

NOTICE OF COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

3. Sustaining Vancouver's Chinatown

Submitted by: Councillors Kirby-Yung and Fry

WHEREAS

1. COVID-19 has had significant negative economic impact including on small businesses and neighbourhoods across Vancouver (due to closure periods, physical distancing requirements and costs of additional cleaning and safety protocols). A full economic recovery from COVID-19 is expected to take some time, likely years;
2. Vancouver's Chinatown is a cultural gem. Considered the largest Chinatown in Canada, it has been a designated National Historic Site since June 2010. Chinatown was established even prior to the incorporation of the City of Vancouver. It is a community that has weathered two world wars – with Chinese Canadians fighting for a country in which they could not vote, race riots -- spurred on by anti-Asian sentiment, and discriminatory policies from all three levels of government, including the Chinese head tax, a freeway that would have paved over Chinatown, and even a federal order to ban the sale of delectable Chinese barbecued meats;
3. In recent years, Chinatown has been facing new challenges from the changing demographics of residents, to developmental pressures, as well as safety concerns related to its adjacency to the DTES, the epicenter of Vancouver's mental health and addictions crisis and housing crisis;
4. Despite these adversities, Chinatown has persevered. There has been resurgence in interest in Chinatown with new shops and restaurants opening and inducing new and returning visitors, and a Cantonese language school organized by Youth Collaborative for Chinatown in partnership with the Wong's Benevolent Association, aimed reaching youth and adults eager to reconnect with their heritage. The community old and young are impassioned about protecting and preserving the rich, cultural legacy of Chinatown and its unique characteristics, whether it is food, arts, cultural heritage, language or more;
5. In April 2018, City Council officially apologized to the Chinese Canadian community, recognizing the historical discrimination against Chinese People in Vancouver, and committed to conserving, commemorating, and enhancing the living heritage and cultural assets of the community. The Chinatown Legacy Stewardship Group was appointed by Council to advise the City on specific actions in order to carry out that commitment;
6. Over the past months however, the unprecedented COVID pandemic as well as worsening conditions in the DTES due to the ongoing opioid health and housing crisis, are threatening that living heritage and many businesses and arts organizations in Chinatown were forced to shut down. Although businesses all across Canada have been impacted, Chinatown merchants were especially hard hit due to the majority of them

not being able to access Federal COVID assistance including the wage subsidy being microbusinesses (Mom & Pop Shops) that didn't have staff other than themselves, and landlords unilaterally not applying for rental subsidies (often the landlord or tenant not qualifying themselves);

7. In fact, according to a preliminary report from City Staff, vacancy rates in Chinatown have increased by 23.7 percent compared to before the pandemic. Vacancy rates now stand at 17 percent relative to the Vancouver city wide average of 10 percent vacancies;
8. In addition to economic challenges, a reduction in foot traffic related to the pandemic as well as the increased impacts of social disorder has led to a troubling perception of Chinatown as an unsafe and unkempt neighbourhood, hindering economic survival and recovery in the community;
9. Without immediate action, more than 700 small businesses and arts and culture organizations that operate in Chinatown are at risk. Many are culturally relevant or legacy businesses such as the community hub Goldstone Bakery and Restaurant which recently closed after 30+ years of operation. These businesses are what make Chinatown; their character and customs which take place at these culturally relevant small businesses and arts organizations constitute the unique qualities of Chinatown that are considered to be intangible, living cultural heritage that will soon be lost forever and upon which the contemplated UNESCO World Heritage Site designation hinges;
10. It is imperative that the City take action now to protect and conserve the unique characteristics of Chinatown to help create a welcoming and safe place for people to enjoy and visit building upon the recent Council motion that called upon the Federal Government for a Targeted COVID-19 Funding Program for Vancouver's Chinatown to provide financial support for local, small businesses, and cultural and arts organizations;
11. A broad number of groups have come together to advocate for these measures including the Vancouver Chinatown Legacy Stewardship Group, Vancouver Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden, Chinese Cultural Centre of Vancouver, Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association, Vancouver Chinatown BIA, Chinatown Plaza Tenants Association, SUCCESS, Chinatown Foundation, and Strathcona BIA; and
12. The Chinatown Community Stewardship Program is run by EMBERS Eastside Works and supported by the City of Vancouver through the Chinatown Transformation Team and in consultation with Chinatown businesses and some of the concerned groups listed above. Community Stewards are hired from DTES residents facing barriers to employment to provide a peer approach to de-escalation and public realm improvements, and facilitate a safe and inclusive community. This program complements existing security and safety work by the BIA and CPC. From April 2020 until September, some highlights of their work during COVID-19 includes:

- a. Loss prevention, de-escalation, crisis intervention and removal of almost 15,000 needles from storefronts;
- b. Responding to over 140 calls for assistance by local businesses; and
- c. Over 950 street and storefront interactions.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council work to reduce barriers to visiting Chinatown by directing staff to include as part of proposed December staff report on meter rate changes for 2021, information on the fee structure and pricing rationale for metered parking in Chinatown relative to other neighbourhoods in the City of Vancouver, with the goal of ensuring they are as competitive as possible while still meeting traffic management goals for turnover and mode share;

FURTHER THAT staff review and prioritize opportunities to reduce barriers to active transportation and public transit access to Chinatown, including secure bicycle and e-bike locking areas, and clean safe bus stops.

- B. THAT Council direct staff to engage with EasyPark to discuss the potential for an incentive program for the Chinatown Plaza Parkade for visitors who patronize local Chinatown businesses, recognizing that the lot is currently underutilized;

FURTHER THAT staff engage with EasyPark to consider installation of free indoor bicycle and e-bike racks, considering lessons and best practices from Lot 31, (Water St).

- C. THAT Council prioritize health, cleanliness and safety in Chinatown by bringing forward options as part of the 2021 budget process to increase street, alley and sidewalk cleaning and sanitation by City of Vancouver Streets & Engineering, as well as well as options through the 2021 budget process to expand and enhance the Community Stewards Program from the current single team that is funded.

- D. THAT Council direct staff to consider and report back on options for a pilot simplified and temporary Merchandise Display Permit fee structure and program, to facilitate outdoor shopping, installation of contactless merchandise drop-off and pick-up zones, and queueing spaces for Chinatown to encourage physical distancing, street animation and placemaking for street-facing businesses.

FURTHER THAT results of this pilot be used to inform potential city-wide implementation for retail businesses and shopping.

- E. THAT Council direct REFM to work with Chinatown Transformation Team and Legacy Stewardship Group with engagement of the larger Chinatown community, to prepare an expedited, innovative tenanting and activation strategy for the City-owned Chinatown Plaza (106 Keefer Street) with the

goal of creating a vibrant hub in this historic neighbourhood that also enables ongoing programming and placemaking.

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