

Testimony for City Planning Commission Jail Hearing, 07.10.2019

My name is Patricia Tsai and I am here to represent the Lin Sing Association, a 119 year old association located on historic Mott Street in the heart of Chinatown. The association is comprised of 18 separate organizations, each of which has at least 80 years of history.

As we have stated from the beginning, real prison reform involves reforming the culture of the criminal justice system and the people who manage prisons, not the concrete walls or land that house prisoners. Change of physical location is not the solution.

Our spendthrift mayor is in a great hurry to commit \$11 billion of public funds to build four skyscraper jails in the city and another \$15 to 22 billion to redevelop Rikers as a 'mixed used development'. He says this is a moral imperative because the inhumane conditions on Rikers must end immediately. That was why the city rushed through SCOPING and EIS and consolidated separate developments in four boroughs into one single ULURP process, **which effectively deprived the public of critical scrutiny over the plan's actual effectiveness and potential harm, as well as exploration of fiscally more responsible alternatives.**

Had the public been given more time, it would have become readily apparent that skyscraper jails are nothing more than a glamorous, headline grabbing 'quick fix', which barely scratches the surface of criminal justice reform. **Simply shuffling detainees around by replicating four Rikers in the city does no justice to the incarcerated because it creates a false appearance of improvements in their conditions while taking away resources for urgent substantive reform.**

Real justice reform begins with reforming case processing, sentencing, bail, changing the laws, and strengthening diversion and preventative mental health programs across the city, the successful implementation of which are expected to lead to speedy adjudications and reducing the number of inmates. ***Progressive justice reform ends with less demand for prison beds, not more monuments of mass incarceration!***

Had the Public been given a fair hearing, it would have become crystal clear that **effective and substantive reform can absolutely be accomplished without four skyscraper jails**, such as by extending the Soundview ferry service or building a footbridge to Rikers, reducing the number of detainees first and tearing down and renovating the interiors of some of the buildings on Rikers, or even the idea of twenty SMALL jails scattered around the city as recommended by the Lippmann Commission.

Most alarmingly, it is a menace to public safety to kickstart some 'design and build' projects without due diligence, such as properly assessing the risks of unsafe construction, soil condition, shifting foundations, damage to Canal Street Sewer causing sewer leakage into Chinatown, Tribeca, Little Italy, and Soho, the dangers posed to surrounding buildings, harm to local residents, etc.

We urge the City Planning Commission to hold the city accountable by demanding that the process be rolled back, specifically, restart SCOPING and EIS with full community engagement as well as accurate site address (not 80 Center Street as a stand-in for 125 White Street) and abide by the democratic principle of one review process per construction site. Thank you.

Lin Sing Association

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