



PLAN: Downtown Roundtable Discussions: Chinatown Community Master Plan

Monday, March 4, 2019, 6:00–8:00 PM

Location: BCNC Board Room, 38 Ash Street, 4th floor

Attendees:

- Doug Brugge, Tufts University School of Medicine
- Paul Chan, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of New England (CCBA)
- Karen Chen, Chinese Progressive Association (CPA)
- Councilor Ed Flynn, City Councilor, District 2
- Barry Keppard, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)
- Jung Shen Kuo, Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC)
- Suzanne Lee, Chinatown Community Land Trust (CCLT)
- Mark Liu, CPA
- Lydia Lowe, CCLT
- Sherry Dong, Chinatown Neighborhood Council, Tufts Medical Center
- Sharon Ron, MAPC
- Kyle Sullivan, ACDC
- Theresa Tsoi, Chinatown Business Association (CBA)
- Danchen Xu, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services

PLAN: Downtown Consultant Team:

- Kathryn Firth, NBBJ
- Chris Herlich, NBBJ
- John Harlow, Engagement Lab

PLAN: Downtown Website: bit.ly/plandowntownboston

Roundtable Summary:

Each roundtable discussion was hosted by the PLAN: Downtown planning consultant, NBBJ. BPDA and City of Boston staff assigned to PLAN: Downtown did not attend. The roundtable discussions supplement the broader conversations that occur within PLAN: Downtown public meetings and the PLAN: Downtown Advisory Group with targeted input from community members well versed in each topic. Roundtable topics include Preservation & Conservation, the Chinatown Community Master Plan, the Institutional Master Plans, Development & Land Ownership, and Ground-floor Business Owners. Shorter follow-up sessions occurred as needed to supplement the conversation.

Meeting Summary:

A short project overview & presentation was provided by NBBJ to outline the intent of PLAN: Downtown and to frame the conversation. This conversation took place as a part of the Chinatown Master Plan Implementation Committee's regularly scheduled meeting.

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Roundtable Discussion Notes:

The notes below were expressed by discussion participants and do not reflect the opinion of the BPDA or its planning consultants.

Chinatown Master Plan 2010

- The top priorities of the 2010 plan are affordability, recreational (not just passive) open space, human and economic development, and small business support and stabilization.
- Specific emphasis on four Anchor Areas: Phillips Square, Hinge Block, South Bay, New York Streets.

Chinatown Master Plan 2020

- MPIC expects PLAN: Downtown to serve as the 2020 version of the Chinatown Master Plan.
- The 2000 & 2010 were community-led/funded and weren't sanctioned by the BPDA. The hope is that this publicly-led process for PLAN: Downtown can bring more legitimacy to the resulting plan. The last BPDA/BRA plan occurred in 1990.

Chinatown Neighborhood Trends

- There is a lot of concern about balancing development with affordability, and relieving pressure on existing owners, residents, and tenants. The population of Chinatown used to be ¾ low-income, but the influx of luxury apartments and students has totally shifted the dynamic.
- Affordable and low-income housing has increased in absolute terms, but the percentage of the whole is much lower than it used to be.
- Student renters are driving up housing prices because they are willing/able to spend more on apartments than low- or middle-income families.
- Chinatown's footprint is actually expanding, but the nature of the businesses is changing. The number of businesses is growing, but is more chain-oriented and is geared more toward wealthy visitors than the middle class or low-income residents that used to rely on Chinatown's commercial tenants. If someone owns multiple businesses, they can survive but if they only own one they cannot.
- Eviction protections, rent control, and tenants' right of first refusal are all policies that are generally popular in Chinatown.
- We welcome density if it is supporting the priorities the community has already identified.
- Climate change is a serious public safety concern, both because of the neighborhood's location in flood areas and its vulnerable population. Superstorm Sandy showed how such populations could suffer the most during extreme weather events.
- Most of the newcomers are in luxury buildings or are students: either transient by nature (renters) or not interested or invested in the neighborhood.
- A 'Rowhouse Subdistrict' is something that has been looked at elsewhere as a way of protecting rowhouses in other neighborhoods.
- We would like to see equitable enforcement between Transportation Network Companies (TNC) pickups/drop-offs are double-parked, block hydrants, etc. and families trying to unload kids or help elderly to places.

- We are working on a permanent library branch, which could also serve as an archive for Chinatown cultural resources.

Plan Outcomes & Role of the City

- There is a need to make enforceable zoning.
- Row houses need to be protected because they define the neighborhood in so many ways – intensification (e.g. “development hats”) would be okay if there are better guarantees that environmental and quality of life concerns will be respected.
- The community wants transparency around development.
- Air pollution has had demonstrable negative public health impacts in the neighborhood – how can we mitigate pollution generated by the Mass Pike, South Station, and I-93? Chinatown has been affected by transportation infrastructure for years.
- Has the City considered performance zoning as a way to build in health protections?
- The plan needs to support more parks and recreational spaces – the focus is often on short-term solutions, but Chinatown needs a long term strategy or plan for improving open space access.
- Pedestrian safety needs to be a bigger priority in Chinatown
 - Want better (wider, maintained) sidewalks.
 - Consider congestion pricing to reduce the total number of vehicles in Downtown.
 - Signalization concerns at major intersections: don’t prioritize pedestrians enough.
 - Consider congestion pricing in order to reduce the total number of vehicles in Downtown.
- Find a way to balance the regional, cultural significance of Chinatown (so many people invested in this place and its institutions live outside the city) with the concerns of locals.
- What would a “cultural-historical district” look like? Could that be a way to provide support for Chinatown?
- We should work to harness tourism to support Chinatown – find ways to keep it authentic, and incorporate public art when possible.
- How can Downtown’s success support/promote connections to Chinatown? How can connections to the South End improve?
- How can the story of Chinatown be shared more widely? How can we make it clear how much this place matters to Downtown and the City?
- The neighborhood needs better connections to existing resources – access to services and spaces, and a guarantee and clear communication that Chinatown residents/stakeholders are welcome.