



COUNCIL REPORT

Report Date: April 23, 2025
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Meeting Date: May 6, 2025
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TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: Deputy City Manager
SUBJECT: Small-Scale Pharmacies in Chinatown

Recommendations

THAT Council direct staff to revise Small-Scale Pharmacy - Location and Operation Guidelines to include additional guidelines for the HA-1 and HA-1A district schedules of Chinatown, as detailed in this report;

FURTHER THAT staff return with revised guidelines for Council adoption.

Purpose and Executive Summary

This report seeks Council direction to revise the Small-Scale Pharmacy - Location and Operation Guidelines to include additional guidelines for application in the HA-1 and HA-1A district schedules of Chinatown.

Council Authority/Previous Decisions

- Uplifting Chinatown Action Plan ([RTS 15432](#), [January 17, 2023](#))
- Chinatown Cultural Heritage Assets Management Plan (CHAMP) – Strategic Framework ([RTS 13710](#), [June 8, 2022](#))
- Downtown Eastside Local Area Plan ([RTS 010175](#), March 12, 2014)

City Manager's Comments

The City Manager concurs with the foregoing recommendations.

Context and Background

On October 31, 2023, Council approved the document entitled [Vibrant Vancouver: City Council's Strategic Priorities, 2023-2026](#), which outlines priorities and provides a framework for Council and staff to make resource allocation decisions and convey Council priorities to the

public. One of Council's priorities under Strategic Objective No. 1 – Vibrant and Diverse is to revive Chinatown's vibrancy by undertaking a set of targeted safety and cultural initiatives.

Since its opening in 2023, the Won Alexander Cumyow Civic Office in Chinatown has received numerous complaints and concerns about the concentration and impacts of small-scale pharmacies in Chinatown.

On June 12, 2024, Council approved the *Chinatown Cultural District Framework* ("Framework") to address Chinatown's most urgent needs, respond to key priorities as identified by community partners, highlight new opportunities, and provide consistent and cohesive direction to the City's ongoing work in Chinatown. The Framework aims to support the renewed vibrancy of the neighbourhood, including both economic and community development.

Discussion

Small-Scale Pharmacies: City Policy and Process

Small-scale pharmacies are defined as drug stores that have a total gross floor area of less than 600 square metres. Municipalities do not have the explicit power to regulate what medical treatments are provided through small-scale pharmacies but can influence where and how such clinics operate. Monitoring and enforcing appropriate management practices of pharmacies is the responsibility of the College of Pharmacists of BC and the Province. In February 2025, the Province of BC announced changes to the prescribed alternatives policy, which now requires all prescribed alternatives to be witnessed by health professionals. At this time, this policy impacts only new clients. There may be further updates to this policy, as it may impact the amount of space small-scale pharmacies may need. If changes are needed to space, they can be brought forward with other changes as recommended.

Under existing City zoning regulations, pharmacies are treated as a type of retail "drug store" use and can locate wherever that use is permitted. The HA-1 and HA-1A district schedules of Chinatown list Small-Scale Pharmacy as a conditional use, which requires approval by the Director of Planning, based on Council-approved regulations and guidelines.

City Council has adopted the Small-Scale Pharmacy - Location and Operation Guidelines (last amended in 2022) to address the geographic concentration and impacts of these businesses, including:

- Consultation area: New applicants should have a waiting area included in the facility of at least 25 square metres (also included in the Zoning and Development Bylaw).
- Good neighbour conditions: Owner operator should agree to conditions related to outdoor line-ups and congregation, maintenance and litter clean-up around their storefront, having established store hours, and identifying a key contact person for the City to reach out to and discuss concerns.
- Geographic location: New small-scale pharmacies are generally not to be located within 400 metres of an existing pharmacy. The Directory of Planning may, upon advice of the Drug Policy Coordinator, consider an application that does not meet the geographic location requirements when it is deemed to be an essential health service or when it is a relocation of an existing small-scale pharmacy.

In addition to the guidelines, the Zoning and Development By-law requires a time-limited permit for small-scale pharmacies. A development permit granted to a new applicant is restricted to two

years, unless extended in writing by the Director of Planning. This is intended to provide sufficient time for the business to establish and the City to evaluate adherence to guidelines and conditions and respond to any negative community impacts.

Neighbourhood Context: Chinatown

There are currently 11 small-scale pharmacies within the 400-metre radius near Main and Keefer Streets (Appendix A).

Chinatown stakeholders, residents, and businesses have reported that the concentration of small-scale pharmacies in the area has had a significant impact on other Chinatown businesses and does not contribute to Chinatown as a historic and cultural destination or the City's broader goals for Chinatown as articulated in the *Chinatown Cultural District Framework*.

Staff Recommendation

Given the Small-Scale Pharmacy - Location and Operation Guidelines state that a small-scale pharmacy should not be located within 400 metres of the property line of an existing pharmacy or small-scale pharmacy, the high concentration of existing small-scale pharmacies within the 400-metre radius around Main and Keefer Streets exceeds the Small-Scale Pharmacy - Location and Operation Guidelines by 10 small-scale pharmacies.

Small-Scale Pharmacy is listed as a conditional use in the HA-1 and HA-1A district schedules of Chinatown. At this time, staff do not recommend removing Small-Scale Pharmacy as a conditional use as there would be unintended impacts, including making existing small-scale pharmacies policy non-compliant and impacting the viability of and access to existing pharmacies.

Instead, staff recommends revising the Small-Scale Pharmacy - Location and Operation Guidelines to include additional guidance for the HA-1 and HA-1A district schedules of Chinatown, including:

- Emphasizing that consideration of new applications for small-scale pharmacies in the HA-1 and HA-1A district schedules of Chinatown should meet the geographic location requirements of 400-metres.
- Stronger enforcement of Good Neighbour Conditions.

In practice, the proposed revisions would limit new applications so as to not further the high concentration of small-scale pharmacies that currently exceeds the Small-Scale Pharmacy - Location and Operation Guidelines, but also would not limit the operations of existing small-scale pharmacies to continue providing essential health services in the area, while being required to ensure they meet their Good Neighbour Conditions.

If so directed, staff would draft revisions to the Small-Scale Pharmacy - Location and Operation Guidelines for the HA-1 and HA-1A district schedules of Chinatown and return to Council for approval of these revisions.

Financial Implications

Implementation of this work will be undertaken within existing staff resource and budget.

Legal Implications

If the Recommendations in this report are adopted, staff will be tasked with revising the Small-Scale Pharmacy - Location and Operation Guidelines and bringing them to Council for approval.

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APPENDIX A
SMALL-SCALE PHARMACIES IN CHINATOWN

There are currently 11 small-scale pharmacies within the 400-metre radius near Main and Keefer Streets:

| Address | Name |
|-----------------------|---|
| 236 E Georgia Street | Corning Drugs No 2 (1199975 BC Ltd) |
| 15 E Hastings Street | Novacare Pharmacy (1484978 BC Ltd) |
| 67 E Hastings Street | Vancouver Pharmacy (Tungs Management Corp.) |
| 199 E Hastings Street | Owl Drugs (377227 BC LTD) |
| 232 E Hastings Street | Garlane Pharmacy Ltd |
| 398 E Hastings Street | Eastside Pharmacy LTD. (Eastside Pharmacy LTD) |
| 223 Main Street | Pier Health Resource Centre (Pier Health Resource Centre Ltd) |
| 465 Main Street | Sam's Pharmacy Ltd |
| 506 Main Street | Flash Pharmacy (1068198 BC Ltd) |
| 515 Main Street | Corning Drugs Ltd (Corning Drugs Ltd) |
| 535 Main Street | Low Cost Western Pharmacy (Low Cost Western Pharmacy Ltd) |