

Minutes of the Chinatown Working Group (CWG) Full Group Meeting
5:30pm-7pm, Monday, September 9, 2013
American Legion L.T. Kimlau Post 1291

Voting members present: American Legion Post 1291 (Gabe Mui); Asian American Arts Centre (Robert Lee); Bowery Alliance of Neighbors (Mitchell Grubler); Chinese Staff and Workers Association (Wendy Cheng, Wah Lee); Committee Against Anti Asian Violence (Helena Wong, Billie Zhu); Community Board 2 (Antony Wong); Community Board 3 (MyPhuong Chung, Gigi Li); Create in Chinatown (Amy Chin); Good Old Lower East Side (Ginger Lopez); National Mobilization Against Sweatshops (David Tieu, Louise Velez); Two Bridges Neighborhood Council (Wilson Soo).

Planning consultant: Jocelyne Chait, Eva Hanhardt.

Also present: Rob Hollander (Lower East Side Residents for Responsible Development); Michael Kralovich (Lower Manhattan Development Corporation), Irving Lee (Property Tax Payers Association); Sam Stein; Susan Yung.

Media: China Press (Sophia Su); Sing Tao Daily News (Bonnie Lee).

Meeting called to order at 5:45pm, Wilson Soo and Antony Wong presiding.

1. Introductions
2. Agenda and Minutes: approved by all present
3. Report on the community workshop August 22, Jocelyne Chait (Pratt) presenting

Jocelyne Chait: 73 attended, fewer than we'd hoped. We presented our research findings, then our strategies. Handouts were distributed in all three languages. The group broke out by topic. We felt we did not have enough time and were rushed at end. We didn't get as much input as we would have liked. We will be meeting with CWG member organizations and non CWG stakeholder organizations to go into more depth on issues people feel are important. We're now listing those organizations that have met and those we have not yet met. There will be one more public presentation, maybe a final recommendation.

CB3 asked us to present to them our current work 6:30 tomorrow. It's an opportunity not only to look at what we've done but to look at issues that remain on the table.

Eva Hanhardt: We have not determined the boundaries of the Special District. We will identify areas that have characteristics similar to those within the RFP boundary, areas that cannot be dealt with adequately through a contextual zoning, thus justifying their inclusion in a special district.

Mitchell Grubler: Are there any areas in the double-asterisk zone that are not included in the East Village/LES rezoning?

Rob Hollander: Yes. Areas east of Norfolk/south of Houston were not rezoned, and east of Essex/south of Delancey were not rezoned.

Mitchell Grubler: Those areas should be looked at.

Eva Hanhardt: We are looking at those. The context must be researched. Areas in Little Italy and in the Chinatown preservation area share those characteristics. We will present these findings to CB2 and 3, recommending that our suggestions for the special district might be applied there as well.

We are not in a position of using ethnicity as a zoning criterion. We mention it in the early part of the report, but ethnicity is not considered a criterion for zoning. Instead we point to the uses, the residential character, rent burden, mixed use, building types.

Irving Lee: Taxes has an immediate effect. Any way to cap taxes?

Eva Hanhardt: Not in zoning, but we will make such recommendations for commercial tax relief for owners.

Helena Wong: Will our workshop recommendations be reflected in the presentation? They should be included.

Jocelyn Chait: Yes they will be presented.

Eva Hanhardt: Let us know any specific suggestions you'd like us to present.

Wendy Cheung: The local AMI should be spelled out clearly.

Jocelyne Chait: We do include it in our map. We will also be referring to the lowest income bands.

Wendy Cheung: We agreed that we wanted 60% affordable housing for private developments and 100% affordable housing on public land.

Eva Hanhardt: The only place where the income bands exist are in the Inclusionary Housing bonuses. Currently there is no language for those percents in the zoning text.

Wendy Cheung: Why can't we include what we actually want.

Eva Hanhardt: I am looking at other means beyond zoning for more affordable housing.

David Tieu: You should include it anyway. Let CB3 reject it. Let us try to create a precedent. Pratt should not do CB3's work but our work.

Eva Hanhardt: We are not rejecting it. We are including it, with the best back-up and technical language. It's in two places. We do recommend it as policy. It can't be just a zoning recommendation.

Rob Hollander: You ask for 100% affordable housing on NYCHA. Isn't that what we want?

Wendy Cheung: But not just NYCHA.

David Tieu: NYCHA should be changed to public land. Schools and post offices...

Mitchell Grubler: ...libraries...

David Tieu: ...are being sold for private housing.

Eva Hanhardt: I think public transfers go through ULURP. I will confirm that for you. It's important to mention NYCHA specifically.

Rob Hollander: Mentioning all public property will offend CB3 because they will interpret it as SPURA, which they are sensitive about. I also find Pratt's approach to the area north of Grand Street persuasive. It puts the ball in CB3's court to justify why they didn't include those areas in the rezoning and gives Pratt the moral and planning high ground.

Wendy Cheung: How are we going to address the areas that were upzoned in 2008?

Eva Hanhardt: We have to bring CB3 to an understanding of the consequences of the rezoning and bring them to appreciate that these are areas that share the same challenges and can have the same solutions as the ones we're recommending for a special district.

Jocelyne Chait: Our task is to make a compelling argument for them to make their own decision, seeing that these areas have the same context and challenges. Rather than tell them what they must do, we will provide them with the argument to do it.

Rob Hollander: As activists you know that you have to go to people where they are and then bring them where you are. Pratt has a brilliant strategy to show CB3 the consequences of the rezoning and the continuity of the overall neighborhood. It's the first step in the process.

Wendy Cheung: We shouldn't shy away from making the demands that need to be made, particularly on Chrystie Street.

Eva Hanhardt: The weakness of the rezoning was the absence of any anti-harassment and anti-demolition provision. The activity you see would have occurred differently if there were such provisions. And harassment will occur even in the downzoned areas. So we have a strong case for those provisions beyond the special district.

No one is saying that groups shouldn't push for more.

Robert Lee: Can we move on to talk about cultural assets. I don't see these in the presentations. In the past, food was the platform that brought people to Chinatown and made it prosper. In the future, culture can be another platform. Great talent is hidden among the people of Chinatown. People go to China to expand their horizons. That can be true of Chinatown too. Missing in this presentation is a cultural center. Also translation services can be an asset for Chinatown. It's an opportunity for people to see things in fresh and new ways.

Eva Hanhardt: Would you have language for that? We talk about allowing services.

Robert Lee: I will come up with that.

Irving Lee: What will the process be for amendment and finalization?

Rob Hollander: These are just recommendations to the CWG.

Eva Hanhardt: We will include a draft special district. If there is no consensus, we will offer you alternatives. But we will give specific language for you both in the district and in areas beyond the district. We will also offer policy recommendations beyond a special district.

Wilson Soo: As with all decisions, CWG will have a review and vote.

Irving Lee: We should challenge the closure of Park Row.

Eva Hanhardt: That is in the transportation action plan.

Wilson Soo: The CB3 Land Use presentation will be held tomorrow at 6:30pm at Kenton Hall/Project Renewal, 333 Bowery.

4. Other business

Rob Hollander: I'd like to ask LMDC if there are any unspent funds held by LMDC that Daniel Squadron promised us would replace the \$15,000 which he previously promised to give to Jim Solomon for his out-of-pocket expenses.

Antony Wong: Michael is new and so wouldn't know about the funds.

Michael Kralovich: LMDC did sign off on those funds. You will have the full grant plus \$15,000.

Antony Wong: We will check on this with Michael Zisser.

Wendy Cheng: Translated Wah Lee's concerns about the upcoming CB3 Land Use committee meeting.

Rob Hollander: This seems a tactical dispute, not a disagreement on goals or strategy.

Wendy Cheung: If we leave these issues unclear, then our goals won't be understood and we are less likely to get what we want.

Jocelyne Chait: It's a question of approach and tactics. We want to keep the lines of communication so that we can eventually obtain those goals, and not have the gates shut at the start.

David Tieu: I'd like CWG to sign on to this letter for CB3. I understand that CB3 is trying to hijack the process and refuses to reconsider the rezoning area.

Rob Hollander: CB3 has not made clear that it will obstruct anything -- they haven't seen anything yet. Pratt is just making CB3 answerable. Wendy is right that it leaves an ambiguity, but the CB members are not stupid. They know the issues.

Wilson Soo: Meeting adjourned at 7:12pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Rob Hollander, Sec'y