Chapter 15: Neighborhood Character

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses the potential for the Proposed Project to result in significant adverse impacts to the neighborhood character of the area surrounding the Rezoning Area. As defined in the 2020 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give a neighborhood its distinct "personality." These elements may include a neighborhood's land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise. However, not all of these elements contribute to neighborhood character in every case; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements.

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the New York Blood Center (the Applicant) is requesting a rezoning and other discretionary actions (the Proposed Actions) to facilitate the construction of the Proposed Project, an approximately 596,200 gross-square-foot (gsf) building on the site of its existing New York Blood Center (NYBC) building at 310 East 67th Street, Block 1441 Lot 40 (the Development Site). Block 1441 is bounded by East 66th and East 67th Streets and First and Second Avenues and is part of a larger Rezoning Area which also includes Block 1441, Lots 1001–1202, and Block 1421, p/o Lot 21.

This analysis of neighborhood character identifies the defining features of the neighborhood and evaluates whether the Proposed Project has the potential to affect the defining features, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical analysis areas. This analysis relies on the analyses of the components of neighborhood character (i.e., land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) as analyzed elsewhere in the environmental impact statement (EIS). To determine the effects of a proposed project on neighborhood character, the defining features of neighborhood character are considered together. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare, and it would be unusual that—in the absence of a significant adverse impact in any of the relevant technical areas—a combination of moderate effects to the neighborhood would result in an impact to neighborhood character. Moreover, a significant adverse impact identified in one of the technical areas that contributes to a neighborhood's character does not necessarily constitute a significant impact on neighborhood character, but rather serves as an indication that neighborhood character should be examined.

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

Based on the methodology of the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a preliminary analysis of the Proposed Project's effects on neighborhood character was conducted and concluded that the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character and that a detailed analysis is not warranted.

The neighborhood character of the ¼-mile study area is primarily defined by its mix of residential and institutional/community facility land uses, the diverse urban and architectural context of the area, and a variety of urban open spaces. The Proposed Project would contribute to the mix of residential and institutional/community facility land uses in the area and the diverse urban and architectural context of the neighborhood. Benefits of the Proposed Project would include the activation of the streetscape along East 66th and East 67th Streets and the strengthening of an existing neighborhood community facility institution. Furthermore, the Proposed Project would not diminish the presence of St. Catherine's Park as a major open space in the neighborhood. Therefore, the Proposed Project would be compatible with the defining characteristics of the study area's neighborhood character, and would not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts.

B. METHODOLOGY

An analysis of neighborhood character begins by determining whether a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any technical area that contributes to an area's neighborhood character (i.e., land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) or if a project would result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that could cumulatively impact neighborhood character. If a project could affect these technical areas, a preliminary assessment is undertaken. The preliminary assessment first identifies the defining features of the neighborhood, and then assesses whether the project has the potential to affect these defining features, either through the potential for significant adverse impacts or a combination of moderate effects. If the preliminary assessment concludes that a proposed project has the potential to affect defining features of a neighborhood, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character is undertaken. Conversely, if the project has no potential to affect the defining features of neighborhood character, a detailed assessment is not warranted.

As described in the relevant chapters of this Draft EIS (DEIS), the Proposed Project would not result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; urban design; visual resources; transportation; or noise. However, the Proposed Project would result in moderate effects in these analysis areas and would also result in a potentially significant adverse shadows impact to St. Catherine's Park. Therefore, a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character impacts from the Proposed Project is provided below. The preliminary assessment describes the defining features of the neighborhood and then assesses the potential for the Proposed Project to impact these defining features.

STUDY AREA

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual,* the study area for a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character should be consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas, and may be modified, as appropriate, either to include any additional areas that may be affected by the project or to exclude areas that would clearly not be affected by the project. Accordingly, this chapter analyzes a study area similar to the open space study area that extends 1/4 mile from the Rezoning Area boundary (see **Figure 15-1**).

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The key elements that define neighborhood character, and their relationships to one another, form the basis of determining impact significance; in general, the more uniform and consistent the

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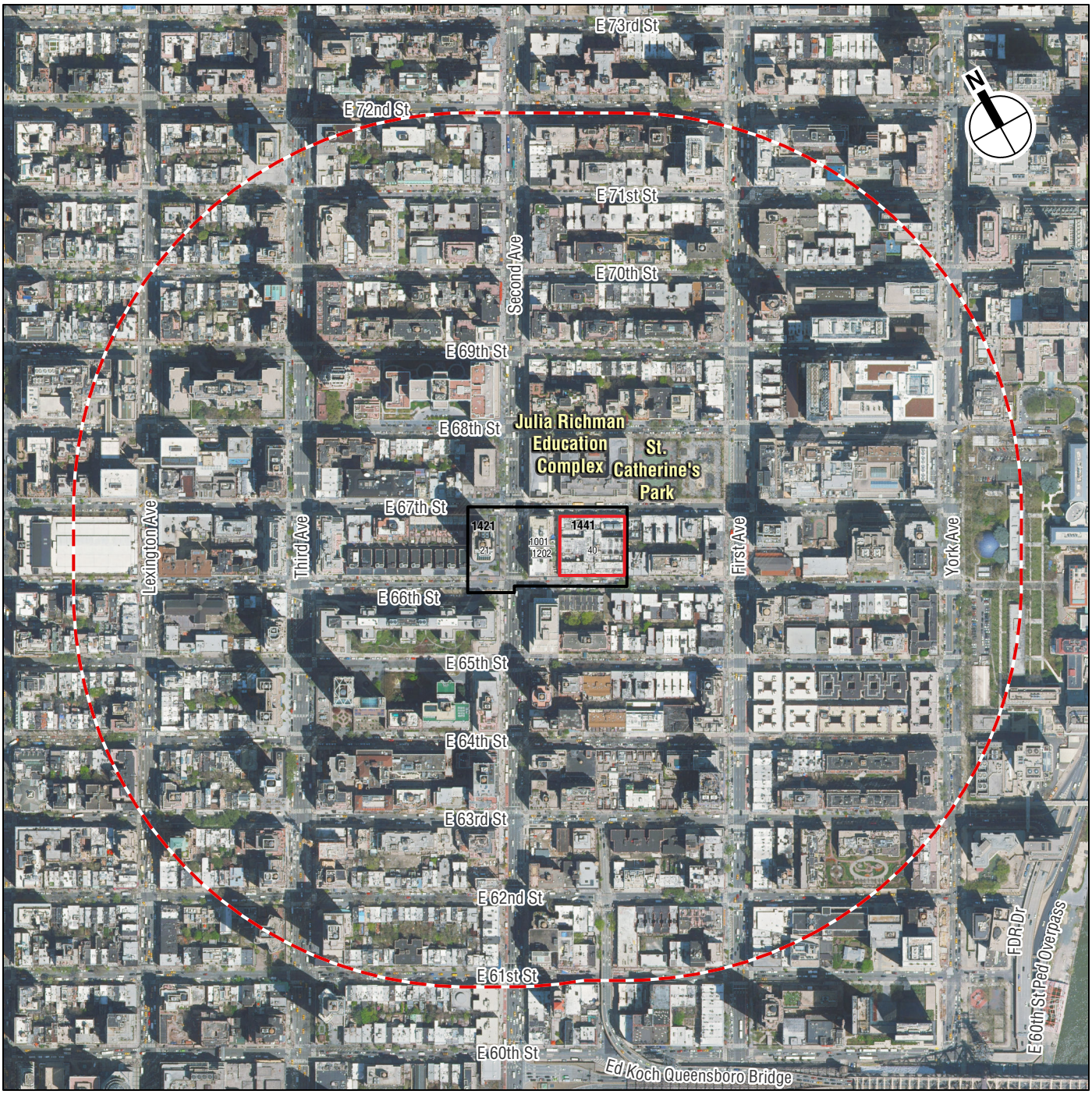

Development Site

Rezoning Area

Quarter-mile Boundary

Neighborhood Character Study Area

NEW YORK BLOOD CENTER—CENTER EAST

Figure 15-1

existing neighborhood context, the more sensitive it may be to change. A neighborhood that has a more varied context is typically able to tolerate greater change without experiencing a significant adverse impact related to neighborhood character.

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare and it would be under unusual circumstances that, in the absence of an impact in any of the relevant technical areas, a combination of moderate effects to the neighborhood would result in an impact to neighborhood character. Moreover, a significant impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood's character is not automatically equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character. Rather, it serves as an indication that neighborhood character may be significantly affected.

C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

DEFINING FEATURES

The area within ¼-mile of the Rezoning Area is generally bounded by East 72nd Street to the north, East 61st Street to the south, the midblock between Lexington and Park Avenues to the west, and a line east of York to the east. The neighborhood character of the study area is primarily defined by its mix of residential and institutional/community facility land uses, the diverse urban and architectural context of the area, and a variety of urban open spaces including St. Catherine's Park.

The study area is a primarily residential neighborhood, characterized by pre-war and post-war apartment buildings, with notable institutional and community facility uses. The Rezoning Area contains the three-story New York Blood Center (NYBC) Building and two other residential buildings of 16 and 45 stories. The study area has a diverse urban design character and architectural context, which includes a mix of older and newer buildings of different architectural styles, including low-rise, masonry-faced rowhouses; high-rise, glass-clad residential towers; and institutional buildings of varied heights and cladding materials. Buildings vary from four to five-story multi-family apartment buildings and townhomes along the east-west streets to mid-rise (11 to 20-story) apartment buildings with ground floor retail shops and restaurants along the avenues. The street pattern follows the Manhattan grid, with wider avenues running north-south and narrower cross streets running east-west. Second Avenue and York Avenue are primarily developed with modern towers both residential and institutional that occupy entire blockfronts. Along the east side of York Avenue, the open space of the Rockefeller University campus are visible between East 63rd and East 68th Streets.

Institutional uses, such as medical and research facilities, and community facilities are interspersed with residential uses in the study area. Notable institutional and community facility uses include the six-story Julia Richman Educational Complex (JREC) that occupies half of the block north of the Rezoning Area, the Memorial Sloan-Kettering (MSK) Breast and Imaging Center on Second Avenue and East 66th Street, the main campus of the MSK Cancer Center east of First Avenue between East 66th and East 68th Streets, and the MSK Center for Prostate and Urologic Cancer on East 68th Street north of St. Catherine's Park. MSK, Weill-Cornell Medicine, and New York-Presbyterian Hospital buildings line York Avenue from East 66th to East 70th Street. While JREC is a six-story, red brick school building composed of two attached wings. The larger institutional buildings are typically modern structures, with materials that include glass curtain walls, stone tile, and brick. The main campuses of MSK Cancer Center, New York- Presbyterian Hospital, Weill Cornell Medicine, and the Rockefeller University clearly characterize this portion of the

neighborhood. Economic activity and patterns in the study area reflect the area's well-established mix of residential, commercial, and institutional uses.

To the west the study area reaches almost to Park Avenue where tall apartment building are dominant. With the subway running beneath it, Lexington Avenue contains small and medium retail establishments. Smaller older buildings are interspersed with taller more recent residential structures. Likewise, Second Avenue with the new subway station access is a retail corridor. The modern subway entrances are new visual resources.

The study area topography has a modest downward slope from west to east. Street trees are planted along the sidewalks, and some of the high-rise buildings are set back behind tall planters or plazas with landscaping. St. Catherine's Park occupies the eastern half of the block north of the Development Site. The park contains a mix of active and passive recreation uses and is well landscaped, well maintained, and well used. The park is characterized by its dense tree canopy and openness that allow views across the park. Other open spaces, some known as Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS), are generally associated with and owned by residential buildings and their owners.

Known architectural resources nearest the Development Site include the 67th Street Branch of the New York Public Library, Manhattan House, 215 East 68th Street/1299 Second Avenue, and 210 East 68th Street. There is also a potential architectural resource, 333 East 68th Street. The Library is a relatively small building adjacent to the Development Site. Manhattan House and 215 East 68th Street are both large white brick-clad imposing structures with landscaping and separated driveways along the streets. Manhattan House is a 21-story mixed commercial and residential building that occupies a full city block, while 215 East 68th Street occupies a little more than half a blockfront in the study area. Visual resources in the study area include St. Catherine's Park, two of the designated architectural resources (Manhattan House and 215 East 68th Street), and 265 East 65th Street, one of the residential buildings in the Rezoning Area. 265 East 65th Street is a 45-story, slim, dark glass-clad tower that sits back from the avenue and streets beyond modest plazas and is among the tallest buildings in the study area. York, First, Second, Third and Lexington Avenues are view corridors in the study area and provide long views north and south. The narrow cross streets do not have long views, as street trees obstruct views and buildings lining the street are mostly built to the sidewalk. While these architectural and visual resources are not defining features of the neighborhood character of the study area, they do contribute to it by contributing to the diverse urban and architectural context of the Upper East Side.

The study area has been designated as being underserved by open space. However, the ¼-mile open space study area does include the East River Esplanade and several public plazas or seating areas maintained by private landlords, in addition to St. Catherine's Park. The largest open space in the area is contained on the Rockefeller University campus. While it is not open to the general public, it serves its own population and reduces the number of people who might otherwise be using the other parks and open spaces in the neighborhood.

The character of the area, like many neighborhoods in New York City, is in part defined by a wide range of travel modes, with moderate foot traffic on most of the area's sidewalks and crosswalks, a mix of automobile/taxi/service traffic on the streets, and bus service. Pedestrian activity in the area is associated primarily with residents and workers, consistent with the mix of uses in the area. Overall, transportation is not a defining feature of the study area's neighborhood character.

With respect to noise, projected noise levels moderate to high and reflect the level of vehicular activity on the adjacent streets. In terms of the CEQR criteria, the projected noise levels are

generally in the "marginally unacceptable" category. Noise is not a defining feature of the study area's neighborhood character.

ASSESSMENT OF THE POTENTIAL TO AFFECT THE DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The Proposed Actions would result in the development of a 16-story, approximately 596,200 gross-square-foot (gsf) building on the Development Site containing community facility uses and laboratory and related uses. The Proposed Project would have a four-story, approximately 85-foot-tall base that would be built to the sidewalk on both street frontages along East 66th and East 67th Streets and the upper floors would be set back from the base on all sides before rising to the building's full, approximately 334-foot height. There would be no changes to the other residential buildings in the Rezoning Area with the Proposed Actions.

The Proposed Project would not result in a substantial change in the land use of the Development Site by replacing an existing community facility building containing laboratories with new community facility and commercial building containing laboratories. The Proposed Project would be compatible with the existing mix of land uses in the area, which already include a number institutional and community facility uses. Furthermore, the Proposed Project would contribute to the creation of a vital life sciences hub that would be well-situated and organized to advance the City's economic development agenda and allow collaboration amongst research partners.

The Proposed Project would not affect socioeconomic conditions in the study area in a manner that would have the potential to affect neighborhood character. The Proposed Project would not introduce new economic activities to the study area, as the study area already has a well-established medical, research, and institutional presence. The commercial laboratory and community facility development resulting from the Proposed Project would strengthen the existing cluster of medical, research, and other institutional uses in the Upper East Side.

St. Catherine's Park is an important amenity in its immediate area, but would not be considered a defining feature, as defined by the *CEQR Technical Manual*, in the context of this neighborhood character assessment. The Proposed Project would introduce new workers and visitors to the Rezoning Area, which would potentially increase the user population on publicly accessible open space resources, including St. Catherine's Park. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, "Open Space," the Proposed Project's population would only use passive recreation resources, and would not result in the overburdening of open space resources in the study area. The Proposed Project would also provide an exterior open space amenity for building tenants, which would reduce the tenant's use of public open space in the neighborhood.

The Proposed Project would cast new shadows on St. Catherine's Park during the afternoons in the spring, summer, and fall, covering large areas of the park at times, thereby causing a significant adverse shadow impact to the use of the park in the late afternoons in those seasons. The park's trees and plantings would continue to receive adequate sunlight over the course of each day throughout New York City's growing season and therefore their health would not be significantly affected by the project-generated shadows. Although there would be a shadow impact on St. Catherine's Park, it would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character within the study area.

The Proposed Project is located adjacent to the New York Public Library, which is considered a historic resource. To avoid the potential for construction-related impacts to this historic resource, the Applicant would prepare and implement a Construction Protection Plan (CPP). The CPP would

be prepared in consultation with LPC and carried out by a licensed professional engineer prior to the start of any demolition, excavation, or construction activities. However, the Proposed Project would not result in any adverse direct or indirect impacts to the other designated or potential architectural resources in the study area. As noted above, the architectural resources contribute to the diverse urban and architectural context of the study area. The Proposed Project would not adversely affect the context of the designated and potential architectural resources, nor would it obstruct public views of any of these resources. Therefore, these resources would continue to contribute to the built context and neighborhood character of the area in the future with the Proposed Project.

The Proposed Project would be consistent with the urban design character of the study area, which includes a mix of older and newer buildings of different architectural styles, including low-rise rowhouses; high-rise residential towers; and medium to high rise institutional buildings of varied heights and cladding materials. The new building's height would be compatible with the larger, taller buildings in the study area, and its base height and streetwall along East 66th and East 67th Streets would be consistent with nearby buildings. In addition, it is anticipated that the new building would be clad in glass and either masonry or metal elements, similar to other recently constructed institutional buildings in the area. The Proposed Project would replace an existing building and would therefore not alter street orientation, street patterns, block shapes, or natural resources in the study area. The Proposed Project would contribute to the study area neighborhood by activating the sidewalk along East 67th Street, with a glass streetwall and community facility space on the ground floor. With respect to visual resources, the Proposed Project would not have the potential to obstruct views to Manhattan House or the apartment building at 215 East 68th Street as they are located away from the Development Site and do not have a visual or contextual relationship to the Development Site. St. Catherine's Park, one of the visual resources in the study area, also would not be adversely affected by the proposed building in terms of urban design. Views to this visual resource would remain available from East 67th Street, and within the park, the dense tree canopy in the eastern portion of the park would partially obscure views of the proposed building in southward views from the park. Views along view corridors in the study area would also remain available and would continue to provide long views north and south.

As discussed in Chapter 10, "Transportation," the Proposed Project would not generate enough traffic, transit, or pedestrian trips to warrant detailed quantified analysis, and would not result in delays or congestion in the local transportation network. As the Proposed Project would not affect transportation conditions in the study area, it would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character due to transportation.

With respect to operational noise, the Proposed Project would not generate traffic volumes that have the potential to cause a significant noise impact and would be designed to provide building attenuation to satisfy applicable interior noise criteria. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character with respect to operational noise. As discussed in Chapter 16, "Construction," construction of the Proposed Project has the potential to result in significant adverse construction noise impacts at receptors surrounding the proposed construction work areas. However, throughout the construction period, measures would be implemented to control noise, and vibration within the Development Site, including the erection of construction barriers. The barriers would reduce potentially undesirable views of construction areas, buffer noise emitted from construction activities, and protect the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists. Therefore, the construction would not result in significant or long-term adverse impacts on neighborhood character in the study area.

The combination of moderate effects from the Proposed Project on the elements that contribute to neighborhood character would not create a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. The Proposed Project would contribute to the mix of residential and institutional/community facility land uses in the area and the diverse urban and architectural context of the neighborhood. Benefits of the Proposed Project would include the activation of the streetscape along East 66th and East 67th Streets and the strengthening of an existing neighborhood community facility institution. Furthermore, the Proposed Project would not diminish the presence of St. Catherine's Park as a major open space in the neighborhood. Therefore, the Proposed Project would be compatible with the defining characteristics of the study area's neighborhood character, and would not result in significant adverse impact to the overall neighborhood character. ✷