

CWG Draft Minutes 3.1.21 6:30pm via Zoom

In attendance:

Art Against Displacement (Ryan Oskin, Vanessa Thill); Artists Space (Nia Nottage); Chinese Staff and Workers Association (Zishun Ning); Citygroup (Michael Robinson, Violette de la Salle); Downtown Independent Democrats (Richard Corman, Tom LaGatta); East River Park Action (Fannie Ip); Lower East Side Preservation Initiative (Richard Moses); National Mobilization Against Sweatshops (Steph Kranes, Briar Winters); Youth Against Displacement (Caitlin Kelmar).

Also in attendance: Andrew Hiller (Democratic Socialists of America); Rob Hollander (LESRRD); Mackenzie Lew (Staff Attorney at Mobilization for Justice); Sheila Kendrick (Save Central Park); Kaiyu-Li (University of Illinois, Chicago)

Draft February minutes and agenda approved; meeting called to order 6:35pm.

LESON/Coalition lawsuit & Two Bridges update

Steph Kranes: We will move to appeal in the Court of Appeals in mid-March. The City and developers appealed our victory in the lower court and overturned the injunction that we won which confirmed the City violated its own law. But beyond the legal aspect it's really important to try to pass the CWG Plan to prevent developments like this and use the election and campaigning for Chris Marte who has a track record of supporting the community's vision [outreach times shared].

Ryan Oskin: Is there anything we can do right now?

Steph Kranes: Legally not right now; this is the last juncture of this lawsuit, if we lose the appeal we'd need to bring a new, environmental-focused lawsuit. But outreach for Marte and mobilizing for CWG is important.

Zishun Ning: Yes, mobilizing is key because the fight has always relied on the community coming together. The court conflated the City Council lawsuit with ours; Chin sued just for another process but we sued on the basis that the City violated the law.

GRAND ST DEMOCRATS MEETING

Briar: There was some confusion and misinformation in the GDS meeting regarding the history of the plan which derailed the meeting.

Rob Hollander: Local Chinese small landlords did not want landmarking in the plan. CWG eventually took all landmarking off the table, but the landlords left the group before the plan was finalized. There remains some confusion around the presentation of the plan, which some people perceive to include landmarking since the Pratt Report, on which our zoning plan is based, includes many recommendations in its research, among them landmarking. However, CWG approved only zoning options in the Pratt report and no landmarking. The small landlords, who left the group before the plan was finalized, still mistakenly believe the plan is a downzoning. The CWG Plan actually increases the allowance for residential housing in Chinatown while lowering the commercial allowance, the goal being to give local

landlords an incentive to stay in Chinatown and not sell out to a hotel developer who will displace residential space. To be clear, the CWG Plan is not a landmarking plan, it is a zoning plan.

Zishun Ning: The CWG Plan is a compromise plan as it reflects the interests of diverse groups, but it is a plan that allows us to come together to fight our common problem, displacement.

CITYGROUP CWG VISUALS

Michael Robinson Cohen: We just finished the first round of the project that will develop, this first iterations shows the visualizations, and we want to have a discussion that will serve the efforts of CWG. Responding to Vanessa's comment we want to communicate the affordability aspect clearly.

Violette de la Salle: We identified sites that were vulnerable because they are under-developed currently, one visual shows each site with the maximum allowable bulk under the CWG Plan and the other shows the site with a more imaginative use/design. [There are also contrasting renderings that show what the site would look like *without* the Plan].

Richard Corman: I think it could come across a little bit more clearly if we could see what's there now, and what are the two alternatives and [how they adhere to the tenets of the plan].

Michael Robinson Cohen: This was just a first iteration which didn't have the space to provide a lot of explanation, but in the next round we are thinking of a booklet that could show more clearly how the visuals adhere to the tenets of the plan.

Mackenzie Lew, Staff Attorney at Mobilization for Justice: I'm a longtime supporter of Chinatown. I think for stakeholders and decisionmakers it is also very important for people to see beyond the visuals/size of buildings to see other effects, like impact on public services in the neighborhood, displacement of people, and also viewing from street level and not just bird's eye view. There are other visual cues for people that help them see the impacts beyond buildings.

Michael Robinson Cohen: If there are posters or pamphlets that we can make to elicit these ideas that would help give people a sense of ownership; we see this project as something that can be used/adapted in different ways.

Zishun Ning: The height limits are a key factor in the CWG Plan to limit the real estate speculation because the developers come in if they're allowed to build tall and profit from the high-rises; so maybe some context in the description would help.

Michael Robinson Cohen: I can also send this PDF and link to people again. We want to continue this discussion and develop the project together.

CWG WEEK OF ACTION

Briar Winters: the week of action would entail an info session and tangible actions people could take to push for the passage of the plan. One idea is a candidate questionnaire, sharing the citygroup visuals, etc. What ideas do people have?

Rob Hollander: I saw Fannie on a walk with Diane Morales the other day.

Briar Winters: Walks are a great way to get people engaged in fighting for the CWG Plan.

Tom LaGatta: DID has endorsed Diane for Mayor, we have a relationship with her and can introduce her to CWG and get her to support it.

Briar Winters: Great. Another idea we have is to create a visual badge that both member groups and friends could post on their website to generate more exposure and support for CWG; we will talk more with AAD, and if people have more ideas we'd love to hear.

Zishun Ning: So there would be actions/events that member groups could take up and host.

Nia Nottage: It could be cool if different groups could state why they support CWG to personalize it and also include the specific points of the plan.

Briar Winters: I love that, it helps people see the meaning behind the plan and connect to it.

Zishun Ning: Maybe Briar and I could pick a point person for this project, the Week of Action, and if anyone has ideas they are welcome to talk to us, and we will also follow up with groups to see what proposals they have, and then we will have a concrete plan for our next meeting in early April.

Andrew Hiller: DSA can send people to the drive.

Michael Robinson Cohen: The week of action seems like a great chance for us to continue to develop the visualizations. Perhaps we could create some material that focuses specifically on 59 Henry street. We could propose a powerful narrative against what is currently being developed on the site. Focusing on one site would also let us set up a template for how to describe the other sites.

Vanessa Thill: CWG merch would be good, too. And AAD started #NoTowersTV.

CWG INFO SESSION WITH NYCHA TENANTS

Zishun Ning: Jonathan Gardenhire the District Leader who lives in Smith Houses is not here, but he really supports CWG and wants to host an info session on CWG for NYCHA residents and some tenant leaders in mid-March, but it could be set for a later date if necessary.

Briar Winters: If anyone is interested to connect more with NYCHA folks, we can plug you in.

CANDIDATE MEETINGS

Zishun Ning: We've met with Diana Florence, Brad Hoylman, Ben Kallos.

Fannie Ip: We should also meet with Diane Morales.

Briar Winters: It would be good to put mayoral candidates on the spot and get them in the conversation so these next weeks will be a good time to connect with candidates. We have a core group who talk with candidates but we'd love to have other people participate in those meetings.

Fannie Ip: I can help set up a meeting with Lindsay [Boylan] if you're interested.

Briar Winters: We'd love that.

Fannie Ip: We could go on a walk with her.

Tom LaGatta: DID has also endorsed Hoylman, I'm going to text him to set up a meeting.

Briar Winters: That would be great, we have been playing phone tag.

Zishun Ning: Anyone excited about any of the mayoral candidates? Some people suggested putting heat on Andrew Yang since he's the frontrunner. Besides Diane Morales, anyone else?

Kaiyu-Li: I attended a lower manhattan mayor candidate forum in Feb and I remember Maya Wiley kept mentioning chinatown.

Andrew Hiller: Yang is really into upzoning.

Caitlin Kelmar: If Yang talks about something everyone else talks about it, too. It's a good way to 'poke the hornet's nest.'

Briar Winters: I'd love to contact as many candidates as possible to force as many people as possible to talk about it.

JOHNSON'S COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING BILL & CLOSING THE FAR LOOPHOLE

Vannessa Thill: It's problematic that Kallos is supporting it but City Planning and the Mayor are against it.

Andrew Hiller: I agree the bill is flawed and very top-down, but also there are some groups who **[wasn't able to catch this part]** so we should be careful how we position ourselves.

Zishun Ning: It's important we push for the upcoming administration to be different than the de Blasio administration and not collude with developers, to put people first like the CWG Plan emphasizes, so if the City works with the community to put a bill forward that actually support communities' vision then we can work with them but this bill doesn't do that.

Richard Corman: Some form of comprehensive planning is sound, but how to make that work in a way that's good for communities I just don't know, but it doesn't seem like it's this particular bill, so the objective is laudable, but it doesn't succeed, and so we oppose the bill as written.

Sheila Kendrick, Save Central Park: Senator Rosenthal and Robert Jackson support this bill. We are so passionate about this bill because it holds developers accountable to the letter and intent of the existing zoning. Developers are using mechanical voids to jack their building heights, 432 Park Ave is a prime example. Every 12 stories has an empty floor that they light up at night. 66th Street as well, will go through as proposed, which has 200 feet of vertical empty space, 20 stories of nothing; it's obscene. It's an egregious abuse of legislation that currently exists. So the basic pieces of it: it limits 5% of void or a maximum of 20 feet or 2 stories, which would be for functional use like HVAC and ventilation. Usage of terrace space would also be limited. Linda Rosenthal with George James, he's a preeminent zoning

expert in the city who, with the NY Firefighters Association, put together a plan to prevent these types of voids on account of their safety issues. Firefighters have to get through the void to save people above the void, putting everyone involved in jeopardy. The bill is very simple and Linda Rosenthal's office thinks they can, with all the difficulty they're facing this year, get this through.

Rob Hollander: In context of CWG, the New Museum, which is in the CWG catch area, exploited these two loopholes, raising the contextual height. Our plan depends on contextual zoning, so such buildings would render our entire plan ineffectual.

Zishun Ning: The Two Bridges towers also use this loophole, but we will also talk more in detail, Briar and Rob, with Save Central Park on Thursday. CWG can write a letter in support.

Sheila Kendrick: If CWG could write on letterhead and individual groups in the CWG could do so as well.

MEMBER GROUP UPDATES

Zishun Ning: We have a draft of a letter in support of LESPI's restoration plan as alternative to the City's demolition of the buildings in East River Park, but the letter also connects to the broader anti-displacement issues like the CWG Plan and the closure of East River Park. Rob strengthened the letter to give voice to the preservation issue, and XXXXX. We will finalize the letter this week and send it to de Blasio.

Richard Moses: Thank you all for a very nice letter.

Rob Hollander: I had a bunch of concerns about the City's resiliency project being delayed by the restoration. The mission of CWG is to protect the residents of the study area, and NYCHA residents are in that study area. They need flood proofing now. They support the City's plan.

Fannie Ip: The NYCHA area has their own flood-proofing plan right now. It's been 8 years since Sandy and we've got no flood protection, but the City is framing their plan as that or nothing, and it involves complete destruction of the park, so at the same time, you have to realize that there is separate flood protection for NYCHA happening now, and we are against the City's plan to destroy the park for 1.45 billion dollars, that has to be carefully scrutinized.

Richard Moses: Nobody wants to see the City's plan delayed, and there's no reason why saving these buildings would delay the project. Restoration would be more environmentally friendly than causing pollution from demolition, carting materials away in trucks.

Rob Hollander: I agree with Fannie and Richard, but our members, the NYCHA residents in this area, are who we are supposed to protect, we can't pit ourselves against them so we're in a delicate position so it has to be treated very gingerly. We haven't polled or spoken to the NYCHA leadership who would be vocal if they found out the CWG abandoned them.

Fannie Ip: The Value Engineering Study, this report that recently came out, because ERPA did a FOIL request, and the City claimed there was no report, so ERPA appealed the FOIL and got the study released, and it's heavily redacted, so ERPA is working on getting a version that is not redacted and looking at legal options to reopen the EIS or do a possible lawsuit.

JING FONG

Zishun Ning: We will protest the landlord on March 2 because he is forcing the business to close. The owner is having problems paying. We will connect it to the anti-displacement fight, that small businesses and workers are losing their jobs, and to save Chinatown this is something people can do. This also connects to the call against anti-Asian violence.

Steph Kranes
Sec'y pro tem