



14

Neighborhood Character

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

Introduction

This analysis of neighborhood character follows the guidelines set forth in the *2020 City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*. As defined in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give neighborhoods a distinct “personality,” including, land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, shadows, historic resources, urban design, 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. For a proposed project, a neighborhood character assessment under CEQR first identifies the defining features of the neighborhood and then evaluates whether the project has the potential to affect these defining features, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical analysis areas. Thus, to determine the effects of a proposed project on neighborhood character, the salient features of neighborhood character are considered together. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, neighborhood character impacts are rare and occur under unusual circumstances. Moreover, a significant adverse impact identified in one of the technical areas that contribute to a neighborhood’s character is not automatically equivalent to a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character, but, rather, serves as an indication that neighborhood character should be examined.

This section includes a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character, with a description of the defining features of the existing neighborhood character and consideration of the potential effects of the Proposed Action on these defining features. The assessment was prepared in conformance with the *CEQR Technical Manual* using information from the technical analyses presented in other relevant chapters of this EIS.

Principal Conclusions

The Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts to the neighborhood character of East Midtown or the Vanderbilt Corridor. The study area is characterized by dense, commercial development, which is reinforced by recent actions, including the Vanderbilt Corridor rezoning in 2015 and the Greater East Midtown rezoning in 2017. As a tall commercial tower, the Proposed Project would be a continuation of this development trend, in keeping with the predominant use and building form that defines the study area. The Proposed Project would incorporate significant transit improvements, sidewalk widening, and ground-floor retail that would contribute to the active and vibrant pedestrian activity and circulation network that defines the area. Construction within the existing East Midtown street grid would maintain significant views to the east within the study area, including views of Grand Central Terminal, the MetLife Building, and the Park Avenue Viaduct.

As detailed in the relevant chapters of this EIS, the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts in the contributing technical areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; open space; shadows; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; or noise. Significant adverse impacts were identified in the transportation technical area (traffic, transit, and pedestrian impacts), per *CEQR Technical Manual* guidelines this is not necessarily equivalent to a significant impact on neighborhood character. Although it is expected that there would be an increase in the level of pedestrian activity and traffic volumes in the future With-Action condition, the resulting conditions would not be out of character with the East Midtown area, which is already defined by high volumes of vehicles and pedestrians. Therefore, the identified impact would not affect the defining features of the neighborhood and would not constitute a significant impact on neighborhood character. Overall, the Proposed Action would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character, either from a significant adverse impact identified in a singular technical area or from the combined effect of changes to the defining elements.

Methodology

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

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

- › **Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy:** If development resulting from a proposed action would conflict with surrounding uses, conflict with land use policy or other public plans for the area, or change land use character, neighborhood character could be affected.
- › **Socioeconomic Conditions:** If a proposed action results in direct or indirect displacement or addition of population, employment, or businesses; or substantial differences in population or employment density, neighborhood character could be affected.
- › **Open Space:** If an action would result in a reduction or displacement of an open space or result in additional population that would place a substantial demand on open space, neighborhood character could be affected.
- › **Shadows:** If a proposed project would cast an incremental shadow on sun-sensitive resources, neighborhood character could be affected.
- › **Historic and Cultural Resources:** If a proposed action would result in substantial direct changes to a historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a historic resource, neighborhood character could be affected.
- › **Urban Design and Visual Resources:** If a proposed action would result in substantially different building form, size, scale, or arrangement; block form, street pattern, or street hierarchy; streetscape elements; or substantial direct changes to a visual feature, such as unique and important public view corridors and vistas, or to public visual access to such a feature, neighborhood character could be affected.
- › **Transportation:** When a proposed project would result in a change in traffic patterns or would substantially increase traffic volumes on residential streets, neighborhood character could be affected.
- › **Noise:** When a proposed action would substantially increase noise levels in an area, neighborhood character could be affected.

A preliminary assessment of neighborhood character determines whether changes expected in other technical analysis areas may affect a defining feature of neighborhood character. As part of a neighborhood character analysis, the defining features of the neighborhood are identified and then a determination is made as to whether a project has the potential to adversely affect these defining features, either through the potential for a significant adverse impact or a combination of moderate effects in relevant technical areas. A neighborhood that has a more varied context is typically able to tolerate greater change without experiencing significant adverse impacts. If the assessment concludes that a proposed project has the potential to adversely affect defining features of a neighborhood, a detailed analysis is undertaken to determine whether the project would result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

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

As detailed in the relevant chapters of this EIS, the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts in the technical areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions;¹ open space; shadows; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; or noise. The Proposed Action would result in significant adverse impacts in the transportation technical area (pedestrian impacts). Therefore, a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character impacts is provided below. The analysis begins with the identification of the defining features of the neighborhood and then assesses whether the Proposed Project would adversely affect those defining features within the framework of the above technical areas.

Preliminary Assessment

Defining Features

Commercial Density

As a central business district, East Midtown and the study area are defined by the density of mid- to high-rise commercial buildings; East Midtown is one of the most densely-developed areas in the City. Buildings in the study area generally have high FARs, with most buildings above 10 FAR and many above 15 FAR. Buildings range generally from 11 stories to over 40 stories in height. Recent actions, including the Vanderbilt Corridor rezoning in 2015 and the Greater East Midtown Rezoning in 2017, have enabled higher-density development within the study area. The goals of the Vanderbilt Corridor and Greater East Midtown rezonings were to enable the development of new, modern office buildings, to preserve and maintain landmarked buildings, to facilitate public realm improvements, and to maintain key physical characteristics of the area, including active retail corridors and the streetwall character of the area around Grand Central Terminal. These rezonings will continue the existing pattern of high- density commercial development within the study area.

The Project Site, which is currently vacant and underutilized, is located within the Vanderbilt Corridor, which spans the blocks from East 42nd Street to East 47th Street between Madison Avenue and Vanderbilt Avenue. As detailed in **Chapter 6, Urban Design and Visual Resources**, the Vanderbilt Corridor buildings greatly influence the character of Madison Avenue and Vanderbilt Avenue within the study area. Generally, these two corridors are lined with a mix of mid- and high-rise office buildings, with ground floor retail primarily included along Madison Avenue. The block between East 45th Street and East 46th Street just north of the Project Site contains the Roosevelt Hotel, a 19-story Italian Renaissance-style building. 383 Madison Avenue, at the northern end of the Vanderbilt Corridor contains a 44-story office tower completed in the early 2000s. Just south of the Project Site at 333 Madison

¹ An assessment of socioeconomic conditions was not warranted as part of this EIS as no changes to socioeconomic conditions are anticipated as a consequence of the Proposed Action, and so that technical area is excluded from this analysis.

Avenue is a full-block 28-story office building. One Vanderbilt, a 68-story glass building between Vanderbilt and Madison Avenues along 42nd Street is already a highly visible building within East Midtown. The building, which occupies the entire block, rises to 1,414 feet (1,514 feet to the top of the spire), with a tapered form almost from top to bottom and a glass facade.

Outside of the Vanderbilt Corridor, other prominent office towers in and around the study area contribute to the overall dense commercial character of the neighborhood, including the 59-story MetLife Building; the 34-story Beaux-Arts New York Central Building (now Helmsley Building) located just north of the MetLife Building, and the 77-story Chrysler Building to the east of the study area.

The high-density commercial development that characterizes the study area, as well as its proximity to the Grand Central Terminal regional transportation hub, supports a high level of pedestrian and vehicular activity and contributes to the area's vibrancy as a central business district. Ground-floor retail provides for an active streetfront. East Midtown pedestrian amenities include well-maintained sidewalks, walking signals, and crosswalks, which together facilitate the movement of a large volume of pedestrians.

The high-density commercial development and associated pedestrian activity and circulation, critical to the functioning of a central business district, are defining features of the study area.

Building Form

As detailed above, one of the goals of the recent rezonings in the study area was to preserve and reinforce the key physical characteristics of the East Midtown neighborhood, including the consistent streetwall and ground floor retail space documented in **Chapter 6, Urban Design and Visual Resources**. As detailed, Madison Avenue and Vanderbilt Avenue are lined primarily with a mix of mid- and high-rise office buildings. Buildings along these avenues range in height between 10 and 30 stories tall, although several buildings are much taller, including the 68-story One Vanderbilt building currently under construction at the southern end of the Vanderbilt Corridor. Buildings in this area are generally built to the lot line, reinforcing a uniform streetwall. Several buildings provide multiple setbacks above the base height while others have a consistent massing with no setbacks. For the most part, streetwalls are consistent throughout the Vanderbilt Corridor, and buildings tend to rise flush from the sidewalk with setbacks at the upper floors. The cross streets within the study area have a similar character to that of the avenues, with generally uniform street walls and mid- to high-rise buildings framing views along the roadways

This consistent building form, particularly highlighted as a feature to be preserved in the stated goals of the recent rezoning efforts, is a central and defining feature of the study area.

The Grand Central Terminal Superblock

The Project Site is located immediately to the west of the superblock formed by Vanderbilt Avenue, East 42nd Street, Lexington Avenue, and East 45th Street. This superblock contains several historic structures, including Grand Central Terminal, the MetLife Building, and the Park Avenue Viaduct. Grand Central Terminal is one of New York City's major transportation hubs and most prominent civic spaces. The landmark building, reflecting the French Beaux-

Arts style, features three great windows on its southern façade flanked by columns. The building was designed on an axis with Park Avenue; the clock and statue of Mercury affixed at the apex of the building terminate the avenue's northward vista, as viewed from points south of East 42nd Street. Just north of Grand Central Terminal is the 59-story concrete, steel, and glass MetLife Building, a prominent building within the East Midtown skyline. The Park Avenue Viaduct wraps around Grand Central Terminal, providing vehicular access north-south across the superblock, with two bridges that run over East 45th Street carrying Park Avenue traffic back to street level.

The presence of the Grand Central terminal superblock, which breaks up the typical Manhattan street grid adjacent to the project block, creates east-facing site lines that are unique to the study area. Pedestrians facing east along East 43rd, 44th, and 45th Streets are afforded views of Grand Central Terminal, the MetLife Building, and the Park Avenue Viaduct and 45th Street bridges. The unique visual character of the study area created by the Grand Central Terminal superblock make it a defining feature of East Midtown Manhattan.

Potential to Affect the Defining Features of the Neighborhood

The sections below discuss potential changes resulting from the Proposed Action in the following technical areas that are considered in a neighborhood character assessment under CEQR: land use, zoning, and public policy; open space; shadows; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; transportation; and noise. The assessment uses the findings from the respective chapters of this EIS to identify whether the Proposed Action would result in any significant adverse impacts or moderate adverse effects in these technical areas, and whether any such changes would have the potential to affect the defining features of neighborhood character. As described below, defining features of the study area would not be affected either through the potential of any significant adverse impact or combination of moderate effects in these relevant technical areas.

Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy

The defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to potential effects of the Proposed Action on land use, zoning, and public policy, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

As described in **Chapter 2, Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy**, no significant adverse impacts related to land use, zoning, or public policy would occur as a result of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would not directly displace any land use, nor would it introduce new land uses that would be incompatible with surrounding land uses or conflict with existing zoning or public policy. With the Proposed Action, the Proposed Project would make use of zoning mechanisms established by the Vanderbilt Corridor rezoning, which had the stated goal of providing modern commercial space in the immediate vicinity of Grand Central Terminal and linking new commercial development to significant infrastructure improvements in the overall Grand Central Terminal area. The construction of a new high-rise office tower would strengthen the predominantly commercial character of East Midtown, adding to the mix of commercial buildings in the study area that are defining features of the neighborhood.

Open Space

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to potential effects of the Proposed Action on publicly accessible open space, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter. As described in **Chapter 3, Open Space**, the Proposed Action would not result in a direct or indirect significant adverse impact on open space. Construction of the Proposed Project would not result in the physical loss or direct displacement of publicly accessible open space or shadows that would affect the usefulness of a public open space. Therefore, open space effects would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

Shadows

Defining features of neighborhood character would not be adversely affected due to potential shadows-related effects of the Proposed Action, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

As discussed in **Chapter 4, Shadows**, the Proposed Action would result in new development that would cast new incremental shadows within the vicinity of the study area. New shadows on nearby sunlight sensitive resources would be limited in extent and duration and would typically only occur in one or two seasons. The short duration of new shadow that would fall on most affected resources would not substantially reduce the quantity of direct sunlight and would not significantly alter the utilization of the resources or the variety of vegetation supported within. No publicly accessible open spaces or historic resources would experience significant adverse shadow impacts as a result of the Proposed Action. Therefore, shadows effects would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

Historic and Cultural Resources

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to potential impacts of the Proposed Action on historic and cultural resources, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

As discussed in **Chapter 5, Historic and Cultural Resources**, the Proposed Action would not result in any significant adverse impacts to archaeological resources, historic districts, or individually designated historic resources. There are twelve historic architectural resources either designated or previously determined as eligible for either New York City Landmarks (NYCL) and/or State/National Registers of Historic Places (S/NR) listing within the study area, including the contiguous Yale Club at 50 Vanderbilt Avenue, a NYCL and S/NR-eligible building, and the S/NR-eligible Vanderbilt Concourse Building at 52 Vanderbilt Avenue. In 2018, the MTA board approved the demolition of the existing buildings within the Project Area, which was subject to a Negative Declaration under SEQRA. Thereafter, LPC confirmed that the buildings were not listed NYCLs, and the SHPO determined that the buildings were not S/NR-eligible (see **Appendix A**). LPC also determined in an Environmental Review letter dated July 2, 2020 that the 343 Madison Avenue Project Site does not have any archaeological significance (see **Appendix A**) and SHPO concurred with this finding.

It is not expected that the Proposed Project would result in any contextual impacts on nearby architectural resources, as it would not adversely change the scale, visual prominence, or visual context of any surrounding historic building or structure, or screen or eliminate publicly accessible views of any architectural resources that would not be screened or eliminated in the No-Action condition. To avoid inadvertent construction-period damage to the contiguous Yale Club and Vanderbilt Concourse Building, a construction protection plan (CPP) for both buildings would be developed and implemented in consultation with LPC, SHPO, and the MTA. The shadows analysis presented in **Chapter 4, Shadows** concluded that that no publicly accessible open spaces or historic resources would experience significant adverse shadow impacts as a result of the Proposed Action. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character due to effects on historic and cultural resources.

Urban Design and Visual Resources

Defining features of the neighborhood would not be adversely affected due to potential impacts of the Proposed Action on urban design or visual resources, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

As described in **Chapter 6, Urban Design and Visual Resources**, the Proposed Project would be a high-rise commercial tower, consistent with the typical built form in East Midtown, with setbacks above a base height and ground-floor. The building would be up to approximately 1,050 feet in height (including the bulkhead) and 55 stories tall. It would be constructed to the lot lines along East 44th Street and East 45th Street and set back seven feet from the Madison Avenue lot line to allow for improved pedestrian circulation. The Proposed Project massing would incorporate an additional setback at a height of approximately 321 feet², creating a base height that is taller than, though generally consistent with, the height of several neighboring buildings.

The ground floor of the Proposed Project would provide an active streetfront consistent with the defining features of East Midtown, providing retail space as well as an at-grade circulation area at the intersection of Madison Avenue and East 45th Street to access the LIRR East Side Access terminal located below the Project Site. Though the Proposed Action would facilitate an increase in density on the Project Site, the Proposed Project would be a high-rise mixed-use building typical of East Midtown and consistent with the zoning framework set by the Vanderbilt Corridor rezoning, which put in place various zoning mechanisms to increase density. Though taller than buildings in its immediate surrounding context, the Proposed Project would sit within the context of the densely developed and continuously evolving East Midtown skyline, including One Vanderbilt currently under construction.

The Proposed Project building form would also maintain the existing views east to the MetLife Building and Park Avenue Viaduct and would not affect views to any of the other visual resources within the study area. The Proposed Project would not obstruct any unique view corridors of significant visual resources. The Proposed Action would not alter the arrangement, appearance, or functionality of the study area such that the alteration would

² As described in **Chapter 1, Project Description**, since publication of the DEIS, it is proposed that the maximum height of the street wall would be reduced to approximately 295 feet. The analysis for the chapter conservatively assumed the higher street wall height of 321 feet.

negatively affect a pedestrian's experience of the area. As such, the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts to urban design and visual resources, and the Proposed Project is expected to complement and enhance the urban design of the area, replacing an underutilized site with a new active pedestrian-oriented development that would not adversely affect the defining features of East Midtown.

Transportation

Defining features of neighborhood character would not be adversely affected due to potential effects of the Proposed Action on transportation, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

Pedestrian traffic would increase in the future with the Proposed Action. As described in detail in **Chapter 9, Transportation**, of the eight pedestrian elements analyzed, the Proposed Project would result in significant adverse impacts at four pedestrian elements during the AM and midday peak hours, and two pedestrian elements during the PM peak hour. Mitigation measures that could be implemented to mitigate the potential significant adverse pedestrian impacts are discussed in **Chapter 16, Mitigation**.

The traffic impact analysis indicated that the Proposed Project would result in significant adverse traffic impacts at the intersection of Madison Avenue and East 44th Street during the AM, midday, and PM peak hours, at the intersection of Vanderbilt Avenue and East 45th Street during the midday peak hour, and at the intersection of Madison Avenue and East 45th Street during the PM peak hour. The identification and evaluation of traffic capacity improvements needed to mitigate these impacts are presented **Chapter 16, Mitigation**.

The Proposed Project would also result in an impact to one station element, the ES208 escalator at the west end of the Flushing platform, during the PM peak hour. However, this anticipated change to transit service conditions resulting from the Proposed Action would not be out of character with the East Midtown area and would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character. In addition, the Proposed Project would incorporate transit improvements including the construction of an at-grade circulation area to access the East Side Access terminal located below the Project Site, as well as improvements to passenger circulation at the Grand Central – 42nd Street Subway Station—consisting of improvements to passenger connections to the IRT Flushing Line (#7 Train) platform.

Overall, although it is expected that there would be an increase in the level of pedestrian activity and traffic and transit volumes in the future with the Proposed Action, the resulting conditions would not be out of character with the East Midtown area, and therefore would not constitute a significant impact on neighborhood character.

Noise

Defining features of neighborhood character would not be adversely affected due to potential effects of the Proposed Action on noise, either alone or in combination with potential impacts in other relevant technical areas discussed in this chapter.

As described in detail in **Chapter 12, Noise**, mobile source noise levels would change by 1.8 dBA or less due to traffic generated by the Proposed Action. Therefore, there would be no potential for significant adverse noise impacts due to mobile sources. The MTA ventilation

building immediately to the east of the Project Site (Block 1279 Lot 25) is currently under construction for the ESA project. The ventilation building is currently being designed and constructed to meet applicable noise codes. The Proposed Action has the potential to cause noise from the roof of the ventilation building, and as a result, it is conservatively estimated that stationary source noise levels on East 44th Street may increase up to 1 or 2 dBA. However, since the increase in noise would be less than 3 dBA, reflection of the vent building noise would not have the potential to result in a significant adverse noise impact due to stationary sources. In addition, the design and specifications for the Proposed Project's mechanical equipment would incorporate sufficient noise reduction devices that would enable the Proposed Project to comply with applicable noise regulations and standards, including the standards contained in the revised New York City noise control code.

Based on the noise modeling detailed in **Chapter 12, Noise**, the With-Action noise conditions would be Marginally Unacceptable or Clearly Unacceptable for new sensitive receptors, according to the CEQR Noise Exposure Guidelines, and a minimum window/wall sound attenuation would be required to meet an interior noise condition of 50 dBA for commercial spaces. The proposed commercial office space would require sufficient outdoor-to-indoor noise reduction measures to reduce the interior sound levels by 32 dBA OITC (outdoor-to-indoor transmission classification) on the Madison Avenue facade, 33 dBA on the East 44th Street and eastern (back) facades, and by 28 dBA OITC on the East 45th Street facade in order to maintain acceptable interior noise conditions and an alternative means of ventilation must be included such as, but not limited to central air conditioning, to provide ventilation during the closed window condition. An (E) designation for noise would be applied to the Project Site specifying the appropriate amount of window/wall attenuation and an alternate means of ventilation.

Therefore, the Proposed Project would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character due to effects on noise conditions.