

DRAFT Minutes
Chinatown Working Group Meeting
July 1, 2019, 6:30pm, 275 Cherry Street Community Room

Voting members present: Art Against Displacement (Francisca Benitez, Caitlin Kelmar, Vanessa Thill); Bowery Alliance of Neighbors (Mitchell Grubler); Chinese Staff and Workers Association (Zishun Ning); Chinatown and Lower East Side Artists Against Displacement (Francisca Benitez); National Mobilization Against Sweatshops (Briar Winters); Youth Against Displacement (Caitlin Kelmar, Zishun Ning).

Also present: Bob Angles (Democratic Socialists of America); Michael Cohen (Citygroup architects); Violette de la Salle (Citygroup architects); rob holland (Lower East Side Residents for Responsible Development); Grace Lee (Children First).

Meeting called to order at 6:40pm, Francisca Benitez (AAD, NMASS) facilitating.

JUNE MINUTES

Minutes approved by all present without objection.

AGENDA

Alliances

Projects

Events

Elections

Development on Henry Street near Market Street is added to the agenda.

Agenda approved by all present.

MADISON STREET

Michael Cohen (Citygroup) reports that the developer's plans were rejected by the Department of Buildings. Their plan proposed 80 units, 19 stories.

rob holland (LESRRD): Is it as of right or are they requesting anything special that would require a public process? If they are using the community facility bonus, have they identified a tenant for the facility?

Mitchell Grubler (BAN): Since it's an empty lot, isn't this the kind of development we support?

rob: Because it will be more than three times the height of its surrounding buildings, it will draw high renters, raising local real estate values and displacement pressures.

Fran: This supports to our public demand for implementing the CWG plan. This development would not be possible if the CWG plan had been implemented.

ALLIANCES

Briar Winters (NMASS): We attended the Human Scale press conference objecting that City Planning commissioners are all connected to real estate.

Zishun Ning (CSWA): It's a conflict of interest, wolves guarding the henhouse. Many different groups spoke demanding DCP should be more accountable. They are demanding a moratorium on developments.

Briar: This was a preliminary event to an October event.

Mitchell: Any media?

Briar: AM New York wrote it up.

Mitchell: Similar demands were made at the previous charter commission but they were not acted upon.

rob: That charter commission was the mayor's promotional scam.

Briar: That's why it's timed this way for the new commission.

Mitchell: Did the anti-jail group attend?

Briar: Yes. Chris Marte was there representing them.

Vanessa Thill (AAD): I went to the Stop Sunnyside Yards group. They are dealing with the same issues, but don't yet have a community plan.

Briar: We will be meeting with Howard Brandstein from the 6th Street Community Center.

Grace Lee (Children First): Is there an East River Park group to connect with?

Briar: There are a couple of groups, the East River Alliance and an East River Action group.

Fran: Jamie and I went to a SPURA walk. There's an exhibit inside the Essex Street Market, an artspace called Cuchifritos The inaugural show looks back at what was demolished and the people displaced.

rob: I will ask Pete Davies of the SoHo-NoHo group again to come to a CWG meeting.

Grace: Howard Hughes Corporation is planning a tower at 250 Water Street. The site was once a thermometer factory, so there may be high levels of elemental mercury, which can at room temperature vaporize and can be carried by dust into enclosed spaces. Also mercury may sink all the way to bedrock. There are two schools nearby and Southbridge Towers with many residents.

Although Hughes has promised to clean up the site and has offered community givebacks, we are concerned that their clean up will disturb and distribute the mercury into the air. We alerted the DEC, sending the most letters on an application they've ever received. We got a delay of 3-4 months. Electeds were alerted as well.

Hughes is allowed to excavate without investigation. Mercury remediation would require excavation. But they have no approved development plans. Once they begin to excavate and remediate, they can use the incompleting remediation as leverage: "Approve our plans or we walk away leaving a disturbed toxic brownfield."

It's a historic district but they want to go higher than is allowed. and they want air rights transfers. They are planning 70 stories in a neighborhood of around 6 stories high. Why disturb the land without a plan? The school has tested and found no chemicals in the water and air currently. DOE has tested too with similar results. So why disturb the lot? Even hurricane Sandy didn't give us toxic chemicals. They get tax abatements once they do the remediation.

PROJECTS

Briar: LESON's lawyer involved in the suit against the towers wants us to catalogue the public assets like light and air that would be stolen by the tower developers. She wants to quantify them financially.

Caitlin: But wouldn't that give the developers a tool to buy out the public?

rob: Since LESON is the plaintiff, we should first ask them to meet and vote on whether they want to quantify the assets. If they want to, then we can help; if not, not.

Fran: We're continuing our community conversations. Someone complained to the library that this was too political for the library. That's why we moved the location to the community room from the library.

Zishun: We're doing outreach for these events. The injunction inspired public enthusiasm. We will petition to implement the full plan. It should be addressed to the Mayor and the Council Speaker, who will be running for mayor soon.

Caitlin: The Speaker is also a plaintiff in one of the lawsuits against the towers.

Grace: Also consider Jumaane Williams. He agreed to write a letter for us. I can introduce you to his staff.

Bob Angles (DSA): Will someone be at the library to direct people to send them here for the community conversation since the previous info had the library as the location?

Zishun: Yes.

Briar: Let's try contacting Jumaane.

ELECTIONS

Zishun: Displacement is the issue of the day.

Briar: Maud Maron, who works for Legal Aid and is a member of CB 2 is planning to run for Council.

rob: Chris Marte?

Briar: Let's meet again with Chris. NMASS and CSWA are planning to meet with the new District Leaders.

Meeting adjourned, 7:37pm

Respectfully submitted,
rob hollander
CWG Sec'y