

8.6 URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

8.6.1 Introduction

This Section evaluates the effects of construction and operation of the alternative Shaft Site at the northeast corner of E. 54th Street and Second Avenue on nearby urban design and visual resources. This includes consideration of changes to the streetscape at the alternative Shaft Site, possible effects to the visual quality of the surrounding area, and potential impacts to views of significant visual resources. The Study Area for the analysis of the alternative Shaft Site's effect on urban design and visual resources is the area extending 400 feet from the boundaries of the site and the potential water main connection route that is unique to this alternative Shaft Site (Figure 8.6-1).

8.6.2 Existing Conditions

Urban Design

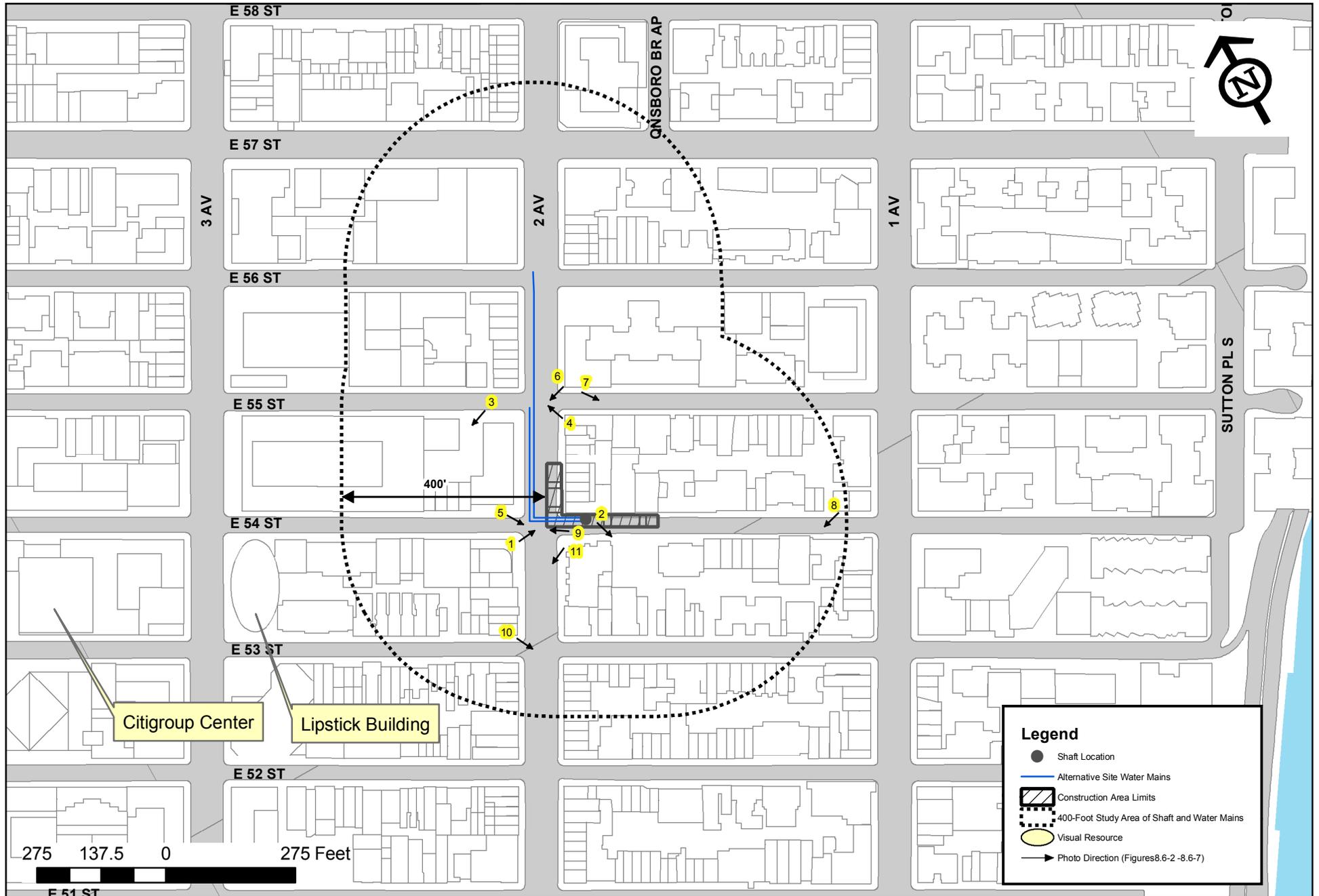
Alternative Shaft Site

The alternative Shaft Site is located at the northeast corner of E. 54th Street and Second Avenue and consists of two traffic lanes on Second Avenue and a portion of the adjacent sidewalk, and two traffic lanes on E. 54th Street and a portion of the adjacent sidewalk. The construction zone would extend from E. 54th Street approximately halfway to E. 55th Street on Second Avenue, and on E. 54th Street would extend eastward for approximately one-third of the length of the block. The affected lanes would include a parking lane and travel lane on each of Second Avenue and E. 54th Street. The sidewalk areas include street trees as well as typical street furniture, such as a street light, newspaper box, wastebaskets, and parking meters (Figure 8.6-2, Photograph 1). The street trees include two along Second Avenue, both 5 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh) and four on E. 54th Street, which are 2, 5, 8 and 8 inches in diameter at breast height.

Study Area

The street pattern of the area surrounding the alternative Shaft Site is the typical rectangular street grid of Manhattan, with narrow east-west streets intersecting with wide north-south avenues, creating short, wide blocks. The streets are flanked by concrete sidewalks and buildings. Second Avenue is a major north-south thoroughfare that carries the majority of vehicular traffic through the area. There is pedestrian activity throughout the area, heavier along Second Avenue and less so along the side streets.

The topography of the Study Area slopes gradually upward from Third Avenue to Second Avenue and gradually downward along Second Avenue heading south. There are street trees along sidewalks throughout the Study Area, and there are also several landscaped public plazas that include trees, shrubs, and flowers surrounding residential and commercial tower buildings (Figure 8.6-2, Photograph 2). Brevard Park, one such plaza on E. 55th Street west of Second



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NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
 PROPOSED SHAFT 33B TO CITY TUNNEL NO. 3
 STAGE 2- MANHATTAN LEG
 E. 54TH STREET/SECOND AVENUE SHAFT SITE
 VISUAL RESOURCES

FIGURE 8.6-1



View of alternative Shaft Site on E. 54th Street 1



Plaza on E. 54th Street, east of Second Avenue 2

Source: Field surveys, spring and summer 2005



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PHOTOGRAPHS OF STUDY AREA

FIGURE 8.6-2

Avenue, is set back into the midblock and includes a waterfall wall and seating on several levels (Figure 8.6-3, Photograph 3). Another such urban plaza is located directly across E. 54th Street from the alternative Shaft Site, adjacent to the high-rise Connaught Tower building. Cobrahead lampposts are generally used in the Study Area, although there are several “long-arm” style lampposts (similar to the bishop’s crook) along Second Avenue near the alternative Shaft Site. The streetscape of the Study Area includes typical street furniture, such as public telephones, trash bins, newspaper dispensers, and bus shelters. Many high-rise buildings, including Connaught Tower, are set back from the streetline by landscaped areas.

The Study Area consists of a mix of low- to high-rise buildings, which are mainly residential east of Second Avenue and more commercial west of Second Avenue, interspersed with institutional uses. Second Avenue also includes many ground-floor retail uses, which are marked by awnings above store entrances and windows (Figure 8.6-3, Photograph 4); the side streets include a number of canopies leading from the street to residential building entrances. Within the Study Area are 3-story rowhouses, 4- to 6-story tenements (particularly along Second Avenue), medium-scale (10- to 20-story) apartment buildings, and large-scale (20+-story), modern apartment towers, including one currently under construction at the southeast corner of E. 53rd Street and Second Avenue (Figure 8.6-4, Photographs 5 and 6). There are also a few small, solely commercial buildings in the study area, particularly west of Second Avenue. The portion of the Study Area west of Second Avenue also includes 909 Third Avenue, a concrete-clad, modern commercial tower set back above a 5-story, windowless base. Institutional uses in the area include the E. 55th Street Conservative Synagogue, a 1-story, unornamented stucco building; and the 54th Street Recreation Center of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYCDPR), located on E. 54th Street between First and Second Avenues, which is a Neoclassical red brick and stone building originally built as a bathhouse (Figures 8.6-5, Photographs 7 and 8). While most buildings are built to the streetline and the Study Area has, in general, very strong streetwalls, several large-scale buildings are set back behind public plazas. The buildings are clad in a variety of materials, mostly brick, glass and metal, and stone.

Visual Resources

Alternative Shaft Site

There are no visual resources located on the alternative Shaft Site. From the site, looking west along E. 54th Street, the Citigroup Center and the Lipstick Building (855 Third Avenue) can be seen (Figure 8.6-6, Photograph 9). No other visual resources are visible from the alternative Shaft Site. Although the 54th Street Recreation Center is an aesthetically interesting building that can be seen from the site, it is not considered to be a visual resource for the purposes of this analysis, as it is not prominent in surrounding view corridors.

Study Area

Visual resources that can be seen within the Study Area include the Citigroup Center and the Lipstick Building, which are visible in views west along E. 53rd and 54th Streets (Figure 8.6-6, Photograph 9, above). Views to the southeast from Second Avenue and E. 53rd Street include the



Brevard Park, view south from E. 55th Street **3**



West side of Second Avenue, view north from E. 55th Street **4**

Source: Field surveys, spring and summer 2005



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PHOTOGRAPHS OF STUDY AREA

FIGURE 8.6-3



E. 54th Street, view east from Second Avenue 5



East side of Second Avenue, view south from E. 55th Street 6

Source: Field surveys, spring and summer 2005



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FIGURE 8.6-4



View east along E. 55th Street, from Second Avenue 7



South side of E. 54th Street, view west from First Avenue 8



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FIGURE 8.6-5



View west on E. 54th Street from Second Avenue 9



East side of Second Avenue, view south from E. 53rd Street 10



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FIGURE 8.6-6

dark-glass Trump World Tower on First Avenue (Figure 8.6-6, Photograph 10). Looking to the southwest from E. 55th Street and Second Avenue, the stainless-steel spire of the Chrysler Building is visible (Figure 8.6-7, Photograph 11). Other views along side streets and Second Avenue similarly do not have any distinguishing features.

8.6.3 Future Conditions Without the Project

Urban Design

Alternative Shaft Site

In the Future Without the Project, the urban design of the alternative Shaft Site would not change. It would continue in its current condition as a streetbed and sidewalk with typical street furniture and street trees.

Study Area

The new apartment tower under construction at the southeast corner of Second Avenue and E. 53rd Street is expected to be similar in style, massing, and height to those that already exist along this thoroughfare, and is expected to result in minor changes to the streetscape of Second Avenue. The addition of another new high-rise building across the street, at the southwest corner of Second Avenue and E. 53rd Street, would the transformation of Second Avenue into a high-rise residential corridor. The renovation of the existing Sutton Hotel building at 330 E. 56th Street for residential use would not be expected to result in any changes to urban design. Further, if the New York City Department of Education completes its currently contemplated reconstruction of P.S. 59 and the High School of Art and Design with a residential tower above, that site will experience a change in urban form; however, it is anticipated that such a development would be consistent with other buildings in the area (that of a residential tower above a base). Overall, in the Future Without the Project the urban design of the Study Area would remain similar to existing conditions.

Visual Resources

Alternative Shaft Site

As described above, there are no visual resources located on the alternative Shaft Site. The development projects listed above are not expected to change existing views to the Citigroup Center and the Lipstick Building from the alternative Shaft Site in the Future Without the Project.

Study Area

None of the projects planned within the Study Area would be expected to significantly change views to surrounding visual resources.



West side of Second Avenue, view south from E. 54th Street 11

Source: Field surveys, spring and summer 2005



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PHOTOGRAPHS OF STUDY AREA

FIGURE 8.6-7

8.6.4 Future Conditions With the Project

Construction

Urban Design

Alternative Shaft Site

During construction, the alternative Shaft Site would be surrounded by a 10-foot-high construction barrier that would separate the area of sidewalk and roadbed to be used for construction from the remaining adjacent sidewalk and roadway. The barrier would shield the construction site from view. The only equipment visible above the barrier from street level would be a crane and, possibly, a concrete truck enclosure. During construction, the six street trees and other street furniture on the alternative Shaft Site would be removed.

Study Area

Use of a portion of the street and sidewalk for construction activities would be similar in nature to other construction projects throughout the City. Narrow sidewalk areas would remain between the construction zone and the buildings at the corner of Second Avenue and E. 54th Street. In addition, as described in Section 8.1, “Project Description,” a portion of the south sidewalk on E. 54th Street alongside the construction zone would be cleared for use as part of the single traffic lane that would remain on this end of the block, and a new temporary sidewalk may be created through a landscaped area adjacent to the high-rise Connaught Tower. The traffic detour would require removal of five street trees along this sidewalk and a raised planter in the landscaped area. These five trees are honey locust trees, with diameters at breast height (dbh) ranging from 6 to 12 inches (one tree with 6-inch dbh, three trees with 10-inch dbh, one tree with 12-inch dbh). The removal of these trees and landscaped area to allow a shift to traffic and pedestrian patterns adjacent to the construction zone would change urban design in the immediate area, but this change would not be anticipated to result in potential significant adverse urban design impacts.

As described in Chapter 2, “Purpose and Need and Project Overview,” some limited construction work would occur on the alternative Shaft Site at night. To facilitate this work, lighting would be installed around the site. This lighting would be noticeable from the surrounding area, but would not be substantially different from the lighting that already illuminates the Study Area at night.

Overall, the construction-period effect on urban design at the alternative Shaft Site would be similar to that of construction projects throughout the City. The construction activities required for Shaft 33B at the E. 54th Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site and the construction of associated water main connections would not involve any changes to block form; street pattern or hierarchy; topography; natural features; or building arrangement, bulk, use, or type within the Study Area. Following completion of construction, NYCDEP would replace any removed street trees in accordance with the requirements of NYCDPR, which administers the street tree program in New York City. The replacement trees would in most cases be smaller than the trees that were lost.

Overall, due to the limited nature of the potential streetscape changes, no potential significant adverse impacts to the urban design of the Study Area are anticipated as a result of construction activities required for the alternative Shaft Site.

Water Main Connections

Construction of the potential water main connections from the E. 54th Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site along Second Avenue between E. 55th and E. 56th Streets and then east along those streets to Third Avenue would have similar effects on the streetscape. During construction, the sidewalk area could be reduced, street pavement would be cut up, and construction equipment would be located in the street. These changes are typical of construction projects in Manhattan. This work would be temporary in nature, with construction lasting 20 weeks on the block adjacent to the alternative Shaft Site, 12 weeks on other blocks, and 10 weeks at intersections.

Every effort would be made to protect and maintain street trees before and during construction. However, it is possible that several street trees along the water main route would be removed.

For the potential water main connections from this site, the same number of street trees and street furniture could potentially be affected on E. 55th and E. 56th Streets between First and Second Avenues as for those segments of the preferred Shaft Site's First Avenue and Sutton Place routes. Detailed information on the trees potentially affected is provided in Appendix 6. It is also possible that some additional street trees would be lost in locations where no sidewalk work is proposed, because of the excavation activities close to those trees. As described in Section 5.6, "Urban Design and Visual Resources" in Chapter 5, "Water Main Connections," where possible along the water main routes, the New York City Department of Design and Construction (NYCDDC) would replace any removed street trees in accordance with the requirements of NYCDPR, which administers the street tree program in New York City. The replacement trees would in most cases be smaller than the trees that were lost. Depending on the placement of the mains within the streetbed, however, NYCDDC may not be able to replace all street trees in the areas where the water main would be located very close to the sidewalk because sufficient clearance between the tree roots and the water mains must be maintained. In this case replacement trees may be provided in the neighborhood area, rather than in existing tree locations. For more information, see Section 5.6.

The potential elimination of mature street trees, in the numbers described, would have a temporary adverse impact on urban design that would be offset by additional tree planting in the community. The elimination of these trees is not considered to be a significant impact because the urban design and visual resources characteristic of this area is not defined by this element. However, NYCDEP recognizes that street trees to be an important part of a community and will work with NYCDPR in the greening of this community.

Overall, due to the limited nature of the potential streetscape changes, no potential significant adverse impacts to the urban design of the Study Area are anticipated as a result of construction activities required for the alternative Shaft Site and its water main connections.

Visual Resources

Alternative Shaft Site

The 10-foot-high barrier that would surround the alternative Shaft Site during construction would be similar to that of construction barriers surrounding development sites throughout the City. Although it would not allow views from the north side of E. 54th Street to the Citigroup Center and the Lipstick Building, these views are readily accessible from elsewhere in the immediate vicinity. Therefore, the alternative Shaft Site would not have a significant adverse impact on visual resources.

Study Area

During construction, the enclosure and construction equipment and activity on the E. 54th Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site would not eliminate views from the Study Area to surrounding visual resources; nor would they become a dominant element of such views. Views of the Citigroup Center and the Lipstick Building would still be available along E. 54th and E. 53rd Streets, and views from Second Avenue to the southeast and southwest of the Trump World Tower and the Chrysler Building spire would not be disturbed. While the construction enclosure, equipment, and related activity would become part of surrounding views, they would be similar in nature to the construction enclosures, equipment, and activity on development sites throughout the city and would not adversely affect the views. Therefore, due to the limited nature of the potential changes, the construction activities for Shaft 33B at the alternative Shaft Site are not anticipated to result in any potential significant adverse impacts to the visual resources of the Study Area. As noted above, the short-term construction activity associated with water main connections from this alternative Shaft Site also would not be anticipated to block any views to visual resources. This work would also be much more temporary in nature than the work on the alternative Shaft Site. Consequently, construction of water main connections from the E. 54th Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site also would not be anticipated to result in any potential significant adverse visual impacts.

Water Main Connections

The water main connections construction activity from the E. 54th Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site would not block views to any visual resources in the Study Area. A low concrete barrier would be in place alongside the construction zone while work is under way, which is not anticipated to block any views. During construction of water main connections from the E. 54th Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site, the disturbance to the streetbed and sidewalk and construction equipment would be visible from elsewhere in the Study Area, but would not eliminate views from the Study Area to surrounding visual resources; nor would they become a dominant element of such views. As described in Section 5.6, while the construction equipment and related activity would temporarily become part of surrounding views, they would not adversely affect the views. The period of diminished visual quality would be short-term along each street segment. Therefore, no potential significant adverse visual impact would be anticipated to occur during construction of the water main connections from this alternative Shaft Site.

Conclusions

Overall, construction activities for Shaft 33B on the E. 54th Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site and its water main connections would result in temporary changes to the appearance of the alternative Shaft Site and water main route. No changes to urban design would result, and no views of visual resources would be blocked. As noted above, construction work at the E. 54th Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site would require removal of up to 11 street trees—6 at the Shaft Site and 5 across the street. In addition, although every effort would be made to maintain and protect street trees before and during construction, some of the work along the water main routes could result in additional loss of street trees. This would be expected for any water main alignment that uses part of the sidewalk on either an avenue or a side street. The potential elimination of mature street trees, in the numbers described, would have a temporary adverse impact on urban design that would be offset by additional tree planting in the community. As described in Section 5.6, construction of the water main connections would not be anticipated to result in significant adverse impacts to urban design or visual character. Overall, therefore, no potential significant adverse impacts on urban design or visual resources are anticipated as a result of construction of Shaft 33B on the E. 54th Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site or its water main connections.

Operation

Urban Design

Alternative Shaft Site

During operation of the project, three permanent above-ground structures would be added to the alternative Shaft Site: a 10-foot-tall, 14-inch diameter air vent and two 3-foot-tall, 6-inch diameter hydrants. These structures would be visible additions to the streetscape, but are relatively unobtrusive and small in size and therefore would not have a potential adverse impact on urban design. In addition, the presence of hydrants near the street edge would be congruous with street furniture that is found surrounding the alternative Shaft Site in existing conditions. The six street trees removed from the alternative Shaft Site and the five street trees removed from the south side of E. 54th Street during construction would be replaced following the construction period in accordance with the requirements of the NYCDPR street tree replacement policy. Therefore, given the low visibility of the Shaft Site once it is operational and the replacement of any affected street trees, no potential significant adverse impacts are anticipated to occur to urban design of the Shaft Site because of operation of the project.

Water Main Connections

Once operational, the new water main connections would be located beneath the street surface, like other water mains in New York City. Once the new water main connections are operational, there would be no visible evidence of the mains (except for some additional manholes and fire hydrants) and no changes would occur to urban design or visual resources. Therefore, no significant adverse impact to urban design or visual resources would occur from operation of the new water mains.

Study Area

The project would not involve any changes to block form; street pattern or hierarchy; topography; natural features; streetscape; or building arrangement, bulk, use, or type within the Study Area. Therefore, no potential significant adverse impacts on urban design of the Study Area are expected because of the operation of the project.

Visual Resources

Alternative Shaft Site

There are no visual resources located on the alternative Shaft Site. No changes to views of the Citigroup Center or the Lipstick Building from E. 54th Street would be altered by the introduction of the air vent and hydrants onto the site.

Water Main Connections

The presence of underground water mains and additional manholes and fire hydrants at street level along the water main route would have no potential for significant adverse effects on visual resources in the Study Area.

Study Area

Views from the Study Area to the Citigroup Center, Lipstick Building, Trump World Tower, and Chrysler Building steeple would not be altered by the introduction of the air vent and hydrants onto the site. Therefore, no potential significant adverse impacts to visual resources are anticipated to occur as a result of the operation of Shaft 33B at the E. 54th Street/Second Avenue Shaft Site. ◆