



CHINATOWN COMMUNITY FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

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CCED x Streetwatch Power Ups!

By Katie Wang
Notes/Edits by Sophat Phea

Starting in May 2021, CCED joined forces with Streetwatch LA for their weekly Power Ups to support and organize houseless community members in and around Chinatown.

While LA City continues to unjustly and forcibly displace unhoused community members and their belongings, Streetwatch volunteers have kept building relationships, providing support, and helping advocate for unhoused community members.

By bringing hot meals from local restaurants in Chinatown and supplies, CCED has assisted in supporting these Power Ups. Thankfully, Hydrate LA, an organization in solidarity with the work, typically provided water bottles and snacks. Every Sunday, houseless community members had the opportunity to gather and connect at these Power Ups. These community members could charge their electronic devices, and pick up hot meals, water bottles, snacks, etc.



CCED is committed to fighting for all tenant rights, including unhoused tenants. We believe in building community power through our organizing.

Through this partnership with Streetwatch LA, we have the opportunity to influence Chinatown to better understand the experiences of and support unhoused community members, because we can make Chinatown better for us ALL.

IN 2021



7,800 HOT MEALS



1,200 BAGS OF PRODUCE



300+ PEOPLE SERVED



The Fight for Cathay Manor

By King Cheung
Notes/Edits by Frances Huynh

For years, the elderly residents of Cathay Manor Senior Apartments dealt with the building slowly deteriorating.

Despite repeated attempts to get their landlord, C.C.O.A. Housing Corporation and its president Don Toy, continually dragged their feet to fix anything. When elevators broke, elderly residents became trapped in their homes, unable to descend and climb 15 flights of stairs. Unable to buy groceries, or even get themselves to the doctor without help, they had suddenly become prisoners in their own homes. Residents very well could STILL have been in that perilous predicament until the majority Chinese, low-income, and elderly residents of Cathay Manor decided they would not and could not take this cruel and unjust treatment anymore.



In 2021, they stood up, and with CCED and the community's support, forced politicians from the city, county, and federal levels to take action.

What has been gained over this struggle that has, so far, continued for 4 months and counting?

In the last 5 months elevators have broken TWICE; once for 22 days straight, and another time soon after for 23 days. In a massive 16-story building with 270 units, one can imagine the hardship, and physical and mental pain the elderly residents of Cathay Manor had to endure climbing up and down the stairs. All that landlord Don Toy did to "help" was say there were no parts to fix the elevator. Because of the residents' courage in standing up and speaking out, they were able to get C.C.O.A. and Don Toy to get a manually operating elevator, with a contract to modernize the current elevator(s).

The laundry room, which had been closed since March 2021 with no reason given to residents, is now finally open. Lights in the stairs on both sides of the building, which were broken for YEARS, now are almost all working. Residents can safely walk up and down the stairs without fear of falling down in the dark. Don Toy was also forced to repair other problems in the building.

Besides the improvement to their physical living conditions, residents can live their lives with more dignity and respect. Don Toy controlled Cathay Manor like a prison and would not allow people to go inside. But now, residents have more control of their living situation. They can hold events inside the courtyard. They can hold their heads high and say they are not afraid anymore.

Without this struggle, residents could very well still be living under those horrid conditions that Don Toy subjected them to for years. Without working elevators, residents would have been forced to move out, pushed out of their own homes.

While these gains have been significant, the residents of Cathay Manor understand that these repairs are forced upon C.C.O.A. Housing Corporation and Don Toy. When the spotlight is turned off, Don Toy will revert back to their same old ways, putting Cathay Manor's residents in danger, once again.

Therefore, residents publicly called for the removal of Don Toy, all the directors of the C.C.O.A. Housing Corporation and demanded their replacements be actual residents, workers, and community stakeholders. Furthermore, they called out C.C.O.A. and Don Toy's shady financial history, getting millions in money from the government, while the residents that money was meant to go towards, squandered in neglect. Another alternative demand was to replace C.C.O.A. Housing Corporation as the landlord with a brand new nonprofit organization. Through this, the residents hope for self determination and community control.

On December 15, 2021, Congressman Jimmy Gomez met Cathay Manor residents, Chinatown Community for Equitable Development (CCED), and other community advocates to discuss their horrific living conditions. Here, Congressman Gomez pledged he would ask the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to get Don Toy to resign. If not, in two weeks, he would contact the California Attorney General Rob Bonta to investigate C.C.O.A. Housing Corporation.

Cathay Manor does not exist in isolation. Its fate is intertwined with the fate of all of Chinatown, and intimately connected with the other struggles that CCED is fighting.

The vendors in Dynasty Center were threatened to be evicted by Red Car properties. If the vendors in Dynasty Center are evicted, where do community residents, including those living in Cathay Manor, buy their clothes and necessities? Tom Botz, landlord of Hillside Villa Apartment, is trying to double or triple rent for residents. Where can they move to? Close by and on the same block with Cathay Manor, 651 N. Broadway is a single room occupancy housing (SRO), in which residents share a kitchen and bathrooms. They live in even worse conditions, arguably, than Cathay Manor. While the Cathay Manor fight is getting a lot of attention, we must not forget that there are other folks, who may not be getting as much attention, who's struggle is more silent, that deserve just as much community support and care.

Gentrification is like a wildfire burning in Chinatown. Developers come in, and build market-rate housing. They want fancy



workspaces and restaurants, thus causing rents to jump and making it unaffordable for immigrant residents and small businesses to rent. If you walk around Chinatown, you can see more wealthier residents, as well as more expensive restaurants, pushing out those who already live here.

This place is our home. And we deserve to be here. To defend Chinatown, we need to support each other. We are in the same fight.

Like the old man who removed the mountain, we will continue to fight until justice is served.

Defending Dynasty Center, Chinatown's Last Community Shopping Mall

By Janis Yue
Notes/Edits by Promise Li and Katie Wang

It all started with a direct message to CCED's Instagram account from a concerned small business owner on June 6th, 2021. The message included photos of a public notice stating that Dynasty Center would be auctioned off

on June 22nd for an opening bid of \$23 million, alerting CCED organizers to potential encroachment of the last and largest community-serving shopping center remaining in LA Chinatown.

Alert escalated across the Chinatown community-residential tenants, commercial tenants, and organizers—once the result of the auction was revealed in July: Dynasty Center had been acquired for \$29.5 million by Redcar Ltd., a corporate developer with a history of evicting community-serving small businesses in Chinatown in order to redevelop buildings as office spaces for young professionals with no connection to the community.

In fact, Redcar had already taken over 6 large buildings in Chinatown, most recently evicting over 20 legacy small businesses from a plaza known as “The Shop” at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Located just down the street from Dynasty Center, The Shop has now been utterly demolished. Construction cranes loom over its grave, crafting a new structure unrecognizable to the Chinatown community.

Ironically, many of the small business owners who had served the community for decades from within The Shop were encouraged by Redcar to move down the street into Dynasty Center, only to be threatened with displacement by the same developer little more than a year later.

Enraged by Redcar's callous, profit-driven destruction of precious Chinatown community spaces, CCED organizers began conducting outreach to Dynasty Center merchants in July in order to begin building deeper relationships and learn more about

the situation at hand. Every other week since July, volunteers have ambled through Dynasty Center's sprawling, labyrinthine configuration, forming new contacts with the approximately 100 commercial tenants within, identifying leaders, and sometimes bumping into familiar residential tenants such as Pauline Chau, who relies on Dynasty Center for its affordable, culturally relevant goods.

“I buy everything here!” says Pauline. “Shoes, clothes...If they destroy Dynasty Center, there will be nowhere to go shopping. What are we supposed to do?”



At first, many Dynasty Center merchants did not feel the same urgency to actively speak out and fight back against Redcar, perhaps due to a confluence of factors: no formal eviction notice had been given, commercial tenants have fewer legal protections relative to residential tenants, and many small business owners were simply concerned with their immediate day-to-day survival in stressful conditions bred by decades of gentrification, government neglect, and exacerbation by the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, the tides began turning in October, when merchants began receiving explicit verbal notification from property manager Song Jackson that they would need to leave Dynasty

Center by various dates. The earliest date tenants were told was March of 2022.

Recognizing a new urgency, CCED organizers and Dynasty Center commercial tenants held a meeting at the end of October in order to discuss organizing goals and potential strategies. From this meeting, a petition was created with the following tenant-driven demands:

- 1. Redcar does not evict any tenant at Dynasty Center.**
- 2. Dynasty Center is preserved as a culturally and historically important community space.**
- 3. Rent is reduced by 50%, returning to the rate prior to the Redcar acquisition.**

The petition has since received over 4,900 signatures across Chinatown residents, commercial tenants, and online supporters, signifying immense public support for the preservation of Dynasty Center. However, Redcar did not respond to the petition, prompting organizers and merchants to escalate through a public speak-out and press conference in December.

The “Defend Dynasty Center” press conference began with All Chinatown Tenants Union (ACTU) tenant leaders Mr. Huang and Pauline Chau emphasizing the importance of Dynasty Center’s existence to both Chinatown residents’ daily lives and the long-term existence of Chinatown as a neighborhood that supports working class immigrants.

Various commercial tenants from Dynasty Center—including Diana Chau and Cindy Ho, Vietnamese refugees who have had their shops in Chinatown for multiple decades and were previously evicted from The Shop—bravely shared about their reliance on Dynasty Center for their livelihoods as well as the meaning Dynasty Center holds for Chinatown, culturally and historically.

While CCED organizer Patrick Chen importantly highlighted Dynasty Center’s interrelation with other Chinatown site fights such as College Station where another profit-hungry vulture developer, Atlas Capital, is carving up land at the expense of working class tenants, fellow CCED organizer Charlotte Nguyen spoke powerfully about her childhood connection to Dynasty Center and the sacredness of the space as a site of community:

“This is about more than just a mall. This is a fight for the future of our community. For the spaces we live in. Work in. The spaces we call home and our right to shape them and pass them on for generations.”

Though the struggle is far from over, many lessons are being gleaned from CCED’s largest commercial site fight yet. Tactics and strategies learned from CCED’s years of organizing with residential tenants can be usefully applied to commercial site fights, but approaches must also be creatively adapted in order to account for commercial tenants’ bare legal protections and demanding daily schedules—many shopkeepers work more than 8 hours a day, 7 days a week, making scheduling organizing meetings challenging.

Chinatown commercial tenants’ political consciousnesses must also continue to be shaped to strengthen solidarity with poor/working class residential tenants and increase recognition of the gentrification-related factors that underscore the precarity of both groups. After all, working class residential tenants and corresponding community-serving small businesses compose the community’s core, and what threatens one group threatens the other due to the intertwined nature of their existences.

The Dynasty Center campaign presents an important opportunity for residential and commercial tenants to co-create struggle and build off each other’s power,

with both groups leading from their own perspectives of how losing Dynasty Center and subsequent speculative real estate could impact the Chinatown community as a whole: “Destroying Dynasty Center would kill Chinatown,” articulates long-time resident Pauline, identifying a common enemy in gentrifying developers like Redcar, who are actively accelerating the death of Chinatown as a safe and prosperous neighborhood for working class immigrants.

Though we must carefully assess Redcar’s power (they are a corporate developer that owns 61 properties across Los Angeles), those of us—residents, merchants, and organizers—who care deeply about an equitable Chinatown living on for generations to come will continue the struggle to amass people power and defend this 80,000 sq. ft. space that has meant so much to so many in the community.

In our 2019 Platform of Demands, we stated that “We don’t need gentrification, we need real accessible community resources.” Defending Dynasty Center is in service of this demand, expressing the same ethos as our defense of Chinatown’s last full-service grocery store, Ai Hoa Market, in 2019 and our continued advocacy for all future spaces in Chinatown to be community-serving.

Wandering through the mazes of affordable plants, woks, and traditional Chinese and Vietnamese dresses that line the shops of Dynasty Center both as a little girl and an adult more than 20 years later, CCED organizer Charlotte Nguyen says, “At Dynasty Center, I always felt like we had enough.”

In 2022, we will continue to defend our community’s right to “have enough”—socially, economically, and materially.

