

## 8.7 NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

### 8.7.1 Introduction

This Section considers the potential neighborhood character effects of the construction and operation of Shaft 33B at the E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site. The methodology used to prepare this Section is presented in Chapter 3, “Impact Methodologies,” Section 3.7, “Neighborhood Character.” As discussed in Section 3.7, neighborhood character is generally considered to be a composite of elements that give a neighborhood its identity, including land use patterns, urban design, visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomic characteristics, traffic, and noise. This Section considers how these characteristics, evaluated separately in the other Sections of this Chapter, interact to give the neighborhood of the E. 61<sup>st</sup> Street Shaft Site its unique feel. The alternative Shaft Site is located in the streetbed and sidewalk at the northeast corner of E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street and Second Avenue. The general Study Area for the alternative Shaft Site is the area within 400 feet of the site, extending to E. 57<sup>th</sup> Street on the north, to approximately 100 feet south of E. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street on the south, to midway between Second and Third Avenues on the west, and to First Avenue on the east since this is the area where project activities would be most noticeable. In addition, other areas where project effects might be felt were also considered during the evaluation of neighborhood character.

### 8.7.2 Existing Conditions

#### Alternative Shaft Site

The alternative Shaft Site and its surrounding construction area is an “L”-shaped site located in the street and sidewalk areas on the north side of E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street and on the east side of Second Avenue. The alternative Shaft Site would occupy approximately half of the length of the east-side Second Avenue sidewalk and approximately one-third the length of the north-side E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street sidewalk, as well as the adjacent streetbeds. The site is adjacent to 4- to 6-story multi-family residential buildings with ground-floor retail uses, including two restaurants, a dry cleaner, and a salon. The sidewalk of Second Avenue includes street trees and typical street furniture. There are no architectural resources or visual resources within the alternative Shaft Site. From the site, looking west along E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street, the Citigroup Center and the Lipstick Building (855 Third Avenue) can be seen.

#### Study Area

The Study Area for the E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site is primarily residential east of Second Avenue, with ground-floor commercial and retail uses located mainly along Second Avenue and on E. 53<sup>rd</sup> and E. 57<sup>th</sup> Streets. As described in Section 4.3, “Open Space,” in Chapter 4, “Preferred Shaft Site,” according to Census 2000, approximately 16,000 people live in the area generally extending from E. 54<sup>th</sup> to E. 59<sup>th</sup> Streets, east of Third Avenue. An additional 7,000 people live in the area between E. 49<sup>th</sup> and E. 54<sup>th</sup> Streets, between First and Third Avenues

(Census Tract 98). The ground-floor retail uses are marked by awnings above store entrances and windows; the side streets also include a number of canopies leading from the street to residential building entrances. Within the Study Area are 3-story rowhouses, 4- to 6-story tenements (particularly along Second Avenue), medium-scale (10- to 20-story) apartment buildings, and large-scale (20+-story), modern apartment towers, including one currently under construction at the southeast corner of E. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street and Second Avenue. The blocks west of Second Avenue contain a greater mix of uses, including residential, office, retail, institutional, parking, and utility uses; this portion of the Study Area contains two high-rise office buildings which occupy the west ends of the blocks located between E. 54<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Streets. There is one publicly owned recreational facility located within the Study Area: the 54<sup>th</sup> Street Recreation Center of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYCDPR), located on E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street between First and Second Avenues, which is a Neoclassical red brick and stone building originally built as a bathhouse. While most buildings are built to the streetline and the Study Area has, in general, very strong streetwalls, several large-scale buildings are set back behind public plazas. The buildings are clad in a variety of materials, mostly brick, glass and metal, and stone.

Traffic volumes along streets in the Study Area experience some congestion. While Second Avenue serves as a main route for vehicles entering midtown Manhattan via the Queensboro Bridge (Bridge), this area is less influenced by traffic from the Bridge than locations farther north and closer to the Bridge. Second Avenue also provides access to the Queens-Midtown Tunnel. There is pedestrian activity throughout the area, heavier along Second Avenue and less so along the side streets. A number of bus routes operate near the alternative Shaft Site. Ambient noise levels are generally at or above the CEQR threshold of acceptability. The primary factor influencing the high existing ambient conditions is vehicular traffic.

The Study Area contains three groups of historic resources: three buildings at 229–235 E. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, two buildings at 237–241 E. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, and two buildings at 312-314 E. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street. The buildings at 229–235 E. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street are identical 5-story brick apartment buildings; 237-241 E. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street are identical 6-story brick apartment buildings designed in a Renaissance Revival style; and 312-314 E. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street are among the last of the pre-1866 wooden buildings constructed north of E. 23<sup>rd</sup> Street. Visual resources that can be seen within the Study Area include the Citigroup Center and the Lipstick Building, which are visible in views west along E. 53<sup>rd</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup> Streets; the dark-glass Trump World Tower on First Avenue, which can be seen in views to the southeast from Second Avenue and E. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street; and the stainless-steel spire of the Chrysler Building, which is visible looking to the southwest from E. 55<sup>th</sup> Street and Second Avenue.

In addition the 54<sup>th</sup> Street Recreation Center, the Study Area includes three publicly accessible open spaces in the Study Area, all of them plazas adjacent to apartment buildings. One such plaza is directly across E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street from the alternative Shaft Site at Connaught Tower. There are street trees along sidewalks throughout the Study Area, and there are also several landscaped plazas that include trees, shrubs, and flowers surrounding residential and commercial tower buildings.

Overall, the Study Area can be generally characterized as a densely populated, noisy, and thriving section of East Midtown. The Study Area marks the transition between the commercial Central Business District to the west and the more residential neighborhood along and east of Second Avenue. Shops and restaurants generally serving the needs of local residents exist mainly on the ground floors of buildings along Second Avenue. The area has seen a number of construction projects, with two recently completed buildings adjacent to the alternative Shaft Site—a residential conversion at E. 56<sup>th</sup> Street between First and Second Avenues, and a new high-rise building under construction on the southeast corner of E. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street and Second Avenue.

### 8.7.3 Future Conditions Without the Project

In the Future Without the Project, the character of the alternative Shaft Site and its surrounding Study Area is not expected to change considerably. The site will continue in its current condition as street and sidewalk area. Three development projects are anticipated in the Study Area. The Sutton Hotel, located at 330 E. 56<sup>th</sup> Street, is undergoing a conversion from a hotel to a residential building, and a new high-rise apartment building is currently under construction at 310 E. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, on the southeast corner of Second Avenue. Another residential development is planned for the southwest corner of E. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street and Second Avenue. These developments will be consistent with the primarily residential character of the Study Area west of Second Avenue. In addition, it is anticipated that two recently completed buildings adjacent to the alternative Shaft Site will become fully occupied in the Future Without the Project: the 119-unit residential building to the north of the alternative Shaft Site at the southwest corner of Second Avenue and E. 55<sup>th</sup> Street (300 East 55<sup>th</sup> Street) and the five-story walk-up apartment building with 8 units on the north side of E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street, east of Lenny's restaurant. In addition, the New York City Department of Education is contemplating a project that would result in the demolition and reconstruction of both P.S. 59 and the High School of Art and Design. As part of this project, a residential tower would be constructed above the rebuilt P.S. 59 and High School of Art and Design Buildings. The projects will bring additional population to the Study Area, who will presumably use the area's open spaces.

In general, the projects that are planned for the Study Area would not be expected to create any substantial changes to the character of the neighborhood. The residential developments would not significantly alter any natural features, street patterns, block shapes, or travel patterns in the area. Traffic in the Study Area would change modestly as a result of the projects. Pedestrian activity would be expected to remain moderate. Noise levels would be expected to be similar to existing levels. Views of visual resources, including views from the alternative Shaft Site as well as views from elsewhere in the Study Area, would not change from existing conditions.

#### 8.7.4 Future Conditions With the Project

##### Construction

###### Shaft 33B

Construction activities for the Shaft 33B at the E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site would transform what is currently sidewalk and roadway into a closed construction zone for approximately five years (61 months if raise bore techniques are used and 70 months with surface excavation).

While construction activities and equipment on the alternative Shaft Site would be shielded from view by a 10-foot-high barrier, construction activity would be disruptive to the nearest sensitive land uses, which are the residences and ground-floor businesses on the north side of E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street and east side of Second Avenue. Residents of the Connaught Tower, located directly south of the site on the south side of E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street, would also be affected by the construction activity, as would the ground-floor businesses on the east side of Second Avenue. Disruptions during construction would include noise, dust, and traffic associated with the construction activity and encroachment on the sidewalks and roadways surrounding the site.

The construction barrier would block off the sidewalks of E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street and Second Avenue, as well as a portion of the adjacent streetbeds. Prior to construction at this site, the enclosed sidewalk café associated with the restaurant at the northeast corner of E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street and Second Avenue, which extends onto City-owned sidewalk, would have to be removed. While access to the remaining portion of the restaurant and to the businesses adjacent to the site would be maintained, and a passageway would be created through the area for pedestrians, this immediate area could be less attractive for pedestrians. As discussed in Section 8.4, “Socioeconomic Conditions,” some customers may choose to avoid walking within the fenced area and next to the construction site, and the businesses could experience substantially lower sales.

In general, the construction-period effect on the visual character of the neighborhood would be similar to that of construction projects throughout the City. The only equipment visible above the barrier from street level would be a crane and, possibly, a concrete truck enclosure. The lighting to be installed around the site for night construction work would be noticeable from the surrounding area, but would not be substantially different from the lighting that already illuminates the Study Area at night.

As described in Section 8.1, “Project Description,” a portion of the south sidewalk on E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street alongside the construction zone would be cleared for use as part of the single traffic lane that would remain on this end of the block, and a new temporary sidewalk may be created through a landscaped area adjacent to the high-rise Connaught Tower. The traffic detour would require removal of five street trees along this sidewalk and a raised planter in the landscaped area.

Construction at the E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site would be noisy, and potential noise impacts during construction could extend to buildings located between First Avenue and the midblock to Third Avenue along E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street and between E. 53<sup>rd</sup> and E. 55<sup>th</sup> Streets along

Second Avenue. Blasting would also contribute to increased intermittent noise levels during construction as well as to vibration levels that could be intrusive and annoying to residents. As discussed in Section 8.3, “Open Space,” construction of Shaft 33B at the E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site would have the potential to affect the public open space at Connaught Tower because of construction noise.

Blasting activities would require the temporary shutdown once or twice per day of traffic and pedestrian movements near the alternative Shaft Site, for approximately two months if raise bore excavation is used or three months if surface excavation is used; this would potentially result in short-term disruptions of vehicular traffic. These disruptions would be short-term and intermittent. For the remainder of the construction period, construction activity would generate a low amount of vehicular traffic and would not result in significant traffic impacts; therefore, traffic changes would not be expected to result in potential significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character during the construction period. In recognition of the area’s high traffic volumes, NYCDEP will provide funding for as many Traffic Enforcement Agents (TEA) at the Shaft Site as are appropriate to assist in maintaining sufficient vehicular and pedestrian flow throughout the construction period.

The construction activities would not involve any changes to block form; street pattern or hierarchy; topography; natural features; or building arrangement, bulk, use, or type within the Study Area. The historic resources in the Study Area are too far away to be adversely affected by project construction, and no contextual impacts on these resources are expected during construction. The enclosure and construction equipment and activity on the alternative Shaft Site would not allow views from the north side of E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street to the Citigroup Center and the Lipstick Building; however, these views would be readily accessible from the street side of the construction enclosure. Views of the Citigroup Center and the Lipstick Building would still be available along E. 53<sup>rd</sup> Street and other areas of E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street, and views south from Second Avenue to the Trump World Tower and the Chrysler Building spire would not be disturbed. While the construction enclosure, equipment, and related activity would become part of surrounding views, they would be similar in nature to the construction enclosures, equipment, and activity on development sites throughout the city and would not adversely affect the views.

As discussed in Chapter 3, “Impact Methodologies,” neighborhood character can be affected when there is a significant impact on a defining feature of a neighborhood or when a proposed action has moderate impacts on a number of defining features that cumulatively result in an impact. Construction of Shaft 33B at the E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site would result in potential significant adverse noise impacts and noise-related significant adverse impacts to the nearby open space at Connaught Tower. However, these impacts would not result in a potential significant adverse neighborhood character impact because the area is not defined by its noise levels (i.e., the area is not defined by quiet). Construction at this alternative Shaft Site would also affect traffic, open space, and local businesses. Therefore, the character of the area immediately surrounding the Shaft Site would be affected. However, no significant adverse neighborhood character impacts are anticipated for the larger Study Area as construction effects would be less perceptible at locations at greater distances from the Shaft Site. In addition, the neighborhood has

experienced a number of recently completed and on-going construction projects; construction of Shaft 33B at the alternative site would be similar to such projects.

#### Water Main Connections

As discussed in Section 5.7, “Neighborhood Character,” construction of the water mains would be disruptive to surrounding land uses—in terms of dust and emissions from construction equipment and potential temporary adverse traffic and noise impacts along the routes and extending to some intersections beyond. However, given the brief duration of the construction disturbance in specific areas, and the generally limited nature of the potential changes, the construction activities associated with the new water mains would not be anticipated to result in any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character. As described in Section 5.16, the water main construction project would employ an aggressive traffic management plan to minimize to the extent practicable the traffic disruptions that would occur as a result of water main construction.

#### Conclusions

As discussed above, neither construction of Shaft 33B at the alternative Shaft Site nor construction of the water mains would result in significant adverse impacts on the combined elements that contribute to the neighborhood character of the Study Area. Construction activities would be disruptive in the areas immediately surrounding the construction sites; however, at other locations throughout the Study Area, construction activities would be less perceptible.

#### **Operation**

During operation of the project, three permanent above-ground structures would be added to the alternative Shaft Site: a 10-foot-tall, 14-inch diameter air vent and two 3-foot-tall, 6-inch diameter hydrants. These structures would be visible additions to the streetscape, but are relatively unobtrusive and small in size and would be congruous with street furniture that is found in the Study Area in existing conditions. Certain surface features of Shaft 33B, such as two relatively small flush-mounted hatchways that provide access to the shaft, a small (10-foot-high by 14-inch diameter) air vent located on the site, and up to two air release hydrants (3-foot high by 6-inch diameter), may take up some pedestrian space within the sidewalk at the alternative Shaft Site. At a maximum, these features could potentially reduce the effective width of that sidewalk by up to 3 feet. This potential reduction in pedestrian space would not result in any potential significant adverse pedestrian impacts.

The project—including Shaft 33B and the water mains—would not involve any changes to block form; street pattern or hierarchy; topography; natural features; or building arrangement, bulk, use, or type within the Study Area. The six street trees removed from the alternative Shaft Site and the five street trees removed from the south side of E. 54<sup>th</sup> Street during construction would be replaced following the construction period in accordance with the requirements of the NYCDPR street tree replacement policy. The operational above-ground structures associated with Shaft 33B (there would be no above-ground features associated with the water mains) would not eliminate views from the Study Area to surrounding historic and/or visual resources;

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nor would they become a dominant element of such views. No permanent changes in land use would occur as a result of the operation of Shaft 33B and the water mains. Operation of Shaft 33B at the alternative Shaft Site and the water mains is not anticipated to have potential direct or indirect adverse impacts on any publicly accessible open spaces; they would not be located in an open space and would not affect the utilization of any open spaces in the surrounding area. Activities associated with operation of Shaft 33B at the alternative Shaft Site and the water mains would not result in increased traffic or increased noise or vibration levels at the site.

In sum, the operation of Shaft 33B at the alternative Shaft Site and the water mains would not be anticipated to result in potential significant adverse effects to the combined elements contributing to the neighborhood character of the Study Area. No significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character would result from operation of the project.

