

Notes taken at the VCBA/VCMA and Chinatown Voices Meeting

6:30 pm, Thursday, May 24, Floata Restaurant
Hosted by VCMA and VCBA

City staff Tom Wanklin, Helen Ma, Aaron Lao, and approximately 36 people in attendance.

The VCBA Vice-president as meeting facilitator, introduces the topic of the meeting, as well as the Chair of VCMA and the President of VCBA.

The President of the VCBA to provide translation into Cantonese for the meeting.

The meeting facilitator introduces City staff: Tom Wanklin, Helen Ma, and Aaron Lao. The meeting is being recorded. Staff confirm that the report cannot be changed by staff, but Council has the ability to make changes.

The facilitator explains the agenda and format of the meeting which includes a presentation, questions, and food.

The facilitator made a power point presentation and describes the community stakeholders in Chinatown, represented by different groups. VCMA, VCBA, property and business owners, residents, and Chinatown Voices. Chinatown Voices is a new group, formed to express opinions to the City.

The facilitator describes the key dates for Chinatown zoning policy:

- Historic Area Height Review, April 2011;
- Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan and Economic Revitalization Strategy, July 2012, which included three pillars (cultural, residential, and economic revitalization);
- Staff attend VCMA board meeting and VCBA board meeting to provide information, March 2018;
- Staff report to Council complete, March 2018;
- City staff host information session for property owners, April 2018, after which the VCMA and VCBA began hearing statements that people were not being consulted;
- Current meeting, May 2018.

The facilitator describes a letter to Council in March 2011 from major Chinatown organizations to support the Historic Area Height Review.

The facilitator states there is a concern there is a reversal of the zoning bylaws from 2011; why should higher density not be allowed? Jordan describes the major changes, including:

- Removal of the rezoning policy for Chinatown South;
- In HA-1:
 - No change to maximum height, but limits at 5 storeys (50 ft) and 7 storeys (75 ft);

- FSR changed from no maximum, to 4.8 FSR, including limits of 2.95 FSR residential and minimum of 1.50 FSR for non-residential required, with relaxations on the non-residential requirement for social housing;
- Limits to development site and storefront widths;
- In HA-1A:
 - No change to maximum height, but 90 ft outright to 70 ft outright and 90 ft conditional, with 6 storeys at 70 ft. and 8 storeys and 90 ft;
 - FSR changed from no maximum to 5.3 FSR including limits of 3.5 FSR residential and a minimum of 1.50 FSR for non-residential required, with relaxations on the non-residential requirements for social housing;
 - Limits to development site and storefront widths.

The facilitator describes how after the March 2018 meeting, VCMA and VCBIA members felt, “What’s happening here, there’s not enough time, we haven’t been involved, we’re major stakeholders”. There was an open letter written asking Council to delay the report. Council deferred the report by 3 weeks, to provide for further consultation with stakeholders.

The facilitator describes a map showing the property owners involved in Chinatown Voices, which represent over 50% of the assessed value of Chinatown properties.

He describes media attention to the topic. He re-states that the “Big 6” Chinatown organizations and other organizations supported the HAHR in 2011. The facilitator describes the motion from the recent Council report delaying the referral to the June 5th Council meeting, and directing staff to conduct further consultation with the newly formed Chinatown Voices group.

He states that people were concerned about putting their names out as dissenting voices. Cites example of individuals feeling that publicly supporting 105 Keefer would lead to being marginalized, and being picketed. Albert expresses concern that the City would interpret this as a lack of opinion.

He describes the meeting as an opportunity to discuss concerns in a safe forum to staff, regardless of their position on the zoning changes. Albert describes this as an opportunity to hear the “true concerns” of the community.

Finally, the facilitator opens the meeting up to questions for staff and provides the staff with a hard copy of the presentation slides.

Questions:

Sun Wah Centre representative states that from 1987 until 2015, there was no occupancy over 35%. However, after 2016, there were individuals negotiating for arts and cultural spaces, and now the building is 95% occupied with leases. Suggests that the Economic Revitalization Strategy led to interest in the building. States that many arts and culture-related uses are interested. States that the policy should not be changed given this success, and that changes would lead to investors being confused.

A meeting member asks how many merchants are in the room (23). Secondly, how many merchants have had their businesses increase compared to 5 years ago (10).

Another member notes that people have invested money on properties. Expresses concern that people will hold on to land without developing, to wait for the policies to change again, especially with the new hospital. States that the housing will be exclusive and expensive, and does not contribute to social housing. States that people want to build rental towers, and would be appropriate for hospital staff. States that there should be density close to amenities, which is green. States that there should be development, except Pender Street, or they will be losing out. States that courtyard requirements do not benefit people.

A property owner states that the company he represents owns 4 properties, and was involved in 2011 Chinatown plan and supports 3 pillars. Expresses concerns about the reversal of the plan that many groups provided input on. Asks why it needs to be changed. Expresses concerns about the consultation and process and the speed at which it went to Council, as the content takes time to comprehend. Expresses specific concerns about height and FSR caps, including conditional FSR. States that this is effectively a downzoning. Is concerned about ability to subdivide.

City of Vancouver staff respond to the question and expresses appreciation to hosts for organizing the meeting, and the importance of including businesses in the conversation around Chinatown. States that when the City consults with the VCBIA and VCMA boards, there can be continued open communications through these networks. Answers the following questions:

- *Why does this policy need to be changed?* States that loud voices were heard in 2015 onward urging Council and staff to consider changing the existing policies for Chinatown. States that people could see that revitalization was taking place, but there were concerns that the pace of change could result in the loss of character in Chinatown as a heritage district. States that some voices wanted a complete moratorium, but Council and staff did not consider a moratorium. States that staff have been trying to find a balanced approach to clarify the current zoning, and manage change with the right kind of development that fits into Chinatown. States that staff support development, and acknowledge voices in the community do and do not support development in Chinatown.
- *Why is the process so rapid going to Council?* States that staff are also aware of the concerns about the process for Council reports, and that there is a requirement for reports to be submitted early to the City Manager. States that when the City Manager approves the report for a forthcoming meeting, City Clerks make the report available to the public and the Council, one week before Council. Clarifies that the report was still a draft at April 19, when staff met with property owners. States that starting in February 2018 meetings with VCBIA and VCMA, as well as the open house on April 3, staff heard concerns that certain parts of the report needed to be changed. Clarified with groups on April 20 that amendments would be made, and were made, before going to the City Manager. At this point, only Council can make changes, for transparency and in fairness to the community. The report as it is will be what is debated by Council.

- *Will subdivision be permitted?* States that the report will not affect subdivision, only lot assembly. States that the proposals include a new limit to the assembly of lots, to reflect the historic, small-lot character of Chinatown.

Another person in the meeting asks about what major changes that were made around March 2018. Staff states that 95% of content of the proposal remained the same. States that there were concerns about outright 1.0 FSR, wording around social housing, and setbacks in laneways due to the high number of heritage buildings preventing fully expanded lanes.

Staff begins to explain the rationale for the proposal for conditional vs outright FSR. Individuals state that 1.0 FSR buildings are unrealistic.

A member states that the Northeast False Creek project must be considered. States that many residential units and high density developments will be allowed in the area. States that Northeast False Creek is being upzoned, while Chinatown is being downzoned.

Another person states that the Chinese community should be able to enjoy the benefit of architecture and more development.

Staff states that there is a 90 ft. limit along Main Street, with towers related to City Gate in the west. States that the hospital will also be high. States that different areas have different policies, and that Chinatown specifically is a historic district. Invites further discussions with Council. Clarifies that Chinatown is a historic district, which is different from Northeast False Creek. Clarifies that the city blocks will have lower land values because they will contain social and affordable rental housing rather than being entirely condo's.

Another person states that on May 29, there will be additional information meetings arranged by the City. Asks how staff will be articulating the feedback from the meetings to Council, since the report has been finalized.

Staff explain that notes are being taken at these meetings, and will be summarized in a presentation to Council which will be made available online.

A member describes his arrival in Canada in 1980 and subsequent arrival in Vancouver. States that Chinatown should be high density by keeping heritage and by having the retail face of Chinatown, with twenty stories on top. States that he wants to come back to Chinatown from Richmond. States that Chinatown is dying, and that the proposal should not be approved. Suggests that heritage can be maintained on the first floor, and everything above the third floor should be residential to enable individuals to come back to Chinatown. States that individuals from outside of Chinatown should be involved in these consultations, and that more voices should be listened to.

A person points to the lack of time for all present to say what they feel and asks how they could provide further feedback.

Staff describe the future meetings.

The person further states that some may not feel safe.

The VCBIA President asks if people feel safe. Describes a previous meeting that was described online by an individual attending the meeting. Expresses concern of having pictures taken. States that people know the license plates of vehicle.

Staff invite members to email, phone and hold meetings. States that ultimately there will be an opportunity to speak to Council.

The meeting facilitator asks how staff differentiate the feedback received from property owners and people who are business owners from others.

Staff states that City Clerk and Corporate Communications takes into account where the feedback is coming from. States that Council have a positive record of being able to assess seriously the information they receive.

A person feels that new methods of social media and engagement are outpacing the business owners and property owners.

Another person describes their family business of 40 years. States the condos are necessary to allow for more consumers. States that social housing is not desired, and seniors housing is desired.

Having reached a point in the meeting where the meal would served, the meeting Facilitator thanked the City staff for attending and for providing clarification to their questions. City staff left the venue.