

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the effects of the proposed Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (MSK)/The City University of New York (CUNY)-Hunter project on neighborhood character. According to the 2012 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give a neighborhood its distinct “personality.” These elements may include a neighborhood’s land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, 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. As described in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare and it would be under unusual circumstances that, in the absence of an impact in any of the relevant technical areas, a combination of moderate effects to the neighborhood would result in an impact to neighborhood character. Moreover, a significant impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood’s character is not automatically equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character.

As described in greater detail in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” the proposed project would introduce new land uses and buildings on the project site compared with the future without the proposed project, in which the project site would remain largely vacant. The proposed project could result in significant adverse impacts to open space and transportation. Therefore, this chapter considers the impact of the proposed project on neighborhood character for both the project site and in the surrounding area. Since many of the relevant technical areas are considered in other sections of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), this chapter has been coordinated with those analyses.

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

Based on the methodology of the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a preliminary analysis of the proposed projects’ effects on neighborhood character was conducted to determine the need for a detailed analysis. The preliminary analysis concluded that the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character and that a detailed analysis was not necessary.

As described in the relevant chapters of this EIS, while the proposed project could have significant adverse impacts on certain technical areas, including open space, and transportation, these technical areas are not defining features of the neighborhood. In addition, the proposed project would include uses that are already common in the area, including institutional and medical facility uses. Although the new buildings would represent a significant change to the project site, the types of uses would not be new to the area and the proposed changes would result in buildings that would be consistent with the existing mix of bulk, uses, and types of buildings in the neighborhood. The entrance to the proposed below-grade parking garage for the

new ambulatory care center (MSK ACC) would be located at the east end of the MSK ACC along East 74th Street, and would be in keeping with other accessory parking garages that are found in the immediate area, such as the garage in the residential buildings at 1 East River Place on East 73rd Street. The proposed project would also be an improvement over the largely vacant and underutilized lot by adding new buildings with active ground floors. In addition, open space within the proposed MSK ACC and CUNY-Hunter Building would serve the user population generated by the project, which would help diminish impacts on nearby open spaces in the study area. Further, MSK would make a substantial contribution to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) for Phase 2B of DPR's improvement plan for Andrew Haswell Green Park, a 1.98-acre open space along the East River Esplanade that is outside the study area. Improvement to this park would allow 1.1 acres of the open space to be opened to the public, and would amount to a substantial contribution to the East River Esplanade in this section of the waterfront and to all the people who use the esplanade for outdoor recreation such as walking and jogging. Overall, the proposed project would revitalize the project site—replacing a largely vacant lot with active uses, and enlivening the neighborhood with street-level activity. Therefore, the proposed project would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

B. METHODOLOGY

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER COMPONENTS

An analysis of neighborhood character begins by determining whether a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any technical area (land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) or if a project would result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that could cumulatively impact neighborhood character. If the answer is yes, a preliminary assessment is undertaken. The preliminary assessment first identifies the defining features of the neighborhood, and then assesses whether the project has the potential to impact these defining features, either through the potential for significant adverse impacts or a combination of moderate effects. If the preliminary assessment concludes that a proposed project has the potential to affect defining features of a neighborhood, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character is undertaken. The detailed assessment uses information from the preliminary assessment as a baseline and the future with and without the proposed project are then projected and compared to determine whether a project would result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

As described in the relevant chapters of this EIS, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, urban design or visual resources; historic and cultural resources, shadows, or noise. The CEQR building-attenuation analysis concludes that in order to meet CEQR interior noise level requirements, up to 38 dBA of building attenuation for the project building would be required by placement of an (E) designation for noise on the project site. Because the project building would be designed to satisfy these specifications, there would be no significant adverse noise impact with respect to building attenuation. In addition, as discussed in the Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS) and Scope of Work, based on the screening questions provided as part of the *EAS Part II: Technical Analysis*, the proposed project would not have the potential for significant adverse impacts to socioeconomic conditions. However, based on the analyses prepared for this EIS, the proposed project could result in potential significant adverse impacts to open space, and transportation.

Therefore, a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character impacts from the proposed project is provided below. The preliminary assessment describes the defining features of the neighborhood and then assesses the potential for the proposed project to impact these defining features.

STUDY AREA

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for neighborhood character should be consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas, and may be modified, as appropriate, either to include any additional areas that may be affected by the project or to exclude areas that would clearly not be affected by the project.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare and it would be under unusual circumstances that, in the absence of an impact in any of the relevant technical areas, a combination of moderate effects to the neighborhood would result in an impact to neighborhood character. Moreover, a significant impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood's character is not automatically equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character. Rather, it serves as an indication that neighborhood character may be significantly affected.

C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

DEFINING FEATURES

The area within 400 feet of the project site is generally bounded by East 75th Street to the north, East 72nd Street to the south, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) Drive to the east, and York Avenue to the west. The neighborhood character of this area is defined by residential, commercial, institutional, utility, and some open space and recreational resources, as well as its physical setting adjacent to the Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) Drive and the East River. In addition to residential uses primarily located along York Avenue, East 72nd, East 73rd, and East 75th Streets, there are several institutional uses in the study area including three schools (the Epiphany Community Nursery School on East 74th Street, the Lycee Francais de New York on East 75th Street, and the Town School on East 76th Street). The southern portion of the study area is characterized by a concentration of medical buildings, primarily for use by the Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS). The study area also contains a number of utility uses, including the Con Edison East 74th Street Steam Plant (Con Edison Steam Plant) that occupies most of the block bounded by East 75th and East 74th Streets to the north and south, and a Con Edison substation located on the north side of East 75th Street, across from the steam generation plant, and a structure directly east of the project site across the FDR Drive where the Con Edison plant receives fuel from barges.

The urban design within the 400-foot study area is also a defining feature of the neighborhood character of the study area. The study area's urban design is characterized by the typical Manhattan grid pattern and a mix of land uses in low- and mid- to high-rise buildings. Low-rise, two- to six story buildings are most prevalent throughout the study area, while four mid-rise buildings are located along the south side of East 72nd Street. Two high-rise buildings, which are the most visually prominent buildings in the study area, are located between East 72nd and East 73rd Streets. Overall, streets in the study area have a consistent street wall, which is only

occasionally punctuated by a public plaza, such as on the north side of East 72nd Street. The Con Edison Steam Plant is a visually prominent building in the northern portion of the study area given that it occupies almost an entire block. The streetscape of the study area is urban in character, with concrete sidewalks containing typical street furniture, including lamp posts, newspaper stands, parking meters, telephone booths, and garbage bins. The most prominent visual natural resource in the study area is the East River. However, views toward the East River from within the study area are limited by vehicle traffic and highway signage on the FDR Drive, as well as by the existing built environment. Therefore, the East River is a contributing element rather than a defining feature of neighborhood character.

There two known architectural resources, including the Con Edison Steam Plant and the garage at 524 East 73rd Street, and one potential architectural resource, a late-19th century carriage house at 502 East 74th Street, located in the 400 foot study area. While these resources are not defining features of the neighborhood character of the study area, they do contribute to it.

The study area has been designated as being underserved by open space, and open space is not a defining feature of the character of the neighborhood. However, the ¼-mile open space study area does include a number of open spaces resources with passive recreational space that can be used by local workers and other non-residents. In addition to John Jay Park and the East River Esplanade, there are several public plazas or seating areas maintained by private landlords, known as Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS).

The character of the area, like many neighborhoods in New York City, is in part defined by a wide range of travel modes, with moderate foot traffic on most of the area's sidewalks and crosswalks, a mix of automobile/taxi/service traffic on the streets, and bus service. However, given the location of the study area on the far east side of Manhattan, existing subway service is located farther away from the project site at Lexington Avenue and there are not high volumes of visitors to the area. The pedestrian activity associated with primarily residents and workers is in character with the mix of uses in the area. Pedestrian activity is concentrated along York Avenue and near the entrances to the Lycée Français de New York on East 75th Street and the community facility and commercial businesses on East 74th Street. The street system consists primarily of narrow one-way, east-west streets, and the wider, two-way York Avenue. Vehicular traffic is heavy on York Avenue and the FDR Drive; however, the FDR Drive is only accessible from the study area on East 73rd Street. Therefore, vehicular traffic tends to be lighter on east-west streets, where it is primarily related to the schools, commercial, and institutional uses located on East 72nd, East 74th, and East 75th Streets. Overall, transportation is not a defining feature of the study area's neighborhood character.

Vehicular traffic on the FDR Drive is the dominant noise source adjacent to the project site. Measured levels are moderate to high and reflect the level of vehicular activity on the adjacent streets. In terms of the CEQR criteria, the existing noise levels at the FDR Drive viaduct between East 74th and East 73rd Streets are in the "clearly unacceptable" category, and existing noise levels on East 73rd and East 74th Streets between the FDR Drive and York Avenue are in the "marginally acceptable" category. Noise is not a defining feature of the study area's neighborhood character.

POTENTIAL TO AFFECT THE DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT

In the future without the proposed project, the project site is expected to remain largely vacant with the existing parking lot as the only active use. It is possible that abatement, demolition, and

remediation would start prior to full project approval. A workplan for any additional testing would have to be submitted and approved, as would the Construction Protection Plan, Remedial Action Plan, and Construction Health and Safety Plan. However, no new development would take place, and the site would be completely vacant.

As described in Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” there is one planned development in the 400-foot study area that is expected to be completed by the 2019 analysis year—west of the project site (Manhattan Block 1485, Lots 11, 14, and 40), on a site currently occupied by commercial office and auto-related uses, HSS plans to develop a new, 13-story, approximately 213,775-gsf Ambulatory Surgery Center (ASC). The project was subject to review pursuant to CEQR (CEQR Number 12BSA126M) by the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA), which issued a Negative Declaration and approved the required variance(s) for the project on December 11, 2012. No changes to neighborhood character in the study area would be expected to occur by the 2019 analysis year.

PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed project would result in the development of the project site with approximately 793,332 square feet (sf) of zoning floor area (zfa) of academic and medical facility uses, including private open space available to users generated from the project, by the 2019 analysis year (see Chapter 1, “Project Description”).

As noted above, the proposed project would result in significant adverse impacts to open space and transportation. However, these technical areas are not defining features of the neighborhood, and as described in Chapter 3, “Open Space,” the proposed project would provide funding for Phase 2B of DPR’s improvement plan for Andrew Haswell Green Park, a 1.98-acre parcel owned by the City and under the jurisdiction of DPR. Andrew Haswell Green Park is located roughly between East 59th Street and East 63rd Street along the East River Esplanade. Improvement to this park would allow 1.1 acres of the open space to be opened to the public, and would amount to a substantial contribution to the East River Esplanade in this section of the waterfront and to all the people who use the esplanade for outdoor recreation such as walking and jogging.

The proposed project would have the potential to affect two defining features of the neighborhood character, including land use and urban design, which are analyzed below.

Regarding land use, the proposed project would replace the largely vacant site with two sizable new buildings that would house academic and medical facility uses. While the proposed project would alter the land use composition of the project site by the 2019 analysis year, the change would not be considered adverse pursuant to the *CEQR Technical Manual*. Compared to the future without the proposed project, the future with the proposed project would improve neighborhood character by replacing a vacant and underutilized site with a new development with uses that are compatible with existing uses in the study area. Overall, the land use changes associated with the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse neighborhood character impacts in the study area.

Regarding urban design, the proposed project would replace a largely vacant lot with new, mid-rise buildings. Therefore, compared to the future without the proposed project, the visual appearance of the future with the proposed project and thus the pedestrian experience of the development sites would change considerably. However, as described in Chapter 8, “Urban Design and Visual Resources,” the changes associated with the proposed project would not meet

MSK/CUNY-Hunter Project at 74th Street

the *CEQR Technical Manual* threshold for a significant adverse urban design impact. Rather, instead of a largely vacant and underutilized site, the pedestrian would experience new, taller buildings with active ground-floor uses. East 74th Street, with the main entrances to both structures, would be improved with new street trees and landscaping. While East 73rd Street would be the location of both service entries, the facilities are designed such that trucks maneuver inside the buildings and the docks and storage areas are inside the buildings and out of sight. Therefore, the proposed project would improve the pedestrian experience on the project site by providing street trees and landscaping, as well as active ground-floor uses, instead of the mesh-covered chain-link fencing and largely vacant and underutilized lot that would remain in the future without the proposed project.

Overall the proposed project would be consistent with the neighborhood character of the study area by developing the project site with two buildings that are comparable to the scale and height of other nearby buildings and with uses that are compatible with existing uses in the study area. In addition, the proposed project would also be an improvement over the largely vacant and underutilized lot by adding new buildings with active ground floors, thereby enlivening the neighborhood with street-level activity. *