

# Chinatown Community Land Trust Community Investment Plan 2021 – 2023

## Section 1

### Community or Constituency

Chinatown Community Land Trust, Inc. (Chinatown CLT) focuses the majority of its efforts on activities to stabilize the future of Boston Chinatown. A secondary service group is the Greater Boston Chinese American community, for which Boston Chinatown serves as a regional hub.

Chinatown spans approximately 137 acres near the heart of downtown Boston. While community leaders consider Chinatown to be roughly bound by Essex Street to the north, the Greenway to the east, East Berkeley to the south, and Tremont Street to the west, important adjacent areas lie outside of those borders with historic and strategic importance to the Chinatown community, including heavily Chinese affordable housing developments in downtown and Bay Village, a new development frontier known as the Chinatown Gateway Special Study Area, and the Harrison-Albany Corridor. (See maps in Appendix 1.)

Due to new development, the population of Chinatown has more than doubled in recent decades, with the traditional Chinese immigrant working class sector shrinking, not numerically, but as an overall percentage of the population. While Chinatown's Asian population was cited in the 1980s as 93% Asian ethnicities<sup>1</sup>, this had shrunk to 48.2% in the past decade.<sup>2</sup> While median household income has risen since 2000, disaggregation of racial data shows a yawning disparity between white median household income of \$113,678 and Asian median household income of \$17,997. (See data and charts in Appendices 2 and 3.)

Chinatown, then, is racially and economically polarized between white and Asian, rich and poor, while remaining an important but struggling regional ethnic and commercial hub for the Eastern Massachusetts Chinese community, particularly its working class sector concentrated along the MBTA lines.

In recent years, the addition of thousands of units of luxury housing to the neighborhood has resulted in displacement of some of Chinatown's most vulnerable residents, renters in privately owned small row house properties. In a survey of 52 Chinatown households experiencing displacement, 58 percent included elderly, 40 percent had children, and over 80 percent said that affordability was at the root of their insecurity. Even in a community with a high proportion of subsidized housing, half of Chinatown households are considered rent-burdened.

Community development priorities identified through the past two years' planning process include both preservation and development of affordable housing; improving access to open space and a healthy environment; improving community assets such as a library; and promoting Chinatown as a historic and cultural district. Particularly since the pandemic, public health and economic development issues are also high priority.

<sup>1</sup> *Chinatown Community Plan of 1990*, Boston Redevelopment Authority

<sup>2</sup> 2013-2017 ACS 5 year survey, US Census Bureau

## Section 2

### Involvement of community residents and stakeholders

Engagement of local residents, business owners and stakeholders is central to Chinatown CLT's work. A majority (71%) of Chinatown CLT's board members are community residents, including tenants, home owners, and small business people, more than half are low/moderate-income according to HUD guidelines, most are Chinese American (6 Chinese American, 1 multiracial), and all board members are elected by community residents.

In addition to community representation on its Board, the organization regularly convenes public meetings to engage residents and community members in strategic planning, visioning, needs assessment, and evaluation. Chinatown CLT also convenes ongoing project committees made up of residents, business owners, and community leaders.

Below is a summary of some of our community involvement activities of the past year:

- 11 workshops on topics including community planning, development finance, COVID assistance, and zoning, reaching about 100 participants
- 4 public community meetings as part of a Chinatown CLT-led participatory community planning process, involving more than 200 participants
- 7 policy-related public education activities around data equity, Chinatown housing, zoning, tenant protection, and development issues and 30 meetings with local policy makers and government officials
- More than 300 residents involved in a variety of engagement and decision-making activities, such as project-based committees, focus groups, community meetings, petition/letter writing, street surveys, interactive table activities, zoom, telephone and WeChat communications

A highlight of last year's work included leading the participatory community planning process that culminated with publication of *Chinatown Master Plan 2020*, released in June 2020 via two Zoom events in English and Chinese involving 115 participants. The Master Plan provides the overarching framework for Chinatown CLT's work.

Some of the ways that residents and stakeholders will continue to monitor, implement, and update both the Master Plan and Chinatown CLT's particular plans will be through involvement in the following participatory committees either facilitated or supported by our staff:

- Chinatown Master Plan Committee
- Chinatown Resident Association
- Friends of Reggie Wong Park
- Public Land Stewardship Committee
- Historic and Cultural Preservation Committee
- Chinatown Stabilization Committee

### **Section 3**

#### **Plan goals**

Chinatown CLT's overall goals reflect some of the key priorities of Chinatown Master Plan 2020.

#### **Goal 1. Preserve Affordable Homes**

Chinatown CLT has a particular focus on preserving permanently affordable homes by removing some of Chinatown's smaller, privately-owned properties from the speculative market. These brick row houses and small-scale multi-family properties have historically housed some of Chinatown's most vulnerable residents, yet too many of these properties were flipped and converted to short-term rental properties over the past decade. Chinatown CLT is working to preserve row house properties as permanently affordable housing and to stabilize core row house streets as important cultural and historic anchors of community life. The organization utilizes a community ground lease as a mechanism to ensure both ongoing community involvement and affordability in perpetuity.

#### **Goal 2. Grow Collective Governance of Shared Resources**

Chinatown CLT is pioneering important experiments in collective control and governance of shared resources important to a healthy community. Through collective stewardship, we both protect these community assets and involve residents and stakeholders in participatory decision-making. Focuses include stewardship of public land, lease of a public recreational park, and community ownership of a planned energy micro-grid.

#### **Goal 3. Plan for a Historic and Cultural District**

Chinatown/South Cove has a more than 150-year history as an immigrant, working class neighborhood, yet its history is largely unrecognized and unprotected. Chinatown CLT is convening several partner organizations to develop a shared cultural and historic preservation strategy and framework. We seek to reinterpret the meaning of "preservation" to focus not only on architectural preservation but also on Chinatown's history, cultural character and ongoing community role as an anchor for immigrant working class families and small businesses. The historic and cultural district strategy includes preserving and activating important historic archives to create an Immigrant History Trail as well as place-keeping through public art and community-led tourism.

## Section 4

### Activities to be undertaken

#### GOAL 1: PRESERVE AFFORDABLE HOMES

The Row House Preservation Project involves:

- Acquisition of historic row houses to preserve as permanently affordable housing through the Community Land Trust model. Chinatown CLT purchased its first two properties late last year, which will be preserved as 7 permanently affordable condo units, six priced for households at 80% of Area Median Income, with one studio at 90% AMI. Marketing has begun, with applications accepted January 6 and unit closings anticipated next spring through fall.
- Seek additional opportunities to acquire preserve Chinatown's small to mid-sized rental properties as permanently affordable housing.
- Growing a Row House Preservation Fund, which to date has raised than \$170,000 in private donations, to help us move nimbly and flexibly in our acquisition and preservation efforts and to leverage other resources.
- Partnership with long-time owners to perform needed home repairs while preserving permanent affordability through a variety of creative covenants, including Right of First Refusal, Purchase of Land and Affordability Deed Restrictions, or Life Estate agreements.
- Advocacy for a Row House Protection Area within the zoning code, with stricter height and massing guidelines, demolition delay, and tenant protections. Work with community members, attorneys, student researchers, and Master Plan Committee to draft a proposal, and organize for passage of the zoning amendments.

#### GOAL 2: GROW COLLECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Reggie Wong Park - Continue to support Friends of Reggie Wong Park (now a separate nonprofit), to finalize the lease with DOT, develop park improvement/construction and general operating plans, fundraise, implement, and monitor. Friends of Reggie Wong Park has become an important intersection for Chinatown and Leather District residents and Chinese nine-man volleyball teams to come together. Upcoming activities will include lease execution, development of construction and operations plans, fundraising, and implementation of a short-term improvement plan that includes resurfacing the park, realigning multi-purpose courts, installing play equipment for children, and replacing fencing.

Public Parcels - Work for community control of development and ongoing stewardship of public parcels in the neighborhood. In the upcoming year, work with residents to articulate vision and demands for City-owned parcel R1, including community ownership or control of the land, permanent affordability, and ongoing community oversight of both housing and public spaces.

Continue to involve community members to ensure that other parcels, including Parcel 12C and Parcel 25, are developed with a focus on community-defined priorities.

Chinatown Microgrid - Using battery storage, smart inverters and isolation controls linked in the cloud, energy efficiency improvements, and renewable sources, the goals of the Chinatown Microgrid Project are to reduce climate emissions, increase resiliency, equitably share economic benefits, and involve community members in democratic governance. Work with the Chinese Progressive Association, Resilient Urban Neighborhoods/Green Justice Coalition, and the Castle Square Tenants Organization/Winn Development team to research, develop, and incorporate a microgrid entity. Upcoming activities will include incorporation of the microgrid entity, contracting an Energy Services Company, completion of a finance and development plan for a pilot project at Castle Square and Eva White Apartments, and implementation of the pilot project.

### GOAL 3: PLAN FOR A HISTORIC AND CULTURAL DISTRICT

Architectural/Neighborhood Conservation District – Petition Boston Landmarks Commission for a Conservation District, propose slate of members to appoint to Historic District Commission to define historic characteristics to be preserved, standards and guidelines, and as ongoing commission to oversee preservation. Upcoming activities include involving community members in defining goals, as well as research, drafting, circulation and submission of a petition.

Immigrant History Trail – Work with Chinese Historical Society of New England, Pao Arts Center, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, Boston Research Center and others on development of an Immigrant History Trail, with a particular focus on celebration of immigrant working class history. Create a digital story map, using QR codes and a digital platform to increase public access to archives and oral history connected to various sites throughout Chinatown, as a pilot of the trail in 2021. Place physical markers on the 29 Oak Street row house for a launch event and develop 29 Oak Street Projections as a public art project to involve abutters and build support for Oak St/Johnny Ct preservation.

Sestercentennial Celebration – Work with government, community and historic preservation partners to utilize the years leading up to the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution as an opportunity to lift up the significant history of Boston's communities of color, its labor, immigrant and women's history, in support of Chinatown stabilization and community development. Activities will include partnership on temporary and permanent public art projects, promotion of community-led historical tours and the Immigrant History Trail, educational events and participatory activities.

## **Section 5**

### **How success will be measured and/or evaluated**

Success will be evaluated using both quantitative and qualitative measures.

#### **Goal 1: Preserving Affordable Homes**

Measures of success and progress will include:

- Number of affordable units preserved
- Number of affordable preservation units in predevelopment phase
- Number of properties acquired/preserved or negotiations in progress with property owners
- Progress steps on filing and passage of amendments to Boston Zoning Code

#### **Goal 2: Grow Collective Governance**

Measures of success and progress will include:

- Number and diversity of community members involved
- Number of meetings, workshops, and events held
- Number of residents/community members involved and engaged
- Project or campaign benchmarks reached
- Documentation of lessons learned

#### **Goal 3: Plan for a Historic and Cultural District**

Measures of success and progress will include:

- Number and diversity of community members involved in activities
- Benchmarks reached in historic district designation effort
- Sites identified and marked in the Immigrant History Trail
- Number of educational events/activities and numbers of participants

## **Section 6**

### **Collaborative efforts to support implementation**

Chinatown CLT engages in an array of partnerships and collaborative relationships with other stakeholders to promote a stable future for Chinatown as well as local community stabilization policies for all neighborhoods. Some of these are listed and described below.

Chinatown Master Plan Committee is a monthly unfunded roundtable of Chinatown stakeholders and resident representatives to share neighborhood news, promote open communication across organizations, and monitor the implementation of the Chinatown Master Plan. Chinatown CLT's executive director was a founding member, and Chinatown CLT and Asian CDC co-facilitate this committee. The committee includes participation from representatives of the Chinatown Resident Association, Chinese Progressive Association, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, Josiah Quincy Upper School, Friends of the Chinatown Library, Tufts Medical Center, Chinatown Neighborhood Council, Boston Chinese Evangelical Church, Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center, as well as City of Boston department representatives and the district city councilor.

Greater Boston CLT Network is a network of seven local community land trusts, hosted by Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, that works to grow the CLT model, promote peer learning, share resources, and advance a shared policy agenda. Active members include Dudley Neighbors Inc., Boston Neighborhood CLT, Highland Park CLT, Urban Farming Institute CLT, Comunidades Enraizadas (Chelsea), Somerville CLT, and Chinatown CLT.

Homes for All is a national alliance of base-building groups organizing around the principle of housing as a human right. Chinatown CLT plays an active role in the translocal committee Our Homes Our Land, which holds monthly peer learning sessions to promote community land trust work and new models for community-controlled land and housing. Chinatown CLT is also a member of Homes for All Massachusetts, which brings together housing justice groups around a statewide agenda.

In addition to these ongoing collaborations, Chinatown CLT has a diverse set of partners across different sectors to support implementation of our plans.

Government – City of Boston multiple departments, Boston City Council, as well as Chinatown's elected officials at the local, state and federal level. Also collaborate with City of Cambridge, City of Malden, City of Somerville.

Financial – Boston Private Bank, Citizens Bank, Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation, Life Insurance Community Investment Initiative.

Corporations – Burns & Levinson LLP, Maloney Properties, Marcus Errico Emmer & Brooks

Education/Research – Harvard University Graduate School of Design, MIT Department of Urban Studies & Planning, Suffolk University Law School, Tufts University, University of Connecticut Department of Public Health, UMass/Boston

Community – Chinatown CLT worked with more than 40 community organizations in the past year both within the Chinese community and across neighborhoods/communities.

## Section 7

### **Integration of activities/consistency with community strategy and vision**

*The Chinatown Community Land Trust (Chinatown CLT) works to stabilize the future of Chinatown as a neighborhood for working class families and elderly and a regional hub for the Chinese community. We work for community control of the land, development without displacement, permanently affordable housing, and shared neighborhood spaces, consistent with the Chinatown Master Plan.*

Chinatown CLT's activities directly address our overall goals of providing permanently affordable housing, growing collective governance of shared resources, and planning for a historic and cultural district in Boston Chinatown. These goals are in line with priorities and strategies of Chinatown Master Plan 2020, as integrated aspects of ensuring a healthy community identified by hundreds of community residents and stakeholders. Affordable housing, improvement of shared public assets, and historic/cultural preservation are also important themes emerging in the City of Boston's PLAN: Downtown initiative.

Affordable housing, particularly low income housing, has long been at the top of the community's priorities. While the community has been largely successful at renewing expiring affordability agreements in its large housing projects, this has increased awareness in the importance of permanent affordability and the role that a community land trust can play.

The Chinatown Master Plan also highlights the need for and importance of shared community assets such as parks, open space, a neighborhood library, and future possibilities such as a local energy microgrid. The CLT model of collective stewardship and democratic governance provides a way to involve community members in improving, monitoring, and protecting these shared assets.

The historic and cultural district framework also was identified through the community planning process as a way to support both preservation of historic buildings and physical sites but also to celebrate and support the stabilization of the immigrant, working class residential and small business community. In a city known for its historic role in the American Revolution, a Chinatown historic and cultural district is an important way to promote community-led tourism as a piece of an economic development strategy as well as a claim to full participation in the social, cultural and political life of the city.

## **Section 8 (20 points)**

### **Financing strategy**

Chinatown CLT's income is primarily from private foundation grants, individual donations, and fees for services aligned with the organization's mission. In the past fiscal year, total revenues more than doubled in comparison to the prior year. Chinatown CLT will continue to grow its donor base and funding sources in the upcoming years.

Grants - Chinatown CLT's grant income increased by 56% from FY 2019 to FY 2020, and at least one new foundation source has committed for FY 2021. An important strategy will be to work collaboratively with the Greater Boston CLT Network to pursue larger grants from national foundations.

Service/consulting fees – Over the past few years, Chinatown CLT has raised approximately \$30,000 in annual income through consulting fees related to its mission, particularly from its partnership on environmental health projects. We will continue to raise revenues from consulting services which are directly related to our mission and priorities.

Individual Donors – Chinatown CLT raised over \$119,350 in individual pledges of \$1,000 and up, of which approximately \$75,000 was collected last year, for our Row House Preservation Fund, with over \$40,000 in multi-year pledge commitments. The CITC program will help us to continue building upon our individual donor base in the coming years.

Special Events – Chinatown CLT has not yet created a signature event, but hope to develop an annual fundraising event in future years as part of our overall strategy.

Affordable housing projects will be financed by a combination of public financing, developer contributions, philanthropic contributions, and private loans. Chinatown CLT's long-term financing strategy includes a portion of income from ground lease fees, development fees, and micro-grid revenue.

## **Section 9**

### **History, track record, and sustainable development**

Below are examples of Chinatown CLT's track record of work and accomplishments and their relationship to the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles.

Chinatown CLT recently reclaimed two historic brick row houses from short term rental use for permanently affordable housing as low/moderate income home ownership units, independently raising \$160,000 to deepen affordability of these two projects. This work reflects our commitment to **expanding housing opportunities** and **advancing equity** by providing stable, permanently affordable home ownership units in a low income, people of color neighborhood.

Chinatown CLT partnered with Metropolitan Area Planning Commission to lead a broad, 18-month participatory planning effort that involved hundreds of residents and stakeholders, eighteen community organizations, and culminated with publication of Chinatown Master Plan 2020. This work reflects our commitment to **regional planning** that advances equity, supports participatory and meaningful **decision-making**, and **protects the land/environment** and plans for **climate change adaptation**. While economic development strategies were not a focus within this plan, our partnership on COVID-precipitated efforts to support Chinatown small business reflect our commitment to **increasing job and business opportunities** for the community.

Chinatown CLT's board and staff leadership has deep roots in the community. Our executive director has more than three decades of experience in organizing, planning, and community development projects.