

### **3.7 Cultural Resources**

For purposes of this section the “study area” is defined by the property limits of the 507-acre annexation territory, adjoining local roads and immediately surrounding lands.

#### **3.7.1 Existing Conditions - Visual and Scenic Resources**

The general visual character of the proposed annexation lands as viewed from the local roads nearby -- Bakertown Road, Acres Road, Forest Road, Mountain Road, and Seven Springs Road -- is a mixture of rural, primarily wooded landscapes, and low-rise, multi-family residential development. Open farm land is also visible along a portion of Bakertown Road.

The general topography of the area consists of low rolling hills, such that there are no notable distant views beyond the local landscapes, nor do there appear to be positions outside of the area that would have expansive views into the study area due to the varied topography. The potential viewshed of the annexation area (limits of potential views to the area) is limited by the local topography to the immediate surrounding landscape and approximately 2.5 miles of local roads.

There were no unique natural visual features identified in the study area, nor are there any designated scenic resources in the annexation lands. Development that is visible in and around the area is generally of contemporary style construction.

##### *Local recreational resources*

The closest open space recreational areas near the study area are Gonzaga Park on Seven Springs Road in the villages of South Blooming Grove and Woodbury and Town of Monroe, the Kiryas Joel Kinder Park off of Larkin Drive in the Town of Monroe, and Crane Park in the Village of Monroe.

Gonzaga Park is a 216-acre tract located at the northwest corner of the existing Village of Kiryas Joel and is operated by Orange County, a portion of which is included in the annexation territory. The park is of varying topography including woodlands, picnic areas, a new Gaelic football field and remnants of the prior monastery buildings. The property also provides access to the Jessup and Highlands trails and the Long Path, marked hiking trails maintained by the NY-NJ Trail Conference. There is substantial woodland cover at this park such that there are no open views out from the property toward the study area.

Kinder Park is located at the opposite side of Kiryas Joel in the Town of Monroe. The Village operates this 3.3-acre facility (on a parcel of approximately 70 acres) which contains several playgrounds and open lawn areas for exclusive use by the residents of

the Village of Kiryas Joel. The open nature of the property provides views out to the surrounding landscape and nearby hills to the north and northwest.

Additionally, the Highlands Trail/Long Path passes through Gonzaga Park from Schunemunk Mountain and follows Seven Springs Road southward for about two-thirds of a mile, then exits the proposed annexation territory going toward Orange-Rockland Lakes. Over this portion of the trail, Seven Springs Road is a rural road (paved, two lanes, with no shoulders) lined on both sides by woodlands and scattered houses. Given the heavy tree cover in the areas surrounding the trail, even during months when leaves are off the trees, there are no open views out toward the south from the trail.<sup>1</sup> Some existing development in Kiryas Joel is visible through the trees from a portion of the trail.

Crane Park is a public park in the Village of Monroe that is a passive recreation resource for the town, with playgrounds, ponds, gazebo, memorials, garden plots, walkway/jogging paths, and lawns.

### **3.7.2 Existing Conditions - Historic/cultural Resources**

Investigation of the New York State Parks archaeological database indicated there are no National Register or State Register listed historic resources in the study area.<sup>2</sup> State Parks' online Cultural Resource Information System identifies generalized half-mile circles as potential archaeologically sensitive areas surrounding the Mountain House at Gonzaga Park and an unidentified resource located south of Route 6 & 17. Both of these resources are located outside the study area. The generalized circles cover the majority of the western annexation territory. The locations of archaeological resources are identified (at least preliminarily) based on reconnaissance by others and the surrounding areas represent a level of potential sensitivity for additional resource recovery, which typically necessitates site-specific investigations when there is a development project proposed.

### **3.7.3 Potential Impacts**

The proposed annexation action would not involve any physical disturbance of the ground and thus, would not directly impact visual or historic/cultural resources. However, under either development scenario described in the Project Description (without or with annexation), disturbance of the land would result from development activities to much the same degree regardless of the action.

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<sup>1</sup> Verified by Tim Miller Associates with field reconnaissance, April 7, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation National Register Listing Internet Application. <http://pwa.parks.ny.gov/nr>. Accessed 3/18/15.

Without or with annexation, future development could disturb virtually all of the developable land in some fashion, either resulting in temporary or permanent removal of vegetation and addition of new buildings and other facilities. As vacant land is cleared to make way for new development, the character of the local landscape will change from rural to suburban. Development can be anticipated to include contemporary, multi-family housing and neighborhood commercial uses, local roads and various pedestrian amenities such as wide sidewalks, shelters at bus stops, and fencing around residential yards. The neighborhood character of the style of development that is anticipated to be built in Kiryas Joel – clustered multi-family lower-cost housing as opposed to sprawling single family, large lot subdivisions, and walkable neighborhoods that have easy access to schools, social facilities and services, recreation, and retail stores for household necessities – promotes the sustainable lifestyle that is desired by the Petitioners.

There are no designated significant visual resources in the study area that would be affected by the anticipated area growth and development. There are higher topographic locations that, once cleared of trees, would no longer provide a wooded backdrop to views from particular locations of nearby roads or nearby private property locations. Development on higher topography, when planned, should be evaluated at the site plan review stage to identify opportunities for buffering of views that would otherwise be opened from nearby vantage points.

There are no identified historical/cultural resources in the annexation territory that would be affected by the anticipated area growth and development. As described earlier, State Parks' mapping indicates that site-specific investigations are warranted during site plan review to ascertain the potential impact to archaeological resources, if any, when there is a development project proposed.

*Impact on existing local recreational resources*

There are no existing views from Gonzaga Park or the Kinder Park that would be directly affected by the proposed annexation. The annexation will not remove or hinder public access to the County parkland from Seven Springs Road or Mountain Road. The annexation will not hinder public use of Crane Park. Area growth will likely increase use of these recreational facilities.

The Highlands Trail/Long Path traverses the ridge of Schunnemunk Mountain north of the annexation territory. From a point approximately one-half mile north of the northwestern tip of the existing Village of Kiryas Joel boundary, the trail descends from a peak at about elevation 1300 feet which is above the surrounding landscape. Along the line of this descent, a site walk was undertaken which confirmed that there would be filtered visibility of buildings through the trees looking toward Kiryas Joel or the proposed annexation territory when leaves are not on the trees. Some development in the annexation territory would be somewhat visible through the trees from a portion of the

trail only during the winter months. The extent of this change would not significantly change the character of the trail experience.

As Seven Springs Road is a public road, the annexation will not remove or hinder public access to the roadway, as it now provides for users of the Highlands Trail/Long Path. However, the anticipated future development on Seven Springs Road and the concomitant modest increase in traffic on the local roads will change the character of this portion of the trail over time from a rural to a suburban landscape.

#### **3.7.4 Mitigation Measures**

Any site-specific action will need to comply with the applicable State and local requirements created for the protection of existing resources. Individual site plan or subdivision reviews will need to investigate the extent of project visibility from nearby roads and publicly-accessible locations, as well as investigate the potential for the presence of archaeological resources. Plan reviews will need to address possible mitigation measures such as avoidance of sensitive resources, replanting visual buffers, establishing green spaces bordering development, and constructing attractive building designs that are appropriate at each site to create a livable community. Such measures should be taken without or with annexation.

As growth occurs, the Village, Town and County should periodically evaluate the adequacy and accessibility of recreation resources that are available to and desired by its residents.