

Final Report, September 2019

Brittany Xiao

Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation Internship

On August 16, my 10-week internship at Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) ended. The Friday before was the deadline for the Callowhill business improvement district, or BID, objection letters to be submitted to City Council and the Callowhill BID Board.

Recently, one of my supervisors notified me and the other intern I worked with closely on the Callowhill BID that the BID had been [defeated](#). Though Philadelphia Councilman Squilla has not officially announced the results, more than one-third of the objection letters signed by property owners in the proposed BID boundaries were submitted. Thus, the requirement to defeat the BID had been met.

Throughout the BID planning process, there was a lot of misinformation spread about PCDC and its intentions for opposing the Callowhill BID. My supervisors asked me to write an [article](#) for the Daily Pennsylvanian (DP) in order to help the public understand PCDC's position. To write the article, I delved deep into Philadelphia Chinatown's history and PCDC's archives, and I received help from a lot my coworkers and the DP staff. I now know Philadelphia Chinatown like the palm of my hand.

It is hard to believe that this BID which was led by a multimillion company was defeated largely by the hands of a small, humble community nonprofit and neighborhood advocates. It is hard to believe that I was involved in those efforts! I have come to be deeply involved in community planning and neighborhood advocacy.

In addition to working on opposing the Callowhill BID, I led a tour of Penn for our youth program and submitted art to the PCDC annual [Chinatown Community Press](#). Working with kids is a humbling experience – there is nothing like trying to hold the attention of at least 10 sweltering kids in the Philadelphia summer heat. However, the kids have taught me to be more patient and have also inspired me a lot. Some of the kids in our youth program live in Chinatown and know the neighborhood and its needs more intimately than I ever could. A lot of them are very fluent in English and Chinese and actually did translation work for us. They have inspired me to try once again to learn my parent's mother tongue.



PCDC Teen Club at The Button, an iconic sculpture on Penn's campus

Though my time at Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation has ended, the lessons I've learned from my time there will stay with me. Working behind the scenes at a community development corporation, engaging in neighborhood advocacy, and seeing the bureaucracy of local government, has really opened my eyes and shifted my perspective on community planning. Going forward, I want to still volunteer with PCDC from time to time and most importantly, remain dedicated to upholding equitable development.

I wanted to intern at PCDC so that I could have a taste of working at a nonprofit and community planning. After having this experience, I know that I'm really interested in learning more about Chinatowns and staying updated on PCDC's proposal for a Chinatown BID. I plan on writing my Urban Studies senior thesis on the BID and what impact it may have on Chinatown.

My plans for post-graduation remain uncertain. I will most likely take a gap year pursuing a research fellowship. However, I do know that I ultimately want to serve immigrants in some capacity, whether that be in the law, social services, etc.

This experience would not have been possible without the support of the Jessica Jennifer Cohen Foundation. I truly could not have done this internship without the JJCF grant and I'm very grateful.