

THOMAS YU

Thomas Yu has lived in Chinatown and the Lower East Side for most of his life, after immigrating with his family to the area from Hong Kong. Thomas grew up in various tenement housing of Chinatown for many years before moving into NYCHA housing in the Lower East Side, where many of his family still currently lives.

Thomas has a lifelong connection with Chinatown, starting with attending elementary school at the PS 124 Yung Wing School, enrolling in after-school daycare programs there run by the Chinese-American Planning Council – where he volunteered for later during his summers – and attending weekend Chinese school housed in the Hamilton-Madison House. His parents worked then as garment factory workers in Chinatown, where he was introduced to community organizing as a young child accompanying his parents and relatives to rallies held by the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and later on, with UNITE.

Since 1997, Thomas has been involved with Asian Americans For Equality (AAFE), starting as a Planning intern before returning full time in 2001. In his tenure at AAFE, Thomas has been directly responsible for overseeing the development of over 250 units of low-to very-low income family housing in Chinatown, Lower East Side and Queens, and bringing \$45 million of public and private housing and infrastructure reinvestment back into these communities. In his capacity as Director of Housing Development, Thomas also provides technical assistance to other non-profit organizations, such as the building of a domestic violence shelter for New York Asian Women's Center, and real estate expertise to the Asian & Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS, to name a few. Utilizing his urban planning background, Thomas has also participated and contributed to numerous comprehensive planning studies and plans in Lower Manhattan and Flushing, Queens. Thomas has been recognized by *Time Out NY* as one of the up and coming new leaders in community activism, and received an Affordable Housing Finance Young Leader Award in 2008 from AHF.

For the past two years, Thomas has served on Manhattan's Community Board #3, specifically on the Parks and Housing committees, and has recently helped chair the Chatham Square Redesign Taskforce. Thomas is a director on the board of Hester Street Collaborative, a local non-profit which aims to use architecture and design to help Chinatown and Lower East Side residents become civically engaged in public space planning. Thomas also sits on the advisory boards of the Chinatown Youth Initiative (CYI), as well as the Furman Center's 2008 State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods. In previous positions held before AAFE, Thomas was a reporter at *Time Inc.*, and summer ombudsman for the NYC Public Advocate's Office.

Thomas received a Bachelor's Degree in Government from Harvard University and a Masters in Urban Planning from the NYU Wagner School of Public Service. Thomas is a published short story writer and tries to write more in his spare time.