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## MEMORANDUM

April 20, 2009

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Penny Ballem, City Manager  
James Ridge, Deputy City Manager  
Marg Coulsen, Acting City Clerk  
Laurie Best, Director of Corporate Communications  
Jennifer Young, Assistant Director of Corporate Communications  
Wendy Au, Assistant City Manager  
David McLellan, General Manager, Community Services  
Brent Toderian, Director of Planning  
Trish French, Assistant Director of Planning  
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FROM: Jessica Chen, Senior Planner, Planning Department

SUBJECT: Chinatown Community Plan and Historic Area Height Review

Many Council members have requested an update on the Chinatown Community Plan of its progress and timing for completion. Meanwhile the technical analysis for the Historic Area Height Review is now complete and the public consultation has just started. This memo provides Council with an update on these two major policy initiatives in the Downtown Eastside that are closely related in its timing and intended policy product.

### CHINATOWN COMMUNITY PLAN

The Chinatown Vision adopted by Council in 2002 outlines eleven vision directions to guide the future development of Chinatown. In summary, it aims to:

- Further develop Chinatown as a complete mixed use community with an increased residential population of diverse social-economic and cultural backgrounds;
- Position Chinatown as one of the cultural districts for Vancouver and its region, where locals and visitors can experience Chinese-Canadian heritage and culture, including its architecture, urban history, arts and cultural events and commercial activities;

- Reflect Chinatown's historic function as a regional centre with institutions and services for the Chinese-Canadian community as well as other cultural groups; and
- Reinforce the role of Chinatown as a regional cultural tourist destination.

"Chinatown Revitalization Program: The Three-Year Action Plan" ("the Program") approved by Council in 2005 is part of the ongoing effort to implement the Vision. It aims to develop critical strategies and ultimately a community plan. The goal of the Chinatown Community Plan is to guide Chinatown's sustainable growth and long-term development in Vancouver's increasingly diversified society with comprehensive land use and built form policies.

Since the start of the Program, the area has seen increased development activities from the private sector and growing interests to renovate heritage buildings. There has also been continued City investment into the area's public realm. Many action items identified in the three-year plan have been implemented. The following section outlines the progress of strategies and projects that are completed and/or underway.

## 1. Heritage and Cultural Strategy

### ▪ **Society Buildings Rehabilitation Strategy**

Staff have been working closely with Chinatown family associations and benevolent societies ("Societies") on a rehabilitation strategy for Society owned heritage buildings as part of Chinatown revitalization. In February 2008, City Council approved the Chinatown Society Buildings Rehabilitation Strategy which included the Phase I Buildings Planning Grant Program. The Buildings Planning Grant Program has been very successful with participation from five societies. Staff are now preparing a report to Council in May on the progress of the overall Strategy and its next steps.

### ▪ **National Historic Site Designation**

Council also passed a motion in April 2008 to support the Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association in its effort to secure a UNESCO World Heritage listing for some of the historical buildings in Chinatown. The first step for that effort was to nominate Chinatown for the National Historic Site Designation. Working with a community-based proponent group, the application has now been completed and submitted to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

### ▪ **"Chinatown and Beyond" International Conference in Vancouver**

Staff continue to partner with educational institutions and community organizations to develop initiatives to better understand Chinese Canadian and Chinatown histories as well as to generate fresh ideas and interests from the younger generations and prospective professionals in being part of Chinatown's future.

Most current initiative is an international conference called "Chinatown and Beyond" to be held in Vancouver (May 13-15). The conference will have an interdisciplinary examination of the historical development, global significance, key characteristics, evolution and future of the world's Chinatowns. Staff will participate and host a panel discussion on the Chinatown planning work together with community members and academic professionals.

## 2. Public Realm Improvement

### ▪ Carrall Street Greenway & Other Public Spaces

In July 2006 Council approved the detailed design and budget for the Greenway and the construction is currently underway. Three blocks (Hastings Street to Expo Boulevard) have been completed. The block between Water and Cordova Streets is currently under construction, and the block adjacent to Pigeon Park (Cordova to Hastings Streets) will be constructed this summer, in conjunction with the upgrade of Pigeon Park. Last month Council also approved the electrical infrastructure plan and budget for the Greenway to support and encourage community events and activities in the public realm.

This major public realm initiative connects the network of public spaces in Chinatown's cultural quarter including the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Courtyard and the Park, the Memorial Square and Shanghai Alley. In addition, it enhances the connection between Chinatown, Gastown, Hastings Street and the Downtown Central Area, together with the Main Street Transit Showcase Project and the future Downtown Streetcar initiative. It is anticipated that the Greenway will be completed by fall 2009.

### ▪ Neon Lighting and Signage Strategy

Re-introducing neon signs, attractive lighting and other signage have been raised by many community members as one way to bring night life back to Chinatown. A detailed Chinatown Lighting Plan has been completed in 2008 by the Chinatown Revitalization Committee. To kick start the implementation of the Lighting Strategy, Council approved \$50,000 in July 2008 to install a 5-storey neon sign onto the City-owned Chinatown Parkade (180 Keefer Street). Design revision for the sign is underway and installation is expected to begin in summer 2009. Staff will prepare a detailed report to Council on this Strategy and its next steps in July 2009.

## 3. Cultural and Economic Revitalization

### ▪ Cultural Development Study

The City has supported various cultural programs and festivals in Chinatown such as Chinatown Arts and Cultural Festival in the past years. Most recently, the Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association, a non-profit group with representatives from 11 Chinatown Societies, launched a Cultural Development Study to identify the wide breadth of arts and cultural activities and groups that take place in Chinatown. The Study will explore opportunities to further enhance Chinatown as a hub of Chinese-Canadian and other cultures.

### ▪ Pender Street Vacant Storefront Strategy

Chinatown's advantages of relatively low-rent, its central location and strong cultural character continue to generate interests from young entrepreneurs. New businesses with more diverse target clientele have been moving into Chinatown. However, there continues to be a number of empty storefronts and underutilized upper floor commercial spaces in Chinatown, particularly on Pender Street. Staff are in the process of scoping out and coordinating a strategy to address the vacant storefront issues on Pender Street.

### ▪ Chinatown Roadmap to 2010 and Beyond

The City has supported a number of economic initiatives over the past years through the funding from the Vancouver Agreement, including projects like the bi-lingual campaign, development of a Marketing Plan and tourism infrastructure plans. The most recent project organized by the Chinatown Business Improvement Area Society (BIA) and supported by the

City is the Chinatown Pedicabs Project. Pedicabs have now been purchased and are expected to be in operation this year. The project aims to increase regional tourism by bringing visitors from major Downtown hotels and the cruise ship terminal at Canada Place into Chinatown.

In addition, a couple of workshops have taken place with broad stakeholder groups in putting together a proposal called "Roadmap to 2010 and Beyond". It is an initiative to work with the Chinatown businesses and organizations to get ready for the upcoming 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympics, and take advantage of this economic driver to create a legacy of improved and diversified businesses for a Chinatown that is welcoming to everyone.

#### **4. Land Use & Built Form Policies and Zoning & Design Guidelines**

The part of the Program that is not yet complete is the revised Land Use Policies and related zoning and guidelines. The discussion below articulates what has been done. It is anticipated these policy work will be forwarded to Council in late 2009.

- **Monitoring Development Trends and Activities**

Since 2005, as real estate market in Vancouver continued to boom, development interests in Chinatown began to increase. In the past two years Chinatown has seen the most number of enquires and projects in decades. There is wide range of project types, including market and non-market housing, new commercial uses, proposals on both narrow 25'-50' lot and larger consolidated lots. There have also been a number of heritage conservation projects.

The current economic conditions have led to a slow down in the pace of development in Chinatown and the rest of the city. However, with Chinatown's central location and access to public transit and shopping, demand on development in this neighbourhood will remain. Staff will continue to monitor development activities to ensure these new projects can meet the diverse city objectives for the area.

- **Technical Analysis and Public Consultation**

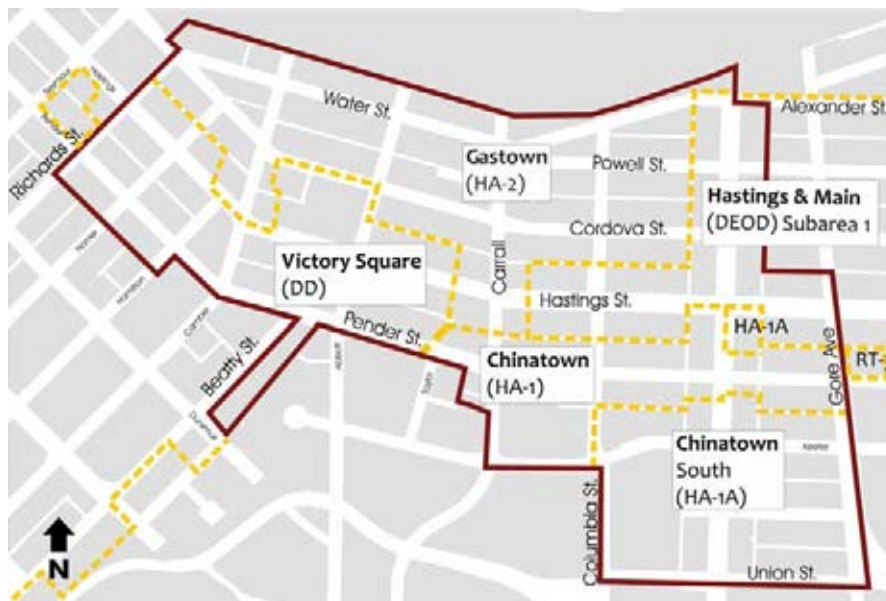
The nature of development in cultural and historical areas demands a more delicate intervention of new construction with existing built form. Also, to achieve the objective of facilitating growth and development potentials while protecting the heritage buildings and the overall scale of the neighbourhood requires careful and thorough analysis. Staff have completed a number of urban design, architecture and economic analyses with assistance from external consultants, including:

- "Urban Acupuncture Study" by UBC Architecture/Living Lab to look into sustainable rehabilitation of Society heritage buildings into contemporary housing. (Fall 2007)
- "New Residential Building Prototypes Study" by Birmingham & Woods to develop a range of building prototypes for new development suitable for the unique Chinatown context. (Spring 2008)
- "Chinatown Market Development Economic Analysis" by G.P. Rollo & Associates to provide pro-forma analysis for the prototypes proposed by the Birmingham & Woods as well as general economic analysis for developments in Chinatown. (Summer 2008)

In March 2007, staff started public consultation on the overall development policy directions for Chinatown. Toward the end of the consultation, staff received several inquiries in the historic areas in and around Chinatown for tower-form developments with heights that could not be considered under the existing height policies set by Council. However, some of the proposed public benefits, including affordable housing, are of great interest to the City. In response, staff started the Historic Area Height Review in 2008. Further consultation of the Chinatown Land Use and Built Form Policies were put on hold, pending the outcome of the Historic Area Height Review.

### HISTORIC AREA HEIGHT REVIEW (“THE HEIGHT REVIEW”)

The Historic Area Height Review is to explore opportunities for additional height and density in the Historic Area. The following map identifies the boundary of the study area.



*Study Area - Historic Area Height Review*

Three main objectives guiding this Height Review and its outcomes are:

- To provide direction for sustainable growth and development in the Historic Area;
- To maintain the Historic Area’s character and general building scale; and
- To ensure significant new development potential that may result from this study generates public benefits and amenities for the area, such as affordable housing, heritage conservation, social and cultural facilities.

The technical work is now complete with assistance of an external consultant study. The consultant study was done jointly by the Spaxman Consulting Group & Lang Wilson Practice in Architecture Culture inc. to conduct urban design and architectural investigation into whether height above current policy limits may be appropriate in the Historic Area, including Chinatown, by examining appropriate general height and possible locations for taller buildings. The Study was completed in Fall 2008.

An extensive public consultation process has begun and will continue through May 2009. The consultation includes meetings and workshops with advisory committees, stakeholder groups and the public, as well as two open houses. Three public workshops and the two open

houses will soon be advertised in newspapers. A Council briefing can be arranged if there are strong interests from Council members.

Through consultation, staff will seek public input on a number of options being considered for additional height including: the general building height in the area, and the roles, number and range of heights for taller buildings (above 150'). Information on the Historic Area Height Review is now available at: [www.vancouver.ca/hahr](http://www.vancouver.ca/hahr)

Feedback received through the Height Review will inform the Chinatown Community Plan currently being prepared and a possible rezoning policy to guide how the City responds to rezoning enquiries for taller buildings in the Historic Area. Staff plan to report back to Council on the Height Review in July 2009.

Following the conclusion and Council decision on the Height Review, staff will start public consultation in fall with the Chinatown community on other land use and built form issues in Chinatown, including the parking policy. It is anticipated that the Chinatown Community Plan will be completed by the end of 2009.

Please contact me at 605.873.7754 if you have further questions.

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