

Minutes of the Chinatown Working Group (CWG) Full Group Meeting
4pm to 6pm, Monday, March 4, 2013
American Legion L.T. Kimlau Post 1291

Voting members present: American Legion Post 1291 (Gabe Mui); Asian American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (Bethany Li); Bowery Alliance of Neighbors (Mitchell Grubler); Cherry Street Tenants Association (Ricky Leung); Chinese Staff and Workers Association (Wendy Cheung, Josephine Lee); Committee Against Anti Asian Violence (Helena Wong); Community Board 1 (Diana Savitaj); Community Board 2 (Edward Ma, Antony Wong); Community Board 3 (My Phuong Chung, Gigi Li); Lower East Side Business Improvement District (Tim Laughlin); Two Bridges Neighborhood Council (Wilson Soo); 318 Restaurant Workers Union (Jason Chen).

Fiscal conduit: Michael Zisser, University Settlement of New York.

Also present: Rob Hollander (Lower East Side Residents for Responsible Development); Zella Jones (NoHo-Bowery Stakeholders); Susan Yung (Gathering of the Tribes)

Press: Sing Tao Daily News (Bonnie Lee); Sinovision (Charlene He); World Journal (Clement Lee).

Elected officials: Borough President Stringer (David Czyzyk); Councilmember Chin (Matt Viggiano)

Planning Consultant Applicants:

The Collective for Community Planning and the Environment/Pratt Center for Community Development: Jocelyn Chait, Project Manager, The Collective/Pratt; Eva Hanhardt, Planner, The Collective/Pratt; Lacey Tauber, Planner, The Collective/Pratt; Paula Crespo, Planner, The Collective/Pratt; Eve Baron, Planner, The Collective/Pratt; Mercedes Narciso, The Collective/Pratt; Charles Lai, Chinatown History Project.

BFJ Team: Frank Fish, BFJ Planning; Xiangyu Li, Project Manager, BFJ; Sarah Yackel, BFJ Planning; Page Cowley, Page Cowley Architects; Regina Armstrong, Urbanomics; Ming Wu, Perkins Eastman; John West, Consultant, BFJ.

WXY Team: Claire Weisz, Principal, WXY; Adam Lubinsky, Principal, WXY; Ethel Sheffer, Principal, Inside Associates; Meisha Hunter, Senior Preservationist, Li/Saltzman; Larisa Ortiz, Principal, Larisa Ortiz Associates; Andy Lun, President Toto Group; George Janes, Principal, George Janes & Associates; Paul Salana, Planner, WXY; Celeste Frye, Principal, Public Works; Allison Quigney, Manager, Public Works. Meeting called to order at 4:19pm, Wilson Soo and Antony Wong presiding.

1. Introductions.

2. Agenda

>>Agenda approved by all members present.

3. Minutes

>> Minutes approved by all members present.

4. Planning consultant presentations.

Wilson Soo: Each planning consultant will present for 10 minutes (a two-minute warning will be given) and then 10 minutes for question-and-answer.

Gigi Li: Why are these three applicants presenting. What is the process?

Wilson Soo: CWG received five bids. Last week the scoring team met to read them. These three received the highest scores.

Antony Wong: The order of presentation was chosen at random.

First presenter: Pratt Center for Community Development and the Collective for Community Planning and the Environment

Paula Crespo: Pratt and Collective for the Community Planning views its role as technical planning support. Chinatown is a vibrant ethnically, economically, socially and culturally place not just for Chinatown but for the city. Pratt has a close alignment with the values of CWG. We believe that community planning should build on the assets and opportunities that already exist within the community. We believe in outreach to the community stakeholders. Excited to be considered in this important effort.

We combine the resources and skills of both the Pratt Center for Community Development and the Collective for Community Planning and the Environment. We are New York City-based and have decades community-based planning, both large scale planning and civic initiatives. Credibility in tech assistance in data collection and visualization and use of GIS. Experts in number of areas allows us to choose many experts. We have familiarity with city process, laws and rules and challenges. We have familiarity with city agencies and members of our team have worked in those agencies. And we know many people in city agencies. We have drafted 197 a plans and environmental impact statements. We also are affiliated with Pratt institute and many of the members teach there. [Technical trouble with powerpoint.]

We also bring experience in comprehensive integrated planning. The style of planning we believe in is not for specific sites but for a neighborhood comprehensively, including the environment, affordability, economic diversity and historic culture.

Jocelyn Chait: We're excited by the project. [Pause for technical difficulty.] We have five subteams each with a expert in the area: Paula Crespo, research, Eva Hanhardt, zoning, Eve Baron, affordability, Jen Becca, economic development, Lacy Tauber and Charlie Lai, cultural and preservation. I will be coordinating an integrated analysis. We will work with the CWG to define project boundaries for different areas. We will present in May to CWG. We will provide a narrative for the literature review and comparisons to Chinatowns, a map catalogue, charts and graphs and submit a report in July. We will supplement our data with interviews with members of the community. We'd work with CWG to identify those people. We will look at the effectiveness of Inclusionary Zoning and special district zoning. Also we will consider climate change. We will look at the viability of commercial affordability and manufacturing. Zoning will pull all strategies together. Eva has the experience of writing zoning text for the waterfront plan. Also the manufacturing and land use 1992 zoning plan published by Pratt and the Municipal Arts Society. Affordability... [time]. Our Cultural team includes Charles Lai founder of MoCA and director of the Chinatown History Project. Here's map of hurricane inundation. The comprehensive plan will bring together all of the pieces of the working teams. Timeline: 6-9 months. We'll conduct town hall community meetings engaging the community in the process.

Questions

Tim Laughlin: A question about budget. The RFP includes a large scope and lots of data. It includes areas besides Chinatown especially the Lower East Side. Will the focus be on the Chinatown core? How will you address different zones and their desires and needs.

Jocelyn Chait: We are considering Chinatown and neighboring areas. CWG hasn't conferenced with us on the boundaries but we are not looking just at Chinatown. We will need to review the materials. And budget would definitely allow for more than just the core.

Mitchell Grubler: I'd like to learn more about Cultural and Historic Preservation.

Jocelyn Chait: We have a really good group -- Lacey Tauber, acting director of Preservation Studies at Pratt Institute for Sustainable Planning and Development, and Charlie Lai. Two advisors, Vicki Weiner, Deputy Director at the Pratt Center, a preservationist and was former Director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historical Preservation. Karen Atlas worked on Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts that looks from the ground up to identify cultural districts.

Charles Lai: This neighborhood is the bedrock of American history. We plan to look at all the cultures, not just Chinatown, but to consider the multi cultural, multi-ethnic, multilingual communities. We have all grown up aware of these layers.

Bethany Li: I'm concerned about a conflict given that you've worked with member organizations. To what extent will you bring fresh opinions?

Jocelyn Chait: There's an advantage of having worked in the past. Others have not been involved who will bring a new perspective because some have not worked here before.

Eva Hanhardt: We will be technical advisors to you. You will make the determination. We will bring the information that is needed for your teams. We look to you to be the advisors. We will supply the research and analysis so you can make the decisions.

Charles Lai: We will identify the synergies in elements and the difficulties so you can see where the conflicts and common grounds. We won't be telling you what you ought to do.

Helena Wong: There's a lot of knowledge in your group in zoning and in past work. What about being bold and pushing the envelope, not just the solutions of the past.

Paula Crespo: We feel strongly about combining the most effective tools and looking at other cities. This is one of the few Chinatowns that has no special district, although some of those plans have not always been successful. So we will look to you for what you are seeking.

Ed Ma: We need to appreciate ourselves. Enrich our understanding but acknowledge what we know.

Rob Hollander: How will you avail yourselves of the resources of Pratt. Suppose you find reasearch can't find out everything. How would you deal with the constraints of the budget?

Eve Baron: Key members of team are also instructors at Pratt. We can tap student power -- planning students, environmental students and preservation students. Pratt also has GIS resources and trained GIS experts. We have thought about the constraints. All of the research is important. We will incorporate

community members -- work with community members to be participatory. Community members would be paid for that.

Jocelyn Chait: We can target a small area to do a spot survey if we can't get all the data.

Josephine Lee: One of the strengths is having worked in and around the city. But there are differences in Chinatown on how to develop. How will you find the best proposal? You worked with Greenpoint and West Harlem which were controversial. I wonder how to deal with differences within Chinatown and the Lower East Side.

Jocelyn Chait: We worked on 197a plans in Sunset Park and Williamsburg-Greenpoint. This was not the rezoning -- the city often did not follow the plan. I worked also with the South Bronx. We are committed to an inclusive process. Not everybody will be happy; seldom all are. In Williamsburg we worked with a Hasidic community next to a Hispanic community that was not talking to each other, yet we could broker together. We have this ability.

Mercedes Narciso: We don't call these recommendations but strategies: if you take this action then you get this result. We will allow the community to judge.

Charles Lai: One reason they brought me on was because I have worked in Chinatown for thirty-five years. I've worked with closest friends who years later were no longer so close. The question is how we can bridge the differences through discussion. We don't have the solutions but we will give you some strategies.

Susan Yung: Asians are being pushed towards the river rather than inland. How can the low income families not to be pushed to the river?

Wilson Soo: We are out of time, please take that comment into consideration.

Second presenter, WXY Architecture and Planning.

Wilson Soo: WXY will have 10 minutes present, followed by a 10-15 question and answer period.

Claire Weisz: I am Claire Weisz, the W of WXY.

Andy Lun: President of Toto Group, a marketing company.

Larisa Ortiz: Principal of Larisa Ortiz, Associates of Jackson Heights.

Allison Quigney: Public Works Partners.

Celeste Frye: Public Works.

Michele Hunter: Senior preservationist, Li Saltzman.

Ethel Sheffer: Inside Associates Community Planning and Development.

George Janes: George Janes of George Janes and Associates, a frequent partner with WXY.

Claire Weisz: We emphasize how special this group is and the principles. All of the work needs to be in dialogue to address the deep issues you've presented. These needs haven't been quantified for an understanding of where the solutions are. We're based in Chinatown on Centre Street. I lived on Mulberry Street. There is an advantage in having a framework in Chinatown every day.

Adam Lubinsky: I'm a partner with WXY. We have carefully selected the right people for each issue. Economic development is key. Larisa Ortiz will be able to answer your questions. She worked on the 125th Street planning including the affordability of commercial spaces and experimented with regulations for economic opportunities. We will reflect the changes over time. Historically, the core has been Mott Street, but there was rapid growth after 1960 when the immigration restrictions were lifted, but from 2000-2010 there has been the first decline of Chinatown. So there's a question of what are the economic opportunities in Chinatown. Chinatown has grown beyond the historic core, into the Bowery, a critical corridor and Grand Street, East Broadway and even Delancey. Each corridor has different character and potential as local drivers or visitor attractions. Public Works looks at affordability of employment and housing. They've done work on the Lower East Side and settlement houses. The Lower East Side has seen changes in rentals versus home ownership and this area relies heavily on rentals, subsidized housing and public housing. New people have moved recently; rents are doubling. Looking at preservation and zoning and the physical characteristics, we have Li Saltzman, WXY and George Janes who have huge experience in design and built environment. WXY looked at the blueway waterfront for four years to see how it ties into Chinatown. There is a huge number of landmarks; there are Historic Districts, also special districts and there are recent zoning changes. The cultural planning piece is quite important. There are still a number of attractions that can continue to be destinations for the wider and Chinese community. WYX will integrate all these. Ethel Sheffer has years of experience and will form a key role of interfacing what can be implemented with city agencies. We've developed four stages. We hold to a rigorous process to bring in the public outreach. You may ask more in the questions.

Questions

Helena Wong: Your presentation is focused on economic opportunities and the affordability of commercial spaces. What is your experience on housing, especially since Chinatown has lost 17 percent of its Asian population? How do you balance housing and economic development?

Adam Lubinsky: Note that rents have nearly doubled -- \$946/month to \$1728/month.

Celeste Frye: We will first review the recommendations that CWG has produced, look at data on housing affordability. Allison Quigney has huge experience with affordable housing and works with HPD, small landlords and tenants, with the housing authority. We'll look at the data and analyse and come up with what can be done with agencies from a public policy perspective and what is workable for the property owners in the area.

Bethany Li: We work with a lot of groups that are discontent with other plans -- 125th street plan -- that caused displacement. What was your involvement?

George Janes: There were two plans. It was a flawed process and top down. There was outreach but the agenda did not consider community. The agenda wasn't set by the community.

Ethel Sheffer: We were asked to work with an advocacy group and a community board in Harlem. It is one of the largest rent regulated neighborhoods and in the greatest danger of losing it. With an extensive outreach process, working with social services, recreational organizations and housing, we ask what are your goals and what tools you need to realize your goals. The city has inclusionary zoning but it's

optional. We proposed mandatory inclusionary housing so that every development must include some affordable housing. Now we're going to be the advocates for mandatory Inclusionary Housing, a new kind of plan that would be helpful here too.

Bethany Li: Which group?

Ethel Sheffer: Civitas and CB11.

Ed Ma: We are still in the shadow of discrimination. How can we set up the solid ground for economic development? How can we overcome the resistance from the Chinatown community?

Claire Weisz: We worked on the waterfront that you worked on. We brought artists to get together with the community to create a vision especially between the two bridges. There is no magic bullet, but deeper knowledge of why are those needs there? What circumstances need to be changed to address those needs. There needs to be some vision that will come right out of this deeper knowledge to give the politicians and leaders something to work with. Planners should not be in charge of the politics, but without the knowledge there's nothing to give to the leaders to take Chinatown to the next step.

Ed Ma: Where to start? We need from you the whole picture.

Claire Weisz: Knowledge is power.

Andy Lun: Talking about 10 and 20 years to come, we have to have a mega plan to communicate with community leaders on what the end result will be. Unless we give them knowledge they can't find the direction and without direction they cannot succeed.

Josephine Lee: Some of your members worked on the Canal Street Corridor. What is your role in it now and the future.

Claire Weisz: It was a study with property owners. It was helpful to map and see the density, physical contours, transportation, to look at the zoning contradictions. Only WXY worked on it. We did physical model studies. The study had a short life. It was commissioned, we did it and there was no impact as far as we know. It didn't go anywhere. But now we understand the topography of Canal Street.

Rob Hollander: The RFP requires a lot of research. I suppose you have discussed whether you can complete it. What recommendation would you give to CWG on the priorities, in case the data cannot all be collected?

Claire Weisz: I'm assuming you got the proposal because that's exactly what we did discuss. We tried to determine why you wanted those data, what was available, what would be effective.

Paul Salana: Some is available from NYCHA. With rents and deposits we'd encounter resistance from community and we'd have to rely on past data. Census data can easily be culled. We'd also have to figure out the borders.

Larisa Ortiz: Revenue is proprietary. We could take a lot of time attempting to get it and fail and it would be very expensive. So we chose outcome market analysis and economic forecast. We've backed into the most effective data. What kind of demand we can generate from residents from visitors and from

employees? What's the business mix? What are businesses doing? That might including interviews, recognizing of course there is also a large underground economy. What are the characteristics of the workforce? Why are they here, what we can do to support them to come forth? Low cost labor is critical to business. We could look at comps -- a representative sample. We could ask brokers to get enough of a sense to make recommendations.

Final presenter: BFJ Planning

Wilson Soo: Final presentation will be 10 minutes with a 2 minute warning, followed by 15 minutes of question and answer.

Frank Fish: I would act as the coordinating principal. Sarah Yackel would be project manager, Shawn Lee, project planner, John West, zoning. We're in the Flatiron District. We started in 1980, a 20 persons firm. I taught at Pratt Institute. Regina Armstrong is here from Urbanomics for economics, Perkins Eastman Architect, Ming Wu, Page Cowley, Historic Preservation. We have all worked together as one team, most share space in the Flatiron District. John Shapiro has worked with many of you, and is Chairman of the Department of Planning at Pratt, but is just an advisor to us.

Sarah Yackel: We'll support the efforts of CWG, offering insight and knowledge of specific significance, support CWG in its mission to support residents, workers, small businesses and visitors, gather and support data analytically, develop implementation strategies for a 197a plan. We see an 8 month process. One and half months at the start, 3 and half months of research, key strategies 2 months. During the research, we'll present a feedback workshop around month 3 to gather input and present the current picture; two later workshops for initial strategies and then finally a draft plan.

Regina Armstrong: We will lead the research element, mapping demographic, economic data real estate data, conditions. We have a lot experience in creating data bases, 15 years creating all the data bases for the Federal Government for transportation, primary and secondary study areas based on essential character immigrant settlements, historic districts and adjoining. We will provide a SWOT analysis -- strengths weaknesses opportunities and threats -- existing and recent trends in population, housing, labor preparedness, income, economic development and property markets and forecast skills ten to fifteen years from now, look at economic development strategies, revitalization strategies including job skills, local opportunities, existing small business and ensure that local residents have local available services. We will analyse the major economic drivers of Chinatown, culinary, hospitality, tourism, garment and other manufacturing. Also bank lending and compare savings of the community. We'll consider how to engage the economic global import of China and its heritage and investment capacity and potential for collaboration.

John West: I've been working with zoning since 1970. Initially with LMDC, also in real estate development. So I've seen both sides. We worked on city rezonings to preserve, something the city frequently does to preserve a neighborhood by choosing a contextual zoning and then identify something where something a little bit bolder can be built. Among the tools to maintain existing affordable housing might be zoning.

Page Cowley: I have a ten person firm. We worked with LPC and later on with the developer. Jumping the fence may seem odd but essential to understand all aspects. We also worked with the community board on the upper west side on land use.

Ming Wu: I'll be guiding the urban planning design. We do a great deal of preservation and adaptive use, including the Tenement Museum. Our work is to build a beautiful mirror for what Chinatown would like to be in the future.

Questions

Bethany Li: To what extent do you feel zoning can be used to protect affordable housing and prevent displacement. There are current inclusionary zoning measures that have been used in the past and there are some that haven't been used. Is there anything useful for Chinatown.

John West: One measure is anti harassment as in the Clinton Special District. The other is Inclusionary Housing, originally designed for high density districts and then used for Williamsburg, increasing the density slightly requiring some amount of affordable housing. Those are the two that come to mind.

Frank Fish: We helped write the Clinton Special District which included those anti-harassment measures.

Rob Hollander: You mentioned economic development and affordability for residents. How do you balance the two: economic revitalization without wholesale gentrification?

Regina Armstrong: Look at the skills of the resident labor force and what kinds of jobs that can be created here and the kind of training to prepare for the new economy. We have new data sources that show those relationships. We can also look at where labor is coming from to do work in Chinatown and see if those jobs can be developed for local residents.

Frank Fish: Housing is protected not just by zoning but by rent regulation. Use those housing tools and keep them in effect. Probably we can't prevent all gentrification.

Josephine Lee: One of the strengths of your proposal is the recognition of the need to protect existing residents, and development not just for visitors but also for existing residents. Will you limit the meetings with teams to eight?

Frank Fish: We could go to ten, but if you want twenty-five, it would cut into the work. But we're flexible as you prefer. We do like outreach to the community.

Sarah Yackel: The eight come from the RFP. So we stuck to that. But we can be flexible. Three public meetings are not extensive outreach to the community.

Helena Wong: Talk about previous rezonings and your role.

Frank Fish: We worked on the Lower East Side rezoning with a community group. We proposed a contextual rezoning the rudiments of which DCP has put in place. Also the South Street Seaport and the East 79th Street and for Civitas on the Upper East Side and Harlem.

John West: I'm a member of CB6 which has done a few 197a plans and a couple of contextual rezonings. We were able to work with City Planning staff to get general agreement with DCP so DCP went forward as a coapplicant, not adversarial, but as a team. The 197a went well, but we found areas where the city wouldn't agree and now we have one plan on our CB6 website, and the city has its own version.

Page Cowley: I participated in the downzoning along Broadway from 110th Street to 96th Street as co chair of Land Use, meeting with the borough president and councilmember. Also Riverside South, the

parcel by Garry Barnett, which was a huge effort, working with our schools committee; the Upper West Side Urban Renewal Area expiration, where developers were able to capture footage where there were setbacks. We get a sense of how communities work. Listening is important. We also worked on the Upper West Side retail guidelines to limit the length of the storefronts. I walked the entirety of Columbus Avenue with DCP. We can put feet on the pavement. Scale and size matter, that's what keeps a neighborhood together.

Mitchell Grubler: Ironic that you say size matters and illustrate 135 Bowery, a nearly 200-year-old rare surviving Federal House where you played a significant role in the demolition of the landmark building. You proposed a seven-story building. Although the owner promised affordable commercial rents, he then turned around and sold the property. And you know that another architect/engineer not paid by the owner would have found conclusions opposite to yours that the building was viable and could have been preserved.

Page Cowley: That's a difficult history. I can talk afterward. I was retained by the owner with the councilmember. We had a solution, but it would require a variance and we couldn't get any traction with the city. The owner already had a demolition permit. I'm not proud of it. All I could do with Councilmember Chin was to salvage some of the materials for later incorporation into the new building. So I have experience on both sides, that's what I know, my metier and passion. The bank will build the building and I will be coaching the designer to create something little bit more sympathetic to the context.

Ed Ma: For Ms. Armstrong: The Chinese community is stubborn. How can you deal with the old fashioned way?

Regina Armstrong: Chinatown has a lot of competitive advantages in terms of the growing role of China worldwide -- imports that can be nurtured here, things like the new Asian medicines. It takes diversification and identifying market potentials and fitting those activities to those of the residents to increase their income, their spending capability and housing quality.

Antony Wong: Review panel will gather and score. The full group will meet next Monday at 4pm for a vote. The contract can be signed by March 15. If there are no announcements, meeting is adjourned 6:15pm.