5.7 NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

5.7.1 Introduction

This Section considers the potential neighborhood character effects of the construction of the water main connections. 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 neighborhoods surrounding the water main connections its unique feel. The general Study Area for the neighborhood character analysis is the area extending 400 feet from the potential water main connection routes, including the First Avenue route, the Sutton Place route, and the E. 59th Street/E. 61st Street route, since this is the area where project-related activities would be most noticeable. In addition, other areas where project effects might be felt were also considered during the evaluation of neighborhood character.

5.7.2 Existing Conditions

First Avenue Route

The First Avenue water main connection route consists of portions of the First Avenue, Third Avenue, and E. 55th Street and E. 56th Street roadbeds. The Study Area for the First Avenue water main connection route is predominantly residential. As described in Section 4.3, "Open Space," in Chapter 4, "Preferred Shaft Site," according to Census 2000, a total of nearly 27,000 people live within approximately ¼ mile of the alternative Shaft Site, in the area generally extending from E. 54th to E. 64th Streets, east of Third Avenue. Buildings within the area include high-rise apartment towers along First and Second Avenues, interspersed with 5- to 6-story tenements (walk-up apartments) and small commercial buildings. Along both avenues, buildings have ground-floor retail space with retailers that serve the local residential population. The side streets in the Study Area are lined with a mix of walk-up and mid-rise apartment buildings, mainly without retail space.

Third Avenue in the Study Area is part of the northern end of the East Midtown commercial district, and as such includes a mix of high-rise office buildings and apartment towers, with ground-floor retail uses that serve the daytime office population. Several of the office buildings on the east side of Third Avenue have wide sidewalk areas that serve as urban plazas for office workers. The west side of Third Avenue between E. 55th and E. 56th Street has lower, 5- to 6-story walk-up type residential and commercial buildings, also with ground-floor retail uses. Notable buildings in the area include the 47-story, modern glass and steel 919 Third Avenue, set back behind a wide, paved plaza with raised planters and modern, dark steel lampposts. Just south of the 919 Third Avenue building is 909 Third Avenue, a concrete-clad, modern

commercial tower set back above a 5-story, windowless base. The recessed plaza at the ground level of the building includes an abstract sculpture and is lined with planters.

The residential and commercial uses in the Study Area are interspersed with several institutional uses, including the High School of Art and Design on Second Avenue between E. 56th and E. 57th Streets, which also houses an elementary school; and the 20-story Terence Cardinal Cooke building on the west side of First Avenue between E. 55th and E. 56th Streets, which houses the New York Catholic Center, the Cathedral High School, and the Church of St. John the Evangelist.

Within the northern portion of the Study Area, the approaches and exits from the Queensboro Bridge cut through the midblocks between E. 58th and 61st Streets and First and Second Avenues. North of E. 60th Street, the exit ramp from the Bridge runs along a steel viaduct; there is also an exit at street level below the viaduct. Traffic volumes along streets in the Study Area are generally congested during both the AM and PM peak hours, particularly at intersections close to the Queensboro Bridge (Bridge). First, Second, and Third Avenues are busy north-south arterial roadways that carry substantial traffic volumes. Several of the area cross streets, including E. 57th, E. 59th, and E. 61st Streets, carry substantial volumes and serve as feeder routes to and from the Bridge and the FDR Drive. Pedestrian activity throughout the area is heavier along Second and Third Avenues and E. 57th Street, and less so along the First Avenue and the side streets. A number of City bus routes travel through the Study Area on the avenues and E. 57th Street. Existing ambient noise levels within the Study Area are generally high, particularly near the major avenues and the Queensboro Bridge, because noise levels are primarily influenced by the vehicular traffic volumes.

There are no architectural resources within the First Avenue route itself; however, the Study Area for the First Avenue route contains one known architectural resource, the Queensboro Bridge, as well as one potential architectural resource, a 12-story, Art Deco style residential building at 310 E. 55th Street. Notable views within the Study Area include views south on Third Avenue and west on E. 54th Street to the Citigroup Center and the Lipstick Building (855 Third Avenue), which stands out because of its circular form and pink hue, and views north along First Avenue of the First Avenue arch, which carries above it the approach ramp to the Queensboro Bridge. Views south on First Avenue from south of E. 54th Street include the dark-glass Trump World Tower at First Avenue and E. 47th Street and the smokestacks of Con Edison's Waterside Generating Station at E. 40th Street and First Avenue. The stainless-steel spire of the Chrysler Building is also visible, looking to the southwest on Second Avenue from E. 55th Street. The East River cannot easily be seen from the First Avenue water main connection route. Views east along E. 59th and 60th Streets include various components of the Queensboro Bridge, the modern glass Conran Shop pavilion, and a tall brick smokestack located adjacent to the Bridge near the East River. For more information on those visual resources, see Section 4.6, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," in Chapter 4, "Preferred Shaft Site."

The Study Area for the First Avenue route includes small open spaces, mainly concentrated near the intersection of E. 59th Street and First Avenue and near E. 55th and 56th Streets. The open spaces are predominantly plazas associated with apartment buildings or office buildings that are

used as sitting areas; Brevard Park, one such plaza on E. 55th Street west of Second Avenue, is set back into the midblock and includes a waterfall wall and seating on several levels. There is also one publicly owned recreational facility located within the Study Area: the 54th Street Recreation Center of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYCDPR), located on E. 54th Street between First and Second Avenues, a Neoclassical red brick and stone building originally built as a bathhouse. There are street trees along sidewalks throughout the Study Area, and there are also a number of landscaped public plazas that include trees, shrubs, and flowers surrounding residential and commercial tower buildings.

Sutton Place Route

The Sutton Place water main connection route consists of portions of the E. 59th Street, Sutton Place, and E. 55th and E. 56th Street roadbeds. The Study Area for the Sutton Place route is entirely residential, occupied by apartment buildings as well as a small group of rowhouses—the Sutton Place Historic District—between E. 57th and 58th Streets. The side streets between Sutton Place and First Avenue are lined with mid- and high-rise apartment buildings, with very limited commercial uses. E. 59th Street is the exception to this pattern; it has high-rise residential uses on the south, and on the north are the commercial spaces at Bridgemarket—a modern adaptive reuse of the archways under the Bridge—the Bridgemarket's public plaza, and the Queensboro Oval public open space (see description below). There are courtyards behind the buildings on the block bounded by E. 55th and 56th Streets and Sutton Place and First Avenue, which open onto the side streets through iron fences. A one-story parking garage topped by a private tennis facility occupies much of the north side of E. 55th Street.

Traffic volumes along streets in the Study Area are generally at acceptable levels, though congestion does exist at some intersections during both the AM and PM peak hours. East-west streets in the Study Area dead-end at the East River. E. 57th and 59th Streets, east-west thoroughfares that elsewhere carry a large amount of vehicular traffic traveling crosstown, are less busy in this area. There is a moderate to small amount of pedestrian activity throughout the area. The M31 and M57 bus routes travel through the Study Area on Sutton Place and E. 55th, 57th, and 60th Streets. Ambient noise levels within the Study Area are high, primarily because of vehicular traffic.

The Study Area for the Sutton Place route contains two architectural resources, the Queensboro Bridge and the Sutton Place Historic District. The Sutton Place Historic District contains 4- to 5-story rowhouses and apartment buildings designed in a variety of styles, including Colonial Revival, Renaissance Revival, and Neo-Georgian. Views north on Sutton Place include the steel latticework of the Queensboro Bridge above E. 59th Street. Wide views of the East River, Roosevelt Island, and the Queensboro Bridge are available from the Sutton Place Parks at the end of the east-west streets in the Study Area. In views east from E. 59th Street and Sutton Place, the Silvercup Studios sign in Long Island City can be seen, as well as the granite Manhattan anchorage of the Bridge and the full span of the Bridge across the East River. The buildings of the Sutton Place Historic District are not considered to be visual resources for the purposes of this analysis, as they are not prominent in surrounding view corridors.

The Study Area for the Sutton Place route includes a number of small open spaces. As with the First Avenue route, the open spaces are predominantly plazas associated with apartment buildings or office buildings. However, they also include the large Queensboro Oval, a space beneath the Queensboro Bridge used for active outdoor recreation in warm weather months and enclosed tennis in cold weather months, and the parks along the East River between E. 54th and 58th Streets. These parks, collectively known as the Sutton Place Parks, provide wide vistas of the East River waterfront. There are street trees along sidewalks throughout the Study Area.

E. 59th Street/E. 61st Street Route

The E. 59th Street/E. 61st Street route consists of portions of the First Avenue, E. 59th Street, and E. 61st Street roadbeds. The Study Area for the E. 59th Street/E. 61st Street route has several distinct segments. Along First and Second Avenues and their adjacent side streets, the Study Area is primarily residential, with mid- to high-rise apartment buildings with ground-floor retail on the avenues and low-rise (3- to 5-story) walk-up apartments on the side streets. Single-family rowhouses are also located in the northwest portion of the Study Area, along E. 61st and 62nd Streets west of Second Avenue (the Treadwell Farm Historic District). In the eastern portion of the Study Area, close to the Bridge, there are several commercial loft and industrial buildings, including a 14-story storage facility and parking garages. Also in this area, the Mount Vernon Hotel Museum and Garden occupies a historic house on E. 61st Street between First and York Avenues. The western portion of the Study Area, along Lexington and Third Avenues and south of E. 60th Street, contains several large-scale commercial uses. These include the well-known Bloomingdale's department store, which occupies a 12-story, full-block building between Third and Lexington Avenues and E. 59th and 60th Streets; and One Beacon Court, a new mixed-use 55-story tower recently constructed on the full block between E. 58th and E. 59th Streets and Lexington and Third Avenues. Along Third Avenue, ground-floor retail uses south of E. 60th Street serve the daytime office population, while ground-floor retail uses north of E. 60th Street generally serve the surrounding residential neighborhood. Throughout the Study Area, there is a concentration of antiques and specialty home, furniture, and design stores.

As described above for the First Avenue route, the portion of the Study Area east of Second Avenue is dominated by the infrastructure of the Queensboro Bridge. The concrete and steel viaduct for the Bridge exit runs from E. 60th Street north to E. 63rd Street between First and Second Avenues. Traffic volumes along streets in the Study Area are generally congested during both the AM and PM peak hours, particularly at intersections close to the Queensboro Bridge. First and Second Avenues are busy arterial roadways that carry substantial traffic volumes. Several of the area cross streets, including E. 59th and 61st Streets, serve substantial volumes and are feeder routes to and from the Queensboro Bridge and the FDR Drive. There is pedestrian activity throughout the area, heavier along the Second and Third Avenues and less so along First Avenue and the side streets. A number of bus routes all operate within the area. Ambient noise levels are in the vicinity are high, predominantly because of vehicle traffic.

The Study Area contains three known architectural resources: the Queensboro Bridge; the Art Deco/Neo-Gothic style Day & Meyer Murray & Young Warehouse, which is located on the east side of Second Avenue between E. 61st and E. 62nd Streets; and the Treadwell Farm Historic

District on E. 61st and E. 62nd Streets between Second and Third Avenues, which includes 3- and 4-story brownstone rowhouses, one 6-story apartment building, and two churches. Visual resources that can be seen within the Study Area include the various components of the Queensboro Bridge, the modern glass Conran Shop pavilion, and a tall brick smokestack located adjacent to the Bridge near the East River, which can be seen in views east along E. 59th Street. The Queensboro Bridge and the steel towers of the Roosevelt Island tram structure also can be viewed along E. 60th Street. The focus of views south along First Avenue is the First Avenue arch, which carries above it the approach ramp to the Queensboro Bridge. The rowhouses within the Treadwell Farm Historic District are not considered to be visual resources for the purposes of this analysis as they are not prominent in surrounding view corridors.

The Study Area for the E. 59th/E. 61st Street route includes a number of small open spaces. As with the First Avenue and Sutton Place routes, these open spaces are predominantly plazas associated with apartment buildings. The Queensboro Oval, described above, is also within the Study Area. Tramway Plaza, on Second Avenue and E. 59th Street, is a City-owned wide, open plaza adjacent to the Roosevelt Island tramway station.

5.7.3 Future Conditions Without the Project

In the Future Without the Project, the character of the potential water main connection routes and their surrounding Study Areas is not expected to change considerably. The potential water main connection routes themselves will continue in their current condition as roadbeds. A number of development projects are anticipated in the Study Areas for the First Avenue, Sutton Place, and E. 59th Street/E. 61st Street Routes. These include the development of a new Ronald McDonald House and Rockefeller University dormitory on E. 60th Street between First and York Avenues; a potential new residence on E. 61st Street between First and Second Avenues; four new residential buildings on E. 57th Street; a new residential building on First Avenue between E. 61st and E. 62nd Streets; the conversion of the Sutton Hotel at 330 E. 56th Street to residential use; a new high-rise apartment tower at 310 E. 53rd Street; a new development for the west side of York Avenue between E. 60th and 61st Streets; and a potential reconstruction of the E. 57th Street Educational Campus with a new high-rise residential tower above. These developments will be consistent with and reinforce the already predominantly residential nature of the Study Areas. The projects will bring additional population to the Study Area. In addition, several rezoning proposals are currently under way or anticipated within the Study Areas (a rezoning on the block between First and York Avenues and E. 61st and E. 62nd Street was recently approved; a proposed rezoning of the block to the south is not yet approved). These rezonings would continue an existing trend in which the heavy commercial and manufacturing uses clustered in the easternmost areas of the Upper East Side are gradually being converted to high-density residential uses more consistent with the residential character of most of the Upper East Side.

Several infrastructure improvements projects are also under way in the Study Areas. The Queensboro Bridge is currently undergoing reconstruction and rehabilitation, which could result in minor changes to the streetscape of its surrounding area. NYCDPR is planning enhancements for the "multi-use" area commonly referred to as 14 Honey Locusts Park, east of the preferred

Shaft Site, upon completion of the Bridge Rehabilitation Program, which may improve the appearance of the multi-use site by adding landscaping and seating. Reconstruction of the FDR Drive is also under way. Upgrades to the Sutton Place Parks to be made as part of this project would further improve these spaces. NYCDPR is also planning to rehabilitate Tramway Plaza, providing new landscaping and other features to improve its condition and possibly encouraging greater use. The 197-a plans prepared by Community Boards 6 and 8, which may be adopted in the Future Without the Project, recommend further open space improvements, including increasing the amount of open space near the Queensboro Bridge and along the FDR Drive, and providing more and improved access to the waterfront.

In general, the projects that are planned for the Study Areas would not be expected to create any substantial changes to the character of these neighborhoods. 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 projects planned for the Study Area and general background growth; intersections that were congested under existing conditions are expected to realize a nominal deterioration in levels of service. Pedestrian activity would be expected to remain moderate. The number and quality of open spaces in the Study Areas could increase, but overall would remain generally the same. Noise levels would be expected to be similar to existing levels. Views of historic and visual resources would not change substantially from existing conditions.

5.7.4 Future Conditions With the Project

Construction

Depending on the water main connection route and final placement of the mains within the City right-of-way, construction of the water main connections would disturb the streetbeds and/or portions of the sidewalks along the selected route. Cut-and-cover construction work would proceed one block at a time in a sequenced fashion. Work would last approximately 10 to 12 weeks per block and 10 to 12 weeks per intersection. The area of disturbance and all construction equipment would be confined to a narrow corridor along the street segment being constructed. Construction activities would occur generally one block or one intersection at a time, reducing the period of disturbance at any one location.

During construction, street pavement would be cut up, sidewalk area would be reduced, and construction equipment would be located in the street. These changes are typical of construction projects in Manhattan. When construction work is under way, it would likely be disruptive to surrounding land uses. Construction work would typically occur during the daytime, but work could also potentially occur during an evening shift (from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.) if NYCDOT Office of Construction Mitigation and Coordination (OCMC) deems evening construction to be necessary to avoid severe traffic tie-ups. It is also possible NYCDOT may require weekend work or water main construction during the overnight shift (11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.). Given the residential nature of the surrounding area, it is not anticipated that OCMC would request overnight work but this is possible.

Daytime construction work for the water mains could be disruptive to nearby residences, nearby institutional uses (including the high schools, elementary schools, and nursery schools), and commercial uses. Work in the evenings, at night, and on the weekends would be particularly disruptive to the surrounding residences. Disruptions would include dust and emissions from construction equipment, and potential temporary adverse traffic and noise impacts.

The traffic delays would depend on the particular construction scenario and water main route, but would typically occur for several blocks surrounding the construction zone. Vehicular access could be affected for very short periods (typically less than a week) as the water mains are constructed in front of garage entrances and driveways, but would be restored as quickly as possible. Residents and commercial facilities would be informed in advance of the access disruption in accordance with established procedures for community coordination for this type of work. Emergency access, pedestrian walkways, and access to building entrances would be maintained at all times. Curbside deliveries, drop-offs, and pick-ups at buildings adjacent to the construction work would be relocated to areas away from the construction, resulting in some inconvenience to the residents, businesses, and visitors of the affected buildings. Curbside parking would also be curtailed for the duration of the construction period on a given block. Some construction scenarios would involve creating narrower sidewalks. Under all water main routes, there would be potential temporary, construction-period traffic impacts to area intersections. As detailed in Section 5.9, construction activities would result in an increase in congestion along the selected water main route and immediate area. Depending on the route selected, this congestion could last as many as 76 weeks in total on any one street (First Avenue), although most intersections would not be affected for that long. As noted earlier, the neighborhood is already characterized by traffic congestion, and an aggressive mitigation plan would be in place to manage traffic congestion caused by the construction project. As part of this plan, NYCDEP would provide funding for as many Traffic Enforcement Agents (TEAs) as are appropriate. Overall, this increase in congestion could be annoying, but it would not change the essential character of the neighborhood.

To facilitate the construction work that could occur at night, lighting would be installed around the street segment under construction. This lighting would be noticeable from the surrounding area, but would not be substantially different from the lighting that already illuminates the Study Area at night. Construction of the water main connections 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 Areas.

As discussed in greater detail in Section 5.6, “Urban Design and Visual Resources,” for street segments that would involve use of a 2-foot-wide strip of sidewalk, all street trees and street furniture located within the affected sidewalk areas may be removed during construction, although efforts would be made to maintain and protect trees wherever possible. Measures to replace these elements are also discussed in Section 5.6. The potential elimination of mature street trees, in the numbers described in Section 5.6, would have a temporary adverse impact on urban design that would be offset by additional tree planting in the community. The elimination of these trees is not considered to be a significant impact on neighborhood character because the

character of the neighborhood is not defined by this element. However, NYCDEP recognizes that street trees to be an important part of a community and will work with NYCDPR in the greening of this community.

Construction of the water mains would not be anticipated to result in potential adverse impacts to architectural resources within the Study Areas, given the short duration of the work and the limited vibration. However, for the E. 59th Street/E. 61st Street route, the New York City Department of Design and Construction (NYCDDC), the City agency that would build the water main connections, would consult with the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (NYCLPC) regarding construction in the Treadwell Farm Historic District to avoid any adverse impacts on this historic resource. The disturbance to the streetbed and sidewalk and construction equipment would be visible from elsewhere in the Study Area, but would not eliminate views from the Study Areas to surrounding visual resources; nor would they become a dominant element of such views. While the construction equipment and related activity would temporarily become part of surrounding views, they would not adversely affect the views. The period of diminished visual quality would be short-term along each street segment.

Construction of the water mains also would have the potential to affect nearby open spaces that are used for passive recreation, where users are likely to value the relative quiet the spaces currently provide. The construction noise would at times be intrusive and disruptive, resulting in temporary adverse noise impacts. The open spaces located on major thoroughfares or near the Queensboro Bridge, however, are already noisy due to their proximity to these roadways. At any open spaces where the construction work makes the plazas less attractive for open space users, it is possible that fewer people would choose to use these spaces during the construction period. During those times, however, people would likely use other plazas in the Study Areas. Intervening buildings and increased distance from construction activities would buffer the other open spaces in the Study Areas from construction activities. Construction work would be adjacent to a particular open space for only a short duration, however, and access to all open spaces would be maintained at all times.

As discussed in Section 4.7, construction of Shaft 33B at the preferred Shaft Site would be expected to be intrusive at times to surrounding residents in terms of increased noise levels and potential intermittent traffic disruption, but would not be expected to influence land use or development patterns. Overall, given the brief duration of the construction disturbance in specific areas, and the limited nature of the potential changes, the activities associated construction of Shaft 33B at the preferred Shaft Site together with construction of its the new water mains under any of the routes analyzed would not be anticipated to result in any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character. Therefore, construction of Shaft 33B and its water main connections would not result in significant adverse impacts to the neighborhood character of the Study Area.

Operation

The new water main connections would be located beneath the street surface, like other water mains in New York City. Except for additional manholes and fire hydrants located at street levels, once operational, these mains would not be visible or otherwise evident in the Study Area.

Therefore, the operation of the new water mains would not significantly adversely affect the combined elements contributing to the neighborhood character of the Study Areas, regardless of the route selected. No significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character would result from the operation of the water main connections. ◆