Chapter 8: Urban Design and Visual Resources

A. INTRODUCTION

The proposed action would result in the construction of a mixed-use building on the project site (Block 1152, Lots 5, 8, 10-13, 43, 52, 53, and 55) and additional residential and school construction on Lots 56, 57, 58, and 61. This chapter considers the effects of the proposed action on the urban design and visual character of the study area from nearby locations from which the proposed project and projected development under the reasonable worst-case development scenario would be visible. Views to the project site and rezoning area are limited primarily to the immediately surrounding streets. Because views of the area are generally not available beyond 400 feet from the boundaries of the project site, the urban design and visual resources study area has been defined as the area roughly bounded by West 59th Street to the south, West 62nd Street to the north, West End Avenue to the west, and Amsterdam Avenue to the east (see Figure 8-1).

As defined in the New York City *Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, urban design components and visual resources determine the "look" of a neighborhood—its physical appearance, including the size and shape of buildings, their arrangement on blocks, the street pattern, and noteworthy views that may give an area a distinctive character. The following analysis addresses each of these characteristics for existing conditions and the future without and with the proposed action for the year 2008, when the development is expected to be completed.

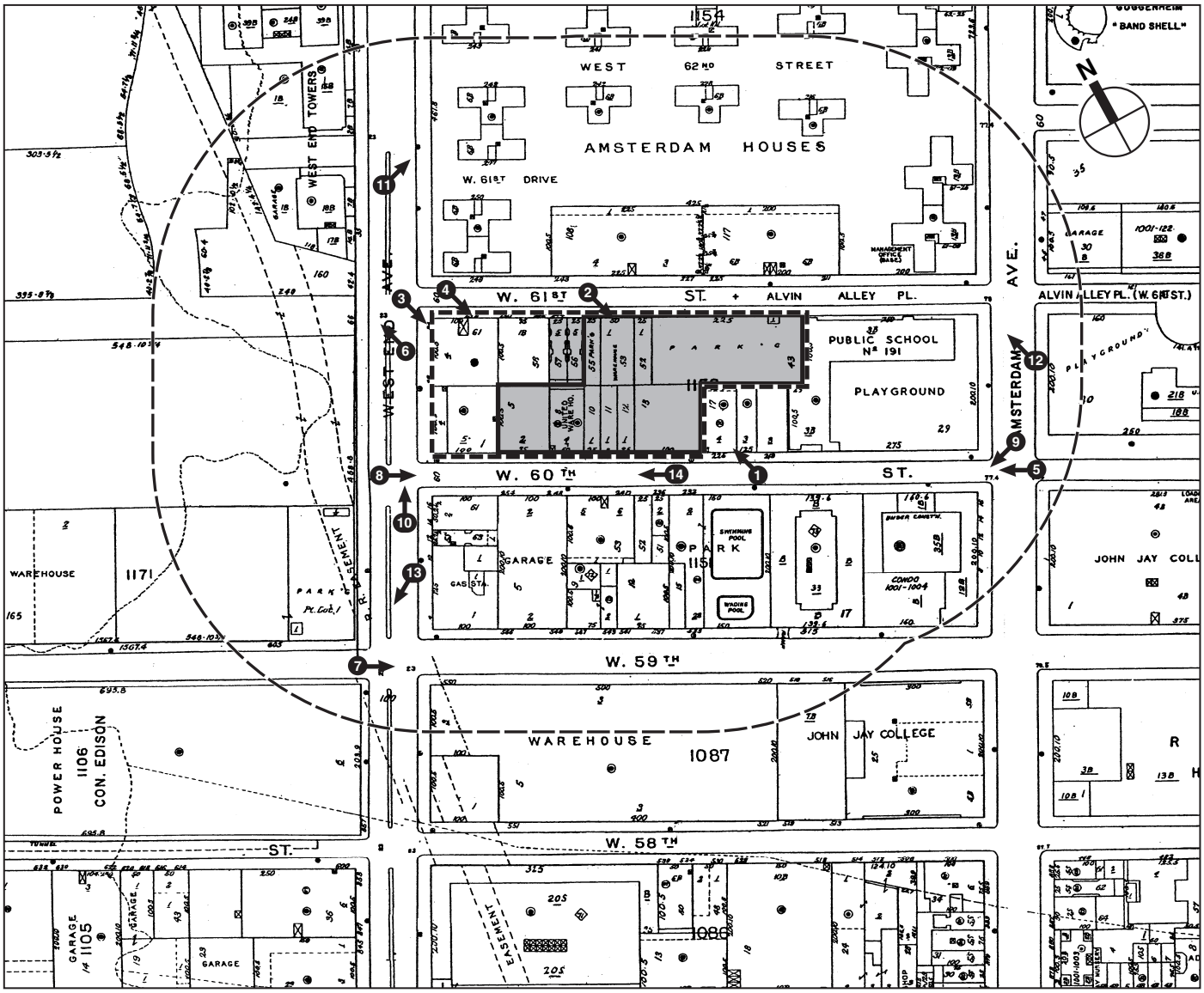
This analysis concludes that the proposed action would not result in any significant adverse impacts to urban design or visual resources in the study area. The proposed action would not alter the street pattern or block shapes in the study area. The proposed building and projected development would maintain (and extend) existing streetwalls. The height of the proposed building, while taller than the buildings currently on the site, would be consistent with other large-scale buildings in the surrounding area, particularly to the north, south, and east. Although the context of the study area's visual resources would be altered by the addition of a new, tall building of modern design to the area, this change would not result in any significant adverse impacts and the proposed development would not affect the visual enjoyment of the area's visual resources.

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

PROJECT SITE

URBAN DESIGN

The project site occupies the middle section of the block bounded by Amsterdam and West End Avenues, with frontage on West 60th and 61st Streets. Until recently, the project site was occupied by several one- to four-story buildings, which were generally boxy, with flat roofs and



Proposed Rezoning Area Boundary

400-Foot Study Area Boundary

Project Site Boundary

Zoning Lot/Proposed General Large-Scale Development

Photograph View Direction and Reference Number

West 61st Street Rezoning
Project and Citywide GLSD Text Amendment

Urban Design and Visual Resources

Figure 8-1

brick facades that lacked ornamentation. These structures have been demolished*, and the project site is now vacant with the exception of a paved parking lot fronting on West 61st Street. The project site is surrounded by a graffiti-painted masonry wall along the West 61st Street sidewalk (see Figure 8-2).

VISUAL RESOURCES

There are no visual resources located on the project site. Visual resources that can be seen from portions of the project site include the Con Edison Power House and the Hudson River.

ZONING LOT AND REZONING AREA

The project site encompasses most of the rezoning area, although a few properties on the west end of the block are not part of the project site. The zoning lot contains two five-story brick residential buildings, 242 and 244 West 61st Street, which each have four bays, intact cornices, and fire escapes (see Figure 8-3). Within the rezoning area, there is a six-story school building that was recently completed at the northeast corner of West End Avenue and West 60th Street. The school building has a light brown brick, metal, and glass façade with a glass-clad corner entrance and a rooftop terrace. Adjacent to this property is a four-story masonry warehouse building at 28-34 West End Avenue (see Figure 8-3). An unadorned one-story brick automotive garage at 246-250 West 61st Street is characterized by its three garage entrances, all of which have metal security screens.

There are no visual resources located in the rezoning area.

STUDY AREA

The study area is located in Clinton, formerly part of Hell's Kitchen. The area has a mix of building types, styles, heights, and uses. The discussion below focuses first on the area's urban design—its basic layout and structures—and then describes its visual resources.

URBAN DESIGN

Natural Features, Street Patterns, and Block Shapes

Street patterns in the study area follow the regular street grid and are rectangular in shape. There is one superblock partially located in the study area. Occupied by the Amsterdam Houses, it is between West End Avenue and Amsterdam Avenue, between West 61st and 64th Streets. West End and Amsterdam Avenues are busy roadways that carry two-way traffic. Crosstown streets are one-way and are less traveled, primarily because they terminate at or just west of West End Avenue. The elevated Henry Hudson Highway and the Hudson River are west of the study area. The topography of the area slopes downward toward the west (see Figure 8-4).

Streetscape

The study area is urban in character, with streets flanked by concrete sidewalks. Parked cars are located on most streets and several buses park on West End Avenue, near the project site. Modern lampposts are used in the area and there is typical street furniture (e.g., public

* As discussed in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the site is being remediated under the Brownfields Cleanup Program.



View northwest of the project side along West 60th Street **1**



View southeast of the project site along West 61st Street **2**



View southeast of properties in the rezoning area along West End Avenue **3**



View southeast of properties in the rezoning area along West 61st Street **4**



View northwest of West 60th Street (from Amsterdam Avenue) showing downward slope of the topography **5**



View north of small park at West End Avenue and West 61st Street **6**

telephones, newspaper bins) throughout the study area and some large signage on the sides of buildings. There are a few areas of open space, including a gated park at West End Towers at the corner of West End Avenue and West 61st Street (see Figure 8-4). The area has little pedestrian traffic.

An undulating wall, painted with murals and proverbs by students at P.S. 191, runs along Amsterdam Avenue between West 61st and West 60th Streets. The project site is surrounded by a masonry wall covered in graffiti. These unique streetscape elements add interesting features to the surrounding area.

Two playgrounds in the area, along the east and west site of the Amsterdam Avenue between West 61st and West 60th Street, also break up the streetscape of the area around the project site.

Building Uses, Shapes, and Forms

The study area consists of low- to high-rise buildings with industrial, commercial, and residential uses. They are primarily built to the lot line, without setbacks. Most high-rise buildings have brick or stone facades. Most industrial and commercial buildings are low-rise plain, boxy, utilitarian structures that lack ornamentation.

West 59th Street is developed with several low-rise (one and two-story) brick industrial buildings (see Figure 8-5). The West 59th Street Recreation Building is a through-block structure with an entrance at 533 West 59th Street and another entrance at 232 West 60th Street, the West 60th Street Public Bath. The 59th Street portion is a narrow two-story brick building designed in the Tudor Revival style. A large three-story brick warehouse is located on the south side of West 59th Street. It occupies the West End Avenue blockfront and extends roughly 520 feet on West 58th and 59th Streets.

West 60th Street is developed with a mix of warehouses, industrial buildings, and garages (see Figure 8-6). A modern, 33-story building is located on the lot adjacent to the West 60th Street Public Bath (see Figure 8-6). The West 60th Street Public Bath is located at 232 West 60th Street and is a two-story brick building with an entrance portico and stone ornamentation. It is a through block structure that also has an entrance 533 West 59th Street for the West 59th Street Recreation Building. Aside from the 33-story building, structures along the section of West 60th Street in the study area range in height from 1 to 6 stories and are predominantly brick, boxy buildings with flat roofs.

Opposite the project site, West 61st Street is developed with two of the buildings of the Amsterdam Houses complex, a three-story school, and a seven-story warehouse. The school and the warehouse building are boxy with stone facades and large multi-paned windows.

West End Towers, a residential complex with 16- to 39-story buildings, is located at the northern portion of the study area, at West End Avenue and West 61st Street (see Figure 8-7). The northern portion of the study area, including the north side of West 61st Street, across from the project site, is part of the Amsterdam Houses complex. This superblock of apartment buildings comprises several 6- and 13-story brick apartment buildings (see Figure 8-7).

Buildings along West End Avenue range in height from 1 to 20 stories and are flat roofed and boxy with brick or stone facades. The Con Edison Power House is located in the southwest portion of the study area, and occupies an entire block bounded by West 58th and 59th Streets and West End and Twelfth Avenues. It is a neo-Renaissance Revival-style structure with a pink granite base, buff-colored Roman brick and terra cotta, and bays with rounded arches and decorative terra cotta elements. A large two-story warehouse is located on the north side of West



View southeast of West 59th Street, as seen from West End Avenue **7**



View southeast of West 60th Street, as seen from West End Avenue **8**



View west of the 33-story building located mid-block between West 59th and 60th Streets, as seen from Amsterdam and West 60th Street **9**



View northeast of West End Avenue near West 60th Street **10**



View northeast of the Amsterdam Houses along West End Avenue **11**

59th Street, west of West End Avenue. Also west of West End Avenue, between West 59th and 61st Streets, are large parking areas.

Within the study area, Amsterdam Avenue is developed with buildings that range from 1 to 35 stories in height (see Figure 8-8). A 35-story residential building is under construction on the block between West 59th and 60th Streets and a four-story building for John Jay College is located across the street. P.S. 191 is located on the block between West 60th and 61st Streets. It is a three-story tan colored brick building with a playground. Another playground is located across Amsterdam Avenue from the school. A garage and vacant lot are located on the east side of Amsterdam Avenue between West 61st and 62nd Streets. The Amsterdam Houses, ranging in height from 6 to 13 stories, are located on the avenue, extending north from West 61st Street. These dark, brick-faced buildings are either in an "H" shape or a "T" shape and rise straight up without setbacks from the open space of the superblock.

VISUAL RESOURCES

The Con Edison Power House, an imposing structure that occupies a full block bounded by West End and Twelfth Avenues and West 58th and 59th Streets, is visible from many locations on West End Avenue (see Figure 8-9). It is most prominent in views west on West 59th Streets. Views of the building are not available from other streets in the study area due to dense intervening development. Partial views of the Hudson River also are available from locations along West End Avenue and from cross streets (see Figure 8-9).

Other view corridors focus on conspicuous buildings that are not considered visual resources, such as West End Avenue, which has as its focal point the West End Towers, a modern 39-story residential building. Views east along West 59th, 60th, and 61st Streets also include modern high-rise buildings located along Tenth/Amsterdam Avenue. These buildings are not visual resources but have a strong visual impact on the study area.

C. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTION

PROJECT SITE, ZONING LOT, AND REZONING AREA

As mentioned earlier, the project site is being cleaned up under the Brownfields Cleanup Program administered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Therefore, the project will be vacant in the future without the proposed action. In the future without the proposed action, it is assumed that there will be no change to the zoning lot and rezoning area. Absent the proposed action, the existing buildings will remain as they are today.

STUDY AREA

In the future without the proposed action, a number of new residential and mixed-use developments are expected to be completed within the study area by 2008. These projects would be a continuation of recent development trends and patterns in the area. A 20-story residential and community facility at 223-227 West 60th Street, currently under construction, will be completed by 2008 on a site adjacent to the project site. Plans for John Jay College to expand its current facilities in the former DeWitt Clinton High School and create a building filling the full block between West 58th and 59th Streets and West End and Amsterdam Avenues have been approved and construction is expected to be complete by 2008.



View north of Amsterdam Avenue near West 60th Street **12**



View south of the Con Edison Power House, as seen from West End Avenue **13**



View northwest towards the Hudson River, as seen from West 60th Street and West End Avenue **14**

Just south of the project site and rezoning area, a 31-story residential building is proposed at Two West End Avenue for completion by 2007. Construction of this building would add a tall, modern building to the immediate study area. Southwest of the project site, the block bounded by West 57th and 58th Streets and West End and Twelfth Avenues, another tall, modern mixed-use development is under construction with residential uses to be completed by 2005 and full development to be completed by 2008.

D. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

PROJECT SITE

URBAN DESIGN

As described in Chapter 1: "Project Description", the proposed project would be massed to contain three distinct components. The tallest component (Building C) would consist of a 27-story tower that would rise to a height of approximately 304 feet to the top of the parapet*. The project's mid-rise component (Building B) would rise to a height of approximately 97 feet before being set back and rising to a total height of approximately 172 feet. The third component of the development (Building C) would contain a base that would rise to a height of approximately 85 feet before being set back and rising to a total height of approximately 121 feet (see Figures 8-10 through 8-14). It would be a residential building with ground floor retail, medical office space, and below-grade parking. The proposed building would be consistent with the architectural design of other tall, modern buildings located within and just outside the study area. The lower portions of the proposed building would be similar in height to some of the existing low- and mid-rise buildings in the area while the tower would be similar to other existing and proposed high-rise structures in the study area (see Figure 8-15). The proposed building would be an improvement over current conditions in that the residential and office uses of the building would bring increased pedestrian traffic and would therefore increase the vitality of the immediate area. The wall along the West 61st Street open space would be predominantly open to provide visual interest along this segment of the street (see Figure 8-16).

VISUAL RESOURCES

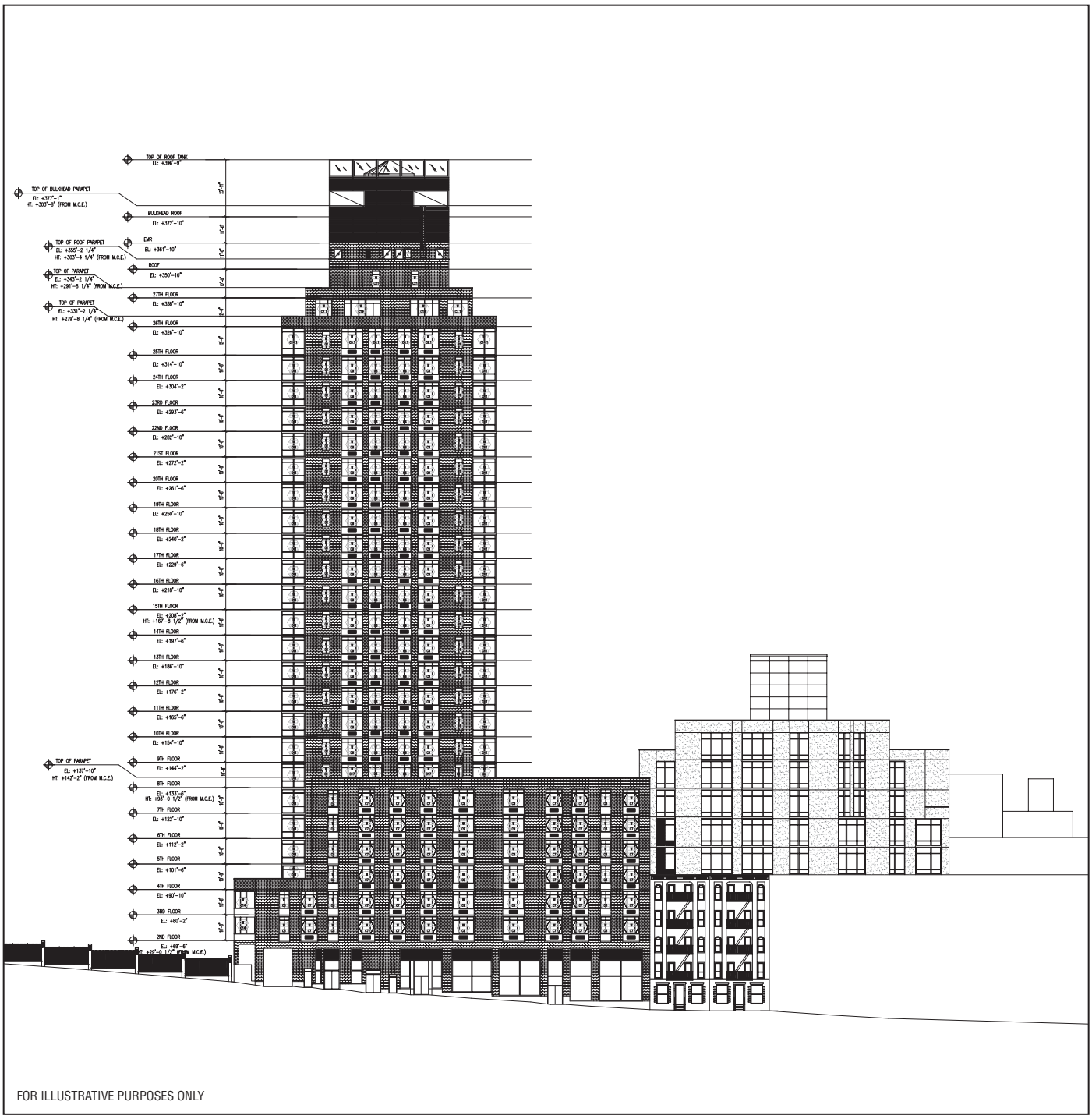
Although the context of the visual resources that can be seen from portions of the project site—the Con Ed Power Station—could be affected by the addition of a new, taller building of modern design to the area, this change in context would not be adverse as the project site is not a prime viewing location for either of these resources. Therefore, the proposed development would not affect the visual enjoyment of these visual resources.

ZONING LOT AND REZONING AREA

The reasonable worst-case development scenario includes the potential for additional construction on Lots 58 and 61. These two buildings are not considered to be visual resources, and their removal would not be considered a significant adverse impact. It is not anticipated that future development of these lots would have any impact on the urban design and visual resources of the study area as the future development is anticipated to range from 10- to 31-

* All heights are measured from the mean curb elevation to the top of the parapet. The mean curb elevation at West 60th Street is 40.46 feet. At West 61st Street, the mean curb elevation is 51.49 feet.

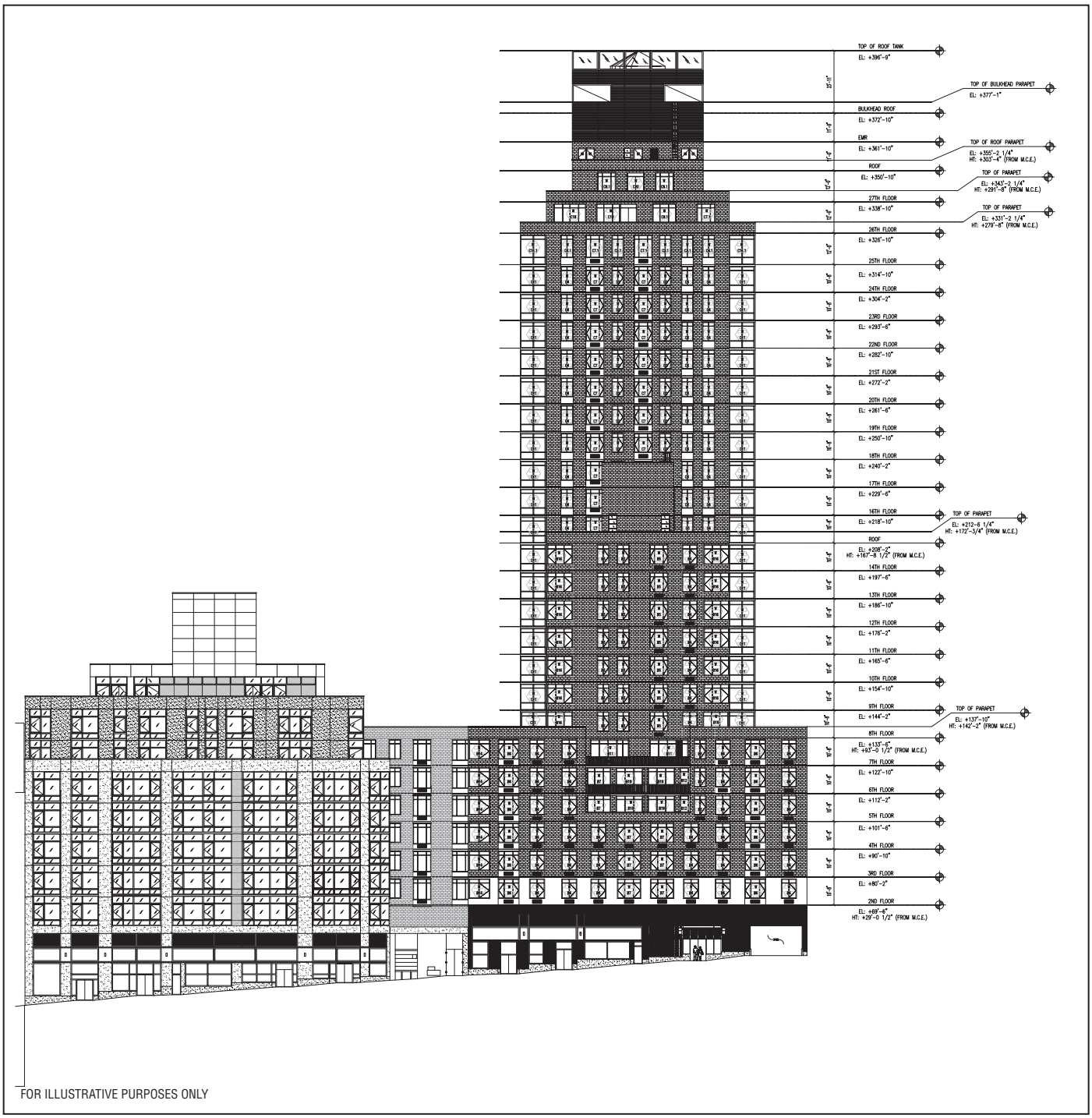
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Source: H. Thomas O'Hara Architect, PLLC

Building Elevation
61st Street
Figure 8-10

8.2.06

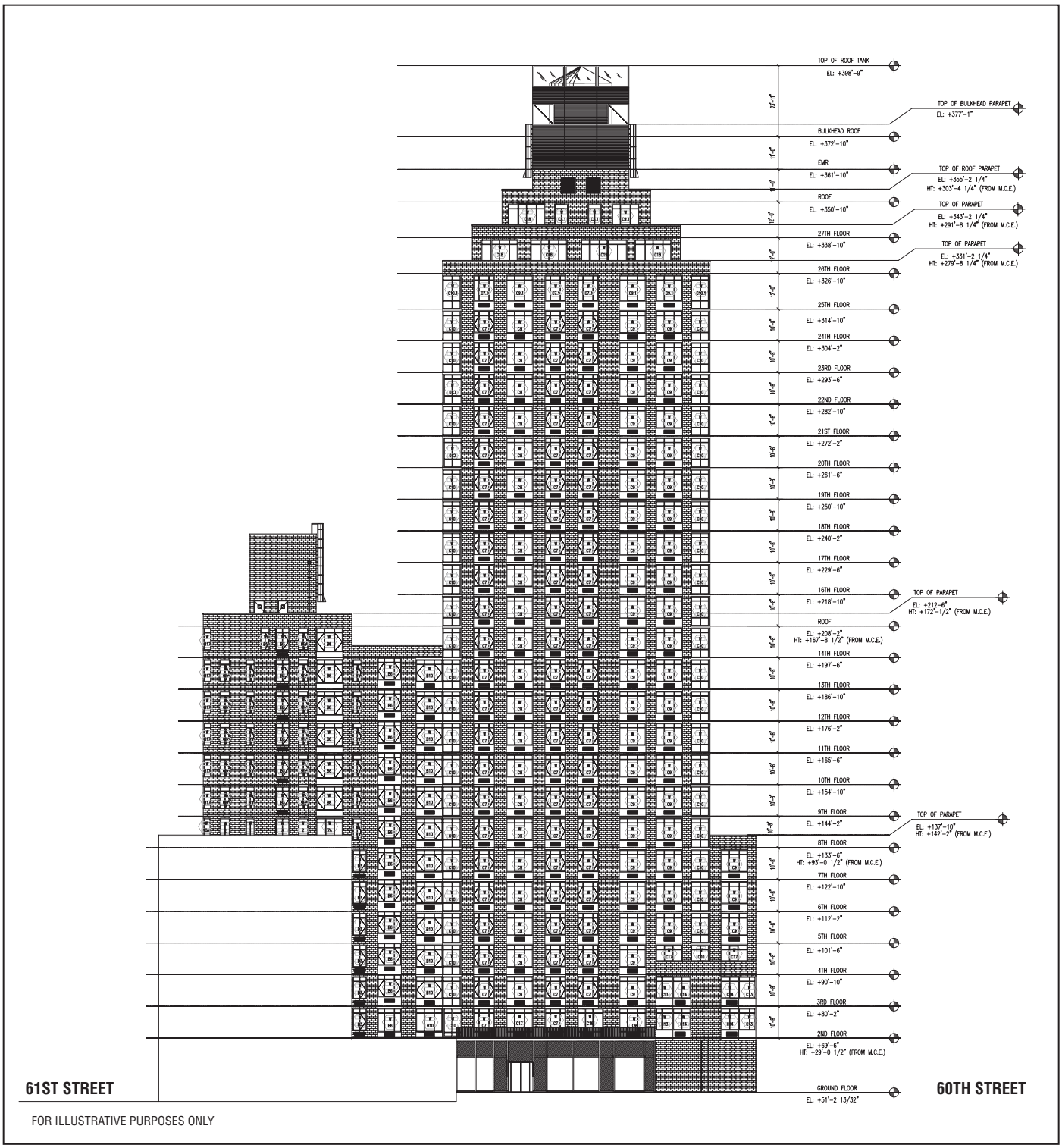


Source: H. Thomas O'Hara Architect, PLLC

West 61st Street Rezoning
Project and Citywide GLSD Text Amendment

Building Elevation
60th Street
Figure 8-11

8.2.06



Source: H. Thomas O'Hara Architect, PLLC

Building Elevation
60th Street to 61st Street
Figure 8-12

7.13.06

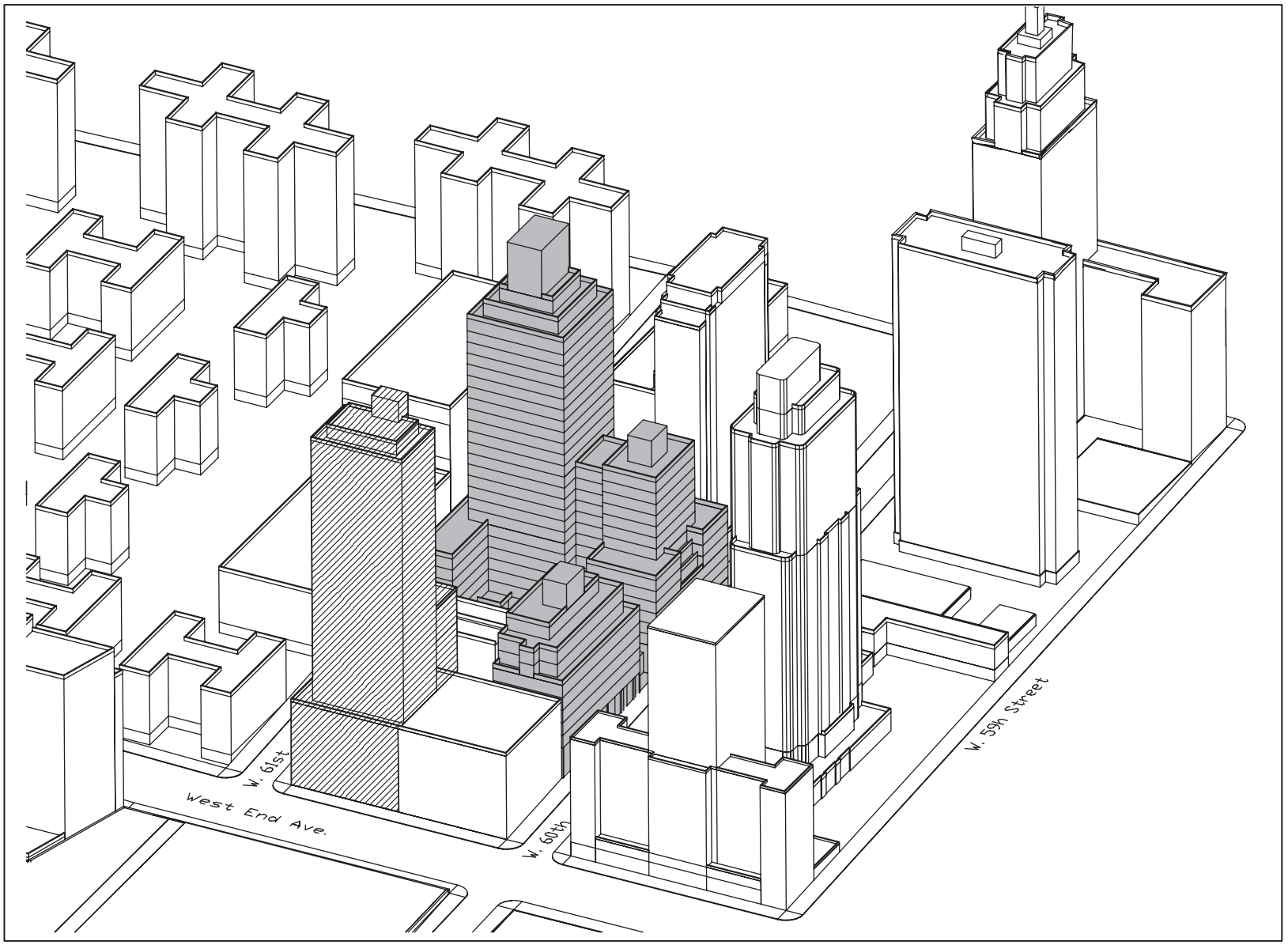


Illustrative View of the Project
60th Street
Figure 8-13



Illustrative View of the Project
60th Street
Figure 8-14

7.13.06



Proposed Project

RWCDS

Illustrative View of the Proposed Project and Reasonable Worst Case Development

Figure 8-15

7.24.06





Proposed West 61st Street Wall Design

Figure 8-16

stories in height which is in keeping with the current and future buildings in the surrounding area. The two 5-story brick residential buildings (Lots 56 and 57) adjacent to the project site would remain. The reasonable worst-case development scenario also assumes that two penthouse units would be constructed on the Lot 56 and Lot 57 buildings.

STUDY AREA

URBAN DESIGN

Natural Features, Street Patterns, and Block Shapes

The proposed buildings (the proposed project and development under the reasonable worst-case development scenario) would be constructed on an existing block. Therefore, the proposed development would not alter any natural features, the street pattern, or block shapes in the study area, and there would be no impacts to these urban design features as a result of the proposed action.

Streetscape

The proposed buildings (the proposed project and development under the reasonable worst-case development scenario) would be built to the lot line, thereby maintaining (and extending) existing streetwalls. Other streetscape elements—such as lampposts and signage—would not be altered by the proposed development. The proposed building would be an improvement over the vacant and underutilized lots which currently comprise the project site. In addition, the residential and commercial uses would increase pedestrian traffic and create a new vitality to the area.

Building Uses, Shapes, and Forms

The residential and office uses of the building would be consistent with the predominant uses in the study area. There is a wide variety of building styles and materials used in the area, thus it is expected that the building's design would be in keeping with that mix. The height of the proposed building, while taller than buildings on the immediately surrounding streets, would be consistent with other large-scale buildings in the study area and in the surrounding neighborhood. The building's greater height and modern design would link it more with the immediate context of the buildings to the north, south, and west of the project site, rather than the smaller-scale buildings immediately surrounding the project site. The different heights of the proposed building would distribute the bulk; the lower 85- and 97-foot parts of the building would be in keeping with the buildings opposite the project site along West 61st Street while the taller, 304-foot component would be in keeping with the taller buildings in the surrounding area. In addition, the two lots in the rezoning area could also be developed under the reasonable worst-case development scenario with a 10-story (approximately 105 feet) building on Lot 58 and a 31-story (approximately 340 feet) building on Lot 61.

In addition, as described in Section C, "The Future without the Proposed Action," the proposed buildings (the proposed project and development under the reasonable worst-case development scenario) would be consistent with future development plans in the study area. Therefore, the new buildings would not be expected to significantly increase the density of the study area. Since the height, materials, and architectural treatment would be sympathetic to the existing urban design of the area, its construction is not expected to result in any adverse impact to the urban design of the surrounding area.

VISUAL RESOURCES

The proposed building would be taller than existing buildings on the project site, as well as buildings in the immediate study area; however, the proposed building, when visible, would not block any important view corridors or block views to any visual resources. As these resources already exist in the larger context of a highly built up urban environment with tall buildings, there would be no adverse impacts on these resources. The Con Ed Power House would still be visible from West End Avenue, its primary viewing location; while the Hudson River would still be visible from West End Avenue and from the side streets.

Many tall modern buildings that are not located within the study area are visible from most locations within the study area and have an impact on the visual quality of the area. This is in part due to the change in topography where the ground slopes downward to the west, thus making tall buildings in the east appear even taller when viewed from the west. The proposed building would be partially located at the downward slope of the topography and as a result would appear smaller in height when viewed from the east.

The height of the building's lower components would be less than the elevation of the central tower of the building, acknowledging the adjacency of the lower-scale neighborhood. As West 60th and 61st Streets are narrow and have narrow view corridors, the proposed building would not significantly alter these corridors, particularly as they would maintain the existing streetwalls.

Thus, the proposed action would result in the construction of another tall structure, but would not result in significant adverse impacts on the visual character of the study area. ✷