



RCI Steering Committee Meeting

GIDC

193 Centre Street, 2nd Floor

December 3, 2003

TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDED COMMENTS (Consultant's responses in parentheses)

General Comments:

- Increasing community pride needs to more explicitly expressed as an objective: it's important for achieving results and is connected to culture as well.
- Overall, a great plan. To gain community buy-in, it is important to advertise successes, even the little ones, like the experiment with angled parking on Forsyth. Even though the parked cars are cutting into the sidewalks, it's better.
- Have you been working with the East River Park re-design? There needs to be a formal Chinese garden; it would be a real attraction. (When the EDC selects a consultant for the re-design, we should descend on them with the RCI waterfront vision.)
- The presentation is both impressive and overwhelming. A politician would simplify the message in order to motivate people to act.
- This presentation is designed for large, broad audiences with a little bit of everything for everyone. It could be tailored and shortened for more specific audiences.

The Metaphor: America's Chinatown?

- AAFE's role is to do outreach and get the community involved by asking: What is needed? How much effort are you willing to contribute? What are you willing to do? Not one organization can handle this: it really needs a unified Chinatown. (We're still looking for a metaphor that will capture the essence and spirit of this plan. We have been calling it "America's Chinatown.")
 - "America's Chinatown": That's good, it aims high.
 - There is a big push from the Mayor for NYC to be the crossroads of America. You need to dream big in Chinatown, because the City is.
 - It's great to see that Chinatown is getting its act together. You've created an entry-level dialogue for outsiders, and you have a lot of visuals similar to the Olympics 2012 presentation, like the illustration of the Canal-Bowery axis for an office-cultural district.

Cultural Magnets:

- The 225 Park Row site would be very good for cultural uses, because of its location: high visual impact. But, when is the 2nd Avenue Subway coming in? (When it comes in, the city may demolish the building. The community could ask the city to replace it with something bigger and high-profile. Plaza improvements could be demanded as mitigation for the Park Row closure as well.)
- The cultural calendar is a great idea.

Learning Campus: all the ingredients are there, but the concept needs a crusader. The City is looking for an olive branch to offer the community for Park Row. It is unlikely that the DMV building will be entirely vacant.

- The China Institute is looking for a new location: maybe it could incorporate an educational component.
- Why not rebuild the little building (225 Park Row) into a beautiful educational building with training classrooms that manifests the value of its students?

- Park Row could also be conceptualized as a new corridor of health care services, bringing together alternative and traditional medicine.

Industrious Chinatown:

- There is no economic development plan for commercial development: how to modernize office buildings? It's important to provide affordable office space with good, modern conditions. The existing infrastructure is not suitable for contemporary uses, yet the rents are high. (Clearly there is a demand for more office space, but it's tricky to pin-point solutions for increasing supply. No one is building spec office buildings like a medical arts building, and banks are holding out for housing since the market is hotter for residential. Maybe the strategy is to approach hospitals with an alternative medicine interest about a medical arts building.)
 - Canal, Centre, Lafayette are ideal corridors for an office district, because of high visibility and soft-sites.
 - Garment is being converted into commercial, but slowly and on a few floors, rather than an entire building.
 - If you set-aside buildings exclusively for garment, then commercial development wouldn't be as restricted. This could allow both the garment and the commercial spaces to be upgraded and modernized according to their particular needs.
- We need to reverse the dispersal from Chinatown. The Fujianese could be key: they are very adventurous, motivated, and more coordinated than traditional groups; they could pull a lot of resources to development like the waterfront.

Unifying Chinatown:

- There is a weakness in east-west linkages, both physically and ethnically. This is significant, because the ethnic cleavages are also east-west. If you walk west from the Lower East Side, you encounter several barriers: Allen Street, Chrystie, Forsyth, and the Bowery.
 - The physical barriers signify the divide between Old/New Chinatown, Cantonese/Fujianese. If you ask a real estate broker in the Core about property on East Broadway, they don't know, because they don't care and vice versa.
 - What will make one group care about ideas that would benefit the other? For example, why would the Core care about the waterfront? Maybe you need to sell how improvement in one area benefits the whole.
 - Instead of articulating one center, position Chinatown as being multi-centered, with Allen Street as the spine, not the new center, of Chinatown.
 - "America's Chinatown" may resonate more with the Core than with the Fujianese.
 - How could the two areas be complementary in terms of economic development? How can we promote even growth on both sides?

Authenticity

- The objective and strategies to preserve authenticity really struck a chord---it will resonate with young Asian-Americans, both students and professionals. Chinatown is the closest thing Asian-Americans have to learning about Chinese culture and identity. Chinatown is also a place for others, for non-Asians to learn about Chinese culture.
- Authenticity is what makes Chinatown viable: the example of Chinatown restaurants and how they initially functioned to serve Chinatown workers, but have become popular with visitors and tourists because they offer an authentic experience of local food is a compelling one. (Maybe we should think about what ingredients go into "America's Chinatown," things that have more political and social meaning to the community.)