



RCI Topical Workshop #3: Commerce, Culture and Tourism

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70 Mulberry Street, 2nd Floor

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TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDED COMMENTS

Culture

- Pedi-cabs not good for winter
- Most essential cultural item is the folkloric aspect. Don't focus on just venues for institutions--put culture out into total environment.
- Don't have a movie house, but outdoor movies in the park would do very well.
- Folk art on the street—want to see it, but also want to look forward—old image (quaint place to eat) was a reaction to a hostile environment—times have changed, Chinatown is larger and more complex, more modern—needs to move on, to change its image—emphasize link with Asia, huge population, huge economy—emphasize Chinatown's global place
- Cultural facilities—capital funds, operating funds, where will they come from?
- Cultural center will help the area enormously, will point to the future
- Pleased to hear from a professional that different cultural activities do not have to all be fit into one cultural center.
- Programming is insular—liability—Chinatown should not be insular (i.e. present Chinese opera at the Met). Chinatown is not an island—a part of NYC—needs to step out and be visible in other parts of town

Urban Design

- Gates—why is there a need for demarcation?
- Gates connote that you've fenced off something—but could serve as beacons
- Gate—a closing off, an enclave—marks the Casbah—want to break down these barriers—will become a war between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese for who can have the biggest gate
- Want the connection with South Street Seaport, lighting under the Brooklyn Bridge
- Vacant land at Manhattan Bridge should be used as site for changing art exhibits—must be contemporary, not folk art
- NYC Chinatown is different—it's a living community—people know when they are in Chinatown from the signs, the businesses, etc.
- The debate about gates in other Chinatowns always brings up these very issues—tension between “looking backwards” and placemaking—fact is that gates bring in tourists
- Instead of marking the edges, create a centerpiece (maybe at Chatham Square)
- Past is problematic—if a gate attracts tourists, that brings in money—but has negative connotations, harkens back to when Chinese were oppressed by prejudice and repressive laws—idea of passage is central to gates—notion of passage is the key

Pedestrian Improvements

- Need pedestrian improvements along Forsyth between East Broadway and Canal
- Men's detention center—how can that be part of the pedestrian plan?

Tourism

- Fallacy of putting on events for tourists—should be folkloric in nature, not just for tourists
- Doesn't have to center around Chinese folklore only—"egg creams and egg rolls"—blending and mixing of cultures. Emphasize synergies and active participation between communities.
- Difficulty of closing off a street—so much controversy
- Anything that even involves a truck delivery is a logistical nightmare
- Roosevelt Park—access is difficult, Columbus Park is more central for events
- Concerts, films in Columbus Park
- Special events yield only temporary improvements in business—will it sustain business?
- Events can start small, yet grow (i.e. pickle festival in L.E.S.)
- Need many events, not just one big one—not enough room to accommodate large events
- Street pattern is small and intimate---part of the charm, but also a handicap
- What about at night? Nightlife.

Shopping and Dining

- Transform warehouse under Brooklyn Bridge into a food market (like Bridgemarket under Queensborough)
- Vendors should leave—they are destroying Chinatown—rats, filth, noise, etc...—Grand and Mott is a horrible spot—smells, people have to hold their nose
- Ranch 99—retail “death stars”—would either kill local retailers, or would fail—very bad idea—small stores keep money in the neighborhood—Ranch 99 attracts drivers, would probably go to Flushing
- Core is trending to low-volume, high-margin businesses (like the tea shops), herb stores, other trendy and upscale businesses
- Hybrid retail/cultural stores—(like the tea shop/museum in SF)
- National destination?—can't get into Chinatown, it's so congested—no banquet hall available without 2 years' wait
- Pearl River went to Broadway to escape congestion, attract upscale clientele—pan-Asian focus will break down barriers, look to the future
- Use the pier and other empty space to bring business and energy to Chinatown
- Didn't talk about the pier—a fundamental problem is congestion—Chinatown has been squeezed—pier is a place to relieve the congestion, create open spaces, opportunities for growth

BID

- Liability in trying to fund something before you have a program—address funding after you know what to do.
- Need lighting at night, on Canal especially, for the restaurants and nightlife
- Sanitation—what's the fundamental cause? Why aren't the businesses keeping their areas clean? Many obstacles—lack of space, garbage collectors not showing up, need Sunday garbage pickup
- BID could provide opportunities for job creation: how many private cleaning companies come to Chinatown? If none, creating one could employ local people.
- Can you move vendors around to one location?

General Comments

- Important to manage all these forces—how do we inject long-range planning—what can we calculate in the long range that will tell us what will happen
- Need to focus on planning issues—traffic, parking, lighting, etc.---for Chinatown to work
- To make things happen, may have to organize some specialized working groups