Chapter 10: Neighborhood Character

A. INTRODUCTION

Neighborhood character is an amalgam of the many components that give an area its distinctive personality. These components can include land use; street layout; scale, type, and style of development; historic features; patterns and volumes of traffic; noise levels; and other physical or social characteristics that help define a community. However, not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements.

In terms of neighborhood character—both on the development site and in the surrounding neighborhood—this chapter discusses existing conditions, the future without the proposed project in 2014 (the "No Action" condition), and the probable impacts of the proposed project. In accordance with the approach outlined in Chapter 2, "Procedural and Analytical Framework," this chapter considers a future No Action condition in which the development site is redeveloped with an as-of-right ("No Action") building that conforms to existing C6-6 and C6-4.5 zoning.

As described elsewhere in this EIS, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts to land use, historic resources, urban design and visual resources, socioeconomic conditions, or noise. Significant adverse impacts on traffic and pedestrian conditions have been identified. Overall, while the development site would be more intensely developed in the future with the proposed project, the character of the surrounding neighborhood would not be affected. The neighborhood would continue to be defined by a level of intense activity that reflects the area's midtown location and its predominant uses as a transportation hub, a major city destination, and a vibrant business district. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER COMPONENTS

According to the 2001 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when an action would exceed preliminary thresholds in any one of the following areas of technical analysis: land use, urban design and visual resources, cultural resources, socioeconomic conditions, traffic and pedestrians, or noise. Key components of neighborhood character addressed in this chapter include:

- *Land Use.* Development resulting from a proposed action would have the potential to change neighborhood character when it introduces a new, incompatible land use, conflicts with land use policy or other public plans for the area, changes land use character, or causes significant land use impacts.
- *Urban Design and Visual Resources.* In developed areas, urban design changes have the potential to affect neighborhood character by introducing substantially different building bulk, form, size, scale, or arrangement. Urban design changes may also affect block forms, street patterns, or street hierarchies as well as streetscape elements such as streetwalls, and land-

scaping. Visual resource changes have the potential to affect neighborhood character by directly changing visual features, such as unique and important public view corridors and vistas, or public visual access to such features.

- *Historic Resources.* According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, when an action would result in substantial direct changes to a historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a resource, or when a historic resources analysis identifies a significant impact in this category, there is a potential to affect neighborhood character.
- *Socioeconomic Conditions:* Changes in socioeconomic conditions have the potential to affect neighborhood character when they result in substantial direct or indirect displacement or addition of population, employment, or businesses; or substantial differences in population or employment density.
- *Traffic and Pedestrians:* Changes in traffic and pedestrian conditions can affect neighborhood character in a number of ways. For traffic to have an effect on neighborhood character, it must be a contributing element to the character of the neighborhood (either by its absence or its presence), and it must change substantially as a result of the action. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, such substantial traffic changes can include: changes in level of service (LOS) to C or below; change in traffic patterns; change in roadway classifications; change in vehicle mixes; substantial increases in traffic volumes on residential streets; or significant traffic impacts, as identified in that technical analysis. Regarding pedestrians, when a proposed action would result in substantially different pedestrian activity and circulation, it has the potential to affect neighborhood character.
- *Noise*. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, for an action to affect neighborhood character in regard to noise, it would need to result in a significant adverse noise impact and a change in acceptability category, as defined by New York City Environmental Protection (NYCDEP) external noise exposure standards.

This chapter's impact analysis focuses primarily on changes in the technical areas discussed above, since changes in these technical areas are most likely to affect neighborhood character. The *CEQR Technical Manual* states that several moderate changes, none of which rises to the level of a significant impact, could combine to create a significant impact on neighborhood character. Therefore, where appropriate, the effects of changes are also looked at to determine whether, taken together, they would result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. This analysis focuses mainly on the area within 400 feet to a ¼-mile of the development site.

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

DEVELOPMENT SITE

The development site consists of the western half of the block bounded by West 33rd Street to the north, the Avenue of the Americas (Sixth Avenue) to the east, West 32nd Street to the south, and Seventh Avenue to the west. The development site is occupied by the Hotel Pennsylvania, which contains approximately 1,700 hotel rooms and approximately 46,400 gross square feet (gsf) of ground-floor retail space. The Hotel Pennsylvania is eligible for listing on the State/National Registers of Historic Places (S/NR-E).

STUDY AREA

The area surrounding the development site is very densely developed and contains several major city destinations—Pennsylvania Station, Madison Square Garden, and Macy's. Commercial office and ground-floor retail uses dominate the neighborhood, but there are also transportation, residential, institutional, and open space land uses. Transportation uses are limited to the below-grade Pennsylvania Station and a small number of surface parking lots and parking garages. Herald and Greeley Squares are two triangular public open spaces formed by the intersections of Sixth Avenue and Broadway and the east-west streets. The landscaping of these areas provides visual relief within the otherwise fully developed streetscape. Residential uses are scattered throughout the study area but are predominantly located in mixed-use buildings along Sixth and Eighth Avenues. Manufacturing and industrial uses are interspersed in the portion of the study area between West 27th and West 31st Street.

Building sizes in the study area range from small 2-, 3-, and 4-story tenement-style buildings, to former loft spaces, typically of 12 to 16 stories, to large-scale buildings, such as One Penn Plaza and the Nelson Tower. Smaller structures are typically in the mid-block, with larger buildings located on the avenues. Although most of the existing building stock was constructed in the early 20th century and is faced in brick and masonry, no one architectural style dominates the area. Most buildings in the study area have retail uses on their ground floors, providing a relatively continuous level of visual interest at the street. A number of buildings within the study area have a large bulk, occupying their entire blockfront and extending far into the midblock. In addition, most buildings fully occupy their zoning lots.

The area contains a mix of older and newer buildings. Of the older buildings, there are a number that are known and potential architectural resources. Within 400 feet of the development site, known architectural resources include the 26-story former Equitable Life Assurance Company Building (S/NR-eligible, New York City Landmarks [NYCL]-eligible) at Seventh Avenue between West 31st and 32nd Streets; the former 31-story Governor Clinton Hotel (S/NR-eligible, NYCL-eligible) on Seventh Avenue; the Church of St. Francis of Assisi complex (S/NR-eligible, NYCL-eligible) on West 31st Street; and the R. H. Macy and Company Store (NHL, S/NR, NYCL-eligible). A small portion of the Garment Center Historic District is also located within the study area. Potential architectural resources include the 25-story Greeley Square Building, the 17-story Greeley Arcade Building, and the 16-story Cuyler Building.

One of the more notable features of the study area's neighborhood character is its large-scale advertising signage, which is particularly prominent at the southwest and southeast corners of West 34th Street and Seventh Avenue, where multi-story vinyl signage and billboards have been erected above low-scale buildings and affixed to the sides of larger buildings. Other examples include the projection television display board at the southwest corner of the Macy's complex; the approximately 4-story red shopping bag sign at the southeast corner of the Macy's complex; the large LCD display board in front of Two Penn Plaza for Madison Square Garden; and a number of other projecting and illuminated signs throughout the area, mainly for retail uses. There are also prominent illuminated signs at the entrances to subway and train stations at West 34th Street and Seventh Avenue.

Because the topography of the area is relatively flat, view corridors are generally long, but are limited by the narrow width of the side streets and the height of their surrounding buildings. Therefore, the most extensive view corridors in the study area are along Seventh Avenue and West 34th Street. The Hotel Pennsylvania is not visually prominent in surrounding views and it is not considered to be a visual resource. Visual resources that can be seen from the sidewalks

adjacent to the development site include: the 45-story Nelson Tower at the northwest corner of West 34th Street and Seventh Avenue, which is notable within this area because of its tall, slender central tower; the two-level copper skybridge spanning West 32nd Street between the Cuyler Building and the former Gimbel Brothers department store (now the Manhattan Mall); and the spire of the Empire State Building.

Located in Midtown, the study area is developed in the typical Manhattan grid pattern with wide avenues running north-south and narrow streets running east-west, creating long, rectangular blocks. The superblock occupied by Madison Square Garden and Two Penn Plaza, and below them Pennsylvania Station, interrupts this pattern, as does Broadway, which cuts across the grid at an angle northeast of the study area. Sixth and Seventh Avenues and West 34th Street carry a significant amount of pedestrian and vehicular traffic through the study area. West 32nd Street also carries a fair amount of pedestrian traffic to Pennsylvania Station.

As described in detail in Chapter 16, "Traffic and Parking," although most intersections in the traffic study area operate at overall acceptable levels during the four analysis peak hours, individual approach movements at numerous intersections operate at mid-LOS D or worse. Overall, of the 135 approach movements analyzed, 27 approach movements at 20 intersections operate at mid-LOS D or worse in the AM peak hour; 18 approach movements at 16 intersections operate at mid-LOS D or worse in the midday peak hour; 23 approach movements at 19 intersections operate at mid-LOS D or worse in the PM peak hour; and 18 approach movements at 17 intersections operate at mid-LOS D or worse in the Saturday midday peak hour.

As described in detail in Chapter 17, "Transit and Pedestrians," of the 123 transit station elements analyzed, congested operating conditions (LOS D or worse) occur at 10 stairways and 8 control area elements during the AM peak period and 13 stairways and 6 control area elements during the PM peak period.

Of the 167 street-level pedestrian elements analyzed (78 sidewalks, 42 corners, and 47 crosswalks), congested operating conditions (LOS D or worse) occur at six sidewalks during the AM peak period, nine sidewalks during the weekday midday peak period, 22 sidewalks during the PM peak period and five sidewalks during the Saturday midday peak period. Congested operating conditions occur at 15 corners during the AM peak period, 19 corners during the weekday midday peak period, 27 corners during the PM peak period, and 18 corners during the Saturday midday peak period. Congested operating conditions occur at 22 crosswalks during the AM peak period, 23 crosswalks during the weekday midday peak period, 29 crosswalks during the PM peak period and 20 crosswalks during the Saturday midday peak period.

Noise levels in the area are moderate to relatively high and reflect the level of vehicular activity on the adjacent streets. In terms of CEQR noise exposure guidelines, during the hour with the highest measured noise levels, based on the measured L_{10} values, existing noise levels at the locations where noise was measures (see Chapter 19, "Noise") are in the "marginally unacceptable" category.

Overall, the area is characterized by a level of intense activity that reflects the area's midtown location. It is a transportation hub (Pennsylvania Station), a major city destination (Macy's, Madison Square Garden), and a vibrant business district (office uses).

C. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT

As described in greater detail in Chapter 2, in the No Action condition the development site will be developed with a No Action building. In addition, as described below, other projects are expected to be completed in the study area.

DEVELOPMENT SITE

The No Action building will consist of approximately 1.6 million gsf of which approximately 1.3 million gsf will be office use, 40,600 gsf will be retail use, 202,000 gsf will be mechanical space, and 35,438 gsf will be lobby area and amenity space. Accessory parking for up to 100 vehicles would be located below grade. The building will have a full block base and three floors of office use above, rising to a height of 85 feet. The office tower will be set back above the podium and will rise to a total roof height of 581 feet, including mechanical space.

Development of the No Action building on the development site would transform this site from a site containing hotel use to a site containing office and retail uses. These uses would be consistent with the mix of uses in the surrounding area. The demolition of the 22-story, brick- and stone-clad Hotel Pennsylvania will remove an S/NR-eligible resource from the development site. The redevelopment of the development site with a 34-story building with a glass curtain wall will alter the context of some of the nearby architectural resources, particularly those closest to the development site. Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) Level II documentation will be undertaken by the project sponsor prior to the hotel's demolition to record the history and appearance of the Hotel Pennsylvania. The HABS documentation will be submitted to an appropriate public repository.

STUDY AREA

As described in Chapter 3, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," in the future without the proposed project, a number of new projects are expected to be completed by 2014 within ¼-mile of the project. These developments will introduce similar land uses to those currently found within the study area, but many will be developed at higher densities. These projects will be in keeping with the existing mixed-use character of this part of Midtown and generally reflect the area's overall pattern of land use and urban design.

With the introduction of these projects, traffic volumes will increase, and additional approach movements at various intersections will operate at mid-LOS D or worse compared to existing 2008 conditions. Specifically, an additional eight approach movements during the weekday AM peak hour, three approach movements during the weekday midday peak hour, six approach movements during the PM peak hour, and three approach movements during the Saturday midday peak hour will operate at mid-LOS D or worse compared to the existing 2008 conditions.

In addition, pedestrian volumes will increase and additional transit station elements will operate at mid-LOS D or worse compared to existing 2008 conditions. An additional five stairways during the AM peak period, as well as three stairways and one control area element during the PM peak period, will operate at congested conditions.

The increase in pedestrian volume will also cause deterioration in operating conditions on street-level elements. For sidewalks, an additional two sidewalks during the AM peak period, six sidewalks during the weekday midday peak period, and nine sidewalks during the PM peak period will operate at congested conditions. Likewise, an additional six corners during the AM peak period, six corners during the weekday midday peak period, two corners during the PM

peak period, and two corners during the Saturday midday peak period will operate at LOS D or worse. For crosswalks, two crosswalks during the AM peak period, three crosswalks during the weekday midday peak period, three crosswalks during the PM peak period, and two crosswalks during the Saturday midday peak period will operate at LOS D or worse.

With the No Action building, the increase in $L_{eq(1)}$ noise levels would be less than 1 dBA for all the analysis periods at all three receptor sites. At one location (West 32nd Street between Seventh Avenue and Sixth Avenue) for the Saturday midday period, noise levels would decrease slightly because of a minor decrease in traffic volumes on West 32nd Street due to a loss of hotel and retail uses for the No Action condition. Changes of these magnitudes would be barely perceptible and insignificant, and they would be below the CEQR threshold for a significant adverse impact. In terms of CEQR Noise Exposure Guidelines, noise levels at all three receptor sites would remain in the "marginally unacceptable" category.

Overall, the character of the neighborhood would continue to be characterized by a level of intense activity that reflects the area's midtown location and its predominant uses as a transportation hub, a major city destination, and a vibrant business district.

D. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

DEVELOPMENT SITE

Development of either the Single-Tenant Office Scenario or the Multi-Tenant Office Scenario on the development site would result in the same mix of uses that will be developed on the development site in the future without the proposed project—specifically commercial office use. While both scenarios would result in a more intensive use on the development site, the proposed land use would not differ from the No Action condition. Furthermore, the proposed scenarios would result in land uses that would be similar to the uses found within the surrounding area. As described in "Existing Conditions," the area surrounding the project site is defined by high-density commercial buildings, many of which contain ground-floor retail. In the No Action condition, additional commercial developments will be constructed in the area immediately surrounding the project site. Therefore, the Single-Tenant Office Scenario and the Multi-Tenant Office Scenario would not result in any significant adverse impact to land use on the development site.

Both scenarios would result in significant upgrades to existing subway infrastructure.

Compared with the No Action building, the proposed project (either scenario) would not result in significant adverse impacts on historic resources since the Hotel Pennsylvania will be removed in the No Action condition. HABS Level II documentation would be undertaken by the project sponsor prior to the hotel's demolition to record the history and appearance of the Hotel Pennsylvania. This commitment would be set forth in a Restrictive Declaration. The HABS documentation would be submitted to an appropriate public repository.

STUDY AREA

Like the No Action condition, with either the Single-Tenant Office Scenario or the Multi-Tenant Office Scenario, the proposed project would alter the context of nearby historic resources by demolishing the masonry-faced 22-story (268-foot-tall) Hotel Pennsylvania and redeveloping the development site with a new tall building with a contemporary steel and glass curtain wall design. As with the No Action condition, the proposed project would result in a building that

would be taller than the existing Hotel Pennsylvania building. However, like the No Action project, the development of either the Single-Tenant Office Scenario building or the Multi-Tenant Office Scenario building would also be built in the context of both older and newer buildings that vary greatly in height, form, and materials. Buildings in the study area already comprise a variety of taller and shorter older, masonry-faced buildings and taller newer buildings with both steel and glass curtain walls and masonry cladding. With either scenario, the proposed actions would result in the addition of a new tall building to the variety of taller and shorter buildings in the immediately surrounding study area and the larger context of Midtown.

Like the No Action building, with either the Single-Tenant Office Scenario or the Multi-Tenant Office Scenario, some views south on Seventh Avenue from the southern portion of the Garment Center Historic District would include views of the proposed project. However, these changes would not be considered adverse due to the existing varied context of the study area architectural resources. Additionally, the proposed project would not obstruct significant views of any architectural resource, or adversely alter the visual setting of any resource in the study area.

With the proposed uses, the project would result in an increase in vehicular traffic. Specifically, an additional one approach movement during the weekday AM peak hour, one approach movement during the weekday midday peak hour, five approach movements during the PM peak hour, and four approach movements during the Saturday midday peak hour operate at mid-LOS D or worse compared to the 2014 No Action condition. Significant adverse traffic impacts were identified for 15 approach movements at 13 intersections during the weekday AM peak hour, 11 approach movements at 11 intersections during the weekday midday peak hour, 20 approach movements at 16 intersections during the weekday PM peak hour, and 12 approach movements at 12 intersections during the Saturday midday peak hour.

As part of the proposed project, significant mass transit improvements are planned, including the re-opening and renovating of the pedestrian passageway under the south side of West 33rd Street. In addition, both scenarios would improve several subway stairways and control areas serving the Seventh Avenue line, the Sixth Avenue line, the Broadway line, and PATH. These mass transit improvements help to improve congested operating conditions on one stairway during the AM peak period and two stairways during the PM peak period. One additional stairway, however, during the AM peak period operates at LOS D or worse.

The proposed project also causes deterioration in pedestrian street-level operating conditions. For sidewalks, one additional sidewalk during the weekday midday peak period and three sidewalks during the Saturday midday peak period operate at LOS D or worse. For crosswalks, one crosswalk during the AM peak period and one crosswalk during the PM peak period operate at LOS D or worse.

In the future with the proposed project, the increase in $L_{eq(1)}$ noise levels would be less than 1 dBA for all the analysis periods at all three receptor sites. Changes of these magnitudes would be barely perceptible and insignificant, and they would be below the CEQR threshold for a significant adverse impact. In terms of CEQR Noise Exposure Guidelines, noise levels at receptors from 1 through 3 would remain in the "marginally unacceptable" category. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse noise impacts from the proposed project.

Overall, while the development site would be more intensely developed in the future with the proposed project, the character of the surrounding neighborhood would not be affected. The neighborhood would continue to be defined by a level of intense activity that reflects the area's midtown location and its predominant uses as a transportation hub, a major city destination, and a vibrant business district. ✷