TO: Standing Committee on Planning and Environment
FROM: Assistant Director, Central Area Planning
SUBJECT: Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan and Economic Revitalization Strategy

RECOMMENDATION


GENERAL MANAGER’S COMMENTS
The General Manager of Community Services recommends approval of the foregoing.

CITY MANAGER’S COMMENTS
The City Manager recommends approval of the foregoing.

COUNCIL POLICY
In 2002, Council approved the Chinatown Vision Directions to help guide city policy decisions, priorities, budgets and capital plans in the Chinatown community. In 2005, Council approved a work program to continue implementation of the Chinatown Vision, which also included the development of a Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan.

On January 26, 2010, as part of the Historic Area Height Review, Council directed staff to engage the Vancouver Economic Commission, Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association, Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association and other organizations in the
creation of an Economic Revitalization Strategy for Chinatown. Council also directed staff to bring forward the Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan.

On April 19, 2011 Council approved the final implementation of the Historic Area Height Review relating to the Chinatown Historic Area (HA-1 and HA-1A zones) which included a residential intensification strategy for Chinatown that supports small-lot and mid-rise development.

SUMMARY

Over the last decade, the City has worked with the Chinatown community to nurture revitalization within this important historic and cultural neighbourhood through public realm improvements, community and economic development projects, and by creating building opportunities to increase the resident customer base to support existing businesses and generate investment in the neighbourhood. While there are early signs of positive growth, in the form of new residential development applications and new businesses locating in Chinatown, the challenges within the neighbourhood remain significant. Chinatown has a high number of vacant storefronts in run-down buildings, struggling businesses and a negative public image as unsafe and out of date. This is an important moment in the evolution of Chinatown to ensure revitalization continues, renews the cultural and heritage fabric of the neighbourhood, and is socially and economically sustainable.

The purpose of this report is to present the Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan (the Plan) and the Economic Revitalization Action Strategy (the Economic Strategy) for Council adoption (both in Appendix A). The Plan is the result of over a decade of community work to encourage private sector investment in the community and improve conditions for those who live, work and visit the area. The Economic Strategy is the fifth and final component of the Plan. The Strategy builds on all that has been learned over the last decade of work in Chinatown and presents a strategy of short-term and medium-term actions to support business retention, expansion and attraction.

BACKGROUND

Chinatown: Past and Present

First established in the 1880s by Chinese immigrants, Chinatown is one of the city’s founding neighbourhoods and part of its original commercial core. The neighbourhood played a formative role in the development of civic and national identity, through the contributions of generations of Chinese-Canadians. Like many historic neighbourhoods, Chinatown has experienced decline due to the social and economic challenges prevalent in our inner city neighbourhoods. It was historically a mixed use neighbourhood with a strong residential base, but up to the 1990s the residential population within Chinatown proper declined, leaving many buildings under-utilized and contributing to the economic challenges of the area. More detailed information on the Chinatown history and neighbourhood profile is included in the Plan’s introduction chapter in Appendix A.

One of the common challenges to revitalization of urban and historic neighbourhoods is the delicate balancing of growth, economic opportunities, affordability and impacts that can displace low-income residents, and heritage conservation. The Chinatown Vision, developed by the community and adopted by City Council in 2002, recognized the need for the neighbourhood to connect with younger generations and to reach out to people of all backgrounds to ensure Chinatown is increasingly relevant to a more multi-cultural Vancouver.
The community’s vision was to build a Chinatown that is open to everyone without losing its culture and heritage and has been a critical framework guiding the City’s policy decisions, priorities, budgets and capital plans in the area over the last decade. The 11 high-level Chinatown Vision directions are:

1. Heritage Building Preservation
2. Commemoration of Chinese-Canadian and Chinatown History
3. Public Realm Improvements
4. Convenient Transportation and Pedestrian Comfort
5. A Sense of Security
6. Linkage to the Nearby Neighbourhoods and Downtown
7. Youth Connection and Community Development
8. Attractions for Vancouverites and Tourists
9. A Community with a Residential and Commercial Mixture
10. Diversified Retail Goods and Services
11. A Hub of Social and Cultural Activities

Chinatown today covers approximately 10 blocks, totalling 16.3 hectares of land area with a small residential population. The neighbourhood’s residents have tended to be older, more likely to be low-income and more likely to be made up of single-member households than the City average. Many Chinatown residents continue to be of Chinese ethnicity (41%) but the neighbourhood is home to an increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse population. The 2006 Census showed that between ’01 and ’06 the population was increasingly younger which may be attributable to the new residential developments created during this time. The most recent 2011 Census showed that the number of people living in the neighbourhood has nearly doubled in the proceeding ten-year period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Chinatown Demographics</th>
<th>Chinatown</th>
<th>City of Vancouver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population*</td>
<td>1277</td>
<td>603,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify as Chinese ethnic origin</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age - Under 19 years</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age - Older than 65 years</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income - Median Household</td>
<td>$17,658</td>
<td>$47,299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. size of household</td>
<td>1.8 persons</td>
<td>2.2 persons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2006 Census Data, except * 2011 Census Data

Planning Hierarchy - Chinatown and the DTES Local Area Planning Process

The Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan exists within a policy and planning hierarchy that runs from the city-wide, to the local area, down to the neighbourhood level. At the city-wide level, Vancouver must grapple with a convergence of challenges to our environment, economy, livability and long-term sustainability. At the local area planning level, neighbouring communities come together to translate these policies to local area scale, and to resolve divergent views. At the neighbourhood level, the issues are further defined with a focus on determining and implementing improvements to the public realm and local economic conditions.
The DTES Local Area Planning Process (LAPP) currently underway will tackle area-wide policy and planning challenges for the local economy, social and urban health, built form & land use, and implementing the DTES Housing Plan. Representatives of the Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Area, the Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee, and seniors from Chinatown have been appointed to the LAPP Committee. The Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan will inform those broader discussions, providing background on the concerns and aspirations of the neighbourhood. The learning and planning that comes out of the DTES Local Area Plan will also inform the Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan, and the implementation of the Economic Strategy. As work progresses on the development of the LAPP, Chinatown residents, businesses and community members are encouraged to actively participate in that process.

**DISCUSSION**

The Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan is the product of over a decade of effort by the community and City staff to address complex neighbourhood issues through community-based projects and the development of new zoning, urban design guidelines and policy. The Plan provides a framework for strategic investment in the community and a context for current and future decision-making. In 2010, City Council directed staff to undertake the development of an economic revitalization action strategy for Chinatown that builds on previous City investments and can provide a road map for the next phase of community plan implementation. Both the Plan and the Economic Strategy are attached in Appendix A.

**Recommendation A. Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan**

The Plan covers five key areas where the City can support revitalization: heritage and culture, built form and urban structure, land use, public places and streets, and local community and economic development (Figure 2). The Plan includes an analysis of the underlying issues and opportunities in each area and the existing community resources. The Plan also describes the significant implementation work through policy, program and capital projects that has been undertaken in each of the five areas. This “action while planning” approach has enabled on-the-ground learning to inform the plans development and timely action on strategic issues and opportunities. The Plan is a living document and staff continue to monitor its implementation and provide Council with regular progress reports.
Below is an overview of the community plan revitalization work completed and in progress, more detail can be found in Appendix A:

1. Public Places and Streets
Special events and daily activities in public places are an essential part of urban life and contribute towards the community’s identity and sense of pride. Enhancing the public realm, for both day and night-time uses, improves Chinatown’s appeal for both residents and visitors, and provides a venue for community programming and special events. Considerable work has been undertaken in this area over the last decade as documented in the Plan. Key initiatives include:

**Carrall Street Greenway (completed)**
In July 2006, Council approved a detailed design and budget for the Greenway and the Chinatown blocks have been completed. Council also approved an electrical infrastructure plan and budget for the Greenway to support and encourage community events and activities in the public realm. This major public realm initiative has created safer biking and pedestrian routes and a more welcoming streetscape between Chinatown, Gastown, Hastings Street and the Downtown Central Area.

2. Land Use
Historically, Chinatown had many small buildings on narrow lots with commercial and retail on the ground floor, often with housing or offices on the upper floors. City policies should reinforce this established mix of uses to ensure the neighbourhood grows as a vibrant hub of social, cultural and commercial activities. Staff have completed a number of urban design, architecture and economic analyses, with assistance from external consultants, to better understand the existing Land Use challenges and opportunities. A key program initiative in this area has been:

**Chinatown Active Storefront Program (on-going)**
The vibrancy of Chinatown has been compromised, in part, due to the high numbers of vacant storefronts and the lack of viable, diverse businesses to meet the needs of the
community and visitors. In 2009, Council approved this program to activate six vacant storefronts by providing a grant of up to $50,000 for façade upgrades when new businesses that fit the character and identity of the area take up tenancy in currently vacant properties. To date, six storefronts in Chinatown have been upgraded and tenanted. This project is improving deteriorated building facades, creating a more active and attractive streetscape, and tenanting once vacant storefronts with new, viable longer-term businesses.

3. Heritage and Culture
Chinatown aims to become a regional and global destination, where people can experience the neighbourhood’s culture and heritage through its architecture, arts and festival events, and urban life. Protecting and growing its valuable cultural assets, including its heritage buildings, cultural facilities and Chinatown Family Societies and Benevolent Associations, is critical to Chinatown’s long-term success. Initiatives in this area include:

**Society Buildings Planning Grant Program (Phase 1 complete; Phase 2 underway)**
Staff have worked closely with Chinatown family associations and benevolent societies ("Societies") to support preparation of rehabilitation strategies for Society owned heritage buildings. The City provides a grant to support individual Societies working with economic and development consultants to create a detailed rehabilitation and financial plan for the restoration of their building. Since the start of the program five grants of $100,000 each have been provided to five different societies (each Society receiving a grant must contribute $20,000 to the planning work). The knowledge gained through this work enables the participant Societies, their members and the City to understand the funding and development challenges and opportunities we face in restoring these historic and cultural assets and enables them to search for additional funding partners.

**National Historic Site Designation (approved)**
Council passed a motion in April 2008 to support the Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association in its effort to secure UNESCO World Heritage listing for the historical buildings in Chinatown. The first step on this path was to apply for National Historic Site Designation and in the fall of 2011 the Minister of Environment announced the awarding of National Historic Site Designation to Chinatown. National and UNESCO Heritage designation, if leveraged through marketing, tourism and economic development strategies, can assist in raising public awareness of the significance of Vancouver’s Chinatown and motivating increased investment in the restoration of its heritage assets.

**Cultural Development (on-going)**
The Chinatown Vision aspires for the neighbourhood to be a hub of social and cultural activities for locals, Vancouverites and Tourists. To support this vision, the City and community developed the Downtown Eastside Arts & Culture Strategic Framework & Investment Plan (2007) and Planning staff supported community leaders to undertake the Chinatown Cultural Development Study (2011). Key revitalization priorities identified in this work include: supporting capacity development in existing community arts & culture organizations, increasing partnership between organizations, and the need for a long-term strategy to address aging infrastructure. City staff in Planning and Cultural Services continue to seek opportunities through projects and policy to
support Chinatown’s arts & cultural organizations as they are integral to the vitality, character and economic success of the area.

4. Built Form and Urban Structure
Chinatown has a unique built form and urban structure that can be enhanced to foster a stronger sense of place while creating opportunities for growth. Chinatown can become a place for innovative redevelopment, including heritage rehabilitation, infill and new low to mid-rise construction. The key initiative in this area is the:

*Historic Area Height Review (completed)*
On April 19, 2011, after an extensive community engagement process, Council approved the implementation of the Historic Area Height Review items relating to the Chinatown Historic Area (HA-1 and HA-1A zones). This included changes to the District Schedule to moderately increase height in Chinatown in the Zoning and Development By-law, changes to the Design Guidelines to support these height increases and to provide greater support for development of small lots, and the adoption of a *Rezoning Policy for Chinatown South* (HA-1A). As of June 2012, two significant rezoning processes are currently in application and two development applications under existing zoning have been approved. If these four projects proceed to development, Chinatown could see approximately 600 new residents in the next three to five years which would strengthen the resident customer base for local businesses.

5. Community & Economic Development
Small enterprises and community and cultural activities form the core of Chinatown’s economy, drawing residents, visitors and tourists to the area. Over the last two decades Chinatown has struggled with vacant storefronts and a negative public image of the neighbourhood as unclean and unsafe. Where once Chinatown was the only Chinese goods and services shopping area, disperse immigration has created new Chinese-oriented shopping districts and businesses across the City and region. This situation has hampered Chinatown’s ability to retain businesses and attract investment.

Working with the Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association, Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association and member organizations of the Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee, the City has piloted many community-based projects to stimulate the local economy, often through funding from the Vancouver Agreement and other sources. Some of these projects have included:

- Outreach initiatives to local tourism groups and organizations
- Promotion of the Chinatown Night Market and Chinatown Festival
- Bilingual (Chinese-English) service promotion and customer service training initiatives
- Awning replacement program
- Rickshaw pedicab project
- Window display competitions

**Recommendation B. Economic Revitalization Strategy**

As part of the above plan, particularly the community and economic development, Council directed staff to identify immediate actions for business retention, expansion and attraction and report back on this Economic Revitalization Strategy. At Council’s direction staff engaged
the resources and expertise of the Vancouver Economic Commission (VEC), the Vancouver Chinatown BIA (VCBIA) and the Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association (VCMA) to develop the plan.

The VEC’s recently released *Vancouver Economic Action Strategy (VEAS)* articulated a plan for creating jobs, cultivating innovation and promoting responsible prosperity in Vancouver. A thriving Chinatown can support job growth by expanding tourism opportunities, creating job space and potentially attracting investment and talent from Asia. Chinatown has the potential to foster innovation and green business by retaining and recruiting local, cultural and socially-responsible businesses. The VEC’s focus on working in partnership and building on existing strengths to create a resilient economy aligns with the approach to economic development currently underway in Chinatown.

**Consultants Findings**

Economic development planners from San Francisco, AECOM, were hired to lead the community consultation, undertake neighbourhood-level research and provide strategic recommendations to the City, VEC, VCBIA and VCMA. The Chinatown community was engaged through a public forum attended by 230 community members, a survey of 77 businesses, interviews with over 40 key stakeholders, and an online feedback forum. AECOM’s recommendations came from analysis of the local and regional economics, direct feedback of the community and their experiences with the revitalization in Chinatowns in other cities.

**Business Climate (key findings from survey of 77 businesses)**

- 64 percent of businesses reported a decrease in revenue over the past three years (08’-11’)
- 43 percent of businesses have been operating for more than 15 years and 23 percent of businesses have been operating less than 5 years
- Client base: 58 percent local residents (Chinatown & Strathcona), 21 percent Lower Mainland residents and 12 percent tourists

**Key Challenges**

- Improve neighbourhood public places, cleanliness and safety to attract locals and visitors, especially the evening and weekend customers
- Existing institutions and organizations do not have the capacity to take on projects requiring significant financial risk
- Aging community leadership group; need to increase the involvement of younger community members in decision-making roles and succession planning
- Old line retailers and restaurateurs need to modernize and broaden their offerings

**Key Strengths and Opportunities**

- Local market area (2 blocks from Pender and Columbia) is growing faster than the city and the region (30% pop. increase - 01/06)
- New residential development in Chinatown; opportunities generated by the Viaducts, False Creek & the Flats
- Cater to new and existing residents (e.g. fresh/organic grocery stores and quality affordable restaurants)
- Demonstrated success of new and more contemporary establishments indicates an opportunity to broaden restaurant and retail offerings
Renovated heritage buildings combined with interesting walkable streets and laneways can be a unique draw for locals and visitors; and more lively streets can combat concerns and negative perceptions about safety.

Community’s Recommended Strategies
AECOM’s findings were presented to Chinatown community partners in December 2011 and specific strategy areas and actions were identified for advancement in the next three years. This is a critical moment for the Chinatown community to work together to ensure that recent positive economic changes continue to build and that the existing communities and cultural organizations are positioned to be part of a strong, sustainable economic future for Chinatown. The main goals of the economic strategy are to modernize and improve the retail and commercial mix, protecting and enhancing Chinatown’s cultural and heritage assets so they can set Chinatown apart from other Asian shopping districts and neighborhoods, and to create interest and appeal in Chinatown’s public spaces through dynamic laneway revitalization projects to attract local and regional customers. Details on the objectives, actions, lead organizations and implementation timelines are outlined below:

Strategy 1. Thriving Business District
Develop tactical tools that will assist merchants and landowners to diversify and intensify the mix of retail/commercial activities in the neighbourhood that will complement the culture of Chinatown, while modernizing the mix to appeal to the growing base of new residents, as well as to a broader customer base across the region including tourism markets. Promote opportunities to attract the growing genre of new technology-based businesses and start-ups that find cultural and even edgy neighbourhoods appealing, and ensure this strategy integrates with initiatives in neighbouring areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPOSED ACTIONS</th>
<th>LEAD ORGANIZATIONS</th>
<th>IMPLEMENTATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tenant Recruitment Strategy</td>
<td>• Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association&lt;br&gt;• Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association&lt;br&gt;• Vancouver Economic Commission</td>
<td>• Research &amp; strategy development late - 2012/early 2013&lt;br&gt;• Implementation - 2013-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenant Retention Strategy</td>
<td>• Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association</td>
<td>• Workshop/outreach - starting Jan. 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism and Marketing Strategy</td>
<td>• Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association (convene Working Group)&lt;br&gt;• Vancouver Chinatown</td>
<td>• Strategy development - late 2012/early 2013&lt;br&gt;• Strategy implementation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Vacant Storefronts Strategy**
Implement a sustainable window improvement program for vacant storefronts in Chinatown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Improvement Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Vancouver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Gardens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 2013/2014

**Strategy 2. Historic Neighbourhood Revitalization**
Retain, revitalize and leverage the unique cultural and heritage assets of Chinatown to provide a long-term economic advantage. Build on the Society Building Planning Grant Program currently offered to Society Heritage Buildings by investigating innovative financing tools to enable the renovation of these key historic and cultural serving buildings. Ensure that the achievement of National Historic Site designation is optimized by identifying marketing, tourism and investment opportunities to be leveraged. Support capacity and youth leadership development within key cultural organizations. Work with community organizations and groups who want to develop culturally appropriate seniors housing in Chinatown to identify future opportunities for collaboration.

**PROPOSED ACTIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEAD ORGANIZATIONS</th>
<th>IMPLEMENTATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restoration of Society Heritage Buildings</td>
<td>• Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimize National Historic Site Designation</td>
<td>• Tourism Vancouver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Development</td>
<td>• Parks Board - Neighbourhood Houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors Housing</td>
<td>• Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strategy 3. Vibrant Public Spaces**
Laneways have a history in Chinatown of being places of commerce and innovation - small hole-in-the-wall restaurants and businesses once flourished on Market Alley, between Pender
Street and Hastings Street. Laneways today offer potential for creative exploration and innovation, to provide dynamic pedestrian connections, new public spaces and in the long-term new retail and commercial spaces. Revitalized laneways can support local businesses by creating something unique and inviting and generating a greater sense of safety for local residents and visitors. Building on all the effort and success in improving the cleanliness of Chinatown over the last decade these efforts need to be sustained while new opportunities for improvement are sought out by the community.

**PROPOSED ACTIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEAD ORGANIZATIONS</th>
<th>IMPLEMENTATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laneway Revitalization Strategy</td>
<td>Laneway Project - implementation spring/summer 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop with the community a strategy for immediate and long-term revitalization of Chinatown’s laneways. Identify specific projects and opportunities for:</td>
<td>Comprehensive Laneway Revitalization Strategy - 2014/2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• temporary street events or installations</td>
<td>• Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• dumpster-free pilot project</td>
<td>• Architecture for Humanity Vancouver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• policy and regulation changes to facilitate retail and commercial uses on laneways</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clean-up public spaces with local businesses</th>
<th>New clean-up project - 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build on existing City and community initiatives to improve neighbourhood cleanliness (e.g. awning improvements, micro-cleaning, Keep Vancouver Spectacular) with additional neighbourhood clean-up events and implement a sustainable program for window displays in vacant storefronts.</td>
<td>Window display program for vacant storefronts - 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LEADERSHIP & IMPLEMENTATION**

The success of the 3-Year Economic Strategy is contingent on commitment, leadership and follow-through from the Chinatown community and the City. As an economic strategy, focused on retaining and attracting local businesses, the key leaders in implementation are the Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association and the Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association. The City and the Vancouver Economic Commission will need to provide strategic support to these organizations as projects are developed and implemented. Other partners who will participate in the development of strategies and projects include, but are not limited to, the Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee, the Chinese Cultural Centre, the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden, SUCCESS, Tourism Vancouver, Chinatown Society Heritage Building Association, the Vancouver Chinatown Foundation and Architecture for Humanity Vancouver. Lead organizations will begin immediately to develop the projects identified in the different strategy areas and these projects will be shared with the broader DTES community through the planning roundtables in the fall of 2012. The action plans will provide useful case studies and concepts to inform the broader discussions underway as part of the Local Area Planning Process.
CONSULTATION

The Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan is the culmination of over a decade of consultation with the community. Consultation events (meetings, briefings, open houses, etc.) number in the hundreds through this time. Periods of intense formal public consultation took place in the lead up to the adoption of the Vision in 2002, the Three-Year Strategy in 2005, and the Historic Area Height Review in 2010/11. In preparation of the Economic Revitalization Strategy the City engaged the community through a public forum attended by 230 community members, a survey of 77 businesses and interviews with over 40 key stakeholders.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As the economic strategies in this report are further developed, staff will bring specific projects requiring capital funding to Council for approval, either through the regular budgeting process or via a stand-alone report. The economic, public realm and heritage and cultural development projects that will be developed through this strategy are potential candidates for allocations from the existing funding in the Downtown Eastside Capital Program. The DTES Capital Program has been a distinct allocation in Capital Plans since 2000 and supports social and economic revitalization and community building objectives across the neighbourhood, including Chinatown. The three principles that have guided allocations from this fund are that candidate projects meet broad Council priorities, leverage funding from other sources and bridge funding gaps, and support strategic revitalization opportunities. Implementation of the economic strategy will proceed within the Community Services Group existing departmental operating budgets.

CONCLUSION

A revitalized Chinatown can be a vibrant community with distinct cultural identity and a strong, resilient and evolving economic base. In the past 125 years since Chinatown’s establishment, the community’s success has been built on its ability to adapt and evolve. Working with the community to implement plans and strategies that enable Chinatown to flourish, while maintaining the neighbourhood’s unique character, will pave the way for Chinatown’s success over the next hundred years.

* * * * *
Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan & Economic Revitalization Strategy

June 2012
Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan & Economic Revitalization Strategy

Contents

Overview 4
Chinatown Vision Statement 7

Neighbourhood Plan

Introduction 8
Chapter 1: Heritage & Culture 15
Chapter 2: Built Form and Urban Structure 23
Chapter 3: Land Use 29
Chapter 4: Public Places and Streets 34
Chapter 5: Community & Economic Development 42

Economic Revitalization Strategy 48

References 54
About the Neighbourhood Plan

Since 2000 the Chinatown planning and revitalization process has worked to address complex community issues through immediate, community-based, action-oriented efforts. This plan reflects over a decade of community and City efforts to identify issues, develop revitalization policy and plans, and implement projects on the ground. As such, the Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan is more than a report card of actions taken, it provides a coherent and comprehensive approach to revitalizing the Chinatown neighbourhood that will guide community planning efforts in the years to come. Vancouver’s Chinatown is one of the largest in North America and regeneration of this neighbourhood is of great significance to neighbourhood residents, the regional population, as well as national and international stakeholders.

About the Economic Revitalization Strategy

In 2010 Council approved the Historic Area Height Review (HAHR) recommendations enabling new residential development in Chinatown. A key objective of this new development was to create a local customer base to support Chinatown’s struggling businesses and draw new investment into the area. Recognizing that “body heat” alone will not solve the issues of vacant storefronts, failing businesses and a negative public image, Council directed staff to work with the local business community to identify short-term and medium-term actions to support business retention, expansion and attraction. The Economic Revitalization Strategy, described in this document, builds on all that has been learned over the last decade of work in Chinatown and identifies the key short-term and medium term actions the community and City should take to ensure that a new, vibrant Chinatown will emerge in years ahead.
Vancouver’s Chinatown is one of the largest in North America. Situated in a region with a high percentage of Chinese-speaking population, Chinatown’s significance in Vancouver reaches far beyond the ten blocks of its physical boundaries.

Vancouver’s Chinatown has always been a place of commerce, community organizing and advocacy. It has also been a place many people called home, metaphorically and physically. The neighbourhood has bore witness to the history, challenges and growth of the Chinese-Canadian community over the past century: the early pioneers’ struggle to establish a home in Canada; the battle for citizenship and voting rights in the 1920s; and the fight against urban renewal and the freeway in the 1960s and 70s. Throughout history, Chinatown continues to adapt, grow and evolve.

The challenges and opportunities that face Vancouver’s Chinatown in the 21st century are different. The historic and cultural significance of Chinatown has since been recognized by Vancouverites of all backgrounds and the Chinese-Canadian communities continue to thrive in all parts of the region. At the same time, Vancouver and the surrounding region are becoming increasingly multi-cultural.

For Chinatown to continue to remain relevant in a more multi-cultural Vancouver, it must strive to connect to younger generations and to reach out to people of all backgrounds. To remain economically competitive, it must do so without losing its culture and heritage - assets that define its identity and set it apart from other neighbourhoods.
The Chinatown Vision is the product of an extensive grass-roots community process supported by action-oriented planning and a close partnership between the City and the community. The 11 Vision Directions developed by the community described Chinatown as:

“a place that tells the history with its physical environment, a place that serves the needs of residents, youth and visitors, and a hub of commercial, social and cultural activities.”

Chinatown Vision Directions

1. Heritage Building Preservation
2. Commemoration of Chinese-Canadian and Chinatown History
3. Public Realm Improvements
4. Convenient Transportation and Pedestrian Comfort
5. A Sense of Security
6. Linkage to the Nearby Neighbourhoods and Downtown
7. Youth Connection and Community Development
8. Attractions for Vancouverites and Tourists
9. A Community with a Residential and Commercial Mixture
10. Diversified Retail Goods and Services
11. A Hub of Social and Cultural Activities
Introduction

I. Historical Overview

Established in the 1880s, Chinatown is one of the two formative communities of Vancouver. This community stands as the vibrant centre of an evolving and enduring culture. The formation of cultural identity through community organizations, the expression of social and cultural history through a distinctive urban and cultural landscape, and the genesis of vernacular architecture are some of the defining characteristics of this lively neighbourhood.

Chinatown speaks to important historical themes in Canada relating to urban immigration and settlement patterns. As one of the original ethno-cultural communities in Vancouver, Chinatown epitomizes the core value of contemporary Canadian society – cultural diversity. It continues to provide numerous social and cultural functions while adapting to change and preserving its historic sense of place. Below are some of the significant moments in Chinatown's history and development.

1880s - 1900: Establishing a Community

In the late 1880s at the conclusion of the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), sojourners attracted by the opportunities in the newly established city, arrived in what was to become Vancouver. Many of Chinatown's earliest residents were railway workers, whose efforts in building the trans-continental railway were recognized as a National Historic Event (1977); 1885, a federal head tax of 50 dollars was instituted; 1887, the presence of a “China Town” at the south end of Carrall Street was noted in local papers; 1889, the construction of the first brick building in Chinatown; 1890s, the construction of the theatre and opera house and the establishment of the Vancouver branch of the Chinese Benevolent Association. An emerging merchant class was established. In 1887 the Chinese population was estimated at 90 but by 1901 the population had risen to almost 2900.

1900 - 1911: Growth and Importance

With the growing importance of Vancouver, Victoria-based Society headquarters moved to Vancouver; 1903, the Empire Reform Association was formed; 1903, head tax was raised to 500 dollars; 1907, a mob charges through Chinatown and Japantown after a meeting of the Asiatic Exclusion League; subsequent reports led to immigration quotas for the Japanese and ultimately to the Chinese Exclusion Act; 1909, the Chinese Benevolent Association building was opened; 1911, Vancouver’s Chinese population of approximately 3500 had surpassed Victoria’s. In this period, Chinatown expanded eastward to Gore and the overall identity of the district was established with the construction of the first of a number of Society buildings, starting with the Chinese Empire Reform Association on Carrall Street. The establishment of the Reform Association and the visits of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen attested to the connection Vancouver’s Chinatown retained with China and the interest and participation in her affairs.
1923 - 1947: Exclusion Act to Enfranchisement

1923 saw immigration to Canada closed for the vast majority of Chinese with the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act on July 1st. Chinatown struggled with families unable to reunite, and an aging bachelor population; 1935, the first of three major music societies was established; 1936, Chinatown celebrated Vancouver's Jubilee by erecting a Chinese Village on the site of today's cultural centre, a turning point in attitudes to the district; 1947, through the efforts of Wong Foon Sien (declared a National Historic Person in 2008) on behalf of Chinese war veterans, the 1923 Act was repealed and Canadian citizenship was granted to Chinese Canadians. The BC legislature returns the right to vote to the Chinese that same year.

1947 - 1966: New Opportunities

With immigration restrictions removed, Chinatown flourished. New and popular restaurants and businesses, attracted citizens from across the city; popular nightclubs such as Forbidden City became part of the city’s social scene; 1957, Chinatown was noted in the City's 25 year plan for downtown as an economic bright spot. In the same year, Canada’s first Chinese-Canadian MP Douglas Jung, was elected in the riding of Vancouver Centre which includes Chinatown. In the 1950s, freeway plans were floated which threaten parts of the district.

1966 - 2012: Freeway Debate to a Chinatown Plan

Rallies and marches drew attention to Chinatown and the threat posed by freeway construction and urban renewal projects. Throughout the 1960s and 70s Chinese organizations fought the redevelopment and freeway proposals; 1971, Chinatown was protected as a historic district along with Gastown under provincial legislation; 1980s, beautification projects were underway; 1981, Chinese Cultural Centre construction began; 1986, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Chinese Classical Garden opened; 2000, the Downtown Eastside Community Development Project starts through the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC); 2001, the Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee is formed; 2002, City Council approves the Chinatown Vision as a blueprint of Chinatown's future and to direct capital investments and projects; 2005 to 2008 the three year action plan for revitalization; 2009 to 2012, completion of the Historic Area Height Review, Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan and development of a 3-Year Economic Revitalization Strategy.

(Source: Chinatown National Historic District Nomination Package, February 2009)
II. Profile of the Neighbourhood

Vancouver and the surrounding region have rapidly grown in the past twenty years. The city has been well-recognized for its achievements in building vibrant mixed-use neighbourhoods that offer quality, high-density living. Vancouver is also recognized by the values shared passionately by its residents, and one of the most important ones is the continued preservation, retention and integration of the city’s historic roots while the city grows.

Within this context, Chinatown and the surrounding areas are a community in transition. Today, Chinatown is situated in a region with a large percentage of Chinese-Canadian population. The significance of this historic neighbourhood’s future reaches far beyond its physical boundaries. While Vancouver values strongly heritage conservation, the preservation of this young city has never been about freezing a place in time. This is particularly true for Vancouver’s Chinatown, whose success throughout history was dependent on its ability to adapt and reinvent itself while maintaining its culture and identity.

Chinatown, like many historic neighbourhoods in other North American cities, have experienced decline due to similar social and economic issues. At the heart of the continued discussion of Chinatown’s future is the delicate balancing of growth, economic opportunities, affordability, heritage conservation and community participation. Other issues also include housing, scale of development, goods and services for the growing population, and Chinatown’s culture and identity in the midst of changes. As one of the largest, most intact Chinatowns in North America, Vancouver’s Chinatown has unique opportunities and challenges in its regeneration. The following section provides some key statistics from Census 2006 of this neighbourhood regarding its built environment and its population.

Chinatown Plan Area

The Chinatown Plan Area covers approximately 10 blocks, totalling 45 acres of land area within the City of Vancouver. The City of Vancouver has a population of 578,000, and is situated within the Metro Vancouver region, the third largest metropolitan area in Canada with a population of 2.1 million. Notably, 25.3% of the City’s population, and 15.3% of the region’s population identified Chinese as their mother tongue.

Chinatown is a centrally located neighbourhood: located east of the downtown peninsula and adjacent to a number of residential neighbourhoods, including historic Strathcona, the newer high-density developments at City Gate, International Village, and the upcoming Northeast False Creek development. Chinatown’s southern boundary is defined by the large structure of the Georgia Street viaduct, remnants of a freeway project that Chinatown helped stall in the 1960s and 70s. It is connected to other neighbourhoods by two main corridors, Main Street and Hastings Street, and is well-served by transit.
Many of its buildings, mostly two to four storeys tall built on narrow lots, were constructed in early 1900s. A number of them are now protected heritage properties and are concentrated along Pender Street (HA-1). HA-1’s Zoning and Development Bylaw generally allows a lower building scale that is compatible with heritage buildings. The HA-1A Zoning District was established in 1994, to encourage more development of low to mid-rise scale in Chinatown South, where fewer heritage buildings are located.

Population, Age, Language

The neighbourhood has always been mixed use with a strong residential base both within Chinatown and the adjacent Strathcona neighbourhood. Up until the 1990s, the residential population in Chinatown declined, leaving many buildings vacant and contributing to the economic challenges of the area.

However, the 2006 Canada Census recorded a significant population growth from 2001. The number of people living in Chinatown nearly doubled from 775 people to 1,420 in this five-year period. This growth can be mainly attributed to a number of larger residential developments at the southern edge of Chinatown. These new residents were also younger in age. in 2006, the age group between 20 to 39 years (31%) is almost as large as the age group between 40 to 64 years (32%). Many Chinatown residents (41%) continue to be of Chinese ethnicity (i.e. identifying their ethnic origin as Chinese according to 2006 census data).

Household Structure and Income

Many residents in Chinatown live in one-person households. The average size of a household in Chinatown is 1.8 persons, compared to 2.2 persons city-wide. The median household income in Chinatown is approximately $17,000, significantly less than that of the whole city. A large portion of the households are considered low income. It should be noted that the large percentage of one-person households affects the median household income figure.
Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dwellings</th>
<th>Chinatown</th>
<th>CoV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rented dwellings</td>
<td>80.20%</td>
<td>51.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average gross rent **</td>
<td>$625</td>
<td>$898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of dwelling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-detached house</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>19.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-detached house</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detached duplex</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>16.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row house</td>
<td>3.50%</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment (&lt; 5 storeys )</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
<td>34.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment (&gt; 5 storeys )</td>
<td>83.50%</td>
<td>24.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of dwelling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>built before 1946</td>
<td>14.50%</td>
<td>18.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>built 1946-1960</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>13.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>built 1961-1970</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>13.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>built 1971-1980</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>13.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>built 1981-1990</td>
<td>3.40%</td>
<td>14.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>built 1991-2000</td>
<td>26.50%</td>
<td>18.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>built 2001-2006</td>
<td>55.60%</td>
<td>8.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chinatown has traditionally been an affordable neighbourhood with a mix of rental, Single Room Occupancy Hotels (SROs), non-market housing and owner-occupied market housing. Over half of the housing units were recently constructed between 2001 and 2006. Another 25.6% of the units were built between 1991 and 2000. There was very little housing built in the half century period between 1946 and 1990. A number of the units (14.5%) constructed before 1946 are still remaining today.

The 2006 census showed that a high percentage (80%) of dwellings in the neighbourhood have remained rented dwellings (i.e. not owner-occupied, which could include dwelling units in SRO, non-market housing and market housing buildings). These units are typically in multi-level apartment buildings, and they offer relatively affordable rents compared to the city average.

In recent years, new market housing units have been developed in Chinatown and have brought more residents to the neighbourhood. In 2012, there are several significant development and rezoning applications in process under the new zoning and development guidelines that resulted from the Historic Area Height Review (2010). If these projects are successful it could result in 500-700 new residents in the next few years; a significant increase in the resident population.

Employment & Incomes

The 2006 unemployment rate in Chinatown was 13.3%, more than twice the figure for the whole city. The average household income in Chinatown was $29,986, compared to City average of $68,271. The neighbourhood has been and continues to be a pre-dominantly low-income community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labour force</th>
<th>Chinatown</th>
<th>CoV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed labour force</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>310,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working at home</td>
<td>8.10%</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in the City, outside the home</td>
<td>17.20%</td>
<td>52.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>13.30%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode of travel to work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car, truck, van as driver</td>
<td>23.40%</td>
<td>51.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car, truck, van as passenger</td>
<td>3.20%</td>
<td>6.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public transit</td>
<td>31.90%</td>
<td>25.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walked to work</td>
<td>30.90%</td>
<td>12.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle</td>
<td>2.10%</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other method</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mode of Travel to Work

Reflecting its central location and accessibility to public transit, a large percentage (64%) of Chinatown’s residents take public transit, walk or bike to work. In contrast, 42.3% of Vancouver residents take public transit, walk or bike to work.

Chinatown Tomorrow

All of this data indicates that Chinatown is a neighbourhood in transition. Central to the search for Chinatown’s future are questions such as: Who is Chinatown for today? Who will be living, shopping and working here in the future? How will the existing low-income community and the new residents define a new vision for the neighbourhood that celebrates and strengthens the cultural and historic fabric while embracing new opportunities?

(Census 2006, Statistics Canada)
III. Planning & Policy

Prior to 2000, a number of policies provided a regulatory framework for development in Chinatown, including policies in the Central Area Plan (1990), and the Chinatown District Schedule and Design Guidelines (1994). Since then, Chinatown has received more intensive planning efforts, which led to a community vision and the comprehensive Chinatown Community Plan.

Chinatown Vision (2002)

In 2000, the Downtown Eastside Community Development Project began with funding support from the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC). The aim of this project was to mobilize the community and bring together community stakeholders to address issues of community safety and economic revitalization.

The Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee (VCRC) was officially formed in 2001, bringing together more than twenty of the area’s social, cultural, residential, and business groups to work with the City on immediate projects and to develop a long-term vision for Chinatown. In 2002, the Vision was brought to City Council for adoption. The Vision served to guide City policy decisions, priorities, budgets and capital plans in the Chinatown community. Implementation of the Vision began immediately with a number of initiatives such as public realm enhancements, business improvement strategies, and the extension of heritage incentives for Chinatown.


At the close of NCPC funding in 2004, Council directed staff to develop a comprehensive planning program, with actions over three years to continue implementation of the Chinatown Vision. A full-time Social Planner dedicated to community development in Chinatown was approved, as part of the work program. The Action Plan included the following key work areas: community and social development, residential intensification, public realm, transportation, cultural development, and economic development.

HAHR & Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan

Since 2009, staff have been working, at Council’s direction, to develop and complete the Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan. One of the most significant pieces of policy work completed during this time was the Historic Area Height Review (HAHR). The objectives of the HAHR were to provide direction for growth and development in the Historic Area; maintain its character and general building scale; and ensure that future new development potential generates public benefits and amenities for the area. Council approved the HAHR Conclusions and Recommendations report in January 2010, and implementing policy and by-law amendments in January 2011. This Plan document provides a summary of the comprehensive array of Council approved policies and directions and relevant community-led projects since 2000. The policies and directions described in this plan are in different stages of implementation and there will be ongoing implementation and monitoring.
IV. Plan Structure

This Plan is organized into five chapters:

1. Heritage and Culture
2. Built Form and Urban Structure
3. Land Use
4. Public Places and Streets
5. Community and Economic Development

Each chapter includes an introduction, a description of community resources and underlying issues and opportunities, key strategies as approved by Council in the Chinatown Vision and Three-Year Action Plan, and a summary of approved Council policies and directions. Policies that have been implemented include an update. This Plan is a summary document and does not intend to replace original policies as adopted by Council. For details, please refer to the original policy documents. A complete list of them can be found in the References section at the end of the Plan.
Vancouver’s Chinatown is a valued cultural and heritage resource. The neighbourhood has an opportunity to become a regional - even global - destination where people can experience Chinatown’s culture and heritage through its architecture, urban life, and festival events. To achieve this, Chinatown needs to respect and protect its cultural assets, and at the same time reach out to the world to make Chinatown relevant not only for Chinese-Canadians, but for everyone.
Chinatown as a Historic Area

Chinatown is one of the city’s founding neighbourhoods. The community began to establish in the area in the 1880s as workers moved into the city after the completion of the railway. Many of the heritage buildings that stand today were built at the turn of the 20th century. Chinatown was recognized as a Provincially-designated Historic Area in 1971. In the 1990s, responsibility for Provincial designation was transferred to the City and Chinatown is now a municipally-designated historic area.

In the 1980s, prompted by the City’s Centennial Celebration, Vancouver developed a Heritage Program to promote conservation and understanding of the City’s valuable heritage resources. This included the first Transfer of Density Policy in 1984 to assist with heritage retention and the adoption of the Vancouver Heritage Register in 1986.

Rich Cultural Assets

Chinatown is known for its rich cultural assets. These include 33 protected heritage buildings, key cultural facilities, and the Chinese Family Associations and Benevolent Society buildings. Many of these assets are concentrated along the Pender Street (HA-1) historic core which is also the area for the National Historic Site nomination. In addition to these physical assets, Chinatown has an active community which organizes many cultural events throughout the year.

Society Heritage Buildings

Chinatown Family Associations and Benevolent Societies (“Society”) represent extensive community networks that have been central to Chinatown’s early establishment. These Societies continue to serve the area’s commercial, cultural and social functions. Twelve of the 33 heritage buildings in Chinatown are owned by Societies.

Community and Neighbourhood Resources

Cultural Assets in Chinatown.
Most of these buildings have not seen major renovation since they were built nearly 100 years ago. Both the architectural character of these buildings and its mix of uses contribute to the character of Chinatown. The building typology typically includes small retail at grade, a mix of community-based uses or housing on the upper floors, and a full floor (typically the top) reserved as the Society meeting hall.

Many buildings also contained courtyards and breezeways which connected the streets and the alleys. These semi-private spaces provided ventilation, light and much needed open space for residents in a dense urban environment. They also contributed to Chinatown’s urban development pattern through intra-block connections to the streets and alleys.

Global Networks

Vancouver is often described as one of the gateways to the Asia-Pacific region and Vancouver’s Chinatown is part of a larger network of Chinatowns. As such, many Societies have chapters in cities around the world, and host regular international conferences with hundreds of participants.

Vancouver is a sister city with Guangzhou, Yokohama and a number of other cities. Many of Chinatown’s organizations have economic and social connections to Asia. There is great potential for Vancouver’s Chinatown to benefit and be one of the centres for coordinating the movement of ideas, people and economic opportunities, including tourism.
### Key Strategies
- Preservation of Heritage Buildings
- Enhance Cultural Facilities
- Encourage Community Programming and Events
- Partner with Academic Institutions

### Council Policies and Directions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.1</th>
<th>Heritage Buildings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Transfer of Density Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Society Buildings Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Chinese Cultural Centre and Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>National Historic Site</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.1 Heritage Buildings

The Vancouver Heritage Register was adopted in 1986 by City Council to inventory properties and sites with architectural and historical significance. The accompanying City-wide Heritage Policies and Guidelines were developed to protect heritage resources and to regulate their alterations and redevelopment. Chinatown has 33 buildings listed on the Heritage Register, 12 of which are owned by Chinese Family Associations and Benevolent Societies.

**East Pender Street in 1970s.**

Chinatown's zoning was revised in 1994 to provide opportunities for growth while protecting the historic core. The neighbourhood was split into two zoning districts: HA-1 for the Pender Street historic core and HA-1A for the remainder of Chinatown (see map on page 8). In addition, responding to the community's desire to stimulate more development in Chinatown, a number of buildings of lesser heritage significance were removed from the Vancouver Heritage Register.

In 2002, to participate in the federal government's Historic Places Initiative, the City retained consultants to develop Statements of Significance for Chinatown as a whole as well as for individual buildings in the area.

**Lion Dancing in Society Hall.**

The Chinatown Statement of Significance is an important tool to enrich public understanding and guide conservation planning of heritage buildings, in addition to the City's Heritage Register and its associated policies and guidelines. The Statement of Significance describes heritage value in a broader sense, including historic, aesthetic, scientific, educational, cultural, social, and spiritual significance. This tool is particularly applicable to Chinatown, a neighbourhood whose heritage value lies not only in its physical environment, but also in its cultural activities and social networks.
1.2 Transfer of Density Policy

In 2002, to facilitate heritage building rehabilitations and to kick-start economic revitalization in the Historic Area, special incentives were developed. The Council-approved Heritage Incentive Programs was initiated in 2003 for a five-year period (2003-2008) for Chinatown, Gastown, Hastings Corridor and Victory Square. These Programs included new provisions for density transfer in addition to the 1984 Transfer of Density Policy. Property Tax Relief and Heritage Façade Improvement Grants were also available as additional incentives.

The Programs were adjusted after the five-year pilot period as increasing numbers of projects seeking density transfer and incentives have contributed to density bank challenges. In 2009, Council approved a series of actions to rebalance the density bank. Council also approved the continuation of the Heritage Façade Rehabilitation Program for three more years (2009-2011).

In 2010, Council approved options to the Transfer of Density Policy and Procedure to allow density to be transferred into or within Chinatown South (HA-1A). This policy allows larger development projects to have the option to assist heritage building rehabilitation projects in Chinatown. The heritage incentives were successful in facilitating rehabilitation and active reuse of heritage properties, especially for privately-owned buildings. In Chinatown, two buildings were fully rehabilitated and two buildings had renovated façades.

1.3 Society Buildings Strategy

Family Associations and Benevolent Societies in Chinatown are typically member-based, non-profit organizations. Many of them have limited financial resources and little development experience. As such, they have not been able to take full advantage of the City’s incentives for heritage buildings rehabilitation. Rehabilitating these buildings is a challenge for both the Societies and the broader community.

To support the community’s effort, in 2008, Council approved the Chinatown Society Buildings Rehabilitation Strategy to support Societies in their heritage conservation planning, implementation and organizational capacity building.

Central to the Strategy was the Society Buildings Planning Grant Program. This Program provided grants for Societies to work with professional consultants to develop rehabilitation policies.
plans specific to their long-term visions, heritage building conditions, programming, and operational needs.

Five Societies have completed their Rehabilitation Plans. A number of Societies are actively pursuing building rehabilitation. Staff will continue to assist the Societies in seeking funding partners, including government and private investors, to realize these projects. Go to Chapter 6: Economic Revitalization Strategy for more information on the recommended next steps to assist Society Buildings.

### Community Development: Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association (CSHBA)

The CSHBA is a non-profit organization established by the Chinatown Societies to support the rehabilitation of Society heritage buildings through information sharing, fundraising and public education. The City supported the establishment of the Association, and continues to liaise with it to implement the Society Buildings Strategy.

The Association serves as a tremendous resource in engaging and building awareness amongst the Societies and the community in general. As a result of the outreach, the Kung Chow Society recently moved their head-quarters back into Chinatown. Other examples of projects City staff and the CSHBA have worked on include: National Historic Site of Canada nomination, a Chinatown Cultural Development Study and the Yue Shan Courtyard renovation project to enhance cultural programming space.

### 1.4 Chinese Cultural Centre and Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden

The Chinese Cultural Centre and the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden are two major cultural facilities in Chinatown. They have a strong physical presence and are central to Chinatown’s identity as a cultural attraction for residents and visitors. Aside from providing educational courses, tours, cultural events and programming, the Chinese Cultural Centre is also a testimony of the community’s activism and dedication to promoting Chinese-Canadian culture. These values are respected and shared by many community members.

*Chinese Class at the Chinese Cultural Centre.*

The Chinese Cultural Centre of Vancouver was founded in 1972 and is currently supported by over 50 community organizations and three levels of government. The Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden Society was established in 1985. The City dedicated a full block of City-owned land in the heart of Chinatown (through a nominal lease) for these facilities. In 2002, the City and Western Economic Diversification of Canada (a federal agency) provided additional capital funding for the expansion of the Garden.

Over the years, the City also invested in a number of major public realm improvements to reinforce this cultural heart of Chinatown, including the Sun Yat-Sen Courtyard upgrade, the Millennium Gate and the Chinatown Memorial Square (see Chapter 5 for more details).
1.5 National Historic Site

Chinatown is a vibrant centre of an evolving and enduring culture. The formation of its cultural identity through community organizations, expression of social and cultural history, and distinctive architecture are some of defining characteristics of this lively neighbourhood.

Chinatown also speaks to important historical themes in Canada relating to urban immigration and settlement patterns. As one of the original ethno-cultural communities in Vancouver, Chinatown epitomizes the core value of contemporary Canadian society: cultural diversity.

In February 2009, Council passed a motion to support the community in its effort to secure United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Heritage Site listing for Vancouver’s Chinatown. As a first step, Chinatown must be recognized as a National Historic Site. Securing both National Historic Site and UNESCO listing would be a great honour to the community’s rich heritage and boost tourism. Moreover, it will help raise public awareness about the national and international significance of Vancouver’s Chinatown, as a bridge between the east and the west across the Pacific Ocean. The nomination package for the consideration of Vancouver’s Chinatown as a National Historic Site of Canada was submitted to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in March 2009.

In the fall of 2011 the Minister of Environment announced the awarding of National Historic Site Designation to Chinatown. Becoming a designated site is a major milestone in raising awareness of the significance of Vancouver’s Chinatown and its heritage assets. Go to Chapter 6: Economic Revitalization Strategy for more information on the next steps to optimize the site designation.
Community Development: Partnership with Academic Institutions

Vancouver’s Chinatown is demonstrating leadership in multi-cultural planning for a diverse community. While its planning process has been positive, drawing attention from Chinatowns in other North American cities, Vancouver has also benefited from studying the best practices on neighbourhood revitalization around the world. Partnerships with academic institutions help build these international connections and bring fresh ideas forward from recognized academics, practitioners and students.

Between 2005 and 2008, working with the University of Washington and the community, City planning staff organized community exchanges with Seattle’s Chinatown International-District for planners and community members to learn from each other’s experiences. Locally, staff and community members have also worked with universities to host a number of conferences and lecture series, including the international conference “Chinatown and Beyond” organized by Simon Fraser University in April 2009.

The School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (SALA) at the University of British Columbia has also been actively involved since 2003. Through the Chinatown Community Studio, university students have the opportunity to work closely with the community on projects such as the building of a three-dimensional Chinatown model to inform public discussions on development and housing.
Vancouver is a rare North American city where its Chinatown remains in its original site. Much of Chinatown’s urban fabric remains intact: a valuable resource that significantly contributes to the neighbourhood’s unique character.

Chinatown has always been a place where new ideas mix with old, and innovations emerge. The existing urban fabric can be enhanced to foster a stronger sense of place while creating opportunities for growth. Specifically, Chinatown can become a place for innovative redevelopment, including heritage rehabilitation, infill and various forms of new construction.
Fine-grain Character

Many of the physical elements that make up Chinatown’s fine-grain fabric are still intact today. Less visible but equally important, the narrow lot pattern and fragmented property ownership continue to influence redevelopment of Chinatown.

The urban fabric in Chinatown consists of narrow lots, human-scale buildings, ornate façades, and shop fronts on the ground floor that animate the sidewalk. Historically, many buildings also had internal courtyards and breezeways, forming an intricate intra-block system that connected streets and alleys. Although many of them were filled overtime, they can be reinterpreted to inform new developments that reflect the historic pattern.

The buildings and their relationship with the streets and alleys not only have heritage value, but also reflect the historical, social, and economic functions of Chinatown and the way it has evolved over time. These features express a Chinatown identity and a sense of place that makes Chinatown unique from other neighbourhoods. This distinctive character is part of Chinatown’s economic advantage, which can attract businesses, investors, residents and visitors.

Height and Scale

Similar to elsewhere in the historic core of Vancouver, Chinatown is a dense neighbourhood. The buildings are generally rectilinear in shape with no setback from the streets. In addition to heritage buildings, the overall coherent scale of the neighbourhood also contributes to Chinatown’s character. Along historic Pender Street (HA-1), 33% of the buildings are on the Vancouver Heritage Register. This compares to 70% in Gastown, and close to 50% in Victory Square. Since a large proportion of buildings in Chinatown are not protected heritage sites, maintaining the scale of development is important in retaining Chinatown’s character.

The streetwall along Pender Street (HA-1) is defined by a variation of lower heritage buildings (two to five storeys) built on narrow lots that create a “sawtooth” pattern. A number of taller buildings (up to nine storeys) on aggregated lots are located in Chinatown South (HA-1A). There is capacity for growth within the Zoning. In general, more redevelopment opportunities can be found in Chinatown South, where a number of larger, aggregated lots are located.
Existing Lot and Development Patterns

Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan & Economic Revitalization Strategy
June 2012

Pender Street (HA-1)

25'  50'  75'  75'+

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heritage Buildings (%)</th>
<th>Avg. Building Height (Storey)</th>
<th>Density (Floor Space Ratio)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>2.1 FSR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chinatown South (HA-1A)

25'  50'  75'  75'+

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heritage Buildings (%)</th>
<th>Avg. Building Height (Storey)</th>
<th>Density (Floor Space Ratio)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33%</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>2.5 FSR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Lots in Each Frontage Category*

(Data Source: Development Database, City of Vancouver, 2009)

*Odd shaped lots are excluded

Development in Chinatown

The 1980s saw a number of significant new developments in the neighbourhood including the establishment of the Chinese Cultural Centre and a number of commercial shopping centres, filling many previously vacant land.

In the 1990s, a number of large community and publicly funded projects were added to the area, including seniors and family housing projects, the Chinatown Plaza and Parkade, and some smaller commercial developments.

Since 2005, the area has seen increased interest in building rehabilitation and new development. There has been a wide range of project types in response to unique development opportunities in Chinatown. Some examples include commercial buildings, non-market housing, new market housing on small and larger lots, and heritage rehabilitation through adaptive reuse.

As the economic conditions of Chinatown and the surrounding area start to improve, and developers utilize the new options under the HAHR, ensuring these policies result in projects that support the heritage, economic and social fabric of the neighbourhood will be important to Chinatown’s future.

Chinatown Plaza and Parkade.

Lore Krill Housing Co-op.
### Council Policies and Directions

#### Key Strategies

- Preserve Chinatown’s character and fine grain development pattern, including public places
- Support small lot and mid-rise development
- Develop a residential intensification strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council Policies and Directions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.1 Chinatown Design Guidelines

The Zoning District Schedule revision and accompanying Design Guidelines developed in 1994 attempted to introduce new development into the historic area at a compatible scale. Chinatown’s Design Guidelines were developed as a tool for a more design-based, contextual approach to neighbourhood regeneration and improved livability. They reflected an increased understanding of the intricacies of neighbourhood fabric, informed by growing public awareness of building with a sense of place.

The design philosophy behind the Guidelines was to not emulate heritage building styles. Instead, the Guidelines encourage respect of the overall massing and scale, while allowing flexibility for contemporary materials and expressions.

The Guidelines also set out expectations for larger lot development to respect Chinatown’s smaller frontage expression, by requiring the division of the ground floor into narrower shopfronts. Several new buildings have been built under the 1994 Guidelines. While some developments were generally compatible with the area, other developments have given expression to larger aggregations that are not in character with the area’s fine-grained historic fabric.

Both staff and community recognized a need to gain a more in-depth understanding of Chinatown’s fine-grain character to facilitate redevelopment on narrow lots and encourage contextual mixing of new and old developments.

In 2011 as part of the Historic Area Height Review, staff were directed to amend the HA-1 and HA-1A design guidelines to reflect the Council approved increased heights, while reinforcing the importance of Chinatown’s sense of place, character, and scale by encouraging heritage rehabilitation, re-use of existing buildings, and high-quality new development. The key revisions included: a new section on design philosophy and principles, changes to the criteria for height, courtyards and rear-yard setbacks to support the increased heights, illustrations and photos to better convey contemporary architectural response in historic Chinatown.

### 2.2 Form of Development

To support Chinatown’s growth, the area’s zoning encourages diverse forms of development, including new construction, heritage, and infill that complement and contribute to a coherent fabric. Low- to mid-rise construction has been the main form of development in the historic area. This form of development is flexible, and can accommodate a variety of building types, lot sizes, and land uses. It can also address adjacency issues with heritage buildings. Low- to mid-rise development enhances and strengthens Chinatown’s urban pattern while accommodating significant growth within the historic area, side by side with heritage and other existing buildings.

As redevelopment on smaller frontage lots is often more challenging due to site constraints, in 2005 Council directed staff to develop a strategy to enable these developments, including removal of barriers in the current Zoning, Design Guidelines, Parking Bylaw, and Building Code Bylaw applicable to Chinatown. Finding a way to unlock the redevelopment potential is critical and practical for the
area’s future growth since many sites are on smaller frontage lots.

In 2010, Council approved mid-rise development remain the primary form for development in the Historic Area, including Chinatown. This form of development complements heritage building rehabilitation, especially considering the area’s existing buildings scale, public realm, smaller lot pattern and the fragmented property ownership pattern.

2.3 Height and Density

In order to support Chinatown’s growth at an appropriate scale, a review of its height and density was undertaken as part of the Historic Area Height Review. The Height Review was directed by Council under the EcoDensity initiative in 2008 and was completed in 2010/11. In January 2010, after detailed technical analysis of urban design, height, density and forms of development in the Historic Area, as well as extensive public consultation, Council approved changes to zoning and development policies to guide growth in the Historic Area, including Chinatown (see map and chart on page 28 for details). Council approved moderate height increases in Chinatown as part of a residential intensification strategy.

There are a number of under-utilized sites in Chinatown such as this surface parking lot in HA-1A that could be redeveloped into more active uses.

This strategy focuses on:

- Better utilization of current building stock, including heritage buildings;
- Encouragement of developments that respond to existing urban development pattern of smaller frontage lots and low to mid-rise scale;
- Ensuring larger projects on consolidated lots integrate well with the prevailing scale and fabric of the neighbourhood; and,
- Allowing density transfers within Chinatown so larger development projects can have the option to assist heritage building rehabilitation projects in Chinatown (see 1.2 on page 19).

Pender Street (HA-1): The maximum discretionary height for Pender Street (HA-1) was increased from 65’
to 75’. Discretionary height requires the approval by the Development Permit Board or the Director of Planning if the project meets a number of conditions, mostly design based. There is no maximum density (Floor Space Ratio) limits on Pender Street (HA-1).

Chinatown South (HA-1A): the maximum height was increased from 70’ to 90’. Similar to Pender Street (HA-1), there is no maximum density (Floor Space Ratio) limits in Chinatown South (HA-1A).

Heigher Heights: A rezoning policy for Chinatown South was also introduced as part of Council’s approval. This policy provides Council the opportunity to consider rezonings up to 120’ throughout HA-1A and up to 150’ within a sub-area of Main Street. The higher buildings in Chinatown were for the specific purpose of economic revitalization while also considering heritage values. These sites are also expected to provide public benefits, and the rezoning policy specifies these benefits should meet the community’s objective of innovative heritage restoration, cultural and affordable housing projects. For every supported higher building, a significantly higher standard of architectural and urban design excellence will be required.

2.4 Public Realm Linkages

The public realm, including parks, plazas, streets and alleys is also part of Chinatown’s fine-grain pattern and provides linkages to neighbourhoods adjacent to Chinatown. The City has invested in a number of capital improvement projects to enhance Chinatown’s public realm, particularly its pedestrian-friendly character. Capital improvement projects such as the historic Shanghai Alley, Suzhou Alley and Canton Alley turned previously neglected spaces into functional places for walking and passive enjoyment.

To further restore the historic intra-block system of courtyards, breezeways and alleyways, the last remaining original courtyard in Chinatown in the Yue Shan Society building was renovated. The courtyard and the breezeways improve visual connections between Pender Street and Market Alley, and set the tone for the future revival of Market Alley. (See Chapter 5 for more details.)

A number of major transportation projects have also been completed to enhance linkages between Chinatown, Downtown and the surrounding neighbourhoods. The Carrall Street Greenway connects Chinatown, Hastings Street and Gastown to the waterfront recreation loop. The Silk Road was developed as a historic walking corridor between Chinatown and Library Square. (See Chapter 5 for more details.)
Historically, Chinatown had many small buildings on narrow lots that were between two to five storeys tall, with commercial and retail on the ground floor, often with housing or offices on the upper floors. The compactness and smaller scale of these buildings reflected the area’s economy, which mainly consisted of locally-owned small enterprises.

Protecting this established mix of uses will help maintain Chinatown’s unique character. The neighbourhood also has an opportunity to help meet the city’s housing needs while retaining its own function as a vibrant hub of social, cultural, and commercial activities.
Land Use Changes

Chinatown has always been a mixed-use neighbourhood providing basic goods and services, professional services, restaurants on Pender Street, housing, warehousing and manufacturing in the southern blocks. Essentially, everything one would need in their daily life could be found in this compact and complete neighbourhood. It was a vibrant neighbourhood with activity day and night.

Land uses have remained diverse in Chinatown, and the neighbourhood still retains its role as an important node for commercial and cultural activities. The top land use categories in Chinatown include basic goods and services, cultural and community uses (including offices and meeting halls for family/clan organizations and community groups), restaurants and specialty retail.

A land use survey showed that between 1970 and 2000, while uses such as basic goods and services remained stable, other uses have changed. Most notable was that restaurants and hospitality uses declined from 35 lots in 1980 to 28 lots in 2000. At the same time, specialty retail increased from 14 lots in 1972 to 30 lots in 2000. These land use fluctuations reflected competition from other commercial nodes in the region and the changing functions of Chinatown.

Population and Housing

Chinatown, like Gastown and Victory Square, is a mixed-use area with both commercial and residential uses. Historically, there was a larger population base in Chinatown and in the adjacent neighbourhood of Strathcona which supported Chinatown’s economy. Up to the 1990s, the residential population within the Chinatown Plan Area declined and the upper floors of many buildings were left vacant as residents moved out. However, adjacent Strathcona continues to be a residential neighbourhood with many families, Chinese seniors and young couples. The population in areas within walking distance of Chinatown, including International Village and City Gate, has increased significantly with the development of a number of new residential towers.

Population in 2006 by Subarea in Downtown Eastside

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subarea</th>
<th>2006 Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gastown</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victory Square</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strathcona</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornton Park</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppenheimer</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the 1990s, a number of non-market housing projects were built in Chinatown. Block 17 at the southwestern corner of Chinatown (bounded by Keefer Street, Pender Street, Taylor Street and Carrall Street) was redeveloped. As a result, the population in the Chinatown Plan Area nearly doubled (from 770 to 1395 people) between 2001 and 2006. Specifically, the portion of the population between 20 and 39 years in age saw the biggest increase.
Jobs and Economy

The Downtown Eastside historic area, including Chinatown, contains a significant amount of commercial space, primarily consisting of retail, restaurants and character offices. According to the Metro Core Jobs and Economic Land Use Plan (2007), the area provided a total of 10,480 jobs. While the growing number of residents in the historic area supports local businesses, particularly in the evening and weekends, maintaining jobs in the area is also important as office workers not only work, but often shop in the area. Protecting jobs in the area has the dual benefits of creating a stronger customer base and supporting the neighbourhood’s economy.

In Chinatown, a significant amount of commercial spaces particularly on the upper floors, are currently vacant. In addition to residential intensification, commercial uses can also be increased to take advantage of available spaces. Chinatown has relatively low lease rates compared to other parts of the downtown, which could make it more attractive for smaller, start-up companies.

(Census 2006, Statistics Canada)
3.1  A Mixed Use Neighbourhood

The Chinatown Vision described Chinatown as a mixed-use neighbourhood with a range of commercial, retail, and cultural uses to serve both residents and visitors. To support its role as a commercial centre, a number of revitalization initiatives have been completed. These initiatives strengthen the diversity of the area’s retail goods and services and attract new customers through improved marketing and promotions. The Active Storefront Program approved by Council, and other community-led projects are examples of economic initiatives (See pages 30 and 34 for more details).

As a social and cultural hub, Chinatown features many cultural assets. The Society Buildings Strategy and enhancements of key cultural facilities discussed in Chapter 1 aim to strengthen these resources (See pages 15 and 16 for more details). Staff also worked with the community to attract media groups, including Channel M, to locate in Chinatown, and build partnerships with academic institutions as identified in the Vision.

As a complete, mixed-use neighbourhood, Chinatown is also a place for residents. Increasing the residential population in Chinatown helps fill under-utilized buildings and support businesses. Policies for a sensitive residential intensification strategy are discussed in 3.2 Diverse Housing Mix.

3.2  Diverse Housing Mix

As land for development in the City’s downtown core becomes less available, Chinatown is well-positioned to receive new residents, especially those who enjoy the convenience of a compact, central neighbourhood that is well served by transit. A residential intensification strategy is included in the Historic Area Height Review recommendations as discussed in Chapter 2.

Chinatown has traditionally been an affordable neighbourhood, with a mix of rental, SROs, non-market housing and limited owner-occupied market housing. To protect the existing low-income housing stock and to encourage new housing types in Chinatown, the Downtown Eastside Housing Plan and Chinatown Vision outlined the following two directions: replace existing SROs with better quality housing targeted to low-income and aging residents and encourage market housing with a focus on affordable market rental and ownership housing.
Since Chinatown is an established neighbourhood, it is anticipated that new housing will continue to be realized in multiple ways: infill, active reuse of heritage buildings, and redevelopment on consolidated sites.

The Single Room Accommodation (SRA) Bylaw was enacted in 2003 to regulate the rate of change in the supply of low income housing in the downtown core (including Chinatown). Chinatown's Zoning District Schedule was revised in 2003 to allow seniors' supportive housing.

In the past ten years, there has also been an increased diversity in housing types in Chinatown. A number of housing projects were completed. These include three social housing and one seniors' supportive housing project. In recent years, under favourable economic conditions for the development of market residential, there have been a number of new market housing projects underway, ranging from small projects with three to four units to larger projects with over 70 units.

Between 1998 and 2009, the total number of residential units has increased from 764 units to 1379 units. The related increase in population was reflected in the 2006 Census (See page 27). The number of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units has remained stable. However, with respect to proportions of housing types, while SROs comprised of over half of Chinatown's housing in 1998, they now represent 37% of the area's housing, as other types of housing were added to the area. In 2012, Staff are working to implement the Downtown Eastside Housing Plan via the DTES Local Area Planning Process currently underway.

### 3.3 Broad Range of Allowable Uses

Chinatown’s mixed-use nature is reflected in the area’s zoning. As described in Chinatown’s HA-1 and HA-1A Zoning District Schedule, the area is unique in the ways it accommodates a wide variety of uses in a very compact area with a degree of tolerance and flexibility not found in all parts of the city.

Recognizing the area’s character, the Central Area Plan (1991) confirmed Chinatown as a “choice of use” area where a wide mix of land uses would continue to be permitted. Specifically, the intention was to allow flexibility in permitting land uses that could be easily accommodated in existing buildings, or new buildings of a compatible scale, to help preserve the heritage character and encourage active reuse and rehabilitation of heritage buildings.

### Addressing Vacant Storefronts Issues

Attracting stable and viable businesses into Chinatown is a significant issue, since the area has a number of vacant storefronts. A 2009 field survey in the historic core of Chinatown indicated ten vacant storefronts in the 100 and 200 blocks of East Pender Street (between Columbia Street and Gore Avenue). Compounding the issue is that business tenants often cycle through different storefronts in search of lower rents. This creates unhealthy internal competition, decreases the quality of goods and services offered in Chinatown, and creates a sense of instability in the business environment.

In 2009, Council approved the Chinatown Active Storefront Program to activate six vacant storefronts. The Program focuses on recruitment of new businesses, especially businesses that are more dependent on the unique character and identity of the area. As a result of this Program, a new restaurant featuring a special type of Chinese cuisine targeted to a wider audience has opened in Chinatown. In addition to this Program, staff have been working closely with local business organizations and individual merchants on a number of economic revitalization initiatives (see Chapter 4 & 6 for more details).
The Chinese New Year Parade is one of the best known public events in Chinatown. Every year, thousands of Vancouverites and visitors fill the streets, balconies and rooftops of buildings in Chinatown to take part in the parade. Special events and daily activities in public places are an essential part of urban life and contribute towards the community’s identity and sense of pride.

Public places are used for both day and night-time events. Chinatown, like Granville Street, was once known for its vibrant night life and associated colourful neon signs. There are many opportunities to enhance Chinatown’s character and re-define its night-time image through ambient and neon lighting.
Public Realm in Chinatown

The quality of a neighbourhood’s public realm - the shared spaces that people use to get around, to meet, to shop and celebrate - plays a key role in a neighbourhood’s identity and livability. The public realm, including streets, alleys, plazas and squares, ties a community together, both physically and metaphorically. Public spaces also provide relief from Chinatown’s urban environment and are affordable venues for non-profit and cultural organizations to host events and performances. In addition, public spaces are some of the most visible elements of the neighbourhood. Improving them through physical upgrades and enhanced programming can have a positive impact on the community and strengthen its appeal to residents, visitors, and tourists.

Since 2000, many public places have been upgraded within Chinatown. These projects not only commemorate the history of Chinatown but also strengthen its cultural identity and create opportunities for many community organizations to work together.

Downtown Transportation Plan

Chinatown is part of the city’s core and its transportation needs are looked at as part of downtown. The Downtown Transportation Plan (DTP) is a comprehensive plan for ensuring that Vancouver’s city centre remains a thriving commercial centre and one of the easiest and most pleasant downtowns to get to and around in, whether by walking, biking, transit, or driving. In conjunction with land use planning, the goal of the DTP is to accommodate more people travelling to the downtown without having to increase road capacity.
Major Streets

The street network in Chinatown reflects its historic roots as one of the original neighbourhoods in Vancouver. The streets are organized in an orthogonal grid typical of most historic neighbourhoods built around the late 19th century. Blocks were bisected by 20’ (6 m) wide laneways, which not only supported servicing and delivery, but were historically lined with commercial shopfronts and access to apartments blocks. The street right-of-way (measured from property line to property line) is typically 66’ (20 m) in width, including a wide sidewalk that can accommodate pedestrian activities. The scale of the streets, the buildings, and the pedestrian interface at ground floor, all contribute to Chinatown’s unique sense of place and its pedestrian-friendly nature.

Pender Street is the high street of the neighbourhood with specialty retail and restaurants. It is part of the Downtown Historic Trail - Silk Road. Other east-west streets, including Keefer, Georgia and Union Streets also support Chinatown’s commercial function, lined with shops and sidewalk merchandise displays. North-south routes including Carrall Street, Main Street and Columbia Street are important transportation routes for Chinatown.

Streets are also the stages for community activities unfold, such as special events, ceremonies, processions and demonstrations. Examples include the Chinatown Night Market and the Chinese New Year Parade.

Courtyards and Squares

In addition to the streets, courtyards and squares in Chinatown provide venues for gathering and entertainment. The Sun Yat-Sen Courtyard in the Chinese Cultural Centre complex has an intimate atmosphere and is suitable for smaller scale programming. In contrast, the Chinatown Memorial Square at Keefer Street and Columbia Street is a larger civic plaza suitable for regional events, such as the summer Chinatown Festival and the Night Market.

Historically, many buildings in Chinatown had internal courtyards and breezeways providing additional connections between buildings and much needed open space, light, and air into buildings constructed on narrow lots. Overtime, many of these semi-private open spaces were filled in, and the last remaining original courtyard in Chinatown today is in the Yue Shan Society building.

Alleyways

In the historic area, alleyways were not only for practical functions such as garbage and recycling pick-ups, loading, and access to parking. Alleyways were also bustling places, with customers visiting laundry services, shoemaker shops, and restaurants. Residents also accessed their apartments from the alley. Shanghai Alley and Canton Alley had special significance as the “birth place” of Chinatown. Market Alley was intimately linked with the City’s early history: it was named after the city market that operated in the old City Hall building, also known as “Market Hall” on Main Street near Hastings Street.

The lane that runs two blocks east-west between Pender Street and Hastings Street from Main Street to Carrall street was known as Market Alley from the early 1880s and was a busy place for shopping.

Public Realm in Chinatown.
Key Strategies

- Provide capital improvement to enhance key public places and streets
- Build linkages to surrounding neighbourhood
- Assist local community and cultural organizations in event and festival programming in public spaces

5.1 Cultural Markers

Public places and streets present opportunities for heritage and cultural commemoration. For example, cultural landmarks can serve as reference points in one’s mental map of a neighbourhood and can become a source of community pride. Many of these projects were made possible with extensive fundraising by the community and funding from three levels of governments through the Vancouver Agreement.

Millennium Gate

The Millennium Gate marks an important entry into Chinatown on East Pender Street at Taylor Street. The Gate was undertaken by the Vancouver Chinatown Millennium Society with funding from three levels of governments to commemorate of Chinatown’s past and celebrate of its entrance to the new millennium. The design was inspired by classical Chinese gates and expresses authentic character through its carefully determined proportions, colour and design motif.

Chinatown Memorial Square

The Chinatown Memorial Square, formerly known as Keefer Triangle, was created in 1995 in conjunction with the construction of the Chinatown Plaza and Parkade and the diversion of Keefer Street to its current alignment. The site was designed to provide an attractive pedestrian-friendly public space with a hard-surfaced, flexible public open space with trees. A sculpture was installed in 2001 to commemorate the historic contributions made by Chinese veterans and rail workers. The Square has since been used for many civic celebrations, including Canada Day and Remembrance Day services for Chinese veterans.

Shanghai Alley Bell and History Panels

To commemorate the “birthplace of Chinatown”, a replica of a Han Dynasty bell was brought to Shanghai Alley. The Alley was repaved and nine history panels were installed.
5.2 Linkages to Adjacent Neighbourhoods

As part of the implementation of the Downtown Transportation Plan, a number of projects that enhance transportation access to Chinatown have been implemented, including the Carrall Street Greenway, Silk Road and the Main Street Transit Showcase Project. The Council approved street-car route connects downtown, Chinatown, the Southeast False Creek Olympic Village and Granville Island. The station in Chinatown is planned at Keefer Street and Columbia Street, adjacent to the Chinatown Memorial Square.

Main Street Transit Showcase Project

The implementation of this project has been completed in Chinatown. The work included upgrading existing infrastructure (including the repair of sidewalks and reconstruction of ramps) and installing new benches and pedestrian bulges at the corners of Keefer and Main Streets, and Pender and Main Streets. These upgrades improve pedestrian comfort and enhance Main Street’s role as a transportation corridor in Chinatown and in Vancouver.

Silk Road

Silk Road is part of the Downtown Historic Trail, linking Chinatown’s historic core along Pender Street and Keefer Street through the Keefer Steps to the Vancouver Public Library. This project is important in building pedestrian linkages and facilitating movements of people between Chinatown and Downtown.

5.3 Courtyards and Alleyways

The preservation of Chinatown’s heritage environment also requires the protection of the neighbourhood’s public realm, including its courtyards and alleyways.

Suzhou Alley

Suzhou Alley was built as part of the redevelopment of Block 17 (the current location of the Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association, the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Senior Care Home and the market residential development at 550 Taylor Street). Suzhou Alley is a greened pedestrian walkway that links Shanghai Alley through a mid-block crossing across the Carrall Street Greenway to the Chinese Cultural Centre.
Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Courtyard

This Courtyard is located at the centre of the Chinese Cultural Centre and Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden. It links these key cultural facilities and is a place for many cultural and recreational community events. In 2001, staff from the City and the Board of Parks and Recreation worked with the community to upgrade the courtyard to encourage more programming. The courtyard was transformed from an under-used grassy area to a paved courtyard that is more in line with traditional Chinese landscape architecture. Phase 2 of the upgrade was completed in 2008, including additional lighting, a sound system and a movable performance stage. These improvements allowed more active use of this space, including outdoor fundraising galas, movie nights, hip-hop dance competitions and the annual Chinatown Arts and Cultural Festival.

Projects such as this help improve the visual and physical connections between Pender Street and Market Alley. The Yue Shan Courtyard upgrade was completed in early 2010. The first community event drew many visitors, and demonstrated how these formerly neglected spaces could be turned into active gathering places for community enjoyment. The upgrade not only increases the recognition of this unique historic place, it also sets the tone for commercial revitalization of Market Alley in the future.

5.4 Convenient Transportation and Pedestrian Comfort

It is important to have appropriate infrastructure to support all modes of transportation including walking, cycling, public transit and driving. Chinatown has an adequate supply of on-street and off-street parking to support daily business functions and special events. Specifically, the City of
Vancouver purchased the Chinatown Plaza and Parkade in 2006, a commercial building with approximately 1000 parking stalls, to secure public parking for shoppers and visitors. As part of the Implementation of the Downtown Transportation Plan, Union Street at Main Street was re-stripped to make biking more attractive, safe and comfortable for riders.

Providing clear wayfinding and better pedestrian amenities are also part of the comprehensive transportation strategy to make Chinatown more convenient and accessible. Working with the community, the City has installed character street lights specially designed to reflect Chinatown’s character. New bus shelters, benches, and garbage bins were also installed. Street signs in Chinatown are bilingual, and new directional signage were added to bring more people into Chinatown.

The bilingual sign incorporates traditional and contemporary design elements and ideas from the community. The installation of the sign has already generated interest from individual merchants to reintroduce neon signs to their business storefronts (See page 30 for more details).

5.5 Ambient and Neon Lighting

Exuberant, colourful neon lighting and associated night-time businesses on Pender Street in the 1950s and 1960s became one of the defining images of the community in its prime: a lively 24/7 hub.

Various factors, including economic decline, changes in choice of advertising methods from neon signs to awnings and Sign Bylaw changes, led to the decline of neon signs in Chinatown. However, there has been steady interest from the community to find ways to bring colour and lighting back to help create a lively evening atmosphere.

Chinatown Plaza Neon Sign

In 2009, Council approved the installation of a prominent five-storey neon sign at the intersection of Keefer Street and Quebec Street. This new neon sign marks Chinatown Plaza, a city-owned commercial building, and improves lighting in the surrounding blocks. Strategically located near key attractions, including the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Garden and the Chinatown Memorial Square, this sign contributes to making Chinatown an exciting place at night.

“African Arts Day” at the Chinatown Arts and Cultural Festival.
Multicultural Programming

The planning of physical improvements and cultural events have also built working relationships amongst Chinatown and other Downtown Eastside groups. For example, the annual Chinatown Arts and Cultural Festival and Chinese New Year Parade, are multi-cultural events that strive to involve the participation of different cultural groups. The Chinese New Year Parade grows every year as more groups of diverse cultural backgrounds join, including Aboriginal groups.

Inter-generational Programming

The Chinatown Vision identified the importance of engaging younger generations to ensure Chinatown will continue to be vibrant in the future. The community has taken leadership on inter-generational programming. ChinatownNext, a youth group formed under the Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee, has been working since 2004 years with existing Chinatown organizations to integrate youth-oriented programming and encourage youth volunteerism at events.

Community and business organizations have also demonstrated leadership in incorporating inter-generational programming, such as the Youth Talent Showdown during the annual summer Chinatown Festival. Recent Chinatown Festivals programs had strong youth participation: the 2009 Festival had over 200 youth volunteers and youth programming expanded into the later evening-hours for the first time.

Other events organized by the community that catered to a younger audience include dodge ball tournaments, Youth Zone at the annual Chinatown Night Market, and an outdoor movie night called “C-Town Summer Cinema”. The City has been supporting the community’s effort in youth engagement through staff involvement and grants.

“B-Boy and B-Girl Battle” at the Chinatown Festival.
Small enterprises and community and cultural activities form the core of Chinatown’s economy, drawing residents, visitors and tourists to the area. Further, community and cultural organizations bring their constituents into the neighbourhood regularly and during special events, supplying a client base for local businesses.

Chinatown’s active community is one of its biggest assets. On-going collaboration between community and government to enhance and diversify the neighbourhood’s economic base, is key to Chinatown’s future. Improving the local economy is a critical issue at this time.
Changing Client Base for Chinatown

Since Chinatown’s establishment in the 1880s, the residential pattern of the Chinese Canadian community shifted from one solely concentrated in Chinatown and Strathcona to one being dispersed to other urban and suburban neighbourhoods throughout the Lower Mainland. Changes in commercial activities soon followed and Chinatown lost its position as the only centre for Chinese-Canadian goods and services. While these trends presented some challenges, Chinatown has many unique features that can help re-brand the neighbourhood. Some of these include its heritage environment and many long-time businesses that have become icons of the neighbourhood and inspirations for new businesses. The new businesses that opened in the recent years in Chinatown are often new interpretations of traditional services offered by Chinatown, including hair salons, clothing stores and restaurants. New businesses not only diversify Chinatown’s economy, but at the same time enhance its character. They also highlight Chinatown’s potential to reposition itself as a local and regional commercial node.

Markets, Shops, and Restaurants

The commercial activities in Chinatown are very diverse and clustered in different parts of the neighbourhood. East of Main Street has a variety of businesses that attract clients to dine and shop on a regular basis, including produce and seafood markets, barbecue and fresh meat shops, and bakeries. The colourful merchandise display that often spills out onto the street, and the sounds and the street-side activities they generate are all important parts of Chinatown’s character. There are a number of accountants and insurance offices, dental and medical clinics, Chinese herbal shops, hair salons, and financial institutions, providing professional and health services by Chinese speaking staff catering to their clientele. The heritage buildings and the character retail spaces in Chinatown are particularly attractive to new entrepreneurs who are seeking to enhance their character and uniqueness. Restaurants, clothing stores featuring local designers, specialty furniture stores, and shops selling cultural products have begun to locate along Pender Street west of Main Street, reinforcing the emerging role of Pender Street as the cultural heart of Chinatown.
Festivals, Events, and Tourism

As recognized in the Chinatown Vision, tourism has been identified as part of the neighbourhood's new economy, centered on Chinatown's culture and heritage. To build on the success of existing attractions, such as the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden, the City invested in building cultural markers in the public realm including the Millennium Gate, Memorial Square, and Heritage Bell in Shanghai Alley with story panels to commemorate history and support educational and cultural tourism.

The Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden is a major tourist draw in Chinatown. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden.)

Chinatown hosts many festivals that attract not only local residents, but regional and international visitors. The Chinese New Year parade is one of the biggest events in Vancouver, bringing thousands of spectators each year. Events such as the Arts and Culture Festival strive to include multi-cultural programming to complement traditional Chinese arts. The Chinatown Festival and the summer Night Market along Keefer Street have also grown in popularity and continue to attract clients into Chinatown.

Rows of barbequed ducks on display at a meat shop.

Community Organizations

The many cultural activities in Chinatown are organized by community groups, reflecting the diversity and leadership in Chinatown’s revitalization. A number of prominent community and cultural groups are located on historic Pender Street, including Chinatown Societies, the Chinese Cultural Centre, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. and the Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association. There are also many agencies providing health, education and welfare support services to Chinatown and Downtown Eastside residents.

The Chinatown community, through the planning process, identified a perception that the area is not for the young. Drawing youth back to the community will help revitalize the community and develop the next generation of leaders. Community organizations including the Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee (VCRC), S.U.C.C.E.S.S., the Chinese Cultural Centre and the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden Society have taken the lead to develop youth programs focussing on leadership training and volunteerism. The business community in Chinatown has also devoted significant effort to include youth orient-ed programming into special events such as the Youth Talent Showdown during the annual Chinatown Festival.

Community organizations provide much needed services and bring their constituencies into the neighbourhood on a regular basis.
Key Strategies

- A community development approach to economic and cultural revitalization
- Develop an economic strategy to build a holistic Chinatown experience, including:
  - Marketing and promotion
  - Business improvement
  - Public realm enhancement
  - Residential intensification

Council Policies and Directions

4.1 Business Improvement Area Program
4.2 Community Development
4.3 Vancouver Agreement

4.1 Business Improvement Area (BIA) Program

The City of Vancouver’s Business Improvement Areas Program was established to assist communities in local economic development. BIAs are non-profit associations of property owners and merchants. At the request of area property owners and merchants, City Council enacts a by-law to establish the BIA, its boundaries, and collects a special property tax on behalf of the BIA. The entire amount of the tax collected is remitted to the BIA’s governing board as part of their annual budget to carry out projects. The City also assists by providing staff liaison who provide contacts between the BIA and City departments, facilitate the funding and renewal process and monitor BIA budgets.

As part of the community development work in Chinatown, staff worked with local merchants and property owners to establish the Chinatown Business Improvement Area Society in 2000, which was approved by Council for an initial five year term. In 2004, with assistance from the Vancouver Agreement, the Chinatown Business Improvement Area Society reached out to their membership to prepare for renewal of the BIA. The Chinatown BIA Society was renewed in 2009. Over the years, the City had partnered with the Chinatown BIA and other business organizations on a number of projects, including the development of a Chinatown logo, staff training, “We Speak English” campaign, special events and the development of a Chinatown Marketing Plan.

While Chinatown will continue to have a role in providing Asian goods and services for the Chinese-Canadian population, the neighbourhood also has an opportunity to diversify its economy. For example, the population within Chinatown has doubled since 2001, and a number of residential projects were also added to the periphery of Chinatown. Census data from 2006 showed that more than half of Chinatown’s population does not speak Chinese at home.

Specifically, the Chinatown Marketing Plan (2003) identified the importance of attracting four emerging client groups: local residents and workers; local visitors; tourists; and, youth and seniors. The community also identified the need to retain existing businesses and recruit viable new businesses, particularly those that can benefit from and enhance Chinatown’s character. A number of new businesses with non-Asian-specific goods have recently opened in Chinatown to capture these emerging economic opportunities. However, vacant storefronts and lack of new investment continues to be a significant challenge for Chinatown.

![Chinatown Logo](image)

(Census 2006, Statistics Canada)
4.2 Community Development

As part of the Downtown Eastside Community Development Project, in 2001, Council directed staff to assist the community in building partnerships and working together. The Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee (VCRC) was established to coordinate revitalization projects (see below). The City assigned a Chinatown Planning Team, including a full-time social planner, to liaise with VCRC and other organizations. This community development approach was important in building working relationships and generating changes with visible results in the short-term.

Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee

The Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee (VCRC) was officially formed in January 2001 to bring together more than twenty of the area’s social, cultural, resident and business groups to work with the City to develop short-term revitalization plans, a long-term vision for Chinatown, and strategies to implement the vision. The VCRC was instrumental in the development of the Chinatown Vision, which was approved by Council in 2002 as the blueprint for Chinatown’s regeneration.

The VCRC has been key to encouraging diverse groups to work together and build partnerships with governments and private funders. The VCRC was also critical in establishing a youth committee, ChinatownNext, to work on inter-generational programming and youth engagement. The Committee has worked on many revitalization initiatives, and continues to monitor the implementation of the Chinatown Vision.

The VCRC includes representatives from:

- Chinatown community organizations
- Chinese Benevolent Association and other Chinatown Societies
- Chinese Community Policing Centre
- Chinese Cultural Centre
- Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden
- Chinese Military Museums
- S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
- Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association

4.3 Vancouver Agreement

The Vancouver Agreement is an urban development initiative involving three levels of government: Canada, the Province of British Columbia and the City of Vancouver. The Agreement began in March 2000 for an initial five-year term and was renewed until March 31, 2010. It commits government partners to work together with communities and businesses in Vancouver on a coordinated strategy to promote and support sustainable economic development with targeted investments.

The Downtown Eastside Economic Revitalization Plan (2005) developed under the Vancouver Agreement, outlined a strategy to increase demand for Chinatown’s goods and services (e.g. marketing campaign and residential intensification), strengthen the capabilities of businesses (e.g. customer service training and business improvement), and improve the area’s physical appearance (e.g. public realm projects).

These directions, and with the support from the Vancouver Agreement, the City worked closely with the Chinatown community to implement a number of public realm and business improvement initiatives, as identified in the Chinatown Marketing Plan. The targeted investments through the Vancouver Agreement served as catalysts to improve the area and attract new investments (see project examples on page 36).
Chinatown Economic Development Projects

A number of projects have been implemented through the City in partnership with a wide range of community organizations. These projects were often made possible with the support from the Vancouver Agreement. Projects were developed in different areas to build a holistic Chinatown experience, from increasing promotion, better business services and provision of goods, a more attractive public realm, and promotion of culture and heritage. Examples of these projects are highlighted below.

Marketing, Promotion, and Tourism

- Chinatown Marketing Plan
- Chinatown Communications Strategy
- Chinatown Logo
- Chinatown familiarization tour for tourism industry and tour operators
- “Shopping in Chinatown” pamphlets and newspaper inserts
- Promotion of Chinatown Night Market and Chinatown Festival

Business Improvement and Diversification

- Bilingual Campaign and “We Speak English Campaign”
- Customer service training initiatives
- Window Display competition project
- “Dragon Rickshaw Adventures” Pedicab
- Awning Replacement Program
- Chinatown Active Storefront Program

Public Realm Improvements

- Street lights, street furniture, way-finding signs, improvements to key public places for events and programming (See Chapter 5)
- Chinatown Murals
- Enhanced transportation including Main Street Showcase, Carrall Street Greenway, renaming of Stadium-Chinatown Skytrain Station, Silk Road, and the future street car line
- Establishment of new cultural markers, including Millennium Gate, Shanghai Heritage Alley, and Memorial Square.
- Chinatown Plaza Neon lighting project

Heritage and Cultural Promotion

- Incentive Programs for heritage buildings renovation
- Chinatown Heritage Map Guides
- Arts and Cultural Festival
- Youth-oriented programming

Art students working on the Window Display Project. (Photo courtesy of Chinatown BIA Society.)
Over the last decade, the City and the Chinatown community have worked together to encourage revitalization through public realm improvements, community and economic development projects, and by creating building opportunities to increase the resident customer base to support existing businesses and generate investment in the neighbourhood. These efforts are now bearing fruit and early signs of revitalization are emerging in the form of development applications and new businesses. Yet the challenges for the local economy remain significant, with a high number of vacant storefronts in rundown buildings, failing businesses and a negative public image of Chinatown as unsafe and out of date.

This is a critical moment in the evolution of Chinatown to ensure revitalization continues, is socially and economically sustainable, and maintains and renews the cultural and heritage fabric of the neighbourhood. The Economic Revitalization Strategy, described here builds on all that has been learned over the last decade of community development work in Chinatown and identifies the key short-term and medium term actions to support the development of a new, vibrant Chinatown in the years ahead.
BACKGROUND

In 2010 Council directed staff to identify economic revitalization strategies with a particular focus on immediate actions for business retention, expansion and attraction. At Council’s direction staff engaged the resources and expertise of the Vancouver Economic Commission (VEC), the Vancouver Chinatown BIA (VCBIA) and the Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association (VCMA) to develop the plan.

Objectives

- Focus on actions that can be implemented in one or two years
- Support existing organizations in promoting Chinatown
- Engage the community in plan development and implementation
- Create a sense of excitement to attract investors and customers

Consultants Findings

Economic development planners from San Francisco, AECOM, were hired to lead the community consultation, undertake neighbourhood-level research and provide strategic recommendations. The Chinatown community was engaged through a public forum attended by 230 community members, a survey of 77 businesses, and interviews with over 40 key stakeholders. AECOM’s recommendations came from analysis of the local and regional economics, direct feedback of the community and their experiences with the revitalization in Chinatowns in other cities.

Business Climate (key findings from survey)

- 64 percent of businesses reported a decrease in revenue over the past three years (08-11)
- 43 percent of businesses have been operating for more than 15 years and 23 percent of businesses have been operating less than 5 years
- Client base: 58 percent local residents, 21 percent Lower Mainland residents and 12 percent tourists

AECOM synthesized the economic analysis, community feedback and survey findings and identified the following issues:

Challenges

- Chinatown needs to modernize and broaden its product offerings
- Old line retailers and restaurateurs are not keeping up with changing times
- Need more people on the street at night and on weekends
- Revitalization strategy must lead with restaurant sector – that’s the heart of Chinatown
- Needs to be clean and safe
- Involve younger community members in decision-making roles and pass leadership to the next generation

Key Strengths and Opportunities

- Local market area (2 blocks from Pender and Columbia) is growing faster than the city and the region (30% pop. increase – 01/06)
- New residential development in Chinatown; opportunities generated by the Viaducts, False Creek & the Flats
- Cater to new and existing residents (e.g. fresh/organic grocery stores and quality affordable restaurants)
- Improve the restaurant sector – make Chinatown a culinary and dining destination again
- Build on the rich historical and cultural attractions. Renovated heritage buildings + revitalized laneways = unique, walkable neighbourhood (competitive advantage)
- Growing Asian population across the region = potential client/visitor base to re-introduce to Chinatown

A Community Strategy

AECOM’s findings were presented to Chinatown community partners in December 2011 and strategy areas were further refined. Community partners identified the following priority interventions for immediate action:

- Modernize and broaden the product offerings of retail, services and restaurants and retain key cultural and low-income serving businesses
- Support restoration of the society and heritage buildings
- Support capacity building in existing organizations to take advantage of new economic opportunities
- Make the laneways and streets dynamic and interesting to attract locals and visitors, especially evening and weekend customers
- Improve Chinatown’s marketing and tourism strategies
## Strategy 1. Thriving Business District

Develop tactical tools that will assist merchants and landowners to diversify and intensify the mix of retail/commercial activities in the neighbourhood that will complement the culture of Chinatown, while modernizing the mix to appeal to the growing base of new residents, as well as to a broader customer base across the region including tourism markets. Promote opportunities to attract the growing genre of new technology-based businesses and start-ups that find cultural and even edgy neighbourhoods appealing, and ensure this strategy integrates with initiatives in neighbouring areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Actions</th>
<th>Lead Organizations</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Tenant Recruitment Strategy**       | • Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association  
• Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association  
• Vancouver Economic Commission       | • Research & strategy development late 2012/early 2013  
• Implementation 2013-2015             |
| Develop a retail-mix inventory and   | **Tenant Retention Strategy**                                                      | **Tenant Retention Strategy**                      |
| profile on the current and changing  | Business training and education workshops and outreach to support existing         | **Tenant Retention Strategy**                      |
| customer base, and develop a strategy to meet the needs of current and future markets. Strategy will inform:  
• BIA business development workshops/outreach  
• zoning and development recommendations  
• BIA and VEC outreach to realtors and investors  
• marketing and tourism campaigns | businesses | Workshop/outreach - starting Jan. 2013 |
| **Tourism and Marketing Strategy**   | • Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association  
• Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association  
• Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Gardens             | • Strategy development - late 2012/early 2013  
• Strategy Implementation - 2013/2014 |
| Coordinate marketing between existing organizations and undertake capacity building to modernize marketing and branding strategies, including:  
• one-stop Chinatown website  
• earned media & social media campaigns | **Vacant Storefronts Strategy**                                                      | **Vacant Storefronts Strategy**                    |
| Implement a sustainable window       | • Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association                          | • Strategy development - Fall 2012  
| improvement program for vacant         | **Vacant Storefronts Strategy**                                                      | • Implementation - Jan 2013                        |
| storefronts in Chinatown             |                                                                                    |                                                    |

---

50 | Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan & Economic Revitalization Strategy June 2012
Retain, revitalize and leverage the unique cultural and heritage assets of Chinatown to provide a long-term economic advantage. Build on the Society Building Planning Grant Program currently offered to Society Heritage Buildings by investigating innovative financing tools to enable the renovation of these key historic and cultural serving buildings. Ensure that the achievement of National Historic Site designation is optimized by identifying marketing, tourism and investment opportunities to be leveraged. Support capacity and youth leadership development within key cultural organizations. Work with community organizations and groups who want to develop culturally appropriate seniors housing in Chinatown to identify future opportunities for collaboration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPOSED ACTIONS</th>
<th>LEAD ORGANIZATIONS</th>
<th>IMPLEMENTATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restoration of Society heritage Buildings</td>
<td>• Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association</td>
<td>• Immediately via working group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore innovative financing tools to leverage additional investment in restoration of these important cultural assets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimize national Historic Site Designation</td>
<td>• Tourism Vancouver</td>
<td>• Immediately via marketing working group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support local arts, cultural organizations and heritage groups to maximize opportunities for new community investment and the development of new program services and attractions. Link to marketing and tourism opportunities in Strategy 1.</td>
<td>• Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Chinese Cultural Centre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Development</td>
<td>• Parks Board - Neighbourhood Houses</td>
<td>• Immediately via leadership/ youth working group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify opportunities to support youth leadership and capacity development in local organizations</td>
<td>• SUCCESS</td>
<td>• First project - 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Benevolent Societies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors Housing</td>
<td>• Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association</td>
<td>• Strategy development - 2012/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify opportunities to increase seniors housing development</td>
<td>• Vancouver Chinatown Foundation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Laneways have a history in Chinatown of being places of commerce and innovation—small hole-in-the-wall restaurants and businesses once flourished on Market Alley, between Pender Street and Hastings Street. Laneways today offer potential for creative exploration and innovation, to provide dynamic pedestrian connections, new public spaces and in the long-term new retail and commercial spaces. Revitalized laneways can support local businesses by creating something unique and inviting and generating a greater sense of safety for local residents and visitors. Building on all the effort and success in improving the cleanliness of Chinatown over the last decade these efforts need to be sustained while new opportunities for improvement are sought out by the community.

**PROPOSED ACTIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>LANEWAY REVITALIZATION STRATEGY</strong></th>
<th><strong>LEAD ORGANIZATIONS</strong></th>
<th><strong>IMPLEMENTATION</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop with the community a strategy for immediate and long-term revitalization of Chinatown’s laneways. Identify specific projects and opportunities for: • temporary street events or installations • dumpster-free pilot project • policy and regulation changes to facilitate retail and commercial uses on laneways</td>
<td>• Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee • Architecture for Humanity Vancouver</td>
<td>• Laneway Project - implementation spring/summer 2013 • Comprehensive Laneway Revitalization Strategy - 2014/2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLEAN-UP PUBLIC SPACES WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES</strong></th>
<th><strong>LEAD ORGANIZATIONS</strong></th>
<th><strong>IMPLEMENTATION</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build on existing City and community initiatives to improve neighbourhood cleanliness (e.g. awning improvements, micro-cleaning, Keep Vancouver Spectacular) with additional neighbourhood clean-up events and implement a sustainable program for window displays in vacant storefronts.</td>
<td>• Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association</td>
<td>• New clean-up project - 2013 • Window display program for vacant storefronts - 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NEXT STEPS

Leadership & Implementation

The success of the 3-Year Economic Strategy is contingent on commitment, leadership and follow-through from the Chinatown community and the City. As an economic strategy, focused on retaining and attracting local businesses, the key leaders in implementation are the Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association and the Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association. The City and the Vancouver Economic Commission will need to provide strategic support to these organizations as projects are developed and implemented. Other partners who will participate in the development of strategies and projects include, but are not limited to, the Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee, the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Gardens, SUCCESS, Tourism Vancouver, Chinatown Heritage Society Building Association, the Vancouver Chinatown Foundation and Architecture for Humanity Vancouver.

Lead organizations will begin immediately to develop the projects identified in the different strategy areas and these projects will be shared with the broader DTES community through the planning roundtables in the fall of 2012. The action plans will provide useful case studies and concepts to inform the broader discussions underway as part of the Local Area Planning Process. Staff will continue monitoring its implementation and provide Council with regular progress reports.
REFERENCES


Copyright Notice: The Census data published here are copyright material provided to the City of Vancouver by Statistics Canada. They are reproduced with the permission of Statistics Canada. They may not be further reproduced without prior approval.


COUNCIL REPORTS

Chinatown Vision and Chinatown Community Plan

Chinatown Community Plan: Summary of City Council Policies and Directions (April 20, 2010, RTS 6478)

Historic Area Height Review: Conclusions and Recommendations (January 19, 2009, RTS 8079)

vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20100119/documents/rr2a.pdf (PDF)

vancouver.ca/hahr (website)

Chinatown Community Plan: Progress Report (December 12, 2006, RTS 6113)

vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20061212/documents/a3.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown Community Plan (February 15, 2005, CC File No.8102)

vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20050215/p3-full.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown Vision (July 23, 2002, RTS 2783)

vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/020723/rr2.htm

Heritage Incentive Programs

Transfer of Density (ToD) Program and Heritage Building Rehabilitation Program (HBRP) Review (July 28, 2009, RTS 7281)

vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20090728/documents/csbu1.pdf (PDF)

Status Report on the Heritage Building Rehabilitation Program for Gastown, Chinatown and Hastings Corridor (November 1, 2005, RTS 4565)

vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20051101/documents/a1.pdf (PDF)

Heritage Incentives Implementation for Gastown and Chinatown (July 10, 2003, RTS 3222)

vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20030710/pe3.htm

Property Tax Incentives for Heritage Properties in Chinatown (October 30, 2002, RTS 3060)

vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/021105/P2.htm
Chinatown Society Buildings Rehabilitation Strategy

Chinatown Society Buildings Rehabilitation Strategy Update and Extension of the Society Buildings Planning Grant Program (Phase II) (May 21, 2009, RTS 8097)
vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/20090521/documents/csb3.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown Society Buildings Rehabilitation Strategy (February 14, 2008, RTS 6114)
vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/20080214/documents/pe1.pdf (PDF)

Public Realm Projects

Market Alley Commemoration Project (December 17, 2009, RTS 8400)
vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/20091217/documents/penv1.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown Yue Shan Society Courtyard Improvement Project (July 21, 2009, RTS 8226)
vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/20090721/documents/a11.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown Plaza Parkade Neon Lighting Project (July 22, 2008, RTS 7510)
vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/20080722/documents/a27.pdf (PDF)

Carrall Street Greenway Detailed Design and Implementation (July 13, 2006, RTS 5800)
vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/20060713/documents/pe3.pdf (PDF)

Carrall Street Greenway Concept Design (April 28, 2005, RTS 4246)
vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/20050428/pe8.pdf (PDF)

Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden Society Education and Presentation Centre (December 2, 2003, RTS 3717)
vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/20031202/a11.htm

Chinatown Millennium Gate (September 20, 2001, RTS 2260)
vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/010920/pe4.htm

Chinatown Memorial Square Place Marker, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Park and Courtyard Improvements (July 26, 2001, RTS 2217) vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/010726/peA1.htm
CHINATOWN ZONING DISTRICT SCHEDULE AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

HA-1 and HA-1A District Schedule (Chinatown)
vancouver.ca/commsvcs/BYLAWS/zoning/ha-1&1a.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown HA-1 Guidelines for Designated Sites
vancouver.ca/commsvcs/guidelines/C018.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown HA-1A Guidelines for Non-designated Sites
vancouver.ca/commsvcs/guidelines/C019.pdf (PDF)

OTHER CITY OF VANCOUVER PLANS AND POLICIES

Downtown Eastside Economic Revitalization Plan (June 24, 2008, RTS 4480)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20080724/documents/pe2.pdf (PDF)

Metro Core Jobs and Economy Land Use Plan: Issues and Directions (July 10, 2007, RTS 6805)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20070710/documents/rr1.pdf (PDF)

Downtown Eastside Housing Plan (Published 2005)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20050524/documents/rr2report.pdf (PDF)

Downtown Transportation Plan: Public Summary Report (Published 2005)
vancouver.ca/dtp/pdf/DTP2005.pdf (PDF)

Vancouver Agreement
http://vancouveragreement.ca/TheAgreement.htm (website)

Downtown Eastside Community Development Project
vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/dtes/project.htm (website)

Central Area Plan (December 3, 1991)
vancouver.ca/commsvcs/guidelines/C028.pdf (PDF)