

DRAFT Minutes
Chinatown Working Group Meeting
March 4, 2019, 6:30pm, 275 Cherry Street Community Room

Voting members present: 83-85 Bowery Tenants Association (Shi Xiang Lin, Cheu Xu Liu, Shu QinSwuy, Qin Rong Wang); Chinese Staff and Workers Association (Zishun Ning); Land's End 2 Residents Association (Mercer Jabul); National Mobilization Against Sweatshops (Steph Kranes, Briar Winters); Youth Against Displacement (Caitlin Kelmar, Steph Kranes, Zishun Ning).

Also present: Michael Robinson Cohen (CityGroup architects), rob hollander (Lower East Side Residents for Responsible Development); Shelly Silver (resident artist), Susan Yung (artist), Christine Zhou (District Attorney New York).

Meeting called to order at 6:50pm, Briar Winters (NMASS) facilitating.

FEBRUARY MINUTES

February minutes approved by all present with no objections.

AGENDA:

- LESON update
- SoHo rezoning
- Commercial rezoning
- Newsletter and growing the group
- Updating CWG Plan
- Artist Grant
- Calculating air space in qualifying public assets

Agenda approved by all present.

LESON

Steph Kranes (NMASS, YAD): We had some trouble arguing the case against blocking air and light because technically they don't pertain to these towers. So we will argue on a different part of the law for the same thing, that the towers will harm the community. But the lawyers don't want to argue that. So we're talking to other lawyers .

rob hollander (LESRRD): What do the lawyers want to argue?

Steph: They want to argue procedural grounds. The EIS lacks relevant findings. We want to set a precedent that LSRD has a purpose and these towers violate them.

Shelly Silver (resident artist): How many units will the towers add?

Steph: 4000 units, times 3: 12,000 people.

Zishun Ning (CSWA, YAD): The main point is that we feel that the argument can be stronger. So we want to bring in other experts to strengthen the argument to protect the community. We need to mobilize the community to show the judges that there is a great impact, that it will destroy the environment, steal the air and sunlight only to benefit the rich. We can work on associating with DSA, the architects, and other groups.

We need more experts and need more money. The Bowery tenants are donating \$5,000 for this fund. We need to fundraise.

SOHO REZONING.

Caitlin Kelmar (YAD): We are going to speak to them. They are holding meetings preliminary to a ULURP. There's a lot of distrust for Chin. The second meeting was very contentious. There's a big artist community, but most are freelance so not counted by DCP as artists. So the demographics are skewed.

Shelly: In the past there was a process for artists, but it didn't include freelance vs salaried employee.

Caitlin: We'll be talking to artists.

Briar: It's developers who asked for this rezoning, not residents.

Caitlin: Big box stores asked for it so they wouldn't need special waivers.

CB₃ COMMERCIAL REZONING

Briar: CB₃ is contemplating a commercial rezoning that would protect the East Village from chain and big box stores, but only for the East Village.

rob: I'll talk to Harry Bubbins for an update.

NEWSLETTER AND GROWING THE GROUP

Briar: We have a draft. We'll email it out to you for your responses.

rob: I have two lists, one for active members and Zella's old list.

Caitlin: You should send it to both.

rob: I'll send it to all.

UPDATING THE CWG PLAN

Briar: Should we each take a piece of the plan to look through?

Caitlin: The introduction should also be rewritten. It's not urgent.

rob: I'll contact Eva Hanhardt to see if the students at Pratt might be interested in updating the plan.

Michael Cohen (CityGroup): This might be something our group would be interested in.

ARCHITECTS' GRANT

Mike: CityGroup is a group of loosely affiliated architects interested in affordable housing. We care about the city and housing. We met with the coalition and saw the zoning plan. We are writing a grant request to the New York State Foundation for the Arts for one of their \$10,000 grants. We could use it to look into the plan or into statistics on demographics. The funding will come much later. But we'd like to get started. We'll be writing the grant in march. We have a core of 10 people who meet weekly but then we have monthly discussions with 30 people. We hold the informal meetings at a storefront on 104 Forsyth between Grand and Broome.

Susan Yung (artist): Near Minerva. She might be interested.

Mike: We want to help with the effort, not bring our own agenda to it.

Caitlin: Vanessa met with you.

Zishun: Would you like to join CWG?

Mike: Yes, definitely. We need to know more about the process.

rob: To join CWG you must be a group, not an individual, provide a contact person name and evidence that your group meets. Would it be useful for us to attend to provide info on our plan?

Mike: Yes.

rob: And please put us on your email list.

Susan: I saw on the web that Margaret Chin is trying to set up a community arts center with opera and other traditional arts. She seems to be trying to organize the artists since there are so many artists setting up in Chinatown. There is a counter-group to hers called the Chinatown Art Brigade.

QUANTIFYING PUBLIC ASSETS

Briar: Maureen was adamant that it's difficult to defend public assets unless we can identify what they are, and thinks that it's helpful to have a value for those things so we can show what is being stolen from residents. The towers will steal light and air from them, but we aren't currently able to tell them how much that is worth. She thinks we should try to do that. She said she might find a consultant who could crunch the numbers. Maybe students or Tom Angotti might have access to students.

Mike: We could do that.

Shelly: It seems unquantifiable but it's somehow done.

rob: How much more rent for a penthouse versus an apartment without air or light...

Briar: She comes from an environmental perspective. How much is clean water worth?

rob: Priceless!

Shelly: That would strengthen the argument.

Caitlin: But do we want to put the price tag on it and then let them pay it? Have them take it from us because we said it was for sale?

Briar: But they are taking it anyway even though we didn't give them a price.

rob: Can we say this is the price that someone gave us but as far as we're concerned the price is infinite and not for sale?

Shelly: I think that's fine because in people's imagination it's good to have something in hand but as we all know we can't live without clean water, for example, so who's going to calculate that.

Briar: So if people are interested in that can we reach out to Tom?

Mike: Yes, we can look into it.

rob: Did you see the exhibit on zoning at the Museum of the City of New York? It was a huge, comprehensive history of zoning in New York City. The last room represents zoning today and the picture of community response to zoning is a photo of the Coalition protesting in the street. The Coalition was recorded in the history of zoning. you didn't know?

Zishun: No, they didn't ask us for permission :)

Meeting adjourned, 7:58pm.

Respectfully submitted,
rob hollander
Secretary, CWG