



## COUNCIL REPORT

Report Date: May 15, 2023  
Contact: Sandra Singh  
Contact No.: 604.871.6858  
RTS No.: 15600  
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20  
Meeting Date: May 30, 2023  
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Vancouver City Council  
FROM: General Manager of Arts, Culture and Community Services  
SUBJECT: Commemorating the Komagata Maru Incident: Secondary Naming of a Street

### Recommendations

- A. THAT Council acknowledges the discriminatory decisions made by the City of Vancouver when responding to the arrival of the Komagata Maru and its passengers in 1914.
- B. THAT Council approve the recommendation that the primary street Canada Place be provided a secondary honorary name "Komagata Maru Place" as an act of cultural redress for the City's role in the Komagata Maru incident.
- C. THAT Council recognize the importance of the 2nd Avenue Gurdwara (1866 West 2nd Avenue) to the South Asian community and direct staff to explore options for how to recognize the specific role it played during the Komagata Maru incident and its larger historical and cultural significance.

### Purpose and Executive Summary

As directed by Council on July 5, 2022 (RTS# 13368), this report seeks Council approval of the recommended location for assignment of a secondary, honorary street name in recognition of the Komagata Maru incident as an act of redress in acknowledgment of the City's role in the incident. This report outlines the project purpose, community engagement outcomes, and next steps.

Please note that some of the information in the report may be difficult to read as it describes historic discrimination and racism.

### Council Authority/Previous Decisions

Related Council authority/previous decisions that are connected to this report include:

- Historical Discrimination against People of South Asian Canadian Descent, [2022](#)
- Equity Framework, [2021](#)
- Motion Carried: Naming a Street After the Komagata Maru, [2019](#)
- Komagata Maru Apology and Remembrance Day Proclamation, [2020](#)

- Healthy City Strategy, [2015 - 2025](#) (Goal: Being and feeling safe and included)

## City Manager's Comments

The City Manager concurs with the foregoing recommendations.

## Context and Background

The City formally apologized for historical discrimination toward passengers of the Komagata Maru in May 2021, citing a 1914 motion that called for a telegram to the Premier advising that City Council was “unilaterally opposed” to immigration of “Hindus and other Asiatic races.” In July 2022, arising from the interim report on *Historical Discrimination against People of South Asian Descent in Vancouver*, Council directed staff to prepare for a secondary naming of a street after the Komagata Maru incident. Other decisions arising from the interim report provided additional specific direction related to the broader project to chronicle historic discrimination toward the South Asian community and develop recommendations for redress. A report back on this additional work will happen at a future date.

The 1914 Komagata Maru incident represents a significant moment in Canadian and Vancouver history in which the City as local government made deliberately discriminatory decisions founded on racist beliefs that prohibited the landing of South Asian immigrants in Vancouver. The City's 2020 apology and recognition was important, but it only recognized one action of the City in relation to the Komagata Maru incident. The City's official role in the incident was in fact multifaceted and must be placed within the historic context of the social and political conditions that engendered the attitudes resulting in the 1914 motion and the City's other responses to the ship and its passengers. This includes the already entrenched and growing anti-Asian and anti-Asian immigration sentiments in Vancouver and across the country, their manifestation in policy and legislation of all three levels of government, and the resulting limitations on the dignity, rights, security, and freedoms of the Asian community, including the South Asian community. Please see [Appendix A](#) for this context.

The Komagata Maru passengers were Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus from Punjab, yet the historical significance of this incident contributed to decades of racism against South Asian Canadian communities in Vancouver broadly. The incident remains emblematic of the decades of discrimination faced by South Asian Canadians – prior to, during, and after the incident – who represent diverse geographies, languages, dialects, religions, race, gender, caste, age, sexual orientation, immigration status, ability, and several different countries of origin that include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

## Historical Summary

In 1914, Gurdit Singh, a Sikh businessman and community leader chartered the Komagata Maru, a Japanese steamship from Hong Kong, and named it *Guru Nanak Jahaz*, (*Guru Nanak*, was the first of the ten Sikh gurus and *Jahaaz* means ‘ship’), following an Ardaas (prayer service) and meeting at a Gurdwara in Hong Kong. On April 4, 1914, the Komagata Maru left Hong Kong carrying 376 passengers – approximately 340 Sikh, 27 Muslim, and 12 Hindu passengers – most originating from Punjab, India. The ship began its two-month journey via Shanghai and Yokohama to Vancouver's Burrard Inlet. The passengers, all British subjects, were traveling across the globe, like many others, in search of a better life. They hoped to find work in Canada and to support their families back home. On May 23, 1914, the ship arrived in Vancouver and anchored in the Burrard Inlet. Although the passengers arrived with valid travel documents, including British passports that proved they were British subjects, and the mandatory \$200 ‘Asian’ head tax, they were prohibited from leaving the ship, effectively detaining the passengers aboard.

The Canadian government used the Continuous Journey Regulation to refuse the passengers entry into Canada despite their status as British subjects. The Continuous Journey Regulation required immigrants to make a direct journey from their country of origin without stopping or disembarking at any other port along the way. This policy specifically targeted immigrants from India who, at the time, had no way to get to Canada in one continuous ship voyage. This regulation was passed within the context of rising anti-Asian and anti-“Hindoo” racism, antisemitism, increasing racism towards Black Canadians, and ongoing anti-Indigenous racism (e.g., Gradual Civilization Act, 1857). Henry Herbert Stevens who was a Vancouver City Alderman until 1911 before becoming Member of Parliament for Greater Vancouver in 1912, publicly supported the Continuous Journey regulation. In a pamphlet titled “*Oriental Problem*” (ca 1912), he named South Asian community leaders as being dangerous, exploiters and ignorant. Stevens was strongly opposed to immigration from India to Canada, calling South Asians undesirables, and opposing their right to be joined by their families.

On July 6, 1914, the British Columbia Court of Appeal ruled in favour of the Government of Canada after finding no principle in Canadian or British law that gave the passengers a right of entry. All but approximately 20 of the passengers were directed to return to India. The Guru Nanak Jahaz was escorted out of the harbor by the Canadian military on July 23, 1914. Upon the ship's arrival to the Indian port Budge Budge near Kolkata, India on September 29, 1914, 19 passengers were shot and killed and many others were imprisoned or placed under house arrest by British Indian police and troops as they were labeled political agitators.

### The Role of the City

As local government, Vancouver's municipal positions and decisions often aligned with and reinforced discriminatory Federal government policies and practices. Please see [Appendix A](#) for commentary on the City's role in contributing to the hostile climate toward South Asians in 1914 as well as further detail provided by a community historian on the City's response to the Komagata Maru. City decisions included, but are not limited to:

- Over their sixty-two day isolation in the Burrard Inlet, passengers often went 3-4 days without food and water. Their representatives wrote repeated letters to the Mayor, requesting food, water, and medical aid in response to the deteriorating living conditions on the ship. The City did not respond to these letters, nor did they seek support from senior government to provide these provisions.
- Vancouver Mayor Baxter organized a public meeting which was held at a community hall referred to as Dominion Hall. South Asians were refused entry and some of those wishing to attend were removed by the police by force. The Mayor's message was to send the *undesirables* back to India:

“We have here in the harbor seeking admittance a boat load of undesirables trying to force their way in defiance of our laws, and who will not stop at taking action in the courts to force their presence upon us. There is no room for them here. Work is not to be had even for our citizens. What I would like to see is that orders be issued for a couple of tug boats to hitch on to the Komagata Maru and haul her with her load of undesirables out to sea. We do not want this thing to get into the courts.... By holding this meeting we desire to show the government [in] Ottawa in a quiet way that we as citizens are behind them in any action that may be taken in ridding the country of these East Indians. The Hindu is not a desirable citizen, and when I say that I am backed up by public opinion.” Vancouver Mayor Baxtor, Vancouver Sun Newspaper June 23, 1914

- City Council unanimously passed a motion advocating for the exclusion of “*Hindus and*

*other Asiatic races into this country*” which stated that:

“...whereas it is known that if these Hindus succeed in landing it is the plan of promoters of the scheme to bring thousands of their compatriots into this country. And whereas the presence of these people would prove a serious menace to our civilization, both economically and socially, besides intensifying the present unsatisfactory labor condition. This Council, therefore, desires to place itself on record as unalterably opposed to the admittance of Hindus and other Asiatic races into this country, and that his worshiped the Mayor, be authorized to send a telegram to Premier Sir Robert Borden conveying this expression of the Council.” (See [Appendix A](#) to read the full motion).

- After the Board of Appeal decision of July 6, the passengers accepted the verdict and agreed to leave only after adequate provisions (food and water for their long return journey) were provided. In the early morning on July 19, 1914, the Sea Lion with 35 deputized officers and 125 City police officers, all armed, approached the Komagata Maru with the intention of forcing her out of the harbour as per the deportation order. The passengers were awake and resisted as they did not receive food and water for their long journey home and a battle commenced. While the police were enforcing a federal deportation order, the City did not oppose their deployment.
- Before, during, and after the incident, Vancouver Police were able to detain any South Asians they deemed suspicious and were able to conduct mass interrogations and searches against the local South Asian population.

The Komagata Maru remained docked with passengers detained on board for sixty-two days while the small, local South Asian communities advocated for the passengers and raised funds to pay for provisions and legal efforts in support of the passengers.

### Impacts of Events

Exposure to racial discrimination is a social determinant of health. The City’s role and responses related to the Komagata Maru incident had significant negative impacts on the passengers, their families, and the local South Asian communities. The City’s response further reinforced for the broader community and senior government that the City as local government endorsed anti-South Asian racism, attitudes that would continue to influence immigration policy and rights of individuals for decades to come. The hostility and racism so evident in all three levels of government’s responses to the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru and as embedded in the Immigration Act largely deterred further South Asian immigration for over half a century. As with all acts of racism and institutional racism across all levels of government, the impact is intergenerational and the future report back will provide further insight on how this type of discrimination impacts community advancement, political representation and social, emotional and cultural wellbeing as well as physical and mental health.

## **Discussion**

### Engagement Process

Since 2018, the Komagata Maru Descendants Society and their Vice President and Spokesperson Raj Singh Toor has requested that the City name a street after the Komagata Maru. Staff acknowledges Raj Singh Toor along with other community leaders for their work in bringing the request to the City. Vancouver’s South Asian communities, like all other communities, are not homogenous and therefore there are diverse perspectives on whether street naming or honorary street naming and other commemorative acts are appropriate or

meaningful forms of cultural redress. Vancouver's South Asian communities have asked that the City recognize that this commemorative act does not end the redress required for the historic discrimination and its impacts on the communities' development here in Vancouver.

To advance the direction on the secondary naming of a street, staff convened targeted focus groups with stakeholders to identify the appropriate street (see details in [Appendix D](#)). Community members provided input regarding the location, history, and design process for a secondary naming and street signage. They also reiterated their hope for City investment in South Asian community assets including a South Asian Canadian museum, art and social spaces, story-telling projects, and supporting the existing community-based Komagata Maru Museum at the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver.

### Site Options

Several options were explored for a potential secondary naming of a street based on the sites' cultural and historic significance in relation to the Komagata Maru incident and for local South Asian communities. The three sites mentioned most frequently were Main St. between Marine Dr and 49<sup>th</sup> Ave, West 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave, and a location in Coal Harbour close to and within view of where the incident happened. After discussion with various community members, the following two options emerged as the most appropriate:

#### *Option A - Secondary Street Naming Location, Canada Place*

The street Canada Place offers a direct view of Vancouver's Harbour where the Komagata Maru ship was held for over two months with its passengers forced to stay onboard and where large crowds would gather daily to get a glimpse of the ship. It would offer residents and tourists arriving to Vancouver on foot, transit and by ship an opportunity to reflect as they learn more about this historic incident from the secondary name signage and from the nearby monument in Harbour Green Park. For further details see ([Appendix B](#)).

#### *Option B - Secondary Street Naming Location, West 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue*

The 2nd Avenue Gurdwara at 1866 W 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue is considered an area of historic significance in relation to the Komagata Maru incident as this was the site from which the local South Asian community mobilized to support the passengers by raising funds and providing legal services, food, and water. This location's significance includes but extends far beyond the Komagata Maru incident. As one of the first community-owned spaces and neighbourhoods where South Asian community members settled and stayed for over 60 years (1906-1969), it was a hub for cultural gatherings, political and civic education, and community building for activists, organizers and attendees of many different faiths. The Gurdwara has significant cultural and historical importance and played a key role in the struggle for voting rights by providing a space for community meetings, organizing protests, and lobbying efforts. The effort eventually led to the removal of discriminatory voting restrictions in British Columbia in 1947 (now known as the 40-year struggle for the vote). This victory marked an important milestone in the struggle for racial equality in Canada, and memorialized 2nd Avenue Gurdwara as the heart of grassroots organizing for the South Asian community. 1866 W 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue is still considered a holy site by many in the community.

### *Recommended Option*

There was a strong mutual consensus from community engagement sessions that the secondary naming should happen in Coal Harbour and the preferred location was Canada Place ([Appendix B](#)). This site is historically accurate as the site closest to the events of 1914 including being able to see where the ship was docked. Accordingly, this is the recommendation provided to Council.

Staff also heard that the significance of Kitsilano and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave Gurdwara and the importance of recognizing the South Asian community and their history and contribution to this area of the city. Ideas from community members ranged from commemorative acts to creating space for the community. Other areas of historical and cultural significance to the South Asian Canadian communities in Vancouver will be explored in the broader Historical Discrimination work underway.

### Next Steps

Should Council approve the recommendations in this report, staff will implement a community process to develop a culturally appropriate design for the sign; create public education materials, including for local residents; work with community to explore how to recognize the cultural and historic significance of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave Gurdwara site; and assist the Khalsa Diwan Society with identifying potential funding sources for the Komagata Maru Museum located at 8000 Ross Street. Staff anticipate the unveiling ceremony for the secondary name to take place in Q4 2023.

In order to ensure City partners are aware of our work in relation to this incident, as requested by community members, staff will share this report and presentation with local South Asian organizations, the xʷməθkʷəy̍əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations and public bodies including the Vancouver School Board, Vancouver Public Library, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver Parks Board, Vancouver Police Department, Vancouver Coastal Health, the Province, Parks Canada, and Heritage Canada.

Alongside the work on this secondary naming of a street, staff are working with Vancouver Board of Parks & Recreation to reduce impacts of repeated vandalism targeting the current monument and to enhance its content to support public education. Multi-media features including audible storytelling and content that includes the impacts of historic discrimination of South Asians are being considered.

Staff anticipate a final report to Council with recommendations related to recognizing historical discrimination against people of South Asian descent in Q4 of 2024.

### **Financial Implications**

Costs to implement these recommendations will be managed within the 2023 ACCS operating budget.

### **Risk**

There are no unanticipated risks associated with the recommendations.

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## **Appendix A**

### Preamble to Historical Overview: Policy Context for Recommendations

Sandra Singh, General Manager, ACCS

On May 18, 2021, Vancouver City Council formally apologized for historical discrimination toward 376 passengers travelling on board the Komagata Maru steamship from British India in 1914 and declared May 23 as the first Komagata Maru Remembrance Day to be marked in Vancouver. The City apology was an important and meaningful recognition of historic Vancouver City Council's racism when they supported through resolution the exclusion of South Asian immigrants aboard the Komagata Maru (<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/council-record-of-komagata-maru-june-30-1914.pdf>).

As part of the broader work to chronicle historic discrimination toward the South Asian community by the City as local government, staff have worked with local community to contribute community perspectives on the Komagata Maru incident. A preliminary partial historical account of the incident and the City's role is provided below by a local community historian. In putting forward this preamble to the following historical overview, I am not attempting to write history, but rather to situate the City's response to the Komagata Maru's arrival within the context of the social climate and policy environment of the day and to illuminate the types of decisions the City did not make that were within its jurisdiction as local government and could have made.

The City's 2021 apology and recognition was important and welcome. At the same time, it only recognized one action of the City in relation to the Komagata Maru incident. The City's official response during this incident was in fact multifaceted and must be placed within the historic context of the social and political conditions that engendered the attitudes resulting in the 1914 motion and the City's other responses to the ship and its passengers, namely the already entrenched and growing anti-Asian and anti-Asian immigration sentiments in Vancouver and across the country, their manifestation in policy and legislation, and the resulting limitations on the dignity, rights, security, and freedoms of the Asian community, including the South Asian community.

As is well documented, the early years of the twentieth century saw growing immigration to Canada from China, Japan, and India. Like all settlers to Canada, these newcomers came to seek a better future for themselves and their families. With their work building the railways and in the growing local fishing, construction, logging, and agricultural industries, these newcomers contributed actively to the economic development and prosperity of Vancouver, the province, and the country. However, they were not welcomed as equal members of society by any level of government or by society at large, including here in Vancouver. Early twentieth century British Columbia saw increasing racism toward these non-White, non-western European residents by all levels and sectors of society, from residents to labour unions, government bureaucrats, and elected officials.

A series of legislative and other decisions of various levels of government prohibited the full inclusion and well-being of Asian immigrants. Early legislation or actions such as the well-documented Federal Chinese Head Tax (1885), 1906 Vancouver City Council's motion to request suspension of immigration of East Indians to Vancouver, Mayor Buscombe's direction to CPR to halt all Indian immigrants who wished to travel by train to Vancouver (1906), and the

changes to the Vancouver Incorporation Act (April 1907) put forward by Premier Bowser to deny South Asians the vote in Vancouver – which then meant they could not vote Provincially or Federally – made it abundantly clear that Asian people were not truly equal in the eyes of the electorate nor in those of elected officials of all levels of government.

The founding of the Asiatic Exclusion League (AEL) in 1907 further illustrates the extent to which racism had infiltrated the political and social life of Vancouver. The AEL-led anti-Asian Vancouver race riot of Sept 7-8 – a reaction to AEL's fear that South Asians millworkers fleeing the anti-South Asian riots in Bellingham just days before were coming to Vancouver – resulted in extensive damage to Japanese and Chinese businesses by rioters carrying signs with slogans such as "Keep Canada White" and "Stop the Yellow Peril." That South Asians were not physically impacted is only a reflection that the community at this time was still quite small and their cultural hub was along 2nd Ave and not in proximity of Chinatown and Paueru Gai. Sadly, it was a further sign of the inherent anti-Asian racism of the day that instead of raising humanitarian outrage in Vancouver residents, Council, or even the Royal Commission looking into the riot, following the riot were further Asian immigration restrictions: the "gentleman's agreement" between Japan and Canada to limit ban immigration for Japanese people to Canada and the introduction of the Continuous Journey Regulation (1908), passed through an order-in-council prohibiting immigration of people who did not travel on a continuous journey to Canada (seeking to block all immigration of South Asians from India, Fiji, etc.). Further, another 1908 Federal order-in-council passed a regulation that expanded the Federal head tax to South Asian immigrants (\$200), creating an additional barrier for migration. In 1910, the Immigration Act was amended to incorporate the continuous journey requirement, expand the list of prohibited immigrants, and give the federal government more discretionary authority over the admission and deportation of immigrants, introducing oblique and clearly racially motivated criteria such as "[suitability] to the climate or requirements of Canada."

At the local level, here in Vancouver, on December 4, 1913 – just months prior to the arrival of the Komagata Maru – City Council passed the motion similar to the 1906 motion entitled "Exclusion of Asiatics," reinforcing their position of exclusion:

That the Government take the necessary steps by Legislation at the first Session of Parliament to totally exclude Hindus, from the Dominion of Canada and so amend the Immigration Laws as to prevent Asiatics from entering the Province of British Columbia.

These formal local, provincial, and federal government policies and actions not only institutionalized racism into all levels of government and created barriers for Asian immigration, they also collectively endorsed and normalized anti-Asian racism as an acceptable attitude in Canada and its local communities.

It is against this backdrop of mutually-reinforcing, multi-level institutional and societal racism that Vancouver residents and local government received – or rather did not receive – the 376 hopeful South Asian immigrants aboard the Komagata Maru. The actions of the City as local government in response to the arrival of the ship both reflected and reinforced the broader anti-South Asian sentiments of the day. The City's actions must also be considered through the lenses of both deliberate action and inaction. Simply put, the deliberate choices of City officials as they responded to this event are represented by both what they chose to do and chose not to do.



For example, supporting settlement of newcomers is not a municipal responsibility – it lands squarely with senior levels of government who have the jurisdiction and resources for both immigration and social services. However, the City did not send letters or make formal requests that senior government make an exception to immigration policy and allow these newcomers to enter Canada. Nor did the City suggest that it would welcome these newcomers as their newest residents should the Federal government make an exception. Nor did the City write to either senior level of government, requesting they provide provisions – or partner with senior government in supplying such provisions – to the passengers while they awaited a final decision from the appeal Board. Nor did the City urge senior government to provide temporary lodgings for the passengers while they awaited a verdict as to whether they would be allowed into Canada. These were all actions well within the purview of local government.

Instead, Mayor Baxter organized an anti- South Asian public meeting at Dominion Hall. The first invited speaker at the rally was former City Alderman and then Member of Parliament for Vancouver H.H. Stevens, who had previously written extensively on his opposition to Asian immigration, including publishing circa 1912 a pamphlet titled *The Oriental Problem* (<https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.98509/1>). At the meeting, Stevens stated “I reaffirm that the national life of Canada will not permit any large degree of immigration from Asia ... I intend to stand up absolutely on all occasions on this one great principle—of a white country and a white British Columbia.” Stevens was well-known and would have been invited by the Mayor to provide such commentary. The June 23, 1914 edition of the *Vancouver Sun* reported on the Mayor’s comments at the public meeting:

“We have here in the harbor seeking admittance a boat load of undesirables trying to force their way in defiance of our laws, and who will not stop at taking action in the courts to force their presence upon us. There is no room for them here. [...] What I would like to see is that orders be issued for a couple of tug boats to hitch on to the Komagata Maru and haul her with her load of undesirables out to sea. We do not want this thing to get into the courts.... By holding this meeting we desire to show the government [in] Ottawa in a quiet way that we as citizens are behind them in any action that may be taken in ridding the country of these East Indians. The Hindu is not a desirable citizen, and when I say that I am backed up by public opinion.”

Further, as another example of deliberate action, Council passed a motion to send a telegram to the Premier advising that City Council was “unilaterally opposed” to immigration of “Hindus and other Asiatic races.” The City also did not oppose the deployment of police to support the Department of Immigration’s decision to force the Komagata Maru out of Canadian waters, also at a time when the City would have been aware that provisions aboard the ship were lacking, and this action if successful would send the passengers back to India without water, food, or other essential supplies. These decisions in response to the Komagata Maru’s passengers – both action and inaction – stand as the City’s historic response.

As noted in the preliminary historical account below, the small Vancouver South Asian community – despite the racism and hostility reflected daily by elected officials of all levels of government, the general public, and in the press coverage – showed incredible resilience, rallying to raise funds for provisions, writing for assistance, and supporting a legal challenge by the passengers. As you will read below, South Asian communities found support and belonging in their cultural and religious spaces, with the 2nd Ave Gurdwara in Kitsilano at the heart of this community. Current day, for the local community, the memory of the 2nd Ave Gurdwara remains

a symbol of the strength and resilience of the community and as a central organization in support for the Komagata Maru's passengers.

The recommended placement of the secondary naming sign in Coal Harbour, close to where the Komagata Maru and its passengers were, and the recommendation to find a way to recognize the importance of the 2nd Avenue Gurdwara to the local community of the day work in tandem to reflect both the injustice experienced by the passengers and the resilience of the South Asian community as they responded to and were impacted by all three levels of government's aligned exclusionary response to the passengers. That noted, it is also important to recognize that an honorary naming – no matter how well-placed and important – cannot be the only response to the gravitas of the impact of historic discrimination toward the South Asian community in Vancouver. For South Asian community members whose ancestors called Vancouver home in the early 20th century, the recognition that the Komagata Maru incident was just one emblematic manifestation of the broader societal and institutional anti-Asian racism that had been experienced by South Asians for many years and over subsequent decades is important context for this report.

Below is a more detailed but still partial account of local responses to the Komagata Maru incident (May 23 -July 23, 1914) as written by a local community historian in discussion with community focus groups including some descendants of passengers. As an interim overview, it is not exhaustive and does not chronicle the broader history of the South Asian community in Vancouver, the impacts of other manifestations of historic discrimination, including other defining and – at times interconnected – moments, such as the story of Mewa Singh, or the various discriminatory policies and practices that impacted the development of the community as a whole over subsequent decades, nor how it has felt being South Asian in Vancouver over the historical decades. This necessary broader history and these local reflections of historic lived experience will be worked on in collaboration with historians and community members over the next year and will be presented for the record when staff report back on the broader work of recognizing historic discrimination and recommendations for redress. Staff would like to extend their thanks to the researcher Monica Cheema for drafting the preliminary account below and to the community members who took the time to give their feedback.

#### Partial Historical Overview: Komagata Maru Incident

This historical summary below was completed by Monica Cheema who is a community-engaged researcher and storyteller based out of Surrey, BC.

#### Trigger Warning

The content shared in this historical account is sensitive in nature with potentially distressing content including but not limited to descriptions of discrimination, violence and trauma connected to racism and racial conflict, death, outdated language including racist slurs, images and newspaper headlines. The content included is done so for the purpose of transparency and for accountability for previous Mayor, Council and City of Vancouver specific actions, and provide insight into the social conditions of Vancouver in 1914 that impacted the welcome and rights of South Asians. Direct, indirect and systemic discrimination continues to negatively impact South Asian and many racialized communities today. Please be sure you have access to self-care prior to reading this summary. To access support resources please click [here](#).

### Context Setting

While we refer to the Komagata Maru “incident” we recognize it is insufficient in that an “incident” implies that something occurred in isolation, and that it was an anomaly. In fact, this injustice belongs to wider systemic discrimination, which arises from historic European colonialism and the belief of cultural and racial superiority that under-pinned its systems and approaches. It is therefore impossible to speak of this particular history, as it relates to the experiences of the South Asian community, without explicitly naming the longstanding colonial policies on which this country was “founded”. The Indian Act is an example of one such policy – as it was first passed in 1876 as Federal law. The Act aimed to “eliminate First Nations culture in favor of assimilation into Euro-Canada society”.<sup>[1]</sup>

The Komagata Maru incident is one example among many of the decades of discrimination against South Asian Canadian communities in Vancouver and is not a stand-alone or one-off incident. The historical accounts of the Komagata Maru incident is emblematic of the discrimination faced by South Asian Canadians and demonstrates the subsequent cultural redress that is required. Cultural redress can include the public dissemination of descriptions of grievances (i.e. publicly sharing accounts of violations), bringing public attention to violations of human rights, raising the social conscience about discriminatory policies, practices, sentiments and impacts without denial, and other actions as determined by affected communities. Any or all of these actions contribute to an affirmation of human rights and is part of the City’s cultural redress with South Asian communities to amend and repair past harms and impacts. Cultural redress must be informed by affected communities and will be considered within the development of the City’s UNDRIP Task Force Report and Recommendations.

### Approach to Historical Summary

The Komagata Maru incident and wider pervasiveness of racial discrimination was endured by South Asian communities at the hands of elected governments including, but not limited to, the Federal, Provincial, and City of Vancouver that were supported by widespread racist attitudes, beliefs and practices.

This historical summary is not an academic or peer reviewed document and as such does not replace any other historical records written and/or oral. This historical summary is developed with the assumption that historical accounts must allow for plural perspectives and expect non-consensus. As such, this historical summary does not aim to provide a complete or definitive account for all related events and impacts involving other levels of government or members of broader society. Nor does it tell a full account of the Komagata Maru incident and its immediate or long-lasting impacts on South Asian communities.

Rather, this historical summary focuses on the City of Vancouver (i.e., local government) related actions and events to address the erasure of City actions and the impact on South Asian Canadians. This historical summary relies on archives and oral history, including variations of sources which pose limitations in representation including intersections of gender, sexual orientation, age, caste, class, ability, and other social identities. For example, the inappropriate label of “Hindoo” – or in some cases misuse of “Hindu” – used in this document reflects the historical references of the day (1914) and was used by government leaders to refer to Sikh, Muslim and Hindu community members and the Komagata Maru passengers.

### Importance of Community Archives and Storytelling

The telling of the story of the Komagata Maru (also known as the Guru Nanak Jahaz) is emblematic of the gaps in British Columbia's documented history. The under-documentation and lack of inclusion of South Asian communities' perspectives and lived experiences is a form of erasure and exclusion from the historic record. In the case of historical archives, this becomes a problem not only of "representation", but of the right to belong and – as felt acutely by communities – the right to exist altogether. The gaps in these archives reflect the history of inequity and racial discrimination in Canada.

While the Komagata Maru incident was well documented by "mainstream society" and academics, the gaps in the full story of the Komagata Maru – the experiences and perspectives of impacted community members and the South Asian diaspora – has been largely kept alive through the work of pioneer families, elders, community historians and storytellers who worked individually and collectively to save and archive family histories. This historic exclusion of perspectives of the South Asian community from the public record related to this incident is consistent with exclusion of racialized and minority community perspectives from the historic record generally. Oral storytelling, specifically, remains an important way for these communities to transmit knowledge, traditions, and histories from one generation to the next. While written records are often considered the standard for historical analysis, it is important to note that oral storytelling can provide unique insights into historical events and the experiences of people who may not have been represented in official written records. The Komagata Maru's history provides a promise of a new and necessary archive, one that is generated from within its community. To read about the Komagata Maru incident from the community perspective, please visit one of the many archives including: The South Asian Canadian Legacy Project: <https://saclp.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/>. To learn more in person, please visit the Komagata Maru Museum located at 8000 Ross Street, Vancouver. To arrange a visit or group tour call the Khalsa Diwan Society at 604-324-2010.

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*Bari Barsi Khatan Gaye Si, Katke Le Ande....*

*ਬਾਰੀ ਬਰਸੀ ਖਤਨ ਗੇ ਸੀ, ਕਟਕੇ ਲੇ ਅੰਦੇ*

*"I traveled for twelve years [far from home] to earn, And after this journey I brought [home]..."<sup>21</sup>*

*(Popular Punjabi Folk Song)*



*"The Komagata Maru is not a story of one century ago; it is a story about today. News about immigration visa delays and restrictions, daily reports on racial profiling and no-fly lists; escalating workplace raids and deportations; and the Safe Third Country Agreement are the stories of today, happening right now." (Harsha Walia, 2008)<sup>[3]</sup>*

#### First South Asian Arrivals Prior to the Komagata Maru & Early Discrimination

On June 3 1902, an ocean liner known as "The Empress of Japan" arrived in Vancouver carrying 125 soldiers from South Asia. Among the many passengers was a small group of Sikh men from Punjab. The soldiers had come to British Columbia as part of a Commonwealth-wide celebration of King Edward VII's coronation. Upon their return to Punjab, word of British Columbia spread, and a wave of immigration took place. Between 1904 and 1908, around 5,000 men settled across the province, mainly finding work in farming, fisheries, and lumber mills.<sup>[4]</sup>

However, as the South Asian population grew in Vancouver, so too did discrimination. The City of Vancouver quickly began limiting South Asian rights when it saw in "Hindoos" the same racial threat as the Japanese and Chinese immigrants before them. In the summer of 1906, the Mayor of Vancouver, Frederick Buscombe, instructed the Canadian Pacific Railway to halt all Indian immigrants who wished to travel by train until the City of Vancouver Council felt certain that these new arrivals would not create any problems.<sup>[5]</sup> Ethnocentric views of "progress", "civilization", and "suitability" were lauded by state players in an intentional effort to maintain a vision of Canada as a "White Man's Country".<sup>[6]</sup> In a telegram to Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier, Vancouver Mayor Bascombe stated that:

"The City of Vancouver will not stand for any further dumping of East Indians here. Mass meeting called to consider active preventative measure unless definitive authoritative assurances received that government has prohibited importation of these undesirable immigrants."<sup>[7]</sup>

Racist fear-mongering ran rampant across the city itself and the City as local government shifted its attitude towards immigration, laying the ideological foundations for exclusion:



[Left image: “Vancouver Citizens Unanimously Demand Exclusion of Hindus”, The Vancouver Sun, June 24 1914] [Right image: “Citizens Will Voice Their Determination To Send Hindus Away”, The Vancouver Sun, June 23 1914]

### The Continuous Journey Regulation

In 1908 the Government of Canada (“Federal government”) enacted *The Continuous Journey Regulation*.<sup>[8]</sup> This regulation was designed to require immigrants to Canada to make a direct journey from their country of origin without stopping or disembarking at any other port along the way. This policy was designed to specifically target immigrants from India who, at the time, had no way to get to Canada in one continuous ship voyage. As an example of institutional racism, this action used the law as a tool to engineer the conditions for exclusion of a racialized group. Practically, these regulatory changes separated families and made further growth of Canadian South Asian communities impossible.

In 1911, the Khalsa Diwan Society and United India League sent four members – Teja Singh, Dr Sunder Singh, Raja Singh, and L.W. Hall – to Ottawa to speak to the Minister of the Interior. During their meeting they stated:

“The next immigration regulation which we ask you to consider with a view to modification or repeal is the continuous journey restriction. Continuous journey, as now defined, is impossible. No other country asks its own subjects to do that, which from the very nature of the case, they cannot. The thinking men of India and all who are directly or indirectly affected by this order-in-council fail to understand its application, where loyal subjects of the Crown are concerned; as a method of total restrictions that is another matter. But, on the other hand, we would ask you to consider; is there any process of the law or regulation that can be indirectly used to strip a loyal British subject of his inherent right to travel or reside in any part of the Empire? If not, then why this restriction?”<sup>[9]</sup>

Former Vancouver City Alderman, (until 1911), and then Greater Vancouver Member of Parliament, Henry Herbert Stevens responded to these grievances. In a pamphlet titled “*Oriental Problem*” (1912), he named Teja Singh as being dangerous, Dr. Sunder Singh as being an exploiter, Raja Singh as being controlled by the former two and Mr. Hall as being



ignorant. Stevens was strongly opposed to the immigration of Indians to Canada, calling them undesirables, and opposing their right to be joined by their families.<sup>[10]</sup>



[Image on left: “Komagata’s Men Have No Chance To Enter, Vancouver Daily World, June 17 1914] [Image on right: “Will Not Let Komagata Maru Touch The Shore”, Vancouver Daily World, May 23 1914]

### The Komagata Maru (Guru Nanak Jahaz) Incident

Chartering a steam ship was the only way to embark on travel between India and Canada, and unfortunately, this was an expensive and long venture. The *Continuous Journey regulation* suddenly became an obstacle for South Asians wishing to immigrate to Canada. In 1914, a Sikh businessman and community leader by the name of Gurdit Singh chartered a Japanese steamship from Hong Kong which he renamed as “Guru Nanak Jahaz”, *Guru Nanak* a reference to the first of the ten Sikh gurus and *Jahaz* meaning ship, following an Ardaas (prayer service) and meeting at a Gurdwara (Sikh temple) in Hong Kong.<sup>[11]</sup> On April 4, 1914, the Guru Nanak Jahaz left Hong Kong carrying a total of 376 passengers including approximately 340 Sikh, 27 Muslim, and 12 Hindu passengers most immigrating from Punjab, beginning its two month journey via Shanghai and Yokohama to Vancouver’s Burrard Inlet.<sup>[12]</sup> The passengers, all British subjects, were traveling, as many immigrants were across the globe, with hopes and dreams of a better life, of finding work in Canada and supporting their families back home.

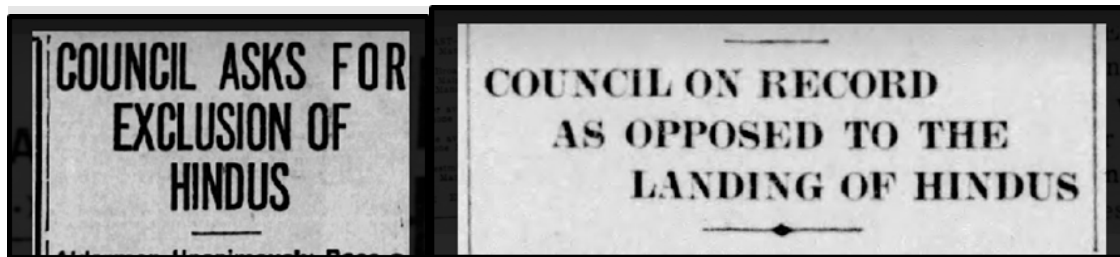
However, on May 23, 1914 when the ship arrived in Vancouver, it was not allowed to dock and the Guru Nanak Jahaz remained anchored in the Burrard Inlet for an arduous two months. The passengers arrived with valid travel documents including British passports to prove that they were British subjects, and a mandatory \$200 head tax that European immigrants were not subjected to, an additional example of racist policy at the time.<sup>[13]</sup> The Canadian government enacted the Continuous Passage Regulation to deny entry to the passengers. Passengers were forced to remain on board in unsafe and deteriorating conditions without access to medical aid, often going 3-4 days at a time without food and water, well to the City’s knowledge as the passengers, local South Asian community members and their lawyer continually wrote for help including to the Mayor of Vancouver who refused to pay for the provisions (food and water) for the detained passengers.

South Asian communities raised funds to pay for the expensive legal fees of the passengers who were fighting their deportation orders as well as for the minimal food, water and medication



that they attempted to get on board the ship.<sup>[14]</sup> It is estimated that approximately \$22,000 Canadian dollars was pooled in support of the Guru Nanak Jahaz's passengers.<sup>[15]</sup>

In addition to efforts by the South Asian community, there are accounts that Musqueam people attempted to get close to the ship to try to provide aid by canoe to the passengers on the ship in the form of food and water.<sup>[16]</sup> It was likely unsuccessful as the Government restricted communities access to the ship. These accounts belong to an oral history held as truth by South Asian elders, and is a demonstration of cross-cultural solidarity and resistance against systemic racism in Canada.



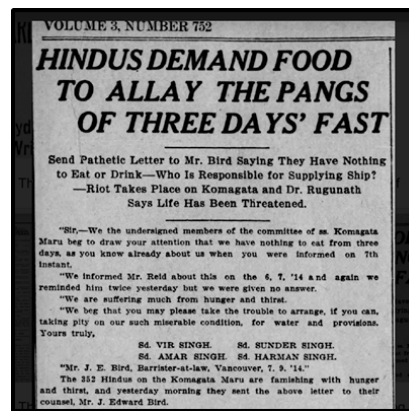
[Image on left: "Council Asks for Exclusion of Hindus", The Province, June 30 1914] [Image on right: "Council On Record As Opposed To The Landing of Hindus", The Vancouver Sun, June 30 1914]

#### Legal Battle & Appeals For Help

Gurdit Singh and the passengers, with help from the small local South Asian community, hired Joseph Edward Bird (an Irish lawyer) to represent the passengers in their legal fight against the decision to deny them entry and force the passengers to remain on board. Bird argued that the government had no legal grounds to detain the passengers without trial and filed an application of unlawful and indefinite imprisonment on their behalf. He also helped the local South Asian community organize protests and raise public awareness about the plight of the passengers despite the wide spread hatred he received including death threats for supporting the passengers.

Passengers were forced to remain on board as they were not allowed to disembark. Food was limited and water supply which was needed for drinking and for powering the steam stoves was insufficient, and passengers often endured three to four days at a time without food and water. The overcrowded living conditions on the ship were also very poor and unsanitary. Passengers had to share common spaces, such as the deck and the hold, for sleeping and eating. The ship had no proper ventilation or sanitation facilities, which severely impacted the health of everyone on board. There was no access to medical aide.

On June 1st, 1914 a committee of organizers and community members, known as The Shore Committee, from Second Avenue Gurdwara led a protest at Vancouver's Dominion Hall which was attended by 600 South Asian community members. The local South Asian communities came together to pledge \$100,000 in support of Guru Nanak Jahaz's passengers. Within 10 days of this protest, the community had collected over \$20,000.<sup>[17]</sup>



[Image above: "Hindus Demand Food To Allay The Pangs Of Three Days' Fast", Vancouver Sun, July 10 1914]

These dangerous and substandard conditions were also well known to the City as the passengers, local South Asian community members, and their lawyer continually wrote for help to many, including the Mayor. These pleas for help were unanswered and the City of Vancouver did not work with senior government to implement any emergency supports in support of the passengers.

"Daljit Singh & Immigration Agent. I have the honor to inform you that we have neither provisions nor water [on] board. Our provisions ran short from this morning and the water too shall be finished tomorrow. I request...therefore that you please arrange to send both things today." <sup>[18]</sup> - Letter from Gurdit Singh on behalf of the passengers onboard the Komagata Maru, July 6<sup>th</sup> 1914.

"One day a child... named Fouja Singh... fainted due to thirst. His mother began to weep. It was a heart-rending scene; I hastened to the cabin of the captain...and brought a bottle of beer. As soon as a few spoons of it were put into his mouth, the child began to regain his senses." Account by Gurdit Singh (charterer of the Guru Nanak Jahaz) <sup>[19]</sup>

### Mayor Baxter's Public Meeting

On June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1914, Vancouver Mayor Baxter called for a public meeting to be held in Dominion Hall in protest of the passengers entry into Canada.

"The Vancouver Daily World published on June 22, 1914 that this meeting would "Give expression to the unqualified objections of the people of Vancouver to the landing in British Columbia of the Hindoos aboard the Komagata Maru" and further stated that "A public expression of opinion, made in this way, will strengthen the hands of the government at Ottawa which, according to Mr. H.H. Stevens, desires to exclude these people and all similar immigration from Canada." <sup>[20]</sup>

Leading up to the protest Vancouver Mayor Baxter made the following comments that were quoted by the Vancouver Sun Newspaper:

“We have here in the harbor seeking admittance a boat load of undesirables trying to force their way in defiance of our laws, and who will not stop at taking action in the courts to force their presence upon us. There is no room for them here. Work is not to be had even for our citizens. What I would like to see is that orders be issued for a couple of tug boats to hitch on to the Komagata Maru and haul her with her load of undesirables out to sea. We do not want this thing to get into the courts, and we want the government to do the same with this boat load of Hindus as was done with Thaw. By holding this meeting we desire to show the government [in] Ottawa in a quiet way that we as citizens are behind them in any action that may be taken in ridding the country of these East Indians. The Hindu is not a desirable citizen, and when I say that I am backed up by public opinion.”<sup>[21]</sup>

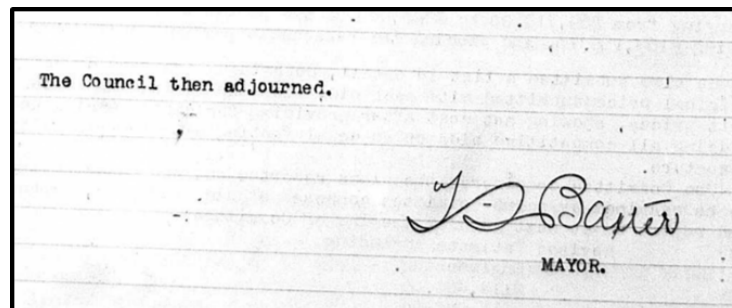
Many prominent public figures were given a platform to speak to the over 2,000 attendees at Dominion Hall. This was overtly discriminatory organizing led by Mayor Baxtor and a clear example of how a local government chose to uphold and advocate for exclusionary and racist policies – and urging local residents to do the same – instead of making a choice to advocate for reform and inclusion. In fact, this incident is a clear example of how federal and municipal governments worked to reinforce and strengthen one another as “champions of exclusion” through policy.<sup>[22]</sup>

#### Council Passes Motion

On June 30, 1914, Vancouver City Council passed a resolution advocating for the exclusion of “*Hindus and other Asiatics*”. The following is an excerpt from the resolution, moved by Alderman McBeath, and unanimously carried by Council. It reads:

“Whereas, the Japanese steamer Komagata Maru has been lying in Vancouver Harbour for over a month with several hundred Hindus on board who are attempting to gain admittance to Canada in deliberate contravention of the Dominion immigration regulations. And whereas it is known that if these Hindus succeed in landing it is the plan of promoters of the scheme to bring thousands of their compatriots into this country. And whereas the presence of these people would prove a serious menace to our civilization, both economically and socially, besides intensifying the present unsatisfactory labor condition. This Council, therefore, desires to place itself on record as unalterably opposed to the admittance of Hindus and other Asiatic races into this country, and that his worshiped the Mayor, be authorized to send a telegram to Premier Sir Robert Borden conveying this expression of the Council.”<sup>[23]</sup>

13	
14	RE IMMIGRATION OF HINDUS & OTHER ORIENTALS:
15	Moved by Ald. Hamilton, Seconded by Ald. McBeath,
16	Whereas the Japanese Steamship Komagata Maru has been lying in Vancouver Harbour, for over a month with several hundred Hindus on Board who are attempting to gain admission into Canada in deliberate contravention of the Dominion Immigration regulations;
17	AND WHEREAS it is known that if these Hindus succeed in landing it <sup>is</sup> the plan of the promoters of the scheme to bring thousands of their compatriots into this Country;
18	AND WHEREAS the presence of these people would prove a serious menace to our civilization both economically and socially besides intensifying the present unsatisfactory labour conditions;
19	This Council therefore desires to place itself on record as unalterably opposed to the admission of Hindus and other Asiatic Races into this Country, and that His Worship the Mayor be authorized to send a telegram to the Premier Sir Robert Borden conveying this expression of the Council.
20	CARRIED.
21	
22	
23	
24	



[Images above: Council Meeting Record, June 30 1914]

#### Battle of the Burrard Inlet - Midnight Raid Attempts to Forcefully Remove Komagata Maru

On July 18<sup>th</sup>, 125 armed City of Vancouver police officers and 35 deputized officers, approached the Guru Nanak Jahaz in a ship named the Sea Lion. This nighttime action planned by the federal government was done so with the intention of forcing the ship out of Vancouver's harbour and eventually out of Canadian waters even though the provisions requested by the passengers for their two month journey home was not provided.

As the Sea Lion attempted to tie on to the ship, the passengers saw they were under attack and quickly noted that the Sea Lion's deck was about 10 feet lower than their own. They defended themselves with projectiles from the ship's deck, including coal, firebricks and scrap metal. This fight, now referred to as the Battle of Burrard Inlet or the Midnight Raid, continued for approximately 15 minutes with many injuries before the Sea Lion was ordered to retreat. It later became ammunition for former Vancouver Alderman - then Member of Parliament for a Vancouver riding - H.H Stevens, as he called for the increase of militarized attempts to coerce the ship out of the Harbour. <sup>[24]</sup>

#### Rejection from Canada

Despite the South Asian communities' exhaustive political protests and legal efforts, as well as hunger strikes by passengers the British Columbia Court of Appeal ultimately ruled against the passengers and ordered them to be deported back to India. <sup>[25]</sup> Despite the ruling, the passengers could not embark on a two month journey back to India without adequate food and

water. Authorities refused to provide provisions for the return journey and instead attempted to use force to remove the ship from Canadian waters.

The Guru Nanak Jahaz had remained docked with the passengers detained onboard by authorities for a total of two months (62 days) before provisions were provided, and it was escorted out of the harbor by the Canadian military aboard the HMCS Rainbow and the Sea Lion on July 23, 1914.

The story of Guru Nanak Jahaz is not an isolated incident. It is evidence of intentional, exclusionary, and deeply racist policies and attitudes of the Canadian government including the City of Vancouver.<sup>[26]</sup>



[Image above: “Hindus Lose Appeal Must Now Return On Komagata Maru”, The Vancouver Sun, July 7 1914]

#### Tragedy After Ship Ordered to Return to India

Over two months later, upon the ship's arrival to the Indian port Budge Budge near Kolkata, India on September 29, 1914, nineteen passengers were tragically shot and killed upon disembarking and many others were imprisoned or placed under house arrest by British Indian police and troops as they were labeled political agitators.<sup>[27]</sup> The British government is also said to have wanted the passengers under the watchful eyes of officials to ensure they were kept isolated and thereby unable to spread word of their mistreatment in Vancouver.<sup>[28]</sup>

“In India, the Komagata Maru represents the Indian people's struggle for independence and was the turning point in India's freedom movement. In Canada, it is a reminder of a policy of exclusion and racism— that for Sikhs and other immigrants from India— lasted for half a century.”

-Jaswinder Singh Toor (Grandson of Komagata Maru passenger)

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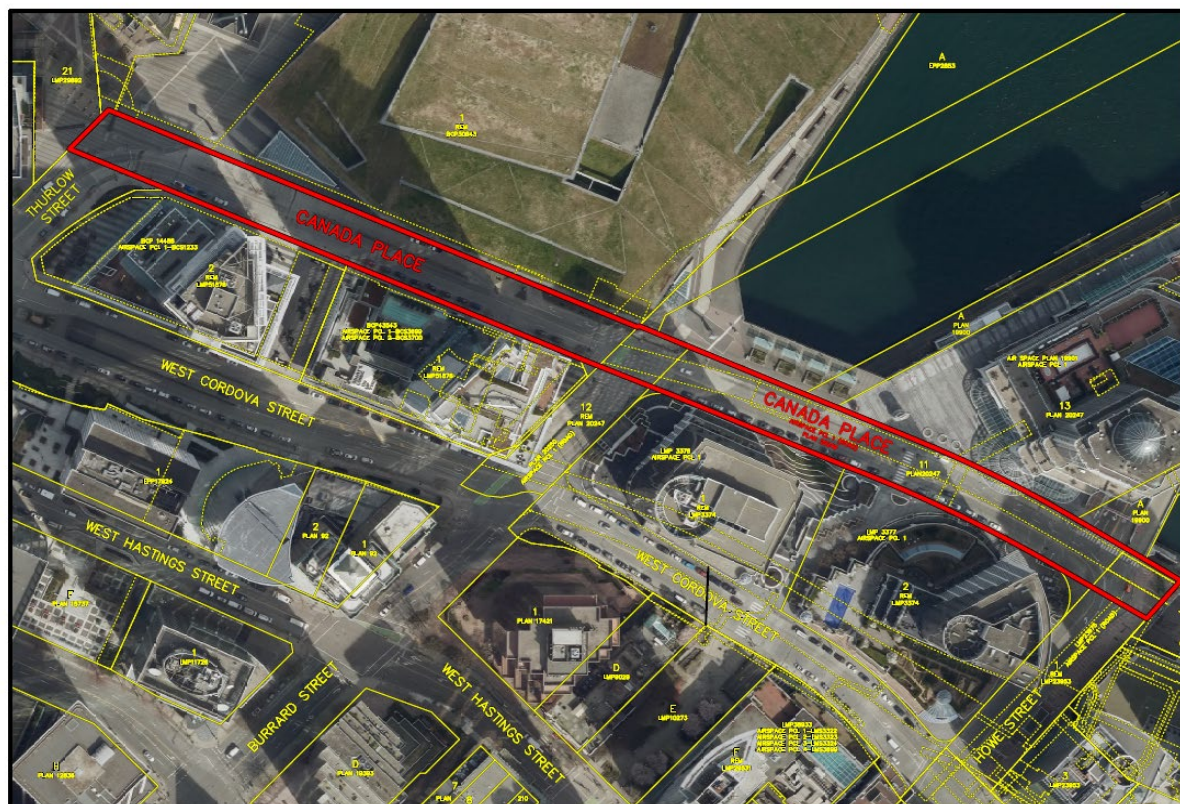
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## Appendix B

### Secondary Naming of a Street: Location Options & Commemoration

Secondary naming of a street is honorary and unlike primary street re-naming it does not affect emergency services and does not require residents to change mailing addresses.

#### Street Naming Location A – Canada Place (Recommended)



**CANADA PLACE – PROPOSED SECONDARY HONOURARY NAME**  
**"KOMAGATA MARU PLACE"**

MAY 15 2023

The street Canada Place, offers a direct view of Vancouver's Harbour where the Komagata Maru ship was held for over two months with its passengers forced to stay onboard. It also offers locals and visitors, including people arriving on ships into Vancouver today, an opportunity to reflect as they learn more about this historic incident from the secondary street naming and from the nearby monument in Harbour Green Park (found in the upper left corner in the image above).

A few location specific reflections from engagement participants include:

"When my family came to visit from India, we took them to Fly Over Canada, showed them Canada Place, the Seawall and to the Federal Komagata Maru Memorial in Harbour Green Park. It was the first time they had heard of the Komagata Maru and I got to experience it through their eyes."

"The City's recognition of the role they played in this tragedy is needed by the Harbour to

raise awareness of this tragedy to all local residents and visitors.”

There was a strong mutual consensus from community engagement sessions that this is the preferred location for the secondary street naming.

#### Street Naming Location B - West 2nd Ave, Kitsilano



Image: Gurdwara at 1866 W 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave, Courtesy of Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver.

The location West 2nd Ave, is a place of historical and cultural significance to South Asian communities as it was the location of Canada’s first community owned Sikh Gurdwara at 1866 West 2nd Avenue. This Gurdwara served as a hub for the local South Asian communities who rose to the defence of the passengers, raised large amounts of money and paid expensive legal fees of the passengers who were fighting their deportation orders as well as advocated for the minimal food, water and medication that they attempted to get on board the ship.

It is important to note that the 2nd Avenue Gurdwara’s significance extends far beyond the Guru Nanak Jahaaz. The temple also became a hub for cultural gatherings, political education and community building for activists, organizers and all attendees. It played a key role in the struggle for voting rights by providing a space for community meetings, organizing protests, and lobbying efforts. This eventually led to the removal of discriminatory voting restrictions in British Columbia in 1947 (now known as the *40-year Struggle for the Vote*). This victory marked an important milestone in the struggle for racial equality in Canada, and memorialized 2nd Avenue Gurdwara as the heart of grassroots organizing for South Asian communities.

## **Appendix C**

### **Intersectional South Asian Canadian Population**

South Asian Canadians have a long, vibrant and evocative history in British Columbia and in Vancouver. When looking at the South Asian Canadian communities that make up Vancouver today, the intersectionality and diversity of the sub-groups must be carefully taken into account. This intersectionality encompasses geographical demographics, different languages, dialects, religions, race, gender, caste, age, sexual orientation, immigration status and ability among others. The countries which make up South Asia are vast and include: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. In addition, many South Asians moved abroad including during the violent partition in India in 1947, as well as indentured labourers for the expanding plantations or railways of East and Central Africa, Malaysia, South Africa, Fiji, the Caribbean and South America.

South Asian immigrants first arrived in Canada in the late 1800s seeking opportunities, including decent wages to support themselves and their families back home. Their history in Vancouver showcases connections to many local cultural and historically significant events and places as well as their 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 of Vancouver, including previous Mayor, Council and leadership, were directly involved in perpetrating racial injustices on South Asian Canadian communities, such as supporting oppression and denying the right to vote in Vancouver, which directly led to the right to vote federally also being revoked. It took 40 years of lobbying and protesting by the South Asian Canadian community to get the right to vote back. The City also supported oppressive and restrictive immigration laws and promoted anti-Asian sentiments. The long history of discrimination highlights the profound weight, importance and need for the City's anti-racism and cultural redress work for the South Asian Canadian communities to continue through a community led approach. For further information about the City of Vancouver's cultural redress work for South Asian Canadian communities please refer to the [Historical Discrimination against People of South Asian Canadian Descent Interim Report – RTS 14853](#).



## **Appendix D**

### **Community Recognition & Engagement Feedback**

Staff would like to thank the following community members for giving their time, guidance and knowledge throughout this process thus far.

#### Community Researcher

Monica Cheema

#### Focus Groups

Komagata Maru Descendants Society

Khalsa Diwan Society

Punjabi Market Collective

South Asian Cultural Redress Community Advisory

#### Additional Advisors:

Dr. Satwinder Bains

Amrit Kaur Bhullar

Raj Singh Toor

Sahib Thind

#### Engagement Feedback

Following the direction of Council and the External South Asian Cultural Redress Advisory Group outlined in the July 22, 2024 report, staff convened targeted focus groups to get feedback for the secondary street naming process. Participants gave feedback on report content including historic accounts and summaries of 'what we heard' in order to deliver accurate and transparent recommendations and content. Input was given regarding the location, history, design process, and the general need for the City to invest in South Asian community assets including museums, art and social spaces, story-telling projects, and supporting the Komagata Maru Museum at the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver. The Komagata Maru Museum at the Khalsa Diwan Society requires assistance with museum promotion, staffing to keep it open and small maintenance and exhibit updates.

Staff also heard some comments from some members of the community that this naming should be a primary street re-naming instead of a secondary street naming to honor the significance of the incident. It is recognized that there are limitations in the act of naming streets. Staff also heard from community engagement sessions this commemoration and cultural redress for South Asian communities should be aligned with Host Nations wishes in recognition of Indigenous rights and governance and that the process be guided by UNDRIP principles.

Staff heard from community members during engagement sessions the importance for “the City to recognize the role it played in the Komagata Maru tragedy, and the City’s responsibility to be accountable for its actions including to educate and raise awareness of this history and the impact it has had on Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities.”

Further staff heard from community that “the City must share the role they played in this tragedy with public organizations such as schools in order to raise awareness of our shared histories and way forward. The heavy emotional impact on the community in the past and today must be considered when sharing this history.”

Another key message from community engagement was that the City further explore and recognize South Asian communities erased history in Kitsilano as it was the first neighborhood in Vancouver where South Asian communities settled and stayed for over 60 years and was the first South Asian hub in Vancouver. South Asian history and contributions in the area are largely erased and needs recognition to give South Asian communities a sense of belonging back in Kitsilano. Participants overwhelmingly requested for the City to provide space back for South Asian Canadian communities in Kitsilano.

South Asian communities, like all others, are not homogenous and are therefore not in consensus on proposed cultural redress mechanisms in the form of secondary street naming. Staff heard that community members would prefer a primary street naming instead of a secondary naming. South Asian Communities have asked that the City recognize that secondary street naming does not end the redress required for this incident.