I. Priorities

The Community Economic Goal
The economy of Chinatown should benefit the residents of Chinatown. Development in Chinatown should benefit the residents of Chinatown.

Fundamental Principle of Respect
Any successful vision of Chinatown’s future must respect the reliable, steady core source of Chinatown’s economy which has been proven over the years to be the local Chinatown goods and services offered to the local Chinatown residents that employ local Chinatown labor. Speculation in Chinatown must not intervene to displace or undermine this reliable core of Chinatown’s commerce and overall economy.

II. Direction

Research Goal
Economic research should discover the fundamental and reliable sources of Chinatown’s economy that benefit the local residents, analyze their character and means, financial sources, material capital, labor resources and space.

A consideration of the future of Chinatown must study and analyze what is currently successful in Chinatown that benefits the local residents, what has succeeded in the past in Chinatown that benefited the local residents, what is falling in Chinatown, what has failed in the past, and what is succeeding in Chinatown that does not benefit the residents of Chinatown or that primarily benefits others than the residents of Chinatown.

Having identified the successes that benefit the local residents/labor/small businesses, research should identify elements that can support those successes and provide benefits that are not otherwise served by the local economy (e.g., education, health care, job training, technological facilities, credit unions), and identify the threats to those benefits and the threats to the further downsizing Chinatown (e.g., outside developers, outside bank predation, chain stores, outside luxury speculation, rising real estate tax burdens).

Research must carefully regard the neighborhoods surrounding Chinatown. Developments in nearby communities directly and indirectly impact Chinatown, whether it be encroaching hotel or nightlife districts or residential and commercial gentrification, predatory equity or overdevelopment.

Prior Studies
All prior studies of Chinatown must be analyzed critically for accuracy and substantiation, for perspective and agenda, for stakeholder interest, and for consistency between data and conclusion. Disinterested studies should be sought (e.g., academic studies) both for data and analysis.

III. Outcomes

Identify:
- available means to enhance the existing businesses that benefit the residents of Chinatown
- business practices that harm Chinatown labor
- economic development strategies in Chinatown that will support locally-serving commerce and local employment opportunities as a priority, both for long-time residents and new immigrants
- education and training opportunities for Chinatown residents and labor
- opportunities and support for new entrepreneurship and new business investment programs targeted for local-serving businesses (e.g., retail, service, and manufacturing) that will employ both long-time residents and new immigrants
- business assistance investment programs and funds to support locally-owned businesses and locally-owned new businesses
- long-term environmental and business improvement efforts to increase business efficiencies thereby increasing revenue, sales, and profits
- zoning designations commensurate with current businesses and allowing for new locally-owned businesses
- means to promote more local contribution from the banks in Chinatown
- means to reopen Park Row – as already mentioned in the CWG Transportation Plan
- ways to bring about tenancy or occupancy for the current and already available, empty/vacant high-quality commercial spaces, utilizing surplus building stocks before planning on more development of them
- existing policies that hinder the sustainability and growth of small businesses
- means to prevent big box/chain/ franchises
- ways to relieve the real estate tax burden.

Produce a study of:
- sidewalk vending, food carts, watch and shoe repair, seasonal carts
- parking
- commercial sidewalk use: shop overflows
- open markets (Forsyth Street)
- health care facilities
- educational facilities
- economic trends in Chinatown that are locally owned
- economic trends in Chinatown that are non-locally owned
- contributions to the local economy of banks in Chinatown
- possible role of a credit union
- vacant commercial space
- the effects of bank buildings on the vitality of street-life, shopping and evening foot-traffic
- the effects and consequential trajectory of the Chinatown BID on commerce, development, gentrification, property values, demographics and local ownership and local investment
- a development zone around Lafayette and Centre Streets, from Canal to Broome Streets
- possible special purpose districts
- real estate tax burden
- residential demographics: impact of immigration, the family, the aging population
Background: Community Commentary  
(Redacted from the Tax Payers Association Response)

Chinatown has an image of being competitive in its prices, and its services, products, and commodities are value-oriented. This is the edge that Chinatown has that draws consumers from the five boroughs and tri-state area to come on a regular basis to Chinatown.

Upzoning and/or current zone designations that encourage expansionist development will rapidly upscale and transform Chinatown and erode its community. Already Chinatown has lost 17% of its Asian population between 2000 and 2010. The upzoning of Chinatown, increasing property values, will create corresponding increase in property taxes thus increasing the cost of doing business. This will have an impact on small family-run businesses and small property owners due to greater expenses, leading to potential business failure. This will undermine the low cost of goods and services that are unique to Chinatown resulting in displacement of Chinatown working families.

Besides closure of traffic in Park Row, Chinatown lost a municipal parking lot. The City has yet to replace or replenish these lost parking spaces. Providing parking will give an immediate and automatic boost to Chinatown community for all vendors and all businesses, especially vendors. Developers should be mandated to provide sufficient parking for their developments, for the community. Developers should provide transient, affordable, equivalent to municipal parking rates, preclude high price parking.

Eliminate the barrier and security restrictions on Park Row. Resume full pedestrian and Automobile traffic as if prior to 9/11 security changes. This will provide a major stimulus to the Chinatown economy which has been severely affected by the restrictions. Resume access to Municipal Parking at Police Plaza to provide badly needed parking for residents who can choose Chinatown as an ideal location to shop. The Chinatown community and especially the Community Boards must challenge the notion of National Security Threat as a basis for the closure.

Examine lending practices of Chinatown Banks to the community relative to the savings the community provides to these banks. Are banks providing sufficient capital?

There are currently lots of empty commercial office space, and lots of vacant commercial office condominiums. 2011-2012 Chinatown has experienced what may be the highest level of commercial/retail/office vacancies ever. Restricting or micromanaging business categories is unlikely to help. Successful existing models or traditional models should not be curtailed. If the market can bear concentrations of similar offerings, then a planning program should not endeavor to interfere. Also, in some instances, crowding of like-businesses draws shoppers to a given area. Price competitiveness, being value-oriented, is Chinatown's edge. It draws significant commerce and revenue for Chinatown.

The City should offer loan guarantees or City Development Bond for Small Property Owners who want to develop or renovate their property, or do small developments on their property. This is a good alternative, compared to having to venture with large developers and large real estate firms who do large developments only.

High-end restaurants and bars do not serve the immigrant community that currently lives and works in Chinatown. Many small business owners object to street closings which may harm their business as well as further limit parking.
Centre - Lafayette Streets Development Zone

Economic Development Working Team
Current Conditions: Grant to Walker St.
(Lafayette, Center, West side of Baxter Sts.)

- Above street level space underutilized on north side of Canal.
  - This area zoned M1-5B and M1-5 in the two blocks bordered by Canal and Walker, Lafayette and Baxter.
  - M1-5B zoning does not allow private medical facilities, undergraduate classrooms, theaters of more than 99 seats – which are no longer economically feasible for live or even art film venues. Another deterrent effect of this zoning is the frequency used alternative RSA conversions to high-end residential uses, contributing to rapidly rising rents for residential, manufacturing, commercial as well as residential space.

- Empty office space in non-residential buildings. The exit of garment manufacturers has left many manufacturing buildings vacant and their infrastructure and configuration uncompetitive with alternative and more modern manufacturing and commercial uses.

- Health and Social Service Growth needs places to locate. Health and social services is the second largest employer. These (health) establishments are probably hospitals or medical centers, which most likely do not employ the majority of their staff from Chinatown’s immigrant population.

- Last manufacturing jobs (out of 21,000...16,000) gone... garment industry staggering loss of jobs.

- Chinatown garment manufacturing was highly concentrated in the area north of Canal from Broadway to Centre Sts.

Economic Development Working Team Strategies: Grant to Walker St.
(Lafayette, Center, West side of Baxter Sts.)


- Re-Purpose Garment Industry Skills: extremely important in worker base. Create opportunities for garment sample assembly, fashion showcase, important to this resource.


- Investigate Manufacturing Cooperatives with resident training programs and classroom spaces

- Develop Training Centers: Adapt “English Language Learners” (ELL) programs among employers for immigrants... job training, skill building all ages/skills. Proximity to Gov’t entities providing programs and funds for such programs is a plus and combine to make a better case for Chinatown as a NYC Center

- Incentivize educational, cultural, financial institution and community facilities investment in Chinatown facilities.

Economic Development Working Team Strategies: Grant to Walker St.
(Lafayette, Center, West side of Baxter Sts.)

- Upzone blocks bordered by Canal, Walker, Lafayette and Baxter

  - These blocks are currently M1-5 where manufacturing use is highly unlikely. The blocks relate to the built environment to the south.

  - As a center triangle at and the MTA Hub these blocks would provide an exceptional opportunity for the “transformational” project cited in the AAFNY, Rebuild Chinatown Initiative and the Columbia Studio studies.

  - Incentivize the inclusion of a major cultural tenancy

See Cultural and Historic Preservation Preliminary Action Plan, Item 1, paragraph vi.