

**Interim Report:**

**Historical  
Discrimination  
against People of  
South Asian  
Canadian Descent**

**Council  
Presentation  
July 05, 2022**



Source: City of Vancouver Archives, 3 Sikh Men in Suits Walking on Granville Street, 1908

# Land Acknowledgement

We recognize we are gathered on the unceded homelands of the x̱w̱məθḵw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətəł (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.



Photo by Vancouver Archives VANOC

Report back on a July 2019 Council motion to:

- Engage and work collaboratively with South Asian Canadian communities to provide recommendations in support of redress, including potential plans for a public acknowledgement and formal apology.
- Provide a summary of Vancouver laws, regulations and policies that discriminated against people of South Asian descent from the late 1890s to present.
- Prepare a proposed scope of work, budget and timeline to ensure consideration into the budget process.
- Recommended actions City Council could take or announce in tandem with the Punjabi Market's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.
- The motion was referred to RECE and staff were directed to work with RECE and report back on recommendations coming from that work.



Image: Jag Nagra (she/her), Artist  
Instagram handle: @jagnagra

- A. THAT Council receive this interim report as an update of work to date on the development of recommendations to Council to acknowledge and address the historical discrimination and ongoing racism against people of South Asian Canadian descent.
  
- B. THAT Council endorse staff to continue to work with the Community Advisory Group and community partners to conduct ongoing research including historical research and document analysis, data collection, and broader community engagement to inform development of recommended actions. Funding needed to continue this work will be considered for the 2023 budget process. Council will need to deprioritize an existing initiative to free up existing funding or approve additional property tax to fund the initiative.

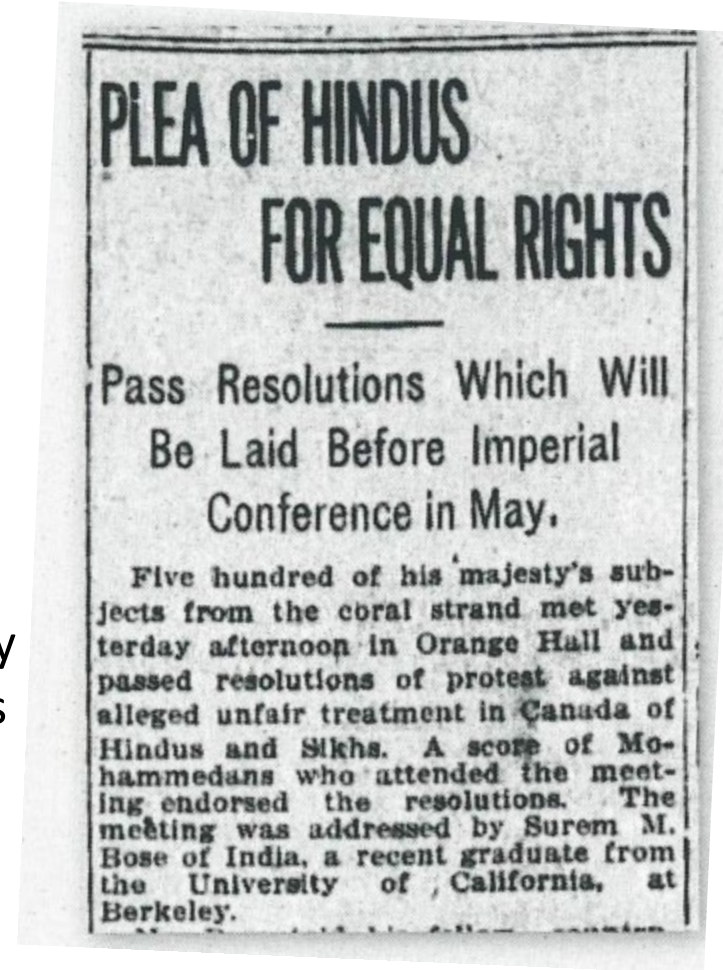
C. THAT Council endorse staff to advance work on the following Action While Planning priorities identified by the community:

- i. As part of ongoing interdepartmental work with Punjabi Market, explore the steps and resources that may be needed in formally recognizing Punjabi Market as a historically and culturally significant area and report back on feasibility and considerations in the final report.
- ii. Identify priorities with regard to the creation and preservation of South Asian Canadian community spaces in Vancouver in response to erasure and loss of cultural heritage and include recommendations in the final report.
- iii. Prepare for a secondary street re-naming after the Komagata Maru, to be implemented after the completion of the Commemoration Policy and work with the community to explore other opportunities to commemorate areas of historical and cultural significance to the South Asian Canadian community in Vancouver.

The South Asian communities' history in Vancouver highlights connections to many local cultural and historically significant events and places, and showcases continued activism and resilience as they faced intense racism, challenged many forms of oppression and fought for human rights.

There are many occurrences where the City, previous Mayor, Council and leadership, were directly involved in perpetrating racial injustices towards South Asian Canadian communities:

- 1907-1947: South Asians were denied the right to vote in Vancouver by a change in the Municipality Incorporation Act; this resulted in the loss of right to vote federally.
- Supporting oppressive and restrictive immigration laws.
- Promoting anti-Asian sentiments which had detrimental impacts.

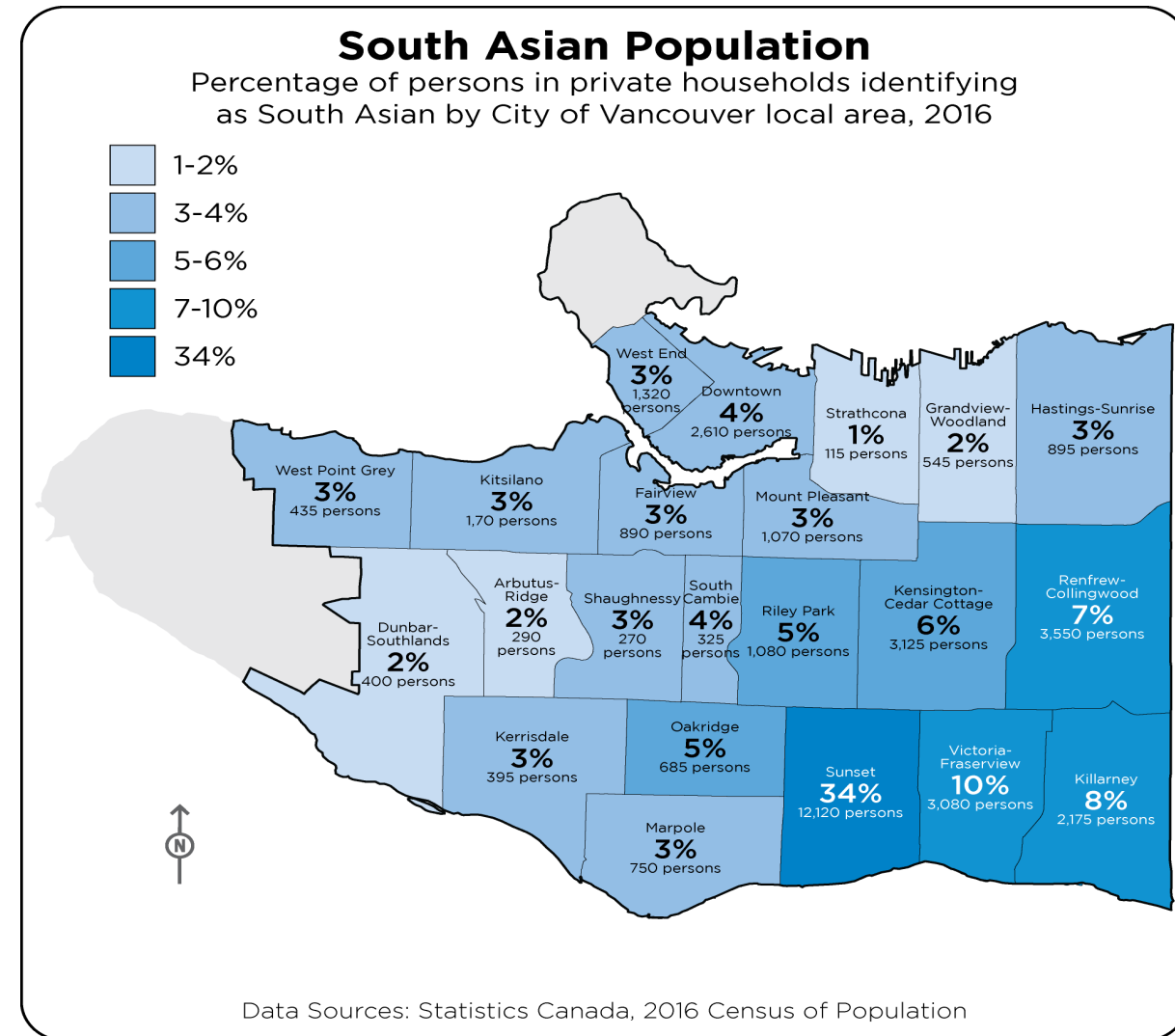


Source: The Battle for the South Asian Right to the Vote, Satwinder Kaur Bains and Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra, Vancouver Daily Province, April 17, 1911, 3

# South Asian Canadian Demographic Data

The South Asian Canadian population in Vancouver is growing and diverse:

- 43% increase in the South Asian population in Vancouver from 1996-2016
- There are over 37,000 (6%) residents in Vancouver and over 291,000 (12%) across the broader Metro Vancouver region
- At least 61 different languages are spoken by South Asian residents
- 20% of South Asian respondents to the BC Centre for Disease Control, COVID SPEAK Survey, reported that they experienced increased racism during the pandemic



Due to pandemic related delays, work was initiated in August 2021. Staff began preliminary historic research over the fall and convened a Community Advisory Group in January 2022.

The Community Advisory Group met once a month for two hours from January to June 2022, and accomplished the following:

- Provided input on overall project including preliminary research and future public engagement session(s);
- Supported review historical policies and practices of discrimination and shared lived experiences and stories;
- Recommended steps and actions including ‘Initial Actions While We Plan’ that the City could take to acknowledge past harms and address current discrimination facing South Asian Canadians in Vancouver.

RECE has been updated about ongoing work and prior to returning to Council, will be provided progress updates and the final recommendations.



The Community Advisory Group identified areas of focus to reflect the potential to remedy the impacts of historic discrimination such as:

- Lack of recognition of the value of South Asian Canadian communities' tangible and intangible traditions;
- Historic under-representation in community processes;
- Historic lack of access to influence and power;
- Other impacts of systemic racism and discrimination, such as under-representation in leadership and public governance.

In order to begin to remedy the impacts of historic discrimination such as systemic racism and lack of access to power, the Community Advisory Group identified the following initial areas for future consideration:

- Economic development
- Human Resources
- Outreach
- Policing

Considerations for a public acknowledgement and formal apology:

- The Community Advisory Group has noted that they would like see “the City’s full commitment to redress past harms by supporting, funding and carrying through their recommendations.”
- Plans for a public acknowledgement and formal apology can then be considered during the larger engagement sessions with the many diverse groups that make up the South Asian Canadian communities in Vancouver.

# Next Steps (1/3): Research, Data and Collaboration

Should Council approve the recommendations in this interim report, staff will...

- Finalize the review of historic and current City policies and procedures for any discriminatory impact on South Asian Canadian communities, including displacement and erasure.
- Gather historical information, including the lived experiences and impact of racism from elders, descendants of early pioneers in the South Asian Canadian communities and others.
- Analysis of how historic discrimination and its legacy/on-going racism continues to impact newcomers of South Asian descent.

Staff will explore collaboration opportunities with South Asian Canadian organizations, educational institutions, community historians, researchers and other levels of government.



Source: Vancouver City Archives, Hastings Street

# Next Steps (2/3): Broader Community Engagement, Outreach & Education

- Continue to work with the advisory group to identify and prioritize meaningful and effective actions that recognize the impacts of historic discrimination for the refinement of final recommendations to Council.
- Begin engagement with the many sub-groups within the diverse South Asian Canadian communities.
- Work on and/or support the development of education and awareness materials on the historic discrimination that South Asian communities faced and its impact today.
- Continue to update RECE on progress and recommendations.



# Next Steps (3/3): Initial Actions While Planning

- As part of ongoing interdepartmental work with Punjabi Market, explore the steps and resources that may be needed in formally recognizing Punjabi Market as a historically and culturally significant area and report back on feasibility and considerations in the final report.
- Identify priorities with regard to the creation and preservation of South Asian Canadian community spaces in Vancouver in response to erasure and loss of cultural heritage and include recommendations in the final report.
- Prepare for a secondary street re-naming after the Komagata Maru, to be implemented after the completion of the Commemoration Policy and work with the community to explore other opportunities to commemorate areas of historical and cultural significance to the South Asian Canadian community in Vancouver.



# Concluding Remarks

Engagement with the broader community is critical to uncover and acknowledge the truth about the past, a crucial part of moving forward to ensure that past injustices are not repeated in the future, and that all communities can have an equitable future in Vancouver.



*South Asian men on Hastings Street and Granville Street around 1907. Federal regulations restricted Punjabi women and children under the age of 18 from entering Canada. From 1904-1920, only 9 Punjabi women migrated to British Columbia.*

*Source: A Social History of South Asians in British Columbia, Satwinder Kaur Bains and Balbir Gurm Image Source: City of Vancouver Archives*