Chapter 15: Neighborhood Character

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses the potential for the proposed Lenox Hill Hospital (LHH) Redevelopment project (the Proposed Project) to result in significant adverse impacts to the neighborhood character of the area surrounding the Project Site. As defined in the 2021 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, neighborhood character is a mixture of various elements that give a neighborhood its distinct "personality." These elements may include a neighborhood's land use, socioeconomic conditions, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, 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.

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," Lenox Hill Hospital (the Applicant) is requesting a series of discretionary actions from the City Planning Commission (CPC) to facilitate the enlargement and modernization of the existing LHH on Block 1411, Lots 1 and 113 (Projected Development Site 1), bounded by Park and Lexington Avenues and East 76th and East 77th Streets in Manhattan. The Proposed Project would include a new building fronting on Lexington Avenue, as well as additions and modifications to portions of the existing hospital complex on Projected Development Site 1 and connections between the new hospital building and the renovated buildings. Two building envelopes are proposed, each of which would accommodate the Proposed Project's program. Envelope 1 would include a new approximately 771,000-gross-square-foot (gsf) building on Lexington Avenue and 56,000 gsf of additions to the existing hospital. Envelope 2 would include a new approximately 867,000-gsf building and 8,000 gsf of additions to the existing hospital. With the existing buildings to remain, the overall gross floor area of the Proposed Project on Projected Development Site 1 would be approximately 1.4 million gsf with either envelope. The program, project population (staff, patients, visitors), site access, zoning actions, and construction duration would be the same for both Envelope 1 and Envelope 2.

This Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) also considers the as-of-right development of a building with hospital support functions at 111-115 East 77th Street between Lexington and Park Avenues (Block 1412, Lots 9, 10, and 11) (Projected Development Site 1a) as part of the Proposed Project. It would be connected to Projected Development Site 1 by a utility tunnel under East 77th Street. In addition, the Applicant proposes to provide improvements to the 77th Street subway station of the Lexington Avenue (No. 6) line, providing Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access to the downtown platform and improving sidewalk conditions in the immediate area.

This analysis of neighborhood character identifies the defining features of the neighborhood and evaluates whether the Proposed Project has the potential to affect the 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, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise), as analyzed elsewhere in the EIS. 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. 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 400-foot study area is primarily defined by its mix of institutional, residential, and ground floor retail uses, as well as the diverse urban and architectural context of the area. The Proposed Project would reinforce the existing institutional nature of the Project Site and neighborhood and would contribute to the mix of land uses in the area and the diverse urban and architectural context. Benefits of the Proposed Project would include the activation of the streetscape, the strengthening of an existing neighborhood community facility institution, and improvements to the local subway station. 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, 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 have a significant adverse impact in one of these areas or a combination of moderate effects in 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 EIS, the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; open space; urban design and visual resources; transportation; or noise. However, the Proposed Project with either Envelope 1 or Envelope 2 would result in a potentially significant adverse shadow impact to the vegetation of the church garden owned and maintained by the Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist located across East 77th Street from Projected Development Site 1 and abutting Projected Development Site 1a. Therefore, 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 similar to the land use study area that extends 400 feet from the Project Site.

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. 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 should be examined. If that examination determines that one of the defining features of the neighborhood's character would be significantly affected, then a significant impact may occur.

C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

DEFINING FEATURES

The area within 400 feet of the Project Site is generally bounded by East 79th Street to the north, the midblock between East 74th and 75th Streets to the south, the midblock east of Lexington Avenue to the east, and the midblock west of Park Avenue to the west. 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.

In terms of land use, the study area is primarily a mix of institutional, residential, and retail uses. Aside from LHH, which itself is a prominent institutional use at the heart of the Lenox Hill neighborhood, other notable community facilities are primarily religious institutions and schools. These include St. Jean Baptiste Church, Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist, Temple Israel Synagogue, the Allen-Stevenson School, the Ramaz Upper School within the Morris and Ida Newman Educational Center, the Hewitt School, and St. Jean Baptiste High School. Looking beyond the study area, other institutional uses located on Manhattan's Upper East Side include Mount Sinai Hospital, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, The Rockefeller University, New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center, the Hospital for Special Surgery, and the Manhattan Eye, Ear, and Throat Hospital.

There are also residential uses (including multifamily elevator buildings and townhouses), with many buildings that include ground floor neighborhood retail uses (such as cafes, shops, and restaurants) or community facility uses (such as medical offices and laboratories). There is a mix

of older and smaller townhouses and large apartment buildings, particularly along Lexington Avenue and Park Avenue where some buildings have large footprints and wide street frontages. Smaller buildings are generally located between East 77th and East 79th Streets and on the east side of Lexington Avenue.

Public open space in the surrounding area is limited and includes the Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist garden at 103 East 77th Street and the Park Avenue Malls. The church garden occupies a narrow lot between the church building and Projected Development Site 1a. There are several trees in tree pits, additional plantings and small benches along the outer walls of the garden, and planted areas with dense, low plantings.

There are no known or potential historic architectural resources on the Project Site. The buildings on the Project Site are located outside the boundaries of the Upper East Side Historic District and Expansion and have not been found eligible as historic resources.

There are four known architectural resources located in the 400-foot study area:

- Within the study area, the Upper East Side Historic District includes properties along Park Avenue, on the north and south sides of East 78th Street between Lexington and Madison Avenues, on the south side of East 76th Street east of Park Avenue, and on the north and south sides of East 75th Street between Lexington and Madison Avenues. Study area buildings in the Upper East Side Historic District Expansion include three- and four-story residential buildings with ground floor commercial uses on Lexington Avenue; a row of five houses at 168-176 East 75th Street that have gabled roofs and dormer windows with garage openings at the ground floor; and an 11-story early 20th century apartment house on Lexington Avenue.
- St. Jean Baptiste Church and Rectory are at the southeast corner of Lexington Avenue and East 76th Street. The Church was designed in the Italian Renaissance style and is clad in stone, with a Corinthian portico flanked by bell towers, and a large dome. The rectory along East 76th Street is a five-story brick building adjacent to the church to the east.
- The Ardsley Garage at 165 East 77th Street was designed as an automobile garage. It is a five-story structure clad in terra cotta, with ornament in the Viennese Secessionist and Arts and Crafts styles. The façade is detailed with end bays that project above the roof; the bays are bridged by a decorative frieze. The parapets of the projecting bays are capped with roundels that contain depictions of spoked wheels, which reference the use of the building as a garage.
- The five houses at 157, 159, 161, and 163-165 East 78th Street, which were constructed in 1861, are primarily three stories and clad in brick, although the building at 157 East 78th Street has an upper floor with a mansard roof, and the western two buildings, combined into one residence, has a modern rooftop addition.

The urban design of the Project Site and surrounding area is characterized by a mix of building heights, styles, and materials. Projected Development Site 1 occupies the entire block bounded by Lexington and Park Avenues and East 76th and East 77th Streets. It contains ten buildings that were built between the late 1800s and 1975 and range in height from three stories (approximately 43 feet tall) to 14 stories (approximately 200 feet tall). Projected Development Site 1a includes three approximately 40-foot-tall, three-story buildings that are located midblock at 111, 113, and 115 East 77th Street, across from Projected Development Site 1. Each of the three buildings was built in the late 19th century and has a small, approximately 25-foot-wide by 100-foot-deep footprint. The buildings were built in the late 19th century and are currently owned and used by LHH for support services for the hospital.

The study area is generally characterized by mid-rise buildings (generally buildings with 6 to 15 stories) and high-rise buildings (generally buildings with more than 15 stories). The mid-rise and high-rise buildings are primarily residential buildings that generally have large footprints and include both older and newer buildings. Mid-rise buildings are located on both the avenues and the east-west streets, with low-rise, older rowhouses and small apartment buildings located on the east-west streets and low-rise older buildings with ground floor commercial located on Lexington Avenue. Many buildings on Lexington Avenue have ground floor retail. Most high-rise buildings are concentrated on or near Lexington and Park Avenues, and on East 79th Street. Institutional buildings in the study area include schools, churches, and synagogues.

The street pattern follows the Manhattan grid, with wider avenues (Lexington Avenue and Park Avenue) extending north-south and narrower streets extending east-west, with the exception of East 79th Street, which is a wider east-west street in the northern part of the study area. The blocks within the study area are rectangular in shape, with the shorter ends of the blocks along the avenues and the longer sides along the east-west streets. Street furniture within the study area includes street lamps (modern, bishop's crook, and mast arm), bus stop signs, fire hydrants, entrances to the 77th Street subway station at the corners of Lexington Avenue, newspaper boxes and stands, mailboxes, bike racks, and sidewalk fences. Subway station entrance stairways are located at each corner of Lexington Avenue and East 77th Street. Citi Bike docking stations are located at the southwest corner of East 76th Street and Park Avenue and the southwest corner of East 77th Street and Third Avenue. Several outdoor dining sheds are located on Lexington Avenue.

None of the buildings on the Project Site are architectural or visual resources. There is one visual resource in the study area—the St. Jean Baptiste Church. The building's most visually prominent elements are its pedimented portico that is topped with stone and copper paired bell towers and a central dome set back from Lexington Avenue. Views north and south on Lexington Avenue include these visually prominent elements, though only the paired towers are visible from longer distances. Views are more limited on East 76th Street with buildings and street trees obscuring longer views.

Views on Lexington Avenue include a variety of building heights, forms, and massings. Views northeast from Lexington Avenue and East 77th Street include the approximately 377-foot-tall residential building at 1370 Third Avenue. Views on Park Avenue are characterized by the many large, masonry-clad apartment buildings and a few institutional buildings that are built to the sidewalk along Park Avenue. Another view corridor is East 79th Street, which is a wider street that provides long east-west views characterized by large, masonry-clad tall older apartment buildings.

The character of the area, like many neighborhoods in New York City (NYC), 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, monitored noise levels are moderate to high and reflect the level of vehicular activity on the adjacent streets. In terms of the CEQR criteria, the projected noise levels are largely in the "marginally unacceptable" category. 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

The Proposed Project would include a new building fronting on Lexington Avenue, as well as additions and modifications to portions of the existing hospital complex on Projected Development Site 1 and connections between the new hospital building and the renovated buildings. With Envelope 1, the new building would rise above its 195-foot-tall podium to a height of 436 feet. With Envelope 2 the building would rise to 395 feet, but to satisfy the proposed program, there would be additional building massing in the midblock (beyond 180 feet west of Lexington Avenue) that would rise to a height of 360 feet. As part of the Proposed Project, there would also be the as-of-right development of a building with hospital support functions at 111-115 East 77th Street between Lexington and Park Avenues on Projected Development Site 1a. It would be connected to Projected Development Site 1 by a utility tunnel under East 77th Street. In addition, the Applicant proposes to provide improvements to the 77th Street subway station of the Lexington Avenue (No. 6) line, providing ADA access to the downtown platform and improving sidewalk conditions in the immediate area. There would be no changes to other buildings in the study area with the Proposed Actions.

The Proposed Project would not result in a substantial change in the land use of the Projected Development Sites because it would continue the existing hospital-related uses. The Proposed Actions would not affect zoning regulations applicable to other sites in the study area. The Proposed Project would be consistent with the mix of institutional, residential, and retail uses in the area surrounding LHH. In addition, the Proposed Project would be consistent with, and supportive of, the public policies applicable to the Projected Development Sites and the study area.

As described in Chapter 4, "Shadows," while the Proposed Project with either Envelope 1 or Envelope 2 would result in new shadow on certain areas of the Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist garden's plantings and tree canopy and would likely cause significant adverse impacts to those resources, the character and look and feel of the garden—that of a shady, intimate oasis suitable for passive recreation—would not change as a result of the Proposed Project. In terms of use, it would continue to serve as intended as a small open space for quiet relaxation and contemplation. For these reasons, the shadow impact on vegetation would not have a significant adverse effect on neighborhood character. Similarly, this would not constitute a significant adverse open space impact because the additional shadow would not significantly affect the use of the garden and there would be no displacement or alteration of the open space.

The assessment detailed in Chapter 7, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," concluded that the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts to urban design or visual resources. Like the existing hospital buildings, the new hospital building with either Envelope 1 or Envelope 2 would be sited within the context of buildings with different massings, heights, and forms that have been built over time as the neighborhood has changed.

While the new hospital building's overall height would be taller than other study area buildings, the new hospital building with either Envelope 1 or Envelope 2 would be compatible with the variety of building heights in the study area. In addition, the new hospital building would activate the sidewalks adjacent to Projected Development Site 1 through an anticipated arcade and widened sidewalks, glazing at the ground floor providing transparency into the new building, and an improved subway station entrance at the corner of East 77th Street and Lexington Avenue. Furthermore, the midblock portion of both Envelope 1 and Envelope 2 would have a base height that would be compatible with the lower rise buildings across East 76th and East 77th Streets. While the massing of the midblock portion with Envelope 2 would be taller than the midblock

massing with Envelope 1, in both scenarios, the new hospital building would be compatible with tall buildings in the study area. The additions and modifications to the buildings on the western portion of Projected Development Site 1 with either Envelope 1 or Envelope 2 would not substantially alter existing massings and would provide transparency and activate uses on the adjacent sidewalks on Park Avenue while maintaining the urban design character of the building form. The smaller new building on Projected Development Site 1a would be compliant with as-of-right zoning controls and would be consistent with the scale, form, and massing of nearby study area buildings. The Proposed Project would not adversely affect views of the St. Jean Baptiste Church, nor would it alter significant view corridors. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse impact on urban design or visual resources from the Proposed Project, and there also would be no significant adverse effect on neighborhood character.

As noted above and as described in the relevant chapters of this EIS, the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; open space; urban design and visual resources; transportation; or noise. The combination of potential 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, the strengthening of an existing neighborhood community facility institution, and access improvements to the local subway station. Overall, the Proposed Project would be compatible with the defining characteristics of the study area's neighborhood character and would not result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character. ✷