

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the potential of the proposed East River Waterfront Access Project to affect the urban design characteristics and visual resources of the three project sites and surrounding areas, roughly defined as those blockfronts facing each project site. The project sites are Catherine Slip/Catherine Street between South and Madison Streets, Rutgers Slip between South and Cherry Streets, and Montgomery Slip between South and Madison Streets (see Figures 2C-1, 2C-4, and 2C-6). As described below, the Proposed Action would involve alterations to medians, repaving of streetbeds and sidewalks, and new plantings, including street trees.

The technical analysis follows the guidance of the 2001 *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Technical Manual*. As defined in the manual, urban design components and visual resources determine the “look” of a neighborhood—its physical appearance, including the size and shape of buildings, and their arrangement on blocks, the street pattern, and the noteworthy views that may give an area a distinctive character. The following analysis addresses each of these characteristics for existing conditions, the future without the Proposed Action, and probable impacts of the Proposed Action by 2011—the Build year of the Proposed Action.

The Proposed Action would change some aspects of the urban design of the project sites but these changes would not be adverse, as they would physically improve the urban design character of the project sites and contribute to greater pedestrian access to the East River waterfront.

As described below, this analysis concludes that the Proposed Action would not result in adverse impacts and would positively affect the urban design and visual resources of the project sites and surrounding study areas.

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS**CATHERINE SLIP***PROJECT SITE*

The Catherine Slip project site comprises Catherine Slip between South and Cherry Streets, including the streetbeds, two raised center medians with plantings, adjacent sidewalks, and a portion of Tanahey Playground to the east. The project site also includes the streetbed and portions of the adjacent sidewalks on Catherine Street between Cherry and Madison Streets (see Figures 2C-1 through 2C-3). The eastern portion of Catherine Slip carries one-way northbound traffic and the western portion of the Catherine Slip project site—Catherine Slip between South and Cherry Streets and Catherine Street between Cherry and Madison Streets—carries one-way southbound traffic. The entire project site has curbside parallel parking. The medians have paved sidewalks at the perimeter of the planted areas containing trees and bushes. The sidewalks have

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standard cobra head street lamps, garbage cans, and street trees. The portion of Tanahey Playground is a paved area with benches and trees.

The project site does not contain any visual resources. From some vantage points on the project site, views include two visual resources—the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges. The Manhattan Bridge, an early 20th century structure, is a two-level steel suspension bridge with blue-painted steel towers that spans the East River northeast of the project site. The Manhattan Bridge’s approach, one of its stone piers, and one of its steel towers are visible in views east from the project site and from study area streets. The late 19th century Brooklyn Bridge, located southwest of the project site, is a suspension bridge with limestone towers and an intricate cable system. Views southwest from Catherine Slip include one of the Brooklyn Bridge’s stone towers and part of the bridge’s approach, with views in context with the elevated FDR Drive, which obstructs some views. Other views from the southern section of the project site are obstructed by construction fencing and equipment stored below the FDR Drive.

STUDY AREA

The blockfronts facing the Catherine Slip project site include free-standing and attached buildings and playgrounds. West of the project site are two tall residential buildings (16 and 17 stories) that are part of the Alfred E. Smith housing development. They are faced in red brick and are X-shaped in plan. Also west of the project site is four-story Public School (P.S.) 126, a rectangular building faced in orange brick and concrete with its primary entrance on Catherine Street. All three buildings are set back from the sidewalk by small grassy areas with trees. There are also two playgrounds in this part of the study area. They both have playground equipment, low decorative cast iron fences, and trees. East of the project site between South and Water Streets is a six-story gray stucco faced storage facility with loading docks in a two-story portion opening onto Catherine Slip. Part of the Tanahey Playground is in the study area east of Catherine Slip. It includes playground equipment, benches, and trees located within a cast iron fence. The study area east of the project site between Cherry and Madison Streets is part of the Two Bridges Historic District, described in Chapter 2B, “Historic Resources.” The buildings in this part of the study area are older structures, including Knickerbocker Village, a 12-story brick-faced, two-building complex; five-story brick-faced tenements with fire escapes and ground floor retail; and a small church. The study area to the north also includes a paved playground enclosed by a chain link fence and a small church building, which are also within the historic district.

The study area south of the project site includes the FDR Drive and South Street. The FDR Drive is a highly trafficked elevated roadway extending along the east side of Manhattan. In the study area, it separates the upland project site from the East River waterfront to the south. South Street, located below and west of the FDR Drive, is an arterial roadway with a single northbound lane and two southbound lanes with bus layover areas on both sides of the street and curbside parking in the southbound lanes. In the study area, the area below the FDR Drive is characterized by chain link fencing enclosing construction equipment.

The study area does not include any visual resources, however, like the project site, the study area includes limited views to more distant resources, namely the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges.

RUTGERS SLIP

PROJECT SITE

The Rutgers Slip project site includes the Rutgers Slip streetbed and adjacent sidewalks in the area between South and Cherry Streets. The Rutgers Slip streetbed is paved in asphalt, carries one-way northbound traffic, and has curbside parking lanes. The east side of the street has a raised concrete curb that defines the boundary of Rutgers Park to the east. The west side of the street has a concrete sidewalk, the southern portion of which is wider than the northern portion. The sidewalks have standard cobra head street lamps, street trees, and standard street signage (see Figures 2C-4 and 2C-5).

The project site does not contain any visual resources. From some vantage points on the project site, views are available to three resources—the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges and the Brooklyn skyline. The Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges, described in “Catherine Slip, Project Site,” are both located southwest of the project site. Views west from Rutgers Slip near Cherry Street include one of the Manhattan Bridge’s stone piers and its approach. Views south and west from other vantage points on the project site closer to the East River include the East River span and towers of both the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges, and the Brooklyn skyline, visible beyond the elevated FDR Drive.

STUDY AREA

The blockfronts facing the Rutgers Slip project site include three tall residential buildings and a one-story Consolidated Edison (ConEd) building, located west and north of the project site. All three residential buildings range in height from 10 to 21 stories, have slab-like forms, are faced in brick, and are set back from the sidewalk by small grassy or paved areas. The ConEd building, located northwest of the project site, is a one-story brick and cinder block building with equipment on the property, which is surrounded by a tall chain link fence. Extending north-south along the east side of the project site is Rutgers Park. Its north and west borders are defined by a cast iron fence set atop a stone curb with graffiti in some areas; the southern and eastern borders have a chain link fence. The park, at a slightly raised elevation from the surrounding area, contains playground equipment, a basketball court, seating, and mature trees. The study area south of the project site includes the FDR Drive and South Street, as described above in “Catherine Slip, Study Area.” In the Rutgers Slip study area, the area below the FDR Drive is characterized by parked vehicles, particularly buses, paved walkways and bike paths, and seating areas.

In the areas where automobiles are parked below the FDR Drive, views south from the study area are obscured. Where vehicles are not parked below the FDR Drive, views south from the study area include paved walkways and bike paths, the East River waterfront, Piers 35 and 36, and views of the Brooklyn skyline and the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges. Pier 35, a flat unused pier, and the southern portion of Pier 36 and its pier shed are visible from the Rutgers Slip study area and obstruct northeast views to the East River.

There are no visual resources in the study area, however, views to the three resources—the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges and the Brooklyn skyline—are available from some vantage points in the study area, particularly to the south from areas near the FDR Drive.

MONTGOMERY SLIP

PROJECT SITE

The Montgomery Street project site is the Montgomery Street streetbed and adjacent sidewalks in the area between South and Madison Streets. The project site is a wide, two-lane street that carries two-way traffic divided by striped medians. It has bike lanes and parallel curbside parking on both sides of the street. The project site has standard cobra head street lamps and standard street signage. Street trees are located on the east side of the project site but are only on the west side of the street in the area between South and Cherry Streets (see Figures 2C-6 and 2C-7). The project site does not contain any structures or natural features. It does not contain any visual resources.

Views from the Montgomery Street project site are generally limited to the surrounding buildings, none of which are visual resources. Views south from the project site include the areas below the elevated FDR Drive. Longer views south are obscured by the FDR Drive and obstructed by the pier sheds on Piers 36 and 42 south of the FDR Drive. These views are not considered view corridors. Visual resources visible from the project site include views west on Cherry Street to one of the stone Manhattan Bridge piers in the distance; views from the southern end of the project site include portions of the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges, and views of the Brooklyn skyline are also visible from the southern section of the Montgomery Street project site.

STUDY AREA

The study area includes the buildings facing the Montgomery Street project site, small grassy areas and playgrounds, surface parking, a portion of the elevated FDR Drive, and sections of streets adjacent to the project site. The study area includes six buildings. Three 21-story, H-shaped residential buildings faced in brown brick are on the east side of Montgomery Street. Two 16-story residential buildings on the west side of Montgomery Street are part of the LaGuardia Houses complex, have X-shaped forms, and are faced in red brick. These five residential towers are set back from Montgomery Street within small landscaped areas, surface parking, and playgrounds. The study area west of the Montgomery Street project site also includes Public School (P.S.) 137, a four-story, rectangular school building with its short end perpendicular to the project site. The buildings in the study area do not create a consistent streetwall.

The southwest corner of Madison and Montgomery Streets is a paved surface parking lot associated with the LaGuardia Houses. East of P.S. 137 is a paved playground enclosed by a chain link fence. It includes a decorative mural, a basketball court, a baseball diamond, and tennis courts. The landscaped and grassy areas adjacent to the study area buildings have several trees that provide shade to these areas. The Lillian D. Wald Playground is a small playground east of the project site that includes handball, volleyball, and basketball courts set among trees and landscaping elements. Outside the study area to the south is the East River. However, this natural feature is not publicly accessible apart from views to it, which are limited from the study area by the FDR Drive and the pier sheds on Piers 36 and 42, described below.

The study area includes portions of four blocks. Two of these are large, merged blocks that include streets that have been converted to walkways or access roads. Most streets in the study area carry local traffic and have curbside parking. In contrast, a portion of the highly trafficked, elevated FDR Drive is immediately south of the Montgomery Street project site. It separates the

upland project site from the East River waterfront to the south. The FDR Drive slopes down to grade in the study area east of Montgomery Street. Below and west of the FDR Drive is South Street, an at-grade arterial roadway with a single northbound and two southbound lanes with curbside car and bus parking lanes. Also in this area, South Street shifts to the east and north around the sloped base of the FDR Drive. The area below the FDR Drive ramp is occupied by parked cars enclosed by a chain link fence.

In the study area where vehicles are not parked below the FDR Drive, views southwest include existing portions of paved walkways and a bike path, the East River waterfront, the Brooklyn skyline, and the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges, as described above in “Catherine Slip, Project Site.” In the areas where automobiles are parked below the FDR Drive, views southwest from the study area are obscured. Views southeast from the study area are obstructed by the pier sheds on Piers 26 and 42.

Outside the study area to the south on the East River waterfront are Piers 36 and 42 that extend over the East River. These piers are occupied by large, low pier sheds, two smaller brick buildings, and surface parking enclosed by a chain link fence separating these areas from South Street. These buildings, along with the elevated FDR Drive structure and buses typically parked on South Street, obscure most views south and southeast to the East River waterfront from the project site and the study area.

There are no visual resources in the study area, however, visual resources located outside the study area are visible from some vantage points in the study area, particularly in views west on Madison, Cherry, and South Streets where views are available of the Manhattan Bridge approach. Views from the study area closer to the East River include the East River, the Brooklyn skyline, and the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges, as described above.

C. FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTION

In the future without the Proposed Action, the East River Esplanade and Piers project will be constructed south of the three project sites. Portions will be complete by 2011. This project will involve improvements to public open spaces along the East River Esplanade, a two-mile-long, public open space connecting Whitehall Ferry Terminal and Peter Minuit Plaza to the south to East River Park to the north. New amenities will include benches, plantings, lighting, walkways, and bike paths. Fourteen pavilions will be constructed beneath the FDR Drive and will be sited so as not to obscure views to nearby historic resources. Basketball City will be a recreational facility built on a portion of Pier 36, near the Montgomery Street project site. This project may also involve the removal of the Pier 42 pier shed to create an urban beach.

D. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

CATHERINE SLIP

The Proposed Action would alter the Catherine Slip project site by widening the median between Water and Cherry Streets and extending it eastward to Tanahey Park. The widened median in this area would include benches; trees, plantings, and other landscaping elements; and pavers at the entrance to Tanahey Park. A small triangular area near Cherry Street would extend into Tanahey Park. These changes to the median would require the closure of the portion of the Catherine Slip right-of-way between Water and Cherry Streets. The existing median between South and Water Streets would also be altered with new trees, plantings, and other landscaping

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elements; pavers; maritime-themed bollards; and a seating area with benches. The walkway would extend through the medians' centers. Alterations to the portion of the Catherine Slip project site between Cherry and Madison Streets would change the existing parallel parking to diagonal parking. Other changes would involve repaving the sidewalks and adding new street trees and neck-downs (see "Project Description," Figures 1-2 through 1-4).

The proposed changes to the median between Water and Cherry Streets would affect the block occupied by Tanahey Playground by making this block larger. Further, these changes would remove a portion of the street and would result in rerouted traffic. However, these proposed changes would not be expected to adversely affect any urban design characteristics of the project site. Further, the Proposed Action would not adversely affect any existing views to visual resources available from the Catherine Slip project site.

The proposed project would not alter the height, bulk, form, size, scale, use, or arrangement of buildings in the surrounding area as the Proposed Action would generally be limited to changes to the streetbeds, sidewalks, and medians. The merging of the portion of the median with Tanahey Playground would improve the physical and visual context of the nearby study area with new plantings and walkways. The proposed changes to the block form and street grid would be limited to this small segment of roadway and would not be expected to adversely affect the surrounding area. The proposed alterations to the medians, landscaping, and sidewalks would not adversely affect views to the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges which would continue to be viewed from limited locations on the project site and in the study area. Further, the Proposed Action would be developed in the context of improvements to the East River waterfront south of Catherine Slip that are part of the East River Esplanade and Piers project.

Overall, the Proposed Action would not be expected to result in adverse impacts to urban design features or visual resources on the project site or in the surrounding area.

RUTGERS SLIP

The Proposed Action would repave the Rutgers Slip streetbed; reconstruct the curb on its west side, including the addition of a neck-down at the north and south ends to formalize the slip's west side parking lane; construct a new sidewalk and curb on the slip's east side, and install new street trees. Crosswalks extending across Rutgers Slip would also be striped at Cherry and South Streets. These proposed changes to the Rutgers Street project site would be expected to improve the physical condition and appearance of the project site and also improve physical and visual access to the East River waterfront.

The proposed project would not alter the height, bulk, form, size, scale, use, or arrangement of buildings in the surrounding area as it would consist of improvements to an existing streetbed and sidewalks, and the construction of a new sidewalk. For similar reasons, the Proposed Action would not alter the block form or street grid of the surrounding area. The addition of new street trees to the project site would not adversely affect views to visual resources. The Proposed Action would physically improve the condition of the streetscape in the Rutgers Slip study area and would be developed in the context of improvements that will occur below the FDR Drive and on the East River Esplanade south of the project site as part of the East River Esplanade and Piers project.

Overall, the Proposed Action would not result in any adverse effects to any urban design features or visual resources on the Rutgers Slip project site or in the study area.

MONTGOMERY SLIP

With the Proposed Action, the Montgomery Street project site would be altered with the construction of four new medians—two would be located between South and Cherry Streets and two would be between Cherry and Madison Streets. Each median would have raised planters with native grasses. The Proposed Action would also involve repaving the Montgomery Street sidewalks, planting new street trees, and adding new neck-downs on the east side of Montgomery Street. These proposed changes would improve the physical appearance of the project site and access to the East River waterfront.

The proposed project would not alter the height, bulk, form, size, scale, use, or arrangement of buildings in the surrounding area as it would consist of improvements to an existing streetbed and sidewalks, including new paving, medians with planters, and street trees. For similar reasons, the Proposed Action would not alter the block form, street grid, or predominant streetscape characteristics of the area. These changes to the project site also would not affect any visual resources visible from the project site or study area. These visual resources would continue to be viewed from limited locations on the project site and in the study area. The proposed changes to the Montgomery Street project site would physically improve the condition of the streetscape in the study area and would be developed in the context of the improvements that will occur with the East River Esplanade and Piers project in the area below the FDR Drive and on the East River Esplanade.

Overall, the Proposed Action would not be expected to result in adverse impacts to urban design features or visual resources on the Montgomery Street project site or in the surrounding area. *