



January 27, 2021

Hon. Bill de Blasio  
Mayor of New York City

Hon. Margaret Chin  
NYC Council Member

Hon. Carlina Rivera  
NYC Council Member

Hon. Corey Johnson  
NYC Council Speaker

Hon. Gale Brewer  
Manhattan Borough President

Dear Mayor de Blasio, Council Members Chin and Rivera, Speaker Johnson, and BP Brewer,

Enclosed please find a Resolution approved by Downtown Independent Democrats General Membership on January 27, 2021:

**In Support of the Chinatown Working Group Plan for Chinatown and the LES**

The current zoning and zoning plans for Chinatown and the Lower East Side fail to meet community needs. These laws displace long-time residents via real-estate speculation, increase taxes on small businesses and tenants, and fail to nurture the historical and cultural character of the neighborhoods.

The Chinatown Working Group Plan is a community-led framework to stop displacement of tenants, workers, and small businesses; to expand affordable housing; to protect the diverse neighborhoods of Chinatown and the Lower East Side; and to prevent rezonings of one neighborhood at the expense of another, as happened with the 2008 East Village rezoning.

**DID endorses the Chinatown Working Group Plan, and intends to join the CWG as a member organization.**

DID urges the City Council and Mayor to support the CWG Plan, support the updating process, move forward with an Environmental Impact Study, and implement the updated Plan.

Sincerely,

Richard Corman  
President, Downtown Independent Democrats

Enclosure

cc: Hon. Jumaane Williams, NYC Public Advocate  
Hon. Scott Stringer, NYC Comptroller  
Hon. Chuck Schumer, U.S. Senator  
Hon. Kirsten Gillibrand, U.S. Senator  
Hon. Carolyn Maloney, U.S. Representative  
Hon. Jerrold L. Nadler, U.S. Representative  
Hon. Nydia Velázquez, U.S. Representative  
Hon. Andrew Cuomo, NYS Governor  
Hon. Carl Heastie, NYS Assembly Speaker

Hon. Andrea Stewart-Cousins, NYS Sen. Leader  
Hon. Brad Hoylman, NY State Senator  
Hon. Brian Kavanagh, NY State Senator  
Hon. Harvey Epstein, NY State Assembly  
Hon. Deborah J. Glick, NY State Assembly  
Hon. Yuh-Line Niou, NY State Assembly  
Tammy Meltzer, Chair, Manhattan Community Board 1  
Carter Booth, Chair, Manhattan Community Board 2  
Alysha Lewis-Coleman, Chair, Manhattan CB 3



## In Support of the Chinatown Working Group Plan for Chinatown and the Lower East Side

January 27, 2021

### Whereas:

**1. Overdevelopment in Chinatown and the Lower East Side is causing displacement of residents and impacting affordability in the neighborhood.**

- a. Real-estate speculation displaces long-time residents, increases taxes on small businesses and tenants, and fails to nurture the historical and cultural character of the neighborhoods.
- b. No zoning is in place to stop large developments. Recent developments include Extell Tower in Two Bridges, Essex Crossing on Delancey St, and large hotel, residential, and commercial developments across the district and nearby areas.
- c. There are 4 more large towers planned for the Two Bridges neighborhood; development is paused pending announcement of ruling results in Feb./March.
- d. Developers are skilled at "divide and conquer" techniques, forcing local community groups on the defensive to stop big-money zoning changes. Communities must be coordinated and engage in collective action.

**2. The Chinatown Working Group Plan is the only community-developed Plan endorsed by dozens of community groups, and works to stop displacement and expand affordable housing. <sup>1</sup>**

- a. "The Chinatown Working Group Plan builds upon a five year community planning process initiated in response to the 2008 East Village / Lower East Side Rezoning and fears that increased development pressure on Chinatown and its surrounding areas as a result of the rezoning would lead to residential and commercial displacement, and loss of significant historic and cultural assets. The Chinatown Working Group (CWG), created in late 2008 at the start of this process, comprises over 50 member organizations, including civic, community and cultural organizations, Community Boards 1, 2 and 3 and other stakeholders." <sup>2</sup>
- b. The CWG Plan is partially codified: Pratt documented the results of the CWG process in 2013, <sup>3</sup> the CWG community voted on subdistrict options in 2015, <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> What is the CWG Plan?, Chinatown Working Group, retrieved January 21, 2020,

<https://www.chinatownworkinggroup.com/the-plan>

<sup>2</sup> CWG Plan Executive Summary, December 2013, page 1,

[https://fe57a06d-3226-42a3-8025-fc62e60ce73b.filesusr.com/ugd/51a3f2\\_619c96cb284d404f9a85c9ac5d0eb84c.pdf](https://fe57a06d-3226-42a3-8025-fc62e60ce73b.filesusr.com/ugd/51a3f2_619c96cb284d404f9a85c9ac5d0eb84c.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Chinatown Working Group Plan, December 2013,

[https://fe57a06d-3226-42a3-8025-fc62e60ce73b.filesusr.com/ugd/51a3f2\\_cc7612ab175148949928009084552939.pdf](https://fe57a06d-3226-42a3-8025-fc62e60ce73b.filesusr.com/ugd/51a3f2_cc7612ab175148949928009084552939.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> CWG/CAPZ Summary, February 27, 2015,

[https://fe57a06d-3226-42a3-8025-fc62e60ce73b.filesusr.com/ugd/51a3f2\\_d51954909dab43139e3227bc7c64700a.pdf](https://fe57a06d-3226-42a3-8025-fc62e60ce73b.filesusr.com/ugd/51a3f2_d51954909dab43139e3227bc7c64700a.pdf)



and the CWG community has continued to meet monthly to discuss and vote on updates.<sup>5</sup>

- c. The intent of the CWG community is to update the Plan and ultimately implement it at the level of the City Council and Department of City Planning.
  - d. See the [Appendix of this Resolution](#) for a summary of the current state of the CWG Plan.
3. Any rezoning plan for Chinatown and the Lower East Side must satisfy a number of key principles and objectives determined from the Chinatown Working Group process:<sup>6</sup>
- a. **Affordability:**
    - i. Preserve existing affordable housing;
    - ii. Develop permanently affordable rental housing, based upon local area median income (AMI).
    - iii. Promote affordable homeownership development.
    - iv. Ensure any new housing development on public land should be affordable to low-income residents.
  - b. **Economic Development:**
    - i. Promote economic development that benefits the residents and businesses of Chinatown and surrounding areas.
    - ii. Create well-paying job opportunities for the residents of Chinatown and surrounding areas.
    - iii. Build upon the existing base of businesses and commercial activity in Chinatown to continue to serve the local and regional Chinese population.
  - c. **Culture and Historic Preservation:**
    - i. Preserve sites of cultural significance to the contemporary community, as well as sites of historic significance.
    - ii. Preserve and build upon Chinatown's cultural assets and promote opportunities for artistic and cultural expression.
  - d. **Zoning:**
    - i. Counter involuntary displacement of existing low income residents and small businesses in Chinatown and surrounding areas.
    - ii. Preserve Chinatown as a first destination for immigrants.
    - iii. Protect Chinatown and the surrounding areas' long time residential population and small businesses;
    - iv. Promote commercial stability, preservation, growth and revitalization.
    - v. Encourage balanced economic growth appropriate to this low-cost and affordable neighborhood, in particular to small businesses, non-profits and culturally-based enterprises.

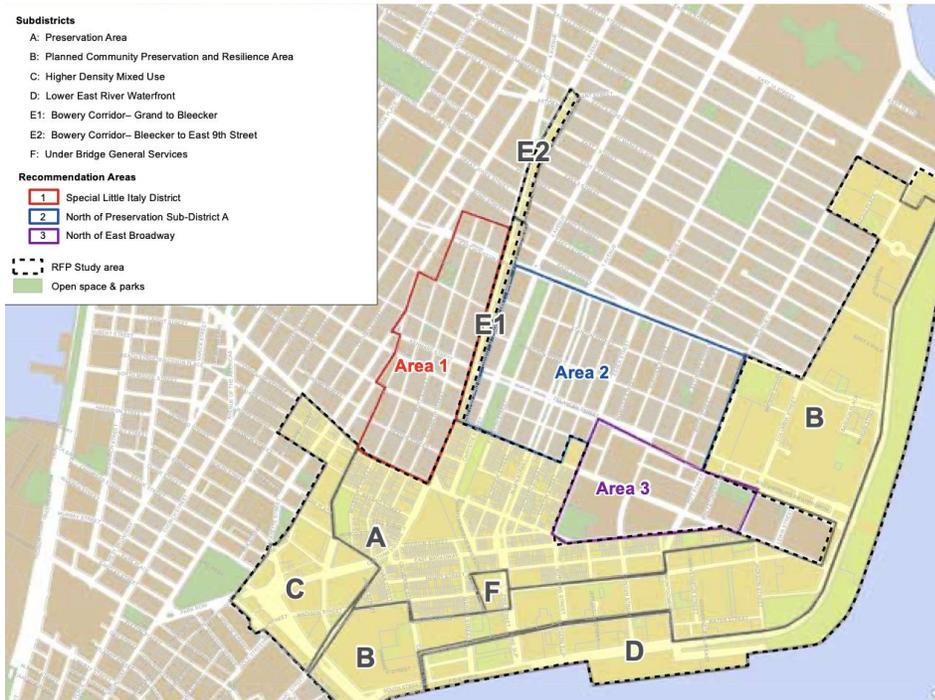
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<sup>5</sup> CWG Meeting Minutes, retrieved Jan 20, 2020, <https://www.chinatownworkinggroup.com/archive>

<sup>6</sup> CWG Plan Executive Summary, pages 3-7

- vi. Protect historical structures, distinctive architecture, notable streetscapes and other characteristic elements of the community while encouraging imaginative new designs that respect the significant architecture in the neighborhood.

Map of Chinatown and Lower East River Special District and Subdistrict Boundaries:



**Therefore Downtown Independent Democrats resolves to:**

1. Endorse the full Chinatown Working Group Plan and request to join the Chinatown Working Group as a member organization;
2. Participate with the Chinatown Working Group to update the Plan and provide grassroots support in concert with CWG to the updating efforts; and
3. Urge the City Council and Mayor to support the CWG Plan, support the updating process, move forward with an Environmental Impact Study, and implement the updated Plan.
4. Stand with community groups across our district and all of Lower Manhattan to cultivate community-led zoning plans and stop developer-led rezonings.

(continue for [Grassroots Action Plan](#) and [Appendix](#))



## Grassroots Action Plan

**Action 1:** send email to Council Members. [We will provide a link in followup email](#), when a person clicks on it they will auto-draft an email to Council with bcc: DID and CWG email addresses.

Dear Council Members Chin and Rivera and Speaker Johnson,

I am a resident of Lower Manhattan and a member of the Downtown Independent Democrats, and I am writing in support of the Chinatown Working Group Plan. We stand in solidarity with our neighbors in Chinatown and the Lower East Side.

We are appalled at the displacement of tenants, workers, and small businesses; the lack of affordable housing and protection for the diverse neighborhoods of Chinatown and the Lower East Side; and the rezonings of one neighborhood at the expense of another, as happened with the 2008 East Village rezoning.

We urge you and the Mayor to support the Chinatown Working Group Plan, and work with the CWG community to move this plan forward toward implementation.

Thank you

**Action 2:** get involved with the Chinatown Working Group and join us at their next actions:

<https://www.chinatownworkinggroup.com/join-1>



## Appendix. Summary of CWG Plan Recommendations

The CWG Plan provides community recommendations across the areas of Affordability, Economic Development, and Culture and Historic Preservation, and provides a concrete Zoning Plan which is designed to achieve the community recommendations.

### 1. Affordability community recommendations:

- a. Increase awareness and use of rental assistance programs such as the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption Program (SCRIE) and the Disability Rent Increase Exemption Program (DRIE) that assist the most vulnerable.
- b. Establish a mutual housing association (MHA) for democratic control of all guaranteed and bonused affordable units in inclusionary zoning projects within the Special Zoning District.
- c. Encourage tenant ownership of buildings taken by the city through In Rem tax foreclosure proceedings.
- d. Consider HPD's micro-unit pilot program for potential development of affordable supportive housing for formerly homeless and low-income adults, through new construction or rehabilitation.
- e. Pursue affordable homeownership development through Inclusionary Zoning, FAR bonuses, Mutual Housing, the NYC Housing Acquisition Fund and the Low-Income Housing Trust Fund.
- f. Apply anti-harassment and anti-demolition provisions throughout Chinatown and its surrounding areas, as in the Clinton Special District.
- g. Incentivize preservation of rent-regulated units in new and old-law tenement buildings through property tax abatements tied to rental income.
- h. Create more affordable rental housing units by requiring 40% affordable housing based on local AMI bands in all new developments in subdistricts outside of NYCHA properties, and 100% affordable housing on public land, retaining the income level of the current NYCHA community.<sup>7</sup>
- i. Guaranteed and bonused affordable housing development provisions, with specific requirements tailored to meet local needs.
- j. Use local median income to determine affordability levels in publicly subsidized or incentivized residential development. Apply "deep rent skewing," targeting AMI bands that reflect the average income in the Study Area, using tax abatements and/or direct public construction.
- k. Ensure that all new affordable housing units created as a result of upzoning or floor area bonus remain permanently affordable.

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<sup>7</sup> 40% recommendation based on Pratt estimates during CWG analysis process.



- l. Promote affordability on NYCHA property and ensure that any new development meets the needs of local residents.
- m. Require public review under ULURP of any proposal for development on NYCHA property.

## **2. Economic Development community recommendations:**

1. Convene a CWG Economic Development Action Group.
2. Foster the next generation of Chinatown's economic development leaders. As Chinatown's population ages, efforts must be taken to groom and attract young entrepreneurs interested in applying their talents in and for Chinatown.
3. Develop sector-based anchor projects such as an Asian Food Center and a Chinatown Jewelry Center that provide multi-use space connected with targeted workforce development programs. Explore additional sector-based workforce development programs in the health care and growing science and technology industries.
4. Revive Chinatown's customer base by leveraging its cultural and unique business assets (sponsor cultural programs; create a coordinated marketing campaign; encourage local bank philanthropy).
5. Enhance business services to support a vibrant business community and a well-trained and well-connected local workforce (better business practices, marketing, ESL, emergency preparedness, emergency grant pool, Neighborhood Challenge grants for Chinatown BID).
6. Pursue improved transportation and parking options for Chinatown residents, workers and visitors, including the reopening of Park Row; new locations for regional bus parking; improved municipal bus service; and alternative parking locations for government employees.
7. Pursue development and implementation of tax abatement measures as incentives for preserving affordable commercial space.
8. Limit the size of certain ground floor commercial uses in some areas.
9. Require a Special Permit for hotels, regardless of size. Protect Chinatown and the Lower East Side as residential areas with street-level commerce, not hotel districts.
10. Allow additional light manufacturing uses that are compatible with a mixed-use neighborhood in commercially zoned areas of the Special District.
11. Include a "G" zoning designation requiring a Special Permit to convert existing manufacturing space, similar to the existing Loft Law.
12. Prohibit or require a Special Permit for certain uses, e.g. university dormitories and very large entertainment or retail establishments that are incompatible with a local residential community.



### 3. Culture and Historic Preservation community recommendations:

- a. Landmarking:
  - i. Consider landmark designation for a Henry Street Historic District, roughly delineated by Henry Street, Madison Street and Monroe Street and including Market Street and Mechanics Alley.
  - ii. Consider a small historic district on the west side of Oliver Street, between Madison Street and St. James Place/Kimlau Square.
  - iii. Consider landmarking for the historic “Five Points” street plan, delineated by Bayard Street, Worth Street, the Bowery, and Baxter Street
  - iv. Support Friends of the Lower East Side’s efforts toward an historic district on Orchard Street, as well as Two Bridges Neighborhood Council’s and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum’s local landmarking efforts.
  - v. Ensure that owners of property listed on the National Register of Historic Places are aware of and can access Historic Preservation Tax Credits for substantial rehabilitation of their property.
  
- b. Arts and Culture
  - i. Continue efforts to develop a Chinatown Arts Center or Campus, initiated by Think!Chinatown.
  - ii. Pursue a two-tiered strategy to advance Think!Chinatown’s recommendations for more effective use of a rebuilt 70 Mulberry Street aimed at (a) strengthening the capacity of the existing tenants and (b) strengthening and enhancing the building’s physical infrastructure, management and operations.<sup>8</sup>
  - iii. Promote development of a local movie theater for Chinatown and its surrounding areas.
  - iv. Celebrate and promote the wide range of craft/artisanal skills and services available in Chinatown. Leverage Chinatown’s unique cultural assets as a means of encouraging local economic development.
  - v. Advocate better promotion of Chinatown and its cultural assets by the Chinatown Visitor Kiosk on Canal and Baxter.
  - vi. Provide better access to and programming in public spaces such as parks, libraries and schools.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> City Launches Community Visioning Process for 70 Mulberry Street, September 16, 2020, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dcas/news/20-005/city-launches-community-visioning-process-70-mulberry-street>

<sup>9</sup> Chinatown Working Group Plan, page 56, [https://fe57a06d-3226-42a3-8025-fc62e60ce73b.filesusr.com/ugd/51a3f2\\_cc7612ab175148949928009084552939.pdf](https://fe57a06d-3226-42a3-8025-fc62e60ce73b.filesusr.com/ugd/51a3f2_cc7612ab175148949928009084552939.pdf)



- vii. Promote use of the Confucius Plaza “amphitheater” as a place for public gathering. Redevelop as public open space to support cultural performances; exhibitions; food, crafts or street fairs; and markets.
- c. Streetscapes and Signage
    - i. Explore the potential use of bank windows to showcase local art.
    - ii. Explore the use of property tax abatements and other incentives to encourage landlords to rent affordable space to community organizations
    - iii. Include signage regulations that legalize existing signage, except illuminated signs above the first floor.
  - d. Sites of Significance
    - i. Incorporate sites of significance into the Chinatown and Lower East River Special District text as “Buildings of Special Significance” modelled on the Special Little Italy District, following close consultation with individual property owners. CWG’s Culture and Historic Preservation Action Group should convene a special committee that includes representation from property owners, to engage with individual owners in determining which sites of significance might be possible candidates for designation as Buildings of Special Significance.
    - ii. Explore individual interventions for identified sites of significance that fall outside the boundaries of the proposed Chinatown and Lower East River Special District, in consultation with property owners, local groups and the affected Community Board.
  - e. Arts and Culture
    - i. Incentivize or mandate affordable arts and cultural uses within new construction.
    - ii. Use Transfer of Development Rights from Subdistrict A and from buildings determined to be of cultural, historic or architectural significance to develop cultural uses.
    - iii. Include contribution to a Cultural Resources Fund in exchange for a floor area bonus, as an alternative to incorporating cultural uses in new development.
    - iv. Establish a Local Arts and Cultural Conservancy to: (a) guide the implementation of culture bonuses in new development; (b) manage a Cultural Resources Fund; and (c) support cultural events and programming as well as local arts and cultural organizations.



**4. The CWG Zoning Plan, which is designed to achieve the above recommendations:**

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**a. Establish a Special Chinatown and Lower East River District (including the Lower East Side), and the following would apply to the entire Special District, including all Subdistricts:**

- i. Zoning density (permissible floor area) and height limits that reflect the existing scale of each Subdistrict.
- ii. Anti-harassment/anti-demolition certification by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), based on the Clinton Special District.
- iii. Recognition of Buildings/Spaces of Significance.
- iv. Use modifications allowing greater diversity of uses than allowed in existing Commercial zones, such as some light industrial uses.
- v. A “G” designation that regulates the conversion of non-residential uses to residential use.
- vi. Prohibit or Special Permit for certain uses such as hotels and some large commercial uses.
- vii. Guaranteed requirement or bonus for permanently affordable housing (defined as up to 50% of AMI).<sup>11</sup>
- viii. Guaranteed requirement for all housing development on public land to be permanently affordable to local residents.

**b. Subdistrict goals and specific recommendations:<sup>12</sup>**

- i. SUBDISTRICT A: PRESERVATION AREA.
  1. Includes the historic core of Chinatown and adjoining blocks with similar lot size, built form, character and socio-economic conditions.
  2. CWG Goals: To preserve the historic core of Chinatown and maintain residential and commercial affordability.
- ii. SUBDISTRICT B: PLANNED COMMUNITY PRESERVATION & RESILIENCE AREA

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<sup>10</sup> For full Zoning Plan details, see CWG Executive Summary, pages 7-20; the CWG Plan, pages 59-120; and the CWG Meeting Minutes, retrieved Jan 20, 2020, <https://www.chinatownworkinggroup.com/archive>

<sup>11</sup> Zoning bonuses were a frequent feature of Bloomberg's rezonings, and are still in use in the locations that the Bloomberg administration rezoned. There are no such bonuses included in the current Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) law, but there is no prohibition against them in the zoning text for new rezonings

<sup>12</sup> For full subdistrict goals and recommendations, see: CWG Plan Executive Summary pages 10-20; the CWG Plan pages 87-119; and the CWG Meeting Minutes



1. Concentration of large public housing developments constructed for low and moderate income New Yorkers along the lower East River in the 1930s, 40s and 50s.
  2. CWG Goals: To preserve existing affordable housing, ensure that any new housing development on public land is affordable to low-income residents, and require public review.
- iii. SUBDISTRICT C: HIGHER DENSITY MIXED USE
1. Medium to high-density commercial and light manufacturing zones near transit hubs along the western boundary of the RFP Study Area, with some potential development opportunities.
  2. CWG Goals: To promote mixed-use development that enhances the long-term commercial viability of Chinatown; produces new affordable housing; and provides an outlet for transfer of unused development rights from the Preservation Area and from Buildings of Significance.
- iv. SUBDISTRICT D: LOWER EAST RIVER WATERFRONT
1. High-density commercial and light manufacturing zones along the East River waterfront with several large open space and recreational areas.
  2. CWG Goals: To promote mixed-use development that produces new affordable housing, provide an outlet for transfer of unused development rights from the Preservation Area and from Buildings of Significance, encourage the development of arts and cultural facilities, and protect open space from speculative development.
- v. SUBDISTRICT E1: BOWERY CORRIDOR – GRAND TO BLEECKER
1. Lots fronting the east side of the Bowery adjacent to the East Village/Lower East Side Rezoning.
  2. CWG Goals: To promote development on both sides of the Bowery that is consistent with neighborhood character and recognizes the Bowery’s historic significance.
- vi. SUBDISTRICT E2: BOWERYCORRIDOR –BLEECKER TO EAST 9TH STREET
1. Lots fronting the east side of the Bowery adjacent to the East Village/Lower East Side Rezoning.
  2. CWG Goals: To promote development along the entire length of the Bowery that is consistent and recognizes its historic importance.
- vii. SUBDISTRICT F: UNDER BRIDGE GENERAL SERVICES
1. CWG Goals: To preserve existing recreational uses and provide a potential location for government parking or regional bus parking.