7.7 NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

7.7.1 Introduction

This section considers the potential neighborhood character effects of the construction and operation of Shaft 33B at the E. 61st Street 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 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 within this Chapter, interact to give the neighborhood of the E. 61st Street Shaft Site its unique feel. The alternative Shaft Site is located on the north side of E. 61st Street, east of the Queensboro Bridge (Bridge) exit ramp. The general Study Area for the alternative Shaft Site is the area within 400 feet of the site, roughly bounded by E. 63rd Street on the north, E. 60th Street on the south, Second Avenue on the west, and First Avenue on the east since this is the area where project activities would be most noticeable. In addition, other areas where project effects might be felt were also considered during the evaluation of neighborhood character.

7.7.2 Existing Conditions

Alternative Shaft Site

The E. 61st Street Shaft Site includes a fenced, vacant lot on the north side of E. 61st Street, just east of the Bridge exit ramp. The vacant lot is covered with grass and surrounded with chain link fencing. There are no architectural resources or visual resources within the alternative Shaft Site.

Study Area

The neighborhood surrounding the alternative Shaft Site is dominated by the infrastructure of the Queensboro Bridge. The Bridge begins at Second Avenue, where it occupies the entire east side of the avenue between E. 59th and 60th Streets. The Bridge visually divides the neighborhood into two sections: the areas north and south of E. 59th and 60th Streets. The concrete and steel viaduct for the Bridge exit runs from E. 60th Street north to E. 63rd Street between First and Second Avenues, immediately west of the E. 61st Street Shaft Site; there is also an exit at street level below the viaduct. On the western side of the alternative Shaft Site a sidewalk cuts through the midblock adjacent to the Bridge ramp, along the sidewalk, which is a City "Greenstreet," there are street-level planters with greenery and small trees. The combination of the midblock passage and the landscaped Greenstreet create an interesting urban design feature adjacent to the E. 61st Street Shaft Site.

The Study Area is predominantly residential, with retail or commercial uses serving local residences located on the ground floor. 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 in the area generally extending from E. 54th to E. 64th Streets, east of Third Avenue. Almost 11,000 people live in the area between E. 59th Street and E. 64th Street east of Third Avenue. Directly north of the site is a 6-story building occupied by a pre-school, the Manhattan Center for Early Learning and Manhattan Center for Early Intervention. Land uses to the south of the site, across E. 61st Street, include four 5-story tenement (walk-up apartment) buildings, with a hair salon, cleaner's, and doctor's office located in the ground floor of two of the buildings. There are also several industrial uses in the Study Area, including 10- and 14-story storage facilities located on Second Avenue and E. 61st Street; the Decorator's Center, located on E. 62nd Street; and two multi-story industrial buildings containing warehousing and other industrial uses located east of First Avenue on E. 60th and 62nd Streets. The majority of the residential buildings in the area are 4- to 6-story tenements; however, the Study Area also includes small 6-story apartment houses, a few tall apartment towers, and several storage warehouses. The apartment towers are generally located along or near First and Second Avenues.

The buildings within the Study Area are primarily built to the street line; exceptions include the Evansview Condominiums at 303 E. 60th Street and the Paladin Condominiums at 300 E. 62nd Street, both of which are set back behind public plazas. The buildings are clad in a variety of materials, mostly brick and stucco. The aerial tramway to Roosevelt Island begins on the west side of Second Avenue and continues along E. 60th 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. 59th and E. 61st Streets, serve substantial volumes and are feeder routes to and from the Queensboro Bridge and the FDR Drive. Pedestrian activity within the Study Area can be characterized as low to moderate. A number of bus routes operate near the alternative Shaft Site. Ambient noise levels are in the vicinity of the CEQR threshold of acceptability. The primary factor influencing the high existing ambient conditions in this area is vehicular traffic.

The Study Area contains two historic resources: the Queensboro Bridge, an exit ramp of which is immediately adjacent to the alternative Shaft Site, and the Day & Meyer Murray & Young Warehouse. The Day & Meyer Murray & Young Warehouse, an Art Deco/Neo-Gothic style storage warehouse, is located on the east side of Second Avenue between E. 61st and E. 62nd Streets. The Queensboro Bridge is a through-type, multi-span cantilever bridge constructed of steel with Beaux Arts granite components. The only visual resources that can be seen within the Study Area are various elements of the Queensboro Bridge, including the First Avenue arch, and the steel towers of the Roosevelt Island tramway, which can be viewed along E. 60th Street. The alternative Shaft Site can only be seen within its immediately adjacent area: the area along E. 61st Street on both sides of the viaduct, and from the intersection of E. 62nd Street and the Bridge exit. There are three publicly accessible open spaces in the Study Area, all of which are bonus plazas

adjacent to apartment buildings. There are a few street trees along sidewalks throughout the Study Area.

The Study Area can be generally characterized as a densely populated, noisy, and thriving section of the lower Upper East Side of Manhattan. Shops and restaurants generally serving the needs of local residents exist mainly on the ground floors of buildings along First and Second Avenues. Large apartment complexes, many with public plazas, line the avenues and 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 greatly influenced by the presence of the Queensboro Bridge, which brings substantial vehicular and commercial traffic volumes through the Study Area roadways each day and is a strong visual presence in the area. Noise generated by vehicular traffic is the primary contributor to the high noise levels present throughout the Study Area.

7.7.3 Future Conditions Without the Project

In the Future Without the Project, a new residential building is currently being planned for the alternative Shaft Site. Three development projects are anticipated in the Study Area. A 16-story Ronald McDonald House and a dormitory for Rockefeller University are both planned on the north side of E. 60th Street facing the Queensboro Bridge, and a 19-story apartment building is under construction on First Avenue between E. 61st and 62nd Streets. These developments will be consistent with the primarily commercial and residential character of the Study Area. The projects will bring additional population to the Study Area. In addition, the Queensboro Bridge is currently undergoing reconstruction and rehabilitation, which could result in minor changes to the streetscape of the Study Area.

In general, the projects that are planned for 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 moderate, with acceptable levels of congestion. Noise levels would be expected to be similar to existing levels. Views of visual resources, including views from the alternative Shaft Site as well as views from elsewhere in the Study Area, would not change from existing conditions.

7.7.4 Future Conditions With the Project

Construction

Shaft 33B

Construction activities for Shaft 33B at the E. 61st Street Shaft Site would bring noticeable activity to a currently vacant site. During construction, activities and equipment on the alternative Shaft Site would be shielded from view by a 20-foot-high barrier. The only equipment visible above the barrier from street level would be a crane and, possibly, a concrete truck enclosure. The barrier would block off the area on the alternative Shaft Site that is currently fenced. As a streetscape element, this barrier would be somewhat similar to the fence that currently encloses the site, except that it would be somewhat taller and would not allow views through to the site. 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 construction activity on the alternative Shaft Site would be noticeable to the nearest sensitive land uses, including the early childhood education facility directly north of the site, the four-story residential building directly east of the site, and the five-story residences and businesses directly south from the site, across E. 61st Street. The construction activities for Shaft 33B would at times be noisy and disruptive to these uses, and potential significant adverse noise impacts are expected to occur during several stages of the construction period (see Section 7.12, "Noise"). While there is the potential for significant adverse noise impacts, these noise impacts would not result in an adverse impact on the overall character of the neighborhood, since the area already has high noise levels and since noise is not the only defining characteristic of neighborhood character in the Study Area. At locations elsewhere in the Study Area, construction activities at the alternative Shaft Site would be less perceptible. The construction activity at the alternative Shaft Site would not be expected to result in potential significant adverse impacts to people's enjoyment of the public open spaces in the Study Area.

Blasting activities would require the temporary shut down once or twice per day of traffic and pedestrian movements near the alternative Shaft Site, for approximately four months if raise bore excavation is used or 12 months if surface excavation is used; 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 funding for as many Traffic Enforcement Agents (TEAs) at the alternative Shaft Site as are appropriate to assist in maintaining sufficient vehicular and pedestrian flow throughout the construction period.

The construction activities 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 Day & Meyer Murray & Young Warehouse and the main structure of the Queensboro Bridge are located outside of the area of potential effects from construction damage, and no contextual impacts on these resources are expected during construction. The enclosure and construction equipment and activity on the alternative Shaft Site would not eliminate views from the Study Area to surrounding visual resources; nor would they become a dominant element of such views.

In sum, the construction of Shaft 33B at the alternative Shaft Site would be expected to be intrusive at times to surrounding residents in terms of increased noise levels and potential traffic disruptions. This type of construction disturbance is fairly typical of other construction projects that occur throughout the City, and it would not be expected to influence land use or development patterns. During the construction period, NYCDEP would address noise and traffic disruptions, as discussed in Sections 7.9, "Traffic and Parking," 7.12, "Noise," and 7.16, "Mitigation Measures." Overall, the construction of Shaft 33B at the alternative Shaft Site would not be anticipated to result in potential significant adverse effects to the combined elements contributing to the neighborhood character of the Study Area.

Water Main Connections

As discussed in Section 5.7, "Neighborhood Character," construction of the water mains would be disruptive to surrounding land uses—in terms of dust and emissions from construction equipment and potential temporary adverse traffic and noise impacts along the routes and extending to some intersections beyond. However, given the brief duration of the construction disturbance in specific areas, and the generally limited nature of the potential changes, the construction activities associated with the new water mains would not be anticipated to result in any significant adverse impacts to neighborhood character. As described in Section 5.16, the water main construction project would employ an aggressive traffic management plan to minimize to the extent practicable the traffic disruptions that would occur as a result of water main construction.

Conclusions

As discussed above, neither construction of Shaft 33B at the alternative Shaft Site nor construction of the water mains would result in significant adverse impacts on the combined elements that contribute to the neighborhood character of the Study Area. Construction activities would be disruptive in the areas immediately surrounding the construction sites; however, at other locations throughout the Study Area, construction activities would be less perceptible.

Operation

During operation of the project, three permanent above-ground structures would be added to the alternative Shaft Site or nearby 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 and would be congruous with street furniture that is found in the Study Area in existing conditions. Certain surface features of Shaft 33B, such as two relatively small flush-mounted hatchways that provide access to the shaft, a small (10-foot-

high by 14-inch diameter) air vent located on the site or the sidewalk, and up to two air release hydrants (3-foot high by 6-inch diameter), may take up some pedestrian space on the sidewalk adjacent to the alternative Shaft Site. At a maximum, these features could potentially reduce the effective width of that sidewalk by up to 3 feet. This potential reduction in pedestrian space would not result in any significant adverse pedestrian impacts.

The project—including Shaft 33B and the water mains—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 associated with Shaft 33B (there would be no aboveground features associated with the water mains) 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 the operation of Shaft 33B and the water mains. Operation of Shaft 33B at the alternative Shaft Site and the water mains is not anticipated to have potential direct or indirect adverse impacts on any publicly accessible open spaces; they 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 alternative Shaft Site and the water mains would not result in increased traffic or increased noise or vibration levels at the site.

In sum, the operation of Shaft 33B at the alternative Shaft Site and the water mains 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 the project.

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