

A. INTRODUCTION

The City of New York (the “City”) Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) has requested funds from the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) for improvements involving reconstruction of six existing sections of the median malls on Allen Street between Delancey and Hester Streets and on Pike Street between Madison and South Streets (the Proposed Project). (See **Figure 1-1** for a map of the proposed project site). These median sections are currently narrow and paved with some trees and benches. It is expected that DPR will design and reconstruct the remaining median sections on Allen and Pike Streets between Hester and Madison Streets in the future as a second phase of the project; however, DPR has not yet requested funding for those sections due to the continuing study of the complex double mall condition between Division Street and East Broadway.

This Environmental Assessment describes the Proposed Project, as well as the reconstruction of the median sections between Hester and Madison Streets, and assesses its potential environmental effects.

B. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT

The Proposed Project aims to provide a unique pedestrian park promenade that would serve as a linear community park linking the adjacent Lower East Side, Two Bridges, and Chinatown neighborhoods to the East River. The Proposed Project would provide for public green space, recreational space, and amenities in an area that has a strong demand for open space south of Delancey Street. The design of the Proposed Project intends to bring a new sense of life and a heightened sense of place to the adjacent neighborhoods and would take its aesthetic cues from their history and diversity and connection to the East River waterfront. The specific goals of the Proposed Project are:

- Creation of connections between the upland and East River waterfront neighborhoods;
- Creation of a series of green, social, and neighborhood spaces, doubling the width of the existing center plots on Allen and Pike Streets;
- Provision of new seating and flexible community gathering spaces;
- Creation and enhancement of separated corridors for pedestrians and bicyclists; and
- Increased site sustainability through removal of excess paving, increased planting areas, and introduction of continuous tree pits.

The reconstruction of the six median sections would begin in the fall of 2010 and be completed by 2012. The City would coordinate construction activities with the Lower Manhattan Construction Command Center (LMCCC). The City would also comply with the requirements of New York City Local Law 77, the New York City Noise Control Code, and LMDC’s Environmental Performance Commitments.

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LMDC would provide a portion of the funding for the proposed reconstruction of the six median sections. Established in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, LMDC coordinates the rebuilding and revitalization efforts in Lower Manhattan. LMDC is a subsidiary of the New York State Urban Development Corporation, doing business as the Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC), a political subdivision and public benefit corporation of the State of New York.

DPR DEMONSTRATION MALL AND NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION INTERIM PLAN

In 2008 and 2009, DPR and the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) implemented two projects on Allen and Pike Streets as part of the planning for the Proposed Project and upon which the Proposed Project would be built.

DPR constructed a Demonstration Mall on the Allen Street median between Delancey and Broome Streets in 2008. The Demonstration Mall contains new pavements and curbs, fences, benches, plant materials, historic and cultural information, new street lighting, and a series of Chinese stones arranged by an artist. Plants and pavement materials in the Demonstration Mall will be used to guide the design of the Proposed Project.

In the summer of 2009, NYCDOT implemented an Interim Plan on Allen and Pike Streets from Houston Street to South Street. The Interim Plan consisted of the following improvements:

- Elimination of one north-bound lane of traffic and one south-bound lane of traffic immediately adjacent to the existing median malls on Allen and Pike Streets;
- Relocation of the existing bike lanes on Allen and Pikes Streets to immediately adjacent to each side of the existing median malls with a striped buffer zone separating them from traffic;
- Closure of four intersections to create plaza connectors at Stanton Street, Broome Street, Hester Street, and Monroe Street. These plaza connectors were implemented with color seal paint, temporary planters, and benches;
- Implementation of new traffic light phases and protected left turn lanes at Houston Street, Rivington Street, Grand Street, Canal Street, Division Street, East Broadway, Henry Street, Madison Street, and Cherry Street;
- Implementation of new traffic signals, protecting pedestrian and bike crossings with new pedestrian crosswalks between mall sections; and
- Provision of tables and chairs within the connector plazas.

See **Figures 1-2 through 1-7** for site plans of the Interim Plan between Delancey and Hester Streets and between Madison and South Streets.

PROJECT DESIGN CONCEPT

The Proposed Project would be superimposed on the NYCDOT Interim Plan footprint on Allen Street between Delancey and Hester Streets and on Pike Street between Madison and South Streets. The width of the proposed median malls would be expanded by the NYCDOT Interim Plan configuration, which presents an opportunity to provide additional public green space, including an integrated park bikeway and planted buffers, by doubling the width of the median malls by expanding into striped, excess streetbed outside the existing traffic lanes. In general, the reconstructed medians would consist of: a central, approximately eight-foot-wide minimum pedestrian path (the maximum width of which would vary); flanking landscaped areas with

seating, each of which would be approximately six feet wide (with varying maximum widths); and a six-foot-wide bike path on each side of the landscaped pedestrian malls. Three-foot-wide planted buffers with street lights and curbs would separate the bike paths from the adjacent vehicular lanes. (See **Figures 1-8 and 1-9** for representative sections of the Proposed Project and **Figures 1-10 through 1-17** for site plans of the Proposed Project.)

The Proposed Project would also reconstruct the NYCDOT Interim Plan plaza connectors at Broome, Hester, and Monroe Streets. Each reconstructed connector would consist of a paved plaza area, a 14-foot-wide paved pedestrian way at one end through the project site, and a 20-foot-wide paved lane for emergency vehicle access through the project site. Landscaped areas with curbs would border each central plaza area between the pedestrian way and emergency vehicle access corridor. Seating and decorative paving would be located in each central plaza area. (See **Figure 1-17** for the proposed site plan of the reconstructed plaza connector at Broome Street.)

The proposed design would create a stronger connection between the upland neighborhoods and the East River. This “city to river” connection would be expressed in the progression of path geometries through the median sections from linear to angular to curved within the increased park width. This progression of path geometries would be accompanied by seating areas within the park that respond to the linear, angular, and curved paths. The pavement in the park would also make a progression from the existing 12-inch square blue/green precast concrete paver panels bordered by bluestone from the Demonstration Mall to panels that incorporate a single color, 12-inch square blue or green glass precast-concrete paver mixed with a grey precast-concrete paver. This progression would end at the last section between Cherry Street and South Street where a 14-foot-wide multi-use bike and pedestrian path would be asphalt.

Plant design concepts include the retention of existing trees and the use of selected specimens from the Demonstration Mall, combined with new understory planting to provide vibrant colors and varied textures and heights inside the plots and in beds between the bike path and street curbs. All plantings would contribute to visual and sound buffering for visitors and provide seasonal variations for community enjoyment.

Although DPR has not designed the potential reconstructed median sections between Hester and Madison Streets, it is expected that the proposed design of those future sections would follow the design concept described above.

PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY OBJECTIVES

Site sustainability is one of the prime goals of the Proposed Project, which would be met through the following objectives:

- *Water.* The expansion of planting areas in the median sections would decrease the area covered by impervious pavement, thereby allowing more storm water to be intercepted for plant use. The retention of storm water for use in the plant beds would decrease water usage for the project site. In addition, planting materials would be carefully chosen to be drought-adapted and drought-resistant species. Overall, the Proposed Project would have minimal water usage.
- *Materials and Climate.* The Proposed Project would increase areas of planting beds, provide much needed expansion space for existing tightly constricted and overgrown tree roots, include increased numbers of plant species, and establish continuous tree pits to increase the health of new tree plantings. Hardscape materials and furnishings would be chosen for long-

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term durability and recycled content where appropriate. The paving materials and expanded planting areas would reduce heat retention on the project site.

- *Community.* The Proposed Project has been informed by extensive community outreach to Manhattan Community Board 3, the Lower East Side Business Improvement District, United Neighbors to Revitalize Allen and Pike (a coalition of local community organizations).
- *Operations.* The Proposed Project would be developed to enable efficient and effective maintenance and operations through design and sustainable plant material and hardscape selections. The 35-year-old street lighting system must be replaced and the proposed design would use the new street lighting and pedestrian lighting fixtures as approved by the Public Design Commission and NYCDOT.

C. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

LMDC is responsible, pursuant to federal statute 42 U.S.C. § 5304(g) as the recipient of United States Department of Housing and Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant program funds, for conducting environmental reviews of projects receiving HUD funds in accordance with 24 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 58, as well as other laws and regulations. LMDC is serving as lead agency for the environmental review of the Proposed Project under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). New York City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) and its implementing regulations are referenced as appropriate. Because the Proposed Project is located in New York City and will involve actions by the City, the *CEQR Technical Manual* (Mayor's Office of Environmental Coordination, 2001) generally serves as a guide with respect to methodologies and impact criteria for evaluating the Proposed Project. In addition to NEPA and SEQRA, the review of the Proposed Project has been coordinated with review pursuant to other applicable laws and regulations, such as Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA). The City is serving as a cooperating/involved agency through relevant departments including DPR, NYCDOT, and New York City Department of Design and Construction. *