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## **Special-District Zoning Is Urged for Chinatown**

By Jennifer 8. Lee

A detailed survey of the rapid pace of gentrification in Chinatown, including counts of luxury hotels and trendy bars, was released Wednesday by two community organizations, which argued that a special protective zone with tenant protections should be drawn around the historic and densely packed immigrant neighborhood.

Over the last few years, new construction in Chinatown — by both Chinese and non-Chinese investors — has increased as the neighborhood has felt spillover development pressures from TriBeCa, the Lower East Side and NoLiTa. In total, the Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center and the Chinatown Justice Project of the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence, which conducted the survey in 2008, counted 25 new hotels, 118 new high-end priced boutiques and cafes and 26 luxury residential buildings in Chinatown, which it defined with borders along Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive, Pearl Street, Worth Street, Broadway and a jagged boundary to the north.

As of July 2008, the maps show a proliferation of high-end housing developments, including Hester Gardens, in Chinatown along Baxter Street north of Canal and near where Canal meets East Broadway. The maps also showed a cluster of hotels along the Bowery and a smaller cluster near Lafayette Street, including the Wyndham Hotel, at 93 Bowery, which has drawn protests. (A “trendy” establishment was defined as a restaurant or store that had menus and other information exclusively in English, non-bilingual staff, above average prices and a wealthier customer base.)

Though Chinatown has evolved greatly throughout New York City’s history, the advocates argue that the pro-development stance of the Bloomberg administration has created an unprecedented crisis in affordability in the neighborhood. While a broad swath of the Lower East Side has been rezoned over the last three years, advocates also felt that the process should also have included Chinatown. Part of the fear is that Chinatown, particularly the Bowery, would receive the brunt of the development pressures displaced from the Lower East Side. (Though as the economy declines, these pressures will undoubtedly subside somewhat.)

Tenant harassment continues to be a problem, with numerous Chinatown residents reporting serious building violations like lack of heat or hot water, potentially as a strategy to drive out long-time tenants from low-rent apartments. Some Chinatown residents have used the new tenant protection law passed by the City Council and sued the landlords for harassment.

Among the group’s proposals, that the city government should create a “special district” zone for Chinatown that includes strong anti-demolition, anti-harassment and anti-eviction provisions. “There is definitely a precedent for this kind of zoning change; that is why we are advocating this for Chinatown,” said Esther Wang, a project coordinator with

Caaav, the anti-Asian violence group. She pointed to the Special Clinton District, which was defined in 1974 as extending from 41st to 59th Street between Eighth Avenue and the Hudson River. The zoning not only limited the height of construction and prohibited demolition of residential buildings, but it also protected tenants against harassment and provided for new moderately priced housing projects.

Chinatown and other neighborhoods look to the Special Clinton District model, Ms. Wang said, “encourage the kind of development which doesn’t lead to more displacement and more gentrification.”