

Minutes of the Chinatown Working Group (CWG) Full Group Meeting
4pm to 6pm, Monday, December 5, 2011
American Legion L.T. Kimlau Post 1291

Voting members present: 61 Delancey Street Tenants Association (Zhi Qin Zheng); American Legion Post 1291 (Gabe Mui); Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (Bethany Li); Bowery Alliance of Neighbors (Mitchell Grubler); Chinese Progressive Association (Mae Lee); Chinese Staff and Workers Association (Wendy Cheung, Josephine Lee, Mooi Yang); Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (Jason Chan, Wen Liu, Esther Wang, Billie Zhu); Community Board 2 (Ed Ma, Antony Wong); Community Board 3 (Gigi Lee, John Leo); Hester Street Collaborative (Anne Frederick); Indochina Sino-American Community Center (Gin Lee); National Mobilization Against Sweatshops (Michael Lalan).

Press: Sing Tao (Lotus Chao, Bonnie Li); World Journal (Yichen Tu).

Also present: Benjamin Chu (Lehman College / Health and Hospitals Corp.); Rob Hollander (Lower East Side Residents for Responsible Development); Charles Lai (Chinatown History Project); Irving Lee, Jan Lee, Margarita Ng (Property Taxpayers); Susan Yung (Bowery Poetry Club).

Meeting called to order, 4:15pm, Mae Lee and Antony Wong facilitating, Jason Chan translating.

1. Approval of the agenda. No objections.

>>Agenda approved.

2. Approval of the November minutes. No objections.

>>November minutes approved.

3. Update on the CAPZ agreements and the RFP for a consultant (presentation delayed, waiting for Michael Levine)

4. Update on the Economic Team meeting, Mae Lee presenting.

-Mae Lee: The Economic Team met after a one year hiatus. The group reviewed about 10 pages of the 40-page Economic Preliminary Action Plan. The group will continue on Monday, December 12, at 3:30pm, in Community Board 1's 7th floor conference room. All are encouraged to attend.

-Irving Lee: What is the process following the Economic Team meetings?

-Mae Lee: The Plan will come to the CWG for review. After that, CWG members will have time to bring back to their organizations before CWG votes on it. The decision making process at community board will require us to make a presentation to CB 1, Cb2, CB3 before their CWG representatives can vote.

5. Update on the Implementation Task Force. Mae Lee and Anne Frederick presenting.

-Mae Lee: The Education, Parks and Immigration parts of the Task Force have scheduled many meetings with community boards, elected officials and city agencies (Dept. of Parks and Dept of Education). We went first to the community boards because they have been supportive and been giving good feedback. Met Councilmember Chin's office (Matt Viggiano and Councilmember Chin). Also met with CB1's Planning and Infrastructure Committee and CB3's Human Services Committee, and the Manhattan Borough President's office. We still have to go to CB2 Social Services, CB1 Youth and Education, State Senator Squadron. After that to the Dept. of Parks and Dept. of Education.

- Anne Frederick: We chose priorities from the Parks and Open Spaces Action Plan that were doable and comprehensive that touched on all the parks in Chinatown. We asked that all the signage be translated. Councilmember Chin's office recommended that we identify specific sites where signage should be translated. A couple of years back, a few elder residents were summonsed for practicing Tai Chi in a children's playground with English-only signage prohibiting adults unaccompanied with a child. The Task Force is currently focusing on reclaiming Park buildings for community use, especially for youth programming. There should be a community process for the use of such buildings. The issues in Columbus Park are focused on rat control and maintenance, which requires addressing the businesses around the park.
- Rob Hollander: Maybe CWG should talk to NYPD about their summons policy towards elder Tai Chi practice.
- Anne Frederick: It was a city-wide, non local sweep, an incident that happened a couple of years ago and has not happened since.
- Irving Lee: Is the soccer playing in Roosevelt Park local or city-wide?
- Anne Frederick: Mostly city-wide. Organized soccer groups have an edge. The Action Plan wants to encourage more flexibility for local groups.
- Irving Lee: Were the summonses for Tai Chi rescinded?
- Anne Frederick: I believe so.
- Ed Ma: A question of the ownership of the parks. NYPD needs more understanding of cultural practices in Chinatown, like Tai Chi among the elderly.
- Irving Lee: Where is Tai Chi restricted?
- Anne Frederick: Only in playgrounds.
- Mae Lee: The Education Task Force is focused on the doable or really important and pressing. Co-location of schools (multiple schools brought into one building) has created overcrowding. Not a charter school issue, but a regular school issue. Needs to have more of a process including parents and principals. We asked that NYC Dept. of Education allow principals a time to meet regularly with each other as they used to. Eliminate high-stake testing. Such tests disadvantage second language learners. This is a state-wide and federal policy, so it is a broader challenge. We also asked that the NYC Dept. of Education monitor local development and construction that might impinge on or compromise school buildings, and protect the schools from neighborhood development. We asked for Mandarin translation for parents at meetings. Finally, we asked for a family resource center in the Chinatown area. The City Council approved a family resource center in each borough. The Manhattan center will be in Washington Heights, but we would like to see one in Chinatown. We were told to provide documentation of specifics of translation lacking, and more details on a family resource center: where would it be placed, who would run it etc. So there needs to be more organizing around it. Eliminating high stakes testing would require a co-ordinated effort beyond just CWG.
- Mitchell: Any discussion about the school closing on East Broadway?
- Gigi: Sheldon Silver's community liaison said that the Speaker will advocate strongly for keeping that school open.

6. Update on the RFP. Rob Hollander presenting an amendment to the RFP.

- Rob Hollander: The RFP doesn't mention the future of Asian immigration in Chinatown. Chinatown has long been an immigrant community, but since 2000, Chinatown has lost 15-17% (4,500-6,000) Asians. Chinatown is shrinking because new immigrants are going directly to Sunset Park. Losing the immigrant base will gentrify the neighborhood and transform its character. So I asked that the RFP mention "future Asian immigrants/immigration."
- Esther Wang: Have there been any other changes to the RFP or the CAPZ agreements.
- Rob Hollander: None. There is some feeling that the Cultural and Historical Preservation Plan should conform its language to the CAPZ agreements.

- Ed Ma: Chinatown serves ethnic Chinese from all over the metropolitan area. Some businesses depend on outsiders. Chinatown should have more social services for new immigrants and senior citizens.
- Rob Hollander: AAFNY showed in their study that one of the few commercial sectors that has been successful and was not hurt by 9/11 was the local services to the recent Fujianese immigrants.
- Mae Lee: Social services for immigrants and seniors is part of the Action Plan, but the immediate efforts are focused on doable projects. However, the family resource center would help provide social services. The center draws parents to the school, and then the parents are given further social services, for example, ESL and computer training. So it is a step in the direction of increased social services.
- Josephine Lee: The Cultural and Historical Preservation Plan should conform to CAPZ...
- Mitchell Grubler: ... but it's going piecemeal to the community boards ...
- Josephine Lee: ... but it should still be a single plan, not piecemeal. Regarding the CAPZ agreements, Community Board has stated that CWG must not touch Seward Park Urban Renewal Area. But there have been development and displacement pressures since the rezoning of the East Village and Lower East Side. So CAPZ feels that rezoning should be reconsidered as well as SPURA, which could be developed for affordable housing which our community desperately needs.
- Mitchell Grubler: Isn't CAPZ presenting its agreements to CB3's Land Use Committee tonight?
- Josephine Lee: How do we respond to CB3's written position that CWG must not touch SPURA and the rezoning areas?
- Mitchell Grubler: We have to wait until they respond to our presentation tonight.
- Ed Ma: To CB3 members: why can't CWG touch these areas? Chinatown was not brought into the rezoning process until the last moment. Why must Chinatown be repeatedly excluded in CB3 land use discussions?
- Gigi Li: The Land Use Committee may vote up or down, and at the full board meeting that decision will be voted up or down. If CB3 votes it down, then John Leo and I am obligated to vote against the plan. Our votes need not influence any other member's vote.
- Mae Lee: Let's see what happens at CB3. This has happened before. When CB3 did not vote for the Transportation Preliminary Action Plan, CB3 gave us their reasons. The Transportation Team then revised its plan. Let's see what CB3 says tonight, and continue from there.
- Michael Lalan: We should not be pushed aside by some interests in CB3.
- Esther Wang: The CAPZ agreements were carefully chosen and are reasonable. DCP often does re-look at rezonings, specifically under Bloomberg. CAPZ does not want to completely revise the process, but to consider the issues of affordable housing.
- Josephine Lee: Historically, why are we here today as CWG? Why were we formed? Because the city has consistently excluded Chinatown and the people of Chinatown from its urban planning process. That's why the CWG was created – because the city would not give the Chinatown community its voice, so we are here to have some kind of control over how our neighborhood is developed. The city opened an OTB parlor in Chinatown saying that the Chinese love gambling. The city pushed development into Chinatown saying that the Chinese love tall buildings and like to live really crowded together. Either we can defer to CB3 or we can, as a community, have a position and not let the CB or the city impose their agenda on us. We need to be stronger as a group to lay out what we want.
- Ed Ma: Essential to speak up to impact the process.
- Rob Hollander: Even though we are coming late to the SPURA process, we aren't saying anything that GOLES didn't already say about SPURA. We are not planning on SPURA, but rather just stating a principle on affordable housing. That aside, reviewing rezonings is standard practice called "corrective action." Furthermore, CB3 has no opinion on the current zoning. The rezoning has been successful. It's done. CB3 has not reviewed it and voted to affirm the current zoning. In fact CB3 never approved the rezoning. It maintained 11 points of disagreement with the rezoning. During the

ULURP, CB3 restated its 11 points, saying that CB3 wanted DCP to proceed with its rezoning, however CB3 still maintained those 11 points of disagreement. So CB3 never approved the rezoning as DCP presented it. Ed Ma asks why CB3 insists that CWG cannot touch the rezoning and SPURA, and for the record, CWG has not been given any answer to that question.

-Lotus Chao: How do you know about the CB3 position?

-Rob Hollander: Because I attended every CB3 committee meeting on the rezoning from September 2005 all the way through the completion.

-Mae Lee: Do we all agree to add "future Asian immigrants/immigration" to the RFP.

>>Unanimous: the RFP will include future Asian immigrants/immigration in its work.

-Jan Lee: **The Economic Team** now has property owners, so the team is now reflective of local property owners, which was not previously true. The Economic Preliminary Action Plan contained a lot of vague, bureaucratic and confusing language. We hope to pare down and clarify that language so that it will have a broader appeal and can be understood clearly. Also the data were based on out-of-date studies; the property owners will help provide current data based on their direct, daily experience. The BID has also changed the dynamic. We also felt that references to "old building stock" must be made more specific, lot-by-lot. We also dealt with sidewalk space, which is controversial in Chinatown.

-Mae Lee: The Economic Team will meet again on Monday, December 12. Please come. Those who used to come to the work team meetings should continue to attend the meetings. The minutes will be distributed. A draft of what was agreed will also be distributed. An update about Economic Development workteam had refrained from mentioning details of what was agreed upon in the meeting because it is not clear what was agreed upon. It will be made clear with the following process: minutes and a new draft plan will be distributed to those present at the meetings. Those present at meetings will have a chance to review, amend, discuss and approve the draft. Then it will be presented at the full group.

-Jan Lee: We were asked to view the documents on which the PAP was based, but the links are all dead.

-Rob Hollander: The PAP bases its claim of "bad image of Chinatown" on the Asian American Federation of New York's (AAFNY) 2008 study. AAFNY mentions bad service, but doesn't mention the stealing of waiters' tips by management. Since the purpose of tips is to improve service, it is disturbing that AAFNY complains of "gruffness" and poor service, recommending that service be improved, but doesn't ask management not to steal tips, which is in fact illegal. The "bad image" is based solely on a Zagat survey compilation. AAFNY mentions that local-serving Fujianese businesses are a Chinatown success. No Fujianese participated in the Zagat survey. Moreover, the survey doesn't show "gruffness" or "bad image" – Chinese restaurants in Chinatown are 31% cheaper in price and 33% less attractive in décor, but only 17% lower in service. Their conclusion: the low prices (which are the key to their success) prevent investment in décor. But local services, which are successful, don't invest in décor because they don't want to push away their market base which is immigrant and working class. Instead, AAFNY recommends pushing the local businesses' market base out of their economy and risk marketing to outsiders where there is no guarantee of success.

-Mae Lee: AAFNY is not present at today's meeting now. The purpose of the Economic Team is to review the plan and make suggestions to improve it. So we hope that you will come to the meeting and participate.

7. Community announcements. Esther presents the CAAAV survey on Chinatown zoning.

-Esther Wang: CAAAV has produced a survey over the summer about development in Chinatown.

CAAAV held two panels on Monday with other organizations with local Chinatown organizers, land use experts and neighborhood organizers who had undergone rezonings in their neighborhoods.

- Irving Lee: Has the CWG ever discussed or responded to the recently passed BID, which has implications for CWG and contradicts the purpose of the CWG?
 - Mae Lee: No. We are saving that for the Economic Team.
 - Michael Lalan: CWG should take time to discuss the BID.
 - Mae Lee: That discussion will be made within the context of the Economic Plan.
 - Antony Wong: Manhattan community boards are looking for new members. Please apply on Manhattan Borough President's website by January 15, 2012.**
 - Ed Ma: There will be a march from the Army Recruitment Center at 143 Chambers Street to Columbus Park and vigil for Danny Chen on December 15.**
 - Antony Wong: There have been requests to change the next scheduled CWG full group meeting from January 2, 2012 to January 9, 2012 at 5:30pm.**
- >>Next CWG full group meeting January 9, 2012 5:30pm.**
Meeting adjourned, 5:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Rob Hollander, Recording Secretary

Minutes approved at the Chinatown Working Group Full Meeting, January 9, 2012