

Minutes of the Chinatown Working Group (CWG) Full Group Meetings for November
5:30-7pm, Monday, February 10, 2014
American Legion L.T. Kimlau Post 1291

Voting members present: American Legion Post 1291 (Gabe Mui); Bowery Alliance of Neighbors (Mitchell Grubler); Chinese Staff and Workers Association (Josephine Lee); Committee Against Anti Asian Violence (Billie Zhu); Community Board 2 (Antony Wong); Community Board 3 (Gigi Li); Create in Chinatown (Amy Chin); Good Old Lower East Side (Julian Morales); National Mobilization Against Sweatshops (David Tieu); Property Tax Payers Association (Irving Lee, Mee Wong); Two Bridges Neighborhood Council (Wilson Soo).

Media: Sing Tao (April Xu).

Also present: Jay Glickman, Rob Hollander.

Meeting called to order, 5:45pm, Wilson Soo and Antony Wong presiding.

1. Introductions

2. Agenda: agenda approved by all present without objection.

3. Minutes: February minutes approved by all present without objection.

4. Report from the Community Board 3 Land Use Committee meeting, Gigi Li reporting.

Gigi Li: Community Board 3's Land Use Committee has decided to look at the Pratt recommendations subdistrict by subdistrict. This is the first time they are seeing this comprehensive study; considering it all at once would be overwhelming. They will meet this Wednesday, February 12 at Confucius Plaza. Overall they are impressed with the recommendations and its creative use combining many prior zoning proposals. They question the viability of special districts given the city's previous administration. They suggest having conversations with the new administration to discuss the more controversial items in the plan. They recently met with new Manhattan Borough President Office land use person.

Josephine Lee: What is CB3's pace of discussion for the proposals?

Gigi Li: Hard to tell the pace for CB3. They understand the urgency, but it's a lot to digest at once. Subcommittees may look at each subdistrict.

Irving Lee: They were concerned that the AMI was too low. What is the role of CB3 regarding CWG's votes?

Gigi Li: We discussed that at CAPZ.

Wilson Soo: Let's finish the discussion of the Land Use meeting.

Antony Wong: So the CB3 Land Use Committee will meet Wednesday, 6:30pm at Confucius Plaza, but it's the fourth item on the agenda, come at 7:30pm instead. The committee was urged to go over more subdistricts at a time by supporters in attendance, but the committee was reluctant. Please attend if possible.

David Tieu: Were there other responses from the committee?

Gigi Li: They also worry that the plan doesn't do enough to protect the middle income community. Also concerned about what is politically appropriate at this moment. Will new city administration welcome

these proposals? There were questions about the sheer size of the area and questions regarding the jurisdiction of the plan over NYCHA if the administration is still considering the NYCHA infill. Land Use committee will only consider the zoning portion of the recommendations from Pratt, even though the committee presented them with everything, not just zoning.

5. CAPZ meeting report, Wilson Soo, presenting

CAPZ will meet Monday, February 24th at 5pm at Community Board 1 49-51 Chambers Street, 7th floor.

Josephine Lee: We agreed to include all the NYCHA properties. Zone site by site or the entirety.

Wilson Soo: CAPZ will propose options for CWG consensus and present these to CB3.

Gigi Li: The community board representatives on CWG have to abstain in CWG until the respective community board has voted on any proposal. CB's won't vote favorably on a proposal until the CB itself has considered and approved it. This can delay the process. CWG requires a 15 voting-member quorum and 15 favorable votes (or a majority of the voting members present, whichever is greater) in order to pass a motion. Without the votes of the three CB voting members, CWG would have to gather an additional three voting members to pass a motion.

Irving Lee: Could the CB veto a CWG vote?

Gigi Li: There is no guarantee that a CB would accept a CWG proposal, but it was mentioned at the Land Use Committee that it would be helpful, as a guide, for them to have an understanding of the CWG preferences. The committee recognizes that the CWG has worked long and hard on this process with many stakeholders, and the committee will give that weight and take the CWG votes under advisement and consideration.

Irving Lee: Do buildings of historical value under 197c?

Rob Hollander: No. 197c regards only zoning, not landmarks.

Mitchell Grubler: But the Environmental Impact Statement may include a list of historically valuable structures.

Rob Hollander: But that is only a recommendation, not a proposal. Landmarking is a separate process through a different commission.

Gigi Li: Also, because this process includes so many other aspects of community planning that might be pertinent to other committees of the community board, it would be in the interests of CWG that more CB members understand the plan and the issues. The more members see it and understand it, the more support for CWG. In addition, the CB will also have to outreach to the community. Questions they will ask will include whether community members have been made aware of the process, whether they have participated, whether they are familiar with it and what their opinions on it are.

Wilson Soo: CB3 Land Use Committee will meet this Wednesday, February 12, at Confucius Plaza community room, the meeting beginning at 6:30pm.

Gigi Li: CWG is the fourth item on the agenda so it will not likely come up for discussion before 7:30pm .

Wilson Soo: CAPZ will meet on Monday, February 24, at Community Board 1, 49-51 Chambers Street, 7th floor.

6. Revitalizing the Economic Team

Antony Wong: Pratt recommends that we look at non-zoning proposals and reconvene teams to address

them. I have extracted these items from the Pratt final recommendations. Please take a copy. Pratt is proposing 6 actionable items including tax abatements, partnerships -- ESL workshop training, assistance with government agencies. These can be found in the Pratt document on pages 32-4. Pratt recommends that we reconvene the Economic Team. We will send a call out to all the prior Economic Team members and include the PTP members and see what the team would like to move ahead with. Maintaining affordable commercial spaces might be a priority. The team should also begin the process of taking the proposals to the relevant government agencies.

Gigi Li: ...or bringing them to CB3 Economic Development committee for presentation. We are working on a plan closely related to these issues. CB3 is tracking retail diversity and thinking about ways to retain retail diversity in the East Village.

Irving Lee: Regarding any required new legislation, who would write the language...

Gigi Li: Probably should take it to Matt Viggiano, Councilwoman Chin's land use advisor. Also call in government agencies, probably with HPD and others to see what legislation would be necessary.

Irving Lee: How long a process?

Gigi Li: It's variable.

Irving Lee: Does it go to the state?

Rob Hollander: Some go to city, some to state, others might go to both.

Irving Lee: Who was on the Economic Team?

Rob Hollander: The chair was Wellington Chen, Zella Jones was the Vice [Chair], Danny Chen, the developers, I went, some business owners. For a while the Transportation Team was folded together with the Economic Team. Then the Economic Team produced a final report but Zella said that she couldn't get support for it and had to drop it. Then Gigi and Mae convened a meeting with some members of the team and there were more meetings and discussions resulting eventually in a document that was presented at CWG just before Pratt was hired. Zella's document was also presented to CWG.

Gigi Li: It would be helpful to write out which agencies should be addressed for each of these items. Also figure out which are the low-hanging fruit among them.

Josephine Lee: Will there be an Economic Team before a CB3 Economic Committee meeting in March? Some of Eva's proposals are not here and there seem to be some conflicts among them.

Antony Wong: Then we will wait until we have had a fuller discussion.

Gigi Li: it would be helpful to me to know which are easier to achieve.

Antony Wong: Eva's point was that we should get to work on whatever we can as soon as possible. Some of these can be implemented quickly.

Gigi Li: For example, the proposal for a public market might be folded into the proposals for Essex Crossing. We could be having a discussion there if Essex Crossing is an appropriate location for CWG proposals.

Rob Hollander: Should teams go to the community boards without consent from the CWG?

Gigi Li: Not for policy decisions, but for preliminary discussions about feasibilities -- which groups would be necessary, what work would be needed.

Amy Chin: So there are policies that require votes, but there may be initiatives that would not require votes for CWG to move forward with.

Rob Hollander: CAPZ is drafting a letter to CB3 representing items of consensus within CAPZ, including anti-harassment and anti-demolition measures throughout the area. That letter should not go first to CB3, but to CWG for approval first.

Amy Chin: Is it possible for us to choose one of these as an easy win to re-energize CWG and bring interest to the community -- for example, make Chinese New Year a holiday or the young entrepreneur boot camp for example, to show an accomplishment for CWG. If everyone takes responsibilities, then no one takes responsibility. So let's try to do something.

Antony Wong: Let's come to the next meeting with ideas and please consider joining the Economic Team.

7. Community Announcements

Gigi Li: Council members are looking for discretionary item requests. If we could partner with the BID or other group as a fiscal conduit, we might be able to create some event. We could discuss with the council member what might be feasible. Also the LES BID is hosting a "re-envisioning Orchard Street" -- placement of bike racks, benches, intersections, deliveries etc. February 19, 6:30pm at the LES Tenement Museum.

Sunday March 2 at Confucius Plaza, New York Rising will meet. It is a state effort to bring money downtown that has been meeting for a couple of months. Final submissions are due in mid-March. The state will choose ideas. This is an opportunity for most needed proposals. At Land Use this Wednesday there will be a presentation by Big "U" -- HUD has funds in the billions for resiliency designers, architects and planners. That will be the first item on the agenda. Essex Crossing will also be discussed at the meeting.

Wilson Soo: Seeing no further community announcements, meeting is adjourned at 6:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,
R. Hollander, Sec'y, CWG

Economic Development Action Group Recommendations & Implementation Strategies

1) Foster the next generation of Chinatown's economic development leaders

- Commit to either developing a “Young Entrepreneurs Boot Camp” series for a cohort of local residents or sponsor participation in existing fellowship programs such as Coro’s Immigrant Civic Leadership Program or the BALLE Fellowship program, both of which provide leadership training to individuals from communities of color to advance local economic development.
- Promote the next round of NYCEDC’s THRIVE Competition throughout Chinatown.

Coordinated efforts by Economic Development Action Group members and local community development organizations as well as youth and workforce development entities such as LaGuardia Community College (LAGCC) and the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC).

2) Maintain affordable commercial space for local businesses to survive and thrive.

(a) Incorporate provisions in the Special Zoning District

Identify members of the Economic Development Action Group to work with the Zoning Action Group to shepherd economic development related provisions in the Special Zoning District through the application process

(b) Pursue development and implementation of the following tax abatement measures as incentives for preserving affordable commercial space.

Work with the Department of Finance and state and local representatives to explore potential changes to the New York City tax code that would preserve affordable commercial space. Definition of “community serving” to be proposed by CWG member organizations. Coordinate with the Affordability Action Group.

3) Develop sector-based anchor projects that provide multi-use space connected with targeted workforce development programs.

- Develop an Asian Food Center in Chinatown that offers a public food market featuring Asian-only cuisine on the ground level and additional space for Asian wholesale food distribution and food manufacturing on the ground and upper floors
- Develop a Chinatown Jewelry Center that offers ground floor jewelry retail space and space for a wholesale jewelry exchange and jewelry production on the upper floors.

- Explore additional sector-based workforce development programs, specifically in the health care industry.

Coordinated effort by the Economic Development Action Group, in consultation with the Department of Small Business Services (Neighborhood Development Division), the NYC Economic Development Corporation, academic institutions such as BMCC and LAGCC, and the Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center, a non-profit industrial developer in Brooklyn.

4) Revive Chinatown’s customer base by leveraging Chinatown’s cultural and unique business assets.

(a) Develop a series of cultural programs, building off the success of cultural programs and events that have taken place in previous years, and market to the regional Chinese community as well as the national and international tourist industry.

(b) Create a coordinated marketing campaign for Chinatown’s businesses aimed at Chinese residents in New York City’s outer boroughs and the wider region. Promote regional and intracity bus service to encourage shopping in Chinatown

The Economic Development Action Group should work closely with the Culture and Historic Preservation Action Group to encourage collaboration between the Chinatown Partnership, Chinatown BID, Chinese Chamber of Commerce of NY, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, NYC Department of Small Business Services, CREATE in Chinatown and others.

5) Enhance businesses services to support a vibrant business community and a well-trained and well-connected local workforce.

Coordinated effort by the Economic Development Action Group, working with the Chinatown Partnership, the Chinatown BID and local economic development groups, in consultation with SBS and in partnership with BMCC and LAGCC.

6) Pursue improved transportation and parking options for Chinatown residents, workers and visitors.

Parking and transportation improvements will require strong advocacy by the Economic Development Action Group, working in close coordination with CWG’s Parking, Transportation, Circulation and Security Working Group, elected officials, and local organizations and civic groups, in consultation with NYCDOT and NYPD.

Full recommendations on page 30 to 34 of Pratt Center final report.