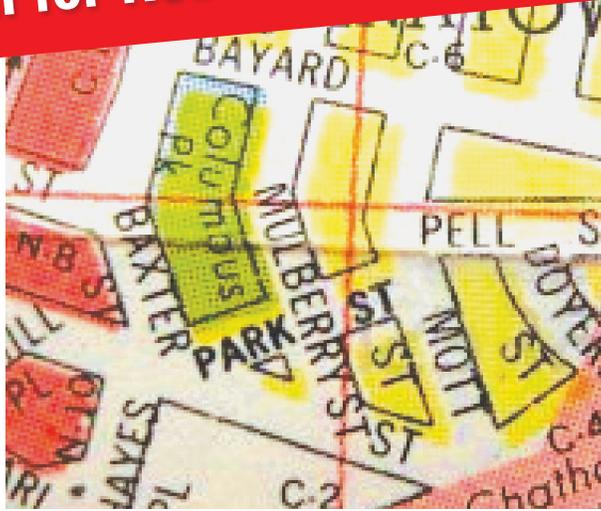


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REIMAGINING REZONING

A Chinatown for Residents is a Chinatown for All



INTRODUCTION

“We need a new rezoning plan because there’s too much development in Chinatown, and it’s not for me or for other poor immigrants.” – Focus Group Participant #2

The Chinatown neighborhood is the physical, economic, and cultural center for new and old Chinese immigrants in New York City. Yet over the past decade, Chinatown has been confronted with the increasing forces of gentrification, and as a result, has lost 17 percent of its Chinese residents as well as scores of small businesses.¹

Zoning rules and regulations, set forth by the Department of City Planning and the City Council, are important tools that Chinatown residents can use to combat gentrification. Rezoning the area will not solve all the complex problems facing Chinatown. However, if undertaken with community residents’ voices at the forefront, rezoning remains a critical way to protect the needs of residents and businesses, preserve historic communities, encourage affordable housing development, increase neighborhood employment opportunities, and expand transportation options. Unfortunately, in New York City, elected officials – in particular Mayor Michael Bloomberg – are increasingly using their rezoning powers to benefit corporations, developers and the wealthy. But as the residents in Chinatown convey throughout this report, this method of city planning is not inevitable, and equitable rezoning could be a powerful way to protect the right of Chinatown’s residents and businesses to remain and thrive in the neighborhood that they call home.

METHODOLOGY

In order to determine and document the priorities and needs of the Chinatown community in a potential rezoning process, CAAAV and the Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center collected 451 surveys with Chinatown residents as well as individuals who frequently come to the neighborhood, conducted a canvass of 140 area businesses in a targeted region, conducted a focus group with 9 tenants, interviewed 5 youth and business owners from Chinatown, and conducted a review of existing literature and data on rezoning in New York City. The quantitative and qualitative data found within this report is generated from these research methods.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

- ***83.1% of respondents that live in Chinatown have had their rent increased in the past 3 years;***
- ***65.1% of respondents that live in Chinatown are concerned about housing affordability;***
- ***66.3% of respondents that live in Chinatown think that at least half of all new housing development should be affordable to low-income people;***
- ***69.0% of respondents that live in Chinatown prefer smaller tenement buildings to larger, taller buildings;***
- ***20.2% of respondents that live in Chinatown have been threatened with eviction;***
- ***80% of businesses have had their rent increased in the past 5 years.***

¹ S. Khan. “Making Census Of It: Chinatown is No Longer Home to NYC’s Largest Chinese Population.” NY 1. July 20th, 2011. Available online at: <http://www.ny1.com/content/special-reports/making-census-of-it/143332/making-census-of-it-chinatown-no-longer-home-to-nyc-s-largest-chinese-population>

REZONING PRINCIPLES

CAAAV's comprehensive and participatory research further highlights the need for a new vision of rezoning—one that support sustainable and just neighborhood development and is rooted in community residents' vision and priorities. To ensure rezoning promotes equitable development, CAAAV believes the following principles must be upheld by the City when rezoning neighborhoods.

- 1. Rezoning should benefit residents.** Too often rezoning benefits outside developers that work to transform the neighborhood until it is no longer recognizable. CAAAV believes that any rezoning of the Chinatown area should, first and foremost, benefit the long-time community residents.
- 2. Rezoning should benefit small, family-owned businesses.** In recent years, affordable businesses and stores that have long served the community have struggled to pay their rent and some have been forced to change location. A Chinatown rezoning plan needs to include protections for small businesses.
- 3. Rezoning should promote affordability.** A rezoning plan for Chinatown should include protections for businesses that serve low-income community members and provide basic goods at an affordable price.
- 4. Rezoning should involve community participation.** Community members particularly low-income and immigrant residents are often left out of the debate about rezoning. CAAAV strongly believes that any plan to rezone Chinatown should be generated by Chinatown residents, who should be involved in every stage of the rezoning process.

REZONING PRIORITIES

An equitable development plan based on the principles laid out above would go a long way towards not only protecting and preserving the neighborhood, but ensuring its continued vitality. Below are some specific rezoning policies the City can implement to uphold CAAAV's rezoning principles and thereby protect and promote Chinatown residents and businesses:

- 1. The Department of City Planning should create a Special Zoning District encompassing all of Chinatown that includes strong anti-demolition, anti-harassment and anti-eviction provisions as well as limits on the kinds of businesses that can open in the neighborhood.**
- 2. The Department of City Planning should include mechanisms to create affordable housing in all rezoning plans. Specifically, the affordable housing mechanisms should:**
 - A. Use a local Area Median Income (AMI) when calculating rent for affordable housing units;*
 - B. Amend the Inclusionary Zoning program to ensure that "affordable" units developed through the rezoning are set aside for very low-income and extremely low-income community residents;*
 - C. Mandate that all developers set aside a minimum of 50 percent of units in new developments for affordable housing (under the new definition laid out above).*
- 3. The Department of City Planning should limit the height of new buildings in Chinatown by reducing the floor to area (FAR) ratio throughout the neighborhood.**

CALL TO ACTION

When land use decisions are made with the needs of residents and with the goal of sustainable development at the forefront, healthy and vibrant communities are the result. We urge the City to take the recommendations in this report and use them as the foundation for a new rezoning plan for Chinatown.

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