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Chinatown Plans Unveiled

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Chinatown leaders announced Monday they will use a \$100,000 grant from Freddie Mac, the mortgage company, to measure the impact of Sept. 11 on the still distressed neighborhood.

They will seek a broad section of input from civic leaders, community and fraternal organizations, residents, business owners and cultural and arts institutions, said Christopher Kui, executive director of Asian Americans for Equality, which is heading the effort.

Chinatown's economy is still suffering from the Sept. 11 attack.

According to a study released last spring, 7,685 workers there or 23 percent of the work force were laid off in the three months after the terrorist attack.

Chinatown has been affected by the events of Sept. 11 like no other community in New York City, said Rep. Nydia Velazquez, a Democrat whose district includes the downtown Manhattan area.

Small businesses in Chinatown saw declines in patronage of up to 70 percent. Garment factories had to cut back production by half, affecting one in six garment jobs in New York City. Phone service was disrupted, cutting off businesses from their customers.

Velazquez said some of the state and federal aid programs that are available to small businesses are of limited use to Chinatown merchants.

They have to pay their bills, she said. They cannot afford to pay for a disaster loan because they don't know what the prospects for their businesses are.

Velazquez joined Chinatown leaders at a news conference to announce the Rebuild Chinatown Initiative, which will include surveys, interviews, focus groups and community forums leading to the creation of an action plan for the area.

The Enterprise Foundation, a community development organization, will provide technical assistance, and the Harvard Joint Center for Housing will provide research and data analysis.

City Finance Commissioner Martha Stark also attended the news conference at Chinatown's Holiday Inn and announced an effort to publicize lower Manhattan's upcoming tax-free shopping days, Tuesday through Thursday and Aug. 20-

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Because some merchants were not aware of the first tax holiday, June 9-11, and mistakenly charged sales tax, the city is circulating fliers explaining the program in English, Spanish and Chinese. The sales tax exemption applies to most purchases under \$500 south of Houston Street.

OPINION

- Letters to the Editor
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捧e hope that downtown visitors and businesses alike will benefit from the remaining sales tax-free days and that the opportunity will encourage thousands to shop, dine and stay in lower Manhattan this summer,?Stark said.

Part 2 / FEATURES

On the Net: Asian Americans for Equality: <http://www.aafe.org/>

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