Chapter 15: Neighborhood Character

A. INTRODUCTION

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," based on projections issued by the national Centers for Disease Control, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) expects that new cancer cases in New York City will increase from the current rate of 40,000 annually to 60,000 annually by 2050. While this increase is a projection among all age groups, this rise is being driven by two populations: older patients, whose cases are more acute and require more complex treatment, and younger patients who are being diagnosed with prostate, colon, and breast cancer at alarming rates. To meet this increase in patient volume and the new interventions that are needed to treat the growing number of acute cases, MSKCC will need to supplement its existing capacity with a purpose-built structure with 28 operating rooms (with four dedicated to interventional radiology procedures) and up to 206 patient beds including intensive care unit (ICU) and single rooms for immunocompromised patients, as well as medical support areas.

To fulfill this need, MSKCC is requesting a series of zoning actions to establish a building envelope to facilitate the development of a new 31-story (up to 598.3 feet including mechanical bulkhead), approximately 903,065 gross square foot (gsf) inpatient hospital building (the Proposed Project), also referred to as the "MSK Pavilion." It would be located on York Avenue between East 66th and East 67th Streets and would consist of 28 operating rooms, including recovery and intensive care facilities, up to 206 single-bedded patient rooms, clinical support, a double-height lobby, and 5 mechanical floors to house intensive technologies and air exchange systems. A two-story patient bridge across East 67th Street (Patient Bridge) connecting floors 5 and 6 of the Proposed Project with floors 8 and 9 of the Memorial Hospital building would serve as the primary connector for patients in either building to access medical services in the other building.

This chapter assesses the potential for the Proposed Project to result in significant adverse impacts to the neighborhood character of the area surrounding the Project Area. As defined in the 2021 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give a neighborhood its distinct "personality." These elements may include a neighborhood's land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise. However, not all of these elements contribute to neighborhood character in every case; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements.

This analysis of neighborhood character identifies the defining features of the neighborhood and evaluates whether the Proposed Project has the potential to affect those defining features, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical analysis areas. This analysis relies on the analyses of the components of neighborhood character (i.e., land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) as analyzed elsewhere in this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). To determine the effects of a proposed project on neighborhood character, the defining features of neighborhood character are

considered together. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare, and it would be unusual that—in the absence of a significant adverse impact in any of the relevant technical areas—a combination of moderate effects to the neighborhood would result in an impact to neighborhood character. Moreover, a significant adverse impact identified in one of the technical areas that contributes to a neighborhood's character does not necessarily constitute a significant impact on neighborhood character, but rather serves as an indication that neighborhood character should be examined.

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

Based on the methodology of the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a preliminary analysis of the Proposed Project's effects on neighborhood character was conducted and concluded that the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character and that a detailed analysis is not warranted.

The neighborhood character of the study area is primarily defined by its mix of institutional/community facility and residential land uses, as well as the diverse urban and architectural context of the area. The Proposed Project would be consistent with the existing character of the neighborhood, particularly in that it would not result in a substantial change in use on the Development Site but rather replace two existing MSKCC community facility buildings with a new state-of-the-art facility serving MSKCC's long-term mission of advancing cancer research and caring for cancer patients.

The Proposed Project would be consistent with other similar uses found throughout the surrounding area, which includes a concentration of major research and health care facilities that have co-existed for many years in a mixed-use neighborhood with residential, retail, and other community facility uses.

Overall, the Proposed Project would be compatible with the defining characteristics of the study area's neighborhood character and would not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts.

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 technical area that contributes to an area's neighborhood character (i.e., land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design and 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 a project could affect these technical areas, 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 affect these defining features, either through the potential for significant adverse impacts or a combination of moderate effects. If the preliminary assessment concludes that a proposed project has the potential to affect defining features of a neighborhood, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character is undertaken. Conversely, if the project has no potential to affect the defining features of neighborhood character, a detailed assessment is not warranted.

As described in the relevant chapters of this DEIS, the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; urban design and visual resources; or noise. In terms of transportation,

while the Proposed Project would result in a potential significant adverse traffic impact in the weekday PM peak hour at the westbound approach of First Avenue and East 67th Street, this impact can be fully mitigated with a minor adjustment to signal timing (a standard measure subject to review and approval by DOT). For shadows, the Proposed Project is expected to result in significant adverse shadow impacts to one sunlight-sensitive historic resource: the stained glass windows on the north and east (rear) façades of St. John Nepomucene Church. However, as described in Chapter 6, "Historic and Cultural Resources," the effect of these shadows would not constitute a significant adverse impact to this resource, and in any event would not be experienced from nearby sidewalks within the public realm. As such, the incremental shadow cast by the Proposed Project would have no impact on Neighborhood Character.

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.

STUDY AREA

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual,* the study area for a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character should be consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas, and may be modified, as appropriate, either to include any additional areas that may be affected by the project or to exclude areas that would clearly not be affected by the project. Accordingly, this chapter analyzes a study area consistent with the land use and urban design/visual resources study areas that extend 400 feet from the Project Area (the 2001 LSCFD) boundary.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The key elements that define neighborhood character, and their relationships to one another, form the basis of determining impact significance; in general, the more uniform and consistent the existing neighborhood context, the more sensitive it may be to change. A neighborhood that has a more varied context is typically able to tolerate greater change without experiencing a significant adverse impact related to neighborhood character.

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare, and it would be under unusual circumstances that, in the absence of an impact in any of the relevant technical areas, a combination of moderate effects to the neighborhood would result in an impact to neighborhood character. Moreover, a significant impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood's character is not automatically equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character. Rather, it serves as an indication that neighborhood character may be significantly affected.

C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

DEFINING FEATURES

The area within 400 feet of the Project Area is generally bounded by East 70th Street to the north, East 65th Street to the south, the midblock between First and Second Avenues to the west, and a line east of York Avenue to the east. The neighborhood character of the study area is primarily defined by its mix of institutional/community facility and residential land uses, as well as the diverse urban and architectural context of the area.

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the Project Area itself encompasses the main MSKCC campus, and within that, the Development Site fronts York Avenue between East 66th and East 67th Streets and includes two buildings—Scholars and Sloan—used for staff and student contract housing and for administrative support services. Overall, MSKCC's buildings, utilized in support of the institution's mission of cancer research and treatment, range in height from 4 to 23 stories.

The larger study area is largely residential and institutional, with ground floor retail uses (primarily along First Avenue). Aside from MSKCC, there are several other institutions concentrated in the area that are major presences, including Rockefeller University, and NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center. Taken together, the main campuses of MSKCC, NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, Weill Cornell Medicine, and the Rockefeller University clearly characterize this portion of the neighborhood.

Directly facing the Project Area across York Avenue is Rockefeller University. Its campus stretches uninterrupted between York Avenue and the FDR Drive from East 68th Street to East 63rd Street, beyond the study area. Overall, the approximately 15-acre campus includes research buildings, student residences, faculty residences, and the domed Caspary Auditorium.

The area north of Rockefeller University and the Project Area is dominated by NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital and Weill Cornell Medical Center, which altogether occupy approximately seven acres of land. Older portions of the extensive campus are generally east of York Avenue, focused on a circular drive along East 68th Street. On the west side of York Avenue is the newer David H. Koch Center, which abuts MSKCC's Zuckerman Research Center to its west. The Weill Cornell Belfer Research Building is at the midblock on 69th Street between York and First Avenues. Other elements of the campus west of York Avenue include staff/student housing and the Weill Greenberg Center which houses outpatient clinical facilities for a number of departments.

Other institutional uses in the study area include P.S. 183, the Robert L. Stevenson School, with midblock frontage on both 66th and 67th Streets and a schoolyard with play area on East 67th Street. St. John Nepomucene Church is at the northeast corner of First Avenue and East 66th Street, with an attached rectory building along East 66th Street and a school wing extending north to the midblock of East 67th Street. At the western edge of the study area is the NYPL's East 67th Street Library and the Julia Richman Education Complex, which houses multiple public schools. MSKCC's Kimmel Center for Prostate and Urological Cancers is at the midblock of East 68th Street, west of York Avenue. The First Hungarian Reformed Church is at 344 East 69th Street.

The study area includes a wide range of building types, heights, and densities. Higher density uses tend to be located along the avenues, while midblocks along narrower streets tend to be developed with lower- or medium-density uses.

St. Catherine's Park, the only major public open space in the area, is on the west side of First Avenue between East 67th and East 68th Streets.

The remaining uses in the study area are almost exclusively residential with a mix of ground floor retail shops. Economic activity and patterns in the study area reflect the area's well-established mix of residential, commercial, and institutional uses. The blocks south of 66th Street contain a mix of older tenements and high-rise residential buildings, including The Pearl, a 24-story residential building opened in 2000, and 401 East 65th Street, a midcentury apartment building. South of MSKCC, the west side of York Avenue contains mostly older residential buildings with very limited ground floor retail.

Between York and First Avenues, the side streets north of East 70th Street and south of the MSKCC campus are generally less densely developed, with four- and five-story residential tenements interspersed with larger luxury apartment complexes. The limited retail space contained in some of the older tenement buildings, such as those on East 70th Street, provide primarily neighborhood services such as dry cleaning or small cafes.

Along First Avenue within the study area, buildings are mostly residential with a range of heights and density, although they are generally of a larger scale than residential buildings between the avenues. Almost all residential buildings along First Avenue contain ground floor retail and commercial uses that provide neighborhood-oriented convenience shops and services. North of East 68th Street, the mix of older tenement and newer high rise residential buildings with ground floor retail continues to the northern border of the study area and beyond.

The study area topography has a modest downward slope from west to east. Street trees are planted along the sidewalks, and some of the high-rise buildings are set back behind tall planters or plazas with landscaping. York, First, and Second Avenues are view corridors in the study area and provide long views north and south. The narrow cross streets do not have long views, as street trees obstruct views and buildings lining the street are mostly built to the sidewalk.

Known architectural resources in the area include the Church of St. Catherine of Siena, the private Rockefeller University campus, an architectural resource described in Chapter 6, "Historic and Cultural Resources," and its Founder's Hall, NewYork-Presbyterian-Weill Cornell Medical Center, PS 183, the Church of St. John Nepomucene, City and Suburban Homes Company First Avenue Estate, the 67th Street Branch of the New York Public Library, First Hungarian Reformed Church of New York City, and Sokol Hall (420 East 71st Street). One potential architectural resource is the apartment building at 333 East 68th Street.

There are no visual resources on the Development Site or in the Project Area. In the larger study area, visual resources include the Rockefeller University campus, the NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center, the Church of St. John Nepomucene, and St. Catherine's Park. These are described in detail in Chapter 7, "Urban Design and Visual Resources."

These architectural and visual resources are defining features of the neighborhood character of the study area and contribute to it by adding to the diverse urban and architectural context of this Upper East Side neighborhood.

The character of the area, like many neighborhoods in New York City, is in part defined by a wide range of travel modes, with moderate foot traffic on most of the area's sidewalks and crosswalks, a mix of automobile/taxi/service traffic on the streets, and bus service. Pedestrian activity in the area is associated primarily with residents and workers, consistent with the mix of uses in the area. Overall, transportation is not a defining feature of the study area's neighborhood character.

With respect to noise, measured levels are moderately high and reflect the level of vehicular activity on the adjacent streets. In terms of the CEQR criteria, the projected noise levels are in the "acceptable" and "marginally unacceptable" categories. Noise is not a defining feature of the study area's neighborhood character.

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

MSKCC's existing Scholars and Sloan buildings would be replaced with a new 31-story (up to 598.3-foot), approximately 903,065-gsf, state-of-the-art inpatient cancer treatment facility. A

through-block driveway for patient drop-offs and pick-ups would be created and, there would be a two-story bridge on the north façade of the building connecting with the Memorial Hospital building to the north across East 67th Street. The RRL building would remain adjacent to the Proposed Project; with modifications related to garage access and a small reduction in some ground-floor conference room space. The public garage entrance would remain on East 66th Street and a new exit would be on East 67th Street. A new valet entrance would also be provided on East 67th Street. There would be three loading docks on East 67th Street and one on East 66th Street.

While larger, the Proposed Project would not result in a substantial change in the land use on the Development Site in that it would replace two existing MSKCC community facility buildings with a new MSKCC community facility. Moreover, the Development Site is, and will continue to be, part of the larger 2001 LSCFD that includes numerous MSKCC patient care and research facilities.

The Proposed Project would be consistent with the existing land use character of the area, which contains MSKCC and numerous other institutional campuses and uses, set among a mix of residential buildings and local retail uses.

The Proposed Project would not affect socioeconomic conditions in the study area in a manner that would have the potential to affect neighborhood character. The study area already has a well-established medical, research, and institutional presence. The community facility development resulting from the Proposed Project would strengthen the existing cluster of medical, research, and other institutional uses on the Upper East Side.

While the Proposed Project would introduce new workers and visitors to the area, the Proposed Project would not result in a significant adverse impact due to an increase in open space users. Similarly, the Proposed Project would not alter or eliminate any publicly accessible open space resources and would not result in direct effects to open space. The Proposed Project would also provide some new exterior open space, which would improve the streetscape and provide passive seating areas for local visitors and workers.

As noted above and described in greater detail in Chapter 5, "Shadows," the Proposed Project is expected to result in significant adverse shadow impacts to one sunlight-sensitive historic resource: the stained glass windows on the north and east (rear) façades of St. John Nepomucene Church. However, as described in Chapter 6, "Historic and Cultural Resources," the effect of these shadows would not constitute a significant adverse impact to this resource, and in any event would not be experienced from nearby sidewalks within the public realm. As such, the incremental shadow cast by the Proposed Project would have no impact on Neighborhood Character.

The Proposed Project would not have an adverse impact on known or potential architectural resources in the area, including the Church of St. Catherine of Siena, the private Rockefeller University campus, an architectural resource described in Chapter 6, "Historic and Cultural Resources," and its Founder's Hall, NewYork-Presbyterian-Weill Cornell Medical Center, PS 183, the Church of St. John Nepomucene, City and Suburban Homes Company First Avenue Estate, the 67th Street Branch of the New York Public Library, First Hungarian Reformed Church of New York City, and Sokol Hall, or the apartment building at 333 East 68th Street. These resources will continue, as they do now, to contribute to the mix of historic and architectural styles that characterize the neighborhood.

The Proposed Project would be consistent with the urban design character of the study area, which includes a mix of older and newer buildings of different architectural styles, including low-rise rowhouses; high-rise residential towers; and medium to high rise institutional buildings of varied heights and cladding materials. The Proposed Project would replace two existing buildings with a

larger new building but would not alter street orientation, street patterns, block shapes, or natural resources in the study area. With respect to visual resources, the Proposed Project would not have the potential to obstruct significant views or view corridors in the study area.

As discussed in Chapter 10, "Transportation," the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse transportation impacts. Since Proposed Project would not affect transportation conditions in the study area, it would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character due to transportation and would not have an adverse effect on the character of the neighborhood.

With respect to noise, the Proposed Project would not generate traffic volumes that have the potential to cause a significant noise impact and would be designed to provide building attenuation to satisfy applicable interior noise criteria. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character with respect to operational noise.

The combination of moderate effects from the Proposed Project on the elements that contribute to neighborhood character would not create a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. The Proposed Project would contribute to the mix of residential and institutional/community facility land uses in the area and the diverse urban and architectural context of the neighborhood. Benefits of the Proposed Project would include the activation of the streetscape and the strengthening of an existing neighborhood community facility institution. Therefore, the Proposed Project would be compatible with the defining characteristics of the study area's neighborhood character and would not result in significant adverse impact to the overall neighborhood character. ✷