

CIVIC-MINDED ARCHITECTS BRING IMPROVEMENTS TO CHINATOWN'S STREETS

STREET WISE

Hester Street Collaborative's outreach tactics are targeting the street. In 2004, the nonprofit design group joined a coalition to spruce up Allen and Pike streets, which run from Houston Street through Chinatown to the East River. In coming weeks, the collaborative—with the research of local teens—will create street signs honoring immigrants for Allen and Pike's midblock malls.

The street sign project brings new exposure for Hester Street Collaborative's kid-focused mission, to initiate design/build projects in its community. Architects Morgan

Hare and Mark Turkel, Yale classmates and principals of Leroy Street Studio, started the collaborative in 2001, when they moved their firm to Hester Street in Chinatown. The group's first project, still in process, is aimed at improving the campus and gardens of the neighboring I.S. 131. The nonprofit's executive director Anne Frederick also helps teach art at school. Earlier this year, program coordinator Alex Gilliam started a summer internship program, engaging local students to address neglected neighborhood sites. Frederick hopes to the mock-ups of new Allen and Pike Street signs (which may be cloth banners or metal) to engage public feedback.

This effort emerged from the architects' frustration with the nature of community development in Chinatown. In 2004, Frederick joined United Neighborhoods To Revitalize Allen and Pike Streets (UNRAP), created by social service agency Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE) after extensive public outreach on design questions. "There's no compelling design aesthetic for Chinatown," explained Robert Weber, AAFE's policy director. Many civic groups sought to glamorize the Allen-Pike corridor, and AAFE created UNRAP to pool political strength. But according to Frederick, city bureaucrats muddled design options at a spring meeting. "They said, 'Do you want high density or low density,'" she recalled. These terms fell

flat with residents, many of whom speak little English.

Hester Street's four summer interns sought community input by handing out postcards at AAFE's street fair in August. But they drew blank stares. "Having compelling visuals was not enough," said Frederick. "To engage the public you need larger strategies."

So interns William Chung and Dominick Freeman, who both graduated from high school in June, concocted a board game called *Bad Design Darts*. "Targets would be areas that seem unlikable," explained Chung, who's now enrolled at the Fashion Institute of Technology. "Participants would throw at the targets and it would be like a survey."

Frederick and Gilliam hope to adopt some of their interns' tactics for subsequent community engagement efforts. "It'd be great to use *Bad Design Darts* to pull people off the street and ask, 'What's wrong with this site?'" said Frederick.

The design of the Allen-Pike signs remains uncertain, pending student input and public response. "Each student [in our art program] is submitting a sign," said I.S. 131 art teacher Alison Plump. "Anne's going to have to do a lot of filtering to figure out what's important to the larger community."

Frederick is coordinating an advisory board of civic leaders to vet design suggestions. She hopes to disperse a public ballot before mid-November. Advisors would vote on a design strategy in December. **ALEC APPELBAUM**

THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND

continued from front page communities. So far, FEMA has purchased 30,000 housing units, all mass-market trailers and mobile homes, according to James McIntyre of FEMA's public affairs office. FEMA intended to create settlements of up to 25,000 inhabitants but widespread outcry prompted the agency to scale them down, which means that it will be necessary to find more, if smaller, sites.

"Our teams are working with the political leadership and residents in each [county] to find the best sites," said Lee Tashjian, vice president of communications at Fluor. The teams ensure that water, sewage, and electricity are readily available and that there are no environmental issues such as ground toxicity or oil seepage.

The sites will be a mix of industrial, commercial, and some private residential land. The trailers can be installed within a matter of days if the sewage and electricity are in order. After a site is selected, it is submitted for FEMA's approval, after which the land will be leased by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA). The GSA is expected to pay full market price for these leases, said Tashjian.

The corporations will manage the government-sponsored trailer parks until they are dismantled. The leases are expected to last two years. **JK**

Intern William Chung presents his ideas on how to solicit community feedback.



ALEX GILLIAM COURTESY, HESTER STREET COLLABORATIVE

WWW.ARCHPAPER.COM