



**RCI Topical Workshop #4: Housing, Quality of Life, Business and Workforce Development**  
**Garment Industry Development Corporation**  
**193 Centre Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor**  
**July 29, 2003**  
**TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDED COMMENTS**

---

### **Housing**

- Who are the landlords? How to prevent them from neglecting/abandoning buildings?
- What are obstacles to building up and up-zoning?
- What prevents the exercise of eminent domain to assemble large sites?
- For proposed zoning, what would be uses?
- What's the impact of new housing on parking lots?
- Advantages of sliver buildings?
- Any benefits for cultural facilities?
- What's demographic pattern in Queens?
- In Chatham Green, most of the people are buying units for their parents, not to raise families in.
- What % of Chinatown residents work in Chinatown?
- Homebuyers are choosing locations based on quality of schools, and Flushing has the #1 school district in the city.

### **Parks**

- If you compare Chinatown's density with that of Hong Kong, it is low; does HK city planning provide for park space?
- What would Chinatown community demand from their park---can't assume they'll want a Central Park experience.
- If you want to attract families, you can't think about parks only from an immigrant perspective.
- How about community gardens? Gardening is popular amongst seniors.
- Chinese need parks for identity, gathering places besides banquet halls. Parks cultivate togetherness, dialogue, interconnections amongst ethnic Chinese from the diaspora. They are a way to incorporate the old and new.
- In China, the parks are not created to impress the West. They are used to create amenities for high-tech workers. In Shanghai, people perform a variety of activities in their parks, including dancing and tai-chi.

### **Waterfront**

- It is very important that Chinatown get in the front of waterfront development; otherwise, private developers will determine what's built and negatively affect existing businesses, taking away customers instead of attracting new ones.
- Could you add landfill to expand the waterfront? (It would be very expensive, at least \$300 million, and would take at least a decade.)

### **Jobs:**

- How to address merchants' fear of additional congestion on Canal?
- You will need to address resistance from people who use trucks for storage and wholesale distribution.
- Flushing is benefiting from Chinatown's lack of parking.

**Vendor Locations:**

- Police park everywhere, even on sidewalks. What can be done?

**BID:**

- What about historic districts?
- There aren't places for large tour and school buses to park; they just idle.

**Construction:**

- Home Depot is already moving to Houston, between Bowery and Allen.
- Loews Department Store is looking to expand.

**Expand Job Training and Education:**

- Under-estimation of employment for garment industry; should be 60 employees/firm, not 10 employees/firm.
- Could Chinatown still be designated an Empire Zone?
- Fashion District BID has marketing function, in addition to sanitation and security.
  - It would make more sense to have one Chinatown BID for unified marketing.
- Flushing BID, a 20-year effort that will finally pass approval next month.
  - Join IDA to get assistance with BID formation.
  - A BID can induce government to do more things.
  - Consider a BID like tuition: it's expensive upfront, but worth investing in.
- Should approach a BID like the controversial pedestrian streets: could you structure it so that it encompasses a small area instead of the entire community?
- There is state legislation being drafted to create culture zones: 2 square miles per county, tracts of land do not have to be contiguous. Would provide tax abatements for landlords who lease to cultural facilities.
- Where would the community college be located?
- The key to (Chinatown's) salvation is education: language barrier and lack of marketable skills are obstacles to upward mobility.
- There already is a BMCC on Chambers Street.
- Chinatown's destiny is in culture; community college could be a think tank.
- Upstate Chinese schools are better, preferred by parents of Chinese adoptees. How about a university for people to learn Mandarin?
- For first time in decades, Chinatown schools have a surplus of teachers, drop in enrollment (because parents are going elsewhere for jobs). Chinatown schools are at a critical juncture. They are a vital part of the neighborhood: Transfiguration has a parochial school. They are great collaborators with cultural groups and incubators for cross-cultural curriculum, potentially could serve as national models for bilingual education.
  - Schools really push kids to learn English and assimilate. Chinese immigrant kids are embarrassed by Chinese culture in front of their classmates.
- Community college needs to address needs of youth as well as adults.
- A community college would be a good bridge between Chinatown and Wall Street: have corporate sponsorship to finance the school? Chinese don't document their history and culture in ways that other groups do, like the Jewish Heritage Museum (?)
- The college should be for all ages. There is a high school at the end of E. Broadway that is currently looking for more space.
- What are next steps?
- Kids want to identify with winners. When parents can't speak English, children look down on them: lack of role models, problems with gangs. Have to simultaneously empower parents and kids.
  - Bilingual schools in Flushing: teachers are bilingual, can quickly explain concepts in Mandarin, then switch back to English.

- Can't see one example of Chinatown successfully integrated with rest of the city (i.e. Chinatown Cornfields in LA, San Jose)---continual process of dislocation.
- Civic participation is critical for larger advocacy and successful implementation. Need a road show to share RCI with schools, family associations and community groups; get momentum going. Next period will be really exciting and needs community groups working together to succeed.