Chapter 3: Open Space

A. INTRODUCTION

Under the 2012 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual* guidelines, open space is defined as publicly accessible, publicly or privately owned land that operates or is available for leisure, play, or sport, or serves to protect or enhance the natural environment. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an open space assessment should be conducted if a project would have a direct effect on open space, such as eliminating or altering a public open space, or an indirect effect, such as when a new population overburdens available open space.

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the proposed project would develop a new laboratory building and the Interactive Conference Center (ICC) at the eastern edge of the Rockefeller University campus and a new one-story fitness center would be developed within the northwest corner of the campus. The proposed laboratory building and ICC would be constructed on a platform structure—including the North Terrace where the ICC would be located—that would occupy air space over the portion of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) Drive between demapped East 68th Street and the Rockefeller Research Building north of East 64th Street. The platform would be supported on the west side of the FDR Drive by twenty vertical columns immediately adjacent to and within the existing schist retaining wall; located along the FDR Drive's eastern edge within the East River Esplanade would be eight Y-shaped columns at the laboratory building and two oval columns at the North Terrace. The ten columns along the FDR Drive's eastern edge would occupy the western edge of the East River Esplanade to a depth of approximately 3'-6". Overall, the column footings for the eight Y-shaped columns and two oval columns would directly displace a total of approximately 236 square feet (sf) of space within the western edge of the esplanade.[1] Accordingly, this analysis considers the proposed project's potential direct impacts on open space resources. The proposed project would not introduce a new population to the Rockefeller University campus that could potentially burden existing open space resources; therefore, an indirect effects analysis of open space is not required.

The East River Esplanade is located between the FDR Drive and the East River. The Esplanade extends along the entire length of the study area east of the project site and continues beyond, to the north and south. The esplanade is accessible via pedestrian bridges spanning the FDR Drive at ~~East 71st Street,~~ East 78th Street at the John Jay Park and Pool, at East 71st Street, and at East 63rd Street adjacent to the Rockefeller University campus. According to the *Manhattan*

[1] The 236 sf includes the eight Y-shaped column footings at 24 square feet each and the two oval column footings at 22 sf each. The area that would be eliminated, discontinued, and closed at the ten column locations at the western edge of the esplanade would total approximately 567 sf above grade, including the 236 sf at grade. The areas to be occupied by the columns are smaller than the volumes being demapped because the demapped volumes are rectangular in shape to accommodate the larger above grade areas of the splay of the Y-shaped columns at an elevation of 25 feet.

Waterfront Greenway Master Plan (2004), the portion of the East River Esplanade between East 63rd Street and East 125th Street, which is referenced as the Bobby Wagner Walk[1], is the oldest portion of the Manhattan Waterfront Greenway, built in 1939. The East River Esplanade is a multiuse path with no separation between the cyclist and pedestrians. The esplanade area was acquired for transportation purposes as part of the FDR Drive right-of-way. It functions primarily as a thoroughfare, and is under the jurisdiction of the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT). By agreement with DOT, the East River Esplanade is maintained by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR).

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

While column footings would be constructed along the East River Esplanade as part of the proposed project, and the proposed project would result in significant adverse shadows impacts as well as construction-related noise and open space impacts, with the incorporation of Project Components Related to the Environment (PCREs) and proposed mitigation measures, including improvements to the Esplanade and replacement-in-kind of areas affected during construction, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse direct impacts to open space resources.

A total of approximately 236 sf of space within the western portion of the East River Esplanade would be demapped to accommodate ten columns supporting the platform spanning the FDR Drive. As shown in **Table 3-1** below under "Existing Conditions," surveys conducted during both weekday and weekend periods indicated that the resources within these sections of the esplanade, including benches and landscaped areas, are not sought out by esplanade users (as most esplanade users pass through the space as active users). Due to its relative isolation and limited access points, this small~~,~~ area totaling approximately 236 sf ~~area~~ of the East River Esplanade attracts a limited number of passive users. The esplanade is predominantly used for active recreation, including running and biking, and the most heavily utilized elements of the esplanade adjacent to the project site—particularly the walkway/bikeway—would not be affected by the proposed project.

In addition, while temporary construction-related noise and construction-duration open space impacts would occur, disruptions of access to the esplanade would be limited to certain periods when usage is minimal.[2] Access to the esplanade during construction of the proposed project would be limited at certain overnight periods. Therefore, the proposed project would not substantially limit access to the esplanade or impair its operation as a predominantly active recreational space. Further, the portions of the East River Esplanade that would be affected by construction-related activities would be replaced in-kind as part of the proposed project.[3] Other

[1] The terms "East River Esplanade" and "esplanade" are used throughout the EIS to describe the Bobby Wagner Walk.

[2] To ensure the safety of East River Esplanade users passing through the area, pedestrian and bike traffic on segments of the esplanade would be stopped briefly by flaggers (approximately less than one minute per lift and occurring infrequently) during the day when construction materials are hoisted overhead from barges to the project site. This is typical practice with New York City construction projects where pedestrian and/or vehicle traffic is stopped briefly during overhead lifts for safety reasons.

[3] To partially mitigate the proposed project's significant adverse shadows impact, Rockefeller University—in consultation with the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP) and DPR—would undertake a substantial upgrade to the portion of the esplanade adjacent to the project site and an additional approximately 150-foot-long section of the esplanade south of the project site. See discussion of

construction-related impacts, such as noise impacts, would be temporary and limited to the period on construction. Therefore, the proposed project would not adversely affect the East River Esplanade.

It should be noted that the proposed project would result in a significant adverse shadows impact on the esplanade. This shadows impact may directly affect the usability of the esplanade for passive users, but with partial mitigation measures introduced with the proposed project, as described in Chapter 13, "Mitigation," this effect would not rise to the level of a significant adverse impact.

Overall, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse direct open space impacts.

B. METHODOLOGY

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a direct effect on an open space would occur if a project would cause the physical loss of public open space; change the use of an open space so that it no longer serves the same user population; limit public access to an open space; or cause increased noise or air pollutant emissions, odors, or shadows that would affect its usefulness, whether on a permanent or temporary basis. The proposed project would result in the direct demapping of a total of approximately 236 sf (approximately 0.01 acres) of publicly accessible open space within the East River Esplanade, located in the western portion of the esplanade immediately adjacent to the FDR Drive. This small area would be occupied by the footings of the eight Y-shaped columns and two oval columns constructed to support the platform spanning the FDR Drive. Therefore, on a permanent basis, the proposed project would result in the physical loss of a total area of approximately 236 sf of public open space and change the use of that small area.

Accordingly, this open space analysis identifies the areas of the East River Esplanade that would be directly affected by the proposed project, and describes their characteristics, features, and context within the esplanade. Field surveys were conducted in July 2013, to determine the number of esplanade users that could be affected by the proposed project, and to characterize the existing use of the segment of the East River Esplanade adjacent to the project site which is publicly accessible open space. Surveys were undertaken in good weather on two days (one weekday and one weekend day) during morning, midday, and evening hours to coincide with periods of high visitation to the esplanade. During each site visit, the areas of the esplanade that would be affected by the proposed project were surveyed in approximately 15- to 20-minute intervals, counting the number of users during each peak visitation period and noting the conditions of the areas.

This analysis then describes future conditions for the 2019 analysis year without the proposed project (the No Action scenario), in order to establish the analytic baseline against which the probable impacts associated with the proposed project are assessed. The assessment of future conditions with the proposed project (the With Action scenario) describes the repair and

bulkhead repair and rebuilding and substantial esplanade upgrades as described in Chapter 13, "Mitigation."

replacement in-kind of the areas of the esplanade affected by construction of the proposed project.[1]

C. BACKGROUND

Pursuant to an agreement with the City signed in 1973, the Rockefeller University, along with New York Hospital (now the New York Presbyterian Hospital-Weill Cornell Medical Center [NYPH-Weill Cornell Medical College]) and the Hospital for Special Surgery, acquired air rights parcels over the FDR Drive for the purposes of expansion. At the time, the City intended to build an elevated public walkway, and the agreement included a permanent easement to allow for the walkway between East 62nd and East 72nd Streets along the East River. Subsequently, the City abandoned the planned elevated pedestrian walkway and constructed the East River Esplanade at grade within the FDR Drive right-of-way on the eastern side of the FDR Drive roadway.

A 1993 amendment to the original agreement removed the East River Esplanade from the air rights parcels controlled by the Rockefeller University, NYPH-Weill Cornell Medical College, and the Hospital for Special Surgery. Pursuant to the amended agreement, portions of the East River Esplanade may still be eliminated, discontinued, or closed "for the limited purpose of allowing the placement therein of support columns, connecting girders and structural bracing that are found to be necessary and appropriate for permitted construction [over the FDR Drive]" and one story of building area.

D. DIRECT OPEN SPACE IMPACTS ANALYSIS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The East River Esplanade is a narrow open space extending along the FDR Drive and the East River roughly between the Queensboro Bridge (East 59th Street) and the Triborough Bridge (East 125th Street). The esplanade is approximately 3.5 miles long and primarily contains a walkway/bikeway and landscaped areas, benches, and trees. Because the esplanade is separated from City streets by the FDR Drive, access is provided by an entrance ramp at its southern end (near East 60th Street) and several pedestrian bridges connecting to streets or other nearby open spaces. A pedestrian entrance is also available at East 96th Street below an elevated portion of the FDR Drive.

As shown on **Figure 3-1**, the portion of the East River Esplanade adjacent to the Rockefeller University Large Scale Community Facility Development (LSCFD) extends from roughly East 62nd Street to demapped East 68th Street. North of this segment is the NYPH-Weill Cornell Medical College platform spanning the FDR Drive, which is supported by large concrete columns located at the western edge of the esplanade. The segment of the esplanade adjacent to the Rockefeller LSCFD contains approximately 69,000 sf of space (1.58 acres). At its southern end, this segment of the esplanade is approximately 35 feet wide, narrowing to approximately 20 feet wide at its north end as it approaches the NYPH-Weill Cornell Medical College platform.

The portion of the esplanade located adjacent to the project site extends from the north side of East 64th Street to demapped East 68th Street. It includes an approximately 13- to 17-foot-wide walkway/bikeway that is paved in gray hexagonal asphalt pavers and is the predominant element

[1] The bulkhead repair and rebuilding and substantial esplanade upgrades are discussed in Chapter 13, "Mitigation."

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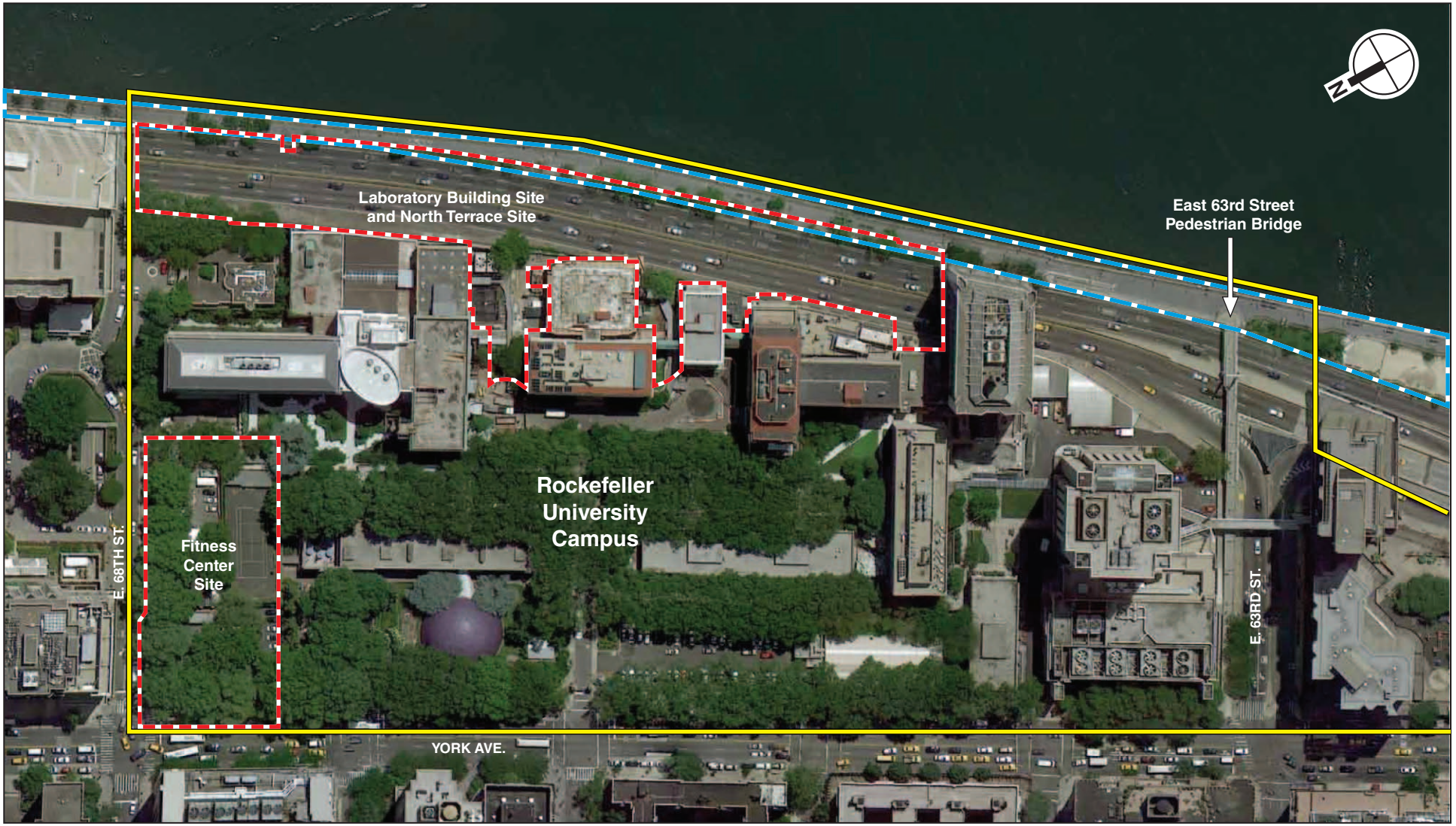

Development Sites

East River Esplanade

Large Scale Community Facility Development (LSCFD)
Rockefeller University Campus

0 100 200 FEET
SCALE

ROCKEFELLER
UNIVERSITY

Proposed Project Location
Figure 3-1

of the esplanade. The walkway/bikeway is flanked on the west, along the FDR Drive's concrete crash wall with a metal fence, by a narrow area containing small low bushes, grass, 23 trees, lighting, and benches. East of the walkway/bikeway is the East River separated from the esplanade by a low metal railing. On the wider portion of the esplanade adjacent to the project site are a second row of benches and several trees located along the east side of the walkway/bikeway oriented near the East River (see **Figures 3-2 through 3-5**).

Field surveys of the segment of the East River Esplanade adjacent to the project site found that this segment has moderate levels of utilization during morning and evening periods during the week (with lower utilization during the weekday midday period). Moderate levels of utilization were also observed throughout the day on weekends. Most users of this portion of the esplanade were adults engaging in active recreation. The most common activities observed on this segment of the esplanade include both active uses (running and biking) and passive uses (walking and, dog-walking). During all observed periods, the walkway/bikeway was the most heavily used area within this segment of the esplanade (see **Table 3-1**). Seating areas, including benches and planted spaces, were more lightly used, particularly during the morning survey periods. More esplanade users were observed using the seating areas in the midday and evening periods, although the walkway/bikeway remained more heavily used during these periods. The benches located along the esplanade's western side (adjacent to the FDR Drive) were very lightly used; the benches located on the esplanade's eastern side (closer to the East River railing on the wider portion of the esplanade) were more heavily used by esplanade users seeking out seating areas within the East River Esplanade. The utilization patterns of this segment of the esplanade can be attributed to its relatively isolated location, separated from the predominantly residential section of the surrounding neighborhood by large institutional campus blocks, its limited access points which discourage casual visitors, and close proximity to the FDR Drive.

Table 3-1
Open Space Utilization—East River Esplanade

Survey Period[1]	Total Users[2]	Walkway/Bikeway Users[3]	Seating Area Users[4]
Weekday			
Morning	79	77 (97%)	2 (3%)
Midday	17	12 (71%)	5 (29%)
Evening	51	39 (76%)	12 (24%)
Weekend			
Morning	64	60 (94%)	4 (6%)
Midday	67	56 (84%)	11 (16%)
Evening	98	86 (88%)	12 (12%)

Notes:
[1]The portion of the esplanade adjacent to the project site was surveyed for periods of 15 to 20 minutes during each survey period.
[2] Total number of users indicates the number of people recorded as sitting within or passing through the esplanade during each 15- to 20-minute survey period.
[3] Activities on the walkway/bikeway portion of the esplanade include running/jogging, biking, walking, and dog-walking.
[4] Seating areas include benches and planted areas along the FDR Drive crash wall and benches close to the East River.
Sources: AKRF, Inc. field surveys, July 14 and 17, 2013

The portion of the esplanade adjacent to the Rockefeller LSCFD south of the project site also includes part of the walkway/bikeway in addition to a dog run located north of the esplanade entrance ramp leading to East 60th Street. Access to this segment of the esplanade is provided by

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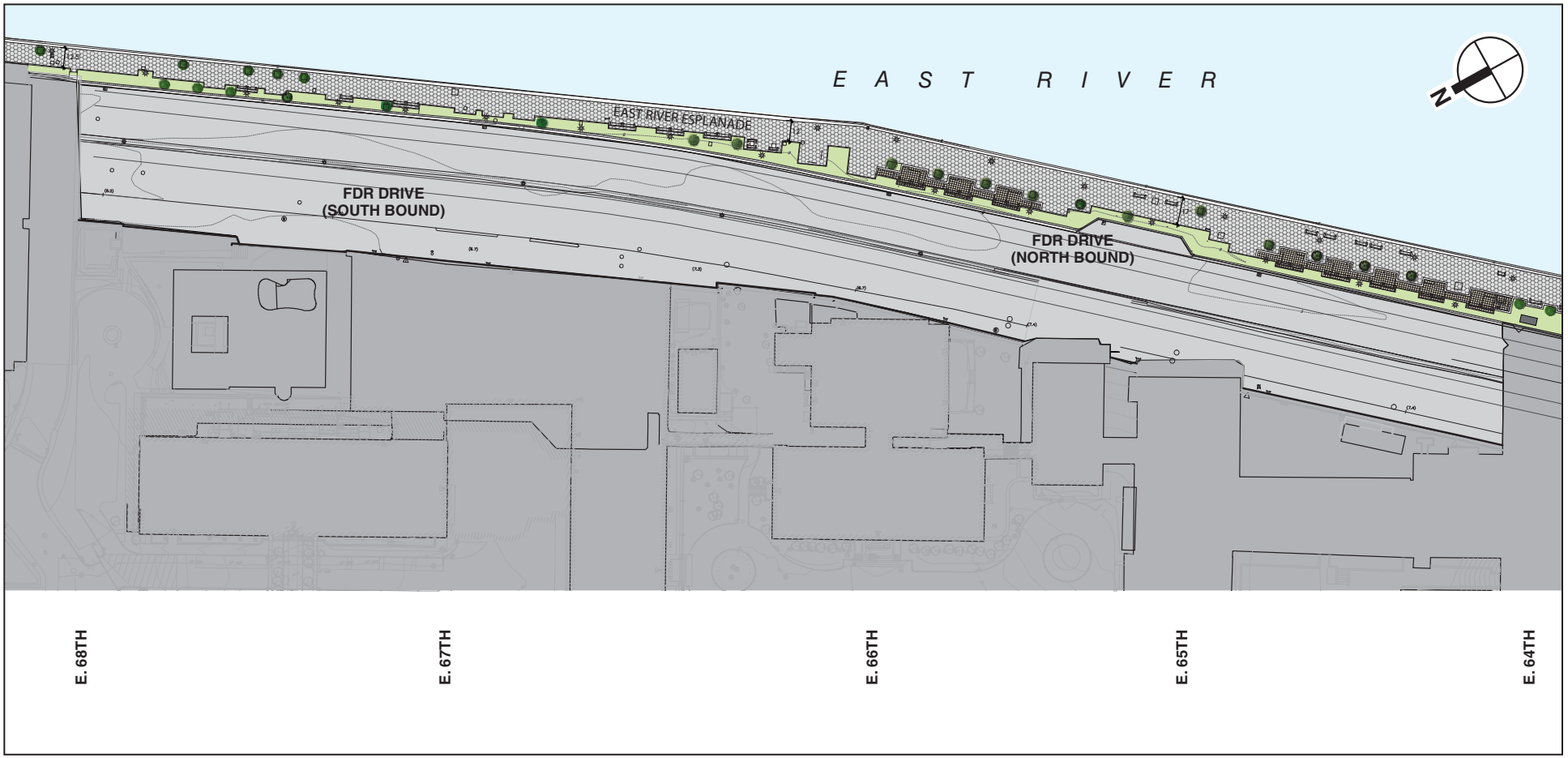


0 100 200 FEET

SCALE

Major Deciduous Tree

Cobble Unit Pavers

Turf or Shrub Row

Asphalt Hexagonal Pavers

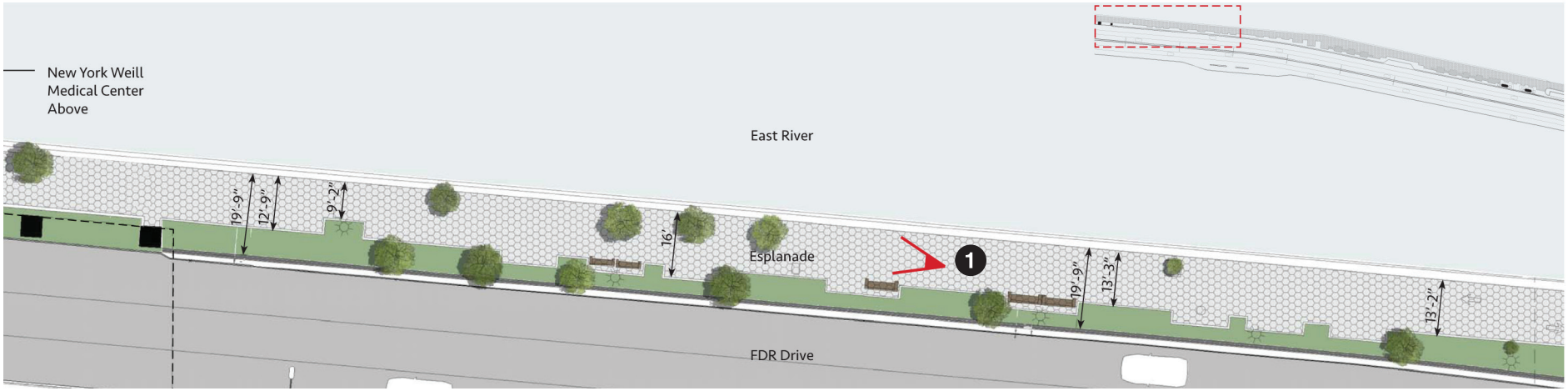
East River

Backed Bench

Light Pole

ROCKEFELLER
UNIVERSITY

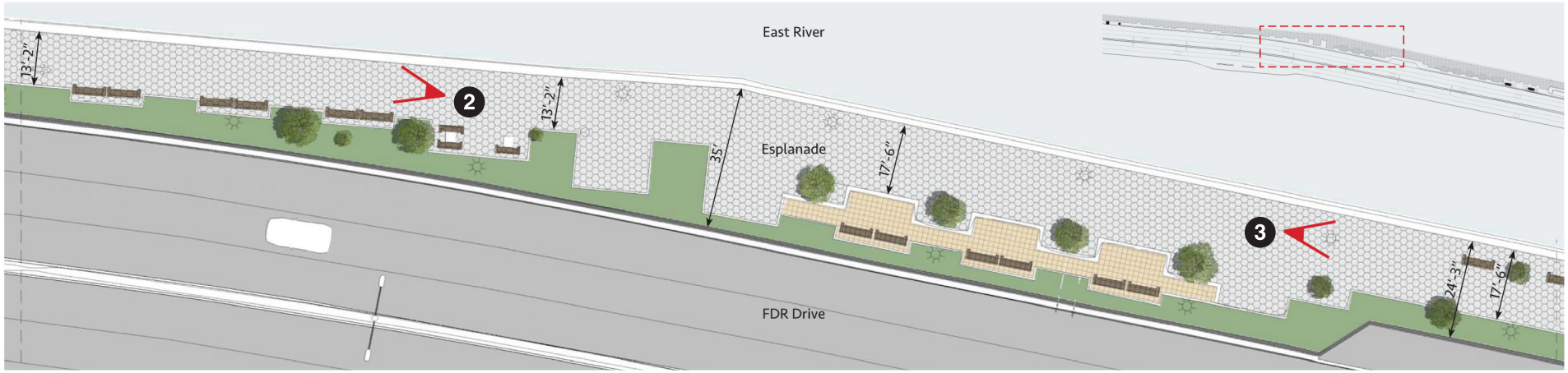
East River Esplanade
Existing Conditions Diagram
Figure 3-2



Source: Mathews Nielson Landscape Architects

East River Esplanade - Exisiting Conditions Photograph

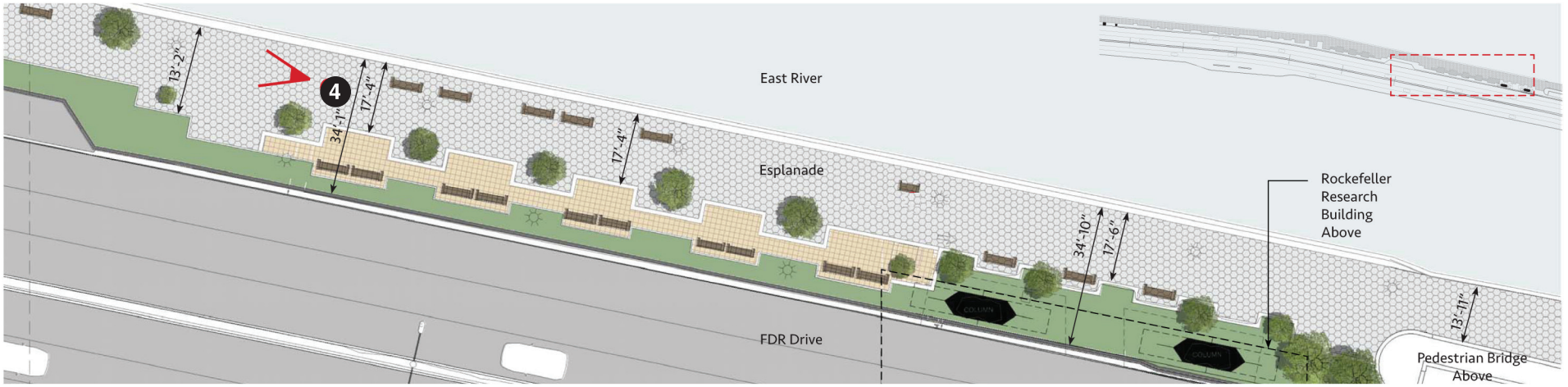
Figure 3-3



Source: Mathews Nielson Landscape Architects

East River Esplanade - Exisiting Conditions Photographs

Figure 3-4



Source: Mathews Nielsen / andscape Architects

East River Esplanade - Exisiting Conditions Photograph

Figure 3-5

both the East 60th Street entrance ramp and a pedestrian bridge over the FDR Drive connecting to the north side of East 63rd Street. A portion of this segment of the East River Esplanade, located in the area adjacent to East 64th Street and south of the project site, contains columns supporting the Rockefeller Research Building. The Rockefeller Research Building was constructed by Rockefeller University in 1988 using the air rights parcels acquired under the 1973 agreement; the East 63rd Street pedestrian bridge was also constructed at that time as part of the esplanade improvements required by the agreement. The Rockefeller Research Building's two V-shaped concrete columns, spaced approximately 50 feet apart, are located at the western edge of the esplanade flush with the FDR Drive crash wall. Landscaping is located adjacent to these columns and a row of benches is located east of the columns facing the walkway/bikeway.

FUTURE NO ACTION SCENARIO

Absent the proposed project, the Rockefeller University LSCFD and the adjacent segment of the East River Esplanade would remain in their current conditions. Although DPR has identified the need to repair the esplanade's substantially deteriorated bulkhead in this area, absent this project bulkhead reconstruction would not occur ~~is still at a preliminary planning stage~~ as DPR has not yet ~~identified~~ secured ~~a source of~~ funding for the bulkhead reconstruction.

FUTURE WITH ACTION SCENARIO

With the proposed project, Rockefeller University would construct a new two-story laboratory building and a one-story conference center (the ICC) on a platform structure situated within ~~using~~ the air rights parcels above the FDR Drive that were obtained by the 1973 agreement with the City. The platform structure, including the North Terrace where the ICC and certain landscaping elements would be located, would span the portion of the FDR Drive between the Rockefeller Research Building north of East 64th Street and demapped East 68th Street. The lowest part of the platform structure (the soffit) would be approximately ~~19~~ 18 feet above the elevation of the FDR Drive.

The platform spanning the FDR Drive would be supported by 20 columns west of the FDR Drive and ten columns east of the FDR Drive along the western edge of the East River Esplanade. The ten columns to the east of the FDR Drive~~,~~ include~~ing~~ eight Y-shaped columns at the laboratory building and two oval columns at the North Terrace. The eight Y-shaped columns—located immediately north of the columns supporting the existing Rockefeller Research Building platform—would be approximately 46 feet in height and would support the laboratory building~~, extending to the laboratory building's second level~~. Two shorter oval columns (approximately 20 feet in height) would be located at the North Terrace between the laboratory building columns and the support structure for the NYPH-Weill Cornell Medical College platform; the shorter columns would support the North Terrace, which would be located east of the President's House and would contain the ICC. In total, the footings of the ten columns along the esplanade would occupy approximately 236 sf of space within the East River Esplanade.

~~These ten columns would represent a minimal loss of recreational space within the East River Esplanade.~~ It should be noted that the 236 sf of space that would be occupied by the column footings represents ~~is~~ less than one-half of one percent of the total space within the portion of the esplanade adjacent to the Rockefeller Campus LSCFD, and the majority of this segment of the esplanade would continue to function as primarily a space for active recreation such as running or biking. The ten columns would be located flush with the FDR Drive crash wall, to a depth of approximately 3'-6" (see Figures 13-4 and 13-5 in Chapter 13, "Mitigation"). This area at the westernmost edge of the esplanade is currently lightly used, in part due to its proximity to the

FDR Drive, making this portion of the esplanade unlikely to be sought out by visitors to this open space. The walkway/bikeway that is the esplanade's most highly utilized component would not be altered by the construction of the ten columns.[1]

Overall, the segment of the East River Esplanade adjacent to the project site would continue to function as an active recreation space, similar to the segment of the esplanade immediately north of the project site (which supports a similar mix of activities, particularly running, walking, and biking).

As described in Chapter 12, "Construction," during construction of the proposed project, a minimum eight-foot-wide pathway through the affected portion of the esplanade would be provided throughout the construction period with the exception of very limited times when construction activities, including heavy lifting, would cause limited closures of the esplanade during night time hours when the esplanade is lightly used. In addition, during the day to ensure the safety of East River Esplanade users passing through the area, pedestrian and bike traffic on segments of the esplanade would be stopped briefly by flaggers (approximately less than one minute per lift and occurring infrequently) when construction materials are hoisted overhead from barges to the project site.

Access to the East River Esplanade for users approaching the esplanade from the area west of the FDR Drive would not be affected by the proposed project. The current access points to the segment of the esplanade adjacent to the project site are the East 60th Street ramp and the East 63rd Street pedestrian bridge, neither of which would be affected by the proposed project. As discussed in Chapter 12, "Construction," while portions of the esplanade would be narrowed during construction of the proposed project, these changes would cause temporary disruptions to the utilization of this portion of the East River Esplanade. As part of construction-related activities in the Future With Action Scenario, any feature of the esplanade temporarily removed or damaged, such as pavers, benches, plantings, or lighting fixtures, would be replaced in-kind.

In addition, as discussed in Chapter 9, "Noise," and shown in **Tables 9-5, 9-6, and 9-7**, the proposed project would include an ~~five~~ eight-foot-tall sound barrier along the eastern edge of the FDR Drive that would reduce noise levels on the esplanade resulting from traffic (including noise reflected by the decking over of the FDR Drive that would occur with the proposed project). The sound barrier would ~~result in~~ reduce noise levels on the esplanade ~~that, depending upon the distance from the FDR Drive,~~ and result in noise levels on the esplanade that would be less than ~~or comparable to~~ existing noise levels. Therefore, the barrier would improve conditions for both passive and active users of the esplanade.[2]

As described above, the introduction of a platform structure spanning the FDR Drive would also affect the shadows on the East River Esplanade, and result in a significant adverse shadow impact. Partial mitigation has been identified and described in Chapter 13, "Mitigation." As discussed in Chapter 4, "Shadows," all affected portions of the esplanade adjacent to the project

[1] As discussed in Chapter 13, "Mitigation," the portion of the esplanade adjacent to the project site and the approximately 150 feet south of the project site would be substantially upgraded as partial mitigation for the significant adverse shadows impact to the esplanade. Upgrades would include the redesign and reconstruction of this portion of the esplanade, with improved spatial organization of the walkway/bikeway and seating areas, new planting beds, and new shade tolerant plantings.

[2] The proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts on air quality within the esplanade, as discussed in Chapter 8, "Air Quality."

site would continue to receive a minimum of five and a half hours of direct sunlight each day throughout the year, and consequently any vegetation in planters would not be significantly impacted by the new shadows. Although the proposed laboratory building and North Terrace would cast new incremental shadows on the segment of the esplanade in the study area that would eliminate all remaining sunlight for between 50 minutes and two hours and 20 minutes depending on the season. It should be noted that, as identified above in **Table 3-1**, the esplanade is primarily used for active recreation such as running and biking and does not attract a substantial number of passive users who would be most vulnerable to incremental shadows.

As discussed above, the segment of the East River Esplanade adjacent to the project site is predominantly used for active recreation and passive activities, such as walking and dog-walking, that do not necessarily benefit from direct sunlight. The proposed project is not expected to reduce the usability of this open space or diminish its attractiveness for the majority of active users to this segment of the East River Esplanade. Further, the repair and replacement in-kind of the affected portion of the esplanade would result in improvements to the open space.[1]

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[1] See discussion of bulkhead repair and rebuilding and substantial esplanade upgrades as described in Chapter 13, "Mitigation."