15

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. For a proposed project, 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 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

As described in **Chapter 1, Project Description**, given the range of programs that could result from the Proposed Actions, the Maximum Residential Scenario and the Maximum Commercial Scenario are assessed to ensure conservative analyses. In both scenarios, existing buildings at the development sites would be demolished and redeveloped. In the Maximum Commercial Scenario, the development sites would be redeveloped with two new, mixed-use residential and commercial buildings that would contain a total of 1,094 DUs, of which 219 to 328 units would be permanently affordable under MIH; 112,714 gsf of commercial office space; and 87,036 gsf of commercial retail space. In the Maximum Residential Scenario, the development sites would be redeveloped with two new, mixed-use residential and commercial buildings that would contain a total of 1,242 DUs, of which 248 to 373 units would be affordable under MIH, and 88,559 gsf of auto dealership space.

Principal Conclusions

The Proposed Actions 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 impacts on the defining features of the neighborhood and potential impacts found in other technical areas. The Proposed Actions would not result in significant adverse impacts in the technical areas of land use, zoning and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; community facilities and services; open space; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; shadows; or noise. The Proposed Actions would result in significant impacts to transportation (traffic and bus services). Therefore, a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character is provided. The Proposed Actions would result in the development of new, mixed-use buildings under both scenarios, each of which would include affordable housing and align with the Hell's Kitchen trend towards residential and mixed-use development without significantly affecting the neighborhood's defining features or existing open spaces. New development under the Proposed Actions would enhance the pedestrian experience and preserve visual corridors while supporting Hudson River Park maintenance. Regarding the impact on bus services, the resulting condition would not result in service conditions that would be out of character with the surrounding neighborhood. As such, the Proposed Actions would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

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 400-foot study area used for the analysis of land use, zoning, and public policy.

As detailed in the relevant chapters of this DEIS, the Proposed Actions would not result in significant adverse impacts in the technical areas of land use, zoning and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; community facilities and services; open space; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; shadows; or noise. The Proposed Actions would result in significant adverse impacts on Transportation (traffic and bus services). Therefore, a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character impacts is provided below. The analysis begins with the identification of the defining features of the neighborhood and then assesses whether the Proposed Actions would adversely affect those defining features within the framework of the above technical areas.

Preliminary Assessment

Defining Features of the Neighborhood

The Proposed Projects are located within the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of Manhattan, New York. The 400-foot study area consists of a mix of land uses, including residential, commercial, utility, transportation, and open space and outdoor recreation. Buildings within the study area are largely characterized by high-rise glass-clad residential towers, interspersed with mid-to low-rise institutional, commercial, and industrial buildings all with rather inactive ground floors. There are some local retail establishments, but most prominent commercial uses are car dealerships with large floor plates. Additionally, the study area is separated by Twelfth Avenue Avenue/NY-9A, which is a major thoroughfare that induces traffic noises and is inhospitable to pedestrians.

The roadway network generally consists of grid-pattered streets that are commonly seen in Manhattan as well as arterial and collector roadways, such as West 54th Street, West 55th Street, West 56th Street, and West 57th Street, that provide vehicular access to the development sites. To the west of the development sites is Twelfth Avenue/NY-9A. Twelfth Avenue, located directly west of the Project Area, is an eight-lane, 150-foot wide (wide street) arterial road that runs along the Hudson River waterfront. West 54th Street is a 60-foot-wide (narrow street) one-way eastbound street with two vehicle lanes, a bike lane, and on-street parking on the north side. West 55th Street is a 60-foot-wide (narrow street) one-way westbound street with two vehicle lanes, a bike lane, and on-street parking. West 56th Street is a 60-foot-wide (narrow street) one-way eastbound street with two vehicle lanes and on-street parking.

Nearby open spaces like DeWitt Clinton Park and the expanding Hudson River Park, including the newly completed Pier 97, indicates the area's transition from industrial to residential and commercial. As discussed in **Chapter 2, Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy**, recent development trends show high-rise mixed-use buildings throughout the study area, highlighting the neighborhood's growth in residential and commercial uses.

Overall, the defining land use and development trends of the neighborhoods are:

- A growing number of mixed-use, multi-family elevator buildings with residential and commercial uses;
- The Hudson River and expanding Hudon River Park separated by the Twelfth Avenue/NY-9A west of the Project Area;
- A mix of older multi-family and mixed-use walkup buildings (i.e. Clinton Towers and Harborview Terrace) and luxury mixed-use residential commercial developments (i.e. Mercedes House) east of the Project Area; and

› A mix of residential, commercial, utility, and transportation buildings north of the Project Area.

Potential to Affect the Defining Features of the Neighborhood

Overall, the Proposed Actions would not adversely affect the defining features of the neighborhood. In both scenarios, the proposed mix of uses would be consistent with the mixed-use character present in the surrounding study area. The Proposed Projects would reflect the ongoing trend towards residential and mixed-uses in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood while creating much needed affordable housing for the surrounding community. Additionally, the Proposed Actions would not physically displace any existing open space resources or affect their current uses, nor would the Proposed Actions have any significant adverse indirect impact on either passive or active open space within the open space study areas. The remainder of the uses in surrounding manufacturing districts, such as commercial, utility, and transportation, are expected to remain functional and continue serving the adjacent midtown business district as well as the city as a whole. The Proposed Projects' emphasis on urban design, coupled with consistent architectural treatments and setbacks, would enhance the pedestrian experience without disrupting the flow of traffic. Additionally, the Proposed Actions would support the transfer of floor area from the Granting Sites (Chelsea Piers, Piers 81/83, and Pier 98) within Hudson River Park to the development sites, allowing for the maintenance and improvement of piers, bulkheads, and infrastructure within Hudson River Park. The proposed building envelopes would integrate harmoniously with the existing street grid of Hell's Kitchen, upholding the existing visual corridors along the roadways. Development Site 1 would not block views, as it fits within the existing grid and is surrounded by tall buildings that already restrict visibility. Similarly, Development Site 2 would not impact views of the Hudson River, as these views from West 55th Street are already largely obstructed by the DSNY building on West 56th Street and other structures. The dense urban environment and limited view corridors to the river from sidewalks along West 54th, West 56th, and West 57th Streets further diminish the likelihood of visual impacts. Therefore, views of the Hudson River, a defining character of the neighborhood, would remain unaffected.

Potential to Affect the Contributing Elements of Neighborhood Character

Overall, the Proposed Actions would not adversely affect the following analytical areas that could contribute to neighborhood character, either individually or through a combination of moderate effects. Though the With-Action condition is expected to result in significant adverse traffic impacts to one intersection during the Saturday peak hour and to bus service due to projected shortfalls on the M12 (north and southbound service during the weekday PM peak period) and M57 (eastbound service during the weekday AM peak period), such effects would not cause substantial changes to the neighborhood character.

Land Use, Zoning, Public Policy

In both the Maximum Commercial Scenario and Maximum Residential Scenario, the Proposed Actions would result in an expansion of existing land uses in the study area, leading to greater bulk and density than currently exists on Development Sites 1 and 2. The addition of the residential use would be compatible with the surrounding Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood and Special Clinton District, where the public transportation and open space are abundant. Additionally, the increased bulk and density facilitated by the Proposed Actions would be compatible with existing uses and consistent

with current development trends in the study area. The Proposed Actions would not conflict with the current zoning or existing uses within the surrounding area. Rather, the Proposed Actions would facilitate developments that would integrate well with the current built environment and the existing zoning framework within the study area. The Proposed Actions would support several public policies, including the goals set forth in Clinton Urban Renewal Area and Special Clinton District, Hudson River Waterfront Revitalization Initiative, Housing New York 2.0, OneNYC 2050, Housing Our Neighbors, and the Waterfront Revitalization Program (WRP). The Proposed Actions would facilitate housing developments that include affordable housing within the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood and Special Clinton District (1,094 units, of which 219 to 328 units would be permanently affordable under MIH, in the Maximum Commercial Scenario and 1,242 units, of which 248 to 373 units would be affordable under MIH, in the Maximum Residential Scenario). The additional funding from this project would facilitate the repair and rehabilitation of Hudson River Park while introducing residential and more active commercial uses on lots that are currently underutilized. The proposed mixed-use developments in both scenarios would bring full-time residents to the neighborhood, contributing to the local community through consistent engagement, daily activities, and long-term investments in the neighborhood's social and economic fabric. The new commercial uses would activate the Project Area with new workers and visitors and help to create a more resilient local economy in Hell's Kitchen. Therefore, the land use and zoning patterns and the public policies contributing to neighborhood character would be not adversely affected by the Proposed Actions, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed herein.

Socioeconomic Conditions

As discussed in **Chapter 3, Socioeconomic Conditions**, the Proposed Actions would not significantly alter the socioeconomic character of the study area. The assessment found that while the estimated weighted average incomes of the new population are expected to be higher than the average incomes of the study area population, the estimated new population would represent an increase of less than five percent over the No-Action condition (approximately 3.7 percent). This level of population increase would not be expected to introduce or accelerate a trend leading to the displacement of vulnerable populations or create a significant indirect residential displacement adverse impact. Therefore, socioeconomic conditions contributing to neighborhood character would not be adversely affected by the Proposed Actions, either alone or in combination with potential effects in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

Community Facilities and Services

As described in **Chapter 4, Community Facilities and Services**, the Proposed Actions would not introduce a sizeable new population to the neighborhood, nor would it displace or alter the existing healthcare facilities and police and fire protective services. The assessment also found the Proposed Actions would not result in significant adverse impacts to elementary and intermediate schools. The Proposed Actions would result in a collective utilization rate for early childhood programs under 100 percent. Therefore, the Proposed Actions would not result in a significant adverse impact on publicly funded early-childhood programs. As for libraries, the Columbus Library's catchment area population is projected to increase by approximately 1.68 percent, less than the five percent impact threshold provided in the *CEQR Technical Manual*. Therefore, the Proposed Actions would not result in a significant adverse impact on public libraries. Overall, the Proposed Actions would not displace or alter a community facility or increase demand on community facilities. The neighborhood character would not be adversely affected by the Proposed Actions through impacts to community facilities,

either alone or in combination with potential effects in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

Open Space

As described in **Chapter 5, Open Space**, an analysis of the potential for the Proposed Actions to indirectly impact residential open space was conducted for a half-mile study area. The residential study area's open space ratios are below the City's guidelines and the Proposed Actions would result a change to open space ratios exceeding the threshold for a possible adverse impact. However, there are numerous additional open spaces within a half mile of the Project Area that are not included in the quantitative analysis, including Hell's Kitchen Park, Gutenberg Playground, Damrosch Park, and Lincoln Center Plaza. These spaces would reduce the burden on open spaces in the study area. Additionally, Riverside Park, located north of the Project Area, is a 222-acre regional open space. The quantitative assessment only includes the 7.46-acre portion of the park within Census Tract 151.02 that lies in the residential study area. Nevertheless, residents of the proposed buildings and the surrounding area will have access to the entire park, which offers a wide range of recreational activities, such as hiking trails; handball, basketball, pickleball, and tennis courts; soccer and baseball fields; and playgrounds. Additionally, Central Park, an iconic urban oasis, is just a 15-minute walk from the development sites, offering a vast array of recreational opportunities such as running and biking paths, playgrounds, and expansive grassy areas, further enhancing the availability and quality of open spaces for local residents. Furthermore, open spaces in the study area contain a mix of passive and active resources and are generally found to be in fair to excellent condition. with the exception of two open spaces. These open spaces experience varying levels of utilization, from low to heavy but are still expected to have capacity to serve the new residents generated in the With-Action condition. Given these factors, the residential study area population would still have access to active and passive recreational opportunities, both within and outside of the Project Area, ensuring no significant open space impacts due to the Proposed Actions.

Shadows

As discussed in **Chapter 6, Shadows**, the Proposed Actions would result in new developments that would cast incremental shadows within the vicinity of the study area. Based on a detailed analysis, it was concluded that the Proposed Projects 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 contributing features of the neighborhood character would not be adversely affected due to potential shadows-related effects of the Proposed Projects, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

Urban Design and Visual Resources

As discussed in **Chapter 8, Urban Design and Visual Resources**, the Proposed Actions would not result in significant adverse impacts to urban design or visual resources in the study area. The development sites would include two new, mixed-use towers—which would increase the area's density and diversify its land uses while seamlessly blending with the existing architectural context. Ground-floor commercial spaces would activate the streetscape, fostering a more engaging and pedestrian-friendly environment. Development under the Proposed Actions would maintain the cohesive street wall, ensuring visual harmony. The Proposed Projects' emphasis on urban design, coupled with consistent architectural treatments and setbacks, would enhance the pedestrian

experience without disrupting the flow of traffic. The proposed building envelopes would not affect views of the Hudson River, a visual resource in the study area. Both Development Sites 1 and 2 are designed to align seamlessly with the lot line, merging smoothly with the existing street layout and preserving the characteristic street wall of the neighborhood. As a result, pedestrian views from the sidewalks and roadways within the study area would remain unobstructed. The proposed building envelopes would integrate harmoniously with the existing street grid of Hell's Kitchen, upholding the visual corridors along the roadways. Development Site 1 would not block views, as it fits within the existing grid and is surrounded by tall buildings that already restrict visibility. Similarly, Development Site 2 would not impact views of the Hudson River from West 55th Street, as these views are already largely obstructed by the DSNY building on West 56th Street and other structures. The dense urban environment and limited view corridors to the river from sidewalks along West 54th, West 56th, and West 57th Streets further diminish the likelihood of visual impacts. Therefore, urban design and visual resources contributing to neighborhood character would not be adversely affected, 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 Actions will not result in significant adverse transportation impact to pedestrians in the vicinity of the development sites. Most traffic intersections and pedestrian elements are currently operating under moderate conditions.

However, the Proposed Actions are expected to result in significant traffic impacts to one intersection during the Saturday peak hour, as well as a potential capacity shortfall for the M57 bus route in the eastbound direction during the AM peak hour and the M12 bus route in the northbound and southbound directions during the PM peak hour. Mitigation measures necessary to alleviate these significant adverse impacts are discussed in **Chapter 18, Mitigation**.

Significant traffic impacts to the intersection of Twelfth Avenue and West 55th Street during the Saturday peak hour could be fully mitigated with signal timing modifications. Significant impacts to the M12 bus route could be mitigated with an additional bus in each direction during the PM peak hour. The M57 bus route could be mitigated with the addition of two buses in the eastbound direction in the AM peak hour. The general policy of the NYCT is to provide additional bus service where demand warrants, taking into account financial and operational constraints. In the absence of the application of a particular mitigation measure, the impact would remain unmitigated. However, an unmitigated impact to one intersection or to bus service is not an important determining characteristic of the neighborhood as a whole.

Overall, although there will be an increase in transportation activity due to the Proposed Actions, the resulting conditions will be similar to those typically found within the study area. Therefore, the impacts to traffic intersections and on bus services will not cause substantial changes to the character of the neighborhood. The transportation patterns and services conditions contributing to neighborhood character are expected to remain unaffected, either alone or in combination with other factors 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 sites, and noise levels would generally fall in the

marginally unacceptable CEQR Noise Exposure category at the six analyzed receptor locations. The Proposed Actions 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 the neighborhood character would not be adversely affected due to potential effects of the Proposed Actions on noise, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.