

Minutes of the Chinatown Working Group (CWG) Full Group Meeting
5:30-7pm, Monday, January 6, 2014
American Legion L.T. Kimlau Post 1291

Voting members present: American Legion Post 1291 (Gabe Mui); Asian American Arts Centre (Robert Lee); Bowery Alliance of Neighbors (Mitchell Grubler); Chinese Progressive Association (Mae Lee); Chinese Staff and Workers Association (Josephine Lee, Wah Lee); Committee Against Anti Asian Violence (Anj Choudhry, Billie Zhu, Jenny Ye); Community Board 2 (Ed Ma, Antony Wong); Community Board 3 (Gigi Li); National Mobilization Against Sweatshops (David Tieu); Property Tax Payers Association (Irving Lee, Kevin Leung); Two Bridges Neighborhood Council (Wilson Soo)

Media: China Press (Sophia Chu); Ming Pao (Eddie Lau); Sing Tao (Lotus Chau & April Xu)

Also present: Rob Hollander; Virginia Wong; Frank Yee (Yee Fong Toy); Susan Yung

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: December minutes approved by all present without objection.

4. Update on the public information session, Wilson Soo presenting.

Wilson Soo: We have asked MS 131 to host again. We expect to hear from them soon. Saturday evening, February 8 is our goal date and time for working people.

Antony Wong: We will still hold a regular February 3 meeting. If February 8 is not available, we will check for other Saturdays in February. We want to begin the process without delay.

David Tieu: 4pm is inconvenient. Can we hold our regular meetings at 5:30pm?

Billie Zhu: Can we vote on this?

Mae Lee: No time is ideal for everyone.

Ed Ma: There are 6:30 CB meetings.

Mae Lee: There are other evening meetings as well.

Gabe Mui: Holding late evenings every month will pose a burden for the Legion. Alternating early and late meetings was an acceptable compromise.

Rob Hollander: Let's do a poll. Who prefers 4pm? (5 prefer 4pm). Who cannot attend at 4pm? (2 cannot attend at 4pm.) How many prefer 5:30? (4 prefer 5:30pm.)

Jenny Ye: Can the public information meeting be held closer to NYCHA, maybe at a NYCHA community center?

5. Discussion of the Pratt Center proposal, Antony Wong presiding.

Antony Wong: The Pratt PowerPoint is on the CWG website. It has been presented at CB3 and will be presented again in greater depth on January 15.

Gigi Li: In addition to the presentations we did get a briefing at Executive Committee of the Community Board. The Board will consider the process. It is an extensive area with nuanced proposals including options. The Land Use Committee might support pieces of the Pratt proposal. It may take 6-12 months for Community Board review. There will need to be additional outreach including NYCHA. It's a large project for the Land Use Committee -- it's new to them a departure for its method. Land Use designed the previous rezoning and Essex Crossing. In this process, the committee has not designed it themselves. It was good that CWG members attended the presentation to the Land Use Committee so that the Committee could see the concerns and differences within CWG.

Mitchell Grubler: There is an inconsistency the recommendations in the Bowery area from East 2nd Street to East 9th Street. Pratt says this area has the same as the zoning from 9th - 13th Streets. That's inaccurate.

Antony Wong: Let's double check on the full report. The proposals do not generally concern areas of Community Board 2. Community Board 2 will support CB3's decisions. Let's go around the room for responses to the Pratt presentations.

Anj Chaudhry: CAAAV feels the document is mostly really good. Couple of things: the waterfront in subdistrict D allows heights that are taller than the current context. We'd prefer less development in that area. Also north of Grand Street should be more like subdistrict area A. We'd like to know the FAR of the NYCHA properties.

Susan Yung: The protections seem weak -- only anti-harassment and anti-demolition -- given what's happening in the city. Will it be too late for the gentrification of the neighborhood? Harassment is difficult to prove. CWG needs to get a much broader range of residents concerned.

Josephine Lee: CSWA feels that the proposals are selling out the surrounding area. We don't want to preserve one area at the expense of others. What's the mechanism to resolve our differences? And the neighborhood is changing now. How will we move forward?

Antony Wong: Eva said that we need to act now. Eight months is too long. Action Teams should move immediately on items of agreement.

Josephine Lee: Pratt did not incorporate all our concerns.

Antony Wong: The research is all documented in the endnotes.

David Tieu: NMASS feels this sells out the LES even with the marginal protections for public housing. It sets up the residents in public housing as a ghetto surrounded by an increasingly gentrified neighborhood where its residents will not have access to affordable groceries and schools. It puts private residents at more risk. It is racist towards black and Latino residents. We need a concrete process. Regarding the town hall: how will it be different? Needs much more outreach otherwise it will be a token sham. We need more clarification of process.

Wah Lee (Josephine Lee translating): I have been an activist in Chinatown for many years. Rezoning is important to our community and its future. It is worth the time to spend more outreach to residents and commercial business. The process will be better with more participation. We need translation and a simplification of the documents that residents can understand clearly.

Irving Lee: Can we get Pratt to answer questions?

Antony Wong: The co-chairs can ask.

Irving Lee: Property owners don't want to see gentrification. They are the backbone of the community, but they bear the brunt of the preservation proposals. They are being restricted, no one else. That's the reality and it's understood. We'd like to know more about the available air rights and the property tax rebates.

Susan Yung: Margaret Chin years ago said she wanted to see SROs in Chinatown. I don't see that in the current proposal.

Gigi Lee: It's important for CWG to divide up what is zoning and what doesn't require waiting. In a new progressive city leadership, there's an opportunity to see who's interested in working with us. As it goes through the Community Board, the Economic Development Committee may take up a piece of the plan and the Landmarks Committee as well. We can get outreach for each of those. Think strategically about location and constituents.

Mae Lee: We need to take action sooner than later. Action groups can do a lot. Stuff is happening now. The new administration needs to hear from us now. On zoning, Chinese Progressive Association has no opinion.

Rob Hollander: Maybe we can talk about how to move forward with action.

Antony Wong: ...maybe at the next Coordinating Committee meeting.

Rob Hollander: We had preliminary Action teams. They turned into action teams. They were empowered to go to city agencies. Only Preservation, Zoning and Affordability and Economic proposals have not been fully approved by CWG. The teams consist of anyone who goes to the meeting and does the work. But there are some aspects that we could vote on like anti-harassment and anti-demolition. It might be useful to find who's interested in participation in teams.

Josephine Lee: Let's not rubberstamp Pratt's documents. I was proposing a process.

Rob Hollander: Why not have a meeting to discuss the issues and go through the proposals? The full group is not an ideal place to hash out all the details.

Anj Chaudhry: What about quorum and missing members?

Rob Hollander: 15 members is quorum and 15 affirmative votes can pass a motion...

Mae Lee: ...or a simple majority whichever is greater. We had an attendance requirement for membership.

Kevin Leung: How long will it take to form the action groups especially the Preservation team.

Gigi Lee: Don't these already exist? Can't we just reactivate them?

Kevin Leung: But the property owners are not on that team even though it impacts them.

Anj Chaudhry: Can we have smaller meetings on either topics or areas?

Rob Hollander: Preservation should be dealt with by the Cultural and Historical Preservation Team and the owners should be invited to it. There should also be a team for Economic Sustainability.

Antony Wong: The Team chair should schedule a meeting and then we will post it on the CWG website.

Anj Chaudhry: Let's meet.

Rob Hollander: Can we do this at the Coordinating Committee?

Josephine Lee: 4pm is inconvenient.

Antony Wong: We will rearrange for the Coordinating Committee meeting to be later in the evening. Wilson will invite the zoning participants from the summer workshop and the CAPZ

members.

Irving Lee: The Property Taxpayers Association should be invited too.

Gigi Li: CB3 will be represented.

Rob Hollander: The Cultural and Historical Preservation Team should hold a meeting as well.

Anj Chaudhry: How long is the CB process?

Gigi Li: Once CWG submits to CB3, CB3 may accept parts and may propose changes. Then it will be up to CWG, as a group comprising 52-members, to express itself on a final proposal. Then there's a city process which also takes several months including review by the Department of City Planning and the Borough President before being approved by the City Council. CB3 views this as a community process that must consider all the stakeholders, so it is unlikely that it will rubberstamp the proposal from CWG. So CWG should start strategizing going forward.

Antony Wong: We will set up a discussion meeting tentatively for January 21. We will try to survey the optimal times for meetings. We will also seek a venue for a town hall meeting ideally for February 8. The Cultural and Historical Preservation Team will survey its members and the Property Taxpayers to find a meeting time. All these will be posted on the website.

6. Community announcements

Robert Lee: There will be a press conference and book party for Uncle Ng Comes to America on January 10, 2014, from 2pm to 4pm, at Silk Road Café, 30 Mott Street.

Antony Wong: Next meeting will be held at 5:30pm.
Meeting adjourned 7:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Rob Hollander, Sec'y