

**City of CHELSEA**  
**ARPA Community Engagement Process**  
**Key Informant Interview Notes**

**I. Perceptions in Chelsea**

**A. Overall**

- “I would say living in Chelsea it is the sense of *cultura* and diversity of our community. We have a large population of Latinos but other cultures. Being able to hear the different languages and all the great food. So many people have been able to build restaurants to serve their community”.
- “One of the strengths is it’s diversity. It’s tight knit community with residents but also with organizations, faith-based communities, government. It’s super small in land size so it’s physically very tight knit. The density is not a strength but everything is so close and you can go from one org to another, from one community space to another, and you’re in the same community”.
- People in Chelsea are deeply committed to Chelsea, to protecting Chelsea. Whether it be around workers or immigrants’ health.
- “There’s a lot of warriors in Chelsea”.
- There is a lot of interest in developing childcare workers
- La Collaborativa is tailoring to the needs of what residents are already doing
- Lots of resources are out there
- Not many folks know about it if they are not in the network
- Found niche
- Providing a good service for the residents of Chelsea, a diverse population
- Largest supermarket is in Chelsea also – Market Basket
- They walk to our store
- Captive market, and we are making money
- Previously, Chelsea had a negative image associated with. Chelsea is more cohesive and collaborative now.
- Mental health services have been expanded since the opioid crisis. A challenge has been how services are siloed.
- Chelsea is my favorite place to work – I feel a warm feeling in Chelsea, a warmth you can’t find in other places, “the sun is shining when I am in Chelsea”
- Walkable city
- Small enough to get around, don’t need a vehicle
- Too many car accidents
- Community resources, absolute unique when it comes to providing resources
- Lots of collaboration to connect people compared to other towns
- Enjoy – community that pulls together, connectedness, during COVID, everyone was helping, delivering food
- The community helps each other
- All the different restaurants

**B. What makes it easier or makes it more difficult for the key priority areas/residents in Chelsea?**

- Latino community really wants to work
- Drive to move forward that propels the community
- There is a line though, working 2 to 3 jobs costs families time with children

- Lack of childcare is very interconnected with these issues
- Parental involvement drops because people have to work
- A lot of the women said yes to working if they had childcare, it is not just feasible
- Costs more to pay for childcare, than what I would make working
- Making it harder to develop the childcare workforce – could not afford mainstream childcare – center or family based
- Many people went to more affordable unlicensed childcare
- People had no idea what a voucher was or how to access it, Navigating how to apply is very difficult
- What is needed is a case manager to help people apply, The process is not easy
- Resources are there but no true access
- La Collaborativa and Bunker Hill offers more, but only one in Spanish
- There is huge interest from moms who would do the childcare
- Systemic barriers of literacy and writing
- The system does not allow for other opportunities if you are not English speaking and reading and writing, not that many avenues
- We're in the middle of a branding project because everyone is having trouble recruiting people but we think we have something special because we have a long history of taking people that are very raw in terms of skills and developed that to become life long employees. We benefit from a really rich, diverse pool of employees in Chelsea. Chelsea has always been a community of immigrants. I think we really encounter a lot of people in talent, dedication, thirst for knowledge. Recognition that it's not the most optimal work environment but the people we've been able to attract have that innate quality
- If we could couple the grit factor with education there would be such a great opportunity to bring people beyond an hourly wage. How can we partner with the city of Chelsea to identify those people and bring them up? English is certainly helpful though everything we do is in English and Spanish and then there's technical skills. We can do some of that.
- How can you develop people out of high school and guide them with technical questions towards a lifelong career?
- Difficulties: All I have is suspicions. I think there's a generational difference in terms of attitudes, entitlements. I think there's a large part of the workforce that's dependent on government entitlements and moving over to a full-time position might put them beyond qualifying for those entitlements so how can we work around that for our employees. There are people that want to take long leaves
  - We're very seasonal – we ramp up over the summer and then ramp back down but we'll find candidates we really like and offer them a full time position but they decline. For reasons – I've heard that people want to go back home for a couple of months, or they have another job that they do in the winter or something under the table. Lately we've been competing with the likes of Amazon whose wages are very generous compared to us, who offered some the cream of the crop for the region, but we can't compete with a company that doesn't need to be profitable
- I think there are a lot of opportunities – the gig economy offers a lot of alternatives and flexibility. I think that provides a lot of options that our business cannot and that's what we're competing against
  - Location and acceptance by the community
  - Tom is doing a great job; we have a good rapport with Tom
  - The city needs more Latinos in the administration, someone who can talk to the community

- Director of DPW is Latino, but there needs to be someone who can be a right-hand person to Tom, to better approach the Latino community
  - Still some theft, but its part of doing business
- Big divide between people pushing for home ownership and people pushing for rentals. No one is against home ownership but what the most vulnerable people in Chelsea need is rental units at a deeply affordable level. You can invest in a lot more deeply affordable rental units than you can in homeownership. I would be on a moratorium on new housing if it wasn't for deeply affordable units.
  - "Housing is the number one in all the conversations...It's not new, but the pandemic really lifted the curtain. The overcrowding and high rents were already there. The fact that Chelsea does not have a transitional housing system means that families displaced don't have a place to stay locally till they get on their feet. In communities like Chelsea, you can't rely on the court, but our evictions happen illegally overnight. Families are threatened with their immigration status. A lot of people also don't even deal with landlord, just the master tenant due to the subleasing situation"
- "The pandemic really pushed us back like 1000ft back. It's hard to recuperate the way the government expects, but our families are still very far from reaching that"
- RAFT has been a huge support. But they will struggle if they still don't have a job or they don't have access to childcare. The Boys and Girls club is affordable, but the waitlist is long. Transportation is limited and expensive.
- I would say that there's a big polarization because it's a low income community and it's gentrifying so quickly so there's a lot of opposing views that can create tension – between home owners and renters, between old school Chelsea and gentrifiers, unspoken racial tension between Black community and Latino community.
- Class and economic issues – 80% deemed essential workers, a lot of priorities in their lives that are pretty urgent
- We carry a big burden in the region for environmental public health. That comes with a lot of consequences.
- Because we have all this land being taken over by industry, what's the missed opportunity for open space?
- Housing, economics, we have a big undocumented population that's not voiceless but is unheard. We see that in the census, in local elections
- Fear. People living in fear
- Chelsea Eats
- Run YouthPass – discounted T pass
- Youth – lack of extracurricular activities, lack of YMCAs or youth centers, lack of resources in schools, I feel like young people are facing a lot of stress at home with low-income parents needing to be working multiple jobs and not there to support them, not through any fault of their own, just needing to make ends meet. And then at the schools there's a lack of resources
- I would say youth jobs is also an issue. We have a program, and we never have a lack of applicants. There's a need for youth jobs that provide a pathway to different options
- Impact of Environmental Factors: Higher rates of asthma and asthma hospitalization, cardiovascular disease, obesity, shorter life span
- Then we get by COVID or another pandemic or a climate disaster and what we expected to happen happened – we got hit first and worst and had the hardest time bouncing back, Our environmental injustices make us be hit unequally.
- Environmental racism

- Housing insecurity and food security. The eviction task force has stabilized a lot of people that people may find themselves in and homelessness. Basically, anything financially related.
- Chelsea is very dense and overcrowded. It is dangerous to have such overcrowding and can lead to domestic violence and sexual abuse. We essentially allowed that and is why Chelsea got hit hard by covid because they couldn't physically separate. I think there was a big push for them to stay in Chelsea, but I think we should do the next best step for them whether that is in another city or another state.
- There are very limited services for mental health. Without wrap around services, people have to reuse those services to get housing, but their mental health isn't getting addressed.
- Cost of living
- Affordable housing is scarce
- Difficult to stay in Chelsea, can't afford rent, can't buy
- Many people have left, a lot going out of state, difficult to stay especially if ELL
- They can speak Spanish at corner store, can connect
- Gentrification
- City living – not easy, gangs – especially if not a lot of support at home
- Making sure kids are support
- Buying food is so expensive, getting worse, no end in sight

#### C. As the pandemic is not over, what challenges are you still facing?

- Trauma and history of corruption. Many immigrants flee from those conditions.
- Historically, Chelsea has been a place for violence, prostitution, drugs, alcohol, and its never really gone away. There are a lot of liquor stores in the city.
- Economic loss is still happening
- People have not fully recovered
- Home based childcare got some support from EEC and have had to make lots of changes in their own homes and it incurred costs
- Big sense in Chelsea of wanting to help one another, but I can't raise prices because Chelsea people
- Many take vouchers but is not enough
- They want to help their own community, but not making enough
- For our organization, it's something that's taken a lot of resources that could be put on other things. For people – we have things we've been able to do as a company. Started early sanitizing, collecting PPE
- I personally don't see us ever requiring the vaccination, but I think those that don't get it are going to have additional hurdles in all walks of life. We're figuring out now how to test people weekly
- We continue to have multigenerational and large households that provide an opportunity for spread. We have carpooling and that's usually a great opportunity but also provides additional opportunities for exposure. And then there's the mental health impacts – fear, isolation, bias due to vaccine status
- Start of pandemic was a learning process, how to operate in this environment
- Managed to survive
- We need more clarity from the city and from the state on what to do and what not to do
- More advanced warning, one day one thing next day
- Now we know how to work, we wear masks, we do the protocols
- No deaths, some sick, no hospitalization

- COVID pushed back progress on economic development/living wages
- Housing, overcrowding, lack of childcare, mental health
- There are thousands of families seeking food from pantries and residents are nervous if there happens to be a holiday closure
- I'll say that everyone has said that COVID has uncovered those inequities so a lot of the things we're doing with in the recovery are related to those things that were uncovered. It's kind of hard to say we don't have a I feel like the recovery, it's more about the structural issues we had before COVID then the COVID itself, even though COVID is still ongoing. Structural plus the pandemic itself
- I think the city of Chelsea has done a beyond incredible – it's such a commitment from city staff has put in to address these issues that COVID uncovered.
- Individuals don't use any of their WIC benefits
- People have not used WIC benefits, can't get to the store, the lines, too busy
- Access to food is not an issue, but time shortage
- A lot people still don't have the time to get everything done, people are so overwhelmed
- If you have children, time is an issue.
- People are nervous about going, people are not going when it is crowded
- Mental health shortage
- One thing that helped is the insurance companies were reimbursing for virtual options
- Hard to find the help they need

**i. [IF NEEDED] Can you talk about any inequities for people of color in Chelsea?**

- It's hard for me to assess. You would find that the over whelming majority of resources that we spend for training are on people of color. And in the community, it's so diverse, it's hard to pinpoint anyone that's particularly marginalized
- Gateway communities impacted by the inequitable distribution of COVID relief funding, so cities like Brookline got a lot of \$
- Protest efforts helped some, but it never matched the need.
- Undocumented students aren't counted, so they are seen as invisible. As a result, funding is spread thin even though students need ESL, mental health services, remote learning technology, and other needs.
  - For some, McDonald's was the only source of wifi for families.
- Overcrowding, sexual abuse by subleasing tenants

**II. Strategies for Supporting Residents in Chelsea**

**A. What efforts or initiatives are you aware of that the City of Chelsea has done to support Chelsea?**

- The navigator program, it also highlighted the needs in the city.
- Chelsea had a legal clinic to help teach residents their rights and get representation
- Right to Counsel – withdrawn from state
- The food one – it's not a structural program because Chelsea EATS program is going to end or ended but it's still a really impressive example of a program. It proved that people will use those funds for groceries or things they needed in their homes. It proved that government should provide a safety net in their homes
- Commitment to addressing housing insecurity and creating opportunities for equity. For addressing zoning and red lining. Looking at it every level of government to move the needle
- The city has shown a real commitment to greenspace, to addressing the urban heat islands – those aren't structural but they are addressing a critical concern in Chelsea. They're looking at flooding

and mitigation. Working to make the MBTA more accountable, make sure that they're providing equitable services to the most dependent riders, to essential workers

- For mental health – Middlesex number
- No solutions and hard to get appointments
- Food has been really good

#### Workforce Development and Small Business

- Small loans to small business, childcare providers could access
- People feel like the city is working to support them
- Very positive about the city
- Need is that people cannot afford childcare where they would want to send their children
- At Early Learning center they have a part time program, families want to be part of it, but only 200 spots for thousands in need
- 80% of children 4 and 5 could not participate
- Not enough spots
- How can we get to capacity and quality for the home-based folks to make up the slack – do what the Early Learning Center is doing
- Not enough space to expand Early Learning Center
- Not enough early education
- Children affected, because parents have to work or surviving on one income
- I know that there's been tons of services in Chelsea – immigration help, food – but in terms of workforce development but other than helping at risk folks, like ROCA, BGSC helps with youth, there is some workplace training – culinary programs, support with academics but in terms of workforce training I'm not aware of anything specific
- They had grants 10k and technical assistance
- City should have done more to help the small stores on Broadway
- Small stores were outside the mainstream, barriers of language, they were not ready to participate, digital literacy – all the applications were on the computer, all these applications needed financial statements, and business did not have it
- Chamber helped some apply for these funds
- Restaurant restoration – small money relative to the size of the problem, not many Latino restaurants able to take advantage

#### B. Have you participated in any federal, state or local programs to support workforce Development in the past?

- Yes – we've received a grant from the state. We participate in ESOL training.
- We applied for PPP and got a fair amount of money, had no way of knowing, lots of uncertainty

### III. Strategies

#### A. What specific strategies would you like to see the City of Chelsea fund, with the ARPA funds it will receive, that will enhance Chelsea?

#### Workforce Development and Small Business

- Highlight early education, expand pre-k – capture 3- and 4-year old's
- Universal Pre-k – huge need already
- If child could be in school during the workforce hours, it would be great for families
- Chelsea residents are in differing work shifts – none of the childcare providers have nontraditional hours, - incentivizing providers to offer differing hours – third shift

- Not charging extra for late hours
- Reimagine childcare
- Connections to apply to vouchers
- Recognizing that majority are family home based providers
- Advocate to increase the wages/voucher reimbursement rates
- Entire workforce that is not licensed which is the result of community needs not being met, don't blame parents, had to rely on other avenues
- Help people get licensed
- Looking beyond our operations, I say get into data analytics. We have a need for people that can look at trends and write algorithms so that we can understand and improve our work. That's a position that we hire and train. From my purview those are very valuable areas. We have people coming in unskilled and we certainly need that but I wouldn't want anyone doing that for their whole lives, doing repetitive motions.
- I think life sciences, just because in this area it's such a huge industry. Life sciences will continue to be an investment in this area. If we can attract life sciences to Chelsea.
  - Surrounding communities should be able to benefit from the overflow of development and construction in Boston. Real-estate development, teaching people how to maintain and run those buildings
- Hands on assistance would be good, nonprofits
- Those that are right there on the street
- Provide services to small businesses
- Doing it in Spanish
- Technical assistance through community-based organizations like the institute and the Chamber
- The institute is partnered with Bunker hill to do workshops for restaurants
- Walking the streets
- Online ordering - local restaurants are way behind
- Chelsea Business Foundation is also good
- Small business strong from State Street Bank
- City have an office or a clearing house
- language barrier is a problem
- To engage these business owners, you have to know and have the cultural aspect not just the language
- We need a rapport and it comes from the culture
- Small operations feel isolated from the mainstream programs particularly in the pandemic they missed out
- Taking back youth workforce development and having it be under the municipality and not under a nonprofit. Having the city create a workforce development department where young people are hired by the city to work in different locations

### Housing and Food Security

- One thing that stayed hidden in the pandemic as people were fighting and focusing on pandemic was housing quality - apartments in poor condition, rain coming in, cockroaches, mold, mildew, broken windows. Tenants were already under pressure because of late rent and so they don't want to feel like they are stirring the pot.
- More enforcement of code violations in a way that tenants feel safe and protected.
- I would say the priorities for issues would be housing – deeply affordable housing, particularly rentals for the vast majority of folks that can't afford to buy a house.

- Community land trust
  - Continuing the Chelsea EATs programs would be huge
  - Hard to talk about their health and nutrition if they are not mentally well
  - We do damage control first
  - Help mental health short of appointments
  - Gym membership for WIC people, working out to help mental health
  - No YMCA in Chelsea
  - Something that can help relieve stress, need more
  - More mental health resources in the language that people speak
  - Encourage self-care, taking care of ourselves, especially if you don't have support and have children
  - Zoom Yoga classes
  - Wellness program for the community
  - Community could use some self-care, self-love
  - Meditation
  - So much trauma – everyone
  - So many families have been through so much, all of these things will impact their health
  - Workforce development - shortage of medical assistants, type of program that does that, Chelsea does that, certification programs and skill development
  - Housing – designate affordable housing, deal with crowding, work with Neighborhood Developers
  - Live in the city they love, they feel welcome, here
- Food Security – Chelsea EATS, 3000 families in WIC, for them – the big store are hard to shop at when you want to stay safe, we advise them to go to the corner store, but they don't have the variety and quality – had done Healthy Store on the block, instead of the Frito Lay up front, you could have fruits at the front, -organize to keep it fresh, Healthy Chelsea Coalition – approved sticker
  - Expand refrigeration
  - If you are eligible for SNAP then you are eligible for WIC, SNAP makes you eligible for delivery
  - Need food delivery for WIC – Fund Delivery of WIC
  - Food delivery for elderly, disabled.
  - Like an Instacart for Chelsea residents.
  - A wellness component would be really important.

### Environmental Health and Behavioral Health

- Centralized pot of money with accountability and reporting processes
- More mental health support, a city employee that oversees these needs/services
  - Many services are overwhelmed and not targeting those with the greatest needs.
- Creating recreational opportunities organized/overseen by the city and more infrastructure to support recreational supports (greenspace, free sports, transportation)
- “Navigators from North Suffolk Mental Health. They were a huge help, but it's like a team of 2 people for the entire city of Chelsea. His case load since January is 6,000 people. I assess them so I can give them as much support, and I try to let them know that there are programs out there. If he had less he feels like we would have more time to work in a wrap-around way with orgs”.



- Energy – investing in decentralizing the grid, micro grids so that we can be more resilient in the face of a climate disaster so investing in batteries
- Climate mitigation – like the work that’s happening on island and river, flooding mitigation, urban heat island
- Transportation – it’s hard because we can’t control the MBTA but can the city cover some of the gaps. The buses aren’t going to all the places that people need to go. If you’re low income and you don’t have a car, and you need to go grocery shopping – the buses aren’t going to go everywhere you need to go so I think the city could invest in
- Electrifying all fleets from the municipality – like DPW trucks, plowing trucks, things like those

#### IV. Vision

##### A. If these strategies are implemented and ARPA funds are used well, what do you see as the future of Chelsea after these three years?

- Some benefits already exist with how Chelsea is seen as a model for public safety, public health, and substance use.
- Continuation of the services that are already being used but increasing accessibility to those needing services the most.
- So the 3-5 years is its just going to get better
- Public Health infrastructure should be beefed up.
- We need more outreach workers
- A space for recreational and community gatherings
- Families and children feel supported, have their needs be met
- Workforce in Chelsea are essential workers – direct impact for long term health and well-being of Chelsea resident
- I’d love to see the median wage increase, the standard of living, purchasing power of Chelsea residents, home ownership, level of education – those are the things of a thriving community
- I have a lot of faith of those in the Chelsea community to uncover all the facts and make some wise choices. It hasn’t always been that way but I think the leadership we’ve seen lately – a lot of invested partners and understanding of what goes into decisions like this
  - My vision of Chelsea – has lots of strengths, has a downtown area that is vibrant and diverse,
  - Chelsea has 5 or 6 hotels, how many of those visitors come to downtown Chelsea
  - Hotels won’t say downtown Chelsea
  - Dozens of restaurants right there
  - People come from outside to visit the culture
  - Make that Latino community an asset to the city
  - MTIC – DOR, blocks form revenue, you don’t see the employees
  - Assets of the arts in Chelsea square, the theater
  - Put these pieces together and Chelsea can be a place for people to come like the North End
  - One thing that stayed hidden in the pandemic as people were fighting and focusing on pandemic was housing quality - apartments in poor condition, rain coming in, cockroaches, mold, mildew, broken windows. Tenants were already under pressure because of late rent and so they don’t want to feel like they are stirring the pot.
  - More enforcement of code violations in a way that tenants feel safe and protected.
  - More financial stability for families if young people have good paying jobs from the city
  - Clean Air & Energy Resiliency– electrify local transit

- Education – funding the public schools long term for additional resources that they need. Smaller classes with more resources, more after school activities. Lower number of young people getting involved in gangs and having paths to college or employment or the trades