18.0 Urban Design and Visual Resources

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter evaluates the effects of the Proposed Action on the urban form and visual resources of the Project Site and surrounding Study Area. Provided in this chapter is a description and analysis of the existing urban design and visual resources of the Project Site and Study Area, and descriptions of Future conditions with and without the Proposed Action in 2009. No significant adverse impacts to urban design or visual resources would result from the Proposed Action; the variations, all of which would be constructed according to the same site plan and building envelope as the Preferred Development Program, would likewise result in no significant adverse impacts to urban design or visual resources.

The Proposed Action would result in development that differs substantially in height, bulk, form, scale, and arrangement compared to the uses currently found on the Project Site. These changes are identified in the *CEQR Technical Manual* as conditions suggesting that analyses of urban design and visual resources are appropriate.

Based on guidance in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the urban design analysis considers the potential impact of the Proposed Action related to building bulk, use, type, and arrangement, block form, street pattern and hierarchy, streetscape elements, and natural features. Also, based on guidance provided in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the visual resources analysis considers the potential impact of the Proposed Action on important views of visual resources, such as the East River waterfront and the historic Queensboro Bridge and New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building, from publicly accessible locations.

The Study Area for the analysis of urban design extends 400 feet from the Project Site to allow for the assessment of building characteristics in the immediate vicinity of the site, as well as block form, and streetscape features most likely to be directly affected by the Proposed Action. Additionally, for the analyses of visual resources, including designated view corridors, views are assessed from sensitive vantage points ½ mile around the Project Site. This Study Area extends from approximately 38th Avenue on the north to approximately 47th Avenue on the south, and from the East River on the west to 24th Street on the east (Figure 18-1).

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

1. Urban Design

The Proposed Action would introduce three high-rise towers along the Queens waterfront on an under-developed site next to the historic Queensboro Bridge and New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building. The Queensboro Bridge, bridge approach roads, and related elevated structures constitute a substantial visual barrier between portions of the Study Area north and south of the bridge. In the vicinity of the Project Site, the roadway of the bridge is at an elevation of approximately 125 feet. The bridge tower rises to an elevation of about 355 feet.

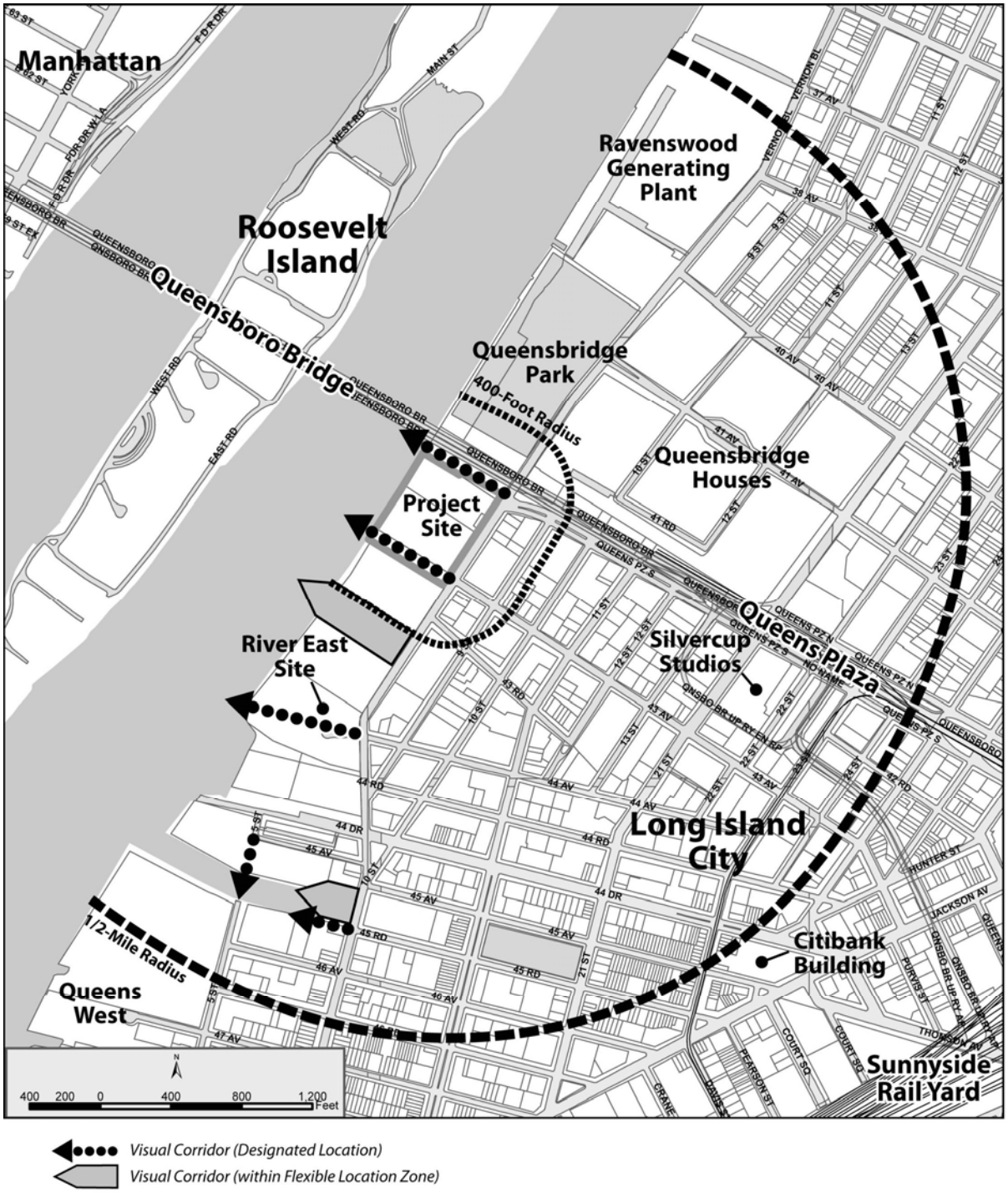

Figure 18-1:
Urban Design and Visual Resources Study Areas

Part of the Long Island City industrial area, which is characterized by low-rise manufacturing and loft buildings, the Project Site does not exhibit noteworthy urban form features (Photos 1 and 2). Mapped but unopened 43rd Avenue extends west from Vernon Boulevard to the shore, defining the southern boundary of the Project Site. The Project Site is part of a simple superblock along the waterfront, its form marginally related to the more regular street grid applied east of Vernon Boulevard. The waterfront edge of the Project Site, though not publicly accessible, is characterized by its bulkhead and rocky shoreline. The Manhattan skyline is visible from the Project Site beyond the East River (Photos 3, 4 and 5).

Contrasting with neighboring properties inland and to the north, but resembling the vacant industrial waterfront land to the south, the Project Site is largely vacant land. The NYPA facility and New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building, which are located on the Project Site, are typical of the diversity of waterfront structures generally present in the Study Area but only minimally contribute to overall urban form (Photos 6 and 7). The NYPA facility, set back from Vernon Boulevard on the southern portion of the Project Site, is comprised of late 20th century mechanical equipment; its two 150-foot tall grey metal stacks rise prominently above the Project Site.

The design of the 2½-story, 19th-century New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building adds visual interest to the Vernon Boulevard streetscape in the immediate vicinity of the Project Site. Its decorative red-brick façades, Tudor Revival style, terra cotta trim, and roof details are atypical of the area. The building is only a small portion of the complex that once operated on the Project Site, but even in its dilapidated condition it makes a nostalgic reference to the history of the area. The building is complemented by the ivy-covered, two-story 19th-century industrial/warehouse building located southeast, across Vernon Boulevard (Photo 8). The placement of the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building along the eastern-most edge of the Project Site is the only formal similarity to urban design inland, where the industrial buildings east of Vernon Boulevard are also built at the lot line, forming nearly continuous streetwalls (Photo 9).

A mapped but unopened portion of 43rd Avenue, leading from Vernon Boulevard (where it is gated) to the waterfront, is the southern edge of the Project Site and is obscured by a DSNY salt storage pile (Photo 10). South of 43rd Avenue is a fenced property containing a large parking lot, equipment buildings, and the modern, three-story red brick Con Edison training facility (Photo 11). The fenced-off River East site is located south of the Con Edison property.

East of Vernon Boulevard, throughout the Study Area south of the Queensboro Bridge, the blocks are comprised of low-scale light industrial and former industrial buildings built to the lot lines, many now used as warehouses and for light manufacturing (Photo 9). An exception is a motel located on Vernon Boulevard across from the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building, with its adjacent, unlandscaped surface parking lot (Photo 13). The street pattern throughout this area is a semi-regular grid. The streetscapes are characterized by continuous streetwalls along the property lines on both sides of the street, a general lack of street trees, poorly maintained sidewalks, and frequent curb cuts for garages and loading areas (Photos 12 and 13). Colorful banners advertising the Long Island City Industrial Park are installed on some street lights. Long Island City high-rise structures beyond the Study Area that are visible above the generally low-scale buildings include the recently constructed high-rise, mixed-use development in Queens West to the south, the Citibank Building to the southeast, and the Silvercup Studios sign at the main lot to the east (Photo 14).

The areas north and south of the bridge share similar block form and street patterns; however, the area to the south, including the Project Site, lacks the nicely developed streetscape that characterizes the area to the north. The blocks immediately north of the Queensboro Bridge comprise two related but distinct areas. Six superblocks east of Vernon Boulevard contain the NYCHA Queensbridge Houses

complex, with its 25 six-story brick apartment buildings spaced at regular intervals around interior parking and well-landscaped open spaces. The 20-acre Queensbridge Park comprises the remainder of the Study Area west of Vernon Boulevard, encompassing the waterfront in that portion of the Study Area north of the bridge. Queensbridge Park contains mature trees oriented around a series of grassy playing fields, with an esplanade at the river's edge (currently in a state of disrepair and blocked-off with a chain link fence) and picnicking and sitting areas. The vast spread of trees throughout both the park and the Queensbridge Houses complex provides an important visual respite from the more typical urban streetscape to the east and south.

2. Visual Resources

Visual resources potentially affected by the Proposed Action include public views of the waterfront from streets surrounding the Project Site, especially where visual corridors are designated. In addition, the visual resources considered include: views of the Queensboro Bridge and Project Site from Queensbridge Park and areas surrounding the Project Site, as well as views of the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building.

A visual corridor is designated along the northern edge of the Project Site, but the elevated grade between Vernon Boulevard and the river precludes views of the water. Similarly, a designated visual corridor along 43rd Avenue is blocked by a gate at Vernon Boulevard and the view toward the water obscured by the salt pile located there (Photo 10).

The Queensboro Bridge, rising to an elevation of about 355 feet, is the most prominent visual resource in this area (Photos 15, 16, and 17). This designated New York City landmark and National Register-listed structure is noted for its ornate architectural features and is recognizable as the backdrop for numerous movie scenes.[1] Built between 1901 and 1908, the bridge overlooks the Project Site and can be seen from public spaces throughout the Study Area. Ornate finials top the bridge, which is constructed of interlacing structural steel. As shown in Photos 18 and 19, the height of the bridge's span above-grade allows views from Queensbridge Park into the Project Site (including partial views of the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building) and views into the Project Site from just north of the bridge.

The NYCDOT's temporary de-icing facility and construction and maintenance equipment staged at the base of the bridge at Vernon Boulevard, in addition to poorly maintained sidewalks within the immediate vicinity of the bridge's piers, limit public accessibility and detract from stunning views of its vertical rise overhead (Photo 20). Open portions of the Project Site allow nearly unobstructed views of the Queensboro Bridge from Vernon Boulevard. The bridge is not currently visible to the public from the closed 43rd Avenue extension to the river. The tall stacks of the NYPA facility impinge on otherwise clear views of the bridge span from sidewalks along Vernon Boulevard south of the plant. Views of the Project Site and Queensboro Bridge are also available from the piers that extend into the East River in Gantry Plaza State Park, nearly ¾-mile south of the Project Site. North of the Queensboro Bridge in Queensbridge Park, a vacant comfort station and concession stand at the southern end of the park nearest the Project Site partly obscure views beneath the Queensboro Bridge of the Project Site. The overgrown southern edge of the park and lack of maintenance detract from the park's otherwise pleasant appearance. Views of the bridge from the park, however, are prominent and attractive.

Views of the Queens waterfront and skyline are not entirely dominated by the massive Queensboro Bridge. Though appearing a fair distance apart, as viewed from Manhattan, the Queens West

[1] White, Norval & Willensky, Elliot. *AIA Guide to New York City.* Three Rivers Press, New York, 2000. page 819.

development and 48-story Citibank building stand as notable introductions of high-rise development. Unlike their low-rise and relatively nondescript surroundings, both the Citibank building and the Queens West development are visible from various points in the Study Area.

Industry signage throughout Long Island City, also visible from various locations throughout the Study Area, adds to Long Island City's visual character (Photo 21). The Pepsi Cola sign, currently located near 45-00 5th Street between 46th Avenue and 46th Road, is an example of the neon display technology that began to transform outdoor advertising in the 1920s. The steel and porcelain enamel sign, built in 1936, depicts the company's logo and a bottle of Pepsi Cola. Originally located atop a concrete two-story bottling and warehouse building, it remains a prominent visual feature of the Long Island City skyline, especially viewed from the east side of Manhattan. The large red illuminated sign for Silvercup Studios is visible above Long Island City's factories and warehouses from the Queensboro Bridge and from the elevated New York City Transit rail lines. In its original incarnation, the sign read "Silvercup Bread" but was modified to "Silvercup Studios" after the film production company occupied the defunct bakery in 1983; both versions of the sign are featured in film and television footage.

C. FUTURE CONDITIONS WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTION

Without the Proposed Action, the urban design and visual quality of most of the Study Area will remain basically unchanged in 2009. The NYPA facility located on the southern portion of the Project Site will be removed by that time, however. As a result, views of the Queensboro Bridge from sidewalks to the south will no longer be obstructed, though the salt piles will remain on 43rd Avenue. The public access to the waterfront in Queensbridge Park will be reintroduced, as the esplanade there will have been restored by that time.

The proposed River East development will extend the urban form characteristic of Queens West northward, nearer to the Project Site. High-rise towers constructed there will likely be surrounded by public open space, including a waterfront promenade, and a visual corridor, extending approximately from 44th Avenue, will likely be realized. Future waterfront parks and community parks are planned as part of Queens West, including the open space that is proposed at the water's edge facing the Anable Basin. However, unlike the piers at Gantry Plaza State Park, these new waterfront areas and other open spaces to be located on inland blocks will not share direct visual connectivity to the Project Site. Views of the Queensboro Bridge and the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building from points within the Study Area will remain basically unchanged. The latter resource will have been restored, somewhat improving the appearance of the Vernon Boulevard streetscape. There will be no improved views along designated view corridors leading through the Project Site to the waterfront, as the salt pile will remain on 43rd Avenue, and that portion of the street will remain gated; also, the current grade of the Project Site, which is elevated between Vernon Boulevard and the river's edge, thus precluding views of the water, will remain.

No projects are planned that will significantly alter the urban form or visual character of the inland blocks south of the Queensboro Bridge, or that will affect the established appearance of Queensbridge Park and NYCHA Queensbridge Houses north of the Project Site.

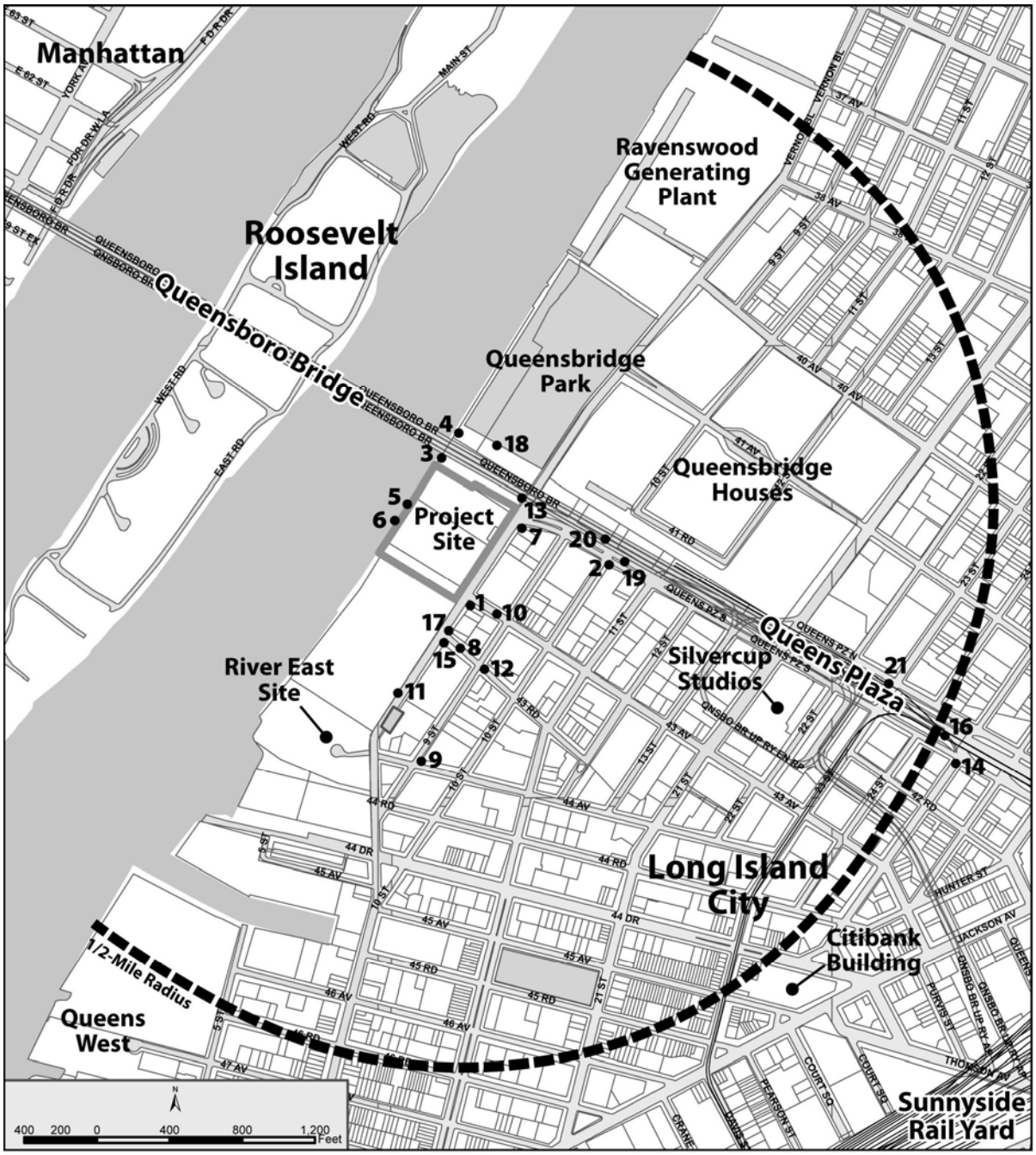

Figure 18-2:
Photo Locator Map

Photo 1

Project Site and Queensboro Bridge viewed looking northwest from southeast corner of 43rd Avenue and Vernon Boulevard.

Photo 2

Project Site in distance with Manhattan skyline beyond, viewed looking west on Queens Plaza South.

Figure 18-3:
Urban Design and Visual Resources – Photos 1 and 2

Photo 3

East River and Manhattan skyline viewed looking southwest from area beneath the Queensboro Bridge.

Photo 4

East River and Roosevelt Island viewed looking northwest from area beneath the Queensboro Bridge.

Figure 18-4:
Urban Design and Visual Resources – Photos 3 and 4

Photo 5

View of waterfront, Roosevelt Island, and Manhattan skyline from Project Site.

Photo 6

Project Site viewed looking southeast from waterfront, with NYPA temporary power generation facility and Citibank Building to rear.

Figure 18-5:
Urban Design and Visual Resources – Photos 5 and 6

Photo 7

New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company Building.

Photo 8

Northeast corner of of 43rd Avenue and Vernon Boulevard.

Figure 18-6:
Urban Design and Visual Resources – Photos 7 and 8

Photo 9

Looking north from 44th Avenue along 9th Street.

Photo 10

Manhattan skyline viewed from 43rd Avenue east of Vernon Boulevard, partly obscured by the DSNY salt and sand pile.

Figure 18-7:
Urban Design and Visual Resources – Photos 9 and 10

Photo 11

Con Edison training facility viewed from Vernon Boulevard.

Photo 12

Post Office Bulk Parcel Facility, 9th Street viewed looking northeast from 43rd Road.

Figure 18-8:
Urban Design and Visual Resources – Photos 11 and 12

Photo 13

Vernon Boulevard looking south from beneath Queensboro Bridge, with Project Site to the right and Queens West development in the distance (motel at left).

Photo 14

Citibank Building viewed looking south from Queens Plaza South.

Figure 18-9:
Urban Design and Visual Resources – Photos 13 and 14

Photo 15

Waterfront view corridor from 43rd Road across Con Edison property.

Photo 16

Queens Plaza South, looking east to Queens Plaza, from Crescent Street Pedestrian Overpass.

Figure 18-10:
Urban Design and Visual Resources – Photos 15 and 16

Photo 17

Vernon Boulevard looking north from 43rd Road with corner of Con Edison property and Project Site to the left.

Photo 18

Project Site viewed through Queensboro Bridge from the north from Queensbridge Park.

Figure 18-11:
Urban Design and Visual Resources – Photos 17 and 18

Photo 19

Queensboro Bridge from Queens Plaza South.

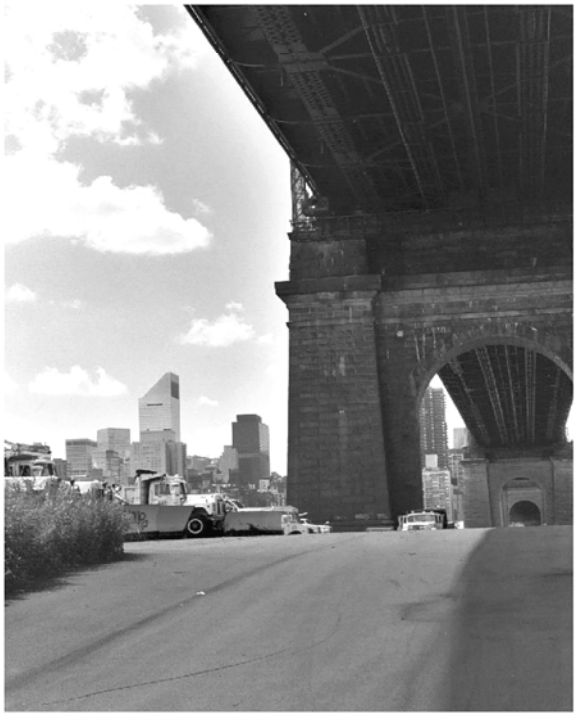

Photo 20

View of NYCDOT construction staging area beneath Queensboro Bridge and of the Manhattan skyline beyond.

Figure 18-12:
Urban Design and Visual Resources – Photos 19 and 20

Photo 21

Silvercup Studios sign and Manhattan skyline viewed from #7 IRT Line elevated platform.

Figure 18-13:
Urban Design and Visual Resources – Photo 21

D. FUTURE CONDITIONS WITH THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action would improve urban design conditions in the Study Area, by establishing a greater formal connection between the inland areas, including the Citibank building, and the waterfront. It would also continue the type of waterfront development initiated by Queens West and furthered by River East. Thus, the Proposed Action would be consistent with the building bulk, type, and arrangement of similar recent development along the Long Island City waterfront. The Proposed Action would also introduce new opportunities for the public to appreciate many attractive features of the Project Site environs, both by providing public open space that takes advantage of the Project Site's location on the East River and proximity to the Queensboro Bridge and New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building and also by providing a mix of uses that would maintain a 24-hour community of residents, workers, and visitors. While no changes to block form or street pattern would result, the mapped but inaccessible extension of 43rd Avenue between Vernon Boulevard and the river would be opened, the salt pile removed, new open space provided, and the visual corridor designated there realized. Seating, landscaping, attractive uses of terra cotta and similar materials and objects inspired by the industrial history of the Project Site would enhance the network of public spaces surrounding Silvercup West.

The new Esplanade at the water's edge would provide new opportunities to view the Manhattan skyline and the Queensboro Bridge and provide attractive waterfront access where none currently exists. This development of waterfront public open space is integral to City plans to provide a series of linked greenways along the East River. The Esplanade, the opening and development of 43rd Avenue, and the Upland Connection and preservation of a spacious visual corridor, together with plazas and the Vernon Boulevard streetscape interface, would ensure proper circulation throughout the Project Site as well as transparency through the Project Site. Therefore, while there would be dramatic changes to urban form as a result of the Proposed Action, the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts to urban design or visual resources, as described in greater detail below. Rather, the Project would contribute to the urban design of the area in a positive way, and in particular, the pedestrian experience and opportunities to appreciate important visual resources would be greatly enhanced beyond Future Conditions without the Proposed Action.

1. Urban Design

a) Block Form and Street Pattern and Hierarchy

The Proposed Action would not change block form, street pattern, or hierarchy. Although 43rd Avenue would be opened and regraded, and the DSNY salt storage facility relocated, the street pattern around the site would not be changed; 43rd Avenue exists already, as a mapped and graded street, and the delineation of Vernon Boulevard would not be altered. These streets, along with the East River waterfront, basically shape the block containing the Project Site. The characteristic superblock form and street pattern of the Long Island City waterfront would be retained and would remain in its existing relationship with the semi-regular grid to the east. The Proposed Action would take advantage of the superblock form to arrange the proposed mix of uses together with open spaces and other pedestrian amenities in order to integrate the Project with the surrounding community.

b) Building Bulk, Use, Type, and Arrangement

The differences, in terms of urban design, between the Project Site and most of the area to the east would be pronounced as a result of the Proposed Action. However, the bulk and site arrangement characterizing the Project would not be unique within Long Island City. The Project would relate to the Citibank building due to similarities in building type and height and would correlate even more closely to the Queens West and River East high-rise towers and open spaces along the waterfront to

the south. The proposed mix of uses, building bulk and type, and arrangement of building towers would ensure that the Project, though of a relatively large scale compared to much of Long Island City, would be integrated into its environs.

The building towers would form a "bold gateway" around the Queensboro Bridge approach into Queens—a Project goal. The creation of such a gateway would be achieved by endowing Silvercup West with a distinctive architectural character. The arrangement of towers would accentuate the catenary arch of the Queensboro Bridge through the arrangement of towers at different heights; the tallest would stand in the southeast corner of the Project Site, descending to the shortest tower on the northern edge of the site, nearest the bridge (Figure 18-14). The Applicant intends to include x-bracing on the towers to reflect similar structural forms within the Queensboro Bridge and further distinguish the gateway design.

The arrangement of uses on the Project Site would be carefully aligned with the form of the building envelope. The mix of residential, commercial, studio, and cultural/community facility uses would be arranged on the Project Site so as to ensure that the on-site residents, workers, and visitors would be accommodated within an attractive setting. The commercial component would be anchored in a 25-story office tower at the northeast corner of the site, with its main entry lobby located at the corner of Queens Plaza and Vernon Boulevard. The six-story cultural/community facility component would be located at the base of the office tower. The planned residential component would be comprised of one 49-story tower and one 57-story tower, with entries located on 43rd Avenue and Vernon Boulevard.

c) Streetscape Elements and Public Space

The streetscape improvements introduced by the Proposed Action, including the provision of linked public open space, would create an attractive pedestrian environment on and around the Project Site (Figure 18-15). The streetscape improvements, in particular, would ensure that the Project Site would be integrated into the surrounding environment in terms of physical access and pedestrian scale as well as design character. The Proposed Action would create the 43rd Avenue streetscape and redefine the Vernon Boulevard streetscape along the eastern edge of the Project Site. The Project would take advantage of the unique on-site historic and visual resource—the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building—to enhance the Vernon Boulevard streetscape. (See discussion of the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building in the Visual Resources section that follows.)

Public open spaces would be developed as attractive components of the Project Site and streetscapes. The open space areas would encourage circulation around the Project Site and from Vernon Boulevard to the waterfront, and designated Visual Corridors would be realized, providing views toward the East River from Vernon Boulevard (see the discussion of Visual Corridors under Visual Resources below). Each area would be landscaped and outfitted with pedestrian amenities. Plazas would be created at the northern and southern corners of the Project Site along Vernon Boulevard, each with trees and seating.

The Upland Connection would direct pedestrian traffic to the East River and shape the experience along Queens Plaza. The Proposed Action would regrade the width of this corridor, which currently rises to block views, over its length from Vernon Boulevard to the river. Pathways and spaces integrated into this extension of Queens Plaza would lead pedestrians past the office and cultural/community facility functions of the Project, as well as the Queensboro Bridge on their way to the Esplanade along the river.

Without the Proposed Action.

With the Proposed Action.

Figure 18-14:
Views Toward Queensboro Bridge and Project Site (Without and With the Proposed Action)

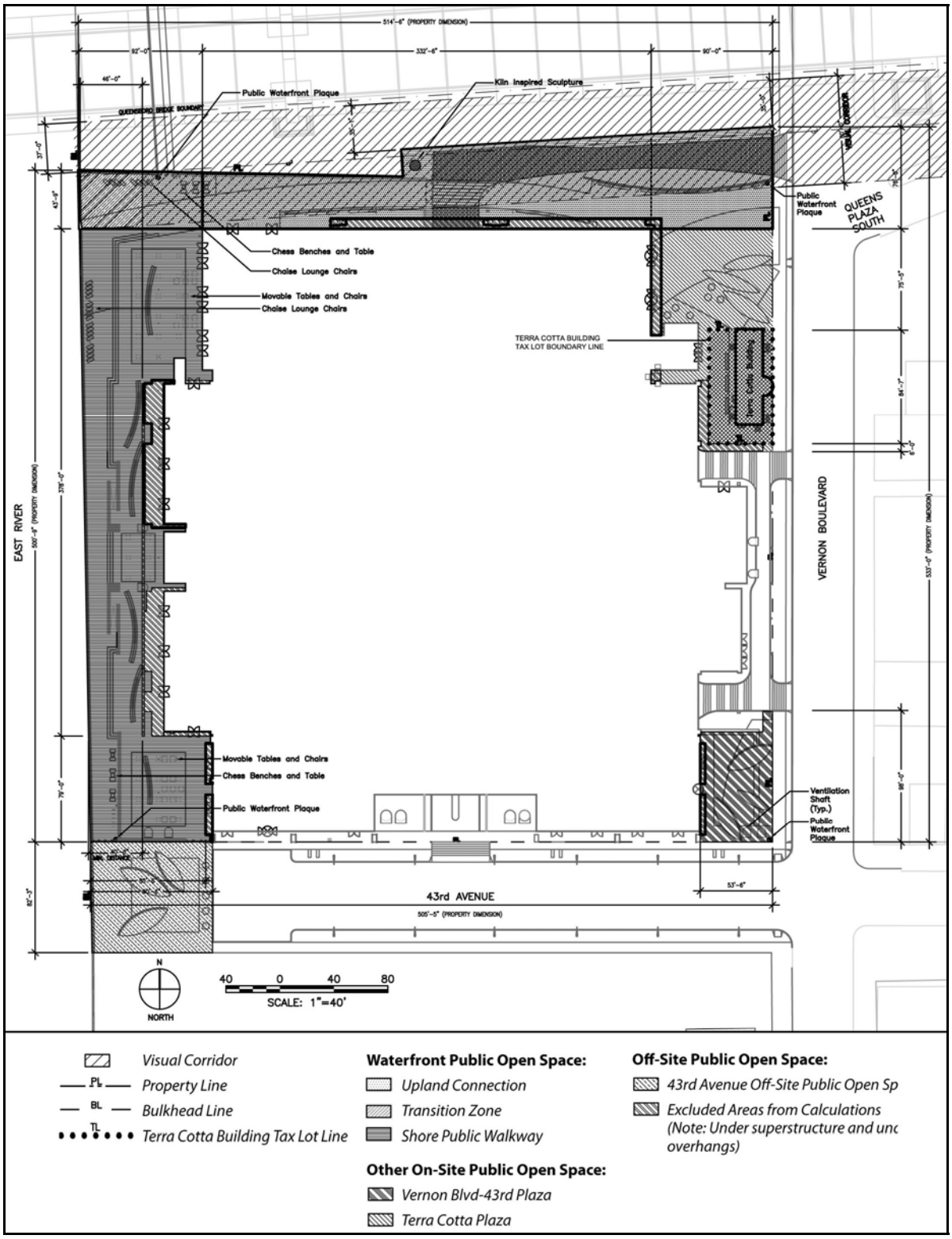

Figure 18-15:
Landscaping and Open Space Plan

The Project would provide a 500-foot long Esplanade along the entire waterfront of the Project Site. It would link the Upland Connection to the City-owned property at the foot of 43rd Avenue. The portion of the Esplanade at the end of the 43rd Avenue view corridor would provide public access to the East River, seating, and panoramic views of Manhattan. The northern end of the Esplanade would permit the future continuation of the public walkway to the City-owned property under the Queensboro Bridge and into Queensbridge Park. The Esplanade would provide two pedestrian circulation zones, an upper zone and a lower zone, that parallel the river's edge. The two distinct circulation zones would encourage a variety of passive recreational experiences along the waterfront: the upland path would be more shaded, adjacent to tables and chairs, and related to the building's ground floor and cultural uses, while the seaward path would be in a more exposed, sunny location, directed more to the north-south flow of pedestrians and to water-viewing.

Along with the mix of uses and arrangement of the Project Site, the proposed building materials and landscape design, as well as art and other public amenities, would be essential to the quality of urban design and pedestrian experience. These design elements would ensure that open spaces relate to one another and to the streetscapes aesthetically. By creating separate outdoor spaces, each with its own unique design character, the large scale of the Project Site would be humanized. At the same time, certain design elements would ensure a sense of unity throughout the public spaces. The Applicant intends to incorporate terra cotta panels into façades, potentially in a range of colors in use at the time the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company was in business on the Project Site. Other building materials would be incorporated as well, particularly within the pedestrian zones, to allude to the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building and site history. Bricks and terra cotta pavers, and other modern terra cotta elements, cobblestone pavers, and bluestone may be among the materials selected to establish both a unique design character within each of the various public spaces and also establish design unity over the Project Site as a whole. Paving patterns would be varied according to location; the paving for the Upland Connection, for example, would use hard pavers set to resemble a boardwalk, with a pattern mimicking the running lines of wooden planking.

The Project Site would feature a variety of plants and trees, including trees that blossom in the spring and trees with attractive fall foliage. Large shade trees would line 43rd Avenue and Vernon Boulevard. The eastern segment of the northern boundary of the Upland Corridor would be planted with a single row of black tupelo or similar trees. These trees would mask the retaining wall that would be required due to the grade change at the City-owned property under the bridge. The pedestrian circulation zone of the Upland Connection would be flanked by low beds planted with native decorative grasses. The plantings have been specifically chosen to provide as little visual obstruction as possible to the waterfront in the west. A series of tree arrangements along the building's western (Esplanade) side would establish gathering zones and provide shaded places to sit in addition to the sunny areas. There would be a bosque at the northwestern and southwestern corners of the building along the Esplanade, and a double row of trees between them. The northern bosque would have a depth of over 80 feet. The southern bosque would have a depth of almost 90 feet. Grates or cobblestone pavers would surround the trees in the bosques, allowing circulation among them. The central area would contain trees flanked to the north and south by smaller ornamental trees. It is intended that public seating and plantings of native grasses and trees, including a grove of three dawn redwoods, would frame the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building as part of the Terra Cotta Plaza on the northeast corner of the Project Site.

Furniture provided throughout the exterior spaces would include chess tables, movable tables and chairs and benches on the western (Esplanade) side and northern side of the building. Round seating platforms with artistic friezes based on terra cotta designs would be placed within the plaza areas and at the waterfront end of 43rd Avenue. It is intended that similar arrangements would be used within the plaza on the northeast and southeast corners of the Project Site (along Vernon Boulevard).

Lighting throughout the Project Site would consist of low-voltage uplighting and along railings, as well as pole lighting and required streetlighting on Vernon Boulevard and 43rd Avenue. In order to provide for a visually uncluttered view of the East River and Manhattan skyline beyond, the Esplanade would feature illuminated bollards, uplights and building-mounted fixtures to provide light without impeding views with raised fixtures.

A sculpture is proposed to be situated within the Upland Connection. Other artistic treatments that may be applied to the design of the outdoor spaces include bollards cast in the form of chimneys that had once been manufactured on the site.

2. Visual Resources

The Project Site includes three major environmental features, which constitute important visual resources on the Project Site and in the Study Area: the East River waterfront, the historic Queensboro Bridge, and the historic New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building. The waterfront and views toward Manhattan are the focus of the designated visual corridors that would be developed as part of the Proposed Action. These visual corridors, together with complementary public open space and pedestrian features incorporated into the Project would further enhance the important visual resources enriching the Project Site. Altogether, the Proposed Action would result in no significant adverse impacts to visual resources; rather, the Proposed Action would improve their condition by realizing designated visual corridors, providing new vantage points from which to appreciate the resources, and designing the public spaces to be attractive to and comfortable for users.

The scale, massing, and orientation of the building and both its interior and exterior public spaces would respond to the historic Queensboro Bridge and the East River, providing new and striking views of both visual resources. Clear pathways and spaces throughout the Upland Connection and Esplanade would provide up-close views of the Queensboro Bridge.

The Applicant intends to include a series of escalators located behind a transparent wall on the northern side of the cultural/community facility that would bring people up and along the space of the Queensboro Bridge, to a promontory overlooking the East River, the bridge, and the Manhattan skyline. A public elevator on the exterior of the building wall, accessed from the Esplanade at the western face of the Core Complex building's northwest corner, would take people to the rooftop space, which would provide a sitting area with movable tables and chairs. It would provide expansive views of the Manhattan skyline to the west and the Queensboro Bridge.

The character-defining presence of the bridge, enjoyed from vantage points outside the Study Area, including the East River Promenade in Manhattan and Roosevelt Island—and often present in the backdrops of movie scenes as well—would not be significantly altered. The formal arrangement of building towers would comprise a coherent "gateway" form on the Long Island City end of the bridge. The Queensboro Bridge stretching across the water, with its unique lighting pattern would remain a prominent feature of the riverscape and nighttime sky, as would the historic industrial signage of Long Island City, which would be complemented by the new proposed Silvercup Studios illuminated sign.

The Upland Connection would be visible from Queensbridge Park (Figure 18-16). Views from Queensbridge Park under the bridge into the Project Site would be improved as a result of the Proposed Action. Views of a derelict Project Site would be replaced with views of a well-landscaped and active public area around the Project. Similarly, new views from the Project Site into Queensbridge Park would add to the visual quality of the Upland Connection.

Without the Proposed Action.

With the Proposed Action.

Figure 18-16:
Views of Project Site from Queensbridge Park
(Without and With the Proposed Action)

The New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building, carefully integrated into the design of the Project Site and Project open spaces in particular, would stand as a new architectural showpiece on the Vernon Boulevard streetscape (Figure 18-17). The Project building would frame and provide a complementary setting for the landmark structure. The New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building would be buffered from the full height of the Project by a mid-rise studio complex (114 to 140 feet tall). The Applicant intends that the exterior of the building would have a glass and terra cotta paneled façade to accentuate the materials and details of the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building by contrast. The surrounding Terra Cotta Plaza would incorporate unique paving patterns, perhaps in brick or bluestone, to recall the materials characteristic of the Project Site throughout its industrial past and extend the texture of the building into the public spaces. It is intended that seating would be provided as well, to further enhance the human scale and accommodation of the plaza. Referred to as a "…veritable catalogue of the company's art…"[2] the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building would once again present the art of terra cotta to visitors, residents, and workers on the Project Site; moreover, this role of historic "catalog" would be carried out by the complementary design of the Project components developed around it. Together with the terra cotta panels that the Applicant intends to incorporate into other façades of the Project building, the various building materials and artwork described above would complement the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company building and allude to the history of the Project Site.

A large illuminated accessory sign ("Sign") would be installed on the western façade of the Core Complex above the Esplanade. The Sign would not flash. The Sign, which would consist of letters made of a perforated metal screen outlined in red lights, would depict the familiar "Silvercup Studios" logo. The Sign would be approximately 195 feet in length and 46 feet in height; the largest letters—the initial "S" and terminal "P"—would be approximately 46 feet in height and the smallest would be approximately 25 feet in height. The lowest point of the Sign would be almost 45 feet above the Esplanade. It would not project above the Building but would be contained within the western façade of the Core Complex. The letters for "Studios" beneath "Silvercup" would be 8 feet 3 inches in height.

The Sign would be in keeping with the rooftop signage that has historically characterized Long Island City. The red, illuminated Silvercup Studios sign on the Main Lot, originally advertising Silvercup Brea, has stood since 1952 as a familiar icon to New Yorkers, now symbolizing Long Island City and its vibrant creative community. Several blocks to the south of the Site, on the northern portion of Queens West, is the historic "Pepsi Cola" sign which also has become an icon of the mixed-use Long Island City community. This red illuminated sign served to advertise the location of the Pepsi Cola bottling facility until its recent removal to another Queens location. However, the sign has been preserved and relocated along the water's edge and would continue to symbolize the Hunters Point community.

The visibility of the existing signs has long served to illustrate—to those unfamiliar with New York City geography—how close Long Island City is to Midtown Manhattan. The proposed Sign would continue to announce the existence of a growing business district to travelers on the Bridge and in Manhattan. The new sign would serve as a continued link to the community's strong industrial past. It would also be an integral part of the future of Long Island City as a center for the City's film industry.

[2] New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, Designation List 158 LP-1304, August 24, 1982.

Without the Proposed Action.

With the Proposed Action.

Figure 18-17:
Views of Project Site from Queens Plaza
(Without and With the Proposed Action)

a) Visual Corridors

As noted previously in the discussion of the arrangement of uses and spaces on the Project Site, two designated visual corridors would be developed by the Proposed Action. In both cases, the Proposed Action would realize visual corridors where effectively none would otherwise exist, since views of the waterfront would remain obstructed without the Proposed Action.

The visual corridor provided at the northern portion of the Project Site, the Upland Connection, would be a prolongation of Queens Plaza South (see Figure 18-17). The length of the corridor from Vernon Boulevard to the East River would be regraded to open views that would otherwise remain blocked by the elevated fill without the Proposed Action. The visual corridor would be 80 feet in width, and would be located primarily on the Project Site, but would also fall at certain portions within the City-owned property to the north, reflecting the property boundary between the parcels.

The visual corridor provided on the southern edge of the Project Site would comprise 43rd Avenue (Figure 18-18). The street would be opened and developed for public access, the salt pile would be relocated, and a continuation of the Esplanade at the waterfront end would provide views to the water.

E. VARIATIONS

The three variations would be constructed within the same footprint and building envelope as the Preferred Development Program, and the overall architectural character would also be the same. Like the Preferred Development Program, the design of the variations would reflect the catenary arch of the Queensboro Bridge. Further, the new visual corridors would also be created, and the Esplanade, Upland Connection, and streetscape components would also be designed the same for the variations and the Preferred Development Program. Therefore, no significant adverse impacts to urban design and visual resources would result from the variations, and the variations, like the Preferred Development Program, would notably enhance this portion of the Long Island City waterfront and enliven the streetscape around the Project Site.

Without the Proposed Action.

With the Proposed Action.

Figure 18-18:
Westward View Down 43rd Avenue
(Without and With Proposed Action)