without the proposed project ("The Future Without the Project"). The Targeted EIS will assume that the physical condition of the project site without the proposed project would resemble existing conditions. In addition, the Targeted EIS also will account for other "background projects" and/or changes expected to occur independent of the proposed project but in the vicinity of the project site, as appropriate.

This document provides a description of the proposed project and includes task categories for all technical areas to be analyzed in the Targeted EIS. The EAF and Supplemental Studies prepared for the proposed action identified several technical areas in which the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts and, therefore, do not require further analysis in the EIS. Therefore, the EIS will be "targeted" in that it will have a detailed focus on those technical areas that could not be screened out at the EAF level. As per the EAF, the technical areas that do not warrant analysis in the Targeted EIS are: Land Use, Zoning and Public Policy; Socioeconomic Conditions; Community Facilities and Services; Open Space; Shadows; Historic and Cultural Resources; Urban Design and Visual Resources; Natural Resources; Hazardous Materials; Water and Sewer Infrastructure; Solid Waste and Sanitation Services; Energy; Air Quality; Noise; Public Health; Neighborhood Character; and Construction-Related Impacts.

The proposed scope of work to be analyzed in the Targeted EIS follows. As the project site is located in New York City, the SCA, although a State-enabled authority, relies upon the *New York City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual* for guidance regarding technical methodology.

TASK 1: PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The first chapter of the Targeted EIS will introduce the reader to the proposed project and set the context in which to assess impacts. The chapter will contain project identification; the background and history of the project and project site; a statement of purpose and need for the proposed project; a detailed description of the proposed action necessary to achieve the project; a description of the development program, project siting, and design; and a discussion of approvals required, procedures to be followed, and the role of the Targeted EIS in the process. This chapter is the key to understanding the proposed project and its impacts, and gives the public and decision-makers a base from which to evaluate the project against the future without the proposed project.

TASK 2: TRANSPORTATION

The transportation analysis will be undertaken pursuant to the methodologies outlined in the 2020 *CEQR Technical Manual*, which describes a two-tier screening procedure to assess the travel demand characteristics of a project. The preliminary assessment begins with a trip generation analysis (Level-1) to estimate the volume of person and vehicle trips attributable to a project. Based on *CEQR* guidelines, if a project is expected to result in fewer than 50 peak hour vehicle trips and fewer than 200 peak hour transit or pedestrian trips, further quantified analyses are generally not warranted. As further described below, pedestrian safety considerations along principal access routes would also be a factor in determining analysis needs for school projects.
When the Level-1 thresholds are exceeded, detailed trip assignments (Level-2) are performed to estimate the incremental trips that could be incurred at specific transportation elements and to identify potential locations for further analyses. If the trip assignments show that a project would

generate 50 or more peak hour vehicle trips at an intersection, 200 or more peak hour subway trips at a station, 50 or more peak hour bus trips in one direction along a bus route, or 200 or more peak hour pedestrian trips traversing a pedestrian element, then further quantified analyses are warranted to assess the potential for significant adverse impacts.

For the proposed school, safety and operations of pedestrian elements (i.e., intersections with high number of pedestrian crashes, uncontrolled pedestrian crossings, narrow sidewalks, non ADA-compliant pedestrian ramps, etc.) along principal access routes to/from the school will also be considered in the overall assessment of potential significant adverse pedestrian impacts or need for safety improvements. In consultation with the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) during their review of the Travel Demand Factors memorandum and a preliminary assessment of the principal access routes, the appropriate study area and safety considerations will be identified for the pedestrian analysis.

The scope of work for the transportation analysis would include the following tasks:

TRIP GENERATION AND SCREENING ASSESSMENTS

In accordance with *CEQR* guidelines, Level-1 (Trip Generation) and Level-2 (Trip Assignment) screenings will be prepared using standard sources, including the *CEQR Technical Manual*, U.S. census data, and approved studies. The trip estimates will be summarized by peak hour, mode of travel, and person/vehicle trips. The results of the Level-1 and Level-2 screening assessments will be summarized for the typical school weekday AM and PM peak hours in a Travel Demand Factors memorandum for review and concurrence by the SCA and NYCDOT.

Based on a preliminary travel demand assessment of the proposed school, the incremental trips generated are expected to show that quantified operational analyses of potential impacts are warranted for nearby traffic intersections and pedestrian elements. An analysis of the proposed school's parking demand and the surrounding area's parking supply and utilization will also be prepared. An assessment of vehicular and pedestrian safety based on recent crash data will accompany the operational impact analyses. If the programming of the proposed project changes substantially and which results in the need for additional detailed transportation analysis, they will be undertaken as contingency tasks.

TRAFFIC

- Define traffic study area. The traffic study area will include the intersections bordering the project site block, as well as the intersections that are most likely to be affected by the project-generated traffic. In total, up to eight intersections have been assumed for detailed analysis during the weekday AM and PM peak hours.
- Conduct traffic counts at the selected analysis locations. Traffic volume data will be collected using a combination of video turning movement and vehicle classification counts and continuous automatic traffic recorder (ATR) counts. Collect information pertaining to street widths, traffic flow directions, lane markings, and parking regulations at intersections in the study area. Conduct observations during data collection periods to note general traffic flow, vehicle queuing (including unmet demand), loading/unloading activities, parking turnover, and lane obstructions, if any. Also perform inventory of traffic control devices in the study area. Obtain official signal timings from NYCDOT to validate field data and to use as an input for traffic capacity analysis.

- Establish existing traffic flows in the study area for the weekday AM and PM peak hours. Perform capacity analyses of the street system for the existing conditions using the *2000 Highway Capacity Manual* methodology and determine the existing levels-of-service (LOS), volume-to-capacity (v/c) ratios, and average vehicle delays for study area intersections. Identify locations with congested traffic conditions.
- Determine traffic volumes, v/c ratios, and LOS at the study area intersections for the weekday AM and PM peak hours for the future No Action condition. Future No Action traffic volumes will be estimated using existing volume information and by adding a background growth factor as well as incremental increases in traffic from any substantial projects in the area. Trip estimates for future projects and the modes of transportation for these trips will be determined using standard sources, census data, and information from other environmental studies, where available. This information will be presented for the two peak analysis periods. Analysis of future volumes without the project will include calculation of v/c ratios and LOS, and the identification of problem intersections.
- Perform a traffic impact assessment for the proposed school. Based on the Level 1 and Level 2 screening assessment results described above, project-generated trips will be overlaid onto the future No Action AM and PM peak hour networks and the impact on v/c ratios and LOS will be evaluated.
- Recommend mitigation/improvement measures, as appropriate, to eliminate identified impacts. Likely measures for eliminating traffic impacts include signal retiming, phasing modifications, addition of turn lanes, and the revision of curbside parking and standing regulations, etc.

TRANSIT

The study area is served by various mass transit options, including the Q1/Q2/Q3/Q17/Q20/Q36/Q43/Q76/Q77 bus routes along Hillside Avenue, the Q6/Q8/Q9/Q41/Q54/Q56 bus routes along Jamaica Avenue, the Q65 bus route along 164th Street, the Q25/Q34 bus routes along Parsons Boulevard, the Q30/Q31bus routes along 169th/170th Streets, the E/J/Z subway line at the Jamaica Center Parsons/Archer Subway Station, and the F subway line at the 169th Street Subway Station and the Parsons Boulevard Subway Station. Since the incremental bus and subway trips would be dispersed to multiple bus routes and multiple subway stations/lines, it is expected that quantified transit analysis will not be warranted. However, the transportation chapter will include a qualitative description of transit services in the area.

PEDESTRIANS

Quantified pedestrian analysis will be conducted for the equivalent of up to three intersections in the study area, consisting of sidewalks, crosswalks, and corners. The analysis will include a quantitative assessment of existing, No Action, and With Action conditions. Quantified pedestrian analysis will include the following tasks:

- Define the study area. Pedestrian elements selected for a detailed analysis of potential impacts will include those identified to exceed the CEQR analysis threshold of 200 peak hour incremental pedestrian trips and possibly others in consultation with NYCDOT. The preparation of the preliminary assessments described above will include an examination of the anticipated walking routes to/from the school to identify pedestrian elements posing safety concerns (i.e., uncontrolled crossings). According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, any

uncontrolled crossing, where, under the With-Action condition an increment of 20 or more students are assigned during the highest crossing hour (a threshold recommended by the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) *2009* edition of the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD))* should be included in the detailed safety and operational analyses, including potentially a signal warrant analysis.

- Inventory lane markings, street furniture, and sidewalk widths at the intersections selected for pedestrian analyses.
- Conduct pedestrian counts at the selected analysis locations and establish baseline pedestrian volumes. Perform existing pedestrian analysis utilizing the *2010 Highway Capacity Manual* methodology for the typical school-day peak periods—weekday AM and PM peak hours.
- Determine pedestrian volumes and LOS for the weekday AM and PM peak hours for the future No Action condition. Future No Action pedestrian volumes will be estimated using the existing pedestrian volume information and by adding a background growth factor as well as incremental increases from any substantial projects in the area. Trip estimates generated for future No Action projects and the modes of transportation for these trips will be determined using standard sources, census data, and information from other environmental studies, where available. The information will be presented for the two peak hour analysis periods. Analysis of future pedestrian volumes without the proposed project will include calculation of LOS and the identification of problem locations.
- Perform pedestrian assessment for the proposed school. Based on the Level 1 and Level 2 screening assessment results described above, school-generated trips will be overlaid onto the future No Action AM and PM peak hour pedestrian networks and the impact on LOS will be evaluated.
- Recommend mitigation/improvement measures, as appropriate, to eliminate identified impacts.

VEHICULAR AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Pedestrian safety issues bordering the site will also be examined. This will include an identification of primary pedestrian paths for students walking to and from the site, and field reconnaissance to identify potential safety hazards. In addition, crash data for the most recent three-year period will be obtained from NYCDOT. Based on the detailed review of the crash data, improvement measures will be proposed for the problem locations, if any.

PARKING

Conduct a parking survey within ¼-mile of the project site to record the utilized and available off-street and on-street parking in the study area. Analyze current and future parking conditions within a ¼-mile of the project site and assess the availability of parking for accommodating project-generated demand.

TASK 3: MITIGATION

Where significant project impacts are identified, measures will be identified and assessed to mitigate those impacts. This chapter will summarize those findings. Where impacts cannot be mitigated, they will be identified in the Targeted EIS as unavoidable adverse impacts.

TASK 4: ALTERNATIVES

The purpose of an alternatives analysis is to examine reasonable and practicable options that avoid or reduce project-related significant adverse impacts while achieving the goals and objectives of the proposed project. SEQRA requires that alternatives to the proposed project be identified and evaluated in an EIS so that the decision-maker may consider whether alternatives exist that would minimize or avoid adverse environmental effects. that the Targeted EIS will assess the No Action and With Action alternatives.

TASK 5: SUMMARY CHAPTERS

The Targeted EIS will include the following summary chapters:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter will include the key information that has been ascertained through this SEQRA environmental review process, and that is disclosed within the body of this Targeted EIS and any accompanying appendices. The information comprising the executive summary will include findings of analyses, identification of impacts, and proposed mitigation measures.

UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS

It is anticipated that unavoidable adverse impacts may be expected with the proposed action; these effects would be summarized in this chapter.

GROWTH-INDUCING ASPECTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed action is not anticipated to induce growth off-site.

IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENTS OF RESOURCES

This chapter will summarize the development associated with the proposed action, as commitments of resources for development of the proposed school.

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