



For Immediate Release
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SDR PARK - COMMUNITY VISIONING & DESIGN EVENTS

Free and open to the public

Community Visioning:

October 26th, 2006 9am – 6pm
SDR Park, Basketball Courts between Hester & Grand

Community Charrette:

November 2nd, 2006 6pm – 9pm
M.S. 131 Library – 100 Hester Street, 2nd floor

Chinatown Citizens Take Back the Park!

Lower East Side Neighborhood Coalition Seeks Voice in Re-building Chinatown Park

New York, NY - October 10th, 2006 - The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation recently announced funding for the improvement of the Hester Street playground in Sara D. Roosevelt Park. In response, local residents, community groups, and schools formed the SDR Coalition to take an active role in the reconstruction efforts. Hester Street Collaborative, a non-profit design-build studio, has organized a Visioning Day on Thursday, October 26th from 9:00 am – 7:00 pm, in conjunction with Partnerships for Parks and the SDR Coalition, to promote the community's involvement in the design process.

A Visioning Day, two days before the city celebrates the 70th year anniversary of SDR Park, will be structured as an open, participatory design forum, with carnival-like games in the Park. A scavenger hunt, playground-modeling, Chinese mask-making, bulb-planting and "hoops" are among the games conceived to both encourage the park constituents to re-envision the park and to celebrate the neighborhood's cultural history. "We are looking for ways to reach out to the predominately Chinese speaking **park users**, a group that is typically not involved in civic processes," explained Anne Frederick, Hester Street

Collaborative's Executive Director. "These games are designed to be non-verbal, and fun."

Organizations from the neighborhood, including a range of cultural, advocacy, and social service-oriented groups will oversee various games and activities. Students from the neighborhood public school, M.S. 131, who use the park on a daily basis, will join in the re-envisioning process with their neighbors.

On November 2nd, local stakeholders and residents will join architects and Parks Department design staff for a Design Charrette Day, to develop design recommendations for the Parks Department based upon information gleaned from the Visioning Day. The Design Charrette Day will provide a forum for discussing community preservation issues in the context of community improvement.

SDR PARK NEIGHBORHOOD

SDR Park has seen a significant sector of its community displaced as local affordable housing has been upgraded or demolished and replaced. M'Finda Kalunga Community Garden, an organization named after an African burial ground once located adjacent to the park, has run a community garden and programs in the Park for the past 20 years.

Kathleen Webster, the M'Finda Kalunga co-chair commented, "We want to see the park improvements benefit the residents who have worked for years to improve this community. We are seeing too many of our members who have dedicated themselves to improving the park being displaced."

The Chinatown YMCA runs a beacon center in M.S. 131 less than a block from the Hester Street Playground. The YMCA sees the new playground as a resource for their after-school youth programs. Nilka Yau, a Chinatown YMCA staff member, and the M.S. 131 Parents Association President noted "We don't take our kids to the Hester Street Playground, it's not safe, instead we go to Seward Park" located eight blocks from the YMCA's after-school programming.

CONTRIBUTORS/ SUPPORT

This project has received support from several fronts: The New York State Council on the Arts is funding the two-stage community engagement process; Manhattan Borough Parks Commissioner, William Castro voiced his commitment to this project; Partnerships for Parks has been instrumental in soliciting community input in the planning process and in helping liaise with the Parks Department; and, all partner and coalition organizations have donated staff time and resources to these events.

SDR Coalition members:

Hester Street Collaborative
Chinatown YMCA
Chinese-American Planning Council
M'Finda Kalunga Garden
BRC Senior (located in SDR Park)
Eldridge Street Project
Dr. Sun Yat Sen School M.S. 131
University Settlement

Visioning/Charrette participants and project partners:

The Museum of the Chinese in the Americas
Community Board #3
Partnerships for Parks
The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation
The Lower East Side Tenement Museum
City Lore
United East Athletic Association
Citizens for NYC
The Municipal Arts Society Planning Center

Funders:

New York State Council on the Arts
The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council
Partnership for Parks
Citizens for NYC

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Hester Street Collaborative is a design/build non-profit organization created to work with NYC neighborhoods to improve their physical environment. Our organization works in public spaces, affordable housing developments and in public schools on participatory architectural projects with tenants and students to improve their communal spaces. For more information, please go to <http://www.hesterstreetcollaborative.org>.