

CWG Meeting Notes 9.13.2021

Voting Member Groups Present: Art Against Displacement (Francisca Benitez), CSWA (Zishun Ning), Downtown Independent Democrats (Tom La Gatta), NMASS (Steph Kranes, Briar Winters), Youth Against Displacement (Zishun Ning) East River Park Action (Fannie Ip), Citygroup (Violette de la Selle, Michael Cohen)

Also Present: Rob Hollander (Secretary/LESRRD); Kaiyu-Li (University of Chicago); Anna Benoit (community member)

Minutes and agenda approved; meeting called to order 6:36pm. Meeting facilitated by Rob Hollander.

Strategizing for plan implementation

Rob mentions that about a month ago he met with Chris Marte, Caitlin, Briar and Zishun to discuss plans for moving forward. Outreach for the current petition created by the Coalition to Protect Chinatown + LES is an important part of that, as well as hosting more events. He suggests a symposium, perhaps with someone from the progressive planning world to discuss community-led planning, and notes that it will be crucial to make the CWG appeal to the new mayor as a plan for the future. Steph likes the idea, and notes that it would be good to have community members on the panel, as well as academic voices.

Michael inquires about the timing of the EIS, Rob notes that it will be at the beginning of the process. DCP will have its own ideas, may negotiate with local councilmember and relevant orgs, like CWG. Then DCP will bid out the EIS, if it wants to move forward. During the hearings process, all options/alternatives will be considered, including those from other parties. Then ULURP can begin. Our concern is how to prepare the new mayor for this, need to coordinate outreach.

Report on CWG reading group

Michael found the process really useful. Rob felt that the hybrid meeting format was difficult to follow. Fannie agrees that it was great to exchange ideas and feels like she is more confident about sharing info on the plan now. Tom notes that DID will begin hybrid meetings soon, he can update us on best practices, we can continue to exchange ideas on this.

Review and updating of the plan

Steph wants to make sure we have a solid team in place for this project, notes that a few people are meeting tomorrow with Anna Benoit, an NYU student studying statistics. Anna is here and interested in learning more and potentially taking on some research to help us. Steph notes that some information can come directly from DCP, as well as the recently released census data. Tom would also like to help and will put together a Drive folder to store our work. He mentions that DID is also looking at demographic data right now, in order to determine how well the club is representing their community. Steph, Tom, Anna and Briar will work on this project, and will keep Rob in the loop.

Non-profit clarifications

Rob thanks Fannie for the useful document she sent along on this topic, which we have sent to Richard Moses at LESPI in response to his concerns. The document says that a non-profit organization can do coalition work, even if the coalition endorses a candidate, as long as the coalition doesn't use the organization's name as part of the endorsement, and doesn't use any funding/resources from the organization. Fannie notes that ERPA, for example, would feel comfortable making the explicit statement that CWG endorses the candidate and not individual groups, as long as no resources are used.

NYCHA Blueprint

Rob notes that the CWG plan does not have specific provisions for Section 8 housing, but that it is a concern. The basic idea of Blueprint is that NYCHA has no money, the Federal government would move money into the Section 8 program, which subsidizes rent by giving money to landlords, so that the rent paid by tenants is lower. NYCHA thinks this is the way forward, but it means the privatization of public housing, and it gives the landlord more leverage around the future of the property. Does CWG need to weigh in on this? Steph reminds us that CWG is a plan for NYCHA because of the

affordability mandate and the potential for setting a citywide precedent for community-led rezoning. Some discussion about the alternatives to Blueprint, including the Green New Deal for NYCHA, which Vanessa has been looking into. Jonathan Gardenhire is also involved in advocacy for this plan in his role at Smith Houses. Tom also notes that Chris Vecchio from DID is also preparing a fact sheet to educate their community on GND-NYCHA. Michael notes that the CWG Plan does not require public ownership of NYCHA, just sets affordability levels. Zishun refers to the exclusion of NYCHA from the East Village plan in 2008, and notes that it is important that we don't fall for dividing NYCHA from other parts of the community, reiterates the importance of the CWG in discouraging speculation. In this case, the city is the landlord, but they behave just like any other landlord, looking for excuses to kick people out, like in the case of 83-85 Bowery. We can bring people together by tackling the underlying motive, we need to keep the bigger picture in mind. Rob wonders if we should be more specific about the protections for NYCHA in the plan. Notes that Campos Plaza is already ½ privatized, which has already changed the numbers around affordability, if CWG says that any new units must match affordability of the existing ones, this could be an issue. It's agreed that we should come back to this.

Other announcements

Tom notes that there is a hearing for the Commercial Rent Stabilization bill on Friday at 10:30am, he has information about submitting testimony. Briar airs her concerns about the bill, including that the mayor appears to be in charge of most of the guidelines panel appointees, and that there is no right to renewal/binding mediation process as in SBJS, also the rent regulation seems to begin at market rate, which is already very high and unaffordable for many small businesses. Rob notes that small landlords may be concerned about the bill because it limits what they can charge for their storefronts when many of them own buildings full of rent-stabilized units and struggle to make their expenses. Michael notes that some of the ideas in CWG could be used to mitigate these concerns, including limiting property tax expenses for smaller landlords (also a demand in the current Coalition petition).

Tom also mentions that DID would like to see Chinatown + LES better represented on their Executive Committee, encourages anyone interested to get in touch with him for more info.

Fannie notes that the vote on redistricting is coming up in November, she would like to get more info on what's going on. She will look for resources to share.

Zishun shares the links to the petition from the Coalition and notes that there will be an art exhibition against displacement at the end of October, near MoCA and a march at the end of September. More details forthcoming.

Meeting notes courtesy of Briar Winters