DRAFT

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Chinatown Working Group
Governance Committee Meeting
Date/Time: Monday, November 8, 2010 - 6pm-7:30 pm
Place: Immigrant Social Services – 137 Henry Street
Minutes

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In attendance: Danny Chen (Chatham Green), Jan Lee (Civic Center Residents Coalition), K Webster (M'Finda Kalunga Garden), Mae Lee (Chinese Progressive Association), Michael Lalan (NMASS), Rob Hollander (LES Residents for Responsible Development), Shane Yamane (resident); Victor Papa (Two Bridges Neighborhood Council), Wilson Soo (Two Bridges Neighborhood Council), Zella Jones (NoHo Manhattan), Lotus Chau (Sing Tao Daily News); Bonnie Li (Sing Tao Daily News)

(minutes begin 10 min into mtg)

Danny:
CWG could borrow from the (urban planner hiring criteria) matrix to help calculate weighting for votes

(Group looks over sample categories for member organizations as presented by Rob Hollander.)

Danny:
The number of votes for each category would be divided equally among the number of groups in that category. For example if there was a category of "residents" that received 40 votes, and there were 20 resident groups in the category, each group would receive 2 votes. But the total number of votes per category would not change – this would prevent packing the category.

Zella:
How do the categories address the geographic area for which we're planning?

Rob:
We eventually must define our geographic basis. I've proposed sample boundaries.

Victor:
It's not wise to delineate boundaries at this point in time. I object to these boundaries.

Mae:
Is this a serious proposal or just a general discussion topic? We should focus serious proposals.
(Rob later withdraws his proposal and group eventually tables question of boundaries)

Rob:
Another proposal is to give voting power to individuals. We must find a way to allow

individuals to participate in this process.

K:
I appreciate this attempt to include other stakeholders, but does not seem realistic to include individual voting members. Another concern is how do we prevent groups from self-selecting to maximize their voting power? Couldn't landlords say they represent residents?

Jan:
Regarding individuals, we want more individuals to participate, but the reality is that most people won't. But we do need clear, transparent guidelines for current voting members so all can understand who they are, who they represent, and why they should be allowed to participate.

Jan:
We should publish the CWG membership rules/guidelines – that openness would encourage further participation, which is what we want. We should be able to clearly explain to people asking "How does my group become a voting member?" Right now it's very challenging for groups unfamiliar with the CWG to join.

Mae:
But the CWG is not like a government where people are elected. We have voluntary membership. It's not hard to join.

Jan:
Well then could we make a commitment to make the voting membership guidelines clear and accessible?

Mae:
Yes.

Jan:
Also, who decides a group is "in" or "out" as a voting member? It's not out the open.

Mae:
Groups must do four things. Once they do that, they're in.

Michael:
Why can't voting membership decisions be made openly at general meeting?

Mae:
We should do more to include more voices & more groups

Victor:
We need to classify the different membership types in more detail

Rob:
Should we require attendance for voting membership? And we need to find a way to include the vast majority of people in our community who currently do not have a voice at our general meetings.

K:
I don't remember voting criteria being voted on? Were membership guidelines ever voted at the general meeting? Should it be revisited?
I'm not sure how individuals not represented by groups could vote at the same meeting as groups or have the same voting power as organizations. It seems to difficult.

Danny:
Determining weighted votes is difficult, but we need to recognize that the current decision-making system is implicitly weighted.
We need more community members discussing this problem – we're striving to approximate, take small steps to get closer to the best model for our community.

Mae:
Weighted voting seems too hard to calculate. We should make it easy for us. Of course, we should do more outreach to include others.

Jan:
The current voting system leaves our community vulnerable. 10 developers could walk in tomorrow and have much more power than the rest of the people. If we have membership categories, we don't fear greater participation.

Zella:
We have to deal with attrition, not just do an expansion. Deal with members leaving.

Jan:
But why is membership declining? People are not seeing new people join and get involved.

Michael:
I agree with Jan that if we open up and expand membership, we'll have a stronger group. And it's normal to have some groups that do not actively participate all of the time.

K:
Well we have to get our materials out there, make our meetings accessible – do our due diligence for the community.

Victor:
I like the idea of ratification by the community at various stages throughout the process. It makes our work more public and we'll leave with something more concrete.

Rob:
But we need to really find ways to get individuals in the community excited to participate.

Danny:
Other members should put out proposals about how to improve the CWG.

K:
That will be hard to do.

Rob:
I think K wants to undermine the whole process of improving the CWG. The current structure is what we have and what we must improve upon.
We shouldn't have to decide to keep the current system – we need to decide from proposals to change it.

Michael:
Just a reminder that we agreed that the general objective of these proposals is to create better governance and democracy, but specifically there are three areas within that: (1) Leadership structure (e.g. co-chairs vs. steering committee); (2) Voting structure & decision-making; (3) Access & participation. Obviously they're all closely related, but it's important to know that not all proposals will address each area.

Danny:
I had a conversation with Margaret Chin who suggested that we record who votes for what, that is, what the voting record for each CWG member.

Mae:
Finally, let's agree to keep email dialogue on this topic respectful, please.

Danny:
If we keep our discussion focused on the proposals posted on Google Docs, we'll be more productive, I think.

Jan:
By the way, could you give some members a 5 minute lesson on using Google Docs? Thanks!

NEXT MEETING:
Monday, 11/29/2010, 6pm at I.S.S. - 137 Henry Street