

FAQ's about the Protests

Who are the protestors?

The protestors include paid staff members of the Chinatown Staff & Workers Association (CSWA), the 318 Restaurant Workers Union, and Youth Against Displacement (YAD). CSWA, which formed the 318 Restaurant Workers Union, has been staging protests in Chinatown since 1979, often requesting financial remuneration for their union or related causes. These organizations, including YAD, share the same address and, in some cases, personnel.

What are the protestors demanding?

The protestors are demanding the return of funding the City granted to the museum to purchase its own building. They are also demanding the reopening of the original Jing Fong restaurant location. The museum has no authority in either matter.

Has the museum met with the protestors?

Yes. MOCA leadership met with protest leaders but explained that the museum has no jurisdiction over their demands. Despite this clarification, the protestors continue to disseminate disinformation, conflate unrelated issues and engage in actions that target and harass the museum's visitors and partners.

Why do the protestors call it a picket line?

Because of their union affiliations, the protestors refer to their demonstrations as a picket line. In typical circumstances, a picket line involves employees or individuals directly associated with the targeted organization. MOCA, however, has no unionized employees and no affiliation – past or present - with CSWA. Their goal is to disrupt MOCA's operations and mission as a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and celebrating the rich history and experience of Chinese in America.

What is the background on the capital funding MOCA received from the city?

In 2014, the previous owners of MOCA's building announced their intention to sell when the museum's lease expired. Faced with possible closure or displacement, the museum launched a campaign to buy the building to preserve its location and mission in the Chinatown community where it was founded. The museum applied for city capital funding annually from 2015-2019. This project was approved, and grant allocations were received during this time. The final grant was approved in 2019. The purchase was finalized in January 2024, securing a permanent home for MOCA. Once renovated, it will be the largest museum in the country dedicated to the history and experience of Chinese in America.

Was funding for the building tied to an agreement for the borough-based jail initiative?

No. In 2019, under the DiBlasio administration, the city approved the Borough-Based Jail System plan to close Rikers Penitentiary and redistribute jails across four boroughs. One of the planned jails is on an existing jail site in Chinatown. The museum's final grant in 2019 was approved in conjunction with the announcement of DiBlasio's plan.

The museum acknowledges that the timing of the approval amid the jail construction controversy created community misunderstandings and disappointment. However, there was no agreement, written or otherwise, to support the jail system in exchange for funding. According to a [New York Times article in August 2021](#), MOCA leadership "were not party to the agreement or any talks with the city." For the record, MOCA opposes the construction of a new jail in Chinatown.

What is the issue with Jing Fong and what does it have to do with the museum?

Jing Fong and its ownership have no affiliation with the museum. For context, Jing Fong was the only unionized restaurant in Chinatown, with staff connected to the protest groups. In [March 2021 to the New York Times](#), 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 restaurant reopened later that year at 202 Centre Street across the street from the museum.

What is the connection to Jonathan Chu?

Jonathan Chu, a former museum trustee whose term ended in 2024, is part of the family that owns the property at 20 Elizabeth Street, Jing Fong's original location. The museum has no role in the business of its trustees.