

Interim Report, July 2019
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It has been 5 weeks since I began interning at the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) this summer. My time spent here has varied from distributing our monthly newsletters in the neighborhood and organizing college tours for our youth program to assisting our project manager in charge of our new affordable housing development and neighborhood advocacy. However, the most significant projects I have worked on have been our efforts to defeat the Callowhill business improvement district, or BID, which was proposed in the area north of Chinatown proper; planning the Eastern Tower Community Center; and collecting applications for our North 12th Street Homes.

In 1991, the Vine Street Expressway was built in the middle of Philadelphia Chinatown, essentially splitting Chinatown proper from Chinatown North. The northern area has become largely contested land. Due to its close approximation to Center City and many vacant lots, Chinatown North has been subject to rapid redevelopment. While PCDC refers to this land as Chinatown North, it has many alternative names such as Eraserhood, Lofts District, and Callowhill. Recently, a large developer called Arts and Crafts Holdings and multiple property owners in Callowhill have been planning a BID in Callowhill. The boundaries of the BID include many Chinatown businesses and Chinese residents. If the BID comes to fruition, all of the property owners within it will be levied an extra fee which would go toward services such as cleaning, greening, and lighting.

While PCDC does not object to these services, the Callowhill BID is being led by a large developer that has a reputation for neglecting its tenants. In addition, the entire BID planning process has lacked transparency and inclusion ranging from not including adequate Chinese translations of the BID materials to not all property owners receiving notice of the BID. Some of the property owners I spoke to did not even know there were plans to create a BID in Chinatown North. Finally, this BID would also create a statement – that this land north of Chinatown proper does not belong to Chinatown. However, even if Chinatown North is physically separated from Chinatown proper by the Vine Street Expressway, it is still very much a part of the neighborhood.

Over the past few weeks, I have been visiting property owners in Chinatown North in order to inform them about the BID and collecting signatures from them for objection letters. I have also attended a public hearing and spoke about Arts and Crafts Holdings alleged negligence of its tenants. If one-third of property owners object it by submitting objection letters, the BID will not come to pass. This is the most significant project I have been working on, and in several weeks, we will find out whether the BID will be defeated or will come to fruition.

In addition, I have been assisting in planning for the much-anticipated opening of the Eastern Tower Community Center this September. Though ETCC is an apartment complex, it is most importantly, a place for the Chinatown community to thrive. ETCC will house a community

center at the base equipped with a large gymnasium, classrooms, and meeting areas. Mandarin language classes, exercise classes, and more will be taught here. But such a large development entails a lot of technical work including ordering and constructing furniture, contacting teachers to teach at ETCC, and more.

Lastly, another significant project I have been working on is assisting our project manager in charge of North 12th Street Homes, PCDC's most recent affordable housing development. One of the most important things I have realized during this internship is the crucial need for affordable housing in Philadelphia. In addition, PCDC makes sure to provide language-accessible affordable housing and always includes Chinese translations of its housing materials. Many people have applied to North 12th Street, so I have been assisting our project manager in organizing applications in order to see if people qualify. Due to the limited amount of economically accessible housing, there are very strict requirements and documents that are needed in order to apply, so there are many materials that I have been organizing.

A lot has happened during my time here at PCDC, and I am eager to make the most of the last 5 weeks I have here. It feels like time is flying by, and I cannot believe my internship is halfway done. Please look forward to my next update!