

## **FAQ's about the Protests**

### **Who are the protestors?**

- We believe some of the protestors include paid staff members of the Chinatown Staff & Workers Association (CSWA), the 318 Restaurant Workers Union, and a group called Youth Against Displacement.
- These individuals have not only protested the museum but various organizations throughout Chinatown. CSWA has been staging protests in Chinatown since 1979. It [formed](#) the 318 Restaurant Workers Union and many of its staff appear on Youth Against Displacement's social media channels.

### **What are the protestors demanding?**

- The return of the funding from the City. However, the funding was restricted for the museum to purchase its own building to remain in Chinatown.
- To reopen the original Jing Fong location (despite it having now moved to 202 Centre Street).
- MOCA has no control over either of these demands.

### **Has the museum met with the protestors?**

- Yes. Following leadership changes at the museum, MOCA met with leaders of the protests to discuss their claims. During these discussions, MOCA explained that we are unable to meet their demands, as we do not have the ability to return the city funding nor the authority to restore the business in question.

### **Is this a strike or a picket line?**

- It is neither. The protestors call it a picket line due to their union affiliations.
- The museum does not have unionized employees, has not employed any of these protestors, and does not have a relationship with CSWA, past or present.

### **Does the museum have control over where Jing Fong Restaurant is located?**

- No. Jing Fong and its owner have no affiliation to the museum.
- Due to the 2020 pandemic, with gatherings paused and tourism non-existent, the owners of Jing Fong determined that they could not sustain operating an 800-seat ballroom, exited their lease early and closed the 20 Elizabeth Street location.
- In [March 2021 to the NYTimes](#), Jing Fong's owner stated, "they could no longer afford to operate the banquet hall after their revenue plunged by 85 percent during the pandemic." The owner of Jing Fong has publicly stated multiple times in the press that they closed the original location for [business and economic reasons](#).
- In 2021, Jing Fong reopened as the museum's neighbor across the street at 202 Centre Street.
- Jing Fong was a [large employer](#) of 318 Restaurant Workers Union members who were let go when the owners decided to move and downsize the restaurant to its current location.

### **What is the connection to Jonathan Chu?**

- Jonathan Chu was a long-time trustee of the museum who stepped down from the board at the end of his term in 2024.
- His family is the property owner of 20 Elizabeth Street, the site of the original Jing Fong location. The owners of Jing Fong requested to exit their lease early during the pandemic, which they granted without penalty. Contrary to the protestors, the Chu family did not evict the restaurant. This fact is a matter of public record and confirmed publicly by the owners of Jing Fong.
- The museum plays no role in the business decisions of its trustees.

### **Does the museum have control over the city borough-based jail initiative?**

- No, it does not. In 2019, under the de Blasio administration, as part of the closing of Rikers, the city approved the [Borough-Based Jail System](#). This borough-based jail system was launched to address the troubled Rikers Penitentiary and its planned closure.
- The city decided to redistribute the jail system across four boroughs as part of a criminal justice reform initiative. One of those planned jails will be on an already existing jail site in Chinatown.
- The museum opposes a jail being constructed in Chinatown. Consistent with other Chinatown organizations and businesses, we were disappointed that the former mayor and city councilpersons approved this plan.
- As reported in the [NYTimes in August 2021](#), MOCA leadership "were not party to the agreement or any talks with the city."

### **When did MOCA first apply for capital funding from the city?**

- The first application started in 2015 and was reapplied for annually from 2015-2019. The board of directors at the museum initiated the conversation with the City about a permanent home at the end of the Bloomberg administration, received approval for this project, and was awarded city capital funding during this period.

### **Why does the museum need capital funding from the city?**

- In 2014, the previous owners of the building at 215 Centre Street told MOCA it would sell the building, likely to developers, when MOCA's lease expired in 2020. To preserve the museum and continue its mission in the community, MOCA launched a campaign to purchase the building. The city supported this plan and began allocating funds for the museum's purchase in 2015.
- Many cultural institutions require public-private partnerships to succeed. Federal, state, and city funding is common for many nonprofits.
- Out of approximately 33,000 museums in this country, less than 10 are dedicated to the history and culture of Chinese in America.

**What is this capital funding for specifically?**

- This capital funding from the city is specifically allocated for the purchase of the building where the museum currently resides with no other permitted use. The funds went directly to the owner of the building as part of the purchase and were never received by the museum. The funding was delayed for four years. The museum closed on the purchase of the building in January 2024.

**Was there an agreement between the City and the museum on the Borough-Based Jail System in exchange for this funding?**

- No, there was not, written or otherwise. There is no agreement to support or advocate for the jail system.
- Unfortunately, the timing of this funding amid the jail construction controversy created misunderstandings within the community. The museum acknowledges how these perceptions and the city's decisions have negatively impacted the community we serve.
- For the record, MOCA opposes the construction of a jail in Chinatown.

**Is MOCA the only institution that received funding from the community investments surrounding the four borough-based jails?**

- No. In the neighborhood, Chung Pak Senior Housing, Columbus Park and 70 Mulberry Street also received funding. Organizations in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens also received funds.

**Can the museum sell the building and redirect these capital funds?**

- No. Spending is at the discretion of the City. With the funding, the city placed a restrictive covenant on the building ensuring that it is used "as a non-for-profit museum and event space" or for "other cultural, educational, artistic, community, social service or recreational use for the benefit of the people of the City." The covenant also states the museum cannot "sell, mortgage, transfer or assign any interest to the Premises" for 30 years.

**What does funding for the purchase of the building mean?**

- This funding will enable "a permanent home, one of a few for a national AANHPI arts and cultural organization, that includes a performing arts space that can be used by the community at large," as per MOU funding statement between the City and City Council.
- With this building, MOCA will have a permanent space for its collection of 80,000 historical treasures from the Chinese American community and to carry out its mission of preserving, illuminating and celebrating the rich history and contributions of Chinese in America.