

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the effects of the proposed actions and proposed One Vanderbilt development on neighborhood character. As defined in the 2014 *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 and visual resources, shadows, transportation, and/or noise. 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.

This examination focuses on whether a defining feature of the neighborhood’s character may be significantly affected by the proposed actions and proposed One Vanderbilt development. Since many of the relevant components of neighborhood character are considered in other sections of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), this chapter has been coordinated with those analyses. Potential future development on the four other blocks in the Vanderbilt Corridor (north of the One Vanderbilt site) is analyzed in Chapter 19, “Conceptual Analysis.”

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

As described in detail below, the proposed actions are not expected to result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character. The proposed size, height, and uses of the proposed One Vanderbilt development would be compatible with the existing high-density commercial uses in the East Midtown neighborhood. The proposed One Vanderbilt development would be taller than other commercial towers within the study area, but would be of a similar height to other commercial towers along major streets in Manhattan and would be a continuation of East Midtown’s status as a center for iconic large-scale commercial architecture. The proposed public realm improvements introduced with the proposed One Vanderbilt development would be expected to benefit the character of the study area by improving the pedestrian experience and serving East Midtown’s needs as a central commercial and tourism district, as well as supporting Grand Central Terminal as a transportation hub. The proposed Vanderbilt Avenue public place would provide a new public amenity for pedestrians. The thoroughfares and sidewalks in the East Midtown neighborhood are already heavily trafficked; therefore, while there would be increased traffic and pedestrian activity with the proposed One Vanderbilt development, the resulting conditions would be similar to those seen in the high activity urban neighborhoods that define the study area and would not result in density of activity or service conditions that would be out of character with the study area or

surrounding neighborhoods. Overall, the combined effect of changes to the defining elements would not create a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

B. METHODOLOGY

An analysis of neighborhood character begins with a preliminary assessment to determine whether changes expected in other technical areas may affect a contributing element of neighborhood character. The preliminary assessment first identifies the defining features of the neighborhood, and then assesses whether the project has the potential to affect these defining features, either through the potential for significant adverse impacts or a combination of moderate effects. If the preliminary assessment concludes that the proposed actions have the potential to affect defining features of a neighborhood, a detailed assessment of neighborhood character may be appropriate. If needed, the detailed assessment would use the information from the preliminary assessment as a baseline and the future No-Action and future With-Action conditions are then projected and compared.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER COMPONENTS

The *CEQR Technical Manual* states that an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when a proposed project has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts in any of the following technical areas: land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual resources; shadows; transportation; or noise. Even if a project does not have the potential to result in a significant adverse impact in any of the technical areas listed above, an assessment may be required if the project would result in a combination of moderate effects to several elements that cumulatively may affect neighborhood character. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a “moderate” effect is generally defined as an effect considered reasonably close to the significant adverse impact threshold for a particular technical analysis area.

As described in the relevant chapters of this EIS, the proposed actions and proposed One Vanderbilt development would not result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of land use, zoning, and public policy; socioeconomic conditions; open space; shadows; historic and cultural resources; urban design and visual character; or noise. However, the proposed One Vanderbilt development would result in significant adverse impacts in the areas of transportation. Therefore, a preliminary assessment of neighborhood character impacts is provided below.

As recommended in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for the analysis is consistent with the study areas in the relevant technical areas assessed under CEQR that contribute to the defining elements of the neighborhood.

C. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

DEFINING FEATURES

VANDERBILT CORRIDOR

The Vanderbilt Corridor includes the five blocks along the west side of Vanderbilt Avenue between East 42nd and East 47th Streets.¹ The One Vanderbilt site is discussed in more detail

¹ Madison Avenue bisects the five blocks, with the eastern portions composing the Corridor.

below. Overall, the Vanderbilt Corridor is characterized by commercial uses, including office and hotel uses. Two blocks are fully occupied by large, modern office towers; the other blocks contain buildings that date from the early 20th century, as well as a structure under construction for the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) East Side Access project. Most buildings within the Vanderbilt corridor have ground-floor retail. 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. There are several historic resources within the Vanderbilt Corridor, including the Yale Club, Roosevelt Hotel, and Vanderbilt Concourse Building. There are no open spaces within the Vanderbilt Corridor.

ONE VANDERBILT SITE

Located immediately west of Grand Central Terminal, the One Vanderbilt site is bounded by East 42nd and East 43rd Streets and Madison and Vanderbilt Avenues. As with the rest of the Vanderbilt Corridor, it is characterized by commercial uses; on this site, those uses are within low- to mid-rise buildings dating from the early 20th century. The One Vanderbilt site also includes the portion of Vanderbilt Avenue between East 42nd Street and East 43rd Street, which is a one-way street carrying one lane of northbound traffic. There is one historic resource on the One Vanderbilt site: the Vanderbilt Avenue Building at 51 East 42nd Street, a 1913 office building. There are no open spaces within the One Vanderbilt site.

STUDY AREA

The study area includes a portion of the East Midtown neighborhood, one of New York City's premier commercial districts. It is densely developed and characterized by a wide variety of low- to high-rise buildings containing primarily commercial, office, and institutional uses, with some transportation and utility uses—the most prominent being Grand Central Terminal, east of the proposed Vanderbilt Corridor. Grand Central Terminal is one of the City's primary transportation hubs, carrying the Metro-North commuter rail system and several subway lines, and is itself a major tourist attraction and urban design element.

Some of the high-rise office buildings constructed during the neighborhood's two peaks of development (the 1920s and 1950s–1960s), such as the Chrysler Building, the Seagram Building, and Lever House, are among the most iconic examples of commercial architecture in New York City. Other major visual and historic resources in the study area include the Park Avenue Viaduct, the Stephan A. Schwartzman Building of the New York Public Library, and Bryant Park. A pocket of residential and mixed-use buildings are located in the southeastern portion of the study area and Bryant Park, one of the most popular and heavily visited parks in the City, is located in the southwestern portion of the study area. The remaining open space resources in the non-residential study area are predominantly privately owned public spaces (POPS).

The northern portion of the study area that is west of Fifth Avenue between West 48th and West 51st Streets contains Rockefeller Center, a complex of buildings constructed in the 1930s containing office, retail, and studio space, as well as public attractions such as a seasonal skating rink. This northern portion of the study area also contains the Saks Fifth Avenue department store, the Waldorf Astoria New York, and two landmarked churches: St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church and the Cathedral of St. Patrick. A portion of the study area, generally located south of East 40th Street, extends into the Murray Hill neighborhood, a more residential area generally built to a lower density than the East Midtown commercial area. This residential area

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consists of larger 10- to 20-story apartment buildings along with smaller 4- to 6-story walk-up buildings and townhouses. As in East Midtown, retail uses are common in the area, particularly along the avenue frontages.

The study area streets are laid out in a grid and most blocks are rectangular. Immediately east of the Vanderbilt Corridor is a superblock that contains Grand Central Terminal and the MetLife Building; a second, smaller superblock is located north of the Grand Central superblock and is bounded by East 45th and East 46th Streets between Vanderbilt and Lexington Avenues. Streets and sidewalks in the study area are generally narrow, except on East 42nd Street, Park Avenue, and Madison Avenue (street only). Food carts are numerous along East 42nd Street and Madison Avenue. The presence of Grand Central Terminal, the shopping district on Madison Avenue, the neighborhood's dense commercial uses, and tourists in the area all contribute to the busy character of the sidewalks and streets in the study area. Noise levels in the study area are moderate to high and reflect the levels of vehicular traffic activity in the neighborhood.

Levels of vehicular traffic in the neighborhood are high, and the following intersections are particularly congested: 42nd Street and Sixth, Fifth, Madison, Park, Lexington, and Third Avenues; East 37th, East 39th, and East 40th Streets and Park Avenue; and East 42nd, East 44th, and East 47th Streets at Madison and Fifth Avenues. However, most of the area's intersection approaches/lane groups operate "acceptably" (at mid-Level of Service [LOS] D or better) for the peak hours. Similarly, with the exception of the following locations, all sidewalk, corner reservoir, and crosswalk analysis locations currently operate at acceptable mid-LOS D or better: the north sidewalk of East 42nd Street between Vanderbilt and Fifth Avenues; the south sidewalk of West 42nd Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues; the northwest corner of East 42nd Street and Lexington Avenue; the southeast corner of East 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue; the south, north, and west crosswalks of 42nd Street and Fifth Avenues; the north and south crosswalks of East 42nd Street and Madison Avenue; the east crosswalk of East 41st Street and Madison Avenue; the northeast corner of East 43rd Street and Madison Avenue; and the northeast corner of East 41st Street and Madison Avenue. To address pedestrian safety along the 42nd Street corridor, the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) has, in recent years, implemented a variety of pedestrian and bicycle safety improvement measures.

There are several subway stations and numerous bus routes with stops within the study area, including local bus routes, express bus routes from the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island, and Port Authority Bus Terminal buses. Several major transportation projects are currently under construction that would affect transit and pedestrian conditions in the study area in the future without or with the proposed actions. These include the LIRR East Side Access project, which would create new street-level entrances to Grand Central Terminal; Phase 1 of the Second Avenue Subway, which will create new stations in the study area and is expected to ease crowding on the Lexington Avenue line; and the No. 7 Subway Line Extension, which will extend west under West 41st Street to a new terminal station at West 34th Street and Eleventh Avenue.

POTENTIAL TO AFFECT THE DEFINING FEATURES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

LAND USE

The proposed One Vanderbilt development would be compatible with the existing high-density commercial uses in the East Midtown neighborhood. It would be taller than other commercial towers within the study area, but would be of a similar height to other commercial towers along

major streets in Manhattan, such as the 1,200-foot-tall Bank of America Tower on West 42nd Street immediately outside of the study area. Further, the One Vanderbilt development would augment East Midtown’s status as a center for iconic large-scale commercial architecture (see “Urban Design and Visual Resources,” below). The proposed public realm improvements introduced with the proposed One Vanderbilt development, which include below-grade circulation space for Grand Central Terminal, the transit hall, the Vanderbilt public place, and potential off-site transit improvements, would be expected to benefit the neighborhood character of the study area by improving the pedestrian experience and would support Grand Central Terminal as a transportation hub and tourist destination. The proposed Vanderbilt Avenue public place would be similar to other pedestrian plazas located in areas of high pedestrian activity in Manhattan, such as Times Square or the proposed Pershing Square plaza. The proposed actions would not alter the underlying zoning of the Vanderbilt Corridor or the One Vanderbilt site. The Grand Central Public Realm Improvement Bonus special permit would support the goal of providing transit and pedestrian improvements for the East Midtown area and around Grand Central Terminal in particular, and the expanded landmark special permit would support the goal of landmark preservation within the Grand Central Subdistrict.

Therefore, the proposed actions and proposed One Vanderbilt development would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character due to land use, zoning or public policy.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS

As discussed in Chapter 3, “Socioeconomic Conditions,” the proposed actions and One Vanderbilt development would not result in significant adverse impacts for any of the issue areas—direct residential displacement, direct business displacement, indirect residential displacement, indirect business displacement, or adverse effects on specific industries.

There are no residential units on the development site; therefore, the proposed One Vanderbilt development would not directly displace any residents. The proposed One Vanderbilt development would not introduce a residential population and, therefore, would not induce a trend that could potentially result in changing socioeconomic conditions for the residents within the surrounding area. The proposed One Vanderbilt development would not directly displace any businesses, because the development site’s existing uses would be displaced irrespective of the proposed development as part of the No-Action condition. The study area already has a well-established commercial office market and, therefore, the proposed One Vanderbilt development would not introduce new economic activities to the development site or to the study area that would alter existing economic patterns. The office and retail uses introduced by the proposed One Vanderbilt development would not be of an amount that would alter commercial market trends within the study area. The proposed One Vanderbilt development would not significantly affect business conditions in any specific industry or any category of businesses, nor would it indirectly reduce employment or impair the economic viability of any specific industry or category of business.

Therefore, the proposed actions would not result in significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character due to socioeconomic conditions.

OPEN SPACE

As described above, the neighborhood’s largest open space resource—Bryant Park—is one of the most active and heavily visited open spaces in the city, and it contributes to the area’s character; the remaining open spaces in the neighborhood are predominantly privately owned

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public spaces. The new worker population that would be introduced by the proposed One Vanderbilt development would place additional demands on the study area's open spaces, and the open space ratios for the future with the proposed actions—as with existing conditions and the future without the proposed actions—would continue to fall short of the City's recommended open space ratio guideline; however, it is acknowledged that this planning goal may not be attainable in a densely populated area such as Midtown Manhattan. The proposed One Vanderbilt development, which includes a new 0.28-acre public open space resource on the Vanderbilt Avenue public place, would result in a decrease in the passive open space ratio of less than 1 percent as compared with the No-Action condition. The proposed One Vanderbilt development would also provide improvements to the public realm beyond open space resources that would serve the East Midtown area's needs as a central commercial and tourism district. Therefore, the proposed One Vanderbilt development would not result in any significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character due to open space.

SHADOWS

A number of open spaces and two sun-sensitive historic resources would receive minimal amounts (10 minutes or less) of incremental shadow as a result of the proposed One Vanderbilt development. Other open spaces and sun-sensitive historic resources would receive more incremental shadow from the proposed One Vanderbilt development, specifically: Bryant Park, the Stephen A. Schwartzman Building Terrace and Fifth Avenue facade, 275 Park Avenue Plaza, Westvaco Building Plaza, three Park Avenue center plots, Grace Plaza, Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, Emigrant Savings Bank Plaza, the East River, and the west windows of Grand Central Terminal's main concourse. Most of this incremental shadow would be of limited extent and duration; for other resources, the incremental shadow would be cast during early morning hours or other times of non-peak usage, and thus would not be expected to substantially reduce the usability of the resource, or in the case of historic architectural resources, would not substantially impact their historic significance or their appreciation by the public. Therefore, the proposed actions would not result in any significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character due to shadows.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Although the proposed One Vanderbilt development would remove the State and National Register (S/NR)-eligible Vanderbilt Avenue Building at 51 East 42nd Street, this architectural resource would be removed in the No-Action condition. To avoid inadvertent direct, physical impacts to resources within 90 feet of project construction, 317 Madison would develop and implement construction protection plans in consultation with the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) (and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, for Grand Central Terminal).

As discussed above, there are a number of historic resources in the study area, some of which are among the most iconic examples of commercial architecture in New York City. It is not expected that the proposed One Vanderbilt development would result in any contextual impacts on these architectural resources, as it would not adversely change the scale, visual prominence, or visual context of any building, structure, object, or landscape feature; or screen or eliminate publicly accessible views of any architectural resources that will not be screened or eliminated in the No-Action condition. While the shadows analysis presented in Chapter 5, "Shadows," concluded that the proposed One Vanderbilt development would cast new shadows on the west windows of Grand Central Terminal's main concourse and on Bryant Park (NYC Scenic

Landmark, S/NR), these new shadows would be limited in extent, duration, and effects and would not result in any significant adverse shadow impacts. Therefore, the proposed One Vanderbilt development would not result in any significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character due to impacts on historic and cultural resources.

URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

The proposed One Vanderbilt development would include the following elements that would improve the pedestrian experience: the building setback on East 42nd Street at the ground floor would create a wider sidewalk; the building's angled façade on East 42nd Street would open up views from the west to Grand Central Terminal; the building setback on Madison Avenue would create a wider sidewalk; ground-floor and second-floor retail with glazing would activate the adjacent sidewalks and provide visual interest to pedestrians; and the new public transit hall space within the building's northeast corner would contribute to the pedestrian experience as this amenity would be accessible to the public. In addition, the proposed Vanderbilt Avenue public place would provide a new public amenity for pedestrians to experience both the new building on the One Vanderbilt site and Grand Central Terminal immediately to the east.

While the proposed One Vanderbilt development would be larger in terms of floor area and taller than other buildings in the study area, its square footage would be comparable to that of other commercial office towers in the study area and its height would be generally consistent with the character of Midtown, which is famous for its tall buildings. Therefore, the introduction of a new tall tower to this high-density commercial district would be in keeping with the neighborhood's character.

Like the No-Action building, the proposed One Vanderbilt development would not obstruct any view corridors in the study area, but would be visible from certain vantage points in surrounding view corridors. However, in either development scenario, the new building would be a tall building among other tall buildings, and the changes to the view corridors would be typical of changes in views that occur with new construction in this densely developed neighborhood. While certain views to the Chrysler Building would change with either the No-Action building or with the proposed One Vanderbilt development, these changes would not result in any significant adverse impacts on the Chrysler Building. Other visual resources in the study area would not be adversely affected by the proposed One Vanderbilt development as they do not have a significant visual relationship with the development site due to distance and intervening buildings. In addition, with both the No-Action building and with the proposed One Vanderbilt development, longer views to the Chrysler Building in the view corridors from Bryant Park and West 42nd Street would change. Views from Gantry Plaza State Park that include the Chrysler Building would remain similar to existing conditions with the No-Action building, while with the proposed One Vanderbilt development a new tall building would be added to the skyline. However, the Chrysler Building would continue to be viewed among other tall office buildings in the Midtown Manhattan skyline.

Therefore, the proposed One Vanderbilt development would not have a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character resulting from urban design and visual resources.

TRANSPORTATION

Significant adverse traffic impacts were identified at 23 approaches/lane groups (of 17 different intersections) in the study area, and significant adverse pedestrian impacts were identified for 1 sidewalk, 2 to 3 corners, and 1 to 5 crosswalks during the various peak hours analyzed. All of

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the significant adverse traffic impacts, except potentially those identified for the 42nd Street intersections with Third, Lexington, Madison, and Fifth Avenues during various peak periods, could be fully mitigated with standard mitigation measures, including signal timing changes and approach daylighting and restriping. Relocating sidewalk/corner obstructions, reconstructing an existing newsstand kiosk, extending existing curb lines to provide for additional corner reservoir space, and widening existing crosswalks, were identified to mitigate the projected pedestrian impacts. The mitigation measures noted above would be subject to approval by the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) prior to implementation. The traffic mitigation measures entail signal timing changes, approach daylighting and restriping, and changes to parking regulations—standard measures routinely implemented throughout the City and generally considered to be feasible. The pedestrian mitigation measures that consist of relocation of non-fixed sidewalk/corner obstructions (i.e., newspaper boxes and trash receptacles) and widening existing crosswalks within certain guidelines are also routinely implemented and are generally considered feasible. The pedestrian mitigation measures that require physical changes to street geometry (i.e., sidewalk/corner extension), relocation of fixed DOT-owned sidewalk/corner obstructions (i.e., signal pole), and widening existing crosswalks beyond certain guidelines will be reviewed by DOT at the time of implementation; if these measures are deemed infeasible at that time and no other alternative mitigation measures can be identified, those impacts would be unmitigated. For transit, while several station elements at the Grand Central subway station would be expected to deteriorate to levels in exceedance of CEQR impact threshold, these impacts, when viewed in the context of the transit station improvements as a whole that are part of the proposed One Vanderbilt development, are not considered significant.

As discussed above, the thoroughfares and sidewalks in this neighborhood are already heavily trafficked. Therefore, while there would be increased traffic and pedestrian activity, the resulting conditions—even if unmitigated—would be similar to those seen in the high activity urban neighborhoods defining the study area and would not result in density of activity or service conditions that would be out of character with the study area or surrounding neighborhoods. In addition, the proposed One Vanderbilt development would create a public place on Vanderbilt Avenue between East 42nd and East 43rd Streets, which would improve pedestrian conditions by providing additional circulation space at-grade. While the proposed One Vanderbilt development is not anticipated to exacerbate any of the current causes of pedestrian-related accidents in the study area, additional safety measures also could be implemented to improve pedestrian safety, particularly along the 42nd Street corridor. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character with respect to transportation.

NOISE

While noise levels in the study area would increase in the future with the proposed actions—from increased traffic and building mechanical equipment—the magnitude of the increases would be generally imperceptible to most listeners and below the CEQR threshold for a significant adverse noise impact. Noise levels within the proposed public place on Vanderbilt Avenue are expected to be above 55 dB(A) L₁₀₍₁₎, which exceeds the recommended noise level for outdoor areas requiring serenity and quiet contained in the *CEQR Technical Manual* noise exposure guidelines. Although noise levels in this area would be above the guideline noise levels, they would be comparable to noise levels in a number of existing open space areas that are located adjacent to roadways, including Bryant Park, Hudson River Park, Riverside Park, Fort Greene Park, and other urban open space areas. The guidelines are a worthwhile goal for outdoor areas requiring serenity and quiet. However, due to the level of activity present at most

New York City open space areas and parks, a relatively low noise level is often not achieved. Therefore, the future projected noise levels would not constitute a significant adverse noise impact to the proposed public place on Vanderbilt Avenue, and there would be no significant adverse impact on neighborhood character with respect to noise.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the proposed actions and One Vanderbilt development are not expected to result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character. The proposed size, height, and uses of the proposed One Vanderbilt development would be compatible with the existing high-density commercial uses in the East Midtown neighborhood. The proposed development would be taller than other commercial towers within the study area, but would be of a similar height to other commercial towers along major streets in Manhattan and would augment East Midtown's status as a center for iconic large-scale commercial architecture. The proposed public realm improvements introduced with the proposed One Vanderbilt development would be expected to benefit the character of the study area by improving the pedestrian experience and serving East Midtown's needs as a central commercial and tourism district, as well as supporting Grand Central Terminal as a transportation hub. The proposed Vanderbilt Avenue public place would provide a new public amenity for pedestrians. The worker population introduced by the proposed One Vanderbilt development would have access to on-site amenities on the rooftop, which would reduce the need for these workers to seek out other open space resources in the area. The thoroughfares and sidewalks in the East Midtown neighborhood are already heavily trafficked; therefore, while there would be increased traffic and pedestrian activity with the proposed One Vanderbilt development, the resulting conditions would be similar to those seen in the high activity urban neighborhoods defining the study area and would not result in density of activity or service conditions that would be out of character with the study area or surrounding neighborhoods. Overall, the combined effect of changes to the defining elements would not create a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character. *