

Parks, Open Space and Recreation Working Team  
Chinatown Working Group  
March 19, 2009

### **Meeting Minutes**

Location: 49 Chamber Street, Room 709

Time: 4:00pm – 5:30pm

In Attendance: Edward Ma (CB #2), Anne Frederick (Hester Street Collaborative), Bob Humber (M'Finda Kalunga Community Garden/SDR Park), Lillian Moy (Chinatown YMCA), Triple Edwards (Chatham Green), Esther Wang (CAAAV)

In Attendance via Phone: Thomas Yu (Asian Americans for Equality)

Media in Attendance: Jacky Wong (Sing Tao Daily)

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#### **1. Introductions**

Anne Frederick facilitated introductions, each attendee articulated their involvement with and interest in parks, open space, and recreation issues.

#### **2. Election of Co-Chairs**

Ed Ma and Anne Frederick were elected co-chairs of the Parks, Open Space and Recreation Working Team

#### **3. Priorities for Parks, Recreation and Open Space in Chinatown**

Attendees brainstormed the following priorities for a comprehensive plan for parks, open spaces and recreation in Chinatown.

##### **Increased Safety in Local Parks:**

The Chinatown YMCA and other local organizations use local parks, (in particular Sara D. Roosevelt Park) for youth recreation activities, however safety is still an issue. The CWG should work with DPR to develop strategies for increasing safety in local Parks.

##### **Increased Open and Green Space:**

The problem: The quality of open spaces in the Lower East Side and Chinatown sorely lags behind the rest of the city, especially in the realm of public park spaces. Despite being one of the top five most densely populated areas in New

York City, at 93,413 people per square mile in 2000, the percentage of open space for the area's 200,000 people is dismally small. While the Governor's Open Space Report recommends an open space/population ratio of 2.5 acres per 1,000 people, New York City as a whole averages only 1.5 acres per 1,000, and Chinatown and Lower East Side has only 0.7 acres of open space per 1,000 people. This situation is even worse if one considers the prevalence of overcrowded, tenement apartments inhabited by low-income households doubling or tripling up to afford the rents.

Of the few precious tracts of open space available to the public in Chinatown and Lower East Side, not all are what might be considered usable park land, despite their official categorization as such on city maps. There is a need to green the existing parks and open spaces in Chinatown. For example, the Allen and Pike Street pedestrian malls and James Madison Park are two examples of local parks that are covered largely in asphalt or concrete and do not serve as viable parks.

The Parks Dept. held a visioning process for the capital improvement of James Madison Park, but little has been done to follow up on how these suggestions are incorporated into a plan for the capital improvements.

**ACTION:** AF will follow up with CB #3 and DPR to determine the status of this project.

**ACTION:** The working team will develop a working plan with an inventory of local parks and open spaces in disrepair and a proposal on how to improve these spaces to best benefit the local community.

Local streets are other site for potential greening. St. James Place is one candidate for greening efforts. However these efforts will require coordinate with the NYPD.

### **Gather Community Input & Prioritize Community Uses:**

All decision-making around local parks and open spaces should be informed by broad outreach and input gathering processes. The working team should serve as a bridge between city agencies and local stakeholders to ensure that community needs are prioritized in all parks, open spaces, and recreation projects.

Capital Improvements: The working team will engage elected officials, and local coalitions to ensure that city agencies are accountable to local residents in capital improvement projects. Parks slated for capital improvements include: The East River Waterfront, East River Park, SDR Park, James Madison Park and the Allen and Pike Street pedestrian malls. One possible solution to the lack of accessible information about park renovations might be to create signage at these sites that post information about the city's timeline and plans.

**ACTION:** CWG will work with DPR, DOT, EDC, CB #3, and local coalitions to ensure that community input is channeled to the appropriate city agency and successfully incorporated.

Athletic fields: Participants raised concerns about the creation of new athletic “turf” fields in local parks. Often multi-use spaces that were used informally by local residents become heavily permitted out and inaccessible once they are renovated. The working team should advocate for a more equitable permitting process and distribution of field time for local residents. Target sites include the turf fields in SDR Park at Grand Street and Rivington. The existing multi-use areas in SDR Park at Hester and Broome, and through out other parks should be preserved for informal community uses.

Community Identity and Cultural Heritage: Parks and Open spaces offer sites for cultural festivities, and the presentation of cultural specific, community based artwork. The working team will seek ways to partner with arts and cultural working team to promote the public presentation of artwork and activities.

Parks also offer an opportunity to cultivate stewardship and promote environmental justice for Chinatown. The working team will support activities, organizations and programming which promote these efforts.

**Increased Cleanliness:**

The current lack of cleanliness in local parks inhibits usage. However, more specific information needs to be gathered to determine how to best remedy the problem.

**ACTION:** CWG will work with DPR and community groups to determine strategies for increasing cleanliness in local parks.

**Parks as Living Rooms:**

The need for more viable park space is underscored by overcrowded housing conditions in Chinatown. For many residents use the park serves as a “living room”. Flexible, multi-use space supports a variety of community uses.

**Increase Communication and Interagency Coordination:**

Attendees cited a lack of interagency coordination and communication between city agencies and stakeholders. In particular there is a lack of follow up on how input is incorporated into capital improvements and decision-making.

**ACTION:** The working team will work to address the following concerns: EDC plans for unaffordable commercial development at the East River Waterfront,

NYPD sidewalk impediments at Chatham Green; the removal of cherry trees in Columbus Park; lack of follow up on DPR plans for James Madison Park.

**Health and the Environment:**

The working team will gather and disseminate information from relevant studies, experts, and fact finding about the environmental and health benefits of sustainable design parks and open spaces.

Resources include, but are not limited to: New Yorkers for Parks studies; community studies on the Allen and Pike Street Pedestrian Malls, the East River Waterfront and SDR Park; DPR's new high performance sustainable design guidelines; and PlaNYC.

Parks and open space offer much needed respite and therapeutic benefits for local residents as articulated in EM's draft principles. The CWG should work to support and enhance parks role as: an outlet for stressful life, self healing and connection with others, promotion of community activities, community healing within our culture heritage, strengthening group coherence and group identity.

**Recreation:**

The handball courts in SDR Park at Grand Street are very popular and should be preserved.

**DOT Plaza Program:**

The working team should examine ways to partner with DOT on the greening of non-Park open spaces via DOT's Plaza Program.

**4. Next Steps**

At the next meeting the working team will begin to create: 1) wish list for the city agencies and 2) a work plan based on the needs and priorities identifies at target sites in Chinatown. Ultimately we will set up meetings with city agency and elected official representatives to discuss our wish list and work plan.

**Next Parks, Open Space and Recreation Meeting:**

**All Parks, Open Space and Recreation Mtgs will occur on:**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month from 4-5:30pm  
Community Board 1, Room 709  
49-51 Chambers Street

**Next Mtg Date: Thursday, April 16**