A. INTRODUCTION

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

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when the action would exceed preliminary thresholds in any one of the following areas of technical analysis: land use, urban design, visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomic conditions, traffic, or noise. An assessment is also appropriate when an action would have moderate effects on several of the aforementioned areas. Potential effects on neighborhood character may include:

* Land Use: When development resulting from the proposed action would have the potential to change neighborhood character by introducing a new, incompatible land use; conflicting with land use policy or other public plans for the area; changing land use character; or resulting in 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, landscaping, curb cuts, and loading docks. 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: 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 levels 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 the 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 regards to noise, it would need to result in a significant adverse noise impact and a change in acceptability category.

This chapter examines neighborhood character in the area surrounding the project site and the action's effects on that character. The chapter's impact analysis focuses on changes to neighborhood character resulting from effects in the technical areas discussed above, since these effects are most likely to result in neighborhood character impacts. The analysis employs a study area encompassing the areas within a quarter-mile radius of the project site.

The analysis concludes that as a result of the proposed action, changes to the land use and urban design components of the project site would occur, as well as increases to traffic and pedestrian activity. However, these changes would not be adverse, as discussed below.

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project site comprises the western portion of the block bounded by W. 54th Street on the north, Tenth Avenue on the east, W. 53rd Street on the south, and Eleventh Avenue on the west. The site is located at 770 Eleventh Avenue in the Clinton section of Manhattan Community District 4 (Block 1082, Lot 1). The rectangular project site occupies the entire frontage along Eleventh Avenue and extends approximately 470.3 feet east toward (the entire block extends 800 feet between the avenues and approximately 200 feet between the streets). Until May 2007, the project site was occupied by a Verizon automotive service/vehicle storage facility. The western part of the site contained two 2-story brick buildings although most of the area was an open paved area. Following Verizon's move from the site, the applicant demolished the buildings used by Verizon and is proceeding with as-of-right excavation.

Adjacent to the project site, occupying the eastern portion of the block, is the AT&T Switching Center Building. It is a 457-foot tall, windowless building containing telephone equipment. The building covers virtually its entire lot and has a streetwall base equivalent to several stories on its three street frontages. Above the base, the building has setbacks and rises as a tower, with an antenna structure extending from the roof. It is among the tallest buildings in Clinton/Hells Kitchen.

The built environment within the neighborhood character study area consists of low, mid, and high rise buildings, paved areas, and open spaces. In addition to varying building heights, there are also a range of building types, with both high lot coverage streetwall buildings as well as tower-in-park developments. Principal study area uses include residential, mixed residential/commercial, commercial, transportation/utility, and institutional. The western edge of the study area is a waterfront area comprised of Hudson River Park areas, Pier 92, which is part of the passenger ship terminal, and Pier 94, which is occupied by the UnConvention Center, a trade show facility.

There are three historic resources within the study area. These include the former Saint Ambrose Roman Catholic Church, now Centro Maria, at 539 W. 54th Street, the former 53rd Street Industrial School, now known as the Old School, at 552 W. 53rd Street, and a building formerly known as The Emerson, now called The Flats, at 554 W. 54th Street. The NY State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has determined that these buildings are eligible for listing on the State and National Register of Historic Places (S/NR). The latter two are adjoining buildings, located across the street from the project site, and have been reconfigured into a single affordable housing development. Centro Maria is now a women's residence operated by an order of Catholic nuns and is also across the street from the project site.

The topography of the study area gradually slopes downward towards the Hudson River on the west. The study area is part of the Manhattan rectilinear street grid pattern, with wide avenues running north-south and narrow streets running east- west (apart from major cross-town streets such as W. 57th Street) with standard 800 foot by 200 foot blocks. An exception from the standard grid is Twelfth Avenue (Route 9A), a two-way boulevard running at the area's western edge parallel to the river's shoreline which creates blocks of varying lengths. The area is urban in character, with De Witt Clinton Park (5.8 acres) serving as a prominent feature given its location across the street from the project site.

The traffic study area is comprised of 16 intersections, extending from W. 57th Street and Twelfth Avenue on the northwest, W. 57th Street and Tenth Avenue on the northeast, and W. 51st Street and Eleventh Avenue on the south. Of these 16 intersections, 9, 7, 9, and 8 currently operate with substandard levels of service (LOS E or F or v/c ratio of 0.90 or higher) in the weekday AM, weekday midday, weekday PM, and Saturday midday peak hours, respectively. Further details and a summary of the delays and corresponding levels of service for the various lane group and approach movements during the four analysis periods are presented in Chapter 13, "Traffic and Parking."

In terms of pedestrian activity, the area surrounding the project site is not heavily traveled by pedestrians; therefore there is little or no congestion on sidewalks, corners, or crosswalks. All analyzed locations currently operate at acceptable levels of service during the weekday AM and weekday PM peak periods. Refer to Chapter 15, "Transit and Pedestrians," for more details.

Existing noise levels in the area surrounding the project site are moderately high but representative of similar areas of the City, with existing L_{10} noise values ranging from 68.5 to 75.0 A-weighted decibels (dBA). These values fall within the marginally unacceptable category. Refer to Chapter 16, "Noise," for more details.

C. FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTION

In the future without the proposed action, for analysis purposes, no new development on the project site would be expected. As-of-right excavation would continue with or without the proposed action, but no new development is assumed. In the area surrounding the project site, a number of new developments would be completed. These include two new residential towers on the Harborview Terrace Houses site located one block north of the project site, expected to be completed in 2009. There are a number of other "No-Build" projects throughout the study area. Refer to Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," for more details.

With increased development and continued growth in travel demand in the area, some congested intersections will become worse and additional intersections will become congested (refer to Chapter 13 for details). The moderately high noise levels in the area are expected to continue. Based on anticipated development in the area, the overall character is expected to become more residential with less underutilized sites and fewer unenclosed areas and low rise commercial and industrial buildings.

D. FUTURE WITH THE PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed project is an approximately 1.1 million gross square foot (gsf) mixed-use development rising to a maximum of 32 stories, including two mechanical levels above the top residential story, plus two cellar levels on a 94,463 sf project site. It would include the following uses (all approximate): 900 dwelling units (DUs) (on floors 3 through 30), 8,800 gsf of retail,(on ground floor); 20,000 gsf of health club space (on the third floor); 330,000 gsf of automobile sales, preparation, and repairs space (on the ground floor and in three cellar levels); 36,000 gsf of NYPD Mounted Unit facility, including stable and related space (on the ground floor); and 225 accessory parking spaces (on the second floor). Twenty percent of the residential units, approximately 180 DUs, would be affordable housing units.

The design of the proposed project is intended to reflect the site's large through-block condition and its unobstructed views to the Hudson River and De Witt Clinton Park, located west of the project site across the 100-foot wide Eleventh Avenue. In order to keep the project's mass away from the park and setback from the side streets, the overall massing slopes up and away from the park, starting at approximately 98 feet along Eleventh Avenue and climbing to approximately 350 feet at the site's eastern edge, near the approximately 457-foot tall AT&T Switching Center tower located on Block 1082, Lot 25. The receding roof line would create a series of stepped outdoor terraces with views to the water and exclusive apartment conditions on each floor. The building moves diagonally across the site, designed to provide light and air for both the apartment units and their neighbors along the narrow side streets. Refer to Chapter 1, "Project Description."

Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy

As described in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," the proposed project and the rezoning that would help to facilitate it would be in keeping with the study area's land use patterns and trends. The proposed project would not introduce an incompatible land use or one that would

conflict with land use policy or zoning for the area. The proposed action would not result in any significant adverse impacts to land use, zoning, and public policy, and therefore, no impacts to neighborhood character related to these areas would occur.

Urban Design and Visual Resources

As described in Chapter 8, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," the principal effect of the proposed project on urban design conditions would be construction of a distinctive new building with an approximately 43 foot tall base covering the full lot and a tower stepping up from approximately 98 to 350 feet. This would replace a site that is assumed to remain vacant in the future without the proposed project and which was previously occupied by open paved areas and two small 2-story commercial buildings. The height, materials, and architectural treatment of the proposed building would relate to its surroundings. While the density on the site would be increased considerably, there are other buildings of similar or greater height including the 457-foot tall AT&T Switching Center building immediately to the east and the 39-story Clinton Towers immediately to the north. Furthermore, with its stepped design, the proposed project would relate to the varied heights of the neighboring buildings. At the street level, the proposed building would enliven the frontage of the site with retail uses and the NYPD stable and would enhance the pedestrian experience on the three streets adjacent to the site. The proposed action would not alter any street patterns, block shapes, or visual resources.

The new building would not obstruct significant views or vistas in the study area, as it would be contained within an existing block form adjacent to the taller, bulkier building. The proposed building would not adversely affect the urban design character of the surrounding area, or adversely affect visual resources. Therefore, no impacts to neighborhood character as a result of changes to urban design or visual resources would occur.

Historic Resources

The analysis in Chapter 7, "Historic Resources," found that the proposed action would not have any significant adverse direct or indirect (contextual) effects on any architectural resources.

As there are three S/NR eligible historic resources located within 90 feet of the project site, the potential for construction effects must be considered. As eligible historic resources, which are not S/NR-listed or NYC Designated Landmarks, a Construction Protection Plan that would provide special protections to these resources from the construction of the proposed project is not required. However, the applicant will voluntarily provide and comply with a Construction Protection Plan for the proposed project to avoid the potential for construction related impacts on these historic resources. Accordingly, with these special protections the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse construction related impacts on these historic resources.

In addition, as discussed in Chapter 6, "Shadows," the proposed action would result in significant adverse shadows impacts on stained glass rose window located above the entryway to Centro Maria. This building is the former Saint Ambrose Church, located at 539 W. 54th Street, which is now a women's residence operated by Catholic nuns. Possible mitigation measures for this impact will be

explored between the Draft and Final EIS. However, if feasible and practicable mitigation measures cannot be identified this impact would remain unmitigated. Refer to Chapter 19, "Mitigation."

This impact may detract from the building's functions and architectural significance and impact the enjoyment of the stained glass window by building occupants. However, this impact would not constitute a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character as its effect would be limited to this building, which is not open to the public.

Socioeconomic Conditions

The proposed project would not have any significant adverse socioeconomic impacts. The proposed project would not result in any direct displacement as the project site is currently unoccupied. In addition, the proposed project is not expected to create any significant adverse impacts related to indirect displacement. Overall, the proposed project is not expected to result in any significant adverse neighborhood character impacts as a result of potential socioeconomic conditions impacts.

Transportation

The proposed project would result in significant adverse traffic impacts at 4, 3, 4, and 4 intersections in the weekday AM, weekday midday, weekday PM, and Saturday midday peak hours, respectively. As many of these intersections already will be congested under 2011 No-Build conditions, these impacts would not significantly alter neighborhood character. Furthermore, these impacts could be readily mitigated with minor signal timing changes. Accordingly, no significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character would be expected as a result of potential traffic impacts. The proposed project would not result in significant adverse pedestrian or transit impacts and no pedestrian or transit related impacts to neighborhood character would occur.

Noise

In terms of noise, although the project would generate new vehicle trips, it would not double traffic volumes and would not result in a perceptible change in noise levels. Therefore, no impacts to neighborhood character from increased noise levels would be expected.

Overall Neighborhood Character Effects of the Proposed Project

As discussed in this chapter, the proposed project is not anticipated to result in any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character related to land use, socioeconomic conditions, historic resources, urban design/visual resources, traffic, air, or noise. In addition, it would not result in moderate effects in those categories that would combine to create a significant impact.

The proposed project would be compatible with and enhance the character of the neighborhood. It would replace a vacant property formerly used as a Verizon vehicle servicing and storage in a redeveloping, primarily residential, mixed-use urban neighborhood with a new development containing a mixture of market rate and affordable housing units, commercial uses, and the NYPD Stable facility. This development would enliven a large site facing a neighborhood park and provide an architecturally distinctive building next to the windowless AT&T Switching Tower.

By redeveloping a vacant lot with a development that is reflective of ongoing trends in the area, the proposed project would have many beneficial effects on the character of the neighborhood and would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.

E. CONCLUSION

The project would not adversely affect the combined elements contributing to the neighborhood character of this area of Manhattan. Overall, no significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character would result from the proposed action.