

JUN 14 2018

Presentation to City of Calgary Standing Policy Committee (June 14)

Honourable members of the City of Calgary Standing Policy Committee:

ITEM: 7.2 PUD 2018-0514
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I am asking you to support the **creation of a Cultural Plan described in Option 3** in your recommendations on the Local Area Plan for Calgary Chinatown. My request is based on the following four points.

1. The value of Chinese culture to Canadian society and the presence of this culture within Canadian Chinatowns

Within the context of multiculturalism Chinese Canadians have promoted alternatives to mainstream values. These alternatives are found in critical mass within Chinatowns. They include the promotion of Traditional Chinese Medicine and culturally-sensitive care for the elderly. A clear example is the promotion of health through the consumption of natural foods. Its value is seen in contrast if one recognizes the problems in the use of pharmaceuticals: seemingly innocuous ones such as blood pressure pills create justification for the use of Ritalin for Attention Deficit Disorder and SSRIs for depression, even the use of opioids. In contrast, Chinatowns house practitioners who promote the consumption of natural preventatives more than pharmaceuticals. In addition, they have worked to establish Traditional Chinese Medicine as a complementary system in Canada. Within Chinatowns, one finds herbalists, acupuncturists, and schools devoted to its instruction. Grocers sell the herbal ingredients and the utensils to decoct them.

Another cultural value epitomized in Chinatowns is care for the elderly. They are cared for in culturally sensitive ways, with organized social activities and medical care, in an environment that allows them to use their native language. It has been shown that because of this they live about six years longer than the average Albertan.¹

Chinatowns also foster connections to China and its culture. For example, Calgary Chinatown has excellent relations with the Chinese consulate here. Chinatown businesses promote bilateral trade and investments. Chinatown venues support diplomatic and ceremonial interactions. These allow Canada to improve relations with China and broaden its trade relations.

Canadian Chinatowns have many functions of which the most important is serving as a symbol of Chinese Canadian culture. The preservation and promotion of Chinese Canadian culture have supported Chinese Canadians and Chinatowns when faced with discrimination. The significance of this function is captured in the words of Ray Lee, who led Sien Lok Society's successful efforts to defend Canadian Chinatowns against the threats of demolition in the 1960s under policies of urban renewal: "To the Chinese Canadians like myself who do not reside in the core, we look to Chinatown as a social-psychological well to which we can return to refresh ourselves."² This role has also led Canadian Chinatowns to become gateways for non-Chinese Canadians to experience Chinese culture. Amid the various festivals, celebrations, restaurants, and shops, non-Chinese Canadians can enter into Chinese Canadian culture and gain exposure to all its

¹ Hude Quan, Fu-Lin Wang, Donald Schopflocher, and Carolyn De Coster, "Mortality, Cause of Death and Life Expectancy of Chinese Canadians in Alberta," *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 98.6 (Nov.-Dec. 2007), 500.

² Sien Lok Society of Calgary, "National Conference on Urban Renewal As It Affects Chinatowns," 1969, 31.

merits.

2. The presence of this culture within Calgary Chinatown

Like other Canadian Chinatowns, Calgary Chinatown promotes Chinese Canadian culture and thereby contributes to Canadian multiculturalism. Within Calgary Chinatown one finds elder homes and activity centers, herbalists, acupuncturists, language schools, tens of restaurants, clan and hometown associations, martial arts studios, the Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre, artistic groups, and the historical sites of the Canton Block, the Chinese Mission, the Ho Lem Block, and the Nationalist Building. These facilities and their contributions to Canadian multiculturalism were not easily achieved. Even though they arrived early in Calgary's history, Chinese Calgarians had to face all sorts of prejudice including the Calgary Smallpox Riot in 1892. Even in today's improved environment maintaining Chinese Canadian culture requires a firm commitment to its practice and thousands of hours of volunteer time. Furthermore, Calgary Chinatown is facing the pressures of development and gentrification. Increasingly, as condominium and office development has intensified, new Chinatown residents are unfamiliar with Chinese Canadian culture. Traditional businesses and services have been forced to leave or give way to more mainstream ones.

In the midst of a legacy of cultural achievement but faced with present-day pressures, Calgary Chinatown is striving to maintain and increase its contributions to Canadian multiculturalism. Proponents of Calgary Chinatown's organic development have defined a mission for it, including three goals directly related to culture: **1) to make Calgary Chinatown an iconic and cultural place that prides itself for its heritage, open space, Asian streetscape, and architecture; 2) to make Calgary Chinatown an inter-generational social and community hub; and 3) to make Calgary Chinatown a most visited local and tourist destination.**

Development of Calgary Chinatown's iconic and cultural resources would make it a leading attraction in the city. The festivals, Chinese New Year (Jan. or Feb.), Canada Day, Stampede Breakfast, the Chinatown Festival (Aug.), and the Mid-Autumn Festival already attract tens of thousands of participants with a minimum of public funding. The Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre displays traditional Chinese architecture and artifacts, has an exhibit devoted to the history of Calgary's Chinese, presents cultural exhibitions and performances, instructs language and art forms, and serves as a venue for many cultural groups. In Sien Lok Park there are monuments to the history of early Chinese Canadians, their sacrifices and contributions in building the nation. The City of Calgary's Chinatown Heritage Project is building on this history to develop a Calgary Chinatown identity and to strengthen Chinatown's ability to contribute to the city's vibrancy.

As for making Calgary Chinatown an intergenerational social and community hub, it is already a sanctuary for Chinese Canadian seniors who enjoy living within their native culture amid a community that values their past contributions. There are activities, such as Mahjong and Taiji, services such as medical care, and entertainment such as Cantonese opera. At the same time Calgary Chinatown is welcoming youth who come to learn Chinese, practise martial arts, perform in concerts, take art classes, participate in speech contests, play badminton, or just have a bubble tea. The Cultural Centre and other venues offer sites for celebration of life-defining events (weddings, anniversaries, and remembrances). The clan and hometown associations, which have evolved as new

immigrants have arrived from China, are active in Chinatown, as are mainstream organizations, such as the Chinatown Lions Club that recently celebrated its fortieth anniversary. Whether for the old or the young, Calgary Chinatown is a focal point for community activities and promotion of Chinese cultural values.

With regard to making Calgary Chinatown a most visited local and tourist destination, there are many attractions in Calgary Chinatown that could draw more visitors. Amid a growing interest in food and dining, Chinatown offers a unique experience with tens of restaurants, a variety of flavours—from Korean to Brazilian to Vietnamese to spicy Sichuan to Cantonese prepared meats to northern dumplings—at a reasonable cost within the space of 4.5 square blocks. Dragon City the marquee mall in Chinatown is undergoing renovations that will boost its attraction. As well, the City of Calgary's Chinatown Heritage Project will strengthen Calgary Chinatown's identity, one that can be built upon to attract more visitors to its historical sites.

3. The need for a Cultural Plan

Calgary Chinatown is at a crossroads. Increasing numbers of new residents unfamiliar with Chinese culture will homogenize the community's culture, replacing Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners with coffee shops. In the other direction, China's increasing importance in world affairs highlights Calgary Chinatown's role in connecting with China. We could allow Chinatown's culture to be diluted as it transforms into services to meet generic demand or we can recognize the value of the critical mass that Calgary Chinatown contains and support its further development.

In light of both new challenges and opportunities there is increased need to maintain the vibrancy of Calgary Chinatown and promote it as a unique place to experience Chinese culture. With this in mind, a Chinatown Cultural Plan must be specific to Chinatown, its culture, its heritage, its history, its language, its social network, its economy, its environment, and its place as a destination for all Calgarians, Albertans, Canadians, and international visitors.

4. Community is willing to assist

In closing, I again encourage the Committee to support the creation of a Cultural Plan in your recommendations on the Local Area Plan for Calgary Chinatown. In advocating for the creation of a distinct Cultural Plan, I realize that it will require extra resources; therefore, I offer my assistance and I am not alone in wanting to help. Many like me worked for nearly a year in formulating a community response to a Chinatown land development application in 2016 and have continued to work since, promoting Calgary Chinatown's development. We would be willing to offer our knowledge and experience as resources for the City. Furthermore, the option of doing a Cultural Plan gives that the City an opportunity to consolidate and fortify the distinct culture that exists within Calgary Chinatown and thereby benefit our city and nation.

Views presented in this report are based on my research as presented in the monograph *From Chopsticks to Hockey Sticks: The Achievements of Chinese Canadians* (2016).

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