



Official Apology to the Italian Canadian Community in Vancouver

Council Presentation
April 26, 2022



Photo by: External Relations & Protocol

Report back on a June 2021 Council motion to:

- Conduct research for a proclamation of Official Apology from the City of Vancouver to be delivered during the Italian Heritage Month (IHM) in 2022, for any historical actions, policies, or public support of measures that contributed to discrimination against Italian Canadians because of their ancestry.
- To work with The Italian Cultural Centre – Il Centro and the Public Art Committee to consider and possibly identify opportunities for an installation of Public Art to commemorate the City of Vancouver’s Official Apology to the Italian Canadian community in Vancouver.



L. Panichelli Shoe Service Shop, 1933

- A. THAT Council approve the attached draft apology for the injustices and harms to members of the Italian Canadian community that occurred as a result of the City of Vancouver’s actions, policies and public support of measures, including reference to “enemy aliens” during World War II (1940-1945); and that the formal apology be issued during Italian Heritage Month, in June 2022.

- B. THAT Council direct staff to create a plan to use the overview of the historical background outlining the discrimination and decision to intern members of the Italian Canadian community, the requirement to report to the RCMP on a regular basis, and impacts on women, children and the Italian community at large during World War II; for public awareness and education.

- C. THAT Council direct staff to consider and identify opportunities for a public art installation to commemorate the Official City Apology for discrimination against Italian Canadians during World War II in alignment with and following the completion of the city-wide Commemoration Policy.

The Apology to the Italian Canadian community in Vancouver is situated within broader reconciliation and equity work at the City.

Council Approvals

- 2014 - City of Reconciliation
- 2018 - Apology to Chinese Canadians
- 2021 - Apology to passengers on board the Komagata Maru in 1914
- 2021 - Equity Framework

Council Motions

- 2019 - Punjabi Market at Fifty: Celebrating the Past and Planning for the Future
- 2019 - Historical Discrimination Against People of South Asian Descent in Vancouver
- 2019 - Combatting Antisemitism in Vancouver

- 2020 - Safety for Residents with Precarious Status: Delivering Access without Fear
- 2020 - Standing Up to the Rise in anti-Asian Racism, All Racism and Hate Crimes

Work Underway

- 2018 & Ongoing - Chinatown Transformation
- 2018 & Ongoing - Northeast False Creek Plan's commitment to address the historic displacement of Black Canadians of Hogan's Alley
- 2020 & Ongoing - Council supported funding to initiate work to address anti-Black Racism
- 2021 & Ongoing - UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Task Force

- In May, 2021 the Federal Government offered an apology for the injustices against the Italian Canadian community during World War II.
- Following the June 2021 Council Motion, staff engaged an advisory to support research on the historical overview and draft apology specifically to the Italian Canadians residing in Vancouver.
- The following people and groups have supported this work in various capacities:
 - Historian and author, Raymond Culos
 - Lawyer, Celso Boscaroli, QC
 - Executive Director, Il Centro, Mario Miceli
 - Professors & Business leaders
 - IHM Planning Committee Members
 - The Italian Consulate



Source: A Brief History of 'Little Italy'

- Following Canada's declaration of war on Italy in 1940, the Canadian Government instructed the RCMP to round up Italian Canadians who were perceived as a threat because of their association with the Fascist Party in Canada.
 - This included members of the BC group (i.e., Giulio Giordani).
- In a February 16, 1942 Council motion, Vancouver City Council made reference to "enemy aliens," a reference viewed as unjustly and unfairly directed at the Italian Canadian community and contrary to the principles of fundamental human rights.
- Vancouver police detectives and/or RCMP personnel interrogated those identified as "enemy aliens" before they were summarily interned.
- In total, about thirty three Italian Canadians were arrested in Vancouver under the Defense of Canada Regulations. None of those interned were charged with any crimes.

Summary of Research Findings (2/3)

- The RCMP, with the cooperation of the City of Vancouver Police Department, instructed between 1,300 and 1,800 Italians to register with the RCMP.
 - Italians who arrived in Canada from Italy after October 1922
- These residents were required to report on a monthly basis to RCMP Headquarters at 33rd Avenue and Heather Street, some for the duration of the war with Italy.
- Interned Italian Canadians lived in silence, burdened with feelings of shame and stigma for their arrest and detention. As the post-war wave of immigration saw more Italians come to Canada, the truth about this history remained largely unknown to newcomers.
- In 1990, the National Congress of Italian Canadian (“NCIC”) and Canadian Italian Business & Professional Inc. (“CIBPA”) initiated a campaign to have unjust internment acknowledged by the Canadian government with an apology and educational recognition of the wrong.



<https://www.straight.com/arts/tracing-forgotten-history-italian-canadian-internment-camps>

Summary of Research Findings (3/3)

- Public meetings were held across Canada to hear from the former internees and their families about the shame, indignity and pain suffered because of the wrongful internment.
- In Vancouver, Celso Boscariol, QC, organized a public meeting on April 7th, 1991 at the Italian Cultural Centre.
- Although then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney acknowledged the wrongs in 1990, no apology was made until 2021 when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized in the House of Commons for the unjust internment of Italian Canadians during World War II.



- The internment of Italian Canadians had impacts not only on the individual internees but also on their families and the entire community.
- Families and young children were abandoned, businesses and livelihoods were impacted.
- The community experienced stigma, humiliation and shame due to being targeted solely because of their national origin, culture and way of life.
- Approval of the draft apology would demonstrate Council's understanding of historical wrongs against Italian Canadians, while acknowledging and taking responsibility for the City's active role in the harms created.



Italian Heritage Month

Source: <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/celebrating-diversity-and-inclusiveness.aspx>

- Should Council approve the recommendations in this report, staff will work with internal and external advisors on public awareness and education.
- The Communications and Protocol teams would support the launch of the attached historical overview and draft apology through internal and external websites, social media platforms and other city communication channels.
- The approved apology would be read in a Council meeting in June, coinciding with the launch of the Italian Heritage Month.
- Opportunities for commemoration of the Official Apology to Italian Canadians will be considered in alignment with and following the completion of the City-wide Commemoration Policy in Q4, 2023.

Concluding Remarks

While none of the interned Italian Canadians are alive today in Vancouver, their descendants are here and deserve a recognition and apology for the injustices visited upon their families. The historical overview and the apology provided herein serve to acknowledge this truth about the past and are a crucial part of moving forward in ensuring that past injustices are not repeated in the future.

