

# Chinatown Gentrification



A Multi-City Study  
Conducted by  
Queens College  
Urban Studies 320

Led by Professor Tarry Hum

With Alice Feng  
Jean Kapkanoff  
Shao Ye Li  
Seth Pollack  
Muneeba Talukder  
Samanthan Varn

In collaboration with  
The Asian American  
Legal Defense and  
Education Fund

Fall 2011



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Acknowledgements

- I. Introduction
- II. Research Methodology
- III. A Literature Survey on the Role of Community Development Corporations
- IV. Chinatown Demographic and Socioeconomic Trends, 1990-2010
- V. Chinatown Community Development Corporations: A Brief Survey of History and Objectives
- VI. Shaping the Future of Chinatown: Current Development Debates
- VII. Conclusion

## Appendix

- a. CDC Interview Template
- b. Chinatown Census Tract Definitions
- c. Chinatown 1990-2010 Tables

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to express our appreciation to Bethany Li, staff attorney with the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) for partnering with our class on this study of Chinatown gentrification. We would especially like to acknowledge the generosity of time and expertise of the executive directors and founding board members of the three Chinatown community development corporations profiled in our study: Tunney Lee, Jacqui Kay, and Janelle Chan of Boston's Asian Community Development Corporation, John Chin of the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation, and Wellington Chan of the Chinatown Partnership Local Development Corporation in New York City. In addition, we had the benefit of meeting and/or speaking with key Chinatown stakeholders including Jan Lee, Civic Center Residents Coalition in New York City, Ellen Somekawa, Asian Americans United, who generously gave a tour of Philadelphia Chinatown to Alice Feng and Samantha Varn, and University of Massachusetts Professor Andrew Leong. We would also like to thank Judith Kubran at the CUNY Graduate Center for providing us with classroom space, and Queens College Urban Studies Department's Hagedorn Fund for funds to cover student travel to Philadelphia. While we interviewed key stakeholders about the role of community development corporations in Chinatown neighborhood and economic development, the views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of AALDEF or any of the CDCs profiled.

## I. Introduction

As ethnic enclave communities in many major U.S. cities, neighborhoods that have come to be referred to as Chinatowns have historically been subjected to the strain of both internal and external development pressures. Compounded by the disenfranchisement of ethnic populations, these pressures shape and at times, threaten community development and sustainability. In the northeast region, the Boston, New York, and Philadelphia Chinatowns are being impacted by gentrification trends which can be expected to affect not only their residential composition but Chinatown's economic development and socioeconomic well-being overall.<sup>1</sup> Common to these three historic northeast Chinatowns are their location near or in the metro area's downtown business district. Post-industrial urbanization is marked by the active role of municipal governments in facilitating private capital and investments in real estate development. Gentrification refers to neighborhood changes when higher-income households move into low-income neighborhoods. Gentrification increases property values and rents resulting in residential and commercial displacement. Moreover, the change in socioeconomic composition is often correlated with shifts in the racial makeup of a neighborhood with an increasing presence of affluent white residents. Gentrification threatens to further disenfranchise ethnic populations in northeast Chinatowns, and the development pressures are further complicated in each Chinatown by tensions and disputes about the community's future.

Key actors in the community development process in Chinatowns are community development corporations (CDCs) formed in response to threats such as disinvestment and urban renewal in (often majority) communities of color. Chinatown CDCs in Boston, New York, and

---

<sup>1</sup> An example of a recent study of Chinatown gentrification is the 2008 CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities and Urban Justice Center report, Converting Chinatown: A Snapshot of a Neighborhood Becoming Unaffordable and Unlivable,

Philadelphia have evolved to become major actors in current community building initiatives. Their actions will shape the futures of the communities they formed to serve. Our class, Chinatown Gentrification: A Multi-City Study, led by Queens College Professor Tarry Hum partnered with Bethany Li of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) to explore the gentrification-related pressures faced by these three Chinatowns and the effects on community development.

With this as our framework, we explored the establishment and roles of community development corporations (CDCs) in each Chinatown. The results of our research and analyses based on official data sources as well as fieldwork and



*Space reserved for future dog park bordering Chinatown and SoHo*

interviews are the subject of this report. Our data resources include Census demographic data for the past thirty years, research on CDC histories, missions, and community engagement and development activities, studies of current land use issues affecting each Chinatown, interviews with CDC executive directors, and scholarly research on the types of pressures faced by each Chinatown. Through these efforts, we hope to provide not only a comparative study of the conditions and issues in the Boston, New York, and Philadelphia Chinatowns, but also

information that can be used to further assess the state of these communities, their needs, and the CDCs charged with the task of meeting those needs. This report will contribute, in turn, to AALDEF's multi-city study on Chinatown land use and housing issues.

Our report is comprised of the following sections. In the research methodology section, we describe our mixed research methods that included quantitative census analysis and in-depth interviews with the executive directors of the Chinatown community development organizations in our three-city study. This section is followed by an introduction to the extensive literature on community development corporations (CDCs) focusing on the debate on the contributions and limitations of CDCs in community empowerment. This section is followed by the census data analysis of Chinatowns over time from 1990-2010 and in relation to each other, bringing to light shared and divergent patterns and trends in the socioeconomic composition of enclave neighborhoods. These sections establish the context for our investigation on the history, establishment, and goals of Chinatown CDCs in Boston, Philadelphia and New York. After introducing the three CDCs, the section on Chinatown's future development discusses the proposals and politics of potentially transformative development initiatives in each respective Chinatown. We conclude with our comments and insights on the Chinatown growth and development, and the role of CDCs in advancing Chinatown's future in post-industrial cities.

## **II. Research Methodology**

Chinatown development, by its broad definition, is not solely limited to market transactions but rather is shaped by the actions and collaborations of political, social, cultural and community actors. Therefore, a research study of Chinatown development requires a comprehensive approach to Chinatown's characteristics and composition. To achieve this goal, our report seeks to identify, describe, and analyze current and potential development trends

through Census data analysis, assessment of local community-based institutions, and most importantly, engaging with those entities.

The first step is to describe Chinatown's population and demographic patterns of the past few decades. The key characteristics of interest are racial composition, housing tenure, median household income, and age by race, poverty rate by race, and nativity and citizenship. We used QC's Social Explorer, which centralizes detailed demographic data for the US from 1790 to present. We defined the census tract composition for each Chinatown in Boston, Philadelphia, and NYC (refer to Appendix), and prepared census tables using 1990, 2000, and 2010 data from the 100% count and sample data, and the 2005-2009 American Community Survey. Reviewing census data over time from 1990-2010 will help us document Chinatown sociodemographic patterns, and compare the three major Chinatowns in the Northeast with each other and in relation to respective city-wide patterns. Moreover, since Chinatown residents will be most impacted by new development, it is important to understand local population composition. This information will be useful in evaluating the potential outcomes and consequences of any development approach to Chinatown revitalization.

While demographic data provides a profile of Chinatown residents and socioeconomic patterns for the past three decades, our study investigates the role of a key actor – community development corporations – in shaping Chinatown neighborhoods. Our class was introduced to the extensive literature on community development corporations and Chinatown development. We read and synthesized materials from academic publications, websites, research reports, and data from the Urban Institute's Center for Charitable Statistics. In addition to secondary resources, our class conducted fieldwork and in-depth interviews with the executive directors of Chinatown community development corporations. To understand current community conditions,

this study conducted on-site visits to New York and Philadelphia Chinatown during which we were able to make observations and conduct face-to face interviews with important stakeholders.<sup>2</sup> The information yielded from this fieldwork provides meaningful firsthand knowledge of community activities, operations, and processes, and illuminated the prospects and challenges facing Chinatowns.



Based on our

*Authors on a tour in NYC's Chinatown with AALDEF's Bethany Li*

interests on Chinatown CDCs, their organizational mission and capacity, definition of community development, collaborations and alliances, and community engagement and accountability, we developed an interview instrument (see Appendix). All interviewees were asked questions pertaining to similar topics; however, the questions may have been slightly modified to accommodate specific organizations. The questions are open-ended which allows respondents to express personal feelings, opinions, and experiences. These structured interviews provide us with the primary material to facilitate our comparative analysis of Chinatown CDCs. Since the objective of our research is to study the role of community development corporations in promoting economic development and addressing Chinatown gentrification, we contacted the

---

<sup>2</sup> Although we were unable to visit Boston Chinatown, we conducted several telephone interviews with ACDC's executive director and two founding board members.



executive directors of Asians American for Equality (AAFE) in NYC, Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC), and Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC) in Boston. With the exception of AAFE, we interviewed the CDC executive director. For ACDC, we were also able to interview two founding board members. Since AAFE did not respond to our interview requests, we decided to interview the executive director of the Chinatown Partnership Local Development Corporation (CPLDC).

We chose the Chinatown Partnership for two reasons. First, as a local development corporation, CPLDC is a comparable non-profit organization with the exception that its sole focus is economic development whereas community development corporations typically engage in both housing and economic development initiatives. Secondly, AAFE played a key role in the establishment and objectives of the Chinatown Partnership and as such, CPLDC's vision and development strategies are complimentary to those of AAFE. Based on the synthesis of census data, interviews, and secondary materials on Chinatown and its development prospects and challenges, we sought to prepare a timely assessment of the role of CDCs in shaping Chinatown's future.

### **III. The Role of Community Development Corporations**

The 1960s and 1970s were marked by social movements engaged in protesting US involvement in the Vietnam War, domestic racist policies, and overall conditions of national oppression such as slum clearance and redlining (Schill 1997, 766). Escalating racial tensions in inner cities frequently resulted in urban revolts. Federal urban renewal programs increased racial tensions by pushing thousands of poor people out of their homes to make way for office buildings, freeways, and university expansion (Domhoff 2005, 3). This period was also marked by the second Great Migration of African Americans to escape Southern poverty and oppression.

However, Northern whites sought to exclude African Americans from white neighborhoods and places of employment (Domhoff 2005, 3). White people also fled to the suburbs as the share of poor, oppressed nationalities increased (Galster 2005, 6).

The first community development corporations (CDCs) were founded during this period after President Johnson's creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity and passage of 1964's Economic Opportunity Act. The Act included a provision called the Special Impact Program, a means of offering federal support for "the solution of the critical problems existing in particular communities or neighborhoods ... having concentrations or substantial numbers of low-income persons."<sup>3</sup> CDCs were a part of the federal response to social unrest and poverty (Vidal and Keating 2004, 127). The first CDC, the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, was incorporated in Brooklyn, NY in 1967. The subsequent 10 years would see the founding of CDCs in urban and suburban areas across the country.

CDCs are nonprofit organizations that seek to reverse inner city neighborhood decline (Vidal and Keating 2004, 127) by attracting investment and revitalizing housing and labor markets (Stoecker 2003, 2). The first wave of CDCs was more concerned about economic development. Their objective was to create jobs since deindustrialization affected many large cities. Since the 1950s, cities in the Northeast and Midwest experienced a population outmigration. People moved to Southern and Western cities where unskilled jobs were still available (Schill 2005, 756). Thirteen out of the fifteen largest central cities continued to lose population from 1950 to 1990 (Schill 2005, 754). According to Schill, changing technologies, suburbanization, and competition from the Sunbelt and overseas were factors in the dramatic decline of manufacturing jobs. Between 1970 and 1990, New York, Philadelphia, Boston,

---

<sup>3</sup> Refer to Public Law 92-424, sec. 711.

Baltimore, and St. Louis lost over half of their manufacturing employment while gaining in service industries (Schill 2005, 756).

For example, from 1970 to 1990, Philadelphia experienced a loss in almost half of its jobs in industries that hired the less skilled and educated. But this trend was accompanied by a 13% increase in industries that required more education (Schill 2005, 756). Clearly, changes in available jobs attract or drive out different classes of people. Those who work in service industry jobs tend to be more educated and skilled whereas people working in manufacturing jobs are usually immigrants, unskilled, and less educated (Schill 2005, 755). These changes may speak to the demographic shifts we see in our socioeconomic analysis later.

Asian Americans for Equal Employment's historic struggle for construction jobs in Chinatown demonstrates the importance of jobs and employment discrimination in oppressed nationality communities. When the city did not employ Chinese construction workers to build the high-rise development on Confucius Plaza in New York City's Chinatown, AAFEE worked with others to organize demonstrations and speak out against discrimination. They demanded the hiring of Asian construction workers.<sup>4</sup> Many organizations, like AAFEE, were founded in the 1970s to serve and protect their communities. Some of these first generation CDCs developed shopping centers and financed small businesses in their communities (Schill 2005, 766). Others started businesses or bought stores or factories that would have gone out of business. However, according to Schill, job creation was just as difficult as maintaining profitability. As a result, many CDC supported businesses failed during the 1960s and 1970s (Schill 2005, 766).

---

<sup>4</sup> [www.aafe.org](http://www.aafe.org)

The political and economic upheavals of the late 20th Century dramatically altered the course of early CDCs. While cities first felt the sting of deindustrialization, Nixon diminished the Office of Economic Opportunity, and Reagan disbanded it altogether. It was in this context that the Ford and Enterprise Foundations and the Local Initiative Support Corporation stepped in as the largest benefactors of CDCs in a sea of other foundations. These groups saw CDCs as more attractive grantees than radical progressive community organizations, generally more concerned with constituency building and even separatist agendas. The existence of CDCs created a more comfortable point of entrance for major corporate and foundational giving into disinvested neighborhoods. By the start of the 21st Century, there were more than two thousand CDCs in the United States (Glickman 1998).

A new wave of CDCs emerged in the 1980s and 1990s when the federal government reduced subsidies to developers of low-income housing, giving private developers an incentive to funnel money into poor communities (Schill 1997, 766). The Federal Low-Income Tax Credit, which was part of the Tax Reform Act of 1986, covered 90 percent of the construction costs for investors (Hevesi 2003). For CDCs, this piece of legislation was extremely helpful in attracting investors to neighborhoods. It matched the second wave of CDCs' mission which is to remove "blight" and improve the quality of neighborhoods mainly through physical changes, planning and creating affordable housing and commercial projects, creating and renovating parks and facilities that are supposed to serve the neighborhood and create jobs. All these efforts are intended to increase property values because they improve and beautify the neighborhood. The remodeling of the neighborhood is supposed to attract potential investors (Galster 2005, 6).

An example of the first to second generation transition in CDCs is Asian Americans for Equal Employment (AAFEE). AAFEE, which was established during the first wave of CDCs,

shifted its mission and changed its name to Asian Americans for Equality during this time period ([www.aafe.org](http://www.aafe.org)). Their primary focus became low-income housing development. Currently, AAFE is the largest nonprofit developer and landlord in Lower Manhattan. According to Christopher Kui, the executive director of AAFE, this was a “natural progression” because many people approached AAFE about housing concerns in the early 80s. Since then, AAFE has partnered with banks and other private entities to create low-income housing (Hevesi 2003).

CDCs are relatively independent of local government and their operating expenses are mostly funded by private entities. They are part of an extensive affordable housing production industry. Elite philanthropic institutions such as the Ford Foundation have a long history of involvement in affordable housing. As funders, these institutions are at the top of an industry hierarchy to produce and/or preserve affordable housing. Community-based organizations (CBOs) which provide social services, job training, support for neighborhood groups and new small businesses, and/or organize and advocate for tenants’ rights, and CDCs are at the bottom of the hierarchy (Domhoff 2005, 1). Furthermore, CDCs usually have ties to national organizations which are typically located in Washington, D.C. For example, CDCs belong to the National Congress for Community Economic Development (NCCED) which conducts key research studies and political lobbying on behalf of CDCs. The NCCED publishes reports intended to attract the attention of corporations, foundations, and local elected officials. It also lobbies Congress on housing issues (Domhoff 2005, 1).

Almost all CDCs raise money through two national-level nonprofits—the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and the Enterprise Foundation. Another source that CDCs look to for funding and staff is the Center for Community Change. To get support for upgrading their financial and administrative skills, CDCs can count on the Development

Training Institute. For training in direct-action tactics in community organizing such as house calls and protests, they go to the National Training and Information Center (Domhoff 2005, 1). Many of the aforementioned organizations (CBOs and CDCs) initially received financial support from churches or church-related groups. Later, three main types of foundations—family-funded, corporate, and community -- also funded CDCs (Dumhoff 2005, 2).

Corporate funding leads us into a discussion about the contradictions of CDCs. CDCs claim to be community-based which often leads people to believe that they are alternatives to government programs. But only about half of CDC operating budget needs is fulfilled by government sources (Stoecker 1997, 6). CDCs rely almost solely on funding from outside of the community which means that it may be community-based but not community-controlled. Funders have the power to dictate what redevelopment would look like and their idea of redevelopment may be fundamentally different from those of poor residents who tend to see resources such as land in terms of their use values rather than exchange values (Stoecker 1997, 10). However, when redevelopment fails, CDCs become the scapegoat for social ills (Stoecker 1997, 7). For example, the CDC and the community-organizing group in Cedar-Riverside in Minneapolis, Minnesota blamed each other when they lost control over a redevelopment project (Stoecker 1997, 10). This example illustrates how the “bricks and mortar” goals of CDCs can divide the community and create disorganization (Stoecker 1997, 6). According to Domhoff and Stoecker, despite initial goals and intentions, CDCs tend to reproduce the status quo (Domhoff 2005, 7).

The extensive literature on CDCs includes heated debates about how CDCs approach community problems. Stoecker argues CDCs tend to approach political problems as technical problems that can only be solved by experts and not people in the community (Stoecker 10).

According to Galster, the structural position of CDCs is that of a mediator between private entities and neighborhood stakeholders (2005, 13). Thus, CDCs use consensus building (which may lead to less community division) as a model of organizing (Bratt 1997, 26). Stoecker does not agree that consensus building empowers community participation and decision-making. While community organizing can be confrontational and argumentative, Stoecker argues, organizing is more beneficial and can ultimately result in community unity.

CDCs try to mediate conflicts that emanate from the demands of a capitalist economy with the needs of community building. Stoecker points out CDCs accept the market economy and see poor neighborhoods as ‘weak markets.’ The problem with this approach, as Stoecker maintains, is that CDCs think that the problems in oppressed communities can be fixed by reinvestment instead of grassroots organizing (Bratt 1997, 23). This creates a contradiction between affordability and control. Since funders are providing capital, they are the ones dictating what the definition of “affordable” would mean. The residents of the neighborhood ultimately have no control over that process (Stoecker 1997, 8). Stoecker proposes an alternative model for CDCs, which is to abandon the small-community based CDC model for high capacity multi-local CDCs that are held accountable by community members (Stoecker 1997, 13). Others including Tufts Professor Rachel Bratt are not convinced that CDCs are set up for failure. Bratt believes affordable rental housing is crucial to stabilizing poor communities particularly those threatened by gentrification. Whether CDCs are successful or not, they can still disrupt a community because they emphasize physical change over social change (Stoecker 1997). And in emphasizing “bricks and mortar” development, the underlying causal factors for community problems are not addressed.

The generality of the guidelines describing CDCs allow for a great degree of structural variation between organizations. CDCs vary in their founding parties, the degree to which they engage their communities, and their funding mechanisms. Residents found some CDCs, while others are created by state or federal actors. CDCs can be membership-based, residency-based, or operate using other models. They can become enmeshed in local politics, or they may focus solely on the provision of services. CDCs relying on federal or state money might be less driven toward quantitative or market-based results than ones funded largely by foundation grants.

The very existence of CDCs and other nongovernmental service providers has long been a contested matter. From the first years after their inception, urban scholars have questioned the ability of single corporations to pursue revenue generating businesses, housing development, and community organizing, all while maintaining public accountability (Sturdivant 1971). Wolch problematizes CDCs and other nonprofit organizations by describing their services as “administered outside traditional democratic politics” and “charged with major collective responsibilities previously shouldered by the public sector,” and, most importantly, “in the purview of state control” (1990, 4).

CDCs’ flexibility of purpose and operation places them in a gray area between the state, private money, and people in need of social services. Kirkpatrick believes CDCs to have been “created to facilitate the marketization of ‘low-income’ development activities” while simultaneously “responsible for mollifying the adverse effects of such maneuvers.” Most persuasively, Kirkpatrick styles CDCs as providing a “potential ‘space’ for active political negotiation and contestation” (2007, 352).

In CDCs’ negotiation of values and priorities, private benefactors have maintained a privileged position over residents. While this has allowed CDCs to be more nimble to changes



in their environments (Sturdivant 1971, 36), it may also mean that CDCs are largely beholden to the vicissitudes of trends in nonprofit funding and management. The dramatic shift toward market-style goals of the 1980s gave way to an early 90s rediscovery of comprehensive service provision as a matter of priority. This push for “capacity building” drove some CDCs to spin off for-profit subsidiaries and expand into the positions once occupied by progressive neighborhood associations, ones in which the CDCs held little or no experience or credibility. This struggle for capacity building was a serious challenge to many CDCs, leading to many serious stumbles and failures.

Trends in capacity building are not the only challenge to CDCs. Many rely largely on grants from Ford, LISC, or Enterprise. If a CDC does not receive one of these large, often multi-year grants, they may have to dedicate staff and resources to the pursuit of a patchwork of smaller grants, often with divergent goals and demands. Funding agencies, public and private, often designate the use of funds toward the program side, leaving CDCs to struggle to budget for operating needs. For housing-based CDCs, development fees come only after construction, and are often used in place of direct funding.

This introduction to the extensive CDC literature has informed our analysis of community development corporations. By providing a historical and political context for the formation and evolution of CDCs, we have gained insight on their strengths and weaknesses. Using these debates as our guide, we analyze what role CDCs play in Chinatown development and gentrification.

#### **IV. Chinatown Demographic and Socioeconomic Trends, 1990-2010**

This section reviews the demographic and socioeconomic trends that have shaped Chinatown over the past three decades. We summarize key census findings for each city’s

Chinatown and then, provide some overview of common and divergent patterns for the three Northeast Chinatowns. Our findings underscore that while Chinatowns remain an important residential hub for working-class Asian immigrants, the trends point to the growing presence of affluent non-Asian homeowners and a declining share of family-based households – indications of Chinatown gentrification.

### **Boston Chinatown**

Boston Chinatown's growth in the past 20 years has outpaced that of the city as a whole. Boston Chinatown's population has almost doubled since 1990, from approximately 6,887 to 12,843. This growth rate of 87% far outstrips Boston's 8% growth rate for the same period. As Boston's Chinatown has grown since 1990, it lost Asian Americans and gained non-Hispanic whites. Asian Americans made up 70.9% of Chinatown's population in 1990, but their share of the neighborhood's population shrank to 45.5% by 2010. It is worth noting that, in absolute terms, Boston Chinatown's Asian-American population has grown—in fact, a roughly 20% growth rate over approximately the past 20 years. However, the non-Hispanic White population of Chinatown has exploded in that same period, growing at a rate of 309%. From 1990 to 2010, Boston has seen non-Hispanic whites drop from 59% to 47% of its population, and Asians grow from 5.2% to 8.9% of its population.

Boston Chinatown's nativity statistics mirror those regarding racial demographics. The percentage of Chinatown residents born abroad has dropped from 62% in 1990 to 48.5% in 2009, while Boston has seen immigrants swell from 20% to 26.7% of its population in the same span of time. Of course, these statistics can be challenging to interpret—immigration is an extremely complicated process, one informed by much larger economic and political forces than can be examined with this data.

Over the past three decades, Boston Chinatown has experienced substantial and unambiguous demographic changes that suggest the neighborhood is less suitable or affordable for families. The percentage of children among Chinatown residents has shrunk from 18.6% in 1990 to 9.4% in 2009. In that same period, children have retained roughly the same share of Boston's overall population, dipping slightly from 19.1% in 1990 to 16.8% in 2009. The percentage of Boston Chinatown residents 65 years old or over has also dipped from 20.6% in 2000 to 14.6% in 2009. The only age cohort to increase in their relative share of Chinatown's population are the 18-24 year old group. In Chinatown, 18-24 year olds made up 30.1% of the population in 2009 up from only 10.8% in 1990. For comparison, that same cohort made up 17.5% of Boston's population in 1990 and 19.4% of Boston's population in 2009. This suggests that Chinatown has been disproportionately affected by the swelling numbers of college students studying and residing in Boston.

The most dramatic changes to Boston Chinatown over the past 20 years have been the changes in income among its residents. Median household income among Asian Americans in Chinatown has fallen from \$16,820 to \$13,057, while median household income among non-Hispanic whites has soared from \$40,554 to \$84,255. Poverty rates in Boston Chinatown were fairly even in 1990, with roughly 30% of whites, Asians, and blacks falling below the federal poverty line. In the past 20 years, the proportion of Chinatown whites has dipped to 18.9%, while 38.8% of blacks, 34.8% of Hispanics, and 43.7% of Asians in Chinatown live below the federal poverty line.

Chinatown has long been a low income working-class neighborhood of Boston, with a greater share of impoverished residents than the city overall for at least the past 20 years. In that same span, poverty among Asian Americans in Boston has held steady at about 30%, poverty

among whites has stood at about 12%, roughly 25% of black Bostonians, and 30% of Hispanic Bostonians.

Chinatown's homeownership data mirror its income and poverty data. For at least 20 years, a greater percentage of Chinatown residents have rented their homes than in Boston's population overall. There is a very dramatic racial difference in tenure in Chinatown. While 7.7% of whites owned their homes in 1990, 42.4% of whites owned their homes in 2009. In that same time, Asian homeownership in Chinatown has increased from 1.9% to 7.9%. Black and Hispanic homeownership rates in Chinatown have remained between the rates of Asians and non-Hispanic whites, with 20.7% of Hispanics and 14.9% of blacks in Chinatown owning their homes in 2009. These percentages can be compared with a 34% rate of homeownership in the city of Boston, up from 30.9% in 1990.

Taken as a whole, these statistics describe a gentrifying Chinatown. The population is growing, but it seems to be young, affluent non-Hispanic whites who are making up the bulk of this growth. Families with children are opting to settle elsewhere. This influx of affluent whites has inflated existing racial divides regarding income and poverty, leaving Chinatown's Asian population behind. Despite the affordable housing developed in Chinatown over the past 20 years, whites have been far more able than Asians, blacks, or Hispanics to become homeowners in Chinatown.

### **Philadelphia Chinatown**

Philadelphia's Chinatown experienced tremendous growth between 1990 and 2010 with a particularly high 102% spike in the total population during the past decade. This growth was especially notable for Non Hispanic Whites whose numbers dipped between 1990 and 2000 but

more than tripled by 2010. We learned this dramatic growth resulted from several new luxury condominium developments in the mid 2000s.

The population growth is accompanied by a shifting racial composition. In 1990, both Non Hispanic Whites and Non Hispanic Blacks comprised 24% of the total population. In 2000, the number of Non Hispanic Blacks surpassed the number of Non Hispanic Whites by 10%. In 2010, there was a 64% increase in the Non Hispanic Black population, however, Non Hispanic Whites outnumbered them by 7%. Like Non Hispanic Whites, Latinos also experienced a decrease in population between 1990 and 2000 but in 2010, the Latino population more than doubled, although it remains the smallest racial group in Philadelphia Chinatown.

Asians continue to comprise the largest racial group. In 1990, they were 45% of the total population. By 2000, they became 30% larger and in the last decade, their numbers increased by 73%. As of 2010, Asians/Pacific Islanders represent 42% of Philadelphia Chinatown's population followed by Non Hispanic Whites (29%), Non Hispanic Blacks (22%), and Latinos (6%). This profile underscores Philadelphia Chinatown's racial diversity and its distinct residential composition in the sizable share of Black residents.

Despite the drastic growth in the last three decades, the percentage of native-born and foreign-born people in Philadelphia's Chinatown has remained quite consistent, about 60% and 30% respectively. However, the percentage of naturalized citizens has not been as consistent. Between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of naturalized citizens dropped by a half—decreasing from 31% to 16%. But in 2009, the percentage of naturalized citizens living in Philadelphia's Chinatown more than tripled.

In all three decades, Philadelphia Chinatown's working age population (25-64 years) has constituted the largest age group. Notably, the relative share of its youth population (up to 17

years) has declined -- dropping from 17% in 1990 to 10% in 2010. Similarly, the percentage of senior citizens (65 and over) has decreased from 14% to 8%. In contrast, the population share of college-age population (18-24 years) has remained steady while the absolute number of this age group has doubled in the last decade. Although many people claim that the elderly tend to stay in Chinatown while young people leave, these statistics prove otherwise.

While the majority of Philadelphia Chinatown lives in family households, the number of family households has steadily decreased in the past three decades from 61.2% to 57.4% to 48.6%. On the other hand, the number of non-family households has increased from 25.4% to a full third (32.8%) in 2010. These statistics increasing share of households comprised of unrelated professional young adults. Most people in Chinatown are renters. In 1990, an overwhelming majority 81.3% of Chinatown residents were renters. In 2000, the number went down slightly to 79.7% and has continued to drop to 70.0% by 2010. Although only a minority are homeowners, their numbers are steadily increasing. In 1990, 18.7% of Philadelphia Chinatown's housing units were owner occupied. This share was 20.3% in 2000 and nearly a third (30%) by 2010. Over the span of three decades, the number of owner occupied units has quadrupled. As more people become property owners, the class character and interests of the neighborhood are certainly changing.

Comparing the median household income by race for 2000 and 2010 suggests that the class recomposition of Philadelphia Chinatown is also marked by important racial patterns. In 2000, the median household income for all racial groups in Philadelphia Chinatown is lower than their city-wide medians with the largest disparity for Asians. Clearly, Philadelphia Chinatown was home to low-income residents especially low-income Asians.

By 2009, this pattern reversed for Chinatown's Non Hispanic White and Latino residents as their median household incomes was notably higher than the city-wide household median incomes for their racial counterparts. The finding that economic hardship in Philadelphia Chinatown tends to be concentrated among Asians and Blacks is reinforced by measures of poverty.

In 1990 and 2000, a sizable share of Blacks, Latinos, and Asians in Chinatown had incomes below the poverty threshold. The majority of Blacks in Chinatown continued to have high poverty rates through the 2000s, however, the share of poor Latinos, Asians, and NHWs dropped such that the majority of people living in Chinatown with the exception of Blacks, are living at or above the poverty level.

### **Manhattan Chinatown**

Manhattan Chinatown, a historic center of Chinese immigration, experienced a significant decline in the number of Asians despite the continued growth of New York City's Asian population. While Asians remain the largest racial group in Manhattan Chinatown, their numbers have dropped by 11% in sharp contrast to the increase in the numbers of non Hispanic whites over the past decade. This increasing presence of non-Hispanic whites in Chinatown is consistent with other major Northeast cities and coupled with the continuing rise of non family households suggests a notable shift in the demographic composition of Chinatown.

While family households remain the majority of household types, the relative share of non family households is rapidly increasing and in 2010, represent nearly one in four Chinatown households. The trend in household types suggests the growing presence of professionals with roommates in a historically family-centered, working class neighborhood. While Chinatown's housing stock remains predominately renter occupied, census data indicates that homeownership



is increasing.

Chinatown remains a critical neighborhood for poor immigrant Asians. According to the 2005-2009 ACS data, the poverty rate for Asians in Chinatown is highest among all racial resident groups. Moreover, the poverty rate among Asian Chinatown residents is significantly higher than the citywide poverty rate for Asian New Yorkers. In Chinatown, the income of one in three Asian residents falls below the federal poverty threshold. The consistently high poverty rates in Chinatown over time suggest a widening class divide among neighborhood residents.



## Synthesis

While studying the data of the three Chinatowns, there are a number of overlapping trends that can be detected. Although common patterns of gentrification can be identified in all three, the data indicates there are divergent themes in each of the Chinatowns. Across the three Chinatowns, the rate of population growth is significantly higher than the city overall. Over the last twenty years, Boston Chinatown experienced a growth rate of 87%. Philadelphia saw similar growth—in the past decade, it has grown by 102%.

With this overall growth, there is also a shifting racial composition. In all three Chinatowns, the percentage of Asians has decreased while there has been an increase in the non-Hispanic White percentage share of the population. In both Boston and Philadelphia, though Asians remain the largest racial group, they are no longer the majority. Asian Americans made up 70.9% of Boston Chinatown's population in 1990, but their share of the neighborhood's population shrank to 45.5% by 2005-2009, with the non-Hispanic White population seeing a 309% growth rate over the past 20 years. In the Philadelphia Chinatown the Asian population went from comprising 45% of the population in 1990 to 42% of the population in 2010. Manhattan Chinatown, the largest of the three, has also seen a 2.6% drop in the Asian population over the last ten years. There have also been significant changes in the share of population held by specific age cohorts. All three Chinatowns have seen a decrease in the share of children (0-17) and seniors (65+)—suggesting that perhaps Chinatowns are becoming a less suitable place for families.

Median household incomes have stayed below the city average for both Manhattan and Boston Chinatowns. In 2010, however, the median household income for Philadelphia has actually risen above the city average. Even so, median incomes of Asian households in all three

Chinatowns suggest that working poor Asians remain concentrated in Chinatowns, as their median household incomes are lower relative to other racial groups. The income differential is especially high for Philadelphia in 2010 as the median household income for non-Hispanic Whites is nearly double that of Asians. These economic disparities are also highlighted when examining the poverty rates across the three Chinatowns. There are persistently high poverty rates for Asian residents in these Chinatowns. In Boston Chinatown, the percentage of Asians living below the federal poverty line has gone up from a rough 30% to around 43% in the last twenty years. From 1990 to 2010, the Asian poverty rate in Manhattan Chinatown has remained a stubborn 33%. Philadelphia Chinatown complicates this narrative slightly. Although there remains working poverty in Chinatown, the dramatic addition of affluent residents including Asians is reflected in the notable decline in the share of Asians whose income falls below the poverty threshold. This finding suggests heightening economic polarization among Philadelphia Chinatown residents.

The homeownership patterns of Asians in Chinatowns provide further evidence of class and race polarization. While all three Chinatowns are majority renter, homeownership is growing. Although homeownership rates are increasing in the Chinatowns, the homeowners are largely non-Hispanic Whites. In Boston Chinatown, while the percentage of Asian homeownership has gone up, the percentage of non-Hispanic White homeownership has risen more substantially. This trend is mirrored to some degree in Philadelphia and Manhattan Chinatown as well.

These trends paint a picture of gentrification within the three Chinatowns. Although these Chinatowns are seeing growth, this growth is marked by an increase of wealthy non-Hispanic Whites. When looking at poverty rates and median household incomes, there is an

increasing racial divide. Even as the home-owning population is increasing, Asians are being significantly surpassed by non-Hispanic Whites in homeownership. When looking at these trends as a whole, our analysis of the census data suggests that working class Asian populations within these gentrifying Chinatowns are slowly being displaced.

## **V. Chinatown Community Development Corporations: A Brief Survey of History and Objectives**

### **Asian Community Development Corporation Boston, MA**

The Asian Community Development Corporation was founded in 1987 by a small group of residents, small business owners, and professionals including an urban planner and educator – some who grew up in Boston Chinatown. It was formed against a backdrop of growing concern about Tufts-New England Medical Center’s continued encroachment into Boston’s Chinatown and a successful community-based organizing response.

ACDC began their involvement in Boston development during a controversial plan for a plot of land called Parcel C which is an one-block area abutting Tufts-New England Medical Center (TNEMC) in a residential area. TNEMC wanted to use this space to create a new, multi-story parking garage but was twice stopped by widespread community opposition, first in 1986 and then again in 1988. The BRA intervened to broker a land swap deal, giving TNEMC an unbroken presence on Washington St. in exchange for land on Oak Street being set aside for community development. This land would later be developed into a mixed income, multi-family complex called Oak Terrace.

The Asian Community Development Corporation formed to serve the Asian American community of Greater Boston with an emphasis on preserving and revitalizing Boston's Chinatown. ACDC’s primary mission is to develop physical community assets including

affordable housing for rental and ownership; promote economic development; foster leadership development; build community capacity and advocate on behalf of the community.

**Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation  
Philadelphia, PA**

The Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) was formed in 1969 in response to the city’s plan to demolish the Holy Redeemer Church and school which served as a Chinatown education and recreation center. The city planned to build the Vine Street Expressway but the Church stood in its way. PCDC was able to successfully prevent the Vine Street Expressway from being built by mobilizing both elders in the Chinatown community and members of the Catholic Church. According to PCDC, because Chinatown had lost over a quarter of its land as the result of “development” projects—such as the Vine Street Expressway



*Traffic on the Vine Street Expressway*

(which split Chinatown in half), Ninth Street Ramp, the Philadelphia Convention Center (whose backdoor faces Chinatown), and the Gallery (a mall)—one of their

primary concerns is land

development projects. This priority on “bricks and mortar” development may have shaped PCDC’s mission statement to protect Chinatown, preserve the heritage of the Chinese people,

and promote the businesses and residents of the Chinatown community. As a CDC, the PCDC's strategy to protect, preserve, and promote Chinatown takes the form of initiating residential and commercial developments. Executive Director, John Chin, claims that the "legacy of PCDC is to preserve the Chinatown community as a gateway for Chinese immigrants".<sup>5</sup>

PCDC blocked the construction of Vine Street Expressway Project. It also initiated the Chris Chadbourne Report in 1972. This report was the first comprehensive study of Chinatown. In 1982, it built 25 townhouses on Spring Street.



*The back door of the Convention Center*

Since then, it has built 54 more residential units and 22 commercial units. Housing is one of PCDC's priorities as they have fought together with working class tenants who were on the verge of eviction. In 1994, PCDC successfully fought against a federal prison that was proposed

---

<sup>5</sup> Source of this quotation is the PCDC's website – [www.chinatown-pcdc.org](http://www.chinatown-pcdc.org).

for 8th and Callowhill Streets. Later in 2000, PCDC helped stop a baseball stadium that was proposed for 11th and Vine Streets.

PCDC has a long history of struggle against outside forces and their proposals for developments that threaten Chinatown's viability as an ethnic residential and commercial center. The future of Philadelphia Chinatown, however, may depend on changing its cityscape to make it more inviting for tourists. According to the PCDC website, it represents Chinatown in city entities such as the Zoning Board, the City Planning Commission, City Council, the Philadelphia Parking Authority, and the Convention Center Authority.

Their recent project, Construction for Chinatown Streetscape Improvement Phase III, is a makeover of the 300th north block of 9th Street and includes a new sidewalk, pedestrian lights, trees, and "cultural elements". In 2008, PCDC received funds from the PA Commerce Department for a Main Street Program. PCDC's Main Street Program is planning to change Chinatown into a tourist attraction by drawing more people to patron the neighborhood's food and service vendors. Included in their calendar of annual events are the Chinese New Year Celebration, Chinatown Block Party, and the Chinatown Restaurant Week. This would promote "economic development and diversity" in Chinatown. According to PCDC, the program would also improve the quality of life for everyone. The Main Street Committee is made up of business owners.

Another one of PCDC's projects is the Chinatown Eastern Tower Community Center. Their reasoning behind this project is that there is no physical space for community residents to gather. PCDC is conducting an \$8 million campaign to raise funds for this project. The center is expected to revive Chinatown by providing retail and office space, and space for families to hold

events. The 38,000 square foot facility is to be built on the corner of 10th and Vine Streets, serving as an anchor of Chinatown in Chinatown North (the Loft District).

PCDC takes a lot of pride in the Chinatown Friendship Arch which they described as “a gateway to our culture and community, a sparkling symbol of international cooperation and welcome, and a beautiful architectural monument that is once again a source of pride and



*The Friendship Arch*

distinction for Chinatown and the broader Chinese population who view our neighborhood as the hub of Chinese culture in the region”.<sup>6</sup> This Arch, which was made in

China, is the marker for

the entrance to Chinatown. Their mission is to preserve, protect, and promote Chinatown as a viable ethnic, residential, and business community. Their economic development initiatives indicate that their strategy to Chinatown’s future is premised on promoting cultural tourism and for these reasons, it would be crucial to ask who will benefit from Chinatown growth and development.

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://chinatown-pcdc.org/about/mission/>

## **Chinatown Partnership Local Development Corporation New York, New York**

The Chinatown Partnership Local Development Corporation (referred to as The Partnership) was formed to act on one of the major recommendations of the Rebuild Chinatown Initiative (RCI) – an AAFE led community plan in response to the devastating impacts of the 9/11 tragedy. This organization intends to unify residents, business owners, and community groups, and create and manage projects with broad support to improve Chinatown’s business environment and neighborhood quality of life. With the investigation and discussion that RCI conducted to identify issues, and propose visions and plans, The Partnership would be able to act on some RCI recommendations by using \$10 million set aside by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the September 11th Fund and the Red Cross for Chinatown rebuilding as well as personal donations.

The Partnership has been engaging in the community’s physical appearance and attraction by conducting the clean streets program—a partnership with the Department of Small Business Services to provide street sanitation seven days a week. The mission is to demonstrate that the economic value of Chinatown is closely associated with a standard of sanitation. A cleaner commercial district has higher economic value and employment opportunities. But the clean street program is not a replacement to city sanitation service, and it exemplifies the types of public and private partnership that the Partnership seeks to promote as a strategy to revitalize Chinatown.

Chinatown Partnership services include organizing events like Taste of Chinatown and the Explore Chinatown campaign. Taste of Chinatown is a food festival that was first launched in 2004. It is one-day event on the Serpentine Street of Chinatown. Offering low prices, such an event could bring large volume of visitors so that overall profits could be rather significant. It is



also a way for Chinatown to generate excitement about cultural activities. Explore Chinatown is an award-winning campaign that includes a visitors information center, an official website and media materials that connect with citywide tourism efforts. Explore Chinatown promotes the community and improved street lighting, piloted a night market and other cultural events and festivals to bring residents and tourists out onto Chinatown streets. There is also a proposal to develop a cultural and performance center in Chinatown to attract artists and performers from around the world, and such projects would certainly stimulate the economy from new investments in hotels, exhibition centers, and commercial businesses.

## **VI. Shaping the Future of Chinatown: Current Development Debates**

### **Boston Chinatown**

Fifty years ago, Parcel 24, a predominantly immigrant residential area, was a vital part of the Chinatown community. The neighborhood was comprised of large groups of Chinese, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants. At that time, the site had been established as part of a series of eminent domain takings for the development of an onramp for the Metropolitan Highway and Boston extension of the Massachusetts Highway. These takings substantially reduced the area of Chinatown and displaced an estimated three hundred residents from Parcel 24. Thirty years later, the Central Artery/Tunnel Project, referred to as the “Big Dig”, moved the highway underneath the city. The Big Dig Project involved the relocation of the connection to the Massachusetts Turnpike westbound. Parcel 24, consequently, became available for redevelopment.<sup>7</sup>

In 2002, the Asian Community Development Center (ACDC) started working on a campaign to reclaim Parcel 24. As Lowe and Brugge describe in "Grassroots Organizing in

---

<sup>7</sup> Parcel 24 Project Narrative, pg. 4

Boston Chinatown: A Comparison with CDC-style Organizing,” the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) reached out to ACDC around this time to initiate a working relationship. ACDC suggested the Parcel 24 campaign as a point of collaboration (28). ACDC focused heavily on a community building approach, striving to work with and reach consensus with the majority of stakeholders. Community involvement for this issue was initiated within the year as Chinatown community residents, leaders and representatives mobilized to advocate for much needed affordable housing—they organized as the Hudson Street for Chinatown (HSC).

Former Hudson Street residents who had been displaced became actively engaged in the process of planning for redevelopment and mobilized with ACDC and other Chinatown residents and organizations to ensure a development plan that met the needs of the community. While CPA along with the Chinatown Resident Association (CRA) played a part in the launching of the Hudson Street for Chinatown (HSC) Coalition, ACDC took on a leadership position in the Parcel 24 struggle. After community planning and legislative action, the Chinatown community was successful in its efforts and the MTA and the BRA adopted the community’s vision for Parcel 24.

In the beginning, CPA and other core organizations that were part of the HSC took secondary roles in the Parcel 24 campaign. However, these organizations became more critical of ACDC’s work as the campaign went forward. While CPA and Chinatown residents prioritized the strengthening of the residents’ role in this process, ACDC was more invested in reaching consensus amongst the number of stakeholders—rather than making commitments to individual stakeholders (Lowe and Brugge 2007, 30-31). Even so, core groups within the HSC coalition eventually reached consensus on an eventually published developmental vision. In

2004, a Request for Proposal (RFP) that was informed by this community visioning was issued by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority (MTA).

The next step was to discuss involvement in the development. Members of the HSC coalition had discussed the possibility of a collaborative developmental entity—an entity that would involve the diverse set of stakeholders. A collaborative development entity would ensure that the role of Chinatown residents would be strengthened, as ACDC gave greater value to consensus building. ACDC was not invested in engaging with any sector on a deeper level. A collaborative entity that included core community organizations would presumably keep this focus on consensus building in check. ACDC had agreed to continue discussion around this prospect through inter-organizational meetings. However, ACDC sidestepped the issue for almost a year, only to end up informing other core members of the HSC coalition that it planned on being the sole community entity involved in development (Lowe and Brugge 2007, 32). It is unclear why core organizations of HSC deferred to ACDC's leading role, but it is important to highlight that other organizations had markedly less experience with development. As many CDC's, ACDC saw itself in a unique position to build consensus and further community development.

In 2006, ACDC and New Boston Fund Inc. (a for-profit development partner that ACDC had paired up with) were designated the developers of the Parcel 24 project by the MTA—in fact, they were the only bidders for the project due to the rigorous set of requirements. This partnership formed as the Parcel 24 LLC and has proposed a mixed-use, mixed-income plan for the 1.5 acre site—with 354 units of housing, 95 of which would be affordable housing units (based on HUD guidelines). ACDC was one of the founding members of HSC but withdrew and partnered with the New Boston Fund, Inc. to propose a plan for the redevelopment of Parcel 24.

For two years the HSC developed and fine-tuned a vision—one that was heavily informed by images of the thriving neighborhood that Parcel 24 used to be. In order to fully ensure community engagement, ACDC had provided relevant courses and workshop to interested community members. However, many of these courses and workshops were geared towards professionals in the community and not accessible to all the residents. Although ACDC stressed residents taking leadership roles, these leadership roles were primarily for professionals.

ACDC claims that even as they alongside the New Boston Fund have made revisions after the release of the RFP, the community has continually approved and engaged with Parcel 24 LLC's decisions. However, ACDC's engagement of the community had at times functioned somewhat superficially. Although community meetings had involved residents, ACDC rarely addressed issues surrounding the changes that were being made. The LLC claims that the needs and vision of the community have been prioritized throughout the process. And while affordable housing is perhaps one of Chinatown's biggest needs, the project also promises green open space, growth of the commercial corridor and essentially the restoration of the residential character of the neighborhood. On October 17th, 2011, ACDC announced state and city funding of Parcel 24.

ACDC's Parcel 24 campaign highlights the limitations of community development corporations in terms of ensuring community empowerment. Although ACDC was able to build widespread community support, there were inconsistencies and contradictions in the process of garnering this support.

### **Philadelphia Chinatown**

Reading Viaduct (RVD) is a 100-year old railroad trestle that runs along a ten-block stretch of Philadelphia's Chinatown. It was abandoned in 1984 and since then, the railroad

trestle and the blocks surrounding it have become a rundown graffiti filled neighborhood eyesore. In 2004, two neighborhood organizations - Friends of Viaduct Park (FVP) and Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC), commissioned and issued redevelopment proposals. These reports outlined what each group thinks will be the best plan to revitalize RVD. In the proposal developed by FVP, the railroad trestle would be turned into a public park that would resemble New York City's Highline. The group claims that this would give the neighborhood much needed green space. In the PCDC plan, part of the trestle would be demolished to make room for additional businesses and affordable housing and the rest set aside as green space.

Philadelphia Chinatown Community Development Corporation has been a driving force in the struggle to make sure that Chinatown continues to be a place where Asian immigrants can live and work.

This has not always been easy. The Reading Viaduct is just the latest attempt to make changes to the community that



The Reading Viaduct

PCDC does not

necessarily agree with. This is not to say that the organization does not like parks or does not want to create green space in Chinatown. In fact, PCDC has planted 140 trees in the

neighborhood since 2006. They also developed an area above the Vine Street Expressway into a small community park. According to PCDC executive director, John Chin, there are two major problems with the FRV's plan to redevelop the Reading Viaduct and they circle around the same core issue, the plan is not the right fit for the residents of Philadelphia's Chinatown.

There is another group with a plan to redevelop the RVD, the Callowhill Reading Viaduct Neighborhood Improvement District. As of December 2011, Philadelphia Mayor Nutter has not signed the bill that would officially create the neighborhood improvement district. However, this does not mean that the group has not unofficially been working to get their vision of the RVD up and running. NID's are a "tool to raise and direct funds to combat blight and improve quality of life in residential, industrial or mixed use area strengthening the ability of property owners to enjoy a safer more attractive neighborhood" (crvnid.org). NID's can raise funds by increasing property taxes in order to pay for projects that will benefit the neighborhood.

PCDC ranks the redevelopment of the Reading Viaduct fourth in their list of priorities for their neighborhood. According to Chin, "PCDC ranks this project behind affordable housing, strengthening of Chinatown commercial corridor, jobs" (Chin interview). The Philadelphia budgeting process allots each neighborhood a certain amount of money for community projects and Mr. Chin thinks that the city should use the money allotted to Chinatown for more immediate quality of life issues. "Let's focus on an environment where Chinatown commerce can grow. More successful businesses lead to more jobs, sustainable wages and increased income for households" (Chin interview).

Another reason that many in Chinatown believe that the Reading Viaduct redevelopment plan which is backed by the CRVNID is not the best plan for the neighborhood is because of the increased tax burden and Mr. Chin underscores this point during our interview, "This is the

wrong vehicle and the wrong time to institute a 7% tax. This 7% would be on top of a 10% increase that was approved in May 2010 and a 3.85% that was approved this summer. That totals 20.35%.”

There are recurring themes in our study of urban ethnic enclaves. Two of those issues are working poverty and the need for affordable housing. The two are often interconnected and inseparable. We talked with Mr. Chin about poverty in Philadelphia’s Chinatown and he mentioned the poverty rate in Chinatown is higher than the rest of Philadelphia. This is one of the reasons why PCDC is so concerned with affordable housing. In 2004, PCDC released a report, Chinatown Neighborhood Plan, outlining its plans for the future of Philadelphia Chinatown.<sup>8</sup> This report proposed a new high-rise building that included 144 mixed income rental units with space for retail, a recreation center and an adult daycare for seniors.

The Reading Viaduct is the latest land use issue that will affect Philadelphia Chinatown. Planning for the redevelopment of the Reading Viaduct is still in the early stages. Reading Entertainment owns the piece of land and according to Mr. Chin, “Reading believes that it is sitting on a valuable asset...for housing” (Chin interview). The company may be holding out for the best offer and the city of Philadelphia is experiencing the same economic difficulties of every major city during this “great recession” which may mean more luxury high rise buildings and less green space. Mr. Chin worries about the effect of this possible scenario for accelerating gentrification especially since the city plans to finance the upkeep of the green space with a 7% increase in property tax. This could equal an additional \$150 per year. According to the proponents of the RV, this is a nominal fee. However, Mr. Chin believes that this will be an additional burden to area residents who can least afford to pay it. In an article published by CBS

---

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.philaplanning.org/cpdiv/Neighborhood\\_Plans/Chinatown-chap1.pdf](http://www.philaplanning.org/cpdiv/Neighborhood_Plans/Chinatown-chap1.pdf)

News, long time resident James Morton said “A tax increase is a real hardship. Sometimes I don’t have enough money to pay for all of my medicine each month” (www.cbsnews.com). Chin elaborated during our interview, “For Chinatown, we want to expand the commercial corridor and the housing corridor. We still don’t see eye to eye. I don’t know what the future holds. I don’t see us (PCDC) being at the table.” It is unfortunate that an organization with as much history as PCDC feels like their voices aren’t being heard in an issue as important as the redevelopment of the Reading Viaduct. Mr. Chin also defends PCDC’s reputation for being anti-green space. “The greening of the viaduct is not the priority of Chinatown. But we did green 10th Street and 9th Street. We believe in green space. Until the other side appreciates small business development, employment, affordable housing, there’s really no possibility [of seeing eye to eye]. So, I get these dirty looks from people who want the green space” (Chin interview).

The FRV was founded in December of 2003 by two artists -- John Struble and Sarah McEnany, longtime residents of the Chinatown/Callowhill neighborhoods in Philadelphia. They were inspired by a local presentation on the success of the Highline in New York City. There is some controversy surrounding the group’s founding. It has been suggested that the two artists were handpicked by a powerful Center City businessman to form this group to give others the impression that the FRV is a group concerned with community beautification and not with speeding up the gentrification process. The FRV would like to see a public private partnership that would alleviate the tax burden from the residents of the surrounding neighborhood.

These two groups may have many ideas for what could be done with this land but the fact is that the land is owned by Reading Entertainment and according to John Chin, “Reading feels like it is sitting on a valuable piece of land...for housing” (Chin interview). Reading Entertainment has never been a part of any official talks but FVP has requested that Reading



Entertainment turn over the deed to their neighborhood nonprofit. Reading Entertainment has not yet done so. This could be an indication that Reading Entertainment is holding out for the highest bidder. It seems as though the City Council is behind the plan to turn the RVD into green space. In December 2011, they passed a bill creating a Cowhill/Chinatown Neighborhood Improvement District but as stated earlier in this report, the bill that not been passed by Mayor Nutter. If this remains the case, there is little chance that either nonprofit will accomplish their goals. The probable outcome of this situation is that a private developer will purchase the land and build a luxury high-rise and a small park for residents.

These dueling opinions have caused a rift in the community among residents, business owners, and local nonprofits. Proponents of the RVP plan emphasize the neighborhoods need for a park and general beautification. While those who favor the PCDC plan are quick to point out that their plan only demolishes part of the viaduct allowing for part of the trestle to be green space and would make several blocks north of the railroad tracks available to small business owners and affordable housing developers.

The two sides may have found a common ally in SEPTA, the Philadelphia public transportation system. SEPTA owns part of the RVD. The Center City District Neighborhood Improvement District secured grant monies to conduct a study of the SEPTA owned part of the RVD. With this newest development it could be possible that both sides can work together on a common goal; to turn the SEPTA part of the viaduct into a park and demolish a part for housing and business and in the process, improve the community, attract business and hold on to its ethnic identity.

It is difficult to pinpoint which nonprofits and community residents support which vision for the future development of the RVD. When you look at the Chinatown Neighborhood Plan

including Callowhill, you will notice that the Callowhill Neighborhood Association and Asian Americans United are credited with being part of the planning process, but there are members of AAU on the board of the FRD. This overlap occurs because everyone agrees that the redevelopment of the RVD is a good idea but differ on how to do it and how to pay for it.

In an interview with Ellen Somekawa, Executive Director of Asian Americans United, a nonprofit organization in Philadelphia's Chinatown, we discussed the idea of community change and she talked about the idea of keeping a neighborhood underdeveloped to keep housing affordable. Should activists fight any kind of neighborhood improvement for fear of the area becoming gentrified? She thought that this was a problem faced by many activists. It was clear from our conversation and her affiliation with FRV that Ms. Somekawa is in favor of the plan to transform RVD into a green space although she remains cautiously optimistic about the outcome. The Reading Viaduct redevelopment will definitely test competing strategies of community sustainability and development.

### **Manhattan Chinatown**

In January 26, 2011, the Chinatown BID steering committee led by New York City Council Member Margaret Chin who represents District 1 which includes Chinatown, presented a Business Improvement District proposal to the City Planning Commission. Given Mayor Bloomberg's policy priority of forming Business Improvement Districts, the proposed Chinatown BID was voted 50 in favor and 0 opposed by the City Council on September 21, 2011. The BID services include street sanitation and decoration, public safety and hospitality, marketing and promotion, and community services. The implementation of these services is funded from an additional annual tax assessment of property owners.

Chinatown Partnership LDC has been providing sanitation service for years but they didn't charge property and business-owners. As the public money dried up, formation of a BID seemed to be the logical solution to create a renewable funding stream for supplemental sanitation services. The Partnership is the district management association that manages the collection of the tax assessment and implementation of BID services. The formation of the Chinatown BID is in response to limited public resources and a declining commercial district especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks which reduced vehicular and foot traffic to Chinatown. The prevailing argument claimed that fewer people were visiting Chinatown which meant less money spent in the neighborhood posing a major disadvantage for local businesses. BID supporters strongly recommend BID formation as a strategic stimulus for economic growth. It provides steady funding to sanitize, beautify, and market Chinatown as an attractive cultural tourist destination.

As gathered from our interview with Mr. Chen, AAFE created CPLDC as part of the implementation of the Rebuild Chinatown Initiative (RCI). CPLDC's board of directors is comprised of experts from various fields, including urban planning, nonprofits, engineering, law, finance and business, and also merchants and entrepreneurs. Construction of the board is self-appointed in the interests of local development, maintenance, and promotion. According to Executive Director Wellington Chen, a goal of the LDC is to unify the factions within the community, reducing the rivalries that cause each group to shirk their responsibilities for Chinatown development.

LDCs are important to the struggle for urban rights, especially in the local development process. However, they are difficult to maintain. According to Chen, one of the major burdens that LDC organizers bear, and one that makes their job exceedingly difficult, is the matter of

fundraising. He emphasized that it's a never-ending struggle to raise the money needed to fund an LDC.

Chen also emphasized CPLDC's long processes of community engagement. Mr. Chen told us that he wore out several pairs of shoes and lost 25 pounds raising stakeholder awareness of CPLDC and the Chinatown BID proposal, and handed out 4000 business cards in the process. They also endorsed their efforts on two websites, and on the radio on two occasions. According to Chen, their process of community engagement also involved about 60 meetings, and several votes held at public hearings on the subject of the BID. Chen says the voter response to the BID at these hearings was consistently in overwhelming support of the initiative. Such community engagement, in addition to their efforts toward the Chinatown BID and related initiatives, comprise the majority of their organizing activities as well. Given their very small staff, which Chen said was about two people, these activities must take up most of the LDC's time.

As Chen stated, the focus of the organization hasn't necessarily changed since its inception, but has instead become more focused on pinpointing specific issues. Initially CPLDC's primary focus was on the sanitation issues affecting Chinatown, around which the BID struggle arose. Programs related to this effort included graffiti- and garbage-removal. Since then, as Mr. Chen described, they have also organized culturally-themed events to draw outside interests to Chinatown, namely the "Taste of Chinatown" event, which featured \$1 plates of food sold by local merchants. The event was a success, drawing in thousands of dollars to the merchants in only a few hours. To Chen, this represents the potential Chinatown has to increase its economic success by drawing in more crowds. While cultural events such as "Taste of Chinatown" provide an obvious spectacle by which to draw visitors, the point is to bring more people into Chinatown, an end which the BID and other infrastructure-related efforts are

intended to meet. “If you can draw them in,” said Mr. Chen, “you don’t need to bang the gong.” Also, CPLDC has been involved in efforts to establish a “wayfinding system” to direct people to Chinatown.

According to Mr. Chen, Chinatown’s first priority is to clean up, in a literal sense. In a larger sense, he said that Chinatown also needs to “reconnect,” “rejuvenate,” and “reimagine itself.” In his comments on “reimagining,” Chen made specific reference to Chinatown’s reputation for counterfeit goods, which he believes is a reflection of a lack of creativity. Chinatown must tap into local talent and creativity in its efforts to rejuvenate itself; conventional development ideas won’t be enough to compete with neighboring economies, according to Chen. Also, it is urgent in the revitalization of the neighborhood economy that Chinatown takes risks, expanding the possibilities in terms of diversifying its sources of profit. Overall, Chinatown’s stakeholders must focus on sustainability for future success.

In reference to Chinatown’s specific development needs, Chen cited the importance of infrastructures, using the American railroad system as an analogy (and making reference to the largely Chinese labor that made it possible). A sustainable framework must be established, one that is efficient, predictable, reliable and stable - qualities he claims the BID model possesses.

In terms of how priorities are set by the LDC, Chen referenced “SWOF,” what he says is a common model by which community conditions are assessed. SWOF stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. One of Chinatown’s strengths is the variety of low-cost goods sold by its merchants, a strength that requires a large volume of customer traffic (something to be considered in economic development concerns). One of its major weaknesses is the generally low educational attainment among its residents and rates of low English proficiency, which Chen says reflects poorly on business. Opportunity has come in the form of

the BID and related initiatives, though the Frets, which include low educational attainment but also the “high-needs” nature of the neighborhood and instances of low English proficiency, continue to exert pressure.

In terms of pressures in the near future, Chen says that Chinatown must set its priorities carefully in relation to the BID and the issues it is intended to address. According to Chen, Chinatown, especially considering its proximity to the Financial District and the World Trade Center site, is “sitting on a goldmine,” and should come together in an effort to respond to that. He says that the time is now for Chinatown, and the choice that stakeholders have is on the table. They can either move forward, or be “sitting ducks.”

Campaign efforts will be needed to further propagate these ideas and messages. One culmination of these efforts, from campaigns to the implementation of the BID, should be to “make [Chinatown] relevant,” specifically to Asian Americans; they must “make the children come back,” as Chen phrased it. One of the CPLDC’s major obstacles is the opposition it faces from major opponents of the BID and other initiatives. One issue on that front is the subject of CPLDC’s use of funding money. Chen says that there is still \$2 million available in funding.

Another major issue, says Chen, is the current economic recession because “we’re all connected.” The whole world is experiencing an economic downturn, and New York’s Chinatown - and CPLDC - must be on guard as well. Both Chinatown and CPLDC need to “keep chipping away,” as there is “no quick fix” to the issues at hand.

According to Chen, we need only look at the data - such as the report issued by AAF in 2008 - to see the rationale and benefits of the Chinatown BID. These types of studies have been done repeatedly, says Chen, and all have similar conclusions as to the nature of the problems and possible solutions in Chinatown. In Chen’s view, more effort should be directed towards sending

outreach groups to the community as opposed to conducting more studies. Also, BID's, the 1965 invention of Chinese-Canadian Alex Ling that subsequently spread across the globe in various formations, have been shown to work in varying circumstances.

BID's provide a steady funding source for the implementation of their services, fast responses to local changing needs, increases in property values, and a competitive advantage against nearby commercial districts. They are self-efficient, self-sustainable systems that unify neighborhoods to share responsibilities, and which are, furthermore, usually started voluntarily by members of the community. Chen illustrated this with an analogy about the cost of buying a radio. If everyone bought their own radio, it would be much more expensive than buying a radio as a group and sharing it. To extend this analogy to sanitation, if every property owner were to buy a broom to sweep his/her storefront, ten property-owners need at least 10 brooms - which is more expensive than if they were to share brooms. They would pay less money in total, but the quality of cleanliness would be the same.

In Chinatown, the BID proposal has been eyed for a very long time. Chen says the concept of the BID is very powerful but often misunderstood. During our interview, Chen phrased the nature of this misunderstanding as follows: "It looks like a duck. It walks like a duck and it quacks like a duck. But it isn't a duck." Initially, not everyone on the board of directors supported formation of a BID. Chen sees the BID as a unifying self-help tool as opposed to one that threatens the stability of the community. In addition to connecting stakeholders, it also ensures the completion of tasks not covered by the Sanitation Department, who Chen said "can't do it *all*." Additionally, BID's have been established in other North American Chinatowns including Toronto and Houston. According to Chen, BID's are not a permanent fix but a tool, a starting point for long-term community sustainability.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

A CDC's strategy is simple and complex in that they build partnerships with local and national politicians, nonprofits and the business community to achieve their goal of community improvement. Some people question the term community development. Often neighborhood reinvestment leads to gentrification which forces many long term residents out of the neighborhood then the question becomes community development for whom? If a CDC is successful, and middle and high income individuals are now interested in residing and/or setting up a business in a once "blighted" neighborhood and long term residents and small businesses face increasing hardship, whom has the CDC made the community better for?

This question is clearly relevant in the case of Philadelphia's Reading Viaduct. It is a set of train tracks that divides Chinatown proper and Chinatown North. The community as a whole would like to see the derelict property converted into something that would be beneficial to the community. Some believe that it should be transformed into an elevated park and others believe that the space could be used as a park and additional affordable housing and retail space. It is clear that all sides want the space to be used for something that betters the community, but a new park would make the community better for some while affordable housing and retail stores would make the community better for others. CDC's have to try and bridge the gap.

CDC's could be considered a predecessor to modern social entrepreneurial projects. At its best CDC's should have a solid knowledge of the American business landscape, and use this knowledge to benefit the community. It is designed to be a vehicle for achieving social good in disinvested neighborhoods. Many of the concepts behind CDC's are the same as those of a governing body of any city or town. Their basic goals are to preserve and build affordable housing, stimulate job growth, protect and nurture small business and nonprofits that are an asset



to the community. All of these individual activities along with other aspects like community advocacy and neighborhood planning should equal community betterment-this is the mission of the CDC.

The Clean Streets program that is run by CPLDC is a perfect example of how CDC's are able to combine business savvy with community improvement. The Clean Streets Program focuses on the physical cleanliness of New York City's Chinatown in order to make it more attractive to businesses and tourists. This program makes good use of the best aspects of CDC's it created jobs as well as attracting new business and tourists. The CDC and its supporters believe that this initiative will make Chinatown a better place to live, work and play.

Community Development Corporations are made up of a board of directors, staff and volunteers. Those selected or elected to the BOD bring with them business know how personal and political connections that will strengthen the CDC's power to make change happen on a local level. CDC's play a major role in the local growth coalition, they combine their business know how with the political connections of their BOD, federal and state grants and influential fundraisers to create a community business partnership. All CDC's believe that business growth and reinvestment into their communities is key to achieving community revitalization and this theory drives their goals. The projects that they participate in from homeownership, to small business development to community beautification are all focused on building businesses that strengthen the community.

In Boston's Chinatown ACDC fought to make sure that Parcel 24 would be developed into a space that would benefit the many community members and not just those who needed to park close to Tufts Medical Center. The end result was a mixed use housing development. This

is an example of what can be accomplished when CDC's work together with community members to achieve results that benefit an entire neighborhood.

Appendix  
CDC Interview Questions

1. What is the history of your organization –
  - a. How did your organization get started/by whom/why?
  - b. What criteria and process is used to put together your board of directors?
  - c. What are the different community interests and/or professional expertise represented on your board?
  
2. Can you describe the key priority concerns and/or issues for community and economic development in Chinatown?
  
3. What are the key challenges and/or obstacles that face (1) Chinatown and (2) your organization in the next few years?
  
4. Which organization(s) does your CDC collaborate and/or build alliances with?
  
5. We are learning about Chinatown land use and development, can you describe a key development issue and the role and position of your organization?
  
6. Is your CDC currently involved in a community planning initiative? If yes, please elaborate. If no, ascertain there is currently no planning initiative and ask if interviewee thinks community planning is necessary.

Census Tract Definitions of Chinatowns - 1990, 2000, 2010			
Manhattan Chinatown	Philadelphia Chinatown 1990 and 2000	Philadelphia Chinatown 2010	Boston Chinatown
Census Tract 2.01	Census Tract 2	Census Tract 2	Census Tract 701
Census Tract 2.02	Census Tract 126	Census Tract 376	Census Tract 702
Census Tract 6	Census Tract 127		Census Tract 704
Census Tract 8			
Census Tract 10.01			
Census Tract 10.02			
Census Tract 12			
Census Tract 14.01			
Census Tract 14.02			
Census Tract 16			
Census Tract 18			
Census Tract 22.01			
Census Tract 25			
Census Tract 27			
Census Tract 29			
Census Tract 30.01			
Census Tract 31			
Census Tract 36.01			
Census Tract 41			
Census Tract 43			
Census Tract 45			

## References

- Asian Community Development Corporation, [www.asiancdc.org](http://www.asiancdc.org), accessed December, 2011.
- Asian Community Development Corporation. 2011. Parcel 24 Project Narrative.
- Bratt, Rachel. 1997. "CDCs: Contributions Outweigh Contradictions, a Reply to Randy Stoecker." *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 19, 23-28.
- Chen, Wellington, Executive Director, Chinatown Partnership Local Development Corporation. Personal Interview. 2 December 2011.
- Chin, John. Executive Director, Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation. Personal Interview. 7 Nov. 2011.
- Domhoff, G. William. 2005. "The Ford Foundation in the Inner City: Forging an Alliance with Neighborhood Activists." *Who Rules America?* Available online: [http://www2.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/local/ford\\_foundation.html](http://www2.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/local/ford_foundation.html)
- Galster, George. 2005. *The Impact of Community Development Organizations on Urban Neighborhoods*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute.
- Hevesi, Dennis. 2003. "Chinatown Journey: From Protestors to Developers." *The New York Times*, January 12.
- Kirkpatrick, Owen L. 2007. "The Two 'Logics' of Community Development: Neighborhoods, Markets, and Community Development Corporations." *Politics and Society*, 35, 2:329-359.
- LeBlanc, Steve. 2007. "On Dec. 31, It's Official: Boston's Big Dig Will Be Done." *The Washington Post*. December 26.
- Lowe, Lydia and Doug Brugge. 2007. "Grassroots Organizing in Boston Chinatown: A Comparison with CDC-style Organizing." *Acting Civically: From Urban Neighborhoods to Higher Education*. Medford, MA: Tufts University Press.
- National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development, [www.nationalcapacd.org](http://www.nationalcapacd.org); accessed 6 Jan. 2012.
- Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation, [www.chinatown-pcdc.org](http://www.chinatown-pcdc.org), accessed 6 Jan. 2012.
- Rong, Xiaoqing. 2011. "With a Shrinking Immigrant Population, Manhattan's Chinatown Ponders Future." May 4, Feet in Two Worlds, Available online: <http://news.feetintwoworlds.org/2011/05/04/with-a-shrinking-immigrant-population-manhattans-chinatown-ponders-future/>

Schill, Michael. 1997. "Assessing the Role of CDCs in Inner City Economic Development." *Review of Law and Social Change*, 22, 4: 753-781.  
[http://www.law.nyu.edu/journals/reviewoflawandsocialchange/issues/ECM\\_PRO\\_065722](http://www.law.nyu.edu/journals/reviewoflawandsocialchange/issues/ECM_PRO_065722)

Somekawa, Ellen. 2011. Executive Director, Asian Americans United. Personal Interview, 7 Nov. 2011.

Stoecker, Randy. 1997. "The CDC Model of Urban Redevelopment: A Critique and an Alternative." *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 19, 1-22.

Stoecker, Randy. 2003. "Understanding the Development-Organizing Dialectic." *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 25, 4:493-512.  
Sturdivant 1971

Vidal, Avis and Dennis Keating. 2004. "Community Development: Current Issues and Emerging Challenges." *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 26, 2:125-137.