

## A. INTRODUCTION

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

According to the 2001 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*, an assessment of neighborhood character is generally needed when the action would exceed preliminary thresholds in any one of the following areas of technical analysis: land use, urban design, visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomic conditions, traffic, or noise. An assessment is also appropriate when the action would have moderate effects on several of the aforementioned areas. Potential effects on neighborhood character may include:

- *Land Use:* When development resulting from the proposed actions would have the potential to change neighborhood character by introducing a new, incompatible land use; conflicting with land use policy or other public plans for the area; changing land use character; or resulting in 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, landscaping, curb cuts, and loading docks. 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.* 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.
- *Socioeconomic Conditions.* Changes in socioeconomic conditions have the potential to affect neighborhood character when they result in substantial direct or indirect displacement or addition of population, employment, or businesses; or substantial differences in population or employment density.
- *Traffic and Pedestrians.* Changes in traffic and pedestrian conditions can affect neighborhood character in a number of ways. For traffic to have an effect on neighborhood character, it must be a contributing element to the character of the neighborhood (either by its absence or its presence), and it must change substantially as a result of the action. According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, such substantial traffic changes can include: changes in level of

service (LOS) to C or below; change in traffic patterns; change in roadway classifications; change in vehicle mixes; substantial increases in traffic volumes on residential streets; or significant traffic impacts, as identified in that technical analysis. Regarding pedestrians, when a proposed action would result in substantially different pedestrian activity and circulation, it has the 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.

This chapter's impact analysis focuses primarily on changes to neighborhood character resulting from changes in the technical areas discussed above, since changes in these technical areas are most likely to result in changes to neighborhood character. The study area surrounding the project site includes the Financial District south of the Brooklyn Bridge, a portion of Chinatown between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, and a portion of the Lower East Side neighborhood north of the Manhattan Bridge.

The Proposed Action would improve a two-mile-long, City-owned public open space connecting the Whitehall Ferry Terminal and Peter Minuit Plaza to the south to East River Park to the north. The existing esplanade would be enhanced, some new sections of esplanade would be created, and several piers would be renovated and redeveloped. The new open space, along with the proposed retail and cultural uses, would alter the project site's land use and urban design characteristics and result in some increases in traffic, pedestrian activity, and noise levels. However, these changes overall would not be significantly adverse with respect to neighborhood character; rather, the Proposed Action is expected to have a positive effect on neighborhood character. The project site, much of which is now isolated and underutilized, would be enlivened with recreational amenities and retail and cultural uses that would draw visitors to the area. The character of the surrounding neighborhoods would be enhanced by the new recreational opportunities and waterfront access that would be provided by the Proposed Action.

## B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project site extends along the waterfront from the Battery Maritime Building (BMB) Plaza at Whitehall Street to Pier 42 near Jackson Street. The site currently includes parking lots, vacant land, vacant buildings, and a waterfront esplanade of varying width and quality. Overall, the character of the project site is defined by the East River shoreline and views of the East River, New York Harbor, the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, the Brooklyn skyline, and Governors Island. The character is also shaped by the FDR Drive running overhead on a viaduct, and by the entrance to the Battery Park Underpass in front of the BMB. Throughout the project site, the condition of the existing esplanade varies from simple, unimproved concrete sidewalks to attractively paved walkways with amenities such as benches, planters, and decorative lighting. Much of the area beneath the FDR Drive is used for vehicle parking, with parking areas often delineated with jersey barriers.

At the southernmost end of the project site is an area in front of the BMB that is currently used primarily for traffic circulation. While there is a small paved pedestrian area just north and west of the BMB, most of this area is occupied by traffic lanes and the entrance to the tunnel linking the FDR Drive to West Street beneath Battery Park. A relatively narrow concrete sidewalk extends north and east along the bulkhead and there are several benches near the water's edge.

From Old Slip north, the FDR Drive is elevated on a viaduct. The underside of the FDR Drive reveals the roadway's structural steel columns and platform for the roadway's deck. The esplanade, here paved with decorative pavers, continues along the bulkhead beneath the elevated highway structure. A two-way bicycle path begins just inland of the esplanade. The area beneath the FDR Drive is used for vehicle parking. The esplanade continues past Pier 11, which houses commuter ferry terminals. At the foot of Pier 11, the area under the FDR Drive serves as a pedestrian plaza where disembarking ferry riders cross beneath the elevated highway to reach Wall Street.

North of Wall Street, the esplanade is widened outboard of the bulkhead on a platform supported by pilings. This area has a decorative fence along its eastern waterfront perimeter and includes flat wooden benches and large planters with flowers and small trees. Chain link fencing runs along the bulkhead and the vacant Piers 13 and 14 adjacent to the project site. Large tour buses park beneath the FDR Drive in this area. Pier 15, located just north of Fletcher Street, consists only of four wooden piles in the water. North of Burling Slip, the esplanade narrows to approximately 12 feet as it approaches Pier 16. Inland of Piers 16 and 17, the area beneath the FDR Drive is largely open to pedestrians. There is a small structure housing restrooms and a storage area. The area of the project site at Fulton Street has a variety of decorative pavers, including gray granite slabs and Belgian block.

Just north of Pier 17, public parking occupies the area under the FDR Drive that formerly was part of the Fulton Fish Market. The New Market Building, which is now vacant, also housed a portion of the Fulton Fish Market until the market was relocated in 2005. This section of the project site is dark and uninviting, and the parking area between Fulton and Beekman Streets is surrounded by jersey barriers. North of the New Market Building, the esplanade continues along the water's edge and has benches and plantings. Decorative lampposts line this portion of the esplanade, which is also paved with multi-colored pavers. There is bus parking along the south side of South Street under the elevated FDR Drive structure from Catherine Slip to Rutgers Slip. The bikeway/walkway runs on either side of the south columns of the FDR Drive structure. The esplanade continues north along the water until it nearly reaches Pier 35. Pier 35 is vacant and access is blocked by a chain link fence. At Pier 35, the pedestrian and bike paths move inland alongside South Street. The bikeway/walkway in this area is narrow and has no amenities. Pier 42 contains a vacant shed and an open storage area for construction materials.

The project site includes two architectural historic resources: the South Street Seaport Historic District and the East River bulkhead. The South Street Seaport Historic District and Extension, which is roughly bounded by Dover and Water Streets, Maiden Lane, and the East River, covers a portion of the project site as well as part of the surrounding study area and contains the largest concentration of early 19th century commercial buildings in New York. The East River bulkhead is located within the project site. Surviving portions of the original bulkhead structure are significant for their engineering and architectural qualities, for their role in the development of New York City waterfront, and for their historical associations.

The study area surrounding the project site is predominantly characterized by residential and commercial uses. South of the Brooklyn Bridge, the Financial District is largely commercial but also contains a mix of residential, institutional, entertainment, and open space uses. The streetscape in this area is generally characterized by buildings that are built to the sidewalk, forming a solid streetwall. While the Financial District is mainly characterized by tall office buildings, the buildings in this part of the study area range considerably in height, with most of the taller buildings located south of Maiden Lane and the South Street Seaport Historic District

and further west toward Broadway. The portion of Chinatown within the study area is characterized primarily by residential uses in large apartment towers and small, older buildings and by retail uses such as restaurants and food markets. The towers of the Governor Alfred E. Smith Houses, located adjacent to the project site just north of the Brooklyn Bridge, are set back from the street amidst surface parking lots and open spaces with grass and trees. The Lower East Side portion of the study area is predominantly residential with retail uses along several main commercial strips and institutional uses such as schools and houses of worship scattered throughout the area. Most of the housing in this area consists of large complexes, including the Rutgers Houses, the Fiorello LaGuardia Houses, the Gouverneur Houses, and the Vladeck Houses. These buildings take the form of towers set back from the streets behind landscaped open spaces. Tenement-style housing in buildings ranging from four to six stories is found along East Broadway, Henry Street, and Madison Street.

As described in more detail in Chapter 6, “Historic Resources,” there are 20 architectural resources located in the area immediately surrounding the project site. These include the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, which pass over the project site, and the Battery Maritime Building, which is adjacent to the project site at its southern edge. Several historic ships are moored in the waters adjacent to the project site at Piers 16 and 17, including the W.O. Decker, Ambrose Lightship, Lettie G. Howard, Wavertree, and the John A. Lynch. Other architectural resources in the study area include the First Precinct Police Station at 100 Old Slip, the Hickson W. Field Store at 170-176 John Street, Schermerhorn Row Block, 77 Water Street, 88 Pine Street, and the former Gouverneur Hospital.

The FDR Drive runs overhead throughout most of the project site, and South Street is a two-way arterial running directly beneath and alongside it. Other major roadways in the study area include Water Street, a two-way, north-south roadway extending from Whitehall Street in the south to the Brooklyn Bridge in the north; Pearl Street, a one-way southbound roadway that begins at State Street in the south and merges with Water Street near Beekman Street; Broad Street, a two-way roadway traveling in a general northwest to southeast direction through the study area; and Whitehall Street, which travels in a northwest to southeast direction between Bowling Green and South Street. Most major intersections within the study area currently operate at acceptable levels of service at peak periods with the exception of four intersections along South Street, two along Water Street, and the intersection at Pearl and Broad Streets.

With respect to pedestrians, all crosswalks and sidewalks analyzed in the study area currently operate at acceptable levels of service. Pedestrian activity in the vicinity of the project site is highest in the Financial District area south of the Brooklyn Bridge, particularly at the South Street Seaport and near the ferry terminal at Pier 11.

In terms of the CEQR criteria, existing noise levels at locations on and adjacent to the project site are relatively high and range from “marginally unacceptable” to “clearly unacceptable.” In terms of HUD criteria, noise levels on and adjacent to the project site are in the “unacceptable” and “normally unacceptable” categories. The high noise levels are due to a combination of existing sources: traffic on nearby streets, the FDR Drive, and the Brooklyn Bridge; traffic and trains on the Manhattan Bridge; aircraft flyovers; and boat traffic on the East River.

With respect to socioeconomic conditions, the project site houses no residents. The only business located on the project site is Propark America, LLC, a private business with four parking lots located under the FDR Drive that have a total capacity of 617 parking spaces.

### **C. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTION**

In the future without the Proposed Action, no major changes are anticipated to occur on the project site. The site will continue to be characterized by parking lots, vacant land, vacant buildings, and the existing unimproved waterfront esplanade. Large portions of the project site, including Piers 35 and 42, will remain inaccessible to the public, and Pier 15 would remain unbuilt. Absent the Proposed Action, the character of the study area will be improved through enhancements to streetscapes and open spaces planned by other projects, as well as the projected reuse of the historic BMB, which is currently contemplated to be transformed into restaurants and a food market. The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation's (DPR) planned East River Waterfront Access Project will improve neighborhood character in the areas immediately surrounding the project site by improving access to the waterfront and enhancing streetscapes. The Access project will include improvements to Peck, Catherine, Rutgers, and Montgomery Slips and the upland portion of Pier 42, which will significantly improve the pedestrian connections between the East River waterfront and its adjacent Lower Manhattan neighborhoods. As part of the Access project, a new public open space appropriate to the South Street Seaport Historic District and Extension will be created at Peck Slip.

New active uses are also expected to be created on piers adjacent to the project site. The Tin Building on Pier 17 will be reactivated with retail use, and an athletic facility known as Basketball City will occupy a portion of Pier 36. These projects would visually enhance the study area, and the new facility on Pier 36 would generate activity in a portion of the study area that is currently underutilized and desolate. A number of additional projects are planned for construction within the upland portion of the study area by 2009; however, these projects are not expected to create any substantial changes to the predominantly residential character of the Chinatown and Lower East Side neighborhoods. The Financial District, which currently has a mix of office and residential uses but is primarily commercial in character, is expected to continue its recent trend toward becoming a 24-hour, mixed-use community with an increased residential population.

It is expected that traffic volumes in the study area will increase slightly in the future without the Proposed Action due to new development within the study area. There would not be a notable increase in noise levels in the future absent the Proposed Action. Pedestrian volumes in the study area would increase slightly due to the new development that is expected to occur.

### **D. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

The Proposed Action would enhance the character of the project site considerably by improving a two-mile-long, City-owned public open space connecting the Whitehall Ferry Terminal and Peter Minuit Plaza to the south to East River Park to the north. The changes associated with the Proposed Action would greatly improve land use on the project site. New recreational space created on piers, and cultural and retail space created in pavilions under the FDR Drive would draw visitors to the area and add activity to this section of the Lower Manhattan waterfront that is currently underutilized despite its dramatic views and recreational potential. The widening and more consistent location of the walkway/bikeway and the extensions and enhancements of the esplanade would improve the urban design of the project site, and the removal of parking beneath the FDR Drive would improve the streetscape. The creation of new open space on the piers and in front of the BMB would create new visual resources on the project site. The Proposed Action also would have a positive effect on visual resources by improving views of the

## **East River Waterfront Esplanade and Piers**

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Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges. New development in pavilions and the New Market Building would be located so as to protect view corridors from upland streets to the East River.

In order to accommodate open space and pavilions beneath the FDR Drive, the Proposed Action would displace the four parking lots operated by Propark America. These parking facilities negatively affect the character of the neighborhood because they are visually unappealing and they help to create a barrier separating the adjacent neighborhoods from the waterfront. Therefore, no significant impact on neighborhood character or socioeconomic conditions would result from the loss of these parking lots.

The Proposed Action would result in some loss of visual access to the East River bulkhead, an architectural historic resource on the project site. The original granite bulkhead from Broad Street to Coenties Slip would be obscured by the new esplanade structure that is to be built outboard of the bulkhead line; however, the bulkhead structure itself would not be altered. In addition, the original bulkhead would remain visible at other locations within the project area. The project elements that would be located within the boundaries of the South Street Seaport Historic District and Extension—including the reconstruction of Pier 15 and the New Market Building pier, the redevelopment of the New Market Building site, and the creation of pavilions between Maiden Lane and Fulton Street and between Peck Slip and Dover Street—are expected to be the subject of a Programmatic Agreement between LMDC and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). As described in the Programmatic Agreement, LMDC will consult with SHPO on the design of these project elements to resolve any adverse effects to historic resources. The Programmatic Agreement is also expected to include the review of any project design elements that could affect the East River bulkhead. In general, the Proposed Action would be expected to enhance the context of surrounding historic resources by improving and enhancing public open spaces with new amenities such as benches, planters, arbors, lighting, and brackets for attaching historic placards and viewfinders for sights of interest.

The Proposed Action would improve the character of the neighborhoods in the study area by enhancing the existing esplanade and creating new open space in areas currently not accessible to community residents and workers. The enhanced esplanade and new waterfront open space would help to link the upland neighborhoods to the East River waterfront and draw neighborhood residents and workers to the waterfront. New retail and cultural space developed under the Proposed Action would add vitality to both the study area and the project site and would serve as amenities for nearby communities.

The vehicle trips generated by users of the park and its associated retail, hotel, and residential buildings would result in significant traffic impacts at four intersections along South Street, two intersections along Water Street, and two intersections along Pearl Street. These impacts could be mitigated using a combination of measures, including changes to signal timing, signal phasing, or parking regulations changes and re-striping of intersection approaches. Therefore, the increased traffic associated with the Proposed Action would not have an adverse impact on neighborhood character. The removal of car and bus parking from the area beneath the FDR drive under the Proposed Action would improve neighborhood character by removing an unsightly land use that currently functions as a physical and visual barrier to the waterfront.

However, the removal of up to 45 commuter and tour bus parking spaces beneath the FDR Drive adjacent to Piers 13 and 14 could potentially have an adverse effect on the neighborhood if bus operators were to seek parking in the adjacent Lower Manhattan neighborhoods. The New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) will be conducting a study for Bus Management in Lower Manhattan from Canal Street to the Battery as part of a larger study for Lower

Manhattan Street Management. It will entail conducting a market analysis, possible alternative parking site selection and possible bus management strategies. If an alternative bus parking location is not identified, operators would need to seek alternative parking, which could increase bus circulation as well as legal and illegal bus parking elsewhere in Lower Manhattan and/or other areas of the city. This could potentially have an adverse effect on neighborhoods near the project site. However, provided that parking regulations are enforced, buses would park in areas of the city deemed appropriate by NYCDOT. Therefore, this would not result in a significant adverse impact on neighborhood character.

Although the Proposed Action would generate new pedestrian trips within the study area, crosswalks and sidewalks would continue to operate at acceptable levels of service. The Proposed Action would greatly improve the pedestrian environment on the project site by enhancing and expanding the existing esplanade, creating a new pedestrian plaza in front of the BMB, providing access to Piers 35, 36, and 42, and creating public open space on a reconstructed Pier 15 .

While the existing high ambient levels would result in noise levels in the park that are above the 55 dBA  $L_{10(1)}$  CEQR criterion for “acceptable” noise conditions, they would be comparable to noise levels in a number of existing parks in New York City that are also located adjacent to heavily trafficked roadways, including Central Park, Riverside Park, Hudson River Park, and Empire Fulton Ferry Park. Users of the existing esplanade are already exposed to these high noise levels. Increases in noise levels due to the additional traffic generated by users of the open space and associated amenities included in the Proposed Action would not be perceptible.

In summary, the Proposed Action would substantially improve the neighborhood character of the project site and the surrounding neighborhoods. The Proposed Action would improve the design and functioning of the existing waterfront esplanade and would create new open spaces in areas that have long been inaccessible to the public. These open spaces would serve as recreational amenities for the residential and worker populations of Lower Manhattan. By removing vehicle parking below the FDR Drive, the Proposed Action would also improve connectivity/access between the surrounding neighborhoods and the East River waterfront. The New Market Building would be reconstructed to house retail and cultural space, and new retail and community space would be created in pavilions below the FDR Drive. These new land uses would attract visitors from the adjacent neighborhoods to the waterfront area, thus enlivening the waterfront and helping to connect it with the surrounding communities. No significant adverse impacts on neighborhood character would result from the Proposed Action. \*