



COUNCIL REPORT

Report Date: July 9, 2024
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Meeting Date: July 23, 2024
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: General Manager of Arts, Culture and Community Services
SUBJECT: Chinatown Housing Partnership Grants

Recommendations

- A. THAT Council approve 6 grants totalling \$1,600,000 to the organizations listed in Appendix A for the amounts in the “2024 Recommend” column to support improved safety and liveability in Chinese Society-owned SRO buildings, subject to:
- i. All required development and building permits having been issued by the City; and
 - ii. The Societies entering into and registering on title to the property a Housing Agreement with the terms outlined in Appendix C, and otherwise upon such terms and conditions as the Director of Legal Services in consultation with the General Manager of Arts, Culture and Community Services may require.
- Source of funds is the 2024 Chinatown Housing Partnership Grant Program Capital Budget.
- B. THAT Council approve 10 grants totalling up to \$240,000 (\$6,000/ building floor) to the organizations listed in Appendix B for the amounts in the “2024 Recommend” column to implement fire safety upgrades in Chinese Society-owned SRO buildings in accordance with recent Fire By-Law amendments that require the installation of sprinkler isolation valves. Source of funds is the 2024 SRO Upgrading Grant Capital Budget.
- C. THAT, pursuant to Section 206 (1) (j) of the *Vancouver Charter*, Council deems any organization that is to receive a grant pursuant to the above recommendations which is not a registered charity with Canada Revenue Agency, to be an organization contributing to the health and welfare of the City.
- D. THAT Council delegate its authority to execute grant agreements that include terms and conditions that are consistent with this report, that satisfy the City’s Director of Legal Services, and that disburse the grants described in this report to the City’s General Manager of Arts, Culture, and Community Services (or their designate).

- E. THAT no legal rights or obligations will arise or be created by Council's adoption of these Recommendations unless and until all legal documentation has been executed and delivered by the respective parties.

Approval of Recommendations A and B require 2/3 affirmative votes of all Council members per section 206 (1) of the *Vancouver Charter*.

Purpose and Executive Summary

In 2018 Council approved \$1,600,000 for a one-time Chinatown Housing Partnership Grant program. The program is designed to fund capital improvements for eligible Chinese Societies operating SROs to improve safety and liveability for tenants while maintaining affordability. This report seeks Council approval of 6 grants, totalling \$1,600,000, with the source of funds being the Chinatown Housing Partnership Grant fund. This report also seeks Council approval of up to \$240,000 to support 10 Chinese Societies operating SRO buildings to implement sprinkler system separation valves in accordance with recent Fire By-law amendments for fire protection upgrades, at an estimated cost of \$6,000 per floor.

Council Authority/Previous Decisions

- Establishing a Chinatown Cultural District (2024)
- Fire By-law Amendments for Fire Protection Upgrades (2024)
- Chinatown Cultural Heritage Asset Management Plan Strategic Framework (2022)
- Downtown Eastside Plan Implementation and Strategic Allocation (2022)
- Final 2019-2022 Capital Plan & Plebiscite Questions (2018)
- Historical Discrimination Against Chinese People in Vancouver and Formal Apology (2017 & 2018)
- Housing Vancouver Strategy 2018-2027 (2017)
- Chinese Society Legacy Program (2015)
- Downtown Eastside Plan (2014)
- Downtown Eastside Social Impact Assessment (2014)
- SRA By-law (2003)

City Manager's Comments

The City Manager concurs with the foregoing recommendations.

Context and Background

Chinese Society-owned SROs

SRO buildings contain small rooms with shared bathrooms and kitchens and are often considered a last resort before homelessness for many of the city's low-income residents. Most SROs are over 100 years old and face numerous issues with aging infrastructure and poor liveability. Chinese Societies (also referred to as Chinese Benevolent Associations) own 2% of the SRO stock and provide some of the lowest rents in the city for low-income residents, many of whom are seniors.

Formed in the early 1900s as a result of discrimination against people of Chinese descent, Chinese Societies were established as non-profit organizations to provide safe social spaces and serve as mutual aid organizations, supporting their community members with finding employment, helping with family remittances, and accessing affordable housing. Today, Chinese Societies represent key cultural, heritage and housing assets in Chinatown. Although the role of the Chinese Societies has changed over time, many continue to own and operate valuable affordable housing, including approximately 238 SRO rooms in the Downtown Eastside, some with rents as low as \$200/month. Increasingly, the Societies are facing mounting financial pressure to adequately maintain and improve their buildings as they continue to age while keeping rents low.

Chinatown Housing Partnership Grant Program

Chinese Societies that operate SROs are eligible for the SRO Upgrade Grant Program, which was approved by Council in 2014 as part of the Downtown Eastside Plan to support capital investments while maintaining affordability in non-profit operated SROs. However, a lack of capacity, language and other systemic barriers, Chinese Societies have generally faced obstacles in applying for and managing grant funds including SRO Upgrading Grants.

As part of multi-year efforts by various City departments to uplift Chinatown and recognize Chinese Societies as important partners, in 2018 Council approved \$1,600,000 for a one-time Chinatown Housing Partnership Grant program. Due to staff capacity and the pandemic, the grant program was developed in late 2023. The goal of the grant program is to build capacity among Chinese Societies and provide additional support to scope, plan and implement capital projects that improve safety and livability in their SRO buildings.

The goals of the Chinatown Housing Partnership Grant Program are aligned with City policies including Housing Vancouver's priorities to protect and retain the existing rental stock and support renters and equity-denied residents, as well as to improve partnership opportunities for the prevention and elimination of homelessness while creating pathways to housing stability.

Discussion

Eligibility

There are ten non-profit Chinese Societies operating SROs that are eligible for this grant stream (see Table 1).

Table 1. Non-profit Chinese Society SROs

Society/Owner	Address	Building Name	# of Rooms
Lung Kong Tien Yee Association	100 E Pender	New Sun Ah Hotel	40
Mah Society of Canada	139 E Pender	Asia Hotel	38
Woo Chuk On Tong	359 E Pender	Woo Society	9
Zhongshan Lung Jen Benevolent Society	240 Keefer	Zhongshan Lung Jen Benevolent Society	4
Hing Mee Society of Vancouver	553 Prior St	Hing Mee Society of Vancouver	7
Lew Mao Wei Tong Association	349 E Pender	Lew Mao Wei Tong Association	9
Natives of Toi Shan Benevolent Society of Vancouver	237 E Hastings	Phoenix Hotel	32
Vancouver Tsung Tsin (Hakka) Association	542 Keefer	Vancouver Tsung Tsin (Hakka) Association	6
Yin Ping Benevolent Society of Canada	414 Columbia	Yin Ping Benevolent Society of Canada	13
Vancouver Chinatown Foundation for Community Revitalization	258 East Pender St	May Wah Hotel	80
		Total	238

Application, Review and Adjudication Processes

In order to maximize uptake and success of this grant program, staff contracted an experienced bilingual Project Facilitator to assist eligible Chinese Societies to apply for and support the completion of projects pending Council approval. The role of the Project Facilitator is to:

- a. Act as a liaison for the Societies;
- b. Work with Societies to build overall capacity through relationship development, information sharing and knowledge transfer;
- c. Act as a “process steward” to provide guidance and support on the grant application process through construction to completion;
- d. Assist the Societies to prioritize work, determine appropriate scope for projects, apply for permits where necessary and obtain quotes from qualified contractors;
- e. Liaise with the City’s project leads and other departments as required;
- f. Provide translation into Cantonese as required;
- g. Work with successful grant recipients to provide support during construction, track progress and address any issues or challenges that may arise and relay information to the Grant Program Administrators.

Staff invited potential applicants to an Information Session held at the City's Won Alexander Cumyow office in Chinatown on March 10, 2024. The session was conducted in English and translated into Cantonese with the help of a hired interpreter. Seven people were in attendance representing 4 Societies. Staff then followed up with the Chinese Societies that did not attend by hand delivering application packages. Interested applicants were introduced to the Project Facilitator, who then arranged a site visit to identify potential projects and develop their grant applications.

Six Societies submitted completed applications. Staff reviewed each application to ensure it met eligibility requirements and goals of the grant program. Six applications were deemed eligible for funding and are being recommended in this report.

Additional Funding to Comply with Recent Fire By-law Amendments

In response to the Winter's Hotel Fire in 2022, Council approved amendments to the [Fire By-Law](#) that require owners of residential and care occupancy buildings to add sprinkler isolation valves so that sprinkler shutdown and maintenance can be limited to one floor without impacting sprinkler protection in the remainder of the building. The new measures will need to be implemented within one year of By-Law enactment (June 2025) and are anticipated to cost approximately \$6,000/floor, which can be cost prohibitive for buildings with very low rents.

In order to support Chinese Societies to adequately respond to the Fire By-law amendments, staff also recommend grant funding to support the installation of the isolation valves, where necessary.

Summary of Grants Recommended in this Report

Recommendation A

The Chinatown Housing Partnership Grant Program provides capital grants with a budget of up to \$1.6M total. Societies that did not submit applications or have scoped smaller projects are able to apply for other funds, including the SRO Upgrading Grants at a future date, either for another project or a subsequent phase of the current project.

This report recommends approval of funding to 6 societies, with \$1.6M from the Chinatown Housing Partnership Grants (See Table 2). Appendix A summarizes the six applications received, the capital projects that will be undertaken and the recommended funding for each Society.

Recommendation B

An amount of up to \$240,000 from the SRO Upgrading Grant funds is being recommended for Chinese Society buildings to be able to respond to new Fire By-law provisions. Each of the 10 Chinese Society-owned SRA-designated buildings will be assessed individually and, should there not be isolation valves already present, the costs for installation will be identified and the grants will be disbursed accordingly. Buildings that already have isolation valves on each floor will not receive grant funds, and the funding will remain in the SRO Upgrading Grants Capital Fund. Appendix B summarizes the maximum grant to each Chinese Society to undertake the necessary fire safety upgrades, should they be needed, based on the number of floors in each building.

Financial Implication

This report is recommending a total of \$1,600,000 to support capital improvements for 6 non-profit Chinese Societies to improve condition, safety and liveability of SROs. The source of funds is the 2024 Chinatown Housing Partnership Grant Program Capital Budget. This report also recommends up to \$240,000 to support 10 non-profit Chinese Society buildings to improve fire safety in their buildings. Source of funds is the 2024 SRO Upgrading Grant Capital Budget.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications associated with this report's recommendations.

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**APPENDIX A
CHINATOWN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP GRANTS RECOMMENDED**

Applicant	Project Description	2024 Request	2024 Recommend Chinatown Housing Partnership Grant
1. Lung Kong Tien Yee Association Sun Ah Hotel (100 E Pender)	Plumbing and Upgraded Finishes Plumbing upgrades to entire building, consolidated individual shower and toilet rooms to one larger bathroom area per floor, and upgraded finishes in common corridors and rooms.	\$560,000	\$560,000
2. Mah Society of Canada Asia Hotel (139 E Pender)	Water Ingress Mitigation Waterproofing strategy and construction to mitigate water ingress at north and south sides of building to basement level.	\$160,000	\$160,000
3. Yin Ping Benevolent Society (414 Columbia)	Roof, Plumbing & Boiler Replacement Roof repairs, plumbing line repairs, boiler replacement and misc. interior upgrades (millwork, appliances etc).	\$290,000	\$290,000
4. Vancouver Tsung Tsin (Hakka Association) (542 Keefer)	General Renovations & Maintenance Plumbing, electrical wiring/panel replacement, sprinkler, new fire alarm system, furnace, hot water tank and new bathroom.	\$160,000	\$160,000
5. Zhongshan Lung Jen Benevolent Society (240 Keefer)	General Renovations & Maintenance New heat pump, hot water tank, appliances, window replacement, awning replacement, washroom and kitchen renovations and finishes.	\$200,000	\$200,000

Applicant	Project Description	2024 Request	2024 Recommend Chinatown Housing Partnership Grant
6. Vancouver Chinatown Foundation for Community Revitalization May Wah Hotel (260 E Pender)	Kitchen & Washroom Upgrades Interior finishes upgrades to communal kitchens and washrooms	\$230,000	\$230,000
	Total Requested	\$1,600,000	
	Total Recommending		\$1,600,000

**APPENDIX B
CHINATOWN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP FIRE SAFETY FUNDING**

Society/Building	# of Floors	2024 Recommend (Maximum Funding Amount)
1. Lung Kong Tien Yee Association Sun Ah Hotel (100 E Pender)	6	\$36,000
2. Mah Society of Canada Asia Hotel (139 E Pender)	6	\$36,000
3. Natives of Toi Shan Benevolent Society of Vancouver Phoenix Hotel (237 E Hastings)	6	\$36,000
4. Yin Ping Benevolent Society of Canada (414 Columbia)	4	\$24,000
5. Vancouver Tsung Tsin (Hakka Association) (542 Keefer)	4	\$24,000
6. Zhongshan Lung Jen Benevolent Society (240 Keefer)	4	\$24,000
7. Vancouver Chinatown Foundation for Community Revitalization (260 E Pender)	4	\$24,000
8. Lew Mao Wei Tong Association (349 E Pender)	2	\$12,000
9. Woo Chuk On Tong (359 E Pender)	2	\$12,000
10. Hing Mee Society of Vancouver (553 Prior)	2	\$12,000
TOTAL 40		\$240,000

**APPENDIX C
CHINATOWN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP HOUSING AGREEMENT TERMS**

Society/Building	Amount Requested	Terms of Housing Agreement
1. Lung Kong Tien Yee Association Sun Ah Hotel (100 E Pender)	\$560,000	1/3 of the units at 100 E Pender, must remain at or below the maximum current income assistance shelter rate for a single person for 15 years.
2. Mah Society of Canada Asia Hotel (139 E Pender)	\$160,000	1/3 of the units at 139 E Pender, must remain at or below the maximum current income assistance shelter rate for a single person for 60 years. ¹
3. Yin Ping Benevolent Society of Canada (414 Columbia)	\$290,000	1/3 of the units at 414 Columbia, must remain at or below the maximum current income assistance shelter rate for a single person for 10 years.
4. Vancouver Tsung Tsin (Hakka Association) (542 Keefer)	\$160,000	1/3 of the units at 542 Keefer, must remain at or below the maximum current income assistance shelter rate for a single person for 10 years. ²
5. Zhongshan Lung Jen Benevolent Society (240 Keefer)	\$200,000	1/3 of the units at 240 Keefer, must remain at or below the maximum current income assistance shelter rate for a single person for 10 years.
6. Vancouver Chinatown Foundation for Community Revitalization (256 E Pender)	\$230,000	1/3 of the units at 256 E Pender, must remain at or below the maximum current income assistance shelter rate for a single person for 10 years.
	TOTAL \$1,600,00	

¹ The terms of this Housing Agreement take into account a \$180,000 SRO Upgrading Grant and Housing Agreement with the Mah Society for 137-139 Pender from 2018. Upon Council approval of the Chinatown Housing Partnership Grant, the total amount received by the Mah Society since 2018 would be \$340,000.

² The terms of this Housing Agreement take into account the SRO Upgrading Grant Vancouver Tsung Tsin (Hakka Association) received in March 2024 which was for \$60,000. Upon Council approval of the Chinatown Housing Partnership Grant, the total amount received by Vancouver Tsung Tsin (Hakka Association) in 2024 would be \$220,000.