

A. INTRODUCTION

Neighborhood character is an amalgam of the many components that give an area its distinctive personality. These components can include land use; street layout; scale, type, and style of development; historic features; patterns and volumes of traffic; noise levels; and other physical or social characteristics that help define a community. However, not all of these elements affect neighborhood character in all cases; a neighborhood usually draws its distinctive character from a few defining elements.

In terms of neighborhood character—both on the development site and in the surrounding neighborhood—this chapter discusses existing conditions, the future without the proposed project in 2013, and the probable impacts of the proposed project. In accordance with the approach outlined in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” this chapter considers a future No Build condition that will include one of two development scenarios on the development site: the Previously Approved Project or the Expanded Development Scenario.

As described elsewhere in this EIS, the proposed project would not result in any significant adverse impacts to historic resources, urban design and visual resources, socioeconomics, traffic, air quality, or noise. As with either of the scenarios in the future without the proposed project, the proposed project would be compatible with surrounding uses, which include museums, residential uses, commercial office buildings, and retail uses. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER COMPONENTS

According to the 2001 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when an action would exceed preliminary thresholds in any one of the following areas of technical analysis: land use, urban design and visual resources, cultural resources, socioeconomic conditions, traffic and pedestrians, or noise. Key components of neighborhood character addressed in this chapter include:

- *Land Use.* Development resulting from a proposed action would have the potential to change neighborhood character when it introduces a new, incompatible land use, conflicts with land use policy or other public plans for the area, changes land use character, or causes significant land use impacts.
- *Urban Design and Visual Resources.* In developed areas, urban design changes have the potential to affect neighborhood character by introducing substantially different building bulk, form, size, scale, or arrangement. Urban design changes may also affect block forms, street patterns, or street hierarchies as well as streetscape elements such as streetwalls, and landscaping. Visual resource changes have the potential to affect neighborhood character by

directly changing visual features, such as unique and important public view corridors and vistas, or public visual access to such features.

- *Historic Resources.* According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, when an action would result in substantial direct changes to a historic resource or substantial changes to public views of a resource, or when a historic resources analysis identifies a significant impact in this category, there is a potential to affect neighborhood character.
- *Noise.* According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, for an action to affect neighborhood character in regard to noise, it would need to result in a significant adverse noise impact and a change in acceptability category, as defined by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) external noise exposure standards.

This chapter's impact analysis focuses primarily on changes in the technical areas discussed above, since changes in these technical areas are most likely to affect neighborhood character. The *CEQR Technical Manual* states that several moderate changes, none of which rises to the level of a significant impact, could combine to create a significant impact on neighborhood character. Therefore, where appropriate, the effects of changes are also looked at to determine whether, taken together, they would result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

DEVELOPMENT SITE

The development site currently consists of seven paved and vacant lots located toward the western end of the project block. The development site is undeveloped but is used at times by The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) for exhibits or for managing visitors waiting in line to enter the museum.

The development site is not a historic or visual resource, and there are no prominent or notable views from the development site to visual resources in the surrounding area. It does not provide any direct or indirect employment, and contains no housing or business activity. As such, there is no vehicular traffic or noise associated with the site, and pedestrian activity is limited to those times when the site is use by MoMA for patron queuing or exhibits.

Overall, the vacant development site contributes little to the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

PROJECT SITE AND TRANSFER SITE

The character of the project site and transfer site is largely defined by their institutional and residential uses. In addition to the development site, the project site contains MoMA, the American Folk Art Museum, St. Thomas Church, and a residential high-rise building (Museum Tower). MoMA has been a part of the neighborhood for almost 80 years, beginning in its first home at 57th Street and Fifth Avenue in 1929 and moving in 1932 to West 53rd Street. MoMA, which has expanded several times to meet its growing needs, is an internationally acclaimed museum that attracts visitors and scholars from around the world. Along the West 53rd Street side, the MoMA complex includes office and administrative space, education facilities, a design and book store, movie theaters, restaurants, storage and service space, and the galleries. Along

the West 54th Street side, MoMA has two building wings on either side of the outdoor Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden.

The American Folk Art Museum is located 45 West 53rd Street, directly east of the development site. It also has a long-standing presence in the area—in 1963, the museum opened its galleries to the public in the rented parlor floor of a townhouse at 49 West 53rd Street. After many years of planning, in 2001 the museum opened its new building at 45 West 53rd Street. The 30,000-square-foot building is clad in a textured bronze alloy, with dramatic facets and angles defining the façade.

Museum Tower is located at 15 West 53rd Street. It is 52 stories (592 feet) tall. The tower's first eight floors include museum space that is part of MoMA; residential uses are located above these floors.

Just east of the MoMA complex, St. Thomas Church and Parish House is a historic and visual resource. Set prominently at the corner of Fifth Avenue and West 53rd Street, it is neo-Gothic in style and is clad in limestone, with an asymmetrically placed tower. Key components of the church's design include its main portal, rose window, and sculptural decoration. The interior of St. Thomas Church is notable for the variety and richness of its decoration, its windows, and its richly detailed chancel and reredos.

Another historic and visual resource is the nine-story University Club, on the corner of West 54th Street and Fifth Avenue. The private club was founded in 1865 for "the promotion of literature and art" and functions today as a social club with restaurant, athletic, and other facilities. The design of the building reflects that of an Italian High Renaissance palazzo. The building is faced with pink granite, with high arched windows, a cornice frieze, and balconies.

The project site is located in a busy part of Midtown and ambient noise levels correspond to the area's levels of activity. As described in greater detail in Chapter 17, "Noise," traffic is the dominant noise source and monitored noise levels are relatively high.

STUDY AREA

The larger study area is characterized by a vibrant combination of uses that reflects the mixed nature of this part of Midtown Manhattan. Within the study area, commercial office and retail uses dominate, with additional hotel, residential, and institutional uses. High-rise buildings are found throughout the area, typically along on both sides of each avenue. While many of the high-rise buildings feature commercial office uses with ground-floor retail, hotel uses are also found throughout the area.

The block face along West 53rd Street across from the project site contains two office buildings: the 38-story, 498-foot-tall CBS Building and the 29-story 31 West 52nd Street Building. Along Park Avenue, commercial uses include the 38-story Park Avenue Tower between East 55th and 56th Streets, the 24-story, 310-foot-tall Lever House on the west side of Park Avenue between East 53rd and 54th Streets, a 39-story full block building on the east side at 399 Park Avenue, the 40-story Park Avenue Plaza at 57 East 52nd Street, and the Seagram Building at 375 Park Avenue. Rockefeller Center includes 19 commercial buildings (the tallest of which is the 850-foot-tall GE Building) and covers 22 acres between Fifth and Seventh Avenues and West 48th and 51st Streets.

Madison and Fifth Avenues contain a concentration of retail shops, among other uses. The concentration of these high-end, luxury, and designer retail uses is unique to this area. Saks Fifth

53 West 53rd Street

Avenue's and Bergdorf Goodman's flagship stores are notable examples. Saks Fifth Avenue is on Fifth Avenue between East 50th and 51st Streets, while Bergdorf Goodman occupies buildings on the east and west sides of Fifth Avenue between 57th and 58th Streets. There are also many other examples, including Tiffany & Co., Takashimaya, and Henri Bendel.

Across West 54th Street from the project site is the Warwick Hotel. The 46-story, 492-foot-tall New York Hilton Hotel occupies much of the block on the west side of Sixth Avenue between West 53rd and 54th Streets, opposite the project block. Other hotel uses in the area include the New York Palace Hotel on the east side of Madison Avenue between East 50th and 51st Streets, the Omni Berkshire Place Hotel at the intersection of East 52nd Street and Madison Avenue, the Shorham Hotel at 33 West 55th Street, the St. Regis Hotel on the corner of East 55th Street and Madison Avenue, the Hotel Elysee, and the Peninsula Hotel. The Plaza Hotel faces Grand Army Plaza at 59th Street/Central Park South and Fifth Avenue.

Residential uses are largely limited to the areas north and west of the project site, particularly around the project site and along Sixth Avenue north of West 54th Street. For the most part, open space consists of publicly accessible indoor and outdoor urban plazas associated with the commercial buildings.

St. Patrick's Cathedral is the most prominent institutional use along Fifth Avenue. The cathedral and its associated buildings occupy the entire block between Madison and Fifth Avenues from East 50th to 51st Streets. Additional institutional uses along Fifth Avenue include the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church at 708 Fifth Avenue and the Argentinean Consulate at 12 West 56th Street.

The area is part of the Manhattan street grid, with wide north-south avenues and narrow east-west streets creating typical rectangular city blocks. Both avenues have bus lanes, and Sixth Avenue has some on-street parallel parking. The east-west streets are narrower and carry one-way traffic. Most east-west streets in the study area also have moderate to high pedestrian traffic, due to the mix of office buildings, the shopping districts along Fifth and Madison Avenues that include department stores, large hotels, museums, the nearness of Central Park, and tourist-heavy sites, such as St. Patrick's Cathedral and Rockefeller Center. West 53rd Street pedestrian traffic is high due to the presence of both MoMA and the American Folk Art Museum. In general, most buildings are built to the lot line and occupy their full site, but some of the larger, modern commercial buildings in the area are set back behind public plazas.

The Rockefeller Center complex, which is bounded by Fifth and Sixth Avenues and West 48th and 51st Streets, also includes a number of notable public plazas, including the plaza in front of the GE Building, which is the centerpiece building of the complex; the Channel Gardens, a pedestrian path that leads from Fifth Avenue through the block between West 49th and 50th Streets to Rockefeller Plaza; and a sunken plaza that contains restaurant seating in the summer and an ice skating rink in the winter months. At the northern edge of the study area is Grand Army Plaza, which is located on both sides of Fifth Avenue between 58th and 60th Streets.

Fifth Avenue consists of many late-19th and early-20th century buildings six to 20 stories tall, although some modern, high-rise (26- to 36-story) office buildings also have been constructed, particularly on the west side of Fifth Avenue. The older buildings are generally constructed of limestone and have many decorative features, while the modern high-rise buildings often have reflective metal and glass and very few decorative features. The General Motors Building and the Sherry-Netherland Hotel are also distinctive buildings located on Fifth Avenue.

Sixth Avenue is characterized by large-scale, modern high-rise buildings that range in height from 21 to 50 stories. Most of these buildings extend far into the midblock and rise to their full height without setbacks, but a few have towers that are set back above a lower base.

While the avenues are largely high-rise office towers, the midblocks offer a greater range of building forms and uses, including both high-rise buildings and lower buildings. On the north side of West 54th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, there are a number of smaller-scale, masonry-clad buildings in commercial and residential use. These include four- and five-story limestone and brick houses. Built in the late 19th century, they are highly decorated with Renaissance, Colonial Revival, and Beaux Arts features. In the same midblock are two 12-story brick apartment buildings, including the Rockefeller Apartments, a through-block complex consisting of two separate buildings linked by a landscaped courtyard. The buildings along West 55th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues are mostly small-scale, ranging in height from five to 11 stories and constructed of brick or limestone. Building types along this street include two series of five-story row houses on the south side of the street, and eight- to 10-story apartment buildings on the north side of the street. There is also a seven-story parish house adjacent to the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, and a wide 14-story apartment building near Sixth Avenue. Many of the buildings contain small stores or restaurants in their lower levels. To the south, tall midblock buildings include Rockefeller Center and 31 West 52nd Street, a modern, 29-story (422-foot-tall) stone commercial structure, and to the north, tall midblock buildings include the Solow Building at 9 West 57th Street, midblock between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. This through-block building has gently sloped facades that rise to a height of 687 feet.

East of Fifth Avenue, East 52nd Street includes smaller row houses, the 38-story Harper & Rowe Building, and the Austrian Cultural Institute Building, a striking building of 23 stories that was designed by Raimund Abraham. The building's façade of teal-colored glass tapers upward to comply with zoning laws, with diagonal steel braces visible beneath the glass skin. A protruding stone, box-like element cantilevers midway up the building, and a stone sculptural element extends vertically through the middle of the façade.

Several of the buildings in the area are historic and/or visual resources. These include townhouses along West 54th Street, the Rockefeller Apartments, the CBS Building, the Gorham and Peninsula Hotel buildings, and others. For a full discussion of historic buildings and visual character see Chapter 7, "Historic Resources," and Chapter 8, "Urban Design and Visual Resources."

C. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT

As described in greater detail in Chapter 1, in the future without the proposed project the development site will be developed with one of two scenarios: the Previously Approved Project or the Expanded Development Scenario. In addition, as described below, other projects are expected to be completed in the study area.

DEVELOPMENT SITE

PREVIOUSLY APPROVED PROJECT

The Previously Approved Project will be a glass-clad tower approximately 285 feet tall with museum, commercial, and ground-floor retail uses, with entrances on both West 53rd and 54th

Streets. A smaller infill building will connect the additional gallery space within the new building to the existing MoMA space.

Development of the Previously Approved Project on the development site would transform this site from a vacant and underutilized parcel to a site containing a structure consistent with the mix of uses and building types found in the surrounding neighborhood. The Previously Approved Project would bring active uses to the site and result in moderately higher levels of pedestrian activity, traffic, and noise than the vacant site does now. However, these increases would be in keeping with the existing environment of the neighborhood, which is characterized by the noise and street life of a busy urban setting.

EXPANDED DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO

The Expanded Development Scenario will be a glass tower approximately 1,089 feet tall that will contain museum, hotel, and residential uses with an entrance on West 53rd Street. The tower of the Expanded Development Scenario building will set back at several stages, but will maintain a mostly rectangular configuration.

The Expanded Development Scenario building will be the tallest structure in the surrounding area; however, there are already a number of tower structures in the study area, including the Museum Tower (approximately 592 feet tall), the 40-story building directly to the west (approximately 496 feet tall); the CBS Building (approximately 498 feet tall); and the New York Hilton Hotel (approximately 492 feet tall), the Alliance Capital Building at 1345 Sixth Avenue (approximately 647 feet tall), and the Credit Lyonnais Building at 1301 Sixth Avenue (approximately 618 feet tall). Within a ¼ mile of the development site, there are many more such tall buildings, some of which have midblock locations. Within this context, the height and size of the structure will not be readily apparent, particularly at street level. The Expanded Development Scenario building would become a prominent feature of views west on West 54th Street to the MoMA sculpture garden area, but these views already include large-scale tower buildings, as do views of St. Thomas Church. Although the building will be visible from more distant points, including Central Park, only its tower will be visible in these locations, rather than the full extent of the building, and it will be viewed as part of the overall skyline of high-rise buildings in Midtown Manhattan.

In terms of historic resources, since the Expanded Development Scenario will not require any special permits, it would not be subject to the review and approval of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC). Furthermore, in this scenario, the project sponsor will not be required to establish continuing maintenance programs for the University Club or St. Thomas Church. The Expanded Development Scenario building will alter the context of the known and potential architectural resources in the surrounding area, but will not block any important views of any known or potential architectural resources.

This scenario will transform the development site from a vacant and underutilized parcel to an active, built, and occupied mixed-use project. The Expanded Development Scenario will be built to the lot lines of West 53rd and 54th Streets, enhancing the existing streetwalls of those streets. It will not entail any changes to topography, street pattern and hierarchy, block shapes, or natural features on the development site or in the study area. The Expanded Development Scenario building will not alter any views from the development site to visual resources.

The uses, including museum, hotel, and residential uses, will be consistent with other uses in the surrounding area. As with the Previously Approved Project, the Expanded Development

Scenario will bring active uses to the site and result in moderately higher levels of pedestrian activity, traffic, and noise than currently exist on the vacant site. However, these increases will be in keeping with the existing busy setting of the neighborhood.

PROJECT SITE AND TRANSFER SITE

In the future without the proposed project, the project site and transfer site will substantially differ from existing conditions. As such, the MoMA complex (with minor changes to link it to either the Previously Approved Project or the Expanded Development Scenario), the Museum Tower, St. Thomas Church, the American Folk Art Museum, and the University Club will remain at their current locations, functioning as they do today.

STUDY AREA

As described in Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” in the future without the proposed project, eight new projects are expected to be completed by 2013 within ¼-mile of the project site, including hotel, commercial, retail, and residential projects. These projects will be similar to, and compatible with, the uses currently found within the study area. They will also be in keeping with the existing mixed-use character of this part of Midtown and generally reflect the area’s overall pattern of land use and urban design.

D. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

DEVELOPMENT SITE

The proposed project would redevelop seven vacant lots used by MoMA into a mixed-use building with museum, hotel, and residential uses. With the proposed project, the development site would be redeveloped with an approximately 712,500-square-foot (sf) mixed-use building with residential, hotel (with associated restaurant), and museum uses. The proposed building would rise to a height of approximately 1,250 feet, including a decorative spire. The building would have a tapered shape, resulting in smaller floor plates at the higher levels of the building. It is expected that the building would be clad with glass and aluminum mullions (as part of the Restrictive Declaration, certain design elements, including cladding materials, will be required to be as shown on the ULURP drawings).

Compared with the Previously Approved Project, the proposed project would result in a different mix of uses on the development site. Specifically, the proposed project would contain hotel and residential uses, whereas the Previously Approved Project would contain commercial office and retail uses. The proposed project would also be considerably taller than the 285-foot-tall building that would be built with the Previously Approved Project.

Compared with the Expanded Development Scenario, the proposed project would result in the same mix of uses (hotel and residential) but would contain 62 more hotel rooms. Like the Previously Approved Project and the Expanded Development Scenario, the proposed project would include additional museum space that would be used to house MoMA’s expanding art collection. The proposed building would be approximately 161 feet taller than the Expanded Development Scenario building.

The proposed building, like the Previously Approved Project and the Expanded Development Scenario, would develop the site with a new, high-rise building with active new ground level uses on both West 53rd and West 54th Streets. As with the Previously Approved Project and the

Expanded Development Scenario, the proposed building would not alter the street pattern, street hierarchy, and block form as related to the development site.

As noted above, there are no visual resources located on the development site, and there are no prominent or notable views from the development site to surrounding visual resources. Therefore, in comparison to either the Previously Approved Project or the Expanded Development Scenario, the proposed project would not have any adverse impacts to on-site visual resources or views from the development site to visual resources.

PROJECT SITE, TRANSFER SITE AND STUDY AREA

As described in greater detail in Chapter 7, because the proposed project would require special permits pursuant to ZR Sections 74-79 and 74-711, it requires a report of the LPC regarding the proposed restoration work to St. Thomas Church and the University Club, and regarding the relationship between the proposed building and these landmarks. In connection with the special permit, LPC must find that the proposed bulk and use modifications would relate harmoniously to St. Thomas Church. In addition, the special permits require that continuing maintenance programs be established for the University Club and St. Thomas Church that would be legally enforceable by LPC under the provisions of a restrictive declaration. As part of the restrictive declaration, each building owner has agreed to put aside 5 percent of the proceeds from the sale of its development rights in a dedicated account to provide for the future maintenance of the buildings.

As discussed in Chapter 7, "Historic Resources," on May 13, 2008, LPC voted to issue favorable reports regarding the continuing maintenance programs for the University Club and St. Thomas Church and regarding the relationship between the landmarks and the proposed project. On October 22, 2008 and November 28, 2008, LPC issued reports to CPC in support of the project's application for these special permits.

The proposed project would be constructed on an existing block and would not alter any street patterns, street hierarchy, block form, topography, or natural features on the project site or transfer site or in the study area. The proposed project, like both the Previously Approved Project and the Expanded Development Scenario, would enhance the streetwalls along West 53rd and 54th Streets on the project site and in the 400-foot-study area by replacing a vacant lot with a new structure that is expected to enliven the study area with increased pedestrian activity. The Previously Approved Project, the Expanded Development Scenario, and the proposed project all would occupy all or most of the project site, like the majority of buildings in the study area.

As discussed above, the proposed building would be 161 feet taller than the Expanded Development Scenario building and would be considerably taller than the previously approved building. However, there are already a number of tower structures in the study area, including the Museum Tower directly to the east (approximately 592 feet tall), the 40-story building directly to the west (approximately 496 feet tall), the landmarked CBS Building across West 53rd Street (approximately 498 feet tall), the New York Hilton Hotel across Sixth Avenue (approximately 492 feet tall), the Alliance Capital Building at 1345 Sixth Avenue (approximately 647 feet tall), and the Credit Lyonnais Building at 1301 Sixth Avenue (approximately 618 feet tall). Within a ¼ mile of the development site, there are many more such tall buildings, some of which have midblock locations. In this context, the height and size of the proposed project's tower structure would not be readily apparent, particularly at street

level. The proposed building's tapering would lessen the tower's perceived height and bulk, particularly at the east and west elevations.

Views in the study area closest to the development site would be altered by the proposed project, as the height of the proposed building would be more notable in surrounding views than that of the previously-approved building. The building's tower in the Expanded Development Scenario also would be prominent in these views. Most notably, the proposed building would become a prominent feature of views west on West 54th Street to the MoMA sculpture garden area and of views east and west on West 53rd Street. It also would be prominently visible from Sixth Avenue in the vicinity of West 53rd and 54th Streets. These views already include large-scale tower buildings, however, and the change in views between the Expanded Development Scenario and the proposed project would not be considerable. The proposed building would not obstruct any views to visual resources in the study area. The proposed building, like the Expanded Development Scenario building, would be visible from multiple locations in Central Park, where it would be one of many tall buildings composing the skyline of Midtown Manhattan, although it would be the tallest building in the skyline in these views.

Like the Previously Approved Project and the Expanded Development Scenario, the proposed project would transform the site from a vacant and underutilized parcel to a site containing active uses. The proposed museum, office, and retail uses would be consistent with the mix of uses found in the surrounding neighborhood. The proposed project would result in about the same levels of pedestrian activity, traffic, and noise as the Expanded Development Scenario, and higher levels than the Previously Approved Project. These increases would be in keeping with the existing environment of the neighborhood, which is characterized by the noise and street life of a busy urban setting. Overall, the proposed project is not expected to result in significant adverse impacts in the technical areas of traffic, pedestrians, noise, historic resources, or urban design and visual resources, nor would it cause any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character. *