Chapter 11: Neighborhood Character

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the impacts of the proposed Rockefeller University 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 neighborhoods their 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.

This analysis considers the impacts of the proposed project on the neighborhood character of the project site and the surrounding area, and relies on the analyses of the components of neighborhood character (i.e., land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise) as analyzed elsewhere in the environmental impact statement (EIS). As detailed in this analysis, the proposed project would change the character of project site and its relation to the larger area; however, these changes would not be considered adverse. Instead, the proposed project would add new activity and vibrancy that would be in keeping with the defining characteristics of the ~~primary and secondary~~ study area's existing neighborhood character.

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

The proposed project would be in keeping with the defining characteristics of the neighborhood character of the study area. The study area is defined by institutional uses, private open space, and a dense urban context. The proposed project would develop a new laboratory building, a small conference and meeting pavilion, and a fitness center. These facilities would allow for the spatial decompression of existing Rockefeller University buildings, and provide state-of-the-art research facilities that would further Rockefeller University's mission. Changes associated with the proposed project regarding land use, zoning, and public policy; ~~socioeconomic conditions;~~ urban design and visual resources; transportation; and noise are not expected to adversely affect neighborhood character.

~~With regard to open space, although the proposed project would result in the demapping of a small, approximately 236 square foot (sf) area within the western edge of the East River Esplanade, this change would not be considered a significant adverse neighborhood character impact.~~

The proposed platform structure for the laboratory building and Interactive Conference Center (ICC) would include eight Y-shaped columns and two oval columns that would be located at the western edge of the East River Esplanade. The walkway/bikeway that is the esplanade's most highly utilized component would not be altered by the construction of the ten columns. Further, the esplanade would continue to contain small planted areas, some trees, and benches and a

walkway/bikeway. Upon completion of the construction of the proposed project, areas of the esplanade damaged by construction-related activities would be replaced in-kind.[1] Therefore, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character due to open space resources.

With regard to open space, although the proposed project would result in the demapping of an ~~small~~ area totaling~~,~~ approximately 236 square ~~foot~~ feet (sf) ~~area~~ within the western edge of the East River Esplanade,[2] this change would not be considered a significant adverse neighborhood character impact.

As detailed in Chapter 4, "Shadows," the new shadows cast by the proposed laboratory building and North Terrace would eliminate the remaining areas of direct sunlight on the esplanade adjacent to the project site for between 50 minutes in the early spring and fall and up to two hours and 40 minutes on the summer solstice. Therefore, the proposed project would cause significant adverse shadow impacts in those seasons to users of the open space seeking direct sun. The shadows impact would be partially mitigated, as described in Chapter 13, "Mitigation." Although the proposed project would cast new shadows that would shade portions of the East River Esplanade, all affected portions of the esplanade would continue to receive a minimum of five and a half hours of direct sunlight each day throughout the growing season. The incremental shadows would not be expected to adversely affect vegetation on the esplanade or aquatic resources of the East River. Further, any new plantings would be shade tolerant.

As described in Chapter 3, "Open Space," 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. Although the incremental shadow on the esplanade may affect the usability of the esplanade for passive users, with the implementation of the partial mitigation measures for the shadows impact, as described in Chapter 13, "Mitigation," the effect of the shadows impact on neighborhood character would not rise to the level of a significant adverse impact ~~Because most users of this open space resource are predominantly walkers, runners, and bicyclists, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character due to shadows.~~

The proposed project would result in changes to the Rockefeller University Historic District (State/National Register-eligible [S/NR-eligible], New York City Landmark-eligible [NYCL-eligible]) that would result in significant impacts to historic and cultural resources. These impacts would result from the removal of the concrete canopy structure and parking area at the campus's northwest corner and locating two stacks for the proposed laboratory building adjacent to the south façade of the Flexner Hall Extension and the north façade of the Hospital. These impacts would be partially mitigated, as described in Chapter 13, "Mitigation." Regarding the canopy structure, ~~the existing canopy structure~~ it is small in scale and set away from the adjacent streets. The dense tree coverage at the perimeter of the campus obscures views to this structure

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

[2] 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.

from the study area. The replacement of the concrete canopy structure and parking area with the new fitness center would result in a new structure similar in scale to the existing structure and would not be expected to significantly adversely affect the nearby character of the neighborhood. Regarding the stacks, ~~The stacks that~~ they would be located on the roof of the laboratory building and would be ~~are~~ sited at the rear of the campus. They would be visible in distant views from the Queensboro Bridge and Roosevelt Island and would be viewed in the context of other tall structures.

~~Although the proposed project would change the context of the Rockefeller University Historic District with the introduction of the new laboratory building and ICC on the North Terrace located at the eastern edge of the campus, two new stacks located adjacent to two historic campus buildings, and the new one-story fitness center at the campus's northwest corner,~~ The features of the campus that contribute to neighborhood character ~~are~~ the brick and metal fence and trees that establish the campus edge along York Avenue and demapped East 68th Street. These elements would not be affected by the proposed project and therefore, the proposed project would not adversely affect neighborhood character.

Overall, the combined effect of changes to the defining elements of the study area would not result in any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character. ~~The neighborhood character of the area would benefit from the new institutional facilities, which would support a defining characteristic of the area.~~ While the development on the project site would noticeably change the character of the area with the new laboratory building and ~~Interactive Conference Center (~~ICC~~)~~ built on a platform over the Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) Drive and the new fitness center at the northwest corner of the campus, these changes would not diminish the study area's overall character~~, and would therefore not constitute a significant adverse impact~~. The proposed project would be compatible with the defining characteristics of the study area~~'s neighborhood character,~~ and would not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts.

B. METHODOLOGY

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 that contributes to an area's neighborhood character (i.e., 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 a project could affect these technical areas, 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 without the proposed project condition and future with the proposed project condition are then projected and compared to determine whether a project would result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. This assessment considers the incremental changes associated with the proposed project, compared to the future without the proposed project, for the 2019 analysis year, in each relevant technical area.

As described in the relevant chapters of this ~~Draft~~ Final EIS (~~D~~FEIS), the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; ~~shadows;~~ urban design; or noise. However, the proposed project would result in a shadows impact to the East River Esplanade, historic and cultural resources in the Rockefeller University Historic District, construction-period noise, and open space during construction. 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. The preliminary assessment is followed by a detailed assessment which considers whether the proposed project would result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER COMPONENTS

As discussed above, the components of neighborhood character include land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, historic and cultural resources, urban design, visual resources, shadows, transportation, and noise.

STUDY AREAS

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. Accordingly, this chapter analyzes a study area that extends 400-feet from the Rockefeller University Large Scale Community Facility Development (LSCFD) boundary.

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 character of the study area is primarily defined by institutional uses and the physical setting adjacent to, and elevated from, the waterfront (see Figure 2-1 in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy"). The study area contains the Rockefeller University LSCFD that includes the area east of York Avenue between demapped East 68th Street and East 62nd Street and extends to the bulkhead line east of the FDR Drive. The LSCFD is occupied by Rockefeller University, a biomedical research institution and graduate school. Rockefeller University is adjacent to the FDR Drive, a six-lane limited access roadway that extends along the length of the east side of Manhattan. The Rockefeller Research Building, located between East 63rd and East 64th Streets partially spans the FDR Drive south of the Laboratory Building Site. The LSCFD includes private open space that is available to Rockefeller University students, faculty, and staff, but is

not publicly accessible. The campus is separated from York Avenue by a fence with the primary entrance gate at East 66th Street.

Rockefeller University is located within a cluster of medical and research institutions including the New York Presbyterian Hospital-Weill Cornell Medical Center (NYPH-Weill Cornell Medical College) directly north of the Rockefeller campus. The Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK) Cancer Center is located across York Avenue at East 67th Street and continues north to East 69th Street. Just outside of the study area, the Hospital for Special Surgery is located north of NYPH-Weill Cornell Medical College between East 70th and East 71st Streets.

The study area also contains some residential uses, which are generally located south of East 66th Street. These blocks contain apartment buildings ranging from six to 18 stories in height. Retail uses in the study area are primarily local, and restaurants generally catering to local residents, as well as staff, faculty, and students at the many nearby institutions.

The study area is also defined in part by the portion of the East River Esplanade that extends through the study area along the East River. The esplanade is the only publicly-accessible open space in the study area. The esplanade is separated from the Rockefeller University campus by the FDR Drive, which limits access to this open space resource. There is a pedestrian bridge over the FDR Drive at East 63rd Street that provides the only connection to the East River Esplanade in the study area. Just north of the study area, there is also a pedestrian bridge at East 70th Street. The portion of the esplanade adjacent to the project site contains seating and some landscaping elements, but is primarily used for running, bicycling, and walking.

Overall, the secondary study area is a dense and vibrant urban community that is shaped in part by its strong concentration of institutional uses, many of which are not publicly accessible. The physical setting of the study area provides for scenic views of the East River in certain areas, which are most readily accessible to the public through the East River Esplanade. These defining features contribute to a distinctive neighborhood character.

POTENTIAL TO AFFECT THE DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Development of the proposed project, consisting of three new buildings containing approximately 157,251 gross square feet (gsf) of new laboratory and support space, a small approximately 3,353-gsf conference and meeting pavilion (the ICC), and a new, approximately 20,498-gsf fitness center, would be completed and operational in 2019.

The proposed project would have the potential to affect the defining features of the neighborhood as follows:

- Land Use. The proposed project would complement and reinforce the institutional uses in the study area, and would be compatible with the residential and commercial uses in the study area. The East River Esplanade would continue to contain landscaping elements and be available for running, bicycling, and walking.
- Open Space. The proposed laboratory building and North Terrace would include twenty columns on the west side of the FDR Drive. Eight Y-shaped columns and two oval columns would be located in the western edge of the East River Esplanade. These ten columns would have a minimal impact on users of the esplanade, which would continue to contain landscaping elements and benches and be available for running, bicycling, and walking.
- Shadows. The proposed project would result in a new platform structure that would cast incremental shadows over sunlight-sensitive resources, including the East River Esplanade and a small area within the East River. The proposed project would result in a significant

adverse shadow impact on the esplanade that would be partially mitigated as described in Chapter 13, "Mitigation."

- Historic and Cultural Resources. The proposed project would result in new buildings that would alter the context the Rockefeller University Historic District. The proposed project would result in a significant adverse historic and cultural resources impact that would be partially mitigated as described in Chapter 13, "Mitigation."
- Urban Design and Visual Resources. The proposed laboratory building would affect the pedestrian experience of the adjacent portion of the East River Esplanade. The proposed project would not adversely affect any views.
- Noise. The proposed buildings would be constructed to provide sufficient window/wall attenuation for an acceptable interior noise environment. An ~~low, five~~ eight-foot-tall barrier would be provided along the eastern side of the FDR Drive to ensure that noise levels on the East River Esplanade would be ~~are~~ less than ~~or comparable to~~ existing noise levels ~~conditions~~.

As noted above, the study area is defined by institutional uses, private open space, and a dense urban context.

As detailed in other sections of this ~~D~~FEIS, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to land use, socioeconomic conditions, open space, urban design and visual resources, and noise. The proposed project would result in a significant adverse shadows impact to the East River Esplanade. In addition, the project would result in a significant adverse impact to historic and cultural resources. ~~Although the proposed project would result in changes to the Rockefeller University Historic District.~~ It should be noted that this impact and the~~se~~ changes to the historic district would not be expected to adversely impact the neighborhood character of the ~~primary and secondary~~ study area~~s~~ due to the scale of the fitness center at the campus's northwest corner and the location of the laboratory building, stacks, and the North Terrace at the rear of the campus. As the proposed project could affect contributing elements of the character of the area, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character is warranted and is presented in the next section.

D. DETAILED ASSESSMENT

As per the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character builds upon the preliminary assessment to project the future without the proposed project (the No Action scenario) and the future with the proposed project (the With Action scenario), in order to determine whether the proposed project would result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts.

FUTURE NO ACTION SCENARIO

Absent the proposed actions, in the Future No Action scenario no new development will occur within the LSCFD by 2019. In this scenario, the air rights spanning the FDR Drive will not be developed and the surface parking lot and canopy structure will remain. Certain areas of the Bronk Building, the Smith Hall Annex, and other campus buildings will be used for storage of University equipment and furniture, as needed, as part of the typical University operations.

Also in the Future No Action scenario, the temporary IT Pavilion, located south of the University's East 66th Street entrance near York Avenue, will be removed and the site will

become a landscaped area. The IT population and equipment will be relocated to other existing buildings and spaces on campus.

In the Future No Action scenario, the existing 52 parking spaces at the East 68th Street surface parking lot will be maintained. However, parking within the LSCFD, and its location within the LSCFD, is not controlled by zoning regulations.

These changes to the LSCFD would not result in changes to the neighborhood character of the study area.

~~Three~~ Two new major institutional development projects are expected to be built or under construction within or adjacent to the 400-foot study area by 2019, as described in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy."[1] These background development projects are consistent with the existing concentration of medical-related institutional uses in the study area. Therefore, the developments would reinforce the existing neighborhood character of the study area.

FUTURE WITH ACTION SCENARIO

As discussed above under "Preliminary Assessment," the proposed project would affect contributing elements of the study area's defining characteristics. This section analyzes the probable impacts of the proposed project on these defining characteristics with regard to each relevant technical area for the 2019 analysis year.

LAND USE, ZONING, AND PUBLIC POLICY

The proposed project would result in modest land use changes in the study area. By permitting Rockefeller University to build over the FDR Drive, the proposed project would allow the University to provide needed research facilities and fitness amenities on the campus. Further, the proposed buildings would allow Rockefeller University to decompress its existing user population and provide a new state-of-the art research facility.

The proposed project would complement and reinforce the institutional uses in the study area, which are a defining element of the neighborhood character. It would be compatible with the residential and commercial uses in the study area, many of which cater to the faculty, staff, and student populations of Rockefeller University and the surrounding hospitals and medical institutions. Other existing buildings have previously been developed above nearby portions of the air space above the FDR Drive, including Rockefeller University's Rockefeller Research Building and NYPH-Weill Cornell Medical College's Greenberg Pavilion.

The columns to be located in the western edge of the East River Esplanade are structurally necessary for the proposed laboratory building and North Terrace and would have a minimal effect on users of the esplanade. The esplanade would continue to contain landscaping elements and be available for running, bicycling, and walking.

Overall, the land use changes associated with the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse neighborhood character impacts.

[1] Since the Draft EIS (DEIS), one of the No Build projects in the study area, the Belfer Research Building at 413 East 69th Street, was completed in early 2014.

OPEN SPACE

The East River Esplanade is a defining element of the ~~primary and secondary~~ study area's neighborhood character. The proposed project would not result in any increase in population on the project site, and would therefore not introduce a new population that could ~~e~~affect or overburden this open space resource. As discussed in Chapter 3, "Open Space," the columns associated with the proposed laboratory building and North Terrace would displace a total of approximately 236 sf of space within the East River Esplanade. However, this would result in a very small decrease in open space since nearly all of the esplanade would remain available to the public, and consequently this change would not result in a significant adverse neighborhood character impact due to open space. Upon completion of the construction of the laboratory building and North Terrace, areas of the esplanade damaged by construction would be replaced in-kind.[1] Due to these factors, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character due to open space resources.

SHADOWS

The proposed project would cast new incremental shadows that would shade portions of the East River Esplanade, which contributes to the neighborhood character of the study area. As described in Chapter 4, "Shadows," the proposed laboratory building would cast between three and five hours of new shadows on portions of the East River Esplanade in the afternoons in the spring, summer, and fall, and 53 minutes on the winter analysis day. These new shadows would eliminate the remaining areas of direct sunlight on the esplanade adjacent to the project site for between 50 minutes in the early spring and fall and up to two hours and 40 minutes on the summer solstice. Therefore, the proposed project would cause significant adverse shadow impacts in those seasons to users of the open space seeking direct sun. These impacts would be partially mitigated, as described in Chapter 13, "Mitigation." All affected portions of the esplanade would continue to receive a minimum of five and a half hours of direct sunlight each day throughout the growing season, and consequently any vegetation on the esplanade would not be adversely impacted by the new shadows. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character due to shadows impacts.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

The proposed project would result in three new buildings on the Rockefeller campus that would result in changes to the Rockefeller University Historic District. As described in Chapter 5, "Historic and Cultural Resources," the proposed project would result in ~~a~~ significant adverse impacts to historic and cultural resources. These impacts would result from the removal of the concrete canopy structure and parking area at the campus's northwest corner and locating two stacks for the proposed laboratory building adjacent to the south façade of the Flexner Hall Extension and the north façade of the Hospital. These impacts would be partially mitigated, as described in Chapter 13, "Mitigation." The existing canopy structure is small in scale and set away from the adjacent streets. The dense tree coverage at the perimeter of the campus obscures views to this structure from the study area. The replacement of the concrete canopy structure and parking area with the new fitness center would result in a new structure similar in scale to the existing structure and would not be expected to significantly adversely affect the nearby character of the neighborhood. The stacks that would be located on the roof of the laboratory

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

building are sited at the rear of the campus. They would be visible in distant views from the Queensboro Bridge and Roosevelt Island and would be viewed in the context of other tall structures.

Although the proposed project would change the context of the Rockefeller University Historic District with the introduction of the new laboratory building and ICC on the North Terrace located at the eastern edge of the campus, two new stacks located adjacent to two historic campus buildings, and the new one-story fitness center at the campus's northwest corner, the features of the campus that contribute to neighborhood character are the brick and metal fence and trees that establish the campus edge along York Avenue and demapped East 68th Street. These elements would not be affected by the proposed project. Therefore, the proposed project would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. As described above under Section C, "Preliminary Assessment," the existing defining features of the ~~primary and secondary~~ study areas are the institutional uses, private open space, dense urban feel, and physical setting. While the proposed project would change the context of certain components of the historic district and Founder's Hall, the historic character of the campus is not considered a defining feature of the neighborhood because the Rockefeller University campus is inward-facing, private, and not open to the public. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character due to historic and cultural resources.

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

The proposed project would change the urban design characteristics of the study area, but these changes would not result in any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character. As described in Chapter 6, "Urban Design and Visual Resources," the proposed laboratory building and North Terrace would only affect the pedestrian experience along the adjacent portion of the East River Esplanade, and those changes would not result in any significant adverse impacts. Further, the proposed laboratory building, North Terrace, and ICC would only be visible from the adjacent portion of the esplanade and from Roosevelt Island, the Roosevelt Island tram, and the Queensboro Bridge, and those views would not be adversely affected. The visibility of the proposed fitness center would be limited to its immediately surrounding vicinity and effects on the streetscape and pedestrian experience would be beneficial. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character due to urban design and visual resources.

TRANSPORTATION

The proposed project would not result in an increase in population on the Rockefeller University campus. Accordingly, the proposed project would not generate any new trips that could result in delays or congestion in the local transportation network. As the proposed project would not affect transportation conditions in the study area, it would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character due to transportation.

NOISE

As described in Chapter 9, "Noise," the proposed design for the laboratory building and North Terrace includes the construction of a<u>n</u> ~~five~~ <u>eight</u>-foot-tall barrier along the eastern side of the FDR Drive between the FDR Drive and the East River Esplanade. This barrier would reduce noise levels on the esplanade and would result in esplanade noise levels that~~, depending on the distance from the FDR Drive,~~ would be less than ~~or comparable to~~ existing noise levels. The proposed laboratory building, ICC, and fitness center would be constructed to provide sufficient

window/wall attenuation to result in satisfactory interior noise levels. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character with respect to noise.

COMBINATION OF MODERATE EFFECTS

Overall, the combined effect of changes to the defining elements of the neighborhood would not create a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. The neighborhood character of the area would benefit from the new state-of-the-art institutional facilities, which would support a defining characteristic of the area. While the development of the new laboratory building, North Terrace, and fitness center would noticeably change the character of the area, these changes would not diminish the study area's essential character, and would therefore not constitute a significant adverse impact. Therefore, the proposed project would be compatible with the defining characteristics of the study areas' neighborhood character, and would not result in significant adverse neighborhood character impacts. ✷