

**Chinatown Working Group  
Economic Development & Revitalization Working Team  
April 22, 2009, 4:00 p.m.**

*Acting Co-Chairs: Wellington Chen*

In Attendance: Wellington Chen, Michael Moi, Lamgen Leon, Taylor Zhou (Chinatown Partnership), Wing K. Ma (CGMA), Rob Hollander (LESRRD), Seth Bronstein (LaGuardia Community College), Rui Wang (LaGuardia Community College), Keith Lipstein (ABS Partners), Frank Choo (Global Arch Architects), Betty Lee Sung (AAARI), Jay Casely (ABS Partners)

Elected Officials/Representatives in Attendance: Sandra Ung (NYC Comptroller), Karen He (State Assemblyman Silver), Matt Viggiano (Councilman Gerson),

Community Board: Edward Ma (CB2), Zella Jones (CB#2), Jerry Chan (CB2 CERT),

Media: Lotus Chau (Sing Tao Daily), Boon Hon Choo (World Journal)

The meeting began with the adoption of the Chinatown Economic Development & Revitalization Working Team's guiding principals which are derived from the Asian American Federation's 2008 study, "Revitalizing Chinatown Business":

Guiding Principles

- ◇ Change business strategies in Chinatown to serve a diverse customer base better.
- ◇ Improve business practices to make Chinatown more appealing to prospective customers and benefit businesses in other ways.
- ◇ Provide targeted business assistance to help businesses enhance their strategies and practices.
- ◇ Sustain environmental and business improvement efforts to raise the community's image and stimulate business growth.
- ◇ Resolve parking and transportation issues to make it easier for customers to patronize Chinatown businesses.
- ◇ Pursue transformational development projects that could strengthen Chinatown's cultural and economic assets, spur an economic resurgence, and receive broad community support.

It was also noted that the advice of the CWG Executive Committee, in suggesting coordinating principles with other Working Teams, especially with the Zoning, Culture and History and Traffic & Transportation Working Teams, would be particularly important in developing a comprehensive Economic Development profile.

Following the adoption of our team's working principals was an enlightening discussion led by Seth Bronstein, Assistant Dean for Economic Development at LaGuardia Community College in Queens with additional information on small business development programs delivered by Ms. Rui Wang, LaGuardia Community College Small Business Development Center - Business Advisor.

Mr. Bornstein's lengthy career and experience in economic development throughout New York, as well as the many case histories he was able to offer in regard to revitalizing neighborhoods was very helpful in framing the discussion of needs and strategies for Chinatown and its neighboring communities.

Citing an article in the New York Times about how Flint Michigan is looking at revitalizing neighborhoods by re-distributing them, Mr. Bornstein offered a phrase he has come to appreciate: "The Private Sector creates; the Public Sector can enable." This seemed particularly fitting the tasks ahead of our working team as we look toward developing a kind of niche strategy for supporting and distinguishing Chinatown.

Mr. Bornstein enumerated programs at La Guardia Community College that have been developed through experience to help small businesses: Customized Trainings on topics like customer service; high tech integrations; English as a second language classes; developing internship programs with colleges and universities; business employment and career development; procurement services (registering to sell products to government entities e.g. Dept. of Defense or Transportation). However, the most discussed topic was Business Incubators.

Two members of the working team, Keith Lipstein and Jay Casely, ABS Partners, who currently represent vacant buildings in the neighborhood offered their insight in the difficulty of building conversions and the lack of opportunity to re-develop former manufacturing space into a viable economic model. This led to discussion of the current Business Expansion Services program thru the SBA, a discussion of NYC's REAP program and the NYS Economic Development EMPIRE ZONE recently granted to areas of Chinatown and the Lower East Side.

The meeting ended with discussion regarding buy-in by Chinatown business leaders. Several members noted that the community overall is fractionalized by family associations and a variety of constituencies who are not used to or who are not convinced that collaboration in a broader picture has relevance. Breaking traditional patterns needs to be a goal, particularly for this Working Team, in order to truly develop the working principles. Mr. Bornstein and several members of the committee supported the idea of focused outreach to younger members of the community, progeny of older families who may be more open to collaboration, innovation and new business models.

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