

MOTION ON NOTICE

10. Historical Discrimination Against People of South Asian Descent in Vancouver

Submitted by: Councillor Boyle

WHEREAS

1. The City of Vancouver strives to be an advocate for racial and cultural equity;
2. The history of Vancouver includes discrimination against people of South Asian Descent;
3. The City of Vancouver has an obligation to facilitate and promote cultural, emotional and material redress for historic wrongdoing;
4. The South Asian community in Vancouver is diverse in terms of its religions, ethnicities, identities and languages; and is growing. The South Asian community is the second largest visible minority group in the City and is projected to make up the largest visible minority group in Canada within the next two decades;
5. The first wave of South Asian immigration to Vancouver occurred in the 1890s. In 1907, all people from India not of Anglo-Saxon parentage were denied the right to vote in BC and later, throughout Canada, despite citizens of India being British subjects;
6. An amendment to the B.C. Elections Act was made to have South Asians added to other "Asian undesirables." This meant South Asians were denied municipal and provincial contracts. They were denied professions in education, law, and pharmacy. They could not own property in Vancouver. They experienced racial stereotyping and physical abuse. They were denied their rights to cultural and religious expression, including being unable to attend a public cinema while wearing traditional headdresses;¹
7. Despite many historic and ongoing injustices and the continuing impacts of institutionalized racism, in 1947, South Asians were given the right to vote federally and provincially and were eligible to apply for Canadian citizenship. In 1948, South Asians were given the right to vote in municipal elections;
8. In May, 2016, the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada formally apologized in the House of Commons for the Canadian government's action in denying the Komagata Maru from docking on the shores of Canada in 1914. The ship carried 376 passengers of Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu faith who were seeking a better life in Canada. The Prime Minister

¹ Henry, Frances & Carol Tator. *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society*. 3rd ed. Toronto: Nelson Publishers, 2006. 71-73.

also formally apologized for the subsequent exclusion of immigration of people of South Asian descent;

9. In May, 2008, the British Columbia Legislature offered an official apology for the treatment of South Asian passengers aboard the Komagata Maru after they were denied entry to Canada in 1914;
10. In April, 2018, the City of Vancouver officially apologized for the City's role in institutionalizing racism against citizens of Chinese descent and offered a recommendation report on how to move forward from these wrongdoings. The apology acknowledged the wrongdoings of past legislation, regulations, and policies of previous Vancouver City Councils;
11. In May 2019, Vancouver's current City Council passed the motion, Punjabi Market at Fifty: Celebrating the Past and Planning for the Future, which affirmed that the Punjabi Market shopping area is an area with historical significance and present day importance;
12. In March 2019, Vancouver's current City Council showed its support for naming a civic asset in the Downtown near the Burrard Inlet after the Komogata Maru;
13. The City's apology and the implementation of the recommendations of the CoV report "Preliminary Research on Historical Discriminaiton Against Chinese People in Vancouver", is resulting in positive, inclusionary societal changes in the City of Vancouver;
14. The South Asian community, as targets of historic and ongoing discrimination and institutionalized racism, would value an initiative similar to which was offered to Vancouver's Chinese community;
15. Such an initiative would benefit the City of Vancouver by encouraging diverse, safe, healthy and respectful communities;
16. Vancouver City Council is considering launching a City Wide Planning Process, where prior, City Council has expressed key goals and objectives to guide a city-wide planning effort, which includes:
 - a. Maintaining Vancouver as a diverse and inclusive community;
 - b. Enhancing social well-being;
17. In June 2019, Vancouver City Council voted unanimously in favour of supporting efforts to revitalize Vancouver's Punjabi Market district (North America's oldest South Asian market). Moving towards reconciliation and a public apology to the South Asian community would promote and celebrate the inclusion, belonging and resiliency of the South Asian community.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council direct staff to develop a report on historical discrimination against the South Asian community in Vancouver. In doing so staff should:

- i. Engage directly and work collaboratively with the South Asian Community in Vancouver, including but not limited to academics, historians, artists, professionals, business and community leaders, and community organizations;
- ii. Provide a summary of laws, regulations and policies of previous Vancouver City Councils that discriminated against the people of South Asian descent in the City of Vancouver from the late 1890s to the present;
- iii. Report back to Council with recommendations on steps and actions in support of reconciliation, including changes to resources and policies to acknowledge any of these wrongdoings, and also including plans for a public acknowledgement and formal apology to the South Asian community;
- iv. Prepare a proposed scope of work, budget, and timeline in Fall 2019 to ensure consideration in the 2020 budget process;
- v. Include recommended actions City Council could take or announce in tandem with the 50th anniversary of Vancouver's Punjabi Market on May 31, 2020;

FURTHER THAT Council directs staff to connect this work to the development and implementation of the City Wide Plan.

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