

*Sept 12th Town Hall
Meeting articles*

Chinatown Fights Back Against Mayor's 'Community-Based' Jail Plan

Bowery Boogie
By Staff
August 20, 2018



Last Wednesday, Mayor de Blasio announced the draft plan to replace the **Rikers Island** prison system over the next decade. As part of its so-called “roadmap to closing Rikers,” the city envisions glitzy new jail facilities in four of the five boroughs. Including one situated in downtown Manhattan, on the border of Chinatown.

In a reversal from prior plans to expand the Tombs, the de Blasio administration is instead eyeing 80 Centre Street – current home of the city’s marriage bureau – as the prime spot for a high-rise detention center. (The city worked in collaboration with the Fortune Society.) This proposed detention center would carry roughly 1,500 beds for the incarcerated, plus a day room, activity room, counseling services, and potentially outdoor space. But since this is New York City, the 430-foot-high building will pull double duty as potential offices for Manhattan DA’s office “programming and recreational space.”

“I would say to the communities, this isn’t just about supplanting what we currently have on Rikers,” Fortune Society SVP Stanley Richards told Gothamist, noting that the four new jails will have smaller, well-lit housing areas with access to services and recreation. “We are fundamentally changing the way detention happens... Those principles require space.”

As before, many Chinatown residents are vehemently against the plan. There is a petition making the rounds that’s gained some traction in recent days; more than 400 signatures were collected so far.

“We the undersigned oppose the building of a new MDC correctional center jail complex at 80 Centre st as part of the overall plan to close Rikers island.

Our neighborhood roads are congested enough with traffic negotiating routes between the Manhattan & Brooklyn bridges and the Holland & Brooklyn Battery tunnels. In addition, this project would undoubtedly exacerbate air, noise & environmental issues we already endure. Residents of Chinatown, Tribeca, Little Italy, Soho, BPC, FiDi & The LES should not be made to suffer more.

We support the call for real prison reform but feel a jail in residential areas is not the best way to approach it.

Please hear our concern and rethink the options.

Thank you”

Meanwhile, Councilwoman Margaret Chin is speaking up, urging City Hall to plan a town hall that provides vital information and address community concerns.

“It’s crucial that the Administration participate in a robust community engagement process, which must begin with full transparency about the proposal to move the Manhattan Detention Center from its current location to 80 Center Street,” Chin said in a statement Friday.

City Officials Get Earful from Residents on Proposed New Jail at 80 Centre St.

The Tribeca Trib
By CARL GLASSMAN
September 10, 2018



Residents living near the site of a proposed new jail at 80 Centre St. slammed the plan at the first public meeting on the project, held last Thursday with city officials.

Representatives from the mayor's office attended the meeting, sponsored by Community Boards 1 and 3, to explain the project and answer questions about what is proposed to be part of the de Blasio administration's initiative to close Rikers Island and open more modern and humane, borough-based detention facilities. But many who crowded into the large hall of the Municipal Building came ready to unleash a volley of opposition.

"When you talk about building a beautiful facility, you're not talking about understanding the impact to our lives," said Nancy Kong, president of the co-op board of nearby Chatham Tower, the 240-unit complex at 170 Park Row.

"The very issues that you speak on behalf of prisoners, I'm speaking on behalf of the children, the seniors, the residents and businesses of Chinatown," said Don Lee, a Chinatown activist. "They matter, too."

The plan calls for converting 80 Centre Street/125 Worth Street, which now houses city offices, into a facility that can accommodate up to 1,510 inmates. The sprawling 640,000-square-foot building, which straddles Chinatown and the Civic Center, would be expanded to 1.56 million square feet and could rise as high as 432 feet. Once completed, the north tower of the Manhattan Detention Center at 125 White St. would be decommissioned and available for a yet-to-be-determined community use. In addition, 20,000 square feet of space on the first and second floors of the east side of the building, facing Columbus Park, would be available for community or retail use.

"We are very mindful of how we can best integrate these facilities into the neighborhood," Dana Kaplan of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, Department of Correction, told the crowd, some of them holding protest signs.

Kaplan said the borough-based jail system plan would reduce recidivism, provide easier access for families and attorneys, and "deliver a jail system that is more fair, more safe and more efficient."

"Our development of a better public safety system and a better criminal justice system has great benefits to people who are in detention," Kaplan said, "and it has benefits to all New Yorkers in terms of better public safety outcomes."

But opponents spoke of fears of crime, traffic congestion, and poor air quality from construction. And they said they are skeptical that future city leaders would bring the project to completion, a goal that is predicated on significant further reductions in the jail population.

"We are not willing to take this leap of blind faith that the prison population scheme will survive into the next administration," said Jan Lee of the Chinatown Core Block Association, "...and that the new jails will finish on time and on budget."

Kaplan said the administration is confident that its goal of reducing the number of detainees to 5,000 from what now is about 8,300 can be met. The cost, originally estimated at \$10.6 billion, will be determined at the end of the year when the master plan is completed. "Obviously it will be a significant capital investment of city funds and financing," she said.

Several residents called for putting the new jails and courts on Rikers Island. “We can have the cops who drive the prisoners over here to the city, drive the judges to the new courts and the new prisons,” said one opponent. “The Chinatown area is currently overwhelmed with jails.”

“This is something that we looked at,” Kaplan said. “It is not just about the facility but the fact that the isolation of Rikers Island, the challenge of accessing it and proximity to the court is very important for a better access to justice. It is about having a borough-based jail system that is better for the public safety system.”

Only last month the city announced it was considering 80 Centre Street as an option for the jail, drawing complaints that the community had not been consulted. “I think a lot of people in this room feel extreme anger and frustration that we were left completely out of it,” said My Phuong Chung, chair of Community Board 3’s Land Use Committee.

Following Chin and Brewer’s town hall meeting on Sept. 12, a hearing on the draft scope of an environmental review of the project will be held Sept. 27 at 6 p.m. at the Manhattan Borough President’s office, 1 Centre St., 19th floor. Other hearings will be held as the review process unfolds over the next year.

“This is the first of many conversations we’ll be having in the process,” said Marco Carrión, the city’s commissioner of community affairs. “We are going to be asking for opinions, concerns as we move forward through this process. We’ll be doing robust engagement in all the areas affected by the new detention center sites.”

For opponents of the 80 Centre Street site, that engagement is well on its way. According to Patricia Tsai of Chinatown’s Lin Sing Association, the organization has collected more than 1,000 signatures opposing the jail.

“More [signatures] will be forthcoming and we are prepared to fight for our preservation,” she said. “We will not be part of this experiment.”

Chinatown Residents Condemn Plans To Build New Jail In Lower Manhattan

Gothamist
BY CINDY RODRIGUEZ
SEPTEMBER 13, 2018



Chinatown residents shouted down city officials attempting to lay out plans for a new jail in lower Manhattan at a public meeting on Wednesday night.

Before the town hall style meeting at a city public school on Division Street even started, the raucous crowd chanted "No jails!" and waved signs with slogans such as, "Convicts will live better than Chinatown residents." The city wants to build four new jails in every borough except Staten Island to replace the notoriously violent and dysfunctional jail complex on Rikers Island. Closing Rikers is the centerpiece of a movement to reform the criminal justice system.

But new jails are a hard sell. Chinatown resident Mary Wu said her community needs senior housing, not a jail. "They should reform the jail system. Not move it down to our community," Wu said. "If they want to be close to their relatives to visit, move it to their community."

The proposed jail in Manhattan would replace a government building that currently houses the city's marriage bureau and offices for the Manhattan District Attorney. Both would be relocated, and the new jail would include ground floor retail space and reach as high as 40 stories.

The city tried to make the plan more appealing by giving the community back one of two jails that already exist in the neighborhood, the Manhattan Detention Complex—more commonly referred to as the Tombs—for housing, a community center, and other purposes. (The other jail is the Metropolitan Correctional Center, a federal complex.)

Jeff Thamkittikasem, Senior Adviser to First Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan, tried to tell the angry crowd the jail would allow inmates to be closer to the courts and more integrated into the community.

"People who are in these facilities [will] have closer access to programming, reentry, mental health programs and education," he said before being drowned out by protests.

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and City Councilmember Margaret Chin were also present at the meeting.

The jail population must shrink to 5,000 inmates for the smaller jails to be sufficient. Just under 9,000 inmates are currently incarcerated in city jails. Residents at Wednesday's meeting expressed skepticism about those numbers and questioned what would happen if the jail population began to increase.

The community complained that they were left out of the planning process and said a study that examines the impact on the neighborhood includes too small of an area.

"It's very limited and it's flawed. It only asks to look at a quarter of a mile," said Nancy Kong, who is on the board of Chatham Towers, a residential building near the planned jail. "It doesn't include the children, the schools, our seniors, our businesses or anything like that."

The meeting is one of several that will take place across the city in the coming months. The process for closing Rikers and opening smaller jails is expected to take a decade to complete, and the City is hoping to certify their plans by the end of 2018, so that the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure can begin in mid-2019.

Furor in Chinatown over jail plan

Our Town NY

By Michael Garofalo

SEPTEMBER 13, 2018



City officials presenting plans for a new 1,510-bed detention center in Lower Manhattan were repeatedly interrupted with chants of “no jail!” from angry Chinatown residents at a contentious Sept. 12 meeting at P.S. 124 in Chinatown.

The proposal to build a new jail facility at 80 Centre St. — a crucial piece in Mayor Bill de Blasio’s plan to close the notoriously violent Rikers Island jail facilities within ten years — has prompted passionate opposition from many in the Chinatown community.

The city’s plan would transform the corner of Centre and Worth Streets, currently the site of the Louis J. Lefkowitz State Office Building, which houses courtrooms and offices of the Manhattan District Attorney, City Clerk, Manhattan Marriage Bureau and other city agencies. The new jail would be one of four new borough-based jails to replace Rikers, with others located in Queens, the Bronx and Brooklyn.

Proponents of the so-called community-based jails say that siting the facilities in each borough will lessen the isolation experienced by incarcerated individuals as they await trial and sentencing by allowing for easier contact with family members and other loved ones. The proposed site of the new jail at 80 Centre St. is adjacent to the New York County Criminal Court; early plans propose a pedestrian bridge across Hogan Street to connect the jail and the court.

Many at the meeting said they support the closure of Rikers and the idea of community jails, but oppose one being built in Chinatown. Much of the public criticism centered on the fact that there was little transparency or opportunity for public input on the new jail’s location before preliminary plans for the 80 Centre St. site were released in mid-August.

“Closing Rikers is a laudable goal,” said Nicholas Stabile, who lives in a Park Row coop near the proposed jail site. “But the process employed by the Mayor’s Office to achieve this goal focuses on only half the equation — the people inside the jail. It ignores the other half of the equation — the people in the surrounding community.” Rather than consulting locals before releasing the plan, Stabile said, the administration “came in with a fully baked plan that burdens the community and provides almost no benefits.”

In comments at the beginning of the meeting, neither Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer nor local Council Member Margaret Chin took a position on the proposal.

Brewer criticized the administration’s handling of the planning process thus far, particularly the decision to release preliminary plans in August, when most community boards do not hold meetings. “I may disagree with you on whether or not there should be a jail, but I will never disagree that there should be a community process that has lots of time in order to have your input,” she said.

Chin emphasized that the process of siting a new jail is still in its early stages and the result is far from certain. “I am not taking a position on this project because it’s only the beginning,” Chin said, explaining that she would listen to and evaluate the city’s presentation before passing judgment. Her statements drew jeers from many in the crowd who already oppose the jail plan.

In an emailed statement following the meeting, Chin said, “The community’s concerns must be heard, and that’s exactly what happened at the Town Hall last night.”

“I look forward to fostering a productive dialogue between the Administration and the residents, small businesses and property owners that stand to be most impacted by any change at the current [Manhattan Detention Complex] site,” she continued, referring to the existing city jail at 125 White Street, commonly known as The Tombs.

During the public comment period, speakers questioned how the jail would impact property values, the availability of parking in the neighborhood, and traffic on Worth Street, a key east-west thoroughfare.

“You look at Worth Street now, it’s a disaster already,” said Chinatown resident Victor Huey. “And you want to put a 40-story tower on Worth Street? Are you kidding me?”

Several locals also brought up safety concerns and said city resources would be better spent on creating affordable housing.

“Our community feels threatened by the idea of being neighbors with criminals,” Chinatown business owner Sio Wai Sang said in written testimony.

Also at issue is the height of the new building, which could rise as tall as 432 feet and cast shadows on neighboring Columbus Park, an important hub of the Chinatown community. City officials said the jail would be designed to minimize shadows on the park.

Public comments on the project will be accepted at a scoping hearing on the project Sept. 27 at 6 p.m. at 1 Centre St.

Chinatown residents come out against 40-story Rikers-replacing jail

Curbed New York
By Tanay Warekar
September 13, 2018



In a raucous meeting where city officials were often unable to complete a sentence, over a hundred Chinatown residents expressed their vehement opposition to plopping a 40-story jail in their neighborhood as part of the city's plan to shutdown the Rikers Island prison over the next 10 years.

Less than a month after Chinatown residents learned that another jail was headed their way (two already exist in the neighborhood), local City Council member Margaret Chin called on the Mayor's office to hold an information session to inform residents of what was to come. That resulted in a town hall meeting held at P.S. 124 on Wednesday night.

Local residents held up a variety of signs in opposition to the development, "Save Foley Square," and "Mayor gives Rikers to realtors," were among them. The residents who spoke at the meeting all concurred: they weren't opposed to prison reform, they just didn't like the idea of the city bringing a 40-story jail to their neighborhood without much notice or discussion.

As plans stand right now, the city wants to replace the nine-story government building at 80 Center Street with a 40-story prison, which would also have retail and public space at the base of the building. At present, Manhattan's detention facilities are located at 124 and 125 White Street. Detainees housed in these buildings would be moved to the new facility at 80 Center Street, and the government services that currently operate out of 80 Center, like the marriage bureau will be moved to one of the two detention buildings. The other will be left open for development into some type of public-use space whether it be community centers or affordable housing.

While the city has discussed its plans with community stakeholders in the past, including a community board meeting last week, this was the first major public forum at which local residents could voice their concerns and questions about the overall development—a point of frustration for many residents who said they needed more time to review the city's proposal.

"The city has been clear they want shovels in the ground before Mayor de Blasio is out," said Nancy Kong, the president of Chatham Towers, a 240-unit residential complex that's located across from the proposed site of the prison. "De Blasio forever wants to be known as the 'mayor who closed Rikers,' and he's willing to trample over members of this community."

Many residents expressed concerns that the city was rushing through the process; some asked about the impact of the dust and debris from demolition work on the existing building and what it would mean for the community and its open space.

"Closing Rikers is a laudable goal," said Nicholas Stabile, a board member at Chatham Green, a 420-unit co-op development in the neighborhood. "But the process employed by the Mayor's office to achieve this goal focuses on only half the equation—the people inside the jail. It ignores the other half of the equation—the people in the surrounding community."

Others still wondered about the fate of Rikers Island once the prison was shut down. Kong expressed concerns that the city would give Rikers Island to developers for large-scale development similar to Roosevelt Island, all at the expense of residents in the boroughs.

In the coming weeks, the city plans to hold meetings in each of the four boroughs set to receive new or expanded prisons as part of the plan to shut down Rikers. These meetings are being held as part of a City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR). After these meetings, the city will issue a Final Scope of Work—this document will be the basis for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which will study the environmental impact of these projects on the surrounding areas. It's after the issuance of this statement that the city will enter into the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP).

So, the public still does have a significant amount of time to comment, but many residents complained that the work was presented to them as a done deal, instead of an ongoing discussion. Margaret Chin, the local City Council member, assured those present at Wednesday night's meeting, that that wasn't the case.

“This is the beginning of a long process—the result of which is far from certain,” said Chin, in a statement issued to Curbed. “This is not a done deal. The community's concerns need to be taken into account in any proposal to move the current detention complex to 80 Centre St.”

Here is a schedule of the upcoming meetings, and their locations:

Borough of Brooklyn, September 20, 2018, 6:00 PM

P.S. 133 William A. Butler School

610 Baltic Street, Brooklyn, NY 11217

Borough of Queens, September 26, 2018, 6:00 PM

Queens Borough Hall

120-55 Queens Boulevard, Kew Gardens, NY 11424

Borough of Manhattan, September 27, 2018, 6:00 PM

Manhattan Municipal Building

1 Centre Street, New York, NY 10007

Borough of Bronx, October 3, 2018, 6:00 PM

Bronx County Courthouse

851 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY 10451

Manhattan Jail Plan Slammed By Locals At Heated Town Hall Meeting

Patch

By Caroline Spivack

September 13, 2018



CHINATOWN, NY — Chinatown residents railed against a proposal for a new jail at 80 Centre St. as part of a plan to shutter Rikers Island at a contentious city-hosted town hall Wednesday.

Officials from the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice were met with a chorus of boos and chants against the project, forcing city officials to cut their presentation short. Residents raised a myriad of concerns and some shouted down officials with fears of traffic congestion, poor air quality from construction and what many have seen as a lack of community input on the 80 Centre St. plan that was only recently announced.

"Our community is being blindsided with this and we still don't have all the facts," said Suzy Hu, 48, a long-time Chinatown resident and community activist. "We need detailed traffic studies, we need air quality reports. Where are the facilities in that building even going? How can we give them input when we have a sliver of the picture."

Protestors repeatedly erupted into chants of, "no jail" and "don't destroy our neighborhood," waving neon-colored signs printed with, "Don't let Chinatown become Prisons town," "Chinatown is over jailed" and "What's the rush? Backroom deals."

The city's proposal would convert 80 Centre St., which houses the city's Marriage Bureau and offices with the Manhattan district attorney, into a high-rise detention center to accommodate up to 1,510 inmates. The 640,000-square-foot building would expand to 1.56 million square feet and rise to more than 400 feet. Additional parking space would be constructed along with a 20,000 square-foot space, which could include affordable housing, a community center or retail space.

"We are being mindful of how to best integrate these facilities into the neighborhood," said Dana Kaplan, with the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, at the town hall. "I understand that community engagement and community feedback is very important to this, obviously this is one opportunity. There will be a number of engagement efforts before, during and following the [Uniform Land Use Review Procedure or ULURP] process."

The city is considering undergoing the extensive land use review process of all four borough-based facilities at once instead of a separate review for each site. Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer noted that she would prefer a separate ULURP for each facility, emphasizing that she is "upset" that may not be the case.

Councilwoman Margaret Chin, whose district includes the proposed detention center, was adamant that she has yet to take a stance on the city's 80 Centre St. proposal.

"I want to let you know right now that this proposal is not a done deal," Chin announced at the town hall. "The process is just beginning, and I also want to be clear that I have not taken a position on this project because it's only the beginning."

City officials estimate the entire borough-based jail plan will come in at a cost of \$10.6 billion, but a hard figure will be determined by the year's end when more concrete plans take shape. Public scoping sessions for each facility are slated for Sept. 20 for Brooklyn, Sept. 26 for Queens, Sept. 27 for Manhattan and Oct. 3 for the Bronx.

Only last month officials announced that the city is considering the 80 Centre St. site as an option for Manhattan's borough-based jail, stunning residents and local leaders who for months believed that the city intended to expand the existing Manhattan Detention Center.

Community advocates launched a volley of criticism at the de Blasio administration for the sudden announcement to introduce a new option with little community input. And for several, Wednesday's town hall raised more questions than answers.

"Why are you building a new jail? Why is it 40 stories high and out of line with all the buildings in the community?" said Nicolas Stabile, a board member of the Chatham Green apartment complex a block from the proposed site.

"We're going to build the new jail now and renovate White Street later, why does the Mayor get what he wants now and the community gets something that they want later? Frankly, it's not fair."

Furor in Chinatown over jail plan

Chelsea News

By Michael Garofalo

SEPTEMBER 13, 2018



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