

## 4.6 URBAN DESIGN AND VISUAL RESOURCES

### 4.6.1 Introduction

This Section evaluates the effects of construction and operation of Shaft 33B at the preferred Shaft Site on nearby urban design and visual resources. This includes consideration of changes to the streetscape at the preferred Shaft Site, possible effects to the visual quality of the surrounding area, and impacts to views of significant visual resources.

The Study Area for the analysis of the preferred Shaft Site's effect on urban design and visual resources is the area extending 400 feet from the boundaries of the Site in the alternate site configuration (Figure 4.6-1); this site configuration was used to define the Study Area boundaries because it would occupy a larger area than the base configuration, resulting in a larger Study Area. See Section 4.1, "Project Description," for more information on the two site configurations for construction at the preferred Site.

### 4.6.2 Existing Conditions

#### Urban Design

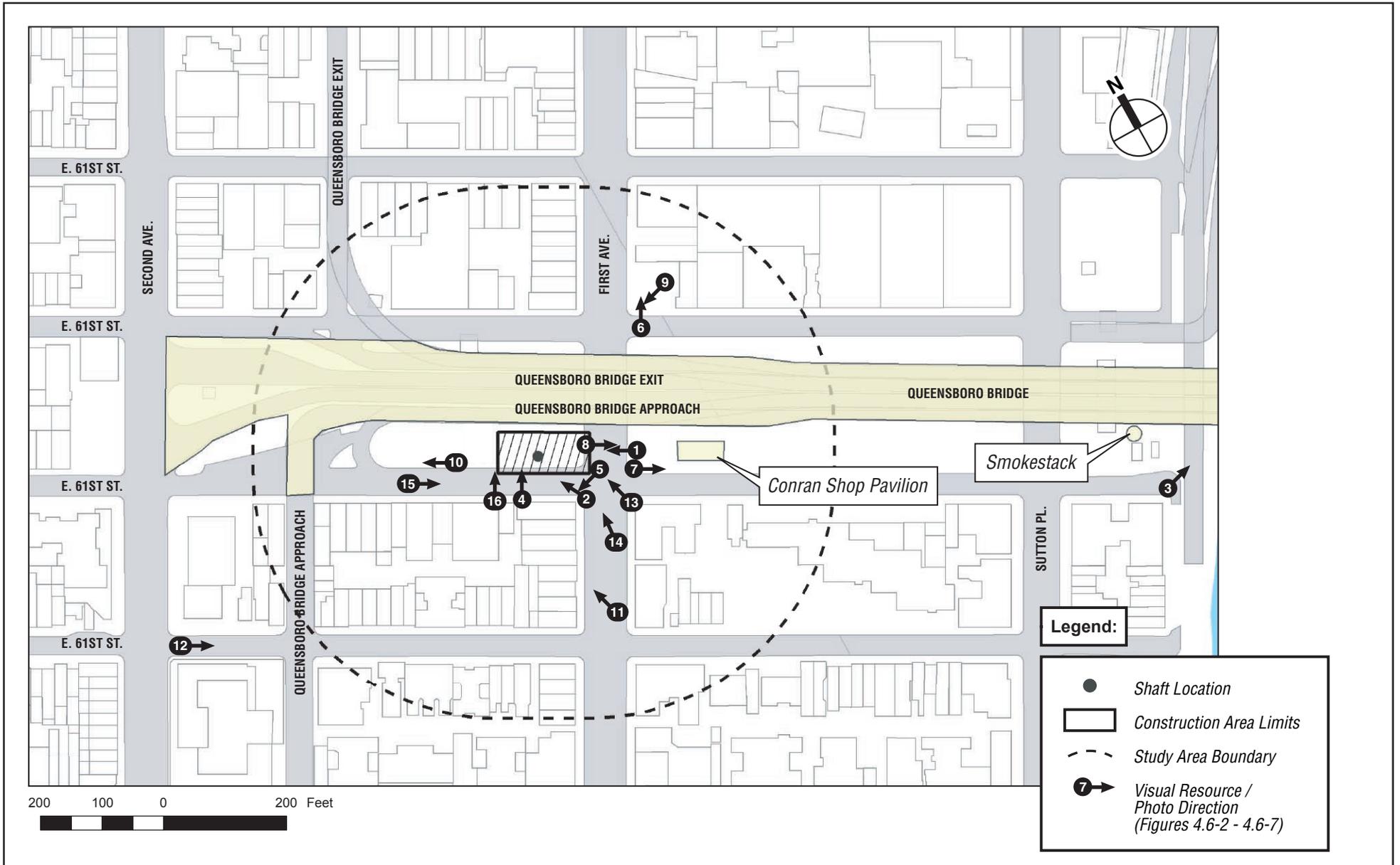
##### *Shaft 33B Site*

##### *Base Configuration*

The preferred Shaft Site, at the corner of E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue, consists predominantly of a paved lot surrounded by chain link fencing covered with green mesh and topped with razor wire. Parked vehicles and equipment used by the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) are visible behind the fence (Figure 4.6-2; Photograph 1). In the base configuration, the site would also include a portion of the adjacent sidewalks on E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue. At night, lighting is provided by standard cobrahead street lights around the site. West of the fence is a multi-use area, which is currently paved and has nine honey locust trees. As described in Section 4.1, approximately 1,800 square feet of this area would be used for construction staging during Stages 2 and 3 (23 months) of construction of Shaft 33B. With no seating areas or other improvements, the multi-use area appears as a landscaped sidewalk area adjacent to the Queensboro Bridge ("Bridge") (Figure 4.6-2, Photograph 2).

##### *Alternate Site Configuration*

The alternate site configuration for the preferred Shaft Site (see Section 4.1) would include the area described above, as well as the full width of the adjacent sidewalks on E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue and portions of the E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue roadways alongside the construction area. As described below, First Avenue is a major north-south thoroughfare and carries the majority of vehicular traffic through the area. E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street, an east-west thoroughfare, is less busy in this location because the traffic traveling east along the street



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**VISUAL RESOURCES**

**FIGURE 4.6-1**





View of preferred Shaft Site 1



View of multi-use area from west of First Avenue 2

Source: Field surveys, spring and summer 2005



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**PHOTOGRAPHS OF STUDY AREA**

**FIGURE 4.6-2**

funnels onto the Queensboro Bridge at Second Avenue. The sidewalks along these streets are of average width.

### *Study Area*

The urban design of the area surrounding the preferred Shaft Site is dominated by the Queensboro Bridge (Figure 4.6-3, Photograph 3). The granite walls of the main Bridge approach structure form the northern boundary of the site (Figure 4.6-3, Photograph 4). The Queensboro Bridge, which is a New York City Landmark and is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, is a through-type, multi-span cantilever Bridge constructed of steel with Beaux Arts granite components. North of the preferred 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.

The typical rectangular street grid of Manhattan is interrupted in this area by the approaches and exits from the Bridge, which cut through the mid-blocks between E. 58<sup>th</sup> and E. 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. First Avenue is a major north-south thoroughfare and carries the majority of vehicular traffic through the area. Because the Bridge approaches and exits create intersections that are difficult for pedestrians to access and cross, the pedestrian activity in the area is mainly located on First Avenue and the side streets east of First Avenue.

The topography of the Study Area slopes gradually downward from Second Avenue to Sutton Place/York Avenue. 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 Shaft Site, although the nine trees in the multi-use area are close to the sidewalk. Cobrahead lampposts are used in the Study Area except at the public plazas at First Avenue and E. 59<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> Streets (described below), where there are lampposts of two modern designs.

There is typical street furniture (e.g., bus shelters, newspaper bins) throughout the Study Area. The wires and support towers for the Roosevelt Island tram run above E. 60<sup>th</sup> Street. The Study Area consists of a mix of low- to high-rise buildings with mainly commercial and residential uses (Figure 4.6-4, Photograph 5). Buildings within the Study Area are primarily built to the street line; one exception is the 36-story modern apartment building at the northeast corner of First Avenue and E. 60<sup>th</sup> Street, which is set back behind a public plaza with rows of seats arranged back to back, interspersed with trees and lampposts (Figure 4.6-4, Photograph 6). In addition to medium- and large-scale apartment buildings, there are a number of 4- to 6-story tenement buildings and garages in the Study Area. The buildings are clad in a variety of materials, mostly brick and stucco.

The plaza at E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street (Bridgemarket) is a raised area with planters adjacent to the Queensboro Bridge approach ramp. It surrounds a striking, modern steel and glass pavilion currently housing the Terence Conran Shop, a retail home furnishings store (Figure 4.6-5, Photograph 7).



View of Queensboro Bridge from E. 59th Street 3



View of granite Bridge approach ramp behind preferred Shaft Site 4

Source: Field surveys, spring and summer 2005



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**FIGURE 4.6-3**



South side of E. 59th Street, view west of First Avenue 5



Bridgetower Place plaza at northeast corner of E. 60th Street and First Avenue 6

Source: Field surveys, spring and summer 2005



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**FIGURE 4.6-4**



View of Bridgemarket plaza and Terence Conran shop 7



View east from edge of preferred Shaft Site 8

Source: Field surveys, spring and summer 2005

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**FIGURE 4.6-5**



## **Visual Resources**

### *Shaft 33B Site*

There are no visual resources located on the preferred Shaft Site, in either the base or alternate site configuration. From the edges of the site (on the public side of the fence), various elements of the Queensboro Bridge can be seen, including the dramatic arch across First Avenue, which is roofed with beige Guastavino tiles (for more information, see Section 4.5, “Historic Resources”); the approach ramps and viaduct, which are clad in rusticated granite; and the Manhattan-side steel tower. Also visible in views east from the site is a tall and looming, tan brick smokestack, located immediately adjacent to the Bridge near the East River. The modern glass pavilion of the Terence Conran Shop, set in the Bridgemarket Plaza, is also visible from this area (Figure 4.6-5, Photograph 8).

### *Study Area*

From the Study Area, the preferred Shaft Site can only be seen within the immediately adjacent area: the area along E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street east of the Bridge viaduct, and the area along First Avenue south of the First Avenue arch. Limited views to the Shaft Site are also available beneath the First Avenue arch from the plaza at E. 60<sup>th</sup> Street (Figure 4.6-6, Photograph 9). Visual resources that can be seen within the Study Area are the Queensboro Bridge, the Conran Shop pavilion, and the tall brick smokestack (described above), all of which can be viewed along E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and from First Avenue at E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street. Views east along E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street (past the Bridge viaduct) are of the Conran Shop pavilion, the Manhattan-side steel tower of the Bridge, and the tall brick smokestack (see Figure 4.6-5, Photograph 8, above). Views west along the street are of the granite-clad Bridge viaduct (Figure 4.6-6, Photograph 10). The East River cannot easily be seen from E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street in the Study Area.

The focus of views north along the view corridor of First Avenue is the First Avenue arch, which carries above it the approach ramp to the Queensboro Bridge; views south do not have any distinguishing features (Figure 4.6-7, Photograph 11). E. 58<sup>th</sup> Street rises from Second Avenue to the Bridge approach, then slopes downward toward First Avenue, and does not include any important views (Figure 4.6-7, Photograph 12). The residences at 311 and 313 E. 58<sup>th</sup> Street (between Second Avenue and the Bridge approach ramp), which are New York City Landmarks and are listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, are not considered to be visual resources for the purposes of this analysis as they are not prominent in surrounding view corridors and, furthermore, cannot be seen in views to or from the site.

## **4.6.3 Future Conditions Without the Project**

### **Urban Design**

#### *Shaft 33B Site*

In the Future Without the Project, the urban design of the preferred Shaft Site (in either the base or alternate site configuration) will not change. The fenced area will continue to be used by



View south to preferred Shaft Site from plaza at E. 60th Street and First Avenue 9



View west of E. 59th Street from multi-use area 10

Source: Field surveys, spring and summer 2005



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**FIGURE 4.6-6**



View north to preferred Shaft Site of First Avenue from E. 58th Street 11



View east on E. 58th Street from Second Avenue 12

Source: Field surveys, spring and summer 2005



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**FIGURE 4.6-7**

NYCDOT for Bridge maintenance activities and as a parking and access area for the vehicles and personnel of NYSDOT and DSNY. The sidewalks and streetbeds of First Avenue and E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street will remain in the current condition, and the multi-use area will continue to be an open, paved area with trees. As discussed in Section 4.2, “Land Use and Community Facilities, Zoning, and Public Policy,” 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 is currently in review and there is no firm 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 the place of the existing chain link fence.

In addition, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYCDPR) is planning enhancements for the multi-use area upon completion of the Queensboro 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. For more information, see Section 4.3, “Open Space.”

#### *Study Area*

The development of a Ronald McDonald House and Rockefeller University dormitory on E. 60<sup>th</sup> Street between First and York Avenues could result in minor changes to the streetscape on E. 60<sup>th</sup> Street, such as the addition of street furniture, lampposts, awnings, or signboards. Ongoing rehabilitation of the Queensboro Bridge also could result in minor changes to the streetscape of the Study Area. Overall, in the Future Without the Project the urban design of the Study Area would remain similar to existing conditions.

### **Visual Resources**

#### *Shaft 33B Site*

In the Future Without the Project, it is anticipated that the 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. None of the anticipated projects in the surrounding area would be expected to alter existing views.

#### *Study Area*

The proposed Ronald McDonald House and Rockefeller University developments described above are not expected to significantly change views to visual resources within the Study Area. As they will be located within existing block forms, they will not eliminate views eastward to the Queensboro Bridge.

#### 4.6.4 Future Conditions With the Project

##### Construction

###### *Urban Design*

###### *Shaft 33B Site*

###### Base Configuration

Construction of Shaft 33B at the preferred Shaft Site would bring more intensive construction activity to the site. This would change views of the site, although overall the site would remain similar in visual character to its appearance today and in the Future Without the Project. During construction, a 20-foot-high solid barrier would surround the preferred Shaft Site, creating a visual buffer that would shield views of activities and equipment on the site. Figure 4.6-8 provides illustrations of the type of barrier that might be used around the perimeter of the preferred Shaft Site under either the base or alternate site configuration during construction. Figure 4.6-9 shows construction activities on another shaft site, to illustrate how construction for Shaft 33B might look.

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 will continue in the Future Without the Project. The only equipment visible above the barrier from street level would be a crane and, possibly, a concrete truck enclosure. In the base configuration (see Section 4.1, “Project Description”), the barrier would block off the area that is currently fenced and used by NYCDOT as well as a portion of the sidewalks on E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue. The narrower sidewalk would represent a change from existing conditions, but would be similar in nature to narrowed sidewalks common at construction zones throughout Manhattan. As discussed above, Community Board 8’s 197-a plan recommends streetscape enhancements surrounding the NYCDOT site. Those streetscape improvements would not occur until completion of the Shaft 33B construction at the preferred Shaft Site, but the construction area would be buffered instead by the construction barrier.

In addition, approximately 1,800 square feet of the multi-use area would become inaccessible to the public and would be enclosed within the construction area during 23 months (Stages 2 and 3) of construction. Two trees located in this area also would be removed during construction. The loss of these trees would not be considered a significant adverse urban design impact. Following completion of Stage 3 of construction, the directly affected portion of the multi-use area would be restored in coordination with NYCDOT and the community as applicable.

As described in Chapter 2, some limited construction work would occur on the Shaft Site at night in the second shift (3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.) and in the third shift (11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.) during the three-month-long raise bore operation. To facilitate this work, lighting would be installed around the Site. This lighting would be noticeable from the surrounding area, but would not be substantially different from the lighting that already illuminates the Study Area at night.



Illustrative rendering of construction barrier surrounding preferred Shaft Site, **13**  
 looking west on E. 59th Street



Illustrative rendering of construction barrier surrounding preferred Shaft Site, **14**  
 looking north on First Avenue

Source: Field surveys, spring and summer 2005

NOTE: This figure has been updated for the Final EIS



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**ILLUSTRATIVE RENDERINGS OF CONSTRUCTION BARRIER**

**FIGURE 4.6-8**



View of a Con Edison Shaft Site at First Avenue and E. 36th Street

Source: Field surveys, spring and summer 2005



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**VIEW OF EXAMPLE SHAFT SITE**

**FIGURE 4.6-9**

### Alternate Site Configuration

With the alternative site configuration, the changes to the preferred Shaft Site would be similar to those of the base configuration, except that the area to be enclosed behind the construction barrier would be larger, encompassing the full width of the sidewalks adjacent to the construction site on E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue and a portion of the E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue roadways. A temporary pedestrian walkway would be created along E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and along First Avenue, as is typical for construction sites in Manhattan. As with the base configuration, during Stages 2 and 3, the construction area would also include an 1,800-square-foot portion of the multi-use area, including a paved area and two trees. The construction barrier and the use of the sidewalk and a portion of the adjacent roadways would be typical of construction sites throughout the City, and would not be anticipated to result in potential significant adverse impacts to the urban design of the preferred Shaft Site, a portion of which is already fenced and in use for construction activities.

### *Study Area*

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. As noted above, the base configuration would use a portion of the adjacent sidewalk and the alternate site configuration would use the full sidewalk and a portion of the nearest travel lanes. These changes are typical of construction projects in Manhattan, and would not endure beyond the 52-month construction period. Therefore, due to the limited nature of the potential changes, no potential significant adverse impacts to the urban design of the Study Area are anticipated as a result of construction activities required for Shaft 33B.

### *Visual Resources*

#### *Shaft 33B Site*

### Base Configuration

The barrier that would surround the preferred Shaft 33B Site during construction would buffer views from the Study Area from the construction activities. In this respect, it would be similar in nature to the fence that surrounds a portion of the preferred Shaft Site today. Views across the preferred Shaft Site to the surrounding area would not be adversely affected. During Stages 2 and 3 of the construction period, the enclosure of a portion of the multi-use area would temporarily block views of a portion of the stone wall of the Queensboro Bridge approach structure immediately north of the multi-use area, but most of the wall would remain visible from the Study Area.

The Queensboro Bridge's Manhattan-side steel tower and the brick smokestack would be visible looking east across the preferred Shaft Site above this barrier. As noted above in the discussion of existing conditions, the views of the Conran Shop pavilion and some of the Bridge elements are from the public edges of the Site, outside the chain-link fence; in the Future With the Project,

these views would still be available on the public side of the construction enclosure. Therefore, the base configuration would not have a significant adverse impact on visual resources.

#### Alternate Site Configuration

As described above, with the alternative site configuration portions of E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue and the full width of the adjacent sidewalks would be behind the construction barrier, as well as the area described above in the base configuration. This would remove the E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street sidewalk as a public place from which the Queensboro Bridge approach structure and other visual resources could be seen, but these visual resources would remain visible from other locations in the Study Area. Views to surrounding visual resources from E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue would still be available from other portions of these streets. Therefore, the alternative site configuration would not have a significant adverse impact on visual resources.

#### *Study Area*

During construction, the enclosure surrounding the preferred Shaft Site would be visible along E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street from east of the Queensboro Bridge viaduct, and along First Avenue from E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street south. 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. Views of the Queensboro Bridge, the Conran Shop pavilion, and the tall brick smokestack would still be available along E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street and from First Avenue at E. 59<sup>th</sup> Street. 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 and would not adversely affect the views. Therefore, due to the limited nature of the potential changes, the construction activities for the project are not anticipated to result in any potential significant adverse impacts to the visual resources of the Study Area.

#### *Conclusions*

The introduction of more intensive construction activities on the preferred Shaft Site under either the base or alternate site configuration would change the appearance of the Site, but overall the Site would remain similar in visual character to its appearance today. The use of sidewalk areas in the base configuration and sidewalk and roadway areas in the alternate site configuration would be similar in nature to construction zones throughout the City. After Stage 3, the multi-use area would be restored in coordination with NYCDOT and the community as applicable, and its temporary use would not be considered a potential significant adverse impact on urban design. Overall, the project's construction activities would not involve any changes to block form, street pattern or hierarchy, natural features, or building arrangement and would not be anticipated to result in potential significant adverse impacts on urban design. The 20-foot-high construction barrier around the preferred Shaft Site would create a visual buffer that would shield views of activities and equipment on the Site, but this barrier would not substantially block views of visual resources nearby. Therefore, the construction at Shaft 33B would not be anticipated to result in potential significant adverse impacts on visual resources. A combined assessment of potential visual impacts from construction of Shaft 33B at the preferred Shaft Site and its water

main connections is presented in Section 5.6, “Urban Design and Visual Resources,” in Chapter 5, “Water Main Connections.”

## Operation

### *Urban Design*

#### *Shaft 33B Site*

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. Figure 4.6-10 provides illustrations of how the air vents and hydrants could look during operation of the project. These structures would be visible additions to the streetscape, but are relatively unobtrusive and small in size and therefore would not have a potential adverse impact on urban design. 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. Therefore, no potential significant adverse impacts are anticipated to occur to urban design of the Shaft Site because of operation of the project.

#### *Study Area*

The project would not involve any changes to block form; street pattern or hierarchy; topography; natural features; streetscape; or building arrangement, bulk, use, or type within the Study Area. Therefore, no potential significant adverse impacts on urban design of the Study Area are expected because of the operation of the project.

### *Visual Resources*

#### *Shaft 33B Site*

There are no visual resources located on the preferred Shaft Site. Views to the Queensboro Bridge, the tall brick smokestack, and the Conran Shop pavilion from the Shaft Site would not be altered by the introduction of the air vent and hydrants onto the Site. If NYCDOT provides a low wall or landscaping around its site in accordance with Community Board 8’s recommendations, this edge treatment would not be affected by the presence of shaft-related features on the site. Following Stage 3 of construction, the multi-use area would be restored as prescribed by NYCDOT and the community, as appropriate. Overall, therefore, the appearance of the preferred Shaft Site would be similar in nature to the Future Without the Project once Shaft 33B is complete and no potential significant adverse impacts are anticipated.

#### *Study Area*

Views from the Study Area to the Queensboro Bridge, the tall brick smokestack, and the Conran Shop pavilion would not be altered by the introduction of the air vent and hydrants onto the Site. Overall, the appearance of the preferred Shaft Site would be very similar to the Future Without the Project once Shaft 33B is operational, and no potential adverse effect on visual resources is anticipated to occur as a result of the operation of the project. ◆



View east on E. 59th Street 15



View north on E. 59th Street 16

Source: Field surveys, spring and summer 2005



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**ILLUSTRATIVE RENDERING,  
 COMPLETED SHAFT FEATURES**

FIGURE 4.6-10