

## 4.7 NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

### 4.7.1 Introduction

This Section considers the potential effects on neighborhood character of the construction and operation of Shaft 33B at the preferred Shaft Site. The methodology used to prepare this Section is presented in Chapter 3, “Impact Methodologies,” Section 3.7, “Neighborhood Character.” As discussed in Section 3.7, neighborhood character is generally considered to be a composite of elements that give a neighborhood its identity, including land use patterns, urban design, visual resources, historic resources, socioeconomic characteristics, traffic, and noise. This Section considers how these characteristics, evaluated separately in the other Sections of this Chapter, interact to give the neighborhood of the preferred Shaft Site its unique feel. The preferred Shaft Site for Shaft 33B is located at the base of the Queensboro Bridge on E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue. The neighborhood character Study Area for the preferred Shaft Site is the area within 400 feet of the site, extending past the Queensboro Bridge to E. 61<sup>st</sup> Street on the north, to approximately 100 feet south of E. 58<sup>th</sup> Street on the south, to the Queensboro Bridge exit and approach ramps on the west, and to midway between First and Sutton Place/York Avenues on the east.

### 4.7.2 Existing Conditions

#### Preferred Shaft Site

The preferred Shaft Site is a paved lot predominantly surrounded by chain-link fencing covered with green mesh and topped with razor wire. The site is under the jurisdiction of the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT), and parked vehicles and equipment used by NYCDOT are visible behind the fence. West of the fence is an area which is currently paved and has nine honey locust trees. Together with a triangular traffic island west of the Queensboro Bridge (Bridge) entrance ramp, where there are three additional honey locust trees, these two spaces are commonly referred to as “14 Honey Locusts Park.” This area is jointly used by NYCDOT for Bridge access and maintenance activities and by the public for passive recreation, and is therefore referred to as a “multi-use” area throughout this EIS. Approximately 1,800 square feet of this area would be used for construction staging during Stages 2 and 3 of construction of Shaft 33B. The preferred Shaft Site also extends past the location of the current fence into a portion of the sidewalk along both First Avenue and E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street. In the alternate site configuration, the preferred Shaft Site would encompass the site described above as the base configuration, as well as the full sidewalk along E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue adjacent to the construction area and a 9-foot-wide portion of the E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue roadways. There are no historic resources or visual resources within the preferred Shaft Site.

## Study Area

The area surrounding the Shaft Site is dominated by the infrastructure of the Bridge, which is adjacent to the preferred Shaft Site. The granite walls of the main approach ramp form the northern boundary of the site. The approaches and exits from the Bridge cut through the midblocks between E. 58<sup>th</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup> Streets and First and Second Avenues; at the west end of the Study Area, the ramping approach to the Bridge arches over E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street.

The Study Area is a predominantly residential neighborhood, with a mix of low- to high-rise buildings with mainly commercial and residential uses. As described in Section 4.3, “Open Space,” in Chapter 4, “Preferred Shaft Site,” according to Census 2000, a total of nearly 27,000 people live within approximately ¼ mile of the alternative Shaft Site, in the area generally extending from E. 54<sup>th</sup> to E. 64<sup>th</sup> Streets, east of Third Avenue. Along First Avenue, ground-floor retail uses serving the neighborhood’s residents are common; uses include restaurants and bars, delis, and local services (e.g., florists, hair and nail salons). In addition to medium- and large-scale apartment buildings, there are a number of 4- to 6-story tenement (walk-up apartment) buildings and multi-story parking garages in the Study Area. The buildings are clad in a variety of materials, mostly brick and stucco. Buildings within the Study Area are primarily built to the street line; one exception is the 36-story modern BridgeTower Place apartment building at the northeast corner of First Avenue and E. 60<sup>th</sup> Street, which is set back behind a public plaza. The aerial tramway to Roosevelt Island begins on the west side of Second Avenue and continues along E. 60<sup>th</sup> Street parallel to the Bridge. While the tram runs in the air above the Bridge and Study Area, its right-of-way includes several latticed steel support structures from which the tram cables hang.

Traffic volumes along streets in the Study Area are generally congested during both the AM and PM peak hours, particularly at intersections close to the Queensboro Bridge. First and Second Avenues are busy arterial roadways that carry substantial traffic volumes. Several of the area cross streets, including E. 57<sup>th</sup>, E. 59<sup>th</sup>, and E. 61<sup>st</sup> Streets, carry substantial volumes and serve as feeder routes to and from the Bridge and FDR Drive. Pedestrian activity within the study area can be characterized as low to moderate. The M15, M15 (Limited), M31, and M57 bus routes all operate near the project site. Existing noise levels near the preferred Shaft Site are high because of the proximity of the Queensboro Bridge and high vehicular traffic volumes.

The Study Area contains three historic resources: the Queensboro Bridge, immediately adjacent to the preferred Shaft Site, and 311 and 313 E. 58<sup>th</sup> Street, which are small brick townhouses. The Queensboro Bridge is a through-type, multi-span cantilever bridge constructed of steel with Beaux Arts granite components. North of the Shaft Site and the adjacent multi-use area, the Bridge approach rises on a rusticated granite base. An open archway allows views beneath the Bridge between E. 59<sup>th</sup> and E. 60<sup>th</sup> Street across the multi-use area. Visual resources that can be seen within the Study Area are the Queensboro Bridge, the Conran Shop pavilion, and a tall brick smokestack, all of which can be viewed along E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and from First Avenue at E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street.

There are four publicly accessible open spaces in the Study Area, all of which are plazas adjacent to apartment buildings, such as the BridgeTower Place plaza, which has rows of seats arranged

back to back interspersed with trees and lampposts, or the Plaza at Sovereign Apartment on the block between E. 58<sup>th</sup> and 59<sup>th</sup> Streets east of First Avenue, which has landscaping, trees, and seating. The multi-use area adjacent to the preferred Shaft Site is also used by the public as an open space. There are street trees along sidewalks throughout the Study Area, including along the south side of E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street between First and Second Avenues and along the north side of E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street between First Avenue and Sutton Place. No street trees are located along the sidewalks surrounding the preferred Shaft Site, although the nine trees in the multi-use area are close to the sidewalk.

The Study Area can be generally characterized as a densely populated, noisy, busy, and thriving section of East Midtown/ lower Upper East Side of Manhattan. Upscale shops and restaurants generally serving the needs of local residents exist mainly on the ground floors of buildings along First Avenue. Large apartment complexes, many with public plazas, line the avenues while small- and medium-scale developments are more prevalent on the cross streets. The area has abundant street greenery, especially on the cross streets, which are generally lined with larger street trees and some plantings. The neighborhood is also influenced by the presence of the Queensboro Bridge, which brings substantial vehicular and commercial traffic volumes through the Study Area roadways each day. Noise generated by vehicular traffic is the primary contributor to the high noise levels present throughout the Study Area.

### **4.7.3 Future Conditions Without the Project**

In the Future Without the Project, the character of the preferred Shaft Site (in either the base or alternate site configuration) is not expected to change. The fenced area will continue to be used by NYCDOT for Bridge maintenance activities and as a parking and access area for the vehicles and personnel of NYCDOT and the New York City Department of Sanitation. The sidewalks and streetbeds of First Avenue and E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street will remain in their current condition. Community Board 8's 197-a plan recommends streetscape improvements for the edges of the fenced portion of the preferred Shaft Site, consisting of low walls or planting to screen views into the site; however, the plan has not been adopted at this time and there is no implementation schedule associated with those improvements. If these changes are made at the preferred Shaft Site, the appearance of the site will be modified because of the presence of the buffer in place of the existing chain link fence.

Within the Study Area, NYCDOT will continue its long-term project to reconstruct and rehabilitate the Queensboro Bridge. The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYCDPR) is planning enhancements for the multi-use area upon completion of the Bridge rehabilitation program. Those enhancements may change the appearance of the multi-use site in the Future Without the Project by adding landscaping and seating to an area that currently has no such amenities. Several rezoning proposals currently under way or anticipated immediately to the east and northeast of the Study Area would continue an existing trend in which the heavy commercial and manufacturing uses clustered in the easternmost areas of the Upper East Side are gradually being converted to high-density residential uses more consistent with the residential character of most of the Upper East Side. Also consistent with these existing trends are a

proposed new Ronald McDonald House and a new dormitory for Rockefeller University, both planned on the north side of E. 60<sup>th</sup> Street facing the Queensboro Bridge.

In general, the projects that are planned for construction within the Study Area would not be expected to create any substantial changes to the character of the neighborhood. The Queensboro Bridge Rehabilitation Program would not significantly alter any natural features, street patterns, block shapes, or travel patterns in the area. Traffic in the Study Area would change modestly as a result of projects planned for the Study Area and general background growth; intersections that were congested under existing conditions are expected to realize a nominal deterioration in levels of service. Pedestrian activity would be expected to remain low to moderate. Noise levels would be expected to be similar to existing levels. Views of surrounding visual resources, including views from the preferred Shaft Site as well as views from elsewhere in the Study Area, would not change from existing conditions.

#### **4.7.4 Future Conditions With the Project**

##### **Construction**

Since most of the preferred Shaft Site is currently fenced, the presence of a barrier during construction would result in a similar streetscape to what exists today and would continue in the Future Without the Project. The construction barrier and the potential use of the sidewalk and a portion of First Avenue would be typical of construction sites throughout the City. The only equipment visible above the barrier from street level would be a crane and, possibly, a concrete truck enclosure. Two trees located in the multi-use area would be removed during construction. The lighting to be installed around the site for night construction work would be noticeable from the surrounding area, but would not be substantially different from the lighting that already illuminates the Study Area at night. The project's construction activities under either the base or alternate site configuration 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.

The construction activity on the preferred Shaft Site would be noticeable to the nearest sensitive land uses, the residences directly across E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and across First Avenue from the site. The construction activities for Shaft 33B would at times be noisy and disruptive to these residential uses, and potential significant adverse noise impacts are expected to occur during several stages of the construction period (see Section 4.12, "Noise"). While there is the potential for significant adverse noise impacts, these noise impacts would not result in an adverse impact on the character of the neighborhood because the area surrounding the preferred Shaft 33B Site currently has high noise levels, as discussed above, because of the proximity of the Queensboro Bridge. At locations elsewhere in the Study Area, construction activities at the project site would be less perceptible.

The historic structures at 311 and 313 E. 58<sup>th</sup> Street are located more than 400 feet from the site, and therefore are too far away to be adversely affected by project construction. To ensure that no potential significant adverse impacts occur to the Queensboro Bridge as a result of any of the

proposed construction activities, a construction protection plan for that property will be developed and implemented prior to construction in consultation with the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. Protection of the Queensboro Bridge would occur during all phases of construction. The enclosure and construction equipment and activity on the preferred Shaft Site would not eliminate views from the Study Area to surrounding visual resources; nor would they become a dominant element of such views. While the construction enclosure, equipment, and related activity would become part of these views, they would be similar in nature to the enclosure, equipment, and activity on the site today.

Blasting activities would require the temporary shutdown of traffic and pedestrian movements near the preferred Shaft 33B Site for approximately four months once or twice a day; this would potentially result in short-term disruptions of vehicular traffic. These disruptions would be short-term and intermittent. For the remainder of the construction period, construction activity would generate a low amount of vehicular traffic and would not result in significant traffic impacts; therefore, traffic changes would not be expected to result in potential significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character during the construction period. In recognition of the area's high traffic volumes, NYCDEP will provide a Traffic Enforcement Agent (TEA) at the preferred Shaft Site to assist in maintaining sufficient vehicular and pedestrian flow throughout the construction period.

In sum, the construction of Shaft 33B at the preferred Shaft Site would be expected to be intrusive at times to surrounding residents in terms of increased noise levels and potential intermittent traffic disruptions. This type of construction disturbance is fairly consistent with other construction projects that occur throughout the City, and it would not be expected to influence land use or development patterns. During the 52-month construction period, NYCDEP would address noise and traffic disruptions, as discussed in Sections 4.9, "Traffic and Parking;" 4.12, "Noise;" and 4.16, "Mitigation Measures." Overall, construction at the preferred Shaft Site would not be anticipated to result in potential significant adverse impacts to the combined elements contributing to the neighborhood character of the Study Area. An assessment of the potential for significant adverse neighborhood character impacts from construction of Shaft 33B at the preferred Shaft Site and its water main connections is presented in Section 5.7, "Neighborhood Character," in Chapter 5, "Water Main Connections."

### **Operation**

During operation of the project, three permanent above-ground structures would be added to the preferred Shaft Site or adjacent sidewalk: 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. In addition, the presence of hydrants on the sidewalk would be congruous with street furniture that is found surrounding the preferred Shaft Site and in the Study Area in existing conditions. It is possible that NYCDOT would provide a low wall or landscaping around the Site in accordance with Community Board 8's recommendations. Following Stage 3 of construction, the multi-use area would be restored in coordination with NYCDOT and the community, as appropriate.

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The presence of two relatively small flush-mounted hatchways that provide access to the shaft, and the air vent and air release hydrants may take up some pedestrian space adjacent to the preferred Shaft Site. At a maximum, these features could potentially reduce the effective width of the sidewalk by up to 3 feet. This potential reduction in pedestrian space would not result in any significant adverse pedestrian impacts.

The project 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. The operational above-ground structures would not eliminate views from the Study Area to surrounding historic and/or visual resources; nor would they become a dominant element of such views. No permanent changes in land use would occur as a result of activation of Shaft 33B. Operation of the preferred Shaft Site is not anticipated to have potential direct or indirect adverse impacts on any publicly accessible open spaces; the shaft would not be located in an open space and would not affect the utilization of any open spaces in the surrounding area. Activities associated with operation of Shaft 33B at the preferred Shaft Site would not result in increased traffic or increased noise or vibration levels at the site.

In sum, operation of Shaft 33B at the preferred Shaft Site would not significantly adversely affect the combined elements contributing to the neighborhood character of the Study Area. No significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character would result from operation of Shaft 33B at the preferred Shaft Site.

