

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

For consideration at the Standing Committee meeting of City Council on November 13, 2024

1. Establishing a South Asian Cultural Centre of Excellence in Vancouver

Submitted by: Councillor Zhou

WHEREAS

1. The South Asian community, which comprises people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka etc., and people from many other South Asian religious and cultural traditions, has long expressed a desire for the establishment of a South Asian Cultural Centre. As envisioned, a cultural centre would be a venue for cultural exchange, education, and community engagement: A place where South Asian cultural arts, heritage, language, and traditions can be safeguarded, promoted, and shared with the broader community;
2. The Province of British Columbia has already embarked on a public engagement process, sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport, to inform the vision for a "new museum or cultural centre" to highlight the histories, cultures, and contributions made by Canadians of diverse South Asian heritages (Timeline: April 2023 to December 2024);
3. To date, the Province's public engagement process has shown a strong convergence around the values and attributes that individuals and communities would find important in a "new museum of cultural centre." For example, there is a general consensus that a physical representation of the contributions and histories of Canadians of South Asian heritages will strengthen cultural connections, provide a sense of belonging, and recognize and preserve an important part of Canada's and B.C.'s history;
4. A central focus of the Province's public engagement process has been where a South Asian cultural centre should be located, along with a strongly expressed desire to cultivate a community-focused, inclusive, and multicultural space where everyone can find connection and belonging;
5. The South Asian community is a significant and vibrant part of the City of Vancouver's cultural mosaic. Throughout history, Vancouver's South Asian community has made numerous contributions to the cultural, social, and economic fabric of our city;
6. A South Asian Cultural Centre of Excellence in Vancouver would provide a much-needed space for cultural preservation, education, and celebration and would enhance the city's cultural infrastructure while promoting inclusivity and a deeper understanding and appreciation of South Asian cultures among all residents;

7. The establishment of a South Asian Cultural Centre of Excellence in the City of Vancouver would not only serve as a beacon for longtime Vancouver residents and newcomers alike, i.e., by providing a space to showcase and promote the rich intangible and tangible heritage of South Asian communities, it would also serve as a landmark destination for cultural tourism and contribute to the city's economy and profile as a city that values and invests in cultural diversity;
8. While the City of Surrey has a significant South Asian population and could be a strong candidate for a South Asian Centre of Cultural Excellence, Vancouver's central location, cultural vibrancy, robust tourism industry, and existing infrastructure make it a compelling location for a South Asian Centre of Cultural Excellence. The advantages Vancouver offers include:
 - Vancouver is a major tourist destination, including cruise ships, and a cultural centre in the city could attract both local and international visitors, boosting tourism and the wider local and regional economy;
 - Proximity to downtown Vancouver would attract more visitors, including tourists and locals who frequent the city centre for various activities (e.g., Granville Island);
 - Vancouver is a major transportation hub with extensive public transit options, including buses, SkyTrain, and ferries, making it easily accessible for people from across the region;
 - Vancouver is known for its cultural diversity and vibrant multicultural communities, which would provide a rich environment for a cultural centre
 - Vancouver already hosts numerous cultural institutions and events, creating opportunities for collaboration and cross-cultural programming (e.g. Chinatown Museum, Science World, etc.);
 - Vancouver has a long history of South Asian immigration and contributions, particularly in neighborhoods like the Punjabi Market on Main Street;
 - Vancouver has well-established South Asian communities that can provide strong support and engagement for the centre;
 - Proximity to universities and colleges can facilitate educational partnerships and new research opportunities;
 - Vancouver offers numerous state-of-the-art facilities and infrastructure that can support the needs of a cultural centre (e.g., the Convention Centre); and
 - Vancouver's higher global profile would attract more funding, sponsorships, and partnerships from both public and private sector, and ensure sustainable operations;
9. Making the longstanding desire for a South Asian Centre of Cultural Excellence a reality, and locating it in the City of Vancouver, will require close collaboration with all levels of government to secure the necessary funding. By committing to a one-third share of the funding for a centre located in the City Vancouver, the City and Council would be demonstrating strong support for this important initiative.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council approves in principle, subject to a report back to Council on the financial project costs and a funding source, a commitment to funding one-third of the capital costs of a South Asian Cultural Centre of Excellence if it is located in the City of Vancouver, inclusive of any contribution of land toward such a venture.

- B. THAT Council empower the Mayor to write to the appropriate Provincial government Minister(s) and Ministries to advise them of Council's interest in a South Asian Centre of Cultural Excellence and for this centre to be located in the City of Vancouver given Vancouver's central location, cultural vibrancy, and existing infrastructure which make Vancouver a compelling choice for the location of a South Asian Centre of Cultural Excellence.

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