

## 3.8 NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

### INTRODUCTION

As defined in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character is considered to be an amalgam of the various elements that give a neighborhood its distinct personality. These elements can include land use, urban design, visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomic conditions, traffic, and noise, as well as any other physical or social characteristics that help to distinguish the community in question from another.

It is anticipated that neighborhood character in the vicinity of the East 125<sup>th</sup> Street Development project site would benefit to the extent that new, mixed-use development on three blocks would replace underutilized land, surface parking, bus storage, and predominantly low-rise commercial buildings, reinforcing a trend of revitalization that has been underway in East Harlem for the last decade. The proposed action would bring an increase in visitors and economic activity, and would increase the density of the built environment on the approximately six-acre project site. In addition to being transformed into a major residential and employment center, the eastern end of 125<sup>th</sup> Street would become more of a destination for shoppers and other visitors. The action would return the project site to residential use and would increase affordable housing opportunities in the area. Overall, there would be no significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when the action would exceed preliminary thresholds in any one of the following areas of technical analysis: land use, urban design and visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomic conditions, transportation, or noise. An assessment is also appropriate when the action would have moderate effects on several of the aforementioned areas. Potential effects on neighborhood character may include:

- *Land Use.* Development resulting from a proposed action could alter neighborhood character if it introduces new land uses, conflicts with land use policy or other public plans for the area, changes land use character, or generates significant land use impacts.
- *Socioeconomic Conditions.* Changes in socioeconomic conditions have the potential to affect neighborhood character when they result in substantial direct or indirect displacement or addition of population, employment, or businesses; or substantial differences in population or employment density.
- *Historic Resources.* When an action would result in substantial direct changes to a historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a resource, or when a historic resource analysis identifies a significant impact in this category, there is a potential to affect neighborhood character.

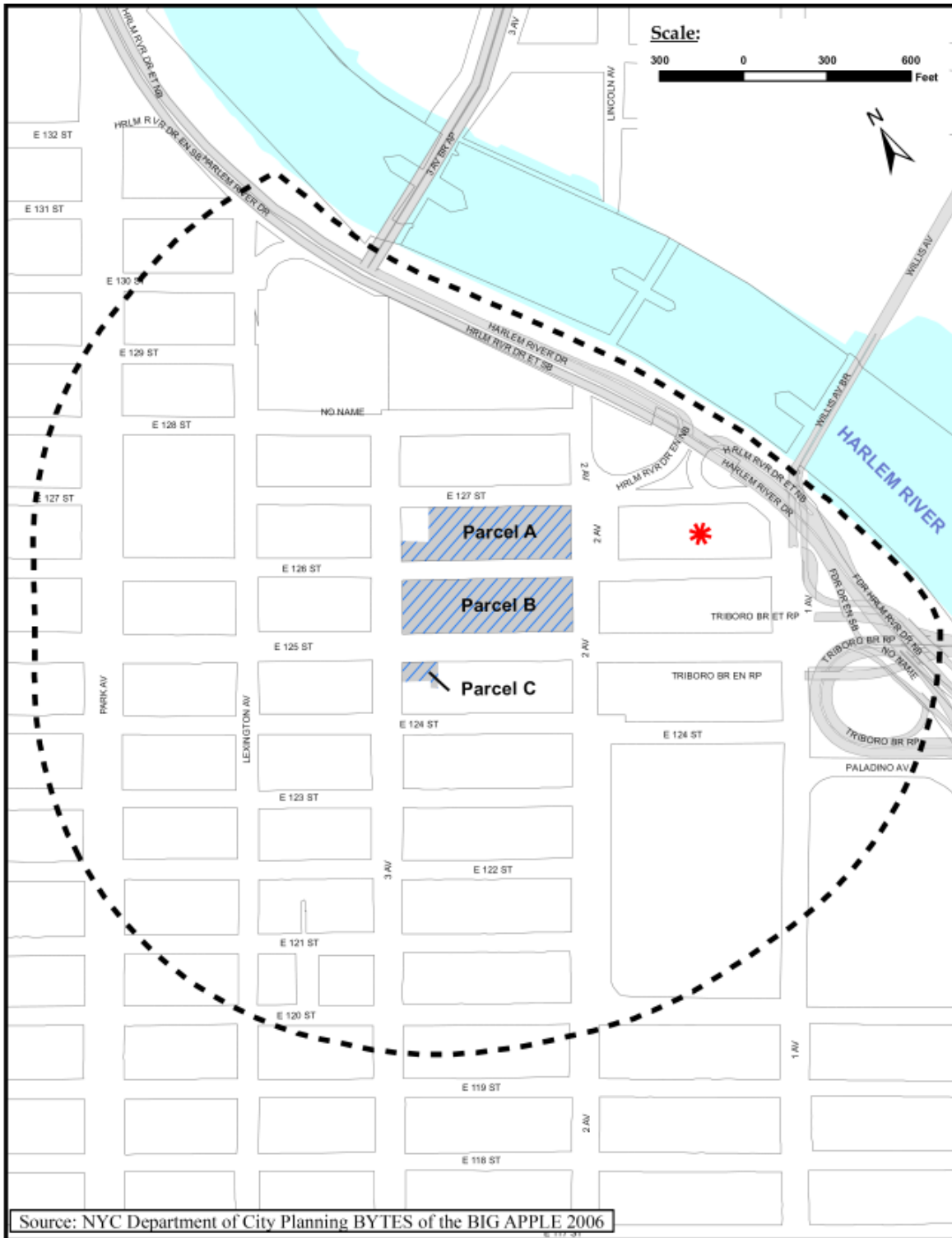
- *Urban Design and Visual Resources.* In developed areas, urban design changes have the potential to affect neighborhood character by introducing substantially different building bulk, form, size, scale, or arrangement. Urban design changes may also affect block forms, street patterns, or street hierarchies, as well as streetscape elements such as street walls, landscaping, curb cuts, and loading docks. Visual resource changes could affect neighborhood character if they directly alter key visual features such as unique and important public view corridors and vistas, or block public visual access to such features.
- *Transportation.* Changes in traffic and pedestrian conditions can affect neighborhood character in a number of ways. For traffic to have an effect on neighborhood character, it must be a contributing element to the character of the neighborhood (either by its absence or its presence), and it must change substantially as a result of the action. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, such substantial traffic changes can include: changes in level of service (LOS) to C or below; change in traffic patterns; change in roadway classifications; change in vehicle mixes, substantial increase in traffic volumes on residential streets; or significant traffic impacts, as identified in the technical traffic analysis. Regarding pedestrians, when a proposed action would result in substantially different pedestrian activity and circulation, it has the potential to affect neighborhood character.
- *Noise.* According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, for an action to affect neighborhood character with respect to noise, it would need to result in a significant adverse noise impact and a change in acceptability categories.

This chapter of the EIS examines neighborhood character within the area to be rezoned and its surrounding blocks, and the proposed action's effects on that character. The chapter's impact analysis focuses on changes to neighborhood character resulting from changes in the technical areas discussed above, since changes to these technical areas are most relevant to potential changes in neighborhood character. The analysis concludes that neighborhood character would change with new land uses and building types, increases in residents and employees, and increases in traffic and pedestrian activity, but the change would not be adverse, as discussed below.




### **3.8.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS**

#### **Project Site**

The project site consists of three blocks or block portions in the area of East Harlem known as the East Harlem Triangle. The project site consists of a vacant corner parcel at Third Avenue and East 125<sup>th</sup> Street and two full blocks to the north extending to East 127<sup>th</sup> Street, between Second Avenue to the east and Third Avenue to the west (see Figure 3.8-1).



Source: NYC Department of City Planning BYTES of the BIG APPLE 2006

- Legend**
-  Approximate 1/4-mile Radius
  -  Project Site
  -  MTA Bus Depot

**Figure 3.8-1 - Neighborhood Character Study Area**  
 East 125th Street Development EIS  
 NYC Economic Development Corporation

The site contains a mix of vacant land, small scale commercial development, light industrial/auto-related uses, and surface parking that is mostly used by the MTA for bus storage. An off-site parcel that is on the same block, but not part of the East 125<sup>th</sup> Street Development, is also proposed for rezoning, although no new development is proposed for that parcel at this time. This off-site parcel contains the two-story United Moravian Church.

The character of the project site is defined by its generally non-residential uses. The presence of bus storage on the majority of the project site's northerly block detracts from its visual character and that of surrounding blocks. The adjacent block to the north is notable for its auto-related retail, light industrial and bus storage uses. High levels of traffic in the vicinity of the project site, much associated with the adjacent bridge and highway entrances, have a negative influence on neighborhood character. The New York City Mayor's Office has proposed to locate an asthma center in the vicinity of East 125<sup>th</sup> Street in East Harlem to address high rates of asthma, which is a major public health concern of area residents.

The majority of the land on the project site is occupied by vacant lots and transportation and utility uses such as bus storage or parking facilities. The remainder of the project site is occupied by commercial buildings including retail or service-related businesses. Commercial uses are located mostly on the north side of East 125<sup>th</sup> Street. Commercial uses include small scale local retail and service-related stores such as a carpet/flooring store, dry cleaner, barber shop and salon, muffler shop, automobile repair shop, appliance parts store, gas station, donut shop, antiques store, and motorcycle dealership. Two of the businesses are located on the ground floor below loft apartments that do not appear to be occupied by residents, but are instead used for commercial storage.

## **Study Area**

As suggested in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for neighborhood character will be coterminous with the ¼-mile land use study area. As shown in Figure 3.8-1, the study area covers an area outside of the project site and bound at its outer limits by East 132<sup>nd</sup> Street on the north, Harlem River Drive on the north and east, East 120<sup>th</sup> Street on the south, and the midblock between Park Avenue and Lenox Avenue on the west.

The study area consists of a variety of land uses and building types including residential buildings, mixed-use commercial buildings, light industrial and auto-related commercial buildings, single-purpose institutional, educational and cultural buildings, parking facilities, and transportation-related facilities that can all be found within the study area, along with public open spaces and vacant land. Signs of new construction and renovation of existing buildings are evident, including major new construction at Second Avenue and East 124<sup>th</sup> Street. In general, the study area has a more residential character than the project site, and many of the blocks within the study area are occupied by large, single uses. Many residential uses in this area are high rise and "Tower-in-the-Park" residential developments (e.g., tall, low coverage buildings) including Wagner House, Taino Towers, and Robinson Houses. Transportation infrastructure, including the Triborough Bridge, Harlem River Drive, and the Metro North Railroad Viaduct, are also dominant features within the study area.

Directly north of the project site, a car dealership and its associated parking lot comprises nearly the entire block directly north of the project site. The northern area of the study area also contains the Alice Kornegay Triangle and a large open space, Harlem River Park, located from East 129<sup>th</sup> to East 131<sup>st</sup> Street on Lexington Avenue below the off-ramp to the Third Avenue Bridge. A portion of Harlem River Park at Second Avenue and East 128<sup>th</sup> Street is utilized for MTA bus parking.

To the northeast and east, the area contains a mixture of uses including parking, transportation and utility, residential, industrial, vacant land and open space. A substantial amount of transportation infrastructure exists in this area including the entrance ramps to Harlem River Drive, the Third Avenue Bridge, the Willis Avenue Bridge, and the Triborough Bridge. Transportation-related uses, including the MTA bus depot, are found east of Second Avenue between East 126<sup>th</sup> Street and East 127<sup>th</sup> Street. A large number of parks can also be found within this area including parkland related to the Triborough Bridge, Crack is Wack playground located east of Second Avenue between East 127<sup>th</sup> Street and Harlem River Drive, and Harlem River Park located between the entrance ramps to the Third Avenue Bridge and Harlem River Drive. Mid-rise residential buildings are located along East 126<sup>th</sup> Street east of Second Avenue. Vacant land is found east of Second Avenue between East 124<sup>th</sup> Street and East 125<sup>th</sup> Street.

To the southeast, prominent tower-type apartment buildings include the Wagner Houses public housing complex and Taino Towers. The Wagner Houses, a large New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) development, occupies two superblocks between East 124<sup>th</sup> Street to the north, East 120<sup>th</sup> Street to the south, Franklin D. Roosevelt (East River) Drive to the east, and Second Avenue to the west. Taino Towers, with four residential towers with buildings heights of 325 feet, is located just west of Second Avenue between East 123<sup>rd</sup> Street and East 122<sup>nd</sup> Street. Wagner Houses Pool is located east of Second Avenue between East 124<sup>th</sup> and East 125<sup>th</sup> Streets.

To the south, mixed-use buildings are found along Third Avenue and in the vicinity of Taino Towers. Local retail uses are located along Third Avenue between East 121<sup>st</sup> Street to East 123<sup>rd</sup> Street. There are very few vacant storefronts along Third Avenue in this area, which has a lively pedestrian presence. Three to four-story brownstone buildings are found directly south of the project site and along 124<sup>th</sup> Street. New commercial uses in the area include large, stand-alone, low-rise stores such as Pathmark supermarket, while directly across from Parcel B on East 125<sup>th</sup> Street are older stores within mid-rise buildings. The New York Public Library's 125<sup>th</sup> Street Branch is located on East 125<sup>th</sup> Street between Third Avenue and Second Avenue. Open spaces in this area include Dream Street Park and Harry's Playground located on East 124<sup>th</sup> Street west of Second Avenue.

To the southwest, there is a mixture of land uses including mid-rise residential apartment buildings ranging from four-to-12 stories in height and a residential tower at East 122<sup>nd</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue. Institutional uses in this area include a fire station (Engine 35 Ladder 14) on the corner of East 124<sup>th</sup> Street and Third Avenue, and a U.S. Post Office. Fenced vacant lots and surface parking are found on the east side of Park Avenue in this area. Mid-block

neighborhood open spaces can also be found west of Third Avenue associated with residential complexes and institutional and educational uses.

To the west, East 125<sup>th</sup> Street contains a mixture of uses including commercial, institutional, mixed commercial/residential, mixed commercial/institutional, parking facilities, and vacant land. The elevated Metro-North Railroad Viaduct runs down the center of Park Avenue at the western edge of the study area. The East 125<sup>th</sup> Street corridor has a high degree of pedestrian activity, with its many commercial uses, and subway and commuter rail stations.

To the northwest, there are multiple land uses in the area, though the larger lots and buildings that characterize this area are predominately residential uses. In general, bulkier buildings can be found in this area, especially west of Third Avenue and north of East 125<sup>th</sup> Street. Large residential apartment buildings located in this area include the 1775 Houses, an 11-story apartment complex which fronts on East 126<sup>th</sup> Street between Lexington Avenue and Park Avenue. Three-story rowhouses are located just to the west of the 1775 Houses. A mid-rise NYCHA development, Robinson Houses, takes up the majority of the block from East 128<sup>th</sup> to East 129<sup>th</sup> Street between Park Avenue and Lexington Avenue. Just north of the Robinson Houses is an abandoned lot, Con Edison substation construction, and eight-to-nine-story residential buildings on the corner of Lexington Avenue and East 129<sup>th</sup> Street. The Salvation Army and the East End Job Center (including an associated tot lot) are located on Third Avenue in this area. Several institutional uses are located along Third Avenue in this area including the Church of God, Salvation Army, P.S. 30, and Kings Academy.

### **3.8.2 FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTION**

In the future without the proposed action in the year 2012, no other projects have been announced or contemplated on the project site, and existing land uses on the project site would be expected to remain. Within the study area surrounding the project site and in the vicinity of the study area, a considerable amount of new development is expected through projected development facilitated by DCP's 125<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Rezoning and Related Actions project, HPD new construction, and other known residential developments including the Kalahari, Fifth on the Park, and a major commercial development known as East River Plaza.

#### **Project Site**

In the future without the proposed action, it is expected that current land uses on the project site would remain. The MTA bus storage facility would continue in its current location, and the project site's East 125<sup>th</sup> Street frontage would continue to be characterized by low density commercial uses and underutilized sites.

## **Study Area**

In the future without the proposed project, there are other development projects that are expected to be in place within the study area by 2012. Two known institutional conversion developments are expected to occur within the study area. These developments are expected to be in place by 2012 and would occur independently of the proposed action. At 220 East 125<sup>th</sup> Street (Block 1789, Lot 39), a known development is expected to convert a currently vacant fire house, which is a National Register-eligible building, to a 27,776-square foot, education-related community facility. At 120 East 125<sup>th</sup> Street (Block 1773, Lot 62), a known development is expected to convert a currently vacant building to an 8,550-square foot community facility. These known developments are shown on Figure 3.1-3 in Chapter 3.1, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy."

For its 125<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Rezoning and Related Actions project, DCP has developed a scenario of assumed development along the 125<sup>th</sup> Street corridor. This Reasonable Worst Case Scenario (RWCDs) is comprised of known, projected, and potential development sites. To assure a conservative analysis in identifying future area-wide land use for this DEIS, RWCDs projected development sites are expected to be built out by 2012.

In the RWCDs for the 125<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Rezoning and Related Actions, DCP has identified nine projected development sites within the study area. These sites would result in development totaling 856 dwelling units, 255,839 square feet of retail space, 372,287 square feet of office space, 3,848 square feet of community facility space, and 20,586 square feet of converted institutional space. These nine projected development sites are shown on Figure 3.1-3 in Chapter 3.1, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy." The RWCDs projected residential development would be expected to include some affordable housing.

Three major developments expected to occur in the vicinity of the study area by 2012 are described below and are illustrated in Figure 3.1-3 in Chapter 3.1, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy." This anticipated development in the future without the proposed action would add approximately 525,000 square feet of retail space, 38,000 square feet of community facility space, 1,365 parking spaces, and 444 new dwelling units by 2012. It is important to note that two of the three development projects, while part of the population and housing study area described in Chapter 3.2, "Socioeconomics," are located outside of the 1/4-mile study area, but have been included in the future without the proposed action discussion because of the close proximity to the project site and possible effects that all three development projects could have on land use in this portion of East Harlem.

### East River Plaza

This development will provide approximately 485,000 square feet of new commercial development and 1,248 parking spaces on the site of the former Washburn Wire plant on East 116<sup>th</sup> Street at Harlem River Drive. According to the development's website<sup>1</sup>, the anchor tenants are expected to be a Home Depot store and a Target store. East River Plaza will span six acres adjacent to Harlem River Drive and will contain a five-level retail center with an attached

---

<sup>1</sup> Forest City Ratner Companies, East River Plaza website ([www.eastriverplaza.com](http://www.eastriverplaza.com)).

parking facility. The site will be directly accessible via the 116<sup>th</sup> Street exit off Harlem River Drive and is expected to open in the summer of 2008.

#### Fifth on the Park

This 194-unit residential development is located on Fifth Avenue between East 119<sup>th</sup> and East 120<sup>th</sup> Streets. The building is currently under construction with an anticipated date of completion of 2008. The 26 stories of residential use will sit atop a 4-level, 1,800-seat church, the Bethel Gospel Assembly (the previous owner of the land)<sup>2</sup>. The building includes approximately 50,600 gross square feet of affordable rental apartments, 247,000 gross square feet of market rate condominiums, and a 117-space underground parking garage.

#### The Kalahari

The Kalahari is a new residential tower under construction at 40 West 116<sup>th</sup> Street, between Fifth and Lenox Avenues. The project includes approximately 250 residential co-op units and 40,000 gross square feet of retail. The building will incorporate many of the principles of sustainable living, such as a green roofs, low flow fixtures, and low- and zero-VOC materials<sup>3</sup>.

In addition to the adjacent 125<sup>th</sup> Street rezoning and the other major development projects, there are numerous housing developments planned with the assistance of HPD in the 1/4-mile study area and also in the vicinity of this study area. A total of 369 housing units are proposed in HPD-assisted projects within the study area including 250 units at 2417 Second Avenue and 237-241 East 124<sup>th</sup> Street, 50 units at 113-127 East 123<sup>rd</sup> Street, and 69 units on Park and Madison Avenues, at East 119<sup>th</sup> Street and 54 East 122<sup>nd</sup> Street.

### **3.8.3 FUTURE WITH THE PROPOSED ACTION**

This section discusses potential changes in the character of the project site and the 1/4-mile study area by 2012. This section focuses on potential changes to neighborhood character resulting from changes in the technical areas of Land Use, Socioeconomic Conditions, Historic Resources, Urban Design and Visual Resources, Traffic and Pedestrians, and Noise. Changes in these technical areas are most likely to result in changes to neighborhood character as follows:

- *Land Use.* The Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy analysis (see Chapter 3.1) indicates that the proposed action would promote new mixed-use development (including housing and ground floor retail uses) and arts and entertainment-related uses on the project site that would compliment area-wise land use patterns and connect to recently developed neighborhoods to the west of the project site. These changes would bring about related changes to urban design, visual resources, socioeconomic conditions, traffic, and pedestrians, which would affect neighborhood character.

---

<sup>2</sup> City Realty.com website ([www.cityrealty.com/new\\_developments/news.cr?noteid=16841](http://www.cityrealty.com/new_developments/news.cr?noteid=16841)).

<sup>3</sup> Full Spectrum of New York and L&M Equity Participants, Kalahari website ([www.kalahari-nyc.com](http://www.kalahari-nyc.com)).



- *Socioeconomic Conditions.* The Socioeconomic Conditions analysis (see Chapter 3.2) indicates that by 2012, the proposed action could result in the direct displacement of a small number of formerly occupied residential units and an estimated ten businesses with 75 private sector employees. However, the direct displacement would not result in a significant adverse impact. Some potential exists for secondary residential displacement. However, secondary displacement trends have been ongoing in East Harlem for a number of years and the additional pressure on low income renter households as a result of the proposed East 125<sup>th</sup> Street Development would represent the continuation of trends that are already in place. No significant impacts on Neighborhood Character from changes to socioeconomic conditions would be expected.
- *Historic Resources.* The analysis in Chapter 3.6, “Historic Resources,” indicates that the new development that could result from the proposed action could potentially cast new incremental shadows on sunlight sensitive historic resources. In addition, one architectural resource that could be sensitive to indirect impacts is the New York Public Library, 125<sup>th</sup> Street Branch. Portions of two lots within the project site may contain the potential for the recovery of remains from 19<sup>th</sup> Century occupation (Block 1790, Lot 13, and Block 1791, Lot 1). Whether or not these areas that may not have been previously disturbed could potentially contain intact nineteenth century archaeological resources, or whether additional testing is required, will be determined by LPC. However, these impacts would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.
- *Urban Design and Visual Resources.* The Urban Design and Visual Resources analysis (see Chapter 3.7) indicates that the proposed action would result in changes to the urban form of the proposed rezoning area. The proposed action would bring new office, retail, cultural, hotel, and residential construction, and new open space, to the project site. The new buildings proposed for the project site would be much larger than the buildings that currently exist on the site, and would be characterized by much larger building frontages and a more intensive array of uses, than would otherwise be present under future conditions without the proposed action.
- *Transportation.* The Traffic and Parking analysis (see Chapter 3.15) indicates that the proposed action would result in traffic impacts at a number of locations in the study area. The analysis also notes that all of the significant adverse traffic impacts would be addressed with improvement measures (see Chapter 3.22, “Mitigation”). In terms of parking, although some of the weekday’s project-generated parking demand would exceed the total capacity of the two garages built as part of the proposed project, the excess demand would be easily accommodated in nearby off-street public parking facilities or by on-street spaces. No significant adverse impact to study area parking conditions would therefore result from the proposed action. The Transit and Pedestrians analysis (see Chapter 3.16) indicates that project-generated subways trips at the 125<sup>th</sup> Street IRT (4, 5, 6) subway station would significantly impact stair S4 at

the northeast corner of East 125<sup>th</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue in both the AM and PM peak hours. Possible mitigation measures to address this subway station stairway impact will be evaluated in consultation with NYC Transit. There would be no other significant adverse impacts on transit and pedestrian facilities in the area.

- *Noise.* As discussed in Chapter 3.18, noise increases as a result of additional traffic that would accompany the proposed development project are expected to be imperceptible at the project site. These noise increases are not expected to result in a significant adverse impact to neighborhood character. In addition, due to existing noise levels, residential, commercial and cultural use portions of the development on the project site would be required to attenuate noise to achieve acceptable interior noise levels.

## **Project Site**

### *Land Use Impacts on Neighborhood Character*

The land use on the project site is the strongest factor in determining the character of the area because changes to land use would alter the “look and feel” of the area, and the levels of activity in the area. Land use changes would spur changes to neighborhood character in the area of visual resources, urban design, socioeconomic conditions, and vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

The proposed action would spur changes in the area’s land use patterns, with new construction for residential, entertainment, office, retail and cultural uses, and public open space. The proposed action would replace underutilized land (surface parking) and predominantly low density commercial uses with high density residential and commercial developments. In addition, developments under the proposed action would help provide much needed affordable housing. The proposed East 125<sup>th</sup> Street Development would revitalize an area that has experienced disinvestment in the past and it would extend development along the 125<sup>th</sup> Street mixed-use corridor to the east.

The project site is currently occupied by existing vacant land, commercial and parking uses. The project would re-establish residential uses on the project site that were replaced in the past through demolition of apartment buildings and row houses, and commercial conversions. Major office development would be introduced that would strengthen the role of 125<sup>th</sup> Street as an employment center and bring workers and visitors to an area that is well served by mass transit. The project would also include open space plazas that would complement the proposed residential and commercial uses, as well as providing additional open space for existing East Harlem residents and visitors. By 2012, with the proposed action, the project site would contain new office, retail, cultural, hotel, and residential uses, and new open space, bringing activity further east on the 125<sup>th</sup> Street corridor to be more consistent with the mixed-use development pattern that is prevalent on blocks to the west.

The proposed action would provide increased opportunities for residential and mixed-use development, including the offsite parcel that is proposed for rezoning with no development

currently proposed. Given the project site's proximity to the mixed-use development along the 125<sup>th</sup> Street corridor and the residential development within the surrounding East Harlem neighborhood, the land uses generated by the proposed action would not be expected to result in significant adverse land use impacts.

#### *Socioeconomic Impacts on Neighborhood Character*

As discussed in Chapter 3.2, "Socioeconomic Conditions," it is concluded that the proposed action would not result in significant adverse socioeconomic impacts on direct residential displacement, direct business displacement, effects on specific industries, or indirect business displacement on the project site or the larger East Harlem study area. Some potential may exist for indirect residential displacement, even with potential mitigation measures discussed in Chapter 3.22.

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a direct displacement impact may be significant if the persons being displaced represent more than five percent of the study area population, and a population with a similar profile would not be able to relocate within the neighborhood (Chapter 3, Section B-331). The number of formerly occupied residential units expected to be directly displaced as a result of the proposed project is small in comparison to the number of units present in the socioeconomic primary study area, and the displacement of this small number of units, if they were to be re-occupied, would not be expected to result in a significant change to neighborhood character. Given the small number of residential units, and that the units are currently unoccupied, it is not expected that the direct displacement would significantly change the demographic or socioeconomic characteristics of the project site, or result in the loss of a significant population group in the neighborhood. As discussed in Chapter 3.2, "Socioeconomic Conditions," the socioeconomic study area contains populations that could be vulnerable to displacement pressures due to the possible rise of land values and rents in areas surrounding the project site. Even with the implementation of mitigation measures to address the potential for secondary displacement, some degree of potential indirect residential displacement resulting from the East 125<sup>th</sup> Street Development would remain unmitigated.

As discussed above, ten businesses and 75 employees on the project site would be displaced as a result of the proposed project. The proposed project directly displaces mostly businesses in the retail and services sectors, including automotive services. These businesses do not constitute a significant or unique economic value to the City or region and could be relocated within and outside Manhattan; they are not subject to regulations or publicly adopted plans to protect them; and they do not constitute a defining element of neighborhood character.

#### *Historic Resources Impacts on Neighborhood Character*

The analysis in Chapter 3.6, "Historic Resources," indicates that the proposed action could result in new development that could potentially cast new incremental shadows on sunlight sensitive historic resources. None of the historic resources are dependent on sunlight during the day to the extent that shadows would impair or obscure their significance. Therefore, while the proposed action in an established urban corridor could potentially cast shadows on these structures, such

shadow effects would not result in significant adverse impacts.

One architectural resource that could be sensitive to indirect impacts is the New York Public Library, 125<sup>th</sup> Street Branch (Resource 1). The New York Public Library is located beyond 90 feet of the project site, but is within direct visual range of projected development on Parcel B and east of Parcel C. Any large-scale development at either of these sites has the potential to contrast with the diminutive scale of this early twentieth century building. The proposed mixed-use buildings facing 125<sup>th</sup> Street would consist of two-to-three stories of retail use facing 125<sup>th</sup> Street, broken by a mid-block public plaza across the street from the landmark library building. The façade materials are proposed to be predominantly glass, comporting with the urban design guidelines for the project requiring this transparency. This alteration of the visual context of the library would provide an urban design focus for this architecturally distinguished building that does not currently exist, given its central location on its block opposite the proposed major retail complex. The taller, more modern, and iconic appearance of the proposed new construction is not expected to result in adverse visual impacts on the library, but rather would provide a more diverse visual environment and improve the visual setting for this resource.

The project site has been significantly disturbed by past construction activities and is not expected to contain significant archaeological resources with the exception of portions of two lots within the project site that may contain the potential for the recovery of remains from nineteenth century occupation (Block 1790, Lot 13, and Block 1791, Lot 1). Whether or not two areas on those two lots within the project site that may not have been previously disturbed could potentially contain intact nineteenth century archaeological resources will be determined by LPC.

The impacts on the above mentioned resources would not result in significant impacts to neighborhood character, as the project development to be constructed subsequent to the proposed action is not expected to have significant adverse impacts on existing historic resources in the area. As such, no significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character can be expected in relation to historic resources.

#### *Urban Design and Visual Resources Impacts on Neighborhood Character*

In the 2012 future with the proposed action, new mixed-use development consisting for the most part of residential, retail, office, commercial and hotel uses, including affordable housing, would replace primarily vacant and underutilized land on the project site. A large, publicly accessible urban plaza is proposed to provide mid-block access from East 125<sup>th</sup> Street to East 126<sup>th</sup> Street, and surface parking lots used for MTA buses would be relocated underground. The proposed project would bring about significant improvements to the urban form of the project site, transforming the project site from its substantially degraded urban design condition into an active, multi-use site. The project is designed so that up to four levels of retail uses would line the base of the proposed mixed-use buildings. The uses and form of the proposed buildings along East 125<sup>th</sup> Street would encourage street level activity at all hours. The buildings are proposed to be built to the lot line, maintaining a consistent streetwall that is interrupted only at mid-block for the proposed open space and curb cuts. The portions of the development that face

avenues would have a consistent streetwall and buildings without any setback from the street. Transparency at the ground floor is proposed along the avenues, either with retail, or lobbies for residential or office uses.

Overall, the proposed action is not anticipated to affect the street hierarchy, street pattern, block form, natural features, nor topography on the project site and within the study area. The building bulk, form and arrangement of the proposed East 125<sup>th</sup> Street development would follow design guidelines that were prepared for the project site by a Task Force with the intent of promoting buildings that are consistent with the context of the surrounding area.

### *Transportation Impacts on Neighborhood Character*

Increases in traffic, transit, and pedestrian levels in the study area as a result of the proposed action would also affect neighborhood character. Traffic would increase over future No-Action levels as a result of the new residential and commercial development on the project site. These increases would result in significant traffic impacts throughout the area. Additionally, bus and subway ridership demand would increase as a result of the proposed action.

### Traffic and Parking

Chapter 3.15, “Traffic and Parking,” analyzes the effects of added traffic and parking demand from the proposed development project on the East Harlem street network during the weekday AM, midday, PM, and Saturday midday peak hours. The proposed project would involve changes to the street network to accommodate various loading and parking facilities on the project site. The results of the traffic analysis show that demand generated by the proposed action would create significant adverse traffic impacts at three intersections in the AM peak hour, three intersections in the midday, six intersections in the PM, and four in the Saturday midday peak hour. Chapter 3.22, “Mitigation,” of this EIS provides a description of measures developed to mitigate the traffic impacts identified in the traffic analysis. As discussed in Chapter 3.22, all of the identified traffic impacts would be mitigated. As the traffic impacts in the area would be fully mitigated, no significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character are anticipated in relation to traffic.

Although the proposed action would result in a shortfall of nine parking spaces on the project site during the weekday midday (1-2 PM) period, the excess demand would be easily accommodated in nearby off-street public parking facilities or by on-street spaces. No significant adverse impacts to study area parking conditions would therefore result from the proposed action. As such, the increase in parking would not have significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character.

### Transit and Pedestrians

Chapter 3.16, “Transit and Pedestrians,” analyzes the effects of added travel demand from the proposed development project on subway stations, local bus services and pedestrian facilities within East Harlem during the weekday AM, PM, and Saturday midday peak hours. The results

of the analyses show that project-generated subway trips at the 125<sup>th</sup> Street IRT (4, 5, 6) subway station would result in significant adverse impacts to stair S4 at the northeast corner of East 125<sup>th</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue in both the AM and PM peak hours. Mitigation measures to address subway station stairway impacts will be evaluated in consultation with NYC Transit. The results of the analyses show that the added travel demand would not result in any significant adverse impacts to subway line haul conditions, local bus services or pedestrian facilities (sidewalks, corner areas and crosswalks) in any analyzed peak hour. Chapter 3.22, “Mitigation,” provides a description of measures to be developed to mitigate the transit impact identified in this chapter.

### *Noise Impacts on Neighborhood Character*

As discussed in Chapter 3.18, noise increases as a result of the additional traffic that would accompany the proposed action are expected to be imperceptible at the project site. As discussed in detail in Chapter 3.18, in order to ensure an acceptable interior noise environment, new residential, commercial and cultural use portions of the development must provide a closed window condition with a minimum of 30, 35 or 40 dBA window/wall attenuation on all facades in order to maintain an interior noise level of 45 dBA or lower. In order to maintain a closed-window condition, an alternate means of ventilation includes, but is not limited to, central air conditioning, air conditioning sleeves containing air conditioners, or the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-approved fans. No adverse impacts to neighborhood character as a result of noise would be expected.

### **Study Area**

The mixed-use, residential, commercial and entertainment uses expected as a result of the proposed project would be compatible with the residential developments and variety of uses found in the study area. The new development on the project site would be in keeping with changes that are occurring in the neighborhoods surrounding the project site and should not cause significant changes in the character of these neighborhoods. Moreover, by increasing housing development on the project site and increasing the supply of housing in the future, including affordable housing, the proposed project would strengthen the trend of reinvestment and housing rehabilitation that has been taking place in the study area. The proposed retail and office uses on the project site would also support new investment in the study area and East Harlem as a whole. The new development on the project site would likely increase traffic and noise in the area, although these increases are not expected to impact neighborhood character.

In addition, as mentioned above, the socioeconomic study area in which the project site is located is already changing and is expected to continue to experience housing and commercial revitalization. As such, while socioeconomic conditions would change as a result of the proposed project, these changes would be consistent with the current trend towards residential and commercial development, redevelopment and revitalization, and would expand the area’s mixed-use character and housing supply. Therefore, no significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character are expected to result from the proposed action on the blocks surrounding the project site.

## CONCLUSION

The proposed action would result in a change in the character of East Harlem in general, however, were the proposed action not to change the character of the area, it would fail to achieve the project's goals.

A close examination of the future No-Action condition, compared to the analyses of conditions as projected in 2012 resulting from the proposed action, indicates that the action would result in an overall change in the character of the project site with respect to land use, socioeconomic conditions, urban design and visual resources, and street-level pedestrian activity. While a number of significant adverse traffic impacts were identified, it is expected that these transportation impacts would not significantly alter neighborhood character. The neighborhood character of the area would not be impacted by noise increases resulting from the proposed action. In addition, the proposed action would not affect historic resources so as to affect neighborhood character.

Overall, the proposed action would alter neighborhood character in beneficial ways, by bringing about significant improvements to the urban form of the project site and the surrounding area and providing for the replacement of underutilized land and predominantly low density commercial uses with high density residential and commercial development. The new mixed-use development on the project site generated by the proposed action would include "active" ground floor retail uses which in turn would encourage pedestrian activity and enhance the area's streetscape. In addition, residential and office uses on the project site would strengthen the area as a 24-hour neighborhood that would bring increased pedestrian traffic to area sidewalks.

The proposed higher building coverage and form is expected to be beneficial for urban design conditions of the study area, bringing more activity to the sidewalks of the area while maintaining a continuous streetwall that would create an attractive environment for pedestrians. The project is designed so that up to four levels of retail uses would line the base of the proposed mixed-use buildings, which would encourage pedestrian activity. The office tower at the corner of Third Avenue and East 125<sup>th</sup> Street, and the residential and hotel uses would also foster pedestrian activity. While taller than most of the new buildings built or planned for the study area, the heights of proposed buildings would not be exceptional in the study area. The proposed project would encourage growth and development in this area of Manhattan, and the increased built density of the project would be in keeping with changes that are occurring and planned along the 125<sup>th</sup> Street corridor and the surrounding area.

Given that the proposed action is expected to have an overall beneficial effect on neighborhood character, significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character are not expected.