

Parks, Open Space and Recreation Working Team
Chinatown Working Group
April 16, 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), , Glenn MacAfee (Chinatown YMCA), Triple Edwards (Chatham Green), Ricky Leung (265/275 Cherry Street Tenant Association), Vivian Xie & Hiroko Tachibana (Council Member Alan J. Gerson)

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

Media in Attendance: Jacky Wong (Sing Tao Daily), Sabrina Wang & Dai Zhen (Sino Television)

1. Introductions

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

2. Timeline

The group reviewed the recommended CWG timeline discussed phase one and two in greater detail.

Phase One/Goals – the group has already begun to loosely articulate goals and guiding principles in our discussions of priorities and needs for parks, recreation and open space in Chinatown. However these discussions need to be distilled into more succinct guiding principles.

ACTION: AF will draft our guiding principles for review at the next meeting.

Phase Two/Research – The group discussed how to integrate research, and input gathering into the upcoming “research” phase over the summer months. The group proposes to do this by creating a survey or other input gathering device that can be deployed at large events, and street fairs in the community. The group agreed to create a calendar of events to connect to. Existing events include: YMCA summer festival; AAFE summer festival; others tbd. The group agreed to coordinate with other working teams to coordinate input gathering efforts.

ACTION: Working Team will review AAARI matrix/site for all relevant studies and data on parks, and open spaces in Chinatown. The Working Team will identify areas where additional research is needed.

ACTION: Working Team will develop a survey and calendar of summer events to gather input based on gaps in existing research.

3. Wish list & Priorities

AF presented a draft “wish list” based on priorities discussed in the prior meeting. The group discussed specific concerns and challenges to addressing these priorities. Our wish list includes the following items, which will be distilled into our “guiding principles”.

Wish list:

1. Increase safety in local parks and open spaces
Concerns include: traffic safety on local streets, sidewalks and other non-park open spaces and an increase in pedestrians and cyclists struck by vehicles.
2. Increase open and green space
The team is working to develop an inventory of local parks and open spaces with corresponding data about the conditions, park users, and other relevant data. The inventory of public spaces to date includes:
 - Allen and Pike Pedestrian Malls
 - Chatham Square
 - Columbus Park
 - East River Park
 - East River Waterfront
 - James Madison Park
 - St. James Place
 - Sara D. Roosevelt Park
 - De-mapped Streets & Sidewalks
 - Public Housing Campuses
 - Seward Park
3. Gather community input & prioritize community uses in local parks
4. Increase cleanliness
5. Preserve and increase flexible, multi-use spaces
6. Increase communication & interagency coordination
7. Increase health and environmental benefits to the community
8. Increase recreation opportunities

Challenges & Concerns:

As the group began to discuss the preliminary “wish list” we also identified the challenges to engaging local residents in their local parks and open spaces. The group agreed that the community-led improvement of local parks must be examined in tandem with the issue of local housing and affordability.

The group identified the lack of a sense of ownership in local parks as the primary hurdle to engaging local residents in stewardship of the local parks. The group discussed how challenges around home ownership, and housing stability tends to inhibit investment in the larger infrastructure of the community, in particular parks. This lack of ownership is evidenced by the lack of cleanliness. One major priority is to explore ways that community engagement around parks can foster a greater sense of ownership, empowerment, and stewardship. It was agreed that our wish list/guiding principles should address the need for greater ownership.

ACTION: AF will integrate the goals around community ownership into the wish list / guiding principles.

The team also discussed the need to balance gentrification and beautification. If we improve local parks and open spaces, who benefits? How can our the improvement of parks and open spaces best benefit existing residents and not spur further displacement by increasing property values? The group will work with the other co-chairs to explore the relationship/balance between beautification, and economic development.

To support park improvements the group discussed the role that local institutions such as banks, real estate owners, and businesses could play. How can we tap into the wealth within Chinatown to enhance public space? How could the Community Re-investment Act be applied to park improvements? There is currently no model for channeling bank funds into park improvements.

Schools could take a greater role in park improvement; students could be engaged in park stewardship from an early age through an “adopt-a-park” program. Student and youth engagement is one strategy for building local ownership.

Public housing campuses were discussed as site of vast open green space that is poorly programmed and under-utilized. Often, prime sunny green spaces are fenced off for maintenance reasons. While these empty spaces are kept clean, they are a missed opportunity for providing viable park space. Often the recreation spaces are poorly located in the full shade areas.

4. Next Steps

At the next meeting the working team will begin to review: 1) a draft version of the local park inventory 2) draft guiding principles 3) a plan for summer park research & input gathering.

Next Parks, Open Space and Recreation Meeting:

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

The 3rd Thursday of the month from 4-5:30pm

Community Board 1, Room 709

49-51 Chambers Street

Next Mtg Date: Thursday, May 21