# 7

# Urban Design and Visual Resources

In an urban design assessment under CEQR, one considers whether and how a project may change the experience of a pedestrian in the project area. The assessment focuses on the components of a proposed project that may have the potential to alter the arrangement, appearance, and functionality of the built environment.

## Introduction

According to the *2021 CEQR Technical Manual*, urban design is defined as the totality of components—including streets, buildings, open spaces, wind, natural resources, and visual resources—that may affect a pedestrian's experience of public space. A visual resource is defined as the connection from the public realm to significant natural or built features, including views of the waterfront, public parks, landmark structures or districts, otherwise distinct buildings or groups of buildings, and natural resources.

Based on the *CEQR Technical Manual* guidelines, a preliminary assessment of urban design and visual resources is appropriate when there is the potential for a pedestrian to observe, from the street level, a physical alteration beyond that allowed by existing zoning. Examples include projects that permit the modification of yard, height, and setback requirements, and projects that result in an increase in built floor area beyond what would be allowed "as-of-right," or in the future No-Action condition.

As described in **Chapter 1, Project Description**, the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC), the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME), and the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) (collectively, the Applicants), in affiliation with the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation (H+H), New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), the New York City School Construction Authority (SCA), and the City University of New York (CUNY), are seeking several Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) and discretionary actions (collectively, the Proposed Actions) to facilitate the development of approximately 2.19 million gross

square feet (gsf) of new construction of academic, healthcare, Life Sciences, retail space, and public realm improvements (the Proposed Project).

The public realm improvements would take the form of a new publicly accessible open space, a replacement bridge over Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) Drive at East 25th Street to make it ADA accessible, a tie-in to the Kips Bay Coastal Resiliency (KBCR) project's planned flood protection to the northeast along FDR Drive and protection along East 25th Street,[1] including a connection to the existing floodwall at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs New York Harbor Healthcare System's Manhattan campus (U.S. Corbin VA Facility), and a widening of the demapped portion of the former East 26th Street located between FDR Drive and First Avenue to accommodate two-way traffic flow.

# Principal Conclusions

## Urban Design

The Proposed Actions would not result in significant adverse impacts to urban design in the study area. The Proposed Actions would result in built forms and building types that are similar in height and bulk to the mid- to high-density institutional buildings that currently exist within the study area. The design of the Proposed Project would provide varied building heights and setbacks that would create visual interest and enhance the pedestrian experience.

The proposed orientation of the massing for the new development would be similar to the existing site, with a collection of multiple new buildings[2] on the periphery of the site surrounding a central open space fronting East 25th Street. However, the proposed massing would shift density and height towards First Avenue, with towers up to 500 feet tall, resonating with other recent development in Kips Bay and beyond. This would allow the massing to drop in scale towards the East River, to be more in context with the residential and institutional uses to the south and east. The easternmost tower occupied by CUNY and NYCPS would be consistent in height with nearby buildings, including Waterside Plaza towers across FDR Drive. The intent of this massing strategy is to maximize light and air into the campus buildings, specifically for classrooms and offices, while cascading the height of buildings towards residential and institutional buildings to the south and east and introducing potential terraces with additional access to open space and air throughout the campus.

The Proposed Project would provide an opportunity for public realm improvements in an area generally characterized by large-scale buildings and highway infrastructure. These improvements respond to long-standing community requests to create more high-quality accessible open space, provide better pedestrian accessibility, and improve vehicular circulation in the surrounding community.

The Proposed Project would bring new public open space that connects to a network of existing neighborhood open spaces, a new accessible pedestrian bridge over FDR Drive at East 25th Street, and a floodwall tie-in to the broader KBCR project, formerly known as the Bellevue Campus Coastal Resiliency project.[3] Further, the introduction of street-fronting retail, ground-floor uses, improved

[1] Absent the KBCR project, the Proposed Project would incorporate standalone flood protections with independent utility into the design.

[2] As design progresses for the Proposed Project, it is likely that the building on the eastern portion of the Development Site (i.e., Building A) would be designed as two buildings with independent utility systems to accommodate separation between the public school and CUNY facilities.

[3] Absent the KBCR project, the Proposed Project would incorporate standalone flood protections into the design.

streetscapes and public realm feature, and new publicly accessible open space would activate the street frontages at the perimeter of the Development Site and spaces within the site. The proposed site plan would turn what is currently a fenced-off private block into a public facing, porous and inviting block. Pedestrians would experience an engaging and transparent ground plane, with widened sidewalks and active street frontage, in contrast to the existing inward-facing inactive frontage of the block. Compared to the existing internal non-accessible open space courtyard, the Proposed Project would improve the block through the addition of the publicly accessible open space. The Development Site would introduce buildings of greater bulk and density than currently exist onsite, but this would align with the bulk and density of the surrounding neighborhood and the orientation of the building and site layout would follow the existing street grid pattern. The Proposed Project would open up the street wall in locations that the current development onsite blocks off via fencing and non-transparent walls. These elements would contribute to the orientation and legibility for pedestrians navigating the Development Site.

These elements of the Proposed Project's design, along with the introduction of street-fronting retail, enhanced landscaping and open space, and the addition of a New York City career-focused public school, would serve to activate the Development Site and provide needed facilities and services to the surrounding community. Compared to the No-Action condition, the With-Action condition would improve the built environment with a mix of commercial/ institutional land uses and a new open space that would improve the pedestrian experience of the Development Site and study area.

### Visual Resources

The visual resources located within the study area include the East River, the East River Greenway (also known as the East River Esplanade), and Asser Levy Playground. The East River Greenway is approximately one block east of the Development Site and includes Stuyvesant Cove Park. Asser Levy Playground is located adjacent to the Development Site and includes the Asser Levy Recreation Center, (a designated New York City landmark), within the block south of the Development Site. The Proposed Project would not negatively affect views to these visual resources. Therefore, no significant adverse impacts to these visual resources would occur as a result of the Proposed Actions.

## Methodology

Per the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the urban design and visual resources assessment is conducted in three basic steps. First, a proposed action is reviewed to determine whether such an assessment is warranted, based on whether it would be expected to result in changes to elements particular to urban design—such as streets, buildings, visual resources, open space, natural features, and/or potential wind effects, and whether there is the potential for a pedestrian to observe, from the street level, a physical alteration beyond that allowed by existing zoning. Projects that permit modification of yard, height, and setback requirements, and projects that result in an increase in built floor area beyond what would be allowed as-of-right, or in the future without a proposed action, require preliminary analysis. When such changes, or "effects," could be expected with a proposed action, then a preliminary assessment of urban design and visual resources is conducted to determine which particular effects expected with the proposed action may warrant further investigation in a detailed analysis.

A detailed analysis may be needed for projects or actions that potentially obstruct view corridors, compete with icons in the skyline, or make substantial alterations to the streetscape of a

neighborhood by noticeably changing the scale of buildings. The effects are characterized within the detailed analysis and a determination is made as to whether any changes to the urban design and visual resources of an area would alter the pedestrian's experience of public space in a significant way. The Proposed Project is located adjacent to visual resources, and given its proposed height, would be visible among existing recognizable buildings in the skyline. Therefore, a detailed analysis of the potential impacts of the Proposed Actions on urban design and visual resources is warranted per the *CEQR Technical Manual* guidelines and is provided below. This analysis describes existing conditions and compares the future with and without the Proposed Actions, to determine potential urban design and visual resource impacts.

Per the criteria listed in Section 230 of the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a pedestrian wind condition analysis is not warranted for the Proposed Actions. The *CEQR Technical Manual* identifies wind as a concern when channelized wind pressure from between tall buildings and/or downwashed wind pressure from parallel tall buildings causes winds that affect pedestrian comfort and safety. The Development Site is not located in a high wind location, such as directly along the waterfront, and would not create a uniform street wall that would result in channelization or downwash effects. Therefore, wind is not considered in this analysis.

The urban design assessment for the Proposed Project focuses on assessing potential changes to the urban fabric without committing to precise building specifications. This approach aligns with standard practices for large-scale developments, where initial environmental assessments and preliminary planning prioritize understanding broad impacts and community feedback over finalizing detailed designs. The *CEQR Technical Manual* outlines that environmental assessments typically analyze the project as facilitated by various discretionary actions but do not require exhaustive detail at preliminary stages. As such, some aspects of the project, like detailed building specifications, may not be fully defined until later stages of the review and approval process. This urban design assessment focuses on potential impacts to the urban fabric based on the most conservative building envelope.

Information pertinent to the assessment of the urban design and visual resources analysis includes data collected and analytical information prepared as part of other analyses included in this DEIS, specifically: **Chapter 2, Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy**; **Chapter 4, Open Space**; and **Chapter 6, Historic and Cultural Resources**. In addition, the study of existing urban design and visual resources conditions has been informed by field visits and photography, and future conditions without and with the Proposed Actions also rely on computer imaging and graphic renderings. All photos included in this assessment were taken in January and May 2024.

## Assessment Criteria

In general, an assessment of urban design is needed when a project may have effects on one or more of the elements that contribute to a pedestrian's experience of public space. The elements contributing to urban design are described in the *CEQR Technical Manual* as follows:

- Streets: For many neighborhoods, streets are the primary component of public space. The arrangement and orientation of streets define the location and flow of activity in an area, set street views, and create the blocks on which buildings and open spaces are organized. The apportionment of street space between cars, bicycles, transit, and sidewalk is critical to making a successful streetscape, as is the careful design of street furniture, grade, materials used, and permanent fixtures, including plantings, streetlights, fire hydrants, curb cuts, or newsstands.

- Buildings: Buildings support streets. A building's street walls form the most common backdrop in the City for public space. A building's size, shape, setbacks, lot coverage, placement on the zoning lot and block, orientation of active uses, and pedestrian and vehicular entrances all play major roles in the vitality of the streetscape. The public realm also extends to building façades and rooftops, offering more opportunity to enrich the visual character of an area.
- Open Space: For the purpose of urban design, open space includes public and private areas such as parks, yards, cemeteries, parking lots and privately-owned public spaces.
- Natural Features: Natural features include vegetation and geologic, topographic, and aquatic features. Rock outcroppings, steep slopes or varied ground elevation, beaches, or wetlands may help define the overall visual character of an area.
- Visual Resources: A visual resource is the connection from the public realm to significant natural or built features, including views of the waterfront, public parks, landmark structures or districts, otherwise distinct buildings or groups of buildings, or natural resources.
- Wind: Channelized wind pressure from between tall buildings and downwashed wind pressure from parallel tall buildings may cause winds that jeopardize pedestrian safety.

As described in **Chapter 1, Project Description**, the Proposed Actions include zoning map amendments, zoning text amendments, special permits, disposition, site selection and acquisition, a City Map change to facilitate demapping related to the existing pedestrian bridge, and State financing and City capital funding. In the areas where those actions would be applicable, there would be physical alterations beyond what is allowed by existing zoning. Therefore, an urban design and visual resources analysis is warranted.

## Study Area

Consistent with **Chapter 2, Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy**, the area within a quarter mile of the Development Site is defined as the study area for this analysis. As shown in **Figure 7-1**, the study area for this analysis is generally bounded by the New York University (NYU) Langone campus to the north, the East River to the east, Third Avenue to the west, and East 20th Street to the south mid-way through the Stuyvesant Town-Peter Cooper Village residential complex.

# Detailed Analysis

## Existing Conditions

**Figure 7-1** provides a map of the Development Site and study area, including existing public transportation routes, publicly accessible open spaces, public facilities, and cultural institutions, with accompanied site-specific photo locations. This section provides a narrative of the existing development on the project block and in the study area. **Photo 7-1** through **Photo 7-11** show existing conditions of the Development Site and Study Area.

## Urban Design: Streets, Buildings, Open Space, and Natural Features

### *Development Site and Rezoning Area*

The 4.75-acre Development Site is located in the Kips Bay neighborhood of Manhattan, New York, Community District 4. It is generally East 25th Street to the south, First Avenue to the west, FDR Drive to the east, and the northern boundary of the former East 26th Street, which is now demapped and predominantly used as a private drive for the superblock owned by H+H. The Development Site is part of Block 962, Lot 100. While Lot 100 stretches from East 25th Street, north to East 29th Street at First Avenue, and north to East 30th Street along FDR Drive, the Proposed Project would only cover the southern 4.75-acre portion of this lot. The Rezoning Area comprises a similar area to the Development Site but is extended to the street centerlines of East 25th Street to the south, First Avenue to the west, FDR Drive to the east, and to the northern edge of former East 26th Street to the north. While the Development Site and Rezoning Area include only the block between East 25th Street and former East 26th Street, they are part of a larger zoning lot (Block 962, Lot 100) that includes Bellevue Hospital and extends north as far as East 29th Street on the west side of the site and East 30th Street on the east side.

The CUNY Hunter College Brookdale Campus currently occupies the Development Site, composed of a total of approximately 538,464 gsf. Since 1952, this campus has housed the Hunter College-Bellevue School of Nursing, dormitories for students, and other medical-related facilities. The existing campus includes the School of Nursing as well as the School of Health Professions (including Physical Therapy, Speech Language Pathology, and Medical Lab Sciences). The campus consists of three main buildings that create a C-shape formation surrounding a courtyard accessible via a single entry from East 25th Street. While the courtyard fronts the street, it remains physically and visually disconnected from it. This courtyard once included tennis courts that were open to Hunter College but is now used for accessory parking.

The existing Brookdale Campus consists of three buildings: the West Building, the North Building, and the East Building. The West Building includes a 110-foot-tall, 10-story brick tower with a two-story podium, with frontage on First Avenue (see **Photo 7-1**). It consists of a library, auditorium, lecture halls, classrooms, a library, a gym, and a pool in the two-story podium and the School of Nursing's offices in the tower portion above. The primary entry to this building is to the east within the courtyard. In total, the West Building includes approximately 210,232 gsf.

The North Building includes a 14-story, 140-foot brick tower with a single-story podium, with frontage on the former East 26th Street (see **Photo 7-4**). It has a shared corridor and student lounge at ground level with a 527-bed dormitory tower above. The building can be accessed via a secured mid-block entry. In total, the North Building includes approximately 198,610 gsf.

The East Building includes a seven-story, 85-foot-tall brick tower with a two-story podium that has frontage on FDR Drive (**Photo 7-6** and **Photo 7-9**). It houses an auditorium, labs, and physical therapy areas on the first two floors and a second dormitory tower with approximately 150 beds on the remaining floors. The East Building includes approximately 129,622 gsf.

The three existing buildings are interconnected at the basement level via a shared service corridor. In the West and North Buildings, this area is used principally for infrastructure and back-of-house functions. In the East Building, the basement contains the Doctor of Physical Therapy program and facility offices. Due to the topography of the Development Site, the West and North Buildings are predominantly below grade at the basement level (with the exception of light wells along the former

East 26th Street), while portions of the East Building's basement level are at grade with windows and entry points. The buildings are also interconnected at the ground level through public corridors, lobbies, and shared amenity spaces.

The primary building entry is on the east side of the West Building, with access from the courtyard. There is a secondary entry to the same shared lobby from the former East 26th Street. At the ground level, the West Building includes amenity spaces that serve student residents, including a basketball court, game room, weight room, locker rooms, and a pool that has been closed for use since 2020. The main shared auditorium for the Brookdale Campus is adjacent to the main lobby. The North Building includes a public corridor linking the buildings together, which is flanked by facilities offices, huddle rooms (once used as typing rooms), a cafeteria, and the audiology suite for the Speech Language Pathology program. The East Building is used principally for instructional spaces at ground level, including shared classrooms, School of Health Professions labs and classrooms, and the Rotunda. The roofs of each of the three towers house elevator rooms, mechanical rooms, and equipment for fire protection. The roofs are not publicly accessible. The north tower also has terraces on the 13th floor, just below and visible from the roof level, which are no longer open for use.

## Figure 7-1 Study Area with Photograph Locations



**Photo 7-1 Development Site Looking Southeast from First Avenue and Former East 26th Street**




Photo captured on 1/8/24.

**Photo 7-2 Facing East Toward Development Site (at Right) at First Avenue and Former East 26th Street**



Photo captured on 1/8/24.

**Photo 7-3 Facing West Toward First Avenue on Former East 26th Street, with the Development Site at Left**



Photo captured on 1/8/24.

**Photo 7-4 Facing West Toward Midblock on former East 26th Street with Development Site at Left**



Photo captured on 1/8/24.

**Photo 7-5 Facing East Toward Waterside Plaza on East 25th Street, with the Development Site at Left**



Photo captured on 1/8/24.

**Photo 7-6 Facing West Toward First Avenue on East 25th Street, with the Development Site at Right**



Photo captured on 1/8/24.

**Photo 7-7 Facing North Toward the Development Site from Asser Levy Playground on East 25th Street**



Photo captured on 1/8/24.

### *Study Area*

Land uses in the quarter-mile study area are predominantly large-scale public facilities, institutions, mixed residential and commercial uses, and highway infrastructure. The Development Site is located in the Kips Bay Science District and on the First Avenue Health and Life Sciences corridor, which contains a mix of hospitals, academic institutions, and commercial Life Sciences uses.

Directly to the north of the Development Site across the former East 26th Street is the H+H Bellevue Hospital, occupying a superblock bounded by East 28th Street, FDR Drive, the former East 26th Street, and First Avenue. The entire campus includes seven buildings (the tallest of which is 25 stories) and includes a private fenced, landscaped courtyard at the corner of First Avenue and the

former East 26th Street, and a privately owned Bellevue Sobriety Garden at the eastern end of the former East 26th Street. The Garden is privately owned, operated, and maintained by the hospital. Within the superblock is the OCME Hirsch Center for Forensic Sciences. Directly south of the Development Site is the U.S. Corbin VA Facility, which consists of several buildings ranging in height from 2 to 19 stories. The U.S. Corbin VA Facility recently constructed a 14-foot-tall flood wall that extends around the site along the northern property line on East 25th Street, along the former Asser Levy Place on the site's eastern property line, and on the site's southern property line along East 23rd Street. East of the former Asser Levy Place, the 2.44-acre Asser Levy Playground and Recreation Center occupies the remaining portion of the superblock south of the Development Site (**Photo 7-7**).

The NYU College of Nursing, Dentistry and Engineering is located directly to the west of the Development Site along East 26th Street. Northwest of these facilities is the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) Public Health Laboratory site. The Alexandria Center for Life Science, located at East 29th Street and First Avenue between Bellevue Hospital and NYU Medical Center, is a state-of-the-art research and development campus. The Alexandria Center currently includes two buildings of approximately 584,000 sf, predominantly dedicated to wet lab space, or specific scientific research and development facilities focused on biological innovations.

In addition to the Life Sciences, health and academic uses, the surrounding area also contains residential, mixed commercial/residential buildings and open space uses, including the Waterside Plaza Residential Apartment Complex to the east of the site (across FDR Drive) (**Photo 7-5**), East Midtown Plaza to the southwest, and Stuyvesant Town-Peter Cooper Village to the south of the U.S. Corbin VA Facility. Stuyvesant Town-Peter Cooper Village is a large residential complex that consists of 62 red brick apartment buildings ranging between 13 and 15 stories on 80 acres (see in background of **Photo 7-11**).

Additionally, several residential developments occur to the northwest of the Development Site, including a New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) development at 344 East 28th Street, a building containing micro residential units at 335 East 27th Street, which was developed on a City-owned site pursuant to a Request for Proposals (RFP) from the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), and Kips Bay Court on Second Avenue. FDR Drive, bordered by the East River Greenway, is a controlled-access parkway that extends the east side of Manhattan to 125th Street. Adjacent to the Development Site, it is made up of six at-grade vehicular lanes of traffic (**Photo 7-10** and **Photo 7-11**).

The existing pedestrian bridge extends east across FDR Drive from the north sidewalk of East 25th Street (**Photo 7-8**). It is supported by three piers; the western pier of the bridge is located in the southeast corner of the CUNY Hunter College Brookdale Campus, the middle pier is located within the median of FDR Drive, and the eastern pier is located in the southwest corner of Block 991, Lot 60, which contains the Waterside Plaza Apartment Complex. Access to the bridge from the west is provided by a series of stairs on the Development Site, while access from the east is provided by a series of ramps on the Waterside Plaza side. Although there are ramps, the existing bridge does not meet current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility requirements on either side of FDR Drive. Currently, the width of the pedestrian path on the bridge ranges from approximately 8 feet wide over FDR Drive to a width of 6 feet for the ramps on the east side of FDR Drive adjacent to Waterside Plaza. The mapped width of the bridge structure is approximately 18 feet on the western side and approximately 21 feet on the eastern side, and it occupies an area of approximately 4,240 square feet. The underside vertical clearance of the bridge is approximately 13 feet to 16 feet in

elevation, which does not comply with current City and State Department of Transportation (DOT) standards for underside bridge clearance heights.

### *Streets*

The study area roadway network is characteristic of many neighborhoods at the end of the Manhattan street grid. While the western portion of the study area follows the classic street grid pattern, east-west running streets to the east of Second Avenue become cut off by FDR Drive.. FDR Drive is a multi-lane highway that separates the historic street grid from the East River Greenway and Waterside Plaza development. FDR Drive runs north to south along the east side of Manhattan. Between 23rd and 25th Streets, FDR Drive is elevated on a viaduct. Vehicular traffic on FDR Drive runs in two directions, northbound and southbound. Conversely, vehicular traffic on First Avenue runs one-way in a northbound direction and vehicular traffic on Second Avenue runs one-way in a southbound direction.

Streets including East 27th Street, East 24th Street, East 22nd Street, and East 21st Street end at First Avenue, creating superblocks between East 28th and East 26th Streets and First Avenue and FDR Drive (which includes the H+H Bellevue Hospital complex); between East 23rd and East 20th Streets and First Avenue and FDR Drive (which includes Peter Cooper Village); as well as between East 23rd and East 25th Streets and First Avenue and FDR Drive (which includes the U.S. Corbin VA Facility and the Asser Levy Playground and Recreation Center).

East 20th Street forms the southern boundary of the study area and separates Peter Cooper Village from the rest of the Stuyvesant Town complex to the south. There are three north-south oriented streets, including First and Second Avenues, which follow the Manhattan street grid pattern and include north-south bus service. Most of the streets in the study area allow for street parking.

**Photo 7-8 Facing Northeast Toward the Pedestrian Bridge and Waterside Plaza from Asser Levy Playground**



Photo captured on 1/8/24.

**Photo 7-9 Facing West Toward FDR Drive and the Development Site from Waterside Plaza**



Photo captured on 1/8/24.

**Photo 7-10 Facing West Toward the Development Site and Pedestrian Bridge from the East River Greenway**



Photo captured on 1/8/24.

**Photo 7-11 Facing Southwest Toward FDR Drive and Stuyvesant Town-Peter Cooper Village from the East River Greenway**



Photo captured on 1/8/24.

Pedestrian amenities in the Kips Bay neighborhood include sidewalks of varying quality and width, with walking signals and crosswalks at most intersections. As this is a densely built neighborhood in Manhattan, sidewalk and intersection quality is good, with regular pedestrian flows throughout commercial and residential areas. Examples of street furnishing in the study area include street trees, benches, trash/recycling cans, bus stop and bike lane signs, and some bus shelters, available to some extent on all streets.

### *Buildings*

The Kips Bay neighborhood is characterized by a mix of medical facilities, educational institutions, multi-family high-density residential towers, and retail corridors running north-south along the avenues. Accordingly, the neighborhood features a wide range of height, density, and materiality matching such uses. Along the super blocks within the study area, large-scale medical hubs, hospitals and campuses dominate the street front. Many of these campuses have internal walking paths and/or landscaping, similar to the "tower in a park" design of the nearby Stuyvesant Town-Peter Cooper Village or Waterside Plaza developments. In most instances, the campuses maintain a consistent street wall along the abutting street or avenue, so as to not disrupt the urban character of the neighborhood, with internal open space networks or courtyards. Along First and Second Avenues in the study area, most buildings are either institutional or mixed residential/commercial, containing a commercial base with residences above them. North of East 23rd Street on First Avenue, primarily institutional buildings range in height from six to approximately 26 stories; south of East 23rd Street on the western side of First Avenue (across from Stuyvesant Town-Peter Cooper Village), pedestrians experience smaller scale, three- to five- story residential buildings with ground floor retail space. Buildings on Second Avenue within the study area contain primarily mixed residential buildings with ground floor retail, ranging between four and 28 stories. The Kips Bay Court apartment complex on the east side of Second Avenue is made up of eight residential brick towers stretching from East 26th Street to East 29th Street, situated around a plaza (and adjacent to Bellevue South Park) and ranging in height from 12 to 27 stories.

Streets running east-west between First and Second Avenues, and between Second and Third Avenues, are almost entirely residential and typically quieter, narrow, and tree-lined. Between Second and Third Avenues, west of the institutional uses concentrated around First Avenue, they primarily consist of smaller scale residential buildings, including one- and two- family buildings, multi-family walk-ups, and multi-family elevator buildings.

Unlike other developments bordering the East River, the triangular area containing Waterside Plaza and the UN International School extends east past FDR Drive and is directly adjacent to the waterfront. This residential and business complex is home to four 31- to 37-story towers, in addition to a large, elevated plaza; the UN International School; and other smaller businesses.

### *Open Space and Natural Features*

Several publicly accessible open spaces are present in the study area, including the Asser Levy Playground located just south of the Development Site. The playground contains the Asser Levy Recreation Center (LPC #0842) (formerly the Public Baths), a designated NYC landmark, as well as a basketball court, fitness equipment, a running track, and playgrounds. The Recreation Center is a small one-story building that contains an outdoor pool and an indoor wading pool. The primary western façade has three arched openings with stone columns. From East of FDR Drive, the portion of the East River Greenway within the study area contains Stuyvesant Cove Park, adjacent to the East River. The 1,400-foot-long park contains planting and seating areas, paths, and floodwall/flood gates that are part of the City's East Side Coastal Resiliency (ESCR) project. Other open spaces within the study area include Bellevue South Park, which contains a basketball court, fitness equipment, playgrounds, and spray showers. The park, which is bounded by Mount Carmel Place to the east, the Kips Bay residential development to the west, the pedestrianized East 28th Street to the north and East 26th Street to the south, was mapped in 1966 as a new green space for an increasingly residential neighborhood. Just north of the Development Site is the Bellevue Hospital Center Plaza open space and the Bellevue Sobriety Garden, which are both private open spaces connected to the Bellevue Hospital complex. Additionally, partially within the study area is Peter's Field, an approximately 1.5-acre open space featuring recreational facilities, including basketball courts, handball courts, and a playground.

### *Visual Resources*

The primary visual resource in the study area is the East River, which is bordered by the East River Greenway and Stuyvesant Cove Park within the study area. Views to these resources from the Development Site are largely blocked by FDR Drive and the Waterside Plaza complex towers. The Asser Levy Playground and Recreation Center comprise the other visual resources visible from the Development Site. The FDR Drive viaduct, which includes a ramp between East 23rd and East 25th Streets, blocks much of the view to the waterfront from this open space. Visual corridors within the study area from which these resources are publicly viewable include East 25th Street.

## No-Action Condition

Absent the approval of the Proposed Actions (the No-Action Condition), it is anticipated that the existing buildings on the Development Site would remain, and the Development Site would continue to accommodate the same uses as the existing on-site uses in the future. The pedestrian bridge would remain in its current, non-ADA compliant condition and the proposed urban design

improvements, such as active ground floor uses, publicly accessible open space, and landscaping improvements would not be implemented. It is anticipated that the No-Build projects in the study area identified in this section would be completed and fully occupied by the 2031 Build Year.

## Urban Design: Streets, Buildings, Open Space, and Natural Features

### *Development Site, Rezoning Area, and Study Area*

#### *Streets*

While there are no planned street or transportation-specific projects anticipated in the study area in the No-Action Condition, several new developments are proposed for development by the 2031 build year. As these No-Action developments are constructed, general street improvements and sidewalk amenities such as street trees are anticipated to be added, which would improve the pedestrian experience throughout the study area.

The planned project at 455 First Avenue, detailed below, is expected to provide ground floor retail – positively influencing the pedestrian experience. The Alexandria Center North Tower project is expected to replace a surface parking lot with lab and commercial space, removing the current break in the street wall. The planned development at 429 Second Avenue would provide new residential space to the western portion of the study area, and Stuyvesant Cove Park would provide a new educational center to this open space resource in the study area. Overall, the street grid would largely remain the same as existing conditions in the No-Action Condition.

#### *Buildings*

Of the five new developments anticipated under the No-Action Condition, four of them would introduce new buildings to the study area. No other changes are anticipated in the No-Action Condition.

- **Innovation East/455 First Avenue.** This project, which is proposed for the existing Public Health Laboratory site at East 26th Street and First Avenue, would result in the construction of an approximately 609,988 gsf, 13-story commercial Life Sciences building and ground-floor retail. This project is expected to be complete in 2030.
- **Alexandria Center (Phase II – North Tower).** This project, which is located at East 29th Street and First Avenue between Bellevue Hospital and NYU Langone Health, will replace the existing surface parking lot with a 20-story building made up of approximately 330,000 gsf of office and laboratory space. This project is expected to begin construction at the end of 2024 and be complete in 2029.
- **429 Second Avenue.** This project will consist of 44,571 gsf of residential space, projected to contain 59 units and 12 stories. This project will be complete in 2025.
- **Stuyvesant Cove Park – Solar 2.** This project will be located on the northern end of Stuyvesant Cove Park and will include the replacement of the existing Solar One structure with a new two-story, 6,409 sf learning center to allow for the teaching and demonstration of urban environmental stewardship. This project will be complete in 2024.

### *Open Space and Natural Features*

As mentioned above, there are a number of existing open spaces within the study area and close to the Development Site that would remain under the No-Action Condition, including Stuyvesant Cove Park and Asser Levy Playground. In the No-Action Condition, a new two-story learning center would be constructed at Stuyvesant Cove Park within the East River Greenway, adding an additional amenity to the space.

The Kips Bay Coastal Resilience (KBCR) project would provide a flood barrier around the Bellevue Hospital campus as well as elevated and/or hardened space for critical mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) equipment. It would also provide redundant systems for important hospital infrastructure to ensure that the hospital is fully operational under backup systems. The timing of this project is unknown at this time but is expected to be partially built out by the Build Year. No other changes to open space and natural resource conditions are anticipated in the No-Action Condition.

### *Visual Resources*

In the No-Action Condition, no changes are anticipated to affect visual resources in the study area.

## With-Action Condition

The With-Action condition reflects the future conditions with the Proposed Actions. The Proposed Project would consist of up to approximately 2.19 million gsf of new construction, including academic, health care, Life Sciences, and retail space, as well as public realm improvements in the form of new 0.60-acre publicly accessible open space, an accessible pedestrian bridge over FDR Drive at East 25th Street, and a floodwall tie-in to the KBCR project's planned flood protection, including a connection to the existing floodwall at the U.S. Corbin VA Facility.

The land use actions included in this application include a zoning map amendment, a zoning text amendment; a special permit; disposition of City-owned property for the Western Parcel, including disposition for the open space premises; site selection and acquisition to allow for a new public facility; acquisition to allow for a new H+H facility; a City Map change; and disposition of a portion of the Eastern Parcel to CUNY. The Proposed Project would use City capital funding. These actions are designed to advance the Life Sciences industry in NYC by facilitating a first-of-its-kind job and education hub in the heart of Manhattan with a mix of state-of-the-art academic, health care, and Life Sciences facilities on the Development Site.

The comparative perspective views shown in **Figure 7-2** through **Figure 7-7** show the maximum building envelope as permitted by the Proposed Actions. Additionally, the Innovation East/455 First Avenue No-Action development described previously is also reflected in **Figure 7-2**, **Figure 7-3**, and **Figure 7-5**. This development, located across First Avenue from the Development Site, would result in the construction of an approximately 609,988 gsf commercial Life Sciences building and ground-floor retail by 2030.

## Urban Design: Streets, Buildings, Open Space, and Natural Features

### *Development Site, Rezoning Area, and Study Area*

#### *Streets*

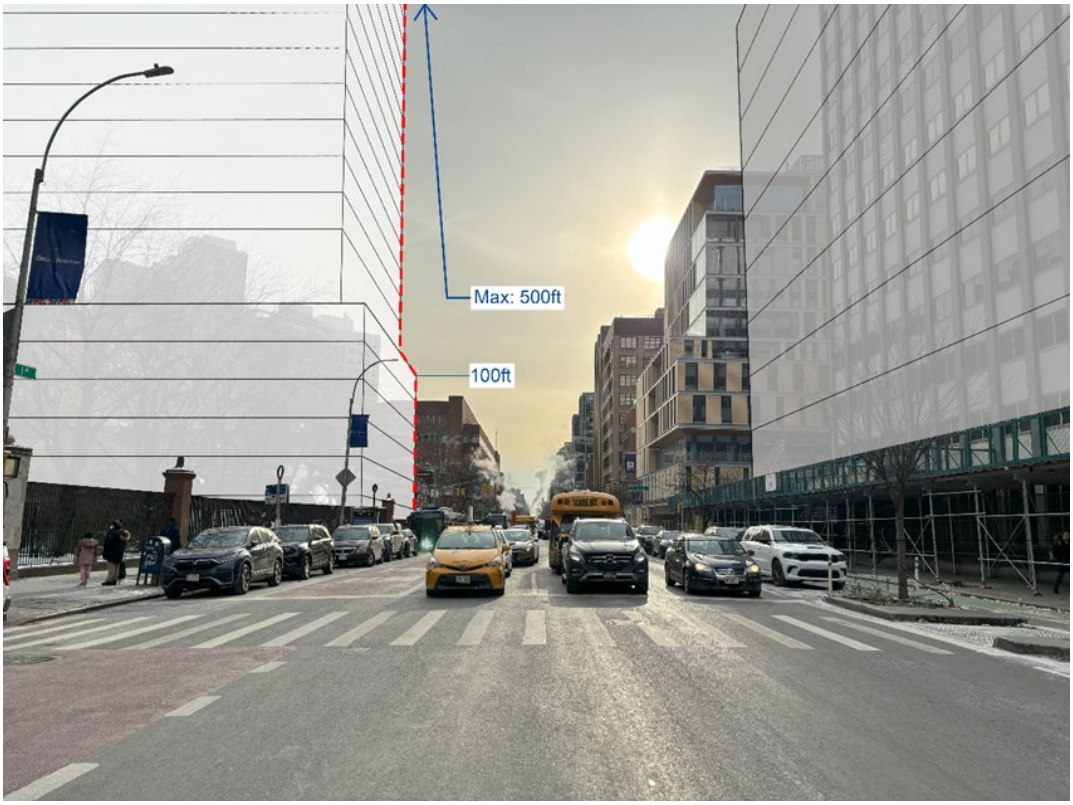
The urban design conditions of local streets and streetscapes would be improved by the Proposed Actions and provide improved access to the East River waterfront. As part of the Proposed Project, a campus of new buildings would be constructed at the Development Site, arranged around a mid-block public open space fronting East 25th Street. The Proposed Project would include crosswalk improvements on East 25th Street to Asser Levy Playground. Key circulation improvements on and around the Development Site, including a new mid-block drop-off and the conversion of former East 26th Street to a two-way access drive, would help improve circulation to existing facilities for H+H/Bellevue and OCME's Hirsch Building for Forensic Sciences to the north, while accommodating the planned redevelopment of the campus that would bring thousands of students, researchers, patients, and visitors to the site every day. Former East 26th Street, which is a City-owned demapped street, would be widened and made two-way to improve vehicular circulation between First Avenue and FDR Drive. Overall, the Proposed Project would transform the street layout of the No-Action condition to provide greater pedestrian and vehicular connectivity for both the public and the regular users of the new campus in the With-Action condition. Widened sidewalks, the proposed open space, and ground-floor retail and lobbies with street-facing amenities would create an inviting street presence for pedestrians compared to the No-Action condition.

## Figure 7-2 Comparative View Facing South on First Avenue at East 27th Street

### No-Action Condition (Showing No-Action Development at 455 First Avenue, at Right)



### With-Action Condition




Note: This massing represents a building envelope within which the building can be constructed rather than the final proposed building design

### *Buildings*

As discussed in **Chapter 1, Project Description** and **Chapter 2, Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy**, the Proposed Actions would lead to zoning and land use changes that would affect the experience of the streetscape and building form throughout the study area. The Proposed Actions would provide an active and transparent ground level experience, including neighborhood serving retail and amenity spaces. The Proposed Project would include a research and public health campus on the site's west side, including two commercial Life Sciences buildings, and a consolidated education campus on the site's east side, which would bring together programs of Hunters College, Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy, and a new NYC public high school focused on the health and sciences.

In the With-Action Condition, the westernmost tower of the Proposed Project fronting First Avenue could be a maximum of approximately 500 feet tall (including mechanical bulkhead allowance) with a 100-foot podium, as shown in **Figure 7-2**, an increase from the No-Action Condition of approximately 140 feet in maximum building height. The Northern tower of the Proposed Project could be a maximum of approximately 22 stories tall, with an approximate height of 420 feet (including mechanical bulkhead allowance). By contrast, the Eastern tower of the Proposed Project could be a maximum of 20 stories and up to approximately 370 feet tall.

Approximate lot coverage would be 128,121 sf of the approximately 206,981 sf site (just over 60 percent lot coverage). This includes the three main buildings, pavilion, and the area that the sky bridges cover but does not include the area under SPARC Square. It is anticipated that this approximately 0.60-acre (26,150 sf) publicly accessible open space would be constructed over a portion of the cellar space. If the SPARC Square space is added to the lot coverage of the buildings, the combined lot coverage would be just over approximately 75 percent.

The proposed orientation of the massing envelope for the Proposed Project would be similar to the No-Action Condition, with a collection of multiple[4] buildings on the periphery of the Development Site surrounding a central open space fronting East 25th Street. The proposed massing would shift density and height towards First Avenue, as shown above in **Figure 7-2**, which presents the maximum building envelope for the Proposed Project. This would allow the massing to drop in scale towards the East River, to be more in context with the residential and institutional uses to the south and east. The easternmost portion of the site occupied by CUNY and the NYC public school would be consistent in height with the nearby Waterside Plaza towers across FDR Drive. The intent of this massing strategy is to maximize light and air into the campus buildings, specifically for classrooms and offices, while cascading the height of buildings towards residential and institutional buildings to the south and east (see **Figure 7-7**). Detailed descriptions of the building massing and how it would contribute to the urban fabric are provided below.

The Proposed Project would include approximately 2.19 million gsf of development (8.60 FAR) within the three buildings, which includes 798,521 gsf of overall academic space, 341,280 gsf of overall healthcare space, 1,040,880 gsf of overall commercial Life Sciences space, 15,000 gsf of local retail, and 225 parking spaces. The westernmost section of the Proposed Project would be constructed along First Avenue, between the former East 26th Street and East 25th Street. This building could rise approximately 26 stories over a base of six stories (a maximum height of approximately 500 feet with

[4] As design progresses for the Proposed Project, it is likely that the building on the eastern portion of the Development Site (i.e., Building A) would be designed as two buildings with independent utility systems to accommodate separation between the public school and CUNY facilities.

a 100-foot podium). The proposed building's street frontage on First Avenue would integrate itself well with neighboring buildings of similar height and density, including the No-Action project at 455 First Avenue, directly across the street and shown in **Figure 7-2**. Street-level frontage would welcome users through inviting lobbies, widened sidewalks and the proposed open space, which would create an inviting street presence and a positive pedestrian experience. Proposed street-facing amenities would include neighborhood-serving retail, educational and public space, which would wrap around East 25th Street.

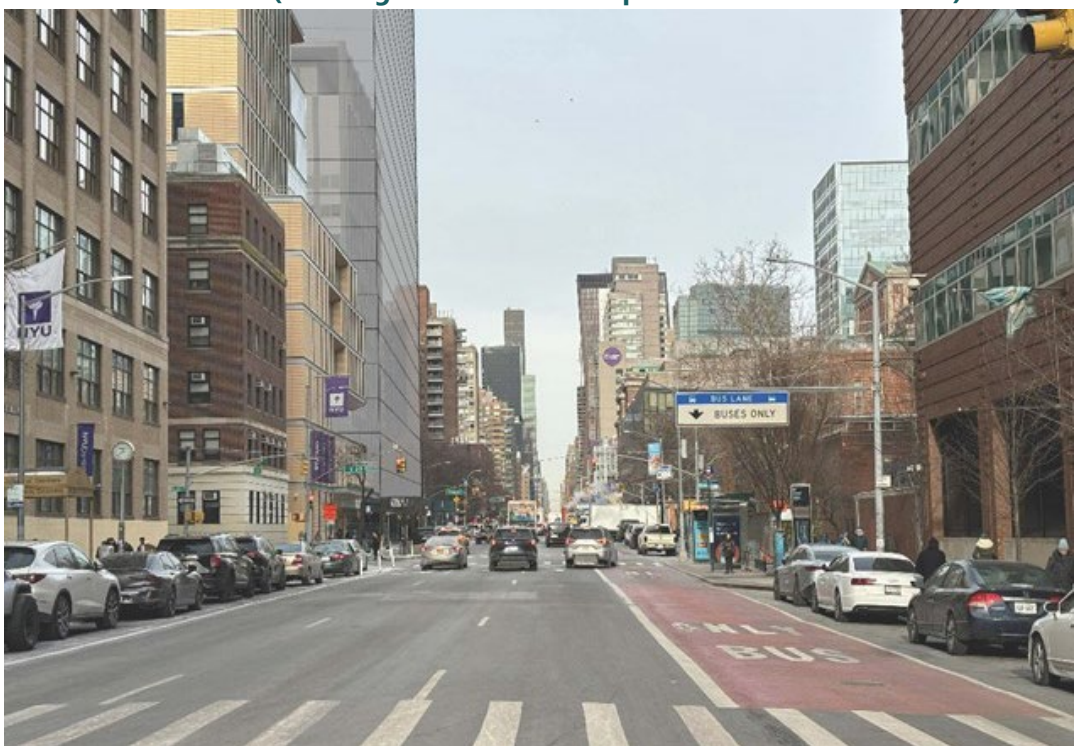
Purpose-built modern buildings and vibrant ground floor spaces would enhance the First Avenue corridor for all users of the campus and community. Transparent and activated ground floor space would further showcase the cutting-edge research being conducted at the Development Site, capturing the interest of the general public and connecting City residents to professions in public health and Life Sciences. Overall, the pedestrian experience would change (from that of the No-Action Condition) in that the proposed buildings would contribute to creating more density—consistent with other similar developments in the area—and activation along and within the street-level frontage.

The middle section of the building complex would be sited mid-block between First Avenue and FDR Drive, with the building located closer to former East 26th Street to allow for the construction of the 0.60-acre SPARC Square along East 25th Street. The maximum building envelope for the Northern building would allow for 22 stories (maximum height of 420 feet), over a base of two to six stories in some areas. A pedestrian sky bridge is proposed over the former East 26th Street to the Hirsch Center for Forensic Sciences, providing access to the H+H Bellevue Hospital superblock (see **Figure 7-5**). On former East 26th Street, efforts to improve access to hospital facilities would affect the pedestrian experience. The street would be widened and converted to a two-way street, which would smooth vehicular traffic, particularly on the eastern end of the street, where back-of-house operations would be clustered. As such, pedestrian traffic would largely be diverted to the southern side of the block, on East 25th Street. There, the pedestrian experience would be vastly improved by the creation of wider sidewalks, the publicly accessible open space in the form of SPARC Square, and an activated street frontage. Landscaping, benches, seating, and plantings would create an inviting space for both users of the campus and the general public. SPARC Square would be framed by modern facades, prioritizing openness, access, and transparency. Specific ground level amenities, such as local retail, landscaping, and food a beverage space, including a kiosk within SPARC Square would further engage the public and invite users to circulate through the Development Site.

On the easternmost section of the Development Site, the building base would be approximately two stories while the maximum building envelope would be up to 20 stories (a maximum envelope height of 370 feet). While the building design has not yet been finalized, given the shape of the maximum building envelope and the sky exposure plan setting back from, it is anticipated that the tallest portion of the building massing would face the middle section of the block, away from FDR Drive and the shortest portion of the building massing would face East 25th Street and wrap around to face FDR drive. The maximum building envelope that could be achieved with the Proposed Actions is illustrated here for conservative analysis purposes as the new building could be located anywhere within the maximum building envelope.

## Figure 7-3 Comparative View Facing North on First Avenue from East 24th Street

### No-Action Condition (Showing No-Action Development at 455 First Avenue)




### With-Action Condition (Showing the Planned No-Action and With-Action Developments)




Note: This massing represents a building envelope within which the building can be constructed rather than the final proposed building design

## Figure 7-4 Comparative View Facing East Toward First Avenue from East 25th Street

### No-Action Condition



### With-Action Condition




Note: This massing represents a building envelope within which the building can be constructed rather than the final proposed building design

## Figure 7-5 Comparative View facing north toward the Development Site from east of FDR Drive

### No-Action Condition



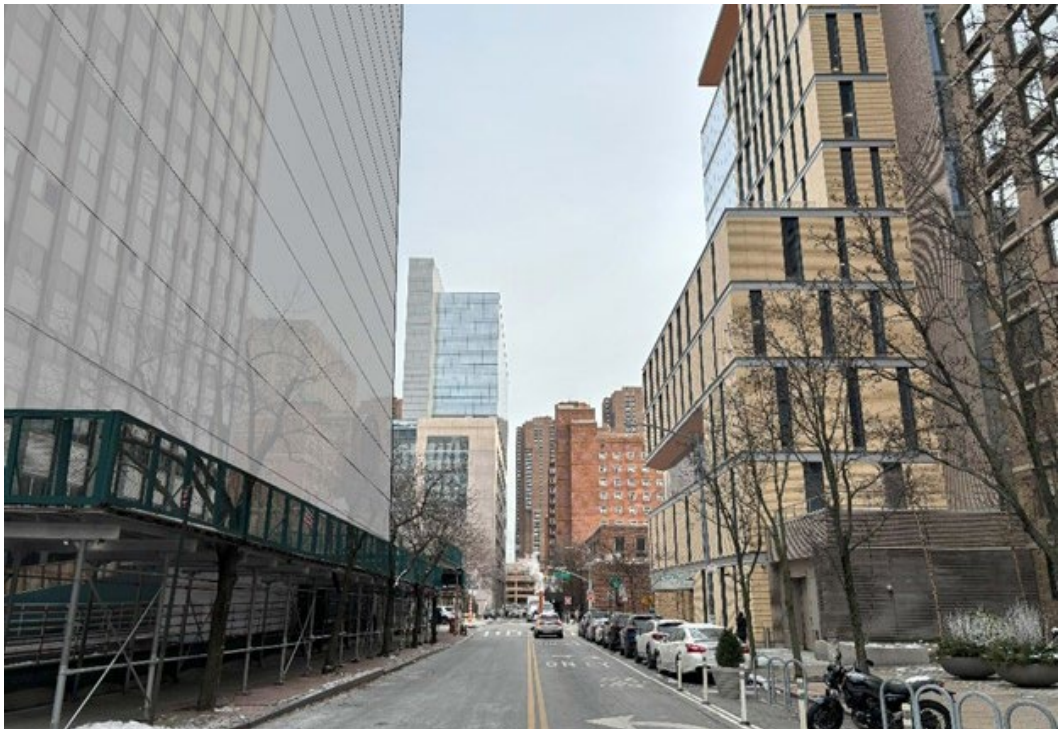
### With-Action Condition



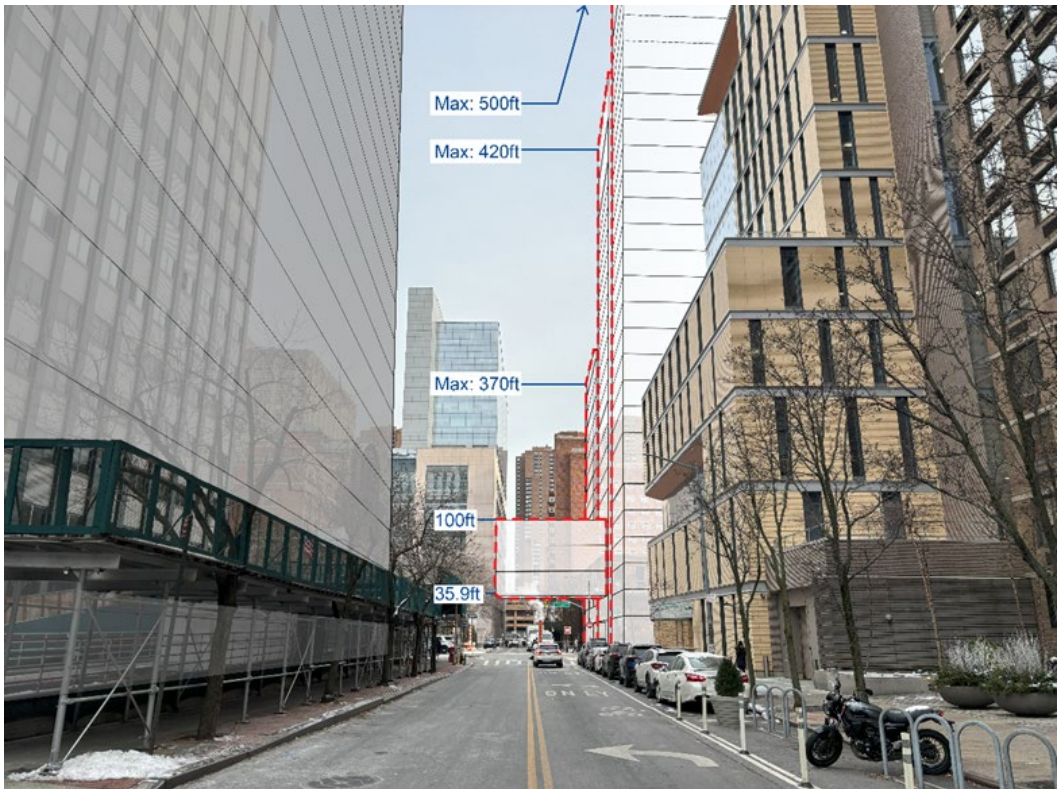

Note: This massing represents a building envelope within which the building can be constructed rather than the final proposed building design

## Figure 7-6 Comparative View Facing East Toward First Avenue from Former East 26th Street

### No-Action Condition (Showing the Planned No-Action Development at 455 First Avenue)



### With-Action Condition



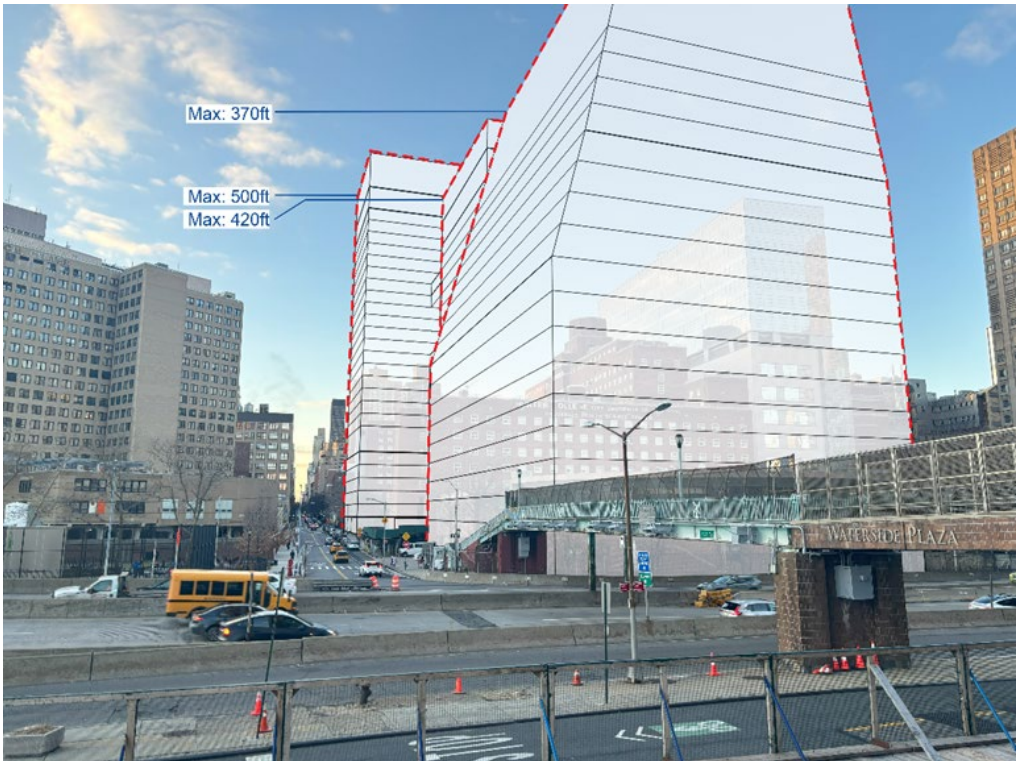

Note: This massing represents a building envelope within which the building can be constructed rather than the final proposed building design

## Figure 7-7 Comparative View Facing West Toward FDR Drive and Along East 25th Street

### No-Action Condition




### With-Action Condition




Note: This massing represents a maximum building envelope within which the building can be constructed rather than the final proposed building design

## Figure 7-8 Comparative View Facing North Toward the Development Site from west of FDR Drive

### No-Action Condition



### With-Action Condition




Note: This massing represents a building envelope within which the building can be constructed rather than the final proposed building design

### *Open Space and Natural Features*

The Proposed Project envisions the transformation of the existing block into a connected series of buildings that would also allow for a major 0.60-acre public open space located mid-block at the Development Site, fronting East 25th Street, that connects to the existing context and street grid. The open space would be a shared space for students, employees, patients, visitors, and the broader public. It would also facilitate easy navigation between the buildings, creating an accessible route from First Avenue to all campus locations, and be connected to the new pedestrian bridge. The Proposed Project also includes a number of on-site community improvements that would be undertaken outside of the SPARC campus to improve public access, pedestrian safety, and resiliency. These public realm improvements are further described below.

### *Pedestrian Bridge Replacement and Infrastructure Improvements*

The Proposed Project would respond to a long-standing request from the community to improve the existing pedestrian bridge that crosses FDR Drive at East 25th street, through the proposed City Map change that would facilitate the demapping related to the pedestrian bridge. This bridge connects to the waterfront and the communities at Waterside Plaza and the UN International School. The proposed pedestrian bridge upgrades would allow the updated bridge to be ADA-compliant, allowing for greater connectivity than exists currently between the Development Site and the East River waterfront. If the design of the new pedestrian bridge would require further change to the City Map, a separate mapping action would be requested in a future application. The replacement bridge would also increase the underside clearance height to approximately 15.5 feet to comply with State and City DOT standards. The proposed replacement bridge would be coordinated with the future floodwall alignment described below. These public realm improvements would support a connected network of parks, forming a link between Asser Levy Playground to the south and the East River Greenway to the east.

In addition to the replacement bridge that would create a safe and universally accessible connection across FDR Drive, the Proposed Project would include a floodwall tie-in to the KBCR flood wall to the northeast along FDR Drive and provide protection along East 25th Street, including a connection to the existing floodwall at the U.S. Corbin VA Facility. This would contribute to long-term resiliency for both the Development Site and the broader neighborhood. Absent the approval of the Proposed Actions, these public realm improvements would not be realized.

### *Visual Resources*

The Proposed Project would not negatively affect views of the visual resources in the study area, which include the East River, East River Greenway (including Stuyvesant Cove Park), and Asser Levy Playground and Recreation Center. Views of the East River from the ground floor level at the Development Site are largely blocked due to FDR Drive and the existing dense built environment present in the study area. The East River Greenway is at present blocked from view by FDR Drive. The Proposed Project would therefore have no negative impact on view corridors to the East River Greenway. Asser Levy Playground and Recreation Center sits just south of the Development Site, on the other side of East 25th Street. Views to this visual resource may be limited by the With-Action Condition from vantage points north of East 26th Street. However, the Asser Levy Playground and

Recreation Center remains accessible and visible from all other vantage points, from FDR Drive, East 25th Street, and East 24th Street.

The Proposed Project would provide greater connectivity between these resources through the new open space and improved pedestrian bridge over FDR Drive and would make it easier for the public to access views of the East River. Therefore, no significant adverse impacts to these visual resources would occur as a result of the Proposed Actions.

### *Summary*

Overall, the Proposed Actions would result in a change in the streetscape across the various zones of the Development Site. The Proposed Actions would introduce buildings of greater bulk and density than currently exist onsite, but this would align with the bulk and density of the surrounding neighborhood to follow the existing street grid pattern and accommodate needed Life Sciences and institutional building space. These uses would be compatible with both existing building uses and those which would be developed in the No-Action Condition in the study area. The increased bulk and density on the Development Site facilitated by the Proposed Actions would be comparable to existing development and planned developments in the study area. While the three existing buildings on site range in height, maxing out at 185 feet tall, the Proposed Project would consist of new buildings roughly occupying the same footprints as the existing buildings. The new buildings would range in height from approximately 20 stories (370 feet) fronting FDR Drive, approximately 22 stories in the center of the Development Site, to approximately 26 stories (500 feet) fronting First Avenue. Despite being taller than the existing structures onsite, this is compatible with surrounding bulk and density, as exhibited by the existing residential buildings at Waterside Plaza (east of the Development Site, with building heights of approximately 300 to 350 feet) and Bellevue Hospital (363feet), just north of the Proposed Project. The Proposed Actions would facilitate buildings similar in form and aesthetic to existing and recently constructed institutional buildings in the study area, including the improvements to the Bellevue Hospital and the NYU Langone Medical Center.

The additional open space and improved pedestrian bridge would result in enhanced connectivity and resiliency of the surrounding area. These elements would contribute to orientation and legibility of pedestrians navigating the site and would create new openings in the street wall in locations that the current development onsite blocks off via fencing and large walls. The Proposed Actions would facilitate development that is well-integrated with current built conditions and the existing pedestrian experience within the study area.

Therefore, no significant adverse impact is expected due to the Proposed Actions' effects on urban design and visual resources at the Development Site or within the study area.