



## ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: September 11, 2013  
Contact: Kent Munro  
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RTS No.: 9998  
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20  
Meeting Date: September 24, 2013

TO: Vancouver City Council  
FROM: General Manager of Planning and Development Services  
SUBJECT: 8 West Pender Street - Façade Grant - DE 416362

### *RECOMMENDATION*

- A. THAT Council approve a façade grant of up to \$100,000 for the rehabilitation of the principal façades at 8 West Pender Street (PID: 015-092-321, Lot 1, Except Part in Reference Plan 636, Block 17, District Lot 541, Plan 854) as contemplated by Development Application Number DE 416362 (the "Application"), the source of funding being the 2012 Capital Budget for the Heritage Façade Rehabilitation Program.
- B. THAT Council authorize the City to enter into an agreement with World's Famous Building Corporation, the owner of 8 West Pender Street, to be registered in the Land Title Office as a covenant under Section 219 of the Land Title Act, which agreement shall require the rehabilitation to be overseen by a qualified Heritage Consultant and will require the owner to maintain the 8 West Pender Street façades in good appearance and good repair for a minimum of fifteen years.
- C. THAT the agreement described above shall be prepared, registered and given priority to the satisfaction of the Director of Legal Services in consultation with the General Manager of Planning and Development Services.

### *REPORT SUMMARY*

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's approval for a façade grant for the Vancouver Heritage Register "A" listed and municipally designated site at 8 West Pender Street, also known as the Sam Kee Building. The Application proposes to preserve and rehabilitate the exterior of the heritage building, replace internal stairs and add a glass enclosure on the

ground floor. The applicant has requested a façade grant through the Heritage Facade Rehabilitation Program. The proposal is consistent with applicable City policy, HA-1 Design Guidelines for Chinatown, Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, and it is eligible for the façade grant.

### *COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS*

Relevant Council policies for this matter include:

- Heritage Building Rehabilitation Program Policies and Procedures for Gastown, Chinatown, Hastings Street Corridor and Victory Square (2003).
- Heritage Façade Rehabilitation Program Policies and Procedures for Gastown, Chinatown, Hastings Street Corridor and Victory Square (2003).

Section 206(2) of the Vancouver Charter requires a resolution passed by not less than two-thirds of all Council members for recommendation “A”.

### *CITY MANAGER'S/GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS*

The General Manager of Planning and Development Services RECOMMENDS approval of the recommendations contained in this report.

### *REPORT*

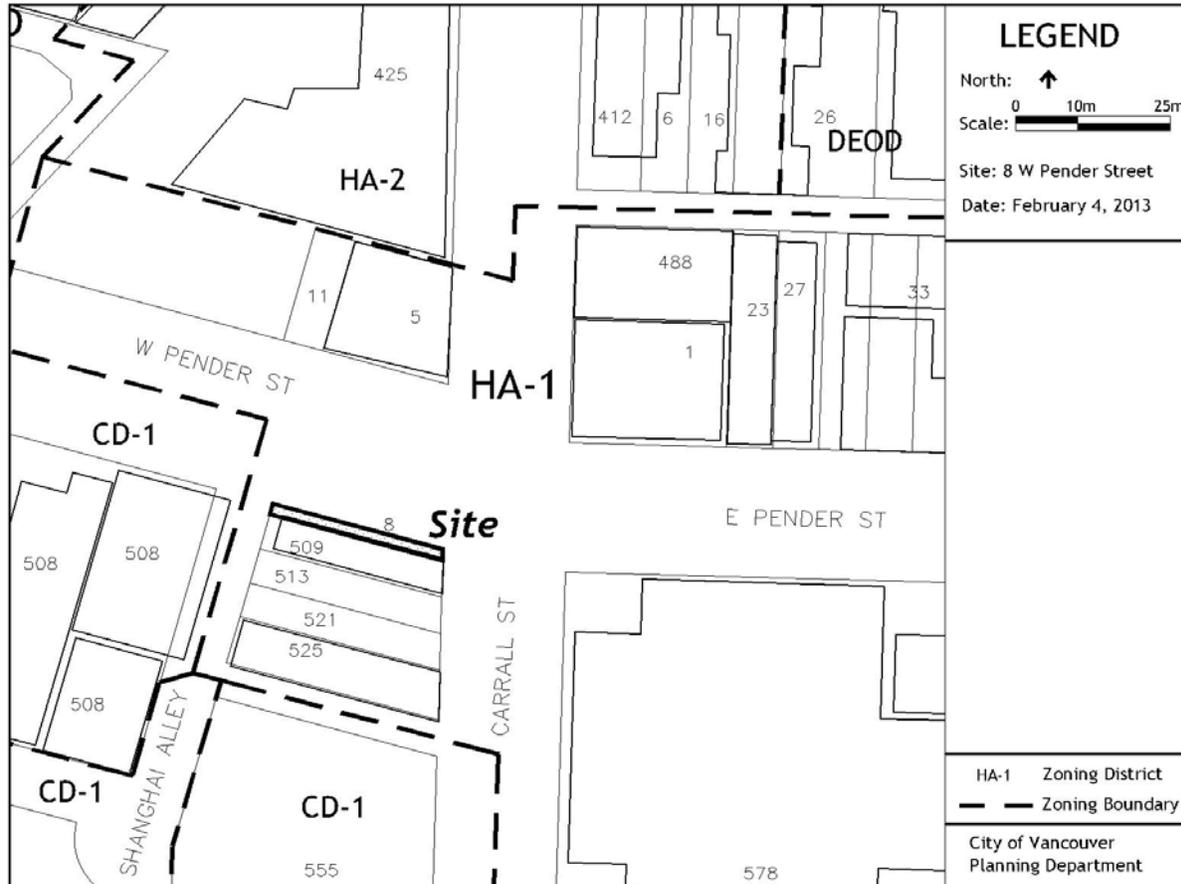
#### *Background/Context*

In July 2003, City Council approved both the Heritage Building Rehabilitation Program (HBRP) and the Heritage Façade Rehabilitation Program (HFRP) to facilitate the conservation and rehabilitation of heritage buildings in Gastown, Chinatown, Hastings Street Corridor and Victory Square. The HFRP is available to assist owners and tenants with 50% of the cost of rehabilitating heritage building facades up to a maximum of \$50,000 per principal façade. The HBRP and HFRP are consistent with current planning initiatives of the Downtown Eastside Local Area Planning Program (LAPP), including the Interim Development Management Guidelines (adopted on March 28, 2012) which allows for heritage façade grants to be considered by Council.

#### *Strategic Analysis*

#### *Site and Context*

The Sam Kee Building was constructed in 1913 at the south-west corner of Pender and Carrall Streets, the traditional entrance to Vancouver’s Chinatown. The two-storey structure, about 97 feet long and six (6) feet wide, is listed in “A” evaluation category on the Vancouver Heritage Register. The building is internationally renowned as the “shallowest commercial building” in the world (The Guinness Book of Records). The Sam Kee Building is a municipally designated historic place and it is located in the Chinatown National Historic District.



Site Plan showing location and surrounding zoning

### *Heritage Value*

The Sam Kee Building has heritage value for its architectural design, particularly the unusually narrow proportions, the characteristic bay windows (a dominating architectural feature of the Pender Street façade) and the areaway, which is the basement that extends beneath the sidewalk.

The unusual building proportions arose from a dispute dating back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when most of the lot was expropriated for street-widening, leaving a virtually unusable sliver of land. The owner of the company, Chang Toy, persisted by constructing a building on the much-reduced site. Although only six feet wide, the structure provided space for retail shops on the ground floor, and the second floor accommodated social and residential uses. The basement reportedly contained public baths.

The building has historical value for its association with the Sam Kee Company and its owner Chang Toy, Birmingham and Wood Architects and their contributions to the conservation and revitalization of Chinatown and Gastown, and most recently, Jack Chow, the principal of the current owner (for the Statement of Significance see Appendix A).



8 W. Pender Street

### *Conservation Approach*

The conservation plan developed for this building is a combination of preservation, restoration and rehabilitation procedures. All exterior building surfaces, including the two principal facades, will receive a thorough conservation treatment. The existing heritage fabric will be primarily retained, repaired and preserved. Some missing or damaged exterior elements will be restored and replaced to match existing materials and finish, as required.

The rehabilitation procedure includes a minor façade addition - the glass enclosure on the ground floor. The entry rehabilitation proposes to remove the existing storefront window, to the east, and reinstitute an original door, to the west of the proposed enclosure. The proposed glass enclosure will provide an indoor connection between the eastern and western portions of the building which currently does not exist, due to a space constraints of this extremely narrow building. The rehabilitated entry assembly will improve the building functionality and enable employees and visitors to move freely from one side of the building to the other, without being exposed to the outdoor environment.

The proposed conservation plan is generally consistent with the Chinatown HA-1 Design Guidelines the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (for more details on the conservation plan see Appendix B).

### *Estimates for Proposed Conservation Work*

The applicant has submitted three competitive cost estimates for the eligible façade rehabilitation work ranging from \$206,000 to \$309,000. Only the cost related to the conservation of the two principal façades (West Pender and Carrall Streets façades), is considered eligible for the façade grant.

### *Proposed Incentives*

A heritage façade grant of up to \$50,000 per principal façade is proposed to financially assist the owner in conducting the conservation work. Since this building is a corner site and, therefore, has two principal façades, the site is eligible for two façade grants of up to \$50,000 each, totalling \$100,000. Given the uniqueness of this building and the fact that the one of the principal façades is only six (6) feet wide (Carrall Street) whereas the other one is almost 97 feet wide (Pender Street), with widely disproportionate costs of their respective conservation, the applicant requested that the cumulative cost to rehabilitate both façades be considered for compensation against the total amount of eligible incentives. The blended cost approach, as described, would allow applicant to optimize the use of incentives which, otherwise, would not be possible.

Recognizing the site's unique circumstances, and that the request is generally consistent with the HFRP policy, staff support the blended cost approach, subject to Council approval.

### *Comments of Advisory Bodies*

The application was reviewed by the Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee on January 8, 2013 and it was supported. The Vancouver Heritage Commission reviewed the proposal on January 21, 2013 and supported it (for detailed minutes see Appendix C).

Both committees requested further design development to the glass enclosure addition in order to minimize its visual appearance. These comments were taken into consideration by staff and the applicant, and these concerns are being addressed through development permit prior-to conditions.

### *Financial*

Council approved a Capital Budget of \$500,000 for funding façade grants through the Heritage Façade Rehabilitation Program in 2009. In February 2012, Council approved a further Capital Budget of \$150,000 for façade grants. Currently, the amount remaining in the program is \$250,000, not including this request.

Staff recommend an allocation of up to \$100,000 from the 2012 Capital Budget for the rehabilitation of the principal façades at 8 West Pender Street. The grant funds will be available to the applicant in accordance with the Heritage Façade Rehabilitation Program Policies and Procedures.

### *Legal*

Should Council approve this facade grant request, an agreement between the City and the property owner to ensure the continued maintenance of the restored/rehabilitated façade, will be required. This agreement will be prepared by the Director of legal Services and, once finalized with the owner, will be registered in the Land Title Office against title to 8 West Pender Street as a covenant under Section 219 of the Land Title Act. The agreement will require that the rehabilitation work is to be supervised by a qualified Heritage Consultant, will contain the terms and conditions upon which the grant is to be paid to the owner once the rehabilitation work is complete and will require the owner to keep the heritage façade in good appearance and good repair for a minimum of fifteen years after completion of the rehabilitation.

The façade grant would be issued only after the agreement is registered on title to 8 West Pender Street, the rehabilitation of the façade has been satisfactorily completed and the conservation plan satisfactorily implemented and the owner has delivered to the City satisfactory proof of payment of the costs incurred in carrying out the façade rehabilitation work.

### *CONCLUSION*

The Sam Kee Building is listed in the “A” evaluation category on the Vancouver Heritage Register and under the provisions of the Vancouver Charter is designated as a protected heritage property. The proposed heritage façade rehabilitation will significantly improve the functionality of this unique heritage building, contribute to the economic revitalization of Chinatown and improve the overall appearance of the strategically located site at the Entrance to Chinatown. The General Manager of Planning and Development Services Recommends approval of up to \$100,000 for the rehabilitation of the principal façades of 8 West Pender Street.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **8 West Pender Street - Statement of Significance**

### **Description**

The historic place at 8 West Pender Street is an internationally renowned mixed-use narrow building, including a lower-level extension beneath the sidewalk, located at the traditional entry to Vancouver's historic Chinatown.

### **Description of Boundaries**

The site is located on the south side of West Pender, at the south-west corner of Pender and Carrall Streets.

**Area** 54.5 square meters

### **Heritage Value**

The Sam Kee Building, constructed in 1913, has heritage value for its architectural design, particularly the unusually narrow proportions; for its association with the Sam Kee Company and other organizations and events that have contributed to the development of Chinatown; and for its role in the heritage conservation of Chinatown.

Touted by The Guinness Book of Records as the 'shallowest commercial building' in the world, the Sam Kee Building has architectural value for being a fully functioning commercial structure with a depth from front to back of only 6 feet (180 cm), augmented on the second floor by projecting bay windows and by a basement that extends as far again beneath the sidewalk. The unusual proportions arose from a dispute whereby the City had expropriated most of the lot for street-widening without compensating the owner, the Sam Kee Company, for the residue - believed to be unusable. This event has value as a gauge of the disrespect shown to Chinese-Canadians by the civic authorities; and owner Chang Toy's response in building on the much-reduced site is an indicator of the Chinese community's defiance to this discrimination.

Additional architectural value resides in the bay windows, which are characteristic of many Chinatown buildings of the time; and in architects Bryan and Gillam, who were competent representatives of their profession.

The building has historical value for having been built by the Sam Kee Company, a highly successful business owned by wealthy merchant Chang Toy, who was known in the Caucasian community as Sam Kee. The ground floor was used for retail shops and the upper floor for a social organization and residential units, both uses characteristic of the area. The basement reportedly contained public baths, an important use that served the wider community and reveals the sanitary shortcomings of many dwelling units in Chinatown.

For the last generation the building has been a focus for the conservation and revitalization of Chinatown and Gastown. In 1966 architects Birmingham and Wood, who were key players in the early conservation initiatives, purchased the Sam Kee Building and used it as their office. The building hosted many key discussions that shaped the historic areas.

The present owner, Jack Chow, continues this valued practice of promoting the area, as he is a well-known businessman who is sometimes regarded as an 'ambassador' for the revitalization of Chinatown. Chow has renamed the historic place the 'World's Famous Building.' He has continued the site's tradition of defying municipal authorities by successfully objecting, with broad public support, to the City's intention to charge an encroachment fee for the projecting bay windows and basement.

### **Character-Defining elements**

- \* Location at the gateway to Vancouver's historic Chinatown district
- \* The existing building envelope, including the shallow dimension from front to back.
- \* The fenestration, including the projecting bay windows on the second floor and the shop fronts (which have been somewhat altered) on the ground floor.
- \* The sloping roof over the bay windows with a central pediment.
- \* The central curved parapet with the date '1913'.
- \* The wood dado beneath the shop front windows
- \* The largely blank side walls pierced by single arched windows at ground level, with corner quoins
- \* The recently installed glass blocks in the sidewalk, which illuminate the basement.

## 8 West Pender Street - Excerpt from the Conservation Plan prepared by Soren Rasmussen Architects



### 1.0 Description of Proposed Project

Proposed type of work: Alteration to interior and exterior of existing building

Proposed area: Approximately 2791 SF (increase from existing of approx. 57 SF)

Proposed height: 2 storeys / 29'-6" FT (no change to existing)

Proposed use: Insurance office and ancillary (no change to existing)

No parking / loading requirements per Parking Bylaw 4.3.4

### 1.1 Design Rationale

Located at the main 'gateway' to Chinatown at Pender and Carrall, the intent of work proposed on this 1913 building is to re-activate its overall street presence. Due to its unique 6-foot depth, much of the value of this building derives from its articulated façade, at the expense of interior space. It has a unique opportunity to enhance the street-side pedestrian experience in Chinatown because of its key corner location, low height, long façade of fine-grained, heritage features, and its use of street-level counters. The renovation work is essentially to add a simple glass box on the ground floor that will connect the east and west sides of the building.

The proposed restoration work will visually enhance this significant corner, and the proposed addition will enable the street-level insurance office to functionally utilize the west half of the building's ground floor level as well as the lower floor. Restored in 1986, the same owner and architect are involved to restore building features now in need maintenance, including items of heritage significance. The overall intent is to visually enhance and prolong the life of the 98-year-old building in a heritage-acceptable manner. Due to the unique 6' depth of building – the 'world's shallowest commercial building' per the Guinness Book of Records - the east and west half of the ground floor are currently separated by the central stairwell. This hardship on the lot has resulted in the west half being under-utilized due to its impracticality as staffs needs to go outside to access one interior half from the other. The proposed work is a modest addition that re-activates the ability of the west half of the ground floor to interact on the street level, while minimizing its effect on existing patterns of pedestrian traffic flow. Its form is to be a clearly new addition in a manner sympathetic to the building's heritage features. With the completion of the proposed renovations, all floors and areas of the building will be contiguous.

## **2.0 Description of Existing Conditions**

The existing building was approved for all office use on 3 levels in the previous application in 1986. In part because the lower level and the west side of the main floor are not contiguous, it has not been practical to use these area as part of the family insurance business. This proposal makes all the areas useable together. It has been about 25 years since the last work was done to the building and as it now sits, is in state that requires significant work to restore the facades back to the condition after the last restoration. The work will include the following:

- Repair exterior masonry, wood storefronts and paneling etc.
- Replace/restore gutters and downpipes
- Repaint exterior
- Restore neon sign
- Replace roof and flashings
- Repair/replace glass blocks as require

The building will generally be restored to the same condition it was after the 1980's restoration.

## **2.1 Heritage Aspects**

Building Name: Sam Kee Building

Built: 1913

Heritage status: A (M)

Heritage value per Statement of Significance

1. Architectural design (unusually narrow proportions; bay windows)

- *SRA: The proposed project intends to restore these existing building features.*

2. Association with Sam Kee Company and organizations and events

- *SRA: The proposed project does not change this historical aspect.*

3. Role in the heritage conservation of Chinatown

- *SRA: The proposed project is innovative in that it is to be restored for a second time.*

### Character-defining Elements

1. Location at the gateway to Vancouver's historic Chinatown district

- *SRA: The proposed project intends to enhance its presence at this prominent location.*



2. The existing building envelope, including the shallow dimension from front to back

- *SRA: The proposed project will not visually extend the impression of the shallow depth.*

3. The fenestration, including the projecting bay windows on the second floor and the shop fronts (which have been somewhat altered) on the ground floor

- *SRA: The proposed project will rehabilitate this aspect. One window will be removed and a door will be reinstated. The entire transom will remain intact.*



4. The sloping roof over the bay windows with a central pediment
  - *SRA: The proposed project will rehabilitate this aspect.*
5. The central curved parapet with the date 1913
  - *SRA: The proposed project will rehabilitate this aspect.*
6. The wood dado beneath the shop front windows
  - *SRA: The proposed project will rehabilitate this aspect.*
7. The largely blank side walls pierced by single arched windows at ground level, with corner quoins
  - *SRA: The proposed project will rehabilitate the walls, windows, and quoins.*
8. The recently installed glass blocks in the sidewalk, which illuminate the basement
  - *SRA: The proposed project removes a small amount of the existing glass blocks that would otherwise straddle the wall of the new addition. Maintenance will be performed on the existing remaining glass blocks including replacing broken blocks and re-caulking.*

Excerpt from the minutes of the Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee meeting held on January 8, 2013:

- 1) 8 West Pender - DE416362  
VHR A, (M)

Zlatan Jankovic, Heritage Planner, introduced the application to rehabilitate the façade of this Chinatown municipally designated heritage building listed under category "A" in the Vancouver Heritage Register. The historic building, also known as the Sam Kee Building, was constructed in 1913. The Guinness Book of Records recognizes it as the "shallowest commercial building" in the world.

The applicant presented the proposed design scheme, noting that one of the main drivers for the rehabilitation is to allow full use of the commercial space. Currently the west side of the space is not being used due to the constricted layout. The applicant is seeking façade grants to cover the costs associated with rehabilitation.

Questions were responded to regarding: the materiality of the glass enclosure; if the original building has an HRA in place; if incentives from the City were used on the last renovation; how the enclosure will interact with the existing sidewalk; the design of the glass enclosure; if the current encroachment will be increased; the extent to which other design solutions were explored; the height of the roof of the enclosure; the roof material; and how the City might be protected from future façade grant requests for the building if the grants were blended.

Comments were offered regarding: suggestion to reduce the size of the roof portion to minimize the appearance of the structure; support for the structure if the City agrees to its design; support for the intent of the financial help in order to keep the building an attraction for Chinatown; sympathy for the building tenants that the space is not currently usable in its entirety; suggestion that the enclosure be fully transparent; suggestion that enclosing the space in any way diminishes the charm of the design by removing access to the interesting nooks and crannies created by the current structure; and suggestion to use a treatment that is more heritage in nature.

MOVED by George Chow  
SECONDED by Kelly Ip

That the Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee fully supports the proposal for 8 West Pender - DE416362 VHR A, (M); and recommends further design development of the glass enclosure.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Excerpt from the minutes of the Vancouver Heritage Commission meeting held on January 21, 2013:

- (b) 8 West Pender - DE416362  
VHR A, (M)

Applicant: Soren Rasmussen Architects Inc.  
Staff: Zlatan Jankovic, Heritage Planner  
Paul Cheng, Development Planner

Staff provided an overview and along with the applicant, responded to questions.

Issues:

- (i) Design development of the glass enclosure

MOVED by Jon Stovell  
SECONDED by Orville Lim

THAT the Vancouver Heritage Commission support the Heritage Façade Rehabilitation application and the proposed design for the glass enclosure for 8 West Pender Street, noting the following suggestions:

THAT the Applicant consider reconfiguring the angled glazing of the glass enclosure (i.e. making it a right angle) and consider the use of starfire glazing to make the glazing as clear as possible.

CARRIED (Michael Kluckner, Anthony Norfolk, Joel Massey, and David Cuan opposed)