

The Chinatown Working Group
CWG Town Hall: Charrette Group Notes for CWG Working Teams
February 2010

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CAPZ: Affordability

Cantonese Group

- The definition of "Low-Income Household" should have a Chinatown measurement and standard without being applied by the use of blanket/ NYC citywide base.
- The incentives for Chinatown real estate development should be retained within the community.

English Group 1

- What would you improve in Chinatown's affordability picture?
 - Preservation of low income houses e.g. Al Smith Houses
 - Restriction on high end residential development
 - Require mandatory affordable housing in all new buildings
 - Definition of affordability should be based on actual Chinatown Area average income data.
 - Protect affordable senior citizen housing
 - Protection of existing tenants
 - Preserve rent stabilization
 - Establish 30% minimum affordability for all new residential development

English Group 2

- Definition should incorporate neighborhoods
- Need local median area income figures utilized for new developments

English / Spanish Group

- Low income rent / senior citizen housing program
- More tenant protections
- More programs like SCRIE for other low income tenants
- Preserve rent regulation
- Maintain nice, decent affordable housing
- Don't demolish apartment buildings for new (high rise) buildings
- Redefine rent regulation – to suit Chinatown family demographics
- Do not lower standards for affordable housing
- 1Z (Inclusionary Zoning) need to be strengthened.
- Affordable housing units on-site
- More space for housing
- Higher wages
- Need to define what is "affordability" within Chinatown – different degrees
- Need a LMI (local median income)
- Preserve rent regulated apartments
- More organizations in Chinatown that help tenants organize and education
- Ensure greater safety and healthy housing
- Tenants do not necessarily know baseline rights
- 421B could be used more in/for Chinatown
- Affordability for both commercial (small biz) and residential
- Feasibility of building projects – so that they can be affordable

CAPZ: Affordability (continued)

Mandarin

2/19/2010 / Facilitator's summary:

The emphasis during the conversation was about housing so while people voted for affordability, it was in the context of being harassed from their homes, and not having enough places to live in Chinatown, and that leading to overcrowding. The focus was not necessarily on the cost of things.

The difficulties of living in Chinatown

- Difficult landlords
- Gentrification push Chinese out of the community
- Dirty Streets
- High rent
- Street food is not sanitized
- No space for youth activities
- Improvement of life quality
- It takes too long to apply for government subsidized housing
- Jammed apartments situation

Why do you want to live in Chinatown?

- Convenience for shopping and doctors
 - Feel more comfortable living among fellow Chinese to relieve homesickness
 - Language convenience
 - Similar in culture, life and ethnicity
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CAPZ: Cultural and Historic Preservation

English Group 1

(This section also included in Immigrants and Parks)

<i>What do you like about Chinatown's cultural, historic, immigrant or parks picture.</i>	<i>What would you improve in Chinatown's culture, preservation, immigrant and parks picture?</i>
Food	Provide better incentives for preservation of buildings
Low rise character of historic Chinatown (non grid)	Official designation of an Historic district
Marketable neighborhood	Enhance/give better care to Sara D Roosevelt Park and Columbus Park
Diversity and melding (blended diversity)	Preventions for creation of a "themed" destination - No Disneyland
Vibrancy and presence of 100 years of living culture	Preservation and maintain affordability
Al Smith Recreation Center	Cultural respect (traditions and practice)
	Financial/Operating Support for the Al Smith Rec Center
	Increase Space for expression of art (performance arts too)

English Group 2

- Stricter laws to safeguard
- Encourage preservation of buildings / possible tax abatement

CAPZ: Zoning

Cantonese

- Zoning
- Protect landmark housing
- Retain middle to low income families
- Ethnic harmony
- Development plan with regarding diversity to include all ethnicity groups and all income level families
- A Chinatown based definition of low income family, not city wide
- Special incentives for Chinatown affordable housing development

English Group 1

<i>What do you like about Chinatown's Zoning</i>	<i>What needs improving in Chinatown's Zoning</i>
Low-Rise character	Prevention of further high-rise development
The blended umbrella of zoning as it is now.	Not transfer air rights to other communities
	Consider South of Houston and East River to Center in the zoning plan
	Preserve current manufacturing and provide areas that continue to allow manufacturing uses. Limit luxury high rises
	Create a special zoning district similar to Little Italy Special District for Chinatown "core" (Worth to Canal, and Allen to Centre) Allow a dog run at Essex and Hester
	Come up with zoning plan that has a chance of approval

English Group 2

- Fair and across the board affordable housing as a result of zoning
- Safe guard small businesses and encourage growth
- Incorporate low-income housing in new developments
- Regulate rentals in favor of small businesses
- New development matches surroundings now
- Maintain hospitals and churches
- No new high rises, save low-income units
- Chinatown / LES one community
- Public amenities for community use

CAPZ: Zoning (continued)

English / Spanish Group

- Likes everyone working here together
- Too many big buildings
- Latino community feels excluded
- Like rules set in Spec. Little Italy district but concerned about abuses and effect on Chinatown population
- Preserve manufacturing to co-exist with residential areas
- Should include NYCHA housing in plan
- Create special zoning, subsidies to enable/incentives business
- Inclusionary zoning affordable housing
- Affordable housing --- need to ensure existence
- Securing anti-demolition provisions
- “New developments that get tax credits for low-income housing – 50% of the housing should be low-income”
- Area median income reflecting local demographic / neighborhood
- Incentives for swapping affordable housing for ht/density increases in buildings
- More opportunity for non-retail professional office spaces (not necessarily corporate buildings- small businesses)
- Become the customer base for local shops
- Increase zoning for height on buildings
- Limit commercial rent
- Encourage small biz providing services
- Don’t tear down old apartment buildings and replace them with unaffordable high rises
- Rethink tax incentive programs that may be lessening affordability

Fujianese Group (Coalition Representatives)

- For Rezoning
 - Include all the Chinatown and LES
 - Do not discriminate nor exclude (Latino, Low income workers, Fujianese)
 - A genuine community plan must benefit and be planned by reps of majority; not by the minority in the community!
-

Economics and Transportation

Cantonese

▪ Economic Development

- Support garment industry through government subsidy
- It takes time for government to revamp the community's economy – long term goal
- Short term- the community hopes the government plans to help with career training, small business related training
- Support hotels and tourism
- Hope government creates garment industrial district
- Reduce production costs
- Balance hotel development and affordable housing

▪ Traffic and Transportation

- Parking (problem)
- Old police headquarter housing now luxury condo. Change into parking lot.
- Government should have plans to resolve long distance bus problem.
- Build pedestrian pathways
- Solve the problem of pedestrians and vehicles fight for the road.
- Build fences to prevent traffic accidents
- Take care of street vendors
- But it should be reasonable to distinguish between vendors with licenses and those without
- Keep Chinatown clean and organized

English Group 1

<i>What do you like about Chinatown's Economic Picture?</i>	<i>What needs improving in Chinatown's Economic picture?</i>
Vibrancy	Incentives for small businesses
Unique businesses	Encourages diversity
Unique living	Preservation of street vending
Working Community	Protect small businesses
Tourist attracted to area	Encourage more small businesses
Diversity	Preserve local service businesses
Specialized stores and markets	Move Police Headquarters, open Park Row
Ultimate green market	Tax incentives for small businesses
	Rent regulation for small businesses

Economics and Transportation (continued)

English Group 2

▪ Economic Development

- Do not restrict businesses with strict regulations / maintain busy active street life

▪ Traffic and Transportation

- AIR QUALITY
- Alleviate car traffic / focus on pedestrian
- Make traffic move better (traffic control devices)
- Create better pedestrian awareness
- Adopt congestion pricing
- Safety around / off bridges
- Enforce existing anti-idling laws (EPA officers to enforce)

English / Spanish Group

▪ Economic Development

- Don't sell off NYCAH housing

▪ Traffic and Transportation

- Need more buses in the neighborhood with more bus frequency
 - Less commercial truck traffic
 - More bike lanes
 - Stop fare hikes
 - No estoy de acuerdo con el cierre de escuelas, ni el nombramiento de policía.
-

Education and Schools

English Group 1

<i>What do you like about Chinatown's Schools</i>	<i>What needs improvement in Chinatown's Schools/Education Opportunities</i>
Schools are Multicultural	ELL teaching geared toward multiple dialects
	Need Charter school for Chinatown
	Chinese classes for non-Chinese
	Need Neighborhood-based schools, no loopholes.

English / Spanish Group

- No more school closings!
-

Immigrants and Parks

Cantonese

▪ Parks, Open Space and Recreation

- Increase open space by adding up floors in buildings (buildings higher not wider)
- Don't treat people who use public space as criminals
- Extend parks hours to meet community needs
- Security

English Group 1

(also included in CAPZ: Cultural and Historic Preservation)

<i>What do you like about Chinatown's cultural, historic, immigrant or parks picture.</i>	<i>What would you improve in Chinatown's culture, preservation, immigrant and parks picture?</i>
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English Group 2

▪ Parks, Open Space and Recreation

- Improve quality of open spaces (parks / cultural buildings)

English / Spanish Group

▪ Immigrant Affairs Social Services

- More social service programs for people in need in our community (substance abuse, domestic violence...)

▪ Parks, Open Space and Recreation

- Nicer parks for our kids
- More green spaces to make neighborhoods more environmentally friendly – lessen pollution

Miscellaneous

English Group 1

2/19/10 / Facilitator's Summary of Most Prominent Concerns

This group stressed the preference for planning that would ensure the preservation of the 197a area culturally and historically; that the entrepreneurial small business tradition could continue and that there be incentives for the continuance of these aspects. The overarching concern was for the area to remain a “living and working” environment. The preservation and continuance – even guarantee - of “affordable” living was acknowledged by all participants, from Chinatown, the Lower East Side and contiguous neighborhoods. There was also agreement that there should be a realistic definition of “affordable” based on the income of the existing population base.

In considering what could be improved through the 197a plan were: more attention to parks, public spaces and coherent streetscapes. Universally acknowledged was the need for better access to public transportation (bus routes within as well as to and from the Chinatown area) and more logical, managed and better-flowing vehicular traffic. Central to the latter point was improvement of the access – pedestrian and vehicular between Chinatown and the Government Center and Financial District areas. The closing of Park Row and the wall of large government and judicial buildings have walled off Chinatown from what should be a more organic and natural interaction between Chinatown and the commerce and functions of government and financial center commerce.

While most recognized that the 197a plan would inherently need to include zoning changes there was agreement that the plan should: preserve the core of Chinatown (though cre was not specifically defined); that zoning provide for mixed use (residential, commercial, industrial/manufacturing) and that there be predominance of low-rise FAR.

English Group 2

- Representation
 - Proportional representation
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English / Spanish Group

- Justice for all; not just for the rich
 - Everyone should work more together and in a more amiable way.
 - CTW should include LES (including Ave D).
 - Decrease crime.
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Fujianese Group (Coalition Representatives)

Any genuine community plan must benefit majority

-Over 90% low income working people

-28% Latino, 7% African American, 44% Chinese (60% Fujianese)

And be decided by those who represent majority!

- 1) We want a plan to benefit us- who live and work here, not only for tourists
- 2) Equal protections for Chinatown and LES
- 3) Build low income housing and preserve NYCHA, rent stabilized, Mitchell Lama
- 4) Preserve small business – no key money
- 5) Mandatory, onsite low income housing for new dev.
- 6) “Affordable” = affordable to people majority who live here
- 7) Limit size and heights of building; limit luxury high rises

Our Demands – Land Use (Zoning) Plan

- 1) To include Chinatown and LES
- 2) No discrimination to exclude Hispanics, low income families, and Fujianese
- 3) Real community zoning plan to protect interests of majority

To achieve this majority must be represented in decision making process.

It seems like the CWG is trying to find ways to make money, by trying dividing and conquering us to sell out our community to Bloomberg and friends.