14

Neighborhood Character

This section considers how the proposed action would affect neighborhood character, which is defined as the elements of the environment that combine to create the context and feeling of a neighborhood.

14.1 Introduction

This analysis of neighborhood character follows the guidelines set forth in the 2014 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*. As defined within the manual, neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give neighborhoods a distinct "personality," including land use, urban design and visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomic conditions, transportation, and noise. Not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare and occur under unusual circumstances.

This section includes a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character; the assessment was prepared in conformance with the *CEQR Technical Manual* using information from the technical analyses presented in other relevant sections of the EIS.

14.2 Principal Conclusions

The proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts in any of the technical areas that contribute to neighborhood character with the exception of transportation nor would it adversely affect the defining features of the neighborhood. Overall, the proposed project would be in keeping with the new tall, multi-family elevator buildings being constructed as part of Essex Crossing and the increasing levels of activity associated with these developments. Therefore, no further assessment is warranted, and the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

14.3 Methodology

A neighborhood character assessment is generally needed, per the *CEQR Technical Manual*, when a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in certain technical areas (land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; shadows; transportation; or noise) or when the project may have moderate effects on several of the elements that define a neighborhood's character.

In the absence of an impact on any of the relevant technical areas, a combination of moderate effects to the neighborhood could result in an impact to neighborhood character. A significant impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood's character is not necessarily equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character. Therefore, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally appropriate if a proposed project has the potential to result in any significant adverse impacts in the technical areas listed above. Examples of possible changes in those technical areas that could result in an adverse effect on neighborhood character, *should those technical areas be defining features of the neighborhood*, are as follows:

- **Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy**: If development resulting from a proposed action would conflict with surrounding uses, conflict with land use policy or other public plans for the area, or change land use character, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Socioeconomic Conditions**: If a proposed action results in direct or indirect displacement or addition of population, employment, or businesses; or substantial differences in population or employment density, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Open Space:** If an action would result in a reduction or displacement of an open space or result in additional population that would place a substantial demand on open space, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Historic and Cultural Resources**: If a proposed action would result in substantial direct changes to a historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a historic resource, neighborhood character could be affected.

- **Urban Design and Visual Resources:** If a proposed action would result in substantially different building block, form, size, scale, or arrangement; block form, street pattern or street hierarchy, streetscape elements, or substantial direct changes to a visual feature, such as unique and important public view corridors and vistas, or to public visual access to such a feature, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Shadows:** If a proposed project would cast an incremental shadow on a sun-sensitive resources, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Transportation**. When a proposed project would result in a change in traffic patterns or would substantially increase traffic volumes on residential streets, neighborhood character could be affected.
- **Noise:** When a proposed action would substantially increase noise levels in an area, neighborhood character could be affected.

As part of a neighborhood character analysis, the defining features of the neighborhood are identified and then a determination is made as to whether the project has the potential to adversely affect these defining features, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas. If the assessment concludes that a proposed project has the potential to adversely affect defining features of a neighborhood, a detailed analysis is undertaken to determine whether the project would result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

The neighborhood character analysis draws from the technical assessments listed above. As recommended in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for the neighborhood character analysis is consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas assessed under CEQR that contribute to the defining elements of the neighborhood. As such, the study area for neighborhood character is consistent with the 400-foot study area used for the analysis of land use, zoning, and public policy.

As detailed in the previous sections of this EIS, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts in any of the above technical areas with the exception of transportation. Therefore, this analysis evaluates the potential for the proposed project to affect neighborhood character through a combination of moderate effects and from the identified transportation impacts. The analysis begins with an assessment of each of the technical areas, then identifies the defining features of the neighborhood and assesses whether the project would adversely affect those defining features.

14.4 Project Potential to Adversely Affect the Contributing Elements of Neighborhood Character

This section evaluates the potential for the project to result in an adverse impact on neighborhood character through a combination of moderate effects in the various technical areas.

- **Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy:** As discussed in **Chapter 2**, "**Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy**," the proposed project would be consistent with land uses, zoning, and public policy in the study area. The project would not conflict with surrounding uses, nor would it conflict with land use policy or other public plans for the area.

- **Socioeconomic Conditions:** The proposed project would not result in a substantial direct or indirect displacement or addition of population, employment, or businesses; or substantial differences in population or employment density.
- **Open Space:** The proposed project would not result in the reduction or displacement of open space, nor would it place a substantial demand on open space.
- **Historic and Cultural Resources:** The proposed project would not affect public views of a historic resource, the Eastern Dispensary (NYCL-eligible, S/NR-listed) and would not change the surrounding context of the portion of the Lower East Side Historic District (S/NR) located within the study area. The applicant is working with LPC to determine specifics of how the remnants of the BHH synagogue (NYCL, S/NR), which is located on Projected Development Site 1, would be incorporated into the proposed development. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a significant adverse impact on historic and cultural resources.
- **Urban Design and Visual Resources:** The proposed project would be compatible with the character of the surrounding area and would be consistent with the surrounding building form, particularly with other recent and on-going Essex Crossing developments in the immediate vicinity, and streetscape. While the proposed project has the potential to change the viewing context of views from within the Lower East Side Historic District (S/NR), the views themselves would not be affected. Overall, the proposed project would be a substantial improvement over the existing and No-Action urban design and visual resources conditions of the site as space currently used as private open space and accessory parking would be replaced with two new buildings and a ground floor expansion of an existing building with active frontage at the street line.
- **Shadows:** The proposed project would result in shadow increments on a recently opened open space resource across Suffolk Street from Projected Development Site 1 on Site 5 of the Essex Crossing development (The Park). As detailed in **Chapter 5**, "**Shadows**," the proposed project's shadow increments on The Park would not result in significant adverse shadows impacts.
- **Transportation:** The proposed project would result in increases in pedestrian and vehicular trips in an area where both pedestrian and vehicular activity is increasing with the continued build out of the Essex Crossing developments.
- **Noise:** The proposed project would not substantially increase noise in the study area.

14.5 Project Potential to Affect the Defining Features of the Neighborhood

Identification of the Defining Features of the Neighborhood

The proposed project is located within the Lower East Side neighborhood of Manhattan. The 400-foot study area consists primarily of mixed-use and multi-family residential developments and a mix of building types with older multi-family walkup buildings located west of Essex Street and taller mixed-use and multi-family elevator buildings east of Essex Street. The area east of Essex Street contains a NYCHA building, which is located on the

block west of the project block and a portion of the Seward Park Cooperative Village on the south side of Grand Street.

The surrounding area is primarily defined by new high-rise buildings being constructed as part of the Essex Crossing development, a large-scale mixed-use development project totaling approximately 1.9 million square feet over nine sites on the Lower East Side. The development, which was approved in October 11, 2012 and is expected to be completed in 2023, will introduce over 1,000 new residences, 450,000 square feet of retail, 400,000 square feet of office space, community attractions, and green spaces.

As mentioned in **Chapter 6**, "**Historic Resources**" a small portion of the Lower East Side Historic District (S/NR) is within the west part of the study area. The Lower East Side Historic District (S/NR) is historically significant for its association with immigration in America between 1820 and 1940. The historic district is characterized primarily by residential structures with commercial ground floors and are largely five- to six-story brick tenements with stone, cast-iron, brick, or terra-cotta trim and galvanized-iron cornices. The buildings are set on lots that are generally 25 feet wide (some are narrower, and a few later buildings are on wider lots) and they extend deep into their lots (generally 90 feet deep).

Delancey Street, a major thoroughfare leading to Williamsburg Bridge that links Brooklyn and Manhattan, is located in the northern portion of the 400-foot study area.

Overall, the defining features of the neighborhood are:

- In the area west of Essex Street: older multi-family and mixed-use walkup buildings
- To the east of Essex Street: taller mixed use and multi-family elevator buildings, including the Seward Park Cooperative Village and a NYCHA building
- More recently constructed buildings being developed as part of the Essex Crossing development and the increasing levels of activity associated with these new buildings
- The Lower East Side Historic District (S/NR) located in the western portion of the study area
- Delancey Street to the northern edge of the study area, leading to the Williamsburg Bridge (which is outside the study area)

In terms of traffic, the area experiences congestion at area intersections because of the existing density of uses and the eastbound and westbound traffic on Delancey Street to the Williamsburg Bridge. In addition, roadway capacity for vehicles has been reduced in the area because of roadway improvements that have included bike lanes (i.e., bike lanes have been introduced in roadway area previously devoted to vehicular transport) and that prioritized pedestrian safety (i.e., sidewalks have been widened and/or bulb-outs have been implemented, again in areas of roadway previously devoted to vehicular transport). Existing congestion will continue in the No Action condition because of substantial increases in background vehicle traffic as a result of planned developments in the area, such as the Essex Crossing developments, and because of the limits on roadway capacity.

In terms of noise, existing measured noise levels range between marginally acceptable to marginally unacceptable (67.3 to 77.8) depending on the location and time of day. Generally,

noise sources in the area are related to vehicular traffic and on-going construction of the Essex Crossing developments.

Assessment

Overall, the proposed project would not adversely affect the defining features of the neighborhood.

The proposed project would result in the development of two buildings on Projected Development Site 1 and additional commercial space on Projected Development Site 2. The Suffolk Building would be a 30-story, 310-foot-tall mixed-use building with ground floor retail and community facility space; the Norfolk Building would be a 16-story, 165-foot-tall building with community facility space. As mentioned previously, the neighborhood is defined by primarily mixed-use and residential uses, and the proposed project would be consistent with these uses. The building form would be in keeping with the new tall, multi-family elevator buildings being constructed as part of Essex Crossing. The addition of retail and community facility uses would support the residential uses in the area.

The proposed project would also not affect the defining features of the remainder of the study area: the roadways and Delancey Street would continue to experience congestion. While significant traffic impacts are expected from the projected development on Projected Development Sites 1 and 2, the projected development would generate only a modest amount of vehicle trips. As noted above, congestion in the area is driven by existing uses, substantial increases in background vehicle traffic as a result of planned developments in the area, such as the Essex Crossing developments, and limits on roadway capacity from the introduction of bikelanes and pedestrian safety measures. Overall, the proposed project would not change the character of the neighborhood's traffic conditions.

In addition, the proposed project would not change the surrounding context of the portion of the Lower East Side Historic District (S/NR) located within the study area.

As discussed above, the projected development would not result in any significant adverse impacts on views to and from the prominent features of the scenic resources within the study area. Therefore, the proposed actions would not result in a significant adverse impact on urban design and visual resources.

In terms of shadows, because of the location of the Projected Development Site in relation to sun-sensitive resources of concern, a detailed analysis was warranted for just one resource: the Park at Essex Crossing, located across Suffolk Street from Projected Development Site 1. The detailed analysis concluded that while the proposed development would result in shadow increments on The Park during the afternoon periods of the March, May and June analysis days, it would not result in a significant adverse shadows impact. From its inception, the site identified and chosen for the privately-owned and maintained, publicly-accessible Park on Site 5 was conceived of as one that would be largely in shadow during most of the fall, winter, and early spring analysis days. For those open space users who want afternoon sun, there is a nearby park (Seward Park) that would be in sunshine during the afternoon periods, which offers similar amenities to those at The Park. In addition, an assessment of whether there would be sufficient sunlight during the growing season so that the viability of The Park's vegetation would be maintained indicated that there is a small

section of The Park that may receive less than four hours of direct sunlight on two of the analysis days. However, consistent with the original conception of the park as a space that would be largely in shadow during most of the fall, winter, and early spring, the planted species in this area of the park are those that tolerate partial shade conditions; therefore, the proposed development is not expected to have a significant adverse shadows impact on vegetation. Overall, the proposed development would not result in significant adverse shadows impacts nor would it affect neighborhood character.

In terms of noise, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse noise impacts at nearby receptors. Noise levels would continue in the marginally acceptable to marginally unacceptable range (68.3 to 79.2). Noise in the neighborhood would continue to be predominantly attributed to vehicular traffic in the area.

Overall, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts in any of the technical areas that contribute to neighborhood character with the exception of transportation nor would it adversely affect the defining features of the neighborhood. The proposed project would be in keeping with the new tall, multi-family elevator buildings being constructed as part of Essex Crossing and the increasing levels of activity associated with these developments. Therefore, no further assessment is warranted, and the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.