

Refers Item No. 1
Public Hearing of February 21, 2013

MEMORANDUM

February 19, 2013

TO: Mayor Robertson and Councillors

COPY TO: P. Ballem, City Manager
S.A. Johnston, Deputy City Manager
J. MacKenzie, City Clerk
M. Welman, Director of Communications
W. Stewart, Assistant Director, Corporate Communications
B. Jackson, General Manager, Planning and Development Services
B. Prosken, General Manager, Community Services
F. Connell, Director of Legal Services
P. Judd, General Manager of Engineering Services

FROM: K. McNaney, Assistant Director, Central Area Planning

SUBJECT: CD-1 Rezoning - 611 Main Street

During referral of this item, Councillor Tang directed staff to provide more information on three topics prior to presentation at the Public Hearing. This memo provides more information on the items discussed at referral.

Part 1 - Cornice Treatments on City Street

Discussion

The first request for information was regarding cornice treatments on city street, with a request to investigate cornice treatments on the proposals in Chinatown. Cornice treatments at the top of a building are seen as a way to blend the use of a contemporary architectural vocabulary with the history, culture, and architecture of Chinatown.

For new commercial buildings (including rental buildings), the Encroachment By-law allows for building encroachments (including cornices) onto city street subject to the registration of a standard encroachment agreement. New encroachments in the historic areas of the City are allowed to complement existing historical architectural elements in the area. While the by-law does not allow for occupiable floor area (i.e., bay windows), it does allow for cornice treatments and other non-habitable elements. Under the encroachment by-law protected heritage properties are exempt from the payment of annual fees.

For new condominium developments and strata conversions of existing buildings (residential or commercial), the Strata Property Act applies. To satisfy the provisions of the act, the Strata Corporation must establish control over the portions of the street affected by the building encroachments, for the life of the building. The process to satisfy the Act is more onerous, requiring more robust legal arrangements and volumetric portions of the street containing the encroachments to be closed and stopped-up, with an easement granted for the volumetric portions of the building that encroach. It is also necessary to raise title for the portions of road that are encroached upon.

The alternative to encroaching onto city right-of-way (and not requiring the volumetric lease) would be to set the building back from the property line to provide for a decorative cornice line. The proposals at 611 and 633 Main Street have a small setback from the property line. A decorative cornice line that reflects the historic nature of Chinatown could be provided within this setback. Design conditions have been included in the Council Reports to explore this element during the Development Permit review.

Part 2 - Neon Signage in Chinatown

Discussion

The second request for comment was regarding neon light signage. Councillor Tang requested that staff explore the possibility and potential to have a neon light program different than the current sign regulations allow, including an extensive application for both 611 and 633 Main Street. The objective of a neon light program would be to contribute to the safety and vibrancy of HA-1A in the nighttime, while also looking into glare, light intensity, and other factors, to mitigate potential impacts to residents.

Staff report that the current regulations, including the Sign By-law for Chinatown (Schedule C) and the Chinatown HA-1A Design Guidelines, support the introduction of significant neon signage to the area. Staff have discussed this with the applicant, who note that they will consider the potential inclusion of neon signage on the buildings as they pursue their developments and tenancies.

Regarding the establishment of a new neon sign program, the Chinatown Vision adopted by Council in 2002 identifies similar objectives regarding improving night-time lighting in Chinatown and support for neon signage. Since that time, a Chinatown Lighting Study was conducted (2008) by the Chinatown Business Improvement Association and Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee. This study examined the history of neon in Chinatown, and explored the challenges and opportunities for sign repair and renewal. Several new neon signs have been introduced to the area in recent years, some funded by DTES Capital Funds. City funded new signs include a prominent 5-storey neon sign on the Chinatown Plaza Parkade (corner of Keefer and Columbia Streets) and at local business Bao Bei (163 Keefer Street). And a privately funded 3-dimensional new sign has been installed at the new location of New Town Bakery (148 East Pender Street). Staff will continue to work with the community and building owners to seek similar opportunities to repair, replace and reintroduce neon signage in Chinatown.

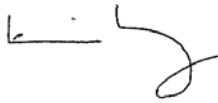
Part 3 - Laneway Activation in Chinatown

The third request was for staff to explore the use of the lane in accordance with the Chinatown Neighborhood Plan and Economic Revitalization Strategy. One of the recommendations in the Plan is to use laneways to contribute to the vibrancy, context, and

fabric of the area. The Plan calls for development of a "Laneway Revitalization Strategy", allowing for temporary street events or installations, dumpster-free zones, and facilitating retail and commercial use in the lanes, to be implemented by the community with assistance from the City.

During review of the applications for 611 and 633 Main Street, staff looked at the existing conditions in the laneway, to try to provide animation to not only the existing lane but also the two existing east-facing plazas adjacent to the Chinatown Plaza Parkade. This resulted in design development of 611 and 633 Main Street to include retail spaces that "wrap" around to the lane, with the goal being to enable activity in these new developments to spill out into the laneway and contribute to animation of the plazas on the northeast and southeast corners of the parkade building. For 633 Main Street, the development will also result in an improved pedestrian connection from Main Street along Georgia to the Chinatown Plaza Parkade mall south entrance. Design development to further animate the lane itself between these two plazas is challenging, as both developments include underground parkade ramps, loading, and other service functions in their lane facades.

Staff are exploring other Chinatown laneway revitalization initiatives with the community, including a possible project for the lane south of Pender Street, between Main and Columbia. We will continue to keep Council informed of laneway revitalization initiatives as they develop.



Kevin McNaney
Assistant Director, Central Area Planning

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