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Neighborhood Character

This chapter considers how the Proposed Actions would affect neighborhood character, which is defined as the elements of the environment that combine to create the context and feeling of a neighborhood.

Introduction

This analysis of neighborhood character follows the guidelines set forth in the *2021 City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*. As defined within the manual, neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give neighborhoods a distinct "personality," including, land use, socioeconomic conditions, community facilities and services, open space resources, historic and cultural resources, urban design and visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise. Not all these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements. A neighborhood character assessment under CEQR first identifies the defining features of the neighborhood and then evaluates whether the project has the potential to affect these defining features, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical analysis areas. Thus, to determine the effects of a proposed project on neighborhood character, the salient features of neighborhood character are considered together. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare and occur under unusual circumstances. Moreover, a significant adverse impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood's character is not automatically equivalent to a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character, but, rather, serves as an indication that neighborhood character should be examined.

This section includes a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character; the assessment was prepared in conformance with the *CEQR Technical Manual* using information from the technical analyses presented in other relevant chapters of this EIS.

As described in **Chapter 1, Project Description**, the Proposed Project would consist of the redevelopment of the southern 4.75-acre portion of Manhattan Block 962, Lot 100 (the Development Site) located at 425 East 25th Street with approximately 2.19 million gross square feet (gsf) of state-of-the-art academic, healthcare, and Life Sciences space, as well as retail space and public realm improvements.

Principal Conclusions

The Proposed Project would not result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character. As outlined in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the assessment of neighborhood character is based on the analyses of other technical areas. The Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts in the technical areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; urban design and visual resources; shadows; or noise. The Proposed Project would result in impacts to historic and cultural resources, and transportation. Therefore, a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character is provided in the EIS. Regarding transportation, the assessment concludes that, while there would be increased transportation activity because of the Proposed Project, the resulting conditions would be similar to those seen in the urban neighborhoods defining the study area and would not result in density of activity or service conditions that would be out of character with the surrounding neighborhood. Regarding historic and cultural resources, the assessment concludes the affected architectural resource is not considered to be a defining feature of the study area's character. As such, the impacts to transportation and historic and cultural resources would not result in a neighborhood character impact.

Methodology

As indicated above, a neighborhood character assessment is generally needed, per the *CEQR Technical Manual*, when a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in certain technical areas (land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; community facilities and services; open space; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; shadows; transportation; or noise) or when the project may have moderate effects on several of the elements that define a neighborhood's character. A "moderate" effect is generally defined as an effect considered reasonably close to the significant adverse impact threshold for a particular technical analysis area.

In the absence of an impact on any of the relevant technical areas, a combination of moderate effects to the neighborhood could result in an impact to neighborhood character. A significant impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood's character is not necessarily equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character. Therefore, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally appropriate if a proposed project has the potential to result in any significant adverse impacts in the technical areas listed above. Examples of possible changes in those technical areas that could result in an adverse effect on neighborhood character, should those technical areas be defining features of the neighborhood, are as follows:

- **Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy:** If development resulting from a proposed action would conflict with surrounding uses, conflict with land use policy or other public plans for the area, or change land use character, neighborhood character could be affected.

- **Socioeconomic Conditions:** If a proposed action results in direct or indirect displacement or addition of population, employment, or businesses; or substantial differences in population or employment density, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Community Facilities and Services:** If a proposed action would displace or alter a community facility or increased demand on community facilities, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Open Space:** If an action would result in a reduction or displacement of an open space or result in additional population that would place a substantial demand on open space, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Historic and Cultural Resources:** If a proposed action would result in substantial direct changes to a historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a historic resource, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Urban Design and Visual Resources:** If a proposed action would result in substantially different building form, size, scale, or arrangement; block form, street pattern, or street hierarchy; streetscape elements; or substantial direct changes to a visual feature, such as unique and important public view corridors and vistas, or to public visual access to such a feature, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Shadows:** If a proposed project would cast an incremental shadow on sun-sensitive resources, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Transportation:** If a proposed project would result in a change in traffic patterns or would substantially increase traffic volumes on residential streets, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Noise:** If a proposed action would substantially increase noise levels in an area, neighborhood character could be affected.

A preliminary assessment of neighborhood character determines whether changes expected in other technical analysis areas may affect a defining feature of neighborhood character. As part of a neighborhood character analysis, the defining features of the neighborhood are identified and then a determination is made as to whether a project has the potential to adversely affect these defining features, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas. A neighborhood that has a more varied context is typically able to tolerate greater change without experiencing significant adverse impacts. If the assessment concludes that a proposed project has the potential to adversely affect defining features of a neighborhood, a detailed analysis is undertaken to determine whether the project would result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

The neighborhood character analysis draws from the technical assessments listed above. As recommended in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for the neighborhood character analysis is consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas assessed under CEQR that contribute to the defining elements of the neighborhood. As such, the study area for neighborhood character is consistent with the quarter-mile study area used for the analysis of land use, zoning, and public policy.

As detailed in the relevant chapters of this EIS, the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts in the technical areas of land use, zoning and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; urban design and visual resources; shadows; or noise. The Proposed Project would result in impacts to historic resources and transportation. Therefore, a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character is provided below. The analysis begins with the identification of the

defining features of the neighborhood and then assesses whether the Proposed Project would adversely affect those defining features within the framework of the above technical areas.

Preliminary Assessment

Defining Features of the Neighborhood

Overall, the neighborhood is defined by the following features:

Area Land Uses and Development Trends

The area within an approximate quarter-mile radius of the Development Site contains several distinct areas, distinguishable from each other by key characteristics that include land use, building bulk and density, and open space. Foremost among these areas is the Kips Bay Science District and First Avenue Health & Life Sciences Corridor in which the Development Site is located, and which contains a mix of hospitals, academic institutions, and Life Sciences uses. This area extends along First Avenue north of East 23rd Street and extending east to FDR Drive, and it includes large-scale campus type developments on large blocks, such as the Bellevue Hospital Center to the north of the Development Site and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs New York Harbor Healthcare System's Manhattan campus (U.S. Corbin VA Facility) to the south of the Development Site. These large-scale uses influence the street grid in the area. Bellevue Hospital Center occupies the superblock bounded by the demapped East 30th Street, FDR Drive, the demapped East 26th Street, and First Avenue, and the U.S. Corbin VA Facility occupies the western portion of the block spanning from East 23rd Street to East 25th Street. On the west side of First Avenue, the Kips Bay Science District and First Avenue Health & Life Sciences Corridor includes several NYU facilities and the existing Public Health Laboratory at 455 First Avenue, which is planned to be replaced by a new Life Sciences building of approximately 609,988 square feet. Other planned developments within the corridor include the Alexandria Center Phase II – North Tower project, a development of approximately 371,000 gsf of office and laboratory space to be constructed on the site of an existing surface parking lot. The First Avenue Health & Life Sciences Corridor has a notable lack of retail amenities.

To the west of the Kips Bay Science District and First Avenue Health & Life Sciences Corridor, neighborhood character is defined by a more mixed-use and varied pattern of development, ranging from large-scale multi-building residential developments along Second Avenue (e.g., Kips Bay Court) to lower scale residential buildings west of Second Avenue. There are two additional areas within the study area with distinct character—the Waterside Plaza area, to the east of the Development Site across FDR Drive, and Peter Cooper Village, south of East 23rd Street and east of First Avenue.

Street Grid and Open Spaces

Within the study area, historical development and the mix of uses influence the character of the street grid in the area, which distinguishes the area from other parts of Manhattan where the street grid is more regular.

Within the Kips Bay Science District and First Avenue Health & Life Sciences Corridor east of First Avenue, East 25th Street provides a connection, via the existing bridge over FDR Drive, to the communities at Waterside Towers and UN International School. The other streets either do not exist as they are part of a campus development (e.g., East 24th Street within the U.S. Corbin VA Facility,

East 27th Street within the Bellevue Hospital Center) or serve distinct functions such that pedestrian use of the streets is minimal (e.g., former East 26th Street, which serves as an exist for the service road that extends north-south along the west side of FDR Drive in this area, and East 28th Street, which provides vehicular service to the Bellevue Hospital Center and Alexandria Center). Exceptions include East 29th Street, which is a pedestrianized area that provides access to the Alexandria Center and East 25th Street, discussed above.

To the west of First Avenue, East 27th Street is pedestrianized between Second and First Avenues, East 28th Street is pedestrianized between Second Avenue and Mount Carmel Place, and East 24th Street is pedestrianized between Second Avenue and First Avenue.

Within the study area, there are two parks that contribute to neighborhood character. The first, located to the south of the Development Site across East 25th Street, is the 2.44-acre Asser Levy Playground, occupying the eastern portion of the U.S. Corbin VA Facility superblock. This facility includes outdoor fitness equipment, playground equipment, handball courts, basketball courts, and seating and also contains a New York City Landmark building (the Recreation Center). The second park—Bellevue South Park—is located to the west and north of the Development Site. This park is lined with trees and planter beds planted with shrubs and groundcovers. The park's mature tree canopy covers seating space, creating a serene environment shaded by foliage of well-established trees.

The eastern portion of the study area is defined by FDR Drive, a major parkway located to the east of the Development Site. As described in **Chapter 7, Urban Design and Visual Resources**, FDR Drive separates the historic Manhattan street grid from the East River Greenway and Waterside Plaza development and also separates the community from the East River waterfront. Additionally, heavy traffic along FDR Drive contributes to high existing noise levels in the area. Additionally, as the study area includes connections to major roadways, i.e., access to FDR Drive and the Queens Midtown Tunnel, there is prevalent congestion within the study area under existing conditions. In addition, New York City Department of Transportation (NYC DOT) is currently in the process of developing the Second Avenue Bus and Bike Lane Enhancements project which could result in changes to vehicular and pedestrian operations at intersections along Second Avenue.

Potential to Affect the Defining Features of the Neighborhood

Overall, the Proposed Project would not adversely affect the defining features of the neighborhood and in fact, would contribute to the defining features of the neighborhood by developing a new Life Sciences and education center along First Avenue, within the Kips Bay Science District and First Avenue Health & Life Sciences Corridor, consistent with the character of First Avenue's concentration of Life Sciences, academic, and medical institutions. In addition, the Proposed Project would incorporate 0.60 acre of high quality, publicly accessible open space, which would add to the neighborhood's open space resources. The Proposed Project would also deliver on a long-standing request from the community to improve the existing pedestrian bridge that crosses FDR Drive at East 25th Street, creating an ADA-accessible pedestrian pathway that connects to the waterfront and the communities at Waterside Towers and the United Nations International School.

While the Proposed Project is expected to increase activity to and from the Development Site, the site is very active under existing conditions due to the CUNY Brookdale dorms and campus on-site. The addition of Life Sciences and educational space introduced by the Proposed Project would be consistent with the existing defining features of the neighborhood.

Potential to Affect the Contributing Elements of Neighborhood Character

Land Use, Zoning, Public Policy

As described in **Chapter 2, Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy**, the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts on land use, zoning, or public policy in the quarter-mile study area. The Proposed Project would facilitate development that is well-integrated with current built conditions and the existing zoning framework within the study area. The proposed land uses would be consistent with existing land uses in the study area and would provide an extension of Life Sciences uses, supporting both the overall integration of the Proposed Project within the surrounding neighborhood, as well as the City's LifeSci Initiative. The proposed local retail space would provide retail space to an area that currently lacks retail amenities. The Proposed Project would incorporate high quality, publicly accessible open space and facilitate the future improvement of the pedestrian bridge over FDR Drive. Therefore, the defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to potential effects of the Proposed Actions on land use, zoning, and public policy, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

Socioeconomic Conditions

As discussed in **Chapter 3, Socioeconomic Conditions**, the Proposed Project would not introduce new economic activities to the study area, as the study area already has a well-established medical, research, educational, and institutional presence with over approximately 8.5 million gsf of medical, research, and educational space and approximately 10.8 million gsf of commercial space overall. The Educational Services sector accounts for approximately 41.4 percent of the total employment in the study area, and the Health Care and Social Assistance sector accounts for an additional approximately 35.0 percent. Therefore, the laboratory and educational facility development resulting from the Proposed Project would not constitute new economic activities in the study area that could substantially alter existing economic patterns; rather, the Proposed Project would strengthen the existing cluster of medical, research, and educational uses in Kips Bay. Therefore, the defining features of neighborhood character would not be adversely affected due to potential socioeconomic effects of the Proposed Actions, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

Open Space

As described in **Chapter 4, Open Space**, an analysis of indirect effects on non-residential open space ratios was conducted for a half-mile study area. The analysis determined that the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse effects on open space. Additionally, the Proposed Project would not have a direct impact on open space resources as the Proposed Project would not cause the loss of public open space, change the use of an open space so that it no longer serves just the same user population, limit public access to an open space, or result in increased noise or air pollutant emissions, odors, or shadows that would temporarily or permanently affect the usefulness of a public space. In fact, the Proposed Project would result in an increase of the passive open space ratio due to the introduction of the 0.60-acre open space at the Development Site and would provide improved connectivity to existing waterfront open space through the proposed pedestrian bridge.

Therefore, the defining features of neighborhood character would not be adversely affected due to potential open space-related effects of the Proposed Actions, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

Shadows

As discussed in **Chapter 5, Shadows,** the Proposed Project would result in new development that would cast incremental shadows within the vicinity of the study area. Based on a detailed analysis, it was concluded that the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts to public sunlight sensitive resources. Therefore, significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character due to shadows are not expected, and defining features of neighborhood character would not be adversely affected due to potential shadows-related effects of the Proposed Project, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

Historic and Cultural Resources

As discussed in **Chapter 6, Historic and Cultural Resources**, there are no archaeological concerns within the Development Site, and therefore the Proposed Project is not expected to result in significant adverse impacts to archeological resources. However, the Division for Historic Preservation of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) has indicated that the Development Site contains an eligible architectural resource for listing under the State and/or National Register of Historic Places (S/NRHP), the CUNY Hunter College Brookdale Campus, which is proposed to be demolished in order to construct the Proposed Project. Under the State Historic Preservation Act, demolition of a historic resource is an Adverse Impact that triggers the requirement for an Alternatives Analysis to identify alternatives that would avoid or minimize the Adverse Impact. As described in **Chapter 6**, the requested Alternatives Analysis is being prepared by the project sponsors. If the Alternatives Analysis determines that the Adverse Impact cannot be avoided or minimized, then mitigation measures will be developed in consultation with OPRHP and LPC and undertaken as part of the Proposed Project. However, if no mitigation measures are identified between DEIS and FEIS, this could result in a significant adverse Historic and Cultural Resources impact. As described in **Chapter 18, Mitigation**, if acceptable mitigation measures are identified, these measures will be stipulated in a Letter of Resolution to be developed by the project sponsors in conjunction with OPRHP and LPC. The potential significant adverse impact on Historic and Cultural Resources would not result in a Neighborhood Character impact, as the character of the study area is not defined by this particular architectural resource.

While the Proposed Project would result in the demolition of this S/NRHP-eligible architectural resource, no other historic or visual resource would be impacted by the Proposed Project. Since historic and cultural resources impacts are limited to just the Development Site, there would be no impact to other historic resources in the study area, nor the defining features of the neighborhood. Therefore, significant adverse impacts on historic and cultural resources would not result in a significant impact on neighborhood character.

Urban Design and Visual Resources

As discussed in **Chapter 7, Urban Design and Visual Resources**, the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts to urban design or visual resources within the study area. The Proposed Project would result in built forms and building types that are similar in height and bulk to the mid- to high-density institutional buildings that currently exist within the study area and the

design of the Proposed Project would provide varied building heights and setbacks that would create visual interest and enhance the pedestrian experience. The Proposed Project would provide an opportunity for public realm improvements in an area generally characterized by large-scale buildings and highway infrastructure. These improvements respond to long-standing community requests to create more high-quality accessible open space, provide better pedestrian accessibility, and improve vehicular circulation in the surrounding community. Additionally, the Proposed Project would not negatively affect views to visual resources located within the quarter-mile study area. Therefore, defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to potential impacts of the Proposed Project on urban design or visual resources, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

Transportation

As discussed in **Chapter 10, Transportation**, the Proposed Project is projected to result in significant adverse transportation impacts, including traffic impacts at area intersections, impacts at stairways at the 23rd Street and 28th Street subway stations, potential capacity shortfalls on the M23-SBS route, and impacts at certain sidewalks, crosswalks, and corners within the study area:

- *Traffic*. Of the 23 intersections analyzed, the Proposed Project would result in significant adverse traffic impacts at 15 intersections during the AM peak hour, 13 intersections during the midday peak hour, and eight intersections during the PM peak hour. Standard traffic capacity improvements typically implemented by NYC DOT, such as signal timing modifications, could potentially provide full or partial mitigation at some of the significantly impacted intersections. These mitigation measures are being explored, and will be studied further in conjunction with NYC DOT between the Draft and Final EIS.
- *Subways*. Of the five fare control areas and 21 stairways analyzed at the 23rd Street and 28th Street Stations, the Proposed Project would result in significant adverse impacts at eight stairways in the AM peak hour, and five stairways in the PM peak hour. Potential improvements that could mitigate the significant impacts could consist of widening of stairways, the practicability and feasibility of which will be evaluated in consultation with NYCT between the Draft and Final EIS.
- *Buses*. The Proposed Project would result in a capacity shortfall for the M23-SBS bus route during the AM and PM peak hours, to the M15 local and M34A-SBS bus routes during the AM peak hour and the M15-SBS bus route during the PM peak hour. Impacts to these bus routes could be mitigated with the addition of buses in the direction of the direction of travel that is impacted. The general policy of the NYCT it to provide additional bus service where demand warrants, taking into account financial and operational constraints.
- *Pedestrians*. Of the 61 pedestrian elements analyzed, the Proposed Project would result in significant adverse pedestrian impacts at nine pedestrian elements (four sidewalks, two crosswalks, and three corners) during the AM peak hour, five pedestrian elements (two sidewalks, one crosswalk, and two corners) during the midday peak hour, and five pedestrian elements (three sidewalks and two corners) during the PM peak hour. Potential improvements that could mitigate the significant impacts, such as widening of crosswalks or relocation of sidewalk or corner obstructions, are being explored and will be studied further in conjunction with NYC DOT between the Draft and Final EIS.

Of the traffic intersections and pedestrian elements that would remain unmitigated, most of them would operate under congested conditions in the future without the Proposed Actions. While there

would be increased transportation activity as a result of the Proposed Project, the resulting conditions would be similar to those seen in the urban neighborhoods defining the study area and would not result in density of activity or service conditions that would be out of character with the surrounding neighborhoods. As such, the transportation impacts associated with the Proposed Project would not be expected to result in substantial changes to neighborhood character, and therefore the defining features of neighborhood character would not be adversely affected because of Proposed Project on transportation, either along or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

Noise

As discussed in **Chapter 13, Noise**, based on noise measurements, vehicular traffic is the dominant source of noise at locations near the Development Site and noise levels range from marginally acceptable (on East 25th Street between First Avenue and FDR Drive, to marginally unacceptable (at locations on or closer to First Avenue, and along former East 26th Street between First Avenue and FDR Drive) to clearly unacceptable (at the eastern portion of the Development Site, closest to FDR Drive). The Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse noise impacts on existing noise-sensitive receptors and would not change noise characteristics in the neighborhood. Therefore, defining features of neighborhood character would not be adversely affected due to potential effects of the Proposed Project on noise, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.