

Minutes of the Chinatown Working Group (CWG)
4pm to 6pm, Monday, April 6, 2009
American Legion L.T. Kimlau Post 1291

Attendees (See Attached Sign-In Sheet):

ORGANIZATIONS (Representatives): American Legion Post 1291 (Gabe Mui); Asian American Arts Center (Robert Lee); Asian American/Asian Research Institute-CUNY (Joyce Moy, Anthony Wong); Asian Americans for Equality (Thomas Yu, Richard Lee); Bowery Alliance of Neighbors (Mitchell Gruber); CAAAV (Helena Wong, Jenny Ye); CB2 Cert (Jerry Chan); Chatham Green (Danny Chen, Triple Edwards); Chatham Towers (John Lee); CCBA (Wee K. Wong); Chinatown Partnership (Michael Moi); Chinese American Medical Society (Jamie Seto); Chinese Progressive Association (Mae Lee); CREATE in Chinatown (Amy Chin); Hester Street Collaborative (Anne Frederick); Immigrant Social Services (Soo Baek); International Chinese Transportation Professionals Association (Jerry Cheng); LES BID (Roberto Ragone); MFY Legal Services (Rachel Sprecher) Two Bridges (Victor Papa); 250 Canal Street Property Owner (James Caseley, Keith Lipstein); Margaret Chin; Bonnie Fujita; Peri Halperin

PUBLIC OFFICIALS (Representatives): Assembly Speaker Silver (Karen He); City Council Speaker Quinn (Jasper Li); MBP Stringer (Jen Hong); Public Advocate Gotbaum (Tommy Lin); Council Member Gerson (Vivian Xie)

COMMUNITY BOARD (Representatives): CB#1 (Michael Levine, Kasey LaFlam); CB#2 (Edward Ma, James Solomon); CB#3 (John Leo, Gigi Li, Harry Wieder)

MEDIA (Representatives): *Sing Tao Daily* (Lotus Chau, Xiaomi Li); *World Journal* (Luna Liu)

I. Co-Chairs Report and Updates

- a. Update of Steering Committee Vote: Steering Committee voted to allow CWG voting members to cast votes via phone call-in conferencing. Danny Chen will help with logistics. (The full CWG and Steering Committee meetings will still require attendance in-person to vote.)
- b. Phone Conferencing: Danny Chen provided a sample list and an overview of free phone conferencing services such as www.freeconferencecall.com. All working teams should avail themselves of these or other services to enable participants to attend meetings remotely. Danny is available to assist in this effort.
- c. CWG Financial Committee: Michael Levine drafted CWG's scope of services for an administrative assistant and a planning consultant. As CWG must budget, fundraise and administer funds in the future, a Financial Committee will be needed. Victor Papa and John Leo volunteered to serve on this Committee.

II. Brief updates from Working Team Chairs:

Transportation: Gerry Bogacz from New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) presented a summary of CATS II study (Canal Area Transportation Study) and discussed possible traffic calming mechanisms for Canal and Grand Street.

Zoning: Definition of 'affordability' was discussed and debated. It was agreed that feedback from other working teams was needed – especially from Economic Development, Cultural and Historic Preservation, and Affordability. Substantive discussions on guiding principles will be resumed after getting feedback from other teams. City Planning has been invited to future zoning meeting.

Affordability: Attendance has been very limited. It was suggested that this team merge with another compatible team such as Zoning.

Parks: Recent meeting was well attended due to active outreach. Priorities for parks were discussed and included increased safety especially in Sara Roosevelt Park and for youth program providers; need for more open and green space; increasing viable park space by improving neglected parks such as Allen/Pike St malls and James Madison Park; importance of ensuring broad public input process for Parks Dept. on impending new park designs; incorporating cultural facilities and public art in the parks; and cleanliness in parks. Representatives from various city agencies will be invited to future meetings. DOT plaza program was cited as a potentially good model for Chinatown.

Immigration: First and second meetings were poorly attended. It was suggested that this team be merged with another. A key issue identified was language access and interpretation – many government agencies do not provide mandated translation services. Employment and workplace discrimination against immigrants is on the rise. Inconsistent application and knowledge of labor laws is common. Community hiring practices should be examined to ensure local immigrants are not overlooked. Immigrant families are at risk for domestic violence

Economic Development: Attendance has been strong from press and government offices, but more involvement from neighborhood stakeholders is needed. The team plans on developing a timeline with milestones and will use press and email blasts to conduct greater community outreach.

Education: Schools are eager to build relationships with community groups. Several community organizations at the meeting had never been inside the schools. All principals of local public schools attended along with some community parents. As a government entity, schools cannot be political advocates, but they will work with other organizations that can. Issues: parents' job loss adversely impacts student attendance; lack of language access means students often must be absent from school to help translate for parents at outside appointments; recent Dept of Education redistricting has disrupted the high level of cooperation between Chinatown schools that previously existed. Team meeting will rotate each month to a different host school.

Cultural and Historic Preservation: The team started an inventory of known studies on culture and preservation in the area. Preservation projects in other Chinatowns worldwide were discussed and compared. D.C. Chinatown was cited as an example of superficial preservation efforts that are unsuccessful and should not be replicated. A list was made of how NYC's Chinatown is unique and of the aspects that are worth preserving. A draft of eight guiding principles was developed and will be further refined. A resource and target outreach list was compiled for future recruitment.

There was concern that outreach is not being well coordinated among the teams and that overlapping concerns between teams are not effectively communicated.

ACTION: Each working team should draft a list of desired participants/stakeholders for Co-chairs who will assist in group outreach strategies.

III. Discussion on Milestone Targets

Michael Levine summarized a planning timeline (see attached). CWG Working teams should use it as a guideline and set benchmarks that mirror this timeline. The timeline is ambitious, but necessary. The ultimate goal is to have a final report for public review by December 2009.

IV. Merging Work Teams – Discussion

It was widely expressed that interaction between working teams is not sufficient and many teams felt that interconnectedness between teams is not being well-served. The number of working teams also poses a time burden to members who wish to take part in several discussions. Viewpoints articulated:

- a. Affordability is an integral element of zoning.
- b. Affordable housing should be seen in two veins – creation of new units and preservation of existing units. Both need to be part of the zoning discussion.
- c. Affordability should not focus solely on housing. There is also a pressing need to protect affordability for light manufacturing industries and small businesses.
- d. Zoning and affordability should concentrate not only on real estate and property, but also on economic development strategies and incentives.

V. AAARI Presentation – Chinatown Studies Matrix

At the request of Dr. Betty Lee Sung, the Asian American/Asian Research Institute (AAARI) has been compiling an online, web-based, searchable matrix of economic and community research studies of Manhattan’s Chinatown since 9/11/01. This is a donated service by AAARI that is not meant to be an in-depth, comprehensive analysis, but is merely a compilation and research tool for public use. Joyce Moy, Executive Director of AAARI, gave an overview of the current format and status of the matrix. Ms. Moy expects the matrix to be online next month. When completed, it will categorize different areas of study, highlight areas that may require updating or more in-depth examination, and offer recommendations for further follow up. Hyperlinks will allow users to access actual reports, search for keywords in ‘binocular’, and connect to specific paragraphs through key links. To date, nine studies have been inputted into the matrix and there is capacity for more. The matrix is expected to be functional within one month.

ACTION: CWG members should forward any other relevant studies or reports to Joyce Moy for inclusion in the matrix and suggest key categories for inclusion. Her contact information is as follows: jmoy@aaari.info / 212-869-0182

It was proposed that graduate students be recruited to help in research efforts. Also, foundation support should be cultivated to support and documentation CWG’s process as a model for ethnic community collaboration.

VI. Town Hall Meetings/Public Meetings

An ad hoc committee was formed to organize a CWG Town Hall meeting on Monday evening, June 1, 2009 to inform a broader community about CWG’s purpose and activities. Ad hoc committee members are: Victor Papa, Michael Levine, Gigi Lee, John Leo, Danny Chen, Jerry Cheng, Jerry Chan, and Lotus Chau.

VII. Community Announcements

- a. AAARI is hosting a free Economic Empowerment seminar 9am-5pm, April 17, 2009 at Baruch College, 55 Lexington Ave (25th St), Manhattan. Details at www.aaari.info
- b. The Office of the Public Advocate has a guide to benefits for immigrants available in English, Chinese, and other languages. It can be downloaded at <http://pubadvocate.nyc.gov/PublicBenefitsGuide.htm>
- c. Two Bridges Neighborhood Council will present a free film screening and panel discussion at the Helen Harris Residence, 80 Rutgers Slip at 6pm, April 23, 2009 featuring a newly produced video on gentrification and how it affects the lives of ordinary people on the lower east side.
- d. Asian American Arts Centre is launching a new public art project at Chatham Green and Columbus Park from May 9th through August 13th. Blank boards will be installed around the park for artists and the public to express themselves through painting, writing and drawing. Bilingual volunteers are needed to help facilitate communication with the public. Contact RLEE@artspiral.org.
- e. Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAA AV) has been assisting displaced tenants of 81 Bowery who are being temporarily housed in the Bronx. One of the tenants was recently robbed and, instead of being helped when he called 911, was mistakenly arrested by the police who had no translation assistance for the victim. CAA AV is asking for an investigation of this incident and needs community support. For more information, contact hwong@caav.org

NEXT CWG Steering Committee Meeting:

Wednesday, April 15, 4-5:30pm
Community Board 1, Rm 709
49-51 Chambers Street

NEXT Full CWG Meeting:

Monday, May 4, 4-6pm
American Legion L.T. Kimlau Post 1291
191-193 Canal Street, 2nd Floor

(The minutes of this meeting were compiled by CWG Secretary Amy Chin)