

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

3. Urgent Measures to Uplift Vancouver's Chinatown

Submitted by: Councillor Kirby-Yung

WHEREAS

1. Vancouver's Chinatown is a cultural gem and holds an irreplaceable place in the fabric of our city and in the hearts and minds of Vancouver residents;
2. Historically, Vancouver's Chinatown community was established before the city was even incorporated and is considered to be the largest Chinatown in Canada. It has been a designated National Historic Site since June 2010;
3. Symbolic of the resilience and strength of Chinatown and Chinese Canadians in the face of adversity, are the 20th century's two world wars where Chinese Canadians fought for a country where they could not vote, where they had been the target of race riots spurred by anti-Asian sentiment, and been subjected to discriminatory policies from all three levels of government including: the Chinese head tax, a freeway plan that would have paved over Chinatown, and even a federal order to ban the sale of delectable Chinese barbecued meats;
4. In April 2018, Vancouver 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;
5. In recent years, Vancouver's Chinatown has been hit by – and struggled with – challenges ranging from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to ongoing anti-Asian hate in the city. Anti-Asian hate crime incidents saw a 400 percent increase from 2018 to 2022 YTD, with violent assaults and random attacks on local seniors, ongoing safety concerns, and increasing graffiti and vandalism impacting small businesses, cultural organizations, and institutions;
6. According to a preliminary report to Council by City staff, vacancy rates have increased in Chinatown by 23.7 percent compared to pre-pandemic levels, hitting 17 percent relative to the Vancouver citywide average of 10 percent. Broken windows are common, and nuisance and damaging graffiti are now a constant that shopkeepers and building owners cannot keep up with (yet many were further challenged by punitive City by-laws that levy fines if graffiti is not removed quickly enough);
7. The economic survival and vibrancy of the Chinatown community is being hindered by these issues that are not being suitably addressed, and the impacts are being felt by area residents, small businesses, cultural organizations, locals, and visitors alike;
8. Without immediate action, more than 700 small businesses and arts and culture organizations that operate in Chinatown are very much 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. The character and the customs of these businesses that could soon be lost forever are what make Chinatown what it is. Collectively they comprise the unique, intangible qualities and living cultural heritage upon which the contemplated UNESCO World Heritage Site designation hinges;

9. Recently, the Vancouver Police Foundation supported a visit of representatives and community leaders to San Francisco's Chinatown in order to learn firsthand how this historic neighbourhood had overcome similar challenges to those faced by Vancouver's Chinatown. City of Vancouver staff were invited to be part of that initiative. The findings the delegation identified highlighted the fact that the success in addressing the problems of San Francisco's Chinatown was built on strong partnerships between local community groups, the San Francisco police department, and the City of San Francisco Public Works department, as well as through the establishment of clearly defined programs, communications protocols, and resource allocation;
10. Specifically, San Francisco set about tackling issues in their Chinatown through a multi-pronged approach including:
 - Alley beautification
 - Graffiti response & mural programs
 - Clean-up efforts
 - Volunteerism and community initiatives
11. Success in San Francisco was achieved by explicitly directing that City sanitation and cleaning resources be stepped up and dedicated to the initiative, including activities such as weekly power washing of sidewalks and alleys, enhanced cleaning and needle pick-up, placemaking through beautification of alleys and art projects with local artists, removal of punitive by-laws that fine businesses for not removing nuisance graffiti quickly enough, shifting to a help-centered approach with a dedicated number to call the City's Public Works for assistance, and volunteer groups that would do patrols and also help with cleanup and other efforts;
12. Vancouver's Chinatown is a cultural gem under siege. Rectifying the situation requires immediate leadership from Vancouver City Hall in partnership with the local community to invest in and support uplifting Chinatown to help return vibrancy to this important neighbourhood.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council direct staff to report back by the first regular Council meeting in January 2023 with a draft action plan to support urgent measures to uplift Chinatown, including engaging with the VPD and community leaders regarding the San Francisco experience to inform the action plan;

FURTHER THAT the plan to uplift Chinatown shall include, but not be limited to, recommendations for enhanced support from Streets & Engineering including robust street, alley, and sidewalk cleaning, litter and needle pick-up, new graffiti removal strategies, place-making, new murals or local artwork, as well as

outreach opportunities that include local community groups in graffiti clean-ups, safe walks, and seniors support.

- B. THAT the above direction to staff in A above, identify the required resources from the 2023 Operating Budget, and that consideration be given to extending the impact of these resources through use of the Community Stewards Program and engagement with the Chinese Policing Centre.
- C. THAT staff report back as soon as possible on potential by-law changes to remove or waive fines to property owners and businesses that are repeat victims of nuisance and damaging graffiti.
- D. THAT Council direct staff to establish a satellite City office in Chinatown, such as within the City-owned Chinatown Plaza, or within another City-owned property or reasonable alternative, to provide Mayor and Council with the ability to work from the space and meet with community members as desired.

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