Chapter 19: Neighborhood Character

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses the potential for the proposed project to impact neighborhood character. Neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give a neighborhood its distinct "personality." These elements may include a neighborhood's land use, urban design and visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomics, transportation, and noise. Not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements. According to the 2014 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare and occur under unusual circumstances in which, 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.

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the applicants, the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP) and SJC 33 Owner 2015 LLC, are proposing a series of discretionary actions (the proposed actions) that would facilitate the redevelopment of St. John's Terminal Building at 550 Washington Street (Block 596, Lot 1) (the development site) with a mix of residential and commercial uses, and public open space (the proposed project) in Manhattan Community District 2.

As detailed in previous chapters, the proposed actions would result in significant adverse impacts in two of the technical areas that contribute to neighborhood character—open space and transportation.

For each of the key technical areas related to neighborhood character, this chapter describes existing conditions, the No Action condition, and the With Action condition. In addition, in accordance with the guidance of the *CEQR Technical Manual*, this analysis considers the potential for the proposed project to affect neighborhood character through a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas.

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

The preliminary assessment of neighborhood character presented in this chapter concludes that the proposed actions would not result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character. The neighborhood character of the study area is defined by a few key components, including its mix of land uses and ongoing trend towards residential use, its location in a busy urban area with major roadways including Route 9A and arterial streets connecting to the Holland Tunnel, and its proximity to Hudson River Park and the waterfront. Since the neighborhood character of the study area is partly defined by existing relatively high traffic volumes, the increased traffic resulting from the proposed project would not represent a significant change to the existing

neighborhood character. While the proposed project would result in a significant adverse open space impact due to quantitative factors, the proposed project would also support a defining feature of the character of the neighborhood—Hudson River Park—through the transfer of floor area from Pier 40 to the development site under the Special Hudson River Park District, which would provide critical funding for repairs to Pier 40. The proposed project would also create a new publicly-accessible open space spanning West Houston Street, which would add to the character of the neighborhood. Therefore, the changes to open space utilization associated with the proposed actions would not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts. While the proposed actions would result in moderate effects in one technical area related to neighborhood character—shadows—even taken together with other categories, the moderate shadows effects would not result in a cumulative significant adverse impact to the area's neighborhood character. Overall, the proposed project would be consistent with the study area's mixed-use neighborhood character, and would enliven the development site by bringing a 24-hour population to this location.

B. METHODOLOGY

As described in Chapter 2, "Analytical Framework," in the future with the proposed actions (the With Action condition), the development site is assumed to be redeveloped with one of two development programs: the proposed project or the proposed project with big box retail. In addition, under both of these scenarios, the South Site could contain either hotel or office use. Both of these scenarios, including the potential for hotel or office use on the South Site, are considered in this preliminary analysis.

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an analysis of neighborhood character begins with a preliminary assessment to determine whether changes expected in other technical areas may affect an element that contributes to neighborhood character. The assessment should identify the defining features of the neighborhood, and assess 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. Potential effects on neighborhood character may include:

- Land Use
- Socioeconomic Conditions
- Open Space
- Shadows
- Historic Resources
- Urban Design and Visual Resources
- Transportation
- Noise

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a project can also have a combination of moderate effects to several elements that cumulatively may affect neighborhood character. Therefore, this analysis also evaluates the potential for the proposed project to affect neighborhood character through a combination of effects.

STUDY AREA

As stated in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for a preliminary analysis of neighborhood character is typically consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas that contribute to the defining elements of the neighborhood. Therefore, the study area for this analysis reflects the study area for the analysis of land use, zoning, and public policy, which generally includes areas up to ¼-mile from the project area. As such, the study area for neighborhood character extends up to ¼-mile to include the area generally bounded by Varick Street to the east, the Hudson River to the west, West 10th Street to the north, and Desbrosses Street to the south.

C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The neighborhood character of the study area is defined by a few key components, including its mix of land uses and ongoing trend towards residential use, its location in a busy urban area with major roadways including Route 9A and the Holland Tunnel, and its proximity to Hudson River Park.

LAND USE

The neighborhood includes a wide range of land uses and building types. Residential uses are primarily located in northern (West Village) and southern (Tribeca) portions of the study area. Residential uses in these portions of the study area include converted manufacturing buildings, apartment buildings of varying heights, and row houses. There has also been a trend towards greater residential development in the areas adjacent to the development site and in the Hudson Square neighborhood. Commercial uses are predominant east of Greenwich Street, including large office buildings, some of which are converted manufacturing space. Light industrial uses are concentrated on several blocks east of the development site, including large UPS and FedEx distribution facilities. One of the most prominent uses in the study area that contributes to neighborhood character is Hudson River Park, including Pier 40.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Household incomes are high in the study area, reflecting the established residential markets in these neighborhoods. As described in Chapter 4, "Socioeconomic Conditions," the area has already experienced a readily observable trend toward increasing rents and new market rate development.

OPEN SPACE

The predominant open space feature in the study area is Hudson River Park, which extends from 59th Street to the north and Battery Park to the south. The portion of the Park within the study area contains a bicycle path, walkways, lawns, landscaped areas, a basketball court, a tennis court, a dog run, restrooms, a café, the Christopher Street pier (Pier 45), and Pier 40; the athletic fields provided by Pier 40 are a recreational resource highly valued by study area residents. The Hudson River Park Trust (HRPT) has reported that Pier 40 is in need of critical infrastructure repairs to its roof, electrical infrastructure, and supportive piles. In recent years sections of the roof have deteriorated significantly, forcing HRPT to close portions of the parking garage to

ensure public safety. According to HRPT, Pier 40's roof must be reconstructed and steel piles supporting the pier also need to be repaired.

Other public open space and recreational resources in the study area also contribute neighborhood character. They include Canal Park (at Canal and West Streets) and James J. Walker Park and the Tony Dapolito Recreation Center (on the block bounded by Hudson, Leroy, and Clarkson Streets and Seventh Avenue South).

SHADOWS

As described in Chapter 7, "Shadows," sunlight-sensitive resources in the study area include the Hudson River and Hudson River Park (including Pier 40).

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

While historic and architectural resources are not defining features of the study area's neighborhood character, there are some important architectural resources located throughout the study area, including the Hudson River Bulkhead.

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

Visual resources in the study area include the Hudson River, Hudson River Park, the Holland Tunnel ventilation structure at the west end of Pier 34, and the residential buildings in the Greenwich Village Historic District in the northern section of the study area. As described in Chapter 9, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," Hudson River Park provides expansive views of the Hudson River and New Jersey, including from Piers 34, 40, and 45 and the extensive walkway/bikeway system. Although the Hudson River extends along the west side of Manhattan and is an important visual resource, its visibility is generally limited to areas closest to the river.

TRANSPORTATION

The character of the study area, like that of many neighborhoods in New York City, is in part defined by the levels of pedestrian and vehicular activity that exist. The study area contains major regional roadways that carry high volumes of traffic, including West Street/Route 9A and the Holland Tunnel (including the routes leading to the Holland Tunnel, such as Canal, Varick, and Broome Streets, and Sixth Avenue). While certain portions of the study area such as Hudson River Park, the West Village, and Sixth Avenue have higher pedestrian volumes, foot traffic in the vicinity of the development site is relatively low.

NOISE

As noted in Chapter 17, "Noise," based on field measurements and monitoring, the dominant source of noise in the study area is from traffic. Measured noise levels are moderate to relatively high and reflect the level of vehicular activity on the major roadways, including Route 9A and the arterial streets leading to the Holland Tunnel.

THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTIONS

As described in Chapter 2, "Analytical Framework," absent the proposed actions, the development site is expected to be redeveloped with new commercial buildings that do not require any discretionary approvals. The existing building on the development site will be demolished, except for the platform space above West Houston Street that will be repurposed as

a private open space serving the building tenants. On the North Site, the No Action development will include hotel, office, and retail uses in a 48-story (approximately 630 feet to the top of the roof) building. The South and Center Sites will include office uses, event space, and retail uses in a three- and four-story building of similar bulk to the existing building.

In addition, several independent background development projects are expected to be completed within the study area by 2024 that will contribute to the study area's neighborhood character. These projects are expected to introduce substantial new residential, commercial, hotel, community facility, and other active uses, increasing the density and mixed-use character of the study area. Overall, more than 4,000 new residential units are planned or projected to be built in the study area by 2024. Notable projects include a 26-story residential development at 537-545 Greenwich Street and a 15-story residential project just north of the development site, at 160 Leroy Street. Other background development projects include the New York City Department of Sanitation (DSNY) garage south of the development site that was recently completed, as well as the projected development sites analyzed in the 2013 Hudson Square Rezoning Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the 2010 North Tribeca Rezoning Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS).

The anticipated No Action projects would not significantly alter the study area's neighborhood character. Rather, the projects would reinforce the mix of land uses and building types that is a defining feature of the study area. In particular, the introduction of new higher-density residential developments would extend the ongoing trend towards greater residential use and buildings with a variety of forms. Other defining features of the area's neighborhood character, including Hudson River Park and the area's pedestrian and vehicular activity, are not expected to substantially change.

THE FUTURE WITH THE PROPOSED ACTIONS

In the With Action condition, the development site is assumed to be redeveloped with one of the two development programs: the proposed project or the proposed project with big-box retail. In either scenario, the proposed project would demolish the existing building on the development site and construct new mixed-use buildings on the North, Center, and South Sites. The new buildings would include up to approximately 1,586 residential units (including up to approximately 476 permanently affordable units) as well as retail uses, hotel or office space, a new 20,750-square-foot (sf) publicly accessible open space, and cellar-level accessory parking spaces. Compared to the No Action condition, the proposed project would result in a substantial increase in residential uses (including affordable housing) and parking on the development site, the same amount of event space, and a reduction in retail uses and hotel or office space. The proposed project would provide new publicly accessible open space, which would be private space for building tenants in the No Action condition.

In addition, the proposed actions include a special permit pursuant to the proposed Special Hudson River Park District to transfer floor area from Pier 40 to the development site. The transfer of floor area would provide funds for HRPT to undertake critical infrastructure repairs to Pier 40. There would not be any changes to the uses on Pier 40 as a result of the proposed actions.

The proposed project has the potential to affect the defining features of the area's neighborhood character related to three technical areas: land use, open space, urban design, and transportation.

LAND USE

The proposed project would result in the redevelopment of a site that is largely underutilized. In place of the aging and outmoded building that now exists, the proposed actions would result in new residential uses and commercial uses, including active ground floor uses, that would complement existing study area uses and improve the streetscape. Compared to the No Action condition, the residents introduced by the proposed project would be expected to enliven the area with activity and the proposed project would provide a new publicly accessible open space on the development site. While the proposed project would change the character of the development site and immediately adjacent area, the change would not be considered adverse. The proposed mix of uses would be consistent with the mixed-use character of the surrounding study area and would reflect the ongoing trend towards residential use. Overall, the land use changes associated with the proposed actions would not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts.

OPEN SPACE

As described in Chapter 6, "Open Space," operation of the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse open space impacts due to direct effects. However, the proposed project would increase utilization of study area resources due to the introduction of a substantial new residential population. In the future with and without the proposed actions, the total and active open space ratios in the residential study area would fall below the City's planning goals. With the proposed project, the study area's total open space ratio would decrease by 5.66 percent, the active open space ratio would decrease by 6.96 percent, and the passive open space ratio would decrease by 4.91 percent. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an action may result in a significant adverse open space impact if it would reduce the open space ratio by more than 5 percent in areas that are currently below the City's median community district open space ratio of 1.5 acres per 1,000 residents. Therefore, the reductions in the total and active open space ratios with the proposed project would result in a significant adverse open space impact based on quantitative analysis of indirect effects as set forth in the *CEQR Technical Manual*. The decrease in the passive open space ratio of 4.91 percent would not be considered a significant adverse impact. Potential partial mitigation measures for these significant adverse impacts are currently being explored by the private applicant in consultation with the lead agency, DCP, and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and will be refined between the DEIS and FEIS. The *CEQR Technical Manual* lists potential mitigation measures for open space impacts. These measures may include, but are not limited to, creating new open space within the study area; funding for improvements, renovation, or maintenance at existing local parks; or improving existing open spaces to increase their utility or capacity to meet identified open space needs in the area, such as through the provision of additional active open space facilities. If feasible mitigation is found, the impacts will be considered partially mitigated. As the significant adverse impact on open space would not be fully mitigated, the proposed actions would result in an unavoidable adverse impact on open space.

While the proposed project would result in a significant adverse open space impact due to the quantitative analysis, there are a number of qualitative factors to take into consideration in the assessment of potential impacts on neighborhood character. The transfer of floor area from Pier 40 to the development site under the Special Hudson River Park District as part of the proposed project would provide critical funding for repairs to Pier 40, ensuring its continued existence as a defining feature of the character of the neighborhood. The proposed project would also create a new publicly-accessible open space spanning West Houston Street, which would add to the

character of the neighborhood. Residents in the study area would have access to other open space resources located outside of the study area—including Hudson River Park, which extends outside of the study area to both the north and south—providing additional space for both active recreation, such as biking and running, as well as passive activities. In addition, the as-of-right development in the No Action scenario is anticipated to introduce a substantial new worker population of approximately 2,788 people associated with retail, hotel, office, and event space uses. While the proposed project would increase utilization of study area open space resources due to the introduction of approximately 2,649 new residents and up to 930 workers, this increased user population would be minimally higher than the 2,788 workers introduced in the No Action condition.

Overall, while the proposed project would result in an increase in demand for open space resources, it would also provide necessary support for an open space that is a defining feature of neighborhood character in the study area, and that also benefits the city as a whole. In addition, the proposed project would provide a new open space that would be accessible to the public. Therefore, the changes to open space utilization associated with the proposed actions would not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts.

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

As described in Chapter 9, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," as currently envisioned by the private applicant, the proposed buildings would be designed to be contextual to the surrounding area, incorporating design features that would help minimize the perceived scale of these buildings. The proposed project would have beneficial streetscape effects as the proposed development would contribute active ground floor uses to the surrounding area. Street trees would be added to the sidewalks adjacent to the development site, and the sidewalks on Washington Street adjacent to the development site would be widened. Also contributing to the urban design character of the development site and surrounding area, the proposed project would include a publicly accessible open space on the platform above West Houston Street with openings allowing sunlight to reach the street level. Further, an east-west driveway between the Center and South Sites would be created that would break down the massing of the new development by establishing a physical and visual separation between the Center and South Site buildings. These project components would enhance the pedestrian experience of the urban design characteristics of the development site and surrounding area. Important views from public spaces would not be obstructed as a result of the proposed project, and expansive views of the Hudson River and New Jersey would continue to be available from numerous vantage points. Therefore, the changes to urban design and visual resources associated with the proposed project would not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts.

TRANSPORTATION

As described in Chapter 14, "Transportation," traffic conditions were evaluated at 18 intersections for the weekday AM, midday, PM, and Saturday peak hours. In the 2024 With Action (the proposed project) condition, there would be the potential for significant adverse traffic impacts at seven intersections during the weekday AM peak hour, two intersections during the weekday midday peak hour, six intersections during the weekday PM peak hour, and four intersections during the Saturday peak hour. In the 2024 With Action (the proposed project with big box retail) condition there would be the potential for significant adverse traffic impacts at five intersections during the weekday AM peak hour, six intersections during the weekday

midday peak hour, nine intersections during the weekday PM peak hour, and five intersections during the Saturday peak hour.

As detailed in Chapter 22, "Mitigation," all of the significant adverse traffic impacts identified with the proposed project—except at the intersections of West Houston Street at Varick Street and Canal Street at Hudson Street during the weekday PM peak hour—could be fully mitigated with standard traffic mitigation measures, including signal timing changes and approach daylighting and restriping. For the proposed project with big box retail, all of the significant adverse traffic impacts—except for the intersections of West Houston Street at Varick Street, West Houston Street at West Street, Canal Street at Hudson Street, Spring Street at West Street, and Spring Street at Washington Street during one or more analysis peak hours—could be fully mitigated with standard traffic mitigation measures, including signal timing changes and approach daylighting and restriping. Between the DEIS and FEIS, additional measures will be explored, where feasible, to further mitigate the impacts identified above. If additional feasible measures can be identified, certain projected impacts may become mitigated. If no additional feasible measures can be identified, the projected impacts would remain unmitigated, and would therefore be considered unavoidable adverse impacts (see Chapter 23, "Unavoidable Adverse Impacts").

In addition, as noted in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the South Site could contain either hotel or office use. The EIS analyses are generally based on hotel use as a more conservative assumption and the transportation analyses presented in Chapter 14, "Transportation" assumed a 229,700-gsf hotel use. However, because of different travel patterns between the hotel and office uses, developing the South Site with office instead of a hotel has the potential to result in additional significant adverse transportation impacts which will be explored between the DEIS and FEIS. Mitigation measures will be explored in coordination with the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) to mitigate any additional significant adverse transportation impacts. The proposed mitigation measures are subject to review and approval by the NYCDOT, and if certain proposed mitigation measures are deemed infeasible by NYCDOT, alternate measures will be explored. If no other alternate mitigation is identified, the impacted locations would be unmitigated.

As previously discussed, the neighborhood character of the study area is partly defined by existing relatively high traffic volumes, particularly along major roadways including West Street/Route 9A and the arterial streets leading to the Holland Tunnel. Therefore, while the proposed project could result in unmitigatable traffic impacts at up to five locations, the increased traffic resulting from the proposed project would not represent a significant change to the existing neighborhood character.

CONSIDERATION OF MODERATE EFFECTS

The *CEQR Technical Manual* states that even if a project does not have the potential to result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character in a certain technical area, the project may result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that may cumulatively affect an area's neighborhood character. A moderate effect is generally defined as an effect considered reasonably close to a significant adverse impact threshold for a particular technical area. The proposed actions would not result in adverse effects that are reasonably close to significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; urban design and visual resources; historic and cultural resources; or noise.

As discussed in Chapter 7, "Shadows," the proposed project would generate incremental shadows on Hudson River Park, which could be considered a moderate effect. However, the shadows analysis concluded that overall these effects would not adversely impact the usability of study area open space resources. Thus, even when considered together with impacts in other categories, the moderate effects due to shadows would not constitute a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character. Moreover, as noted above, the proposed transfer of floor area from Pier 40 to the development site under the Special Hudson River Park District would provide critical funding for repairs to Pier 40, ensuring its continued operation as a public open space amenity and important defining feature of the character of the neighborhood.

CONCLUSION

This preliminary assessment identified no potential significant adverse impacts to the study area's neighborhood character resulting from the proposed actions. Therefore a detailed neighborhood character analysis is not necessary. Overall, development resulting from the proposed actions would be consistent with the study area's mixed-use neighborhood character, and would enliven the development site by bringing a 24-hour population to this location. In addition, the transfer of floor area from Pier 40 to the development site would provide critical funding for repairs to Pier 40, ensuring its continued operation as a public open space resource for the neighborhood. ✷