

**MINUTES OF THE
CHINATOWN HISTORIC AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE**

APRIL 9, 2013

A meeting of the Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee was held on Tuesday, April 9, 2013, at 5:35 pm, in the Boardroom of the Chinese Cultural Centre, 50 East Pender Street, Vancouver, BC.

PRESENT: Henry Tom, Chair
Alan James, Vice Chair
Carla Graebner
Matthew Halverson
Kelly Ip
Oliver Lang
William Ma
Clinton McDougall
Mike Newall (5:39)

ABSENT: Councillor Tony Tang
George Chow
Jun Ing

ALSO PRESENT: Zlatan Jankovic, Heritage Planner
Ian Cooper, City of Vancouver, Planner
Holly Foxcroft, MCIP
Cameron Owen, IBI/HB Architects
Martin Rendall, IBI/HB Architects

RECORDING SECRETARY: Linda Tylla, Raincoast Ventures Ltd.

Adoption of Agenda

MOVED by Alan James
SECONDED by William Ma

That the Agenda for the Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee meeting scheduled April 9, 2013 be adopted as amended:

- Item 1) 188 Keefer St. (611 Main St.) - DE416573, be removed as it has been withdrawn by the applicant.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Adoption of Minutes

MOVED by Alan James
SECONDED by Clinton McDougall

That the Minutes of the Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee meeting held December 11, 2012 be adopted as ratified.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

MOVED by Kelly Ip
SECONDED by Alan James

That the Minutes of the Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee meeting held January 8, 2013 be adopted.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

1) **188 Keefer St. (611 Main St.) - DE416573**

Withdrawn by applicant.

5:39 p.m.

Mike Newall arrived at the meeting.

2) **City of Vancouver Sign By-law Review -
Stakeholder Invitation Text and Project Overview**

Zlatan Jankovic, Heritage Planner, introduced the item and the team from IBI/HB Architects, Cameron Owen, and Martin Rendall. He also introduced Ian Cooper, City of Vancouver, Planner, and Holly Foxcroft, MCIP.

Martin Rendall provided an overhead presentation, "City of Vancouver Sign By-law Review - Stakeholder Invitation Text and Project Overview", noting:

- The City of Vancouver is planning to develop a new, comprehensive Sign By-law that will incorporate other City of Vancouver sign policies and regulations, streamline the application and approvals process, and address items not currently addressed, such as current and emerging technologies. The project will be undertaken between January 2013 and January 2014.
- IBI Group has been hired by the City to manage this process, and in the first phase, is gathering information on the current state of signage in Vancouver, including issues identified by internal and external stakeholders. Following that, a best practices review will be conducted considering the local context and a Sign By-law will be developed.

- The existing Sign By-law has been in place since 1974, and has not undergone substantive updates since that time. The impetus for updating the Sign By-law derives from the need for an all-encompassing strategy that streamlines the approvals process and provides mechanisms for current or emerging digital or technological practices.
- The City of Vancouver currently regulates signs through the implementation of the sign bylaw via Development Services, specifically Permits and Licensing, as well as the Department of Engineering (temporary, movable signs in the right of way), Parks Board (parks signage), and Vancouver Public Library (library signage). Consequently, the application of sign design standards across the departments and agencies is segmented, producing an inconsistent application of signage across the City.
- The current signage approvals process has challenges, as the Sign By-law does not adequately address the current state of signage. As a result, approximately 100 sign applications are referred to the Board of Variance for their approval, complexifying the application process and timeline for applicants, and intensively using staff time.
- Since the adoption of the Sign By-law there have been significant technological advances in signage, most notably the digitization of signage. Digital signs, typically billboards of fascia, can be monochromatic or high definition digital (HDD). The existing Sign By-law does not have regulations that govern the use of HDD signs. The nature of these signs (illuminated, animated/moving, and multiple sources of advertising content e.g. third party advertising) require regulatory consideration that does not currently exist in the Sign By-law.
- Outputs from the Sign By-Law review project will also be provided that relate to the City's current corporate naming and revenue generation policies.
- As signage can be a character-defining element of an area, CHAPC is being consulted for insights into the issues, concerns and ideas about signage in Vancouver, especially in the historic area of Chinatown. This information will be used to inform the development of policies to regulate signage.

The Committee was asked to comment on the following questions:

- 1) What are the most common issues that you confront with the existing signage bylaw?
- 2) Does the existing bylaw adequately address heritage sign considerations in Chinatown?
- 3) Is the existing sign bylaw at odds with the conservation of heritage signs? Are there gaps in the bylaw with respect to historic signs in Chinatown?
- 4) What issues have arisen in the past between the sign bylaw and the designation of Chinatown as a municipal and national heritage area?
- 5) What principles should shape the development of a new sign bylaw?

In response to the suite of questions, the Committee provided the following comments:

- i. Signage can be a key component of a project but it is not reflected on the development permit application materials. This committee does not see it.

- ii. In the past, there have been situations where applicants have applied for commercial signage and the bylaw was very restrictive. The results did not bode well with the area, where chaos and non-uniformity are more the norm. The bylaw gets in the way of preserving the character of the Chinatown neighbourhood, which is more “prescribed chaos” than anything. It is required to go to the Board of Variance as a result. The Bow Bay neon sign was an example. It required a bylaw variance, but the variance only allowed for a slight increase in area.
- iii. In regard to signs as a character-defining element, Chinatown may require its own subsection with different requirements. It should prescribe treatment to retain character, and reduce the number of applications having to go to the Board of Variance.
- iv. How will language issues be dealt with?
- v. Would like to see allowances for common practices in Chinatown, multiple small signs to attract attention to certain products, multi-language signs, and small speakers built into signs.
- vi. Would like to see more neon signs brought back and are concerned over digital signage.
- vii. The incorporation of more digital displays may disadvantage neon in the area. Would like to see more neon brought back to reinvigorate the area.
- viii. How much of sign is defined by content or media? How will the bylaw deal with changing media?
- ix. The New Town Restaurant installed a large sign with a three-dimensional bun and neon. This was to be a special component on the canopy. The heritage bylaw was used to address restrictions from the Sign Bylaw. Will this still be allowable?
- x. Would it be considered a sign if there is no copy? Some signage could be beneficial to deter graffiti?

Discussion ensued on how a “sign” would be determined. The current definition is broad.

- xi. Would like to see a move back to traditional signage, like on East Pender. Would like to encourage the vibrancy of the area with a return to neon. Is there an opportunity with the bylaw open to encourage the use of signage?
- xii. Blade signs were banned for a time, but that is generally the structure of neon signs. Would like to see projection or blade signs returned.
- xiii. The extra approval steps may be discouraging neon or similar signage. The Sign Bylaw should be the least of their worries if an applicant wants to include one. If neon can’t be encouraged with the bylaw, do not discourage either. It has been discouraging in the past.
- xiv. The qualitative aspect of signs is difficult to codify.
- xv. There are two concerns with signs, how the sign fits on the building and how it fits on the streetscape. How can policy capture the design guideline intent? How can the process be integrated? Is there value to bring concept of signage package with application? When does the signage package become part of the design process? This is a unique problem in Chinatown where signage is very reflective of character and a random presence adds to the neighbourhood.
- xvi. Is there an education opportunity for new businesses or developments around the type and character of signs that would be appropriate for the area?
- xvii. Reduce restriction and allow for more creativity.

Discussion ensued on how to encourage historic neon signs in HA1 and HA1a. The Committee could consider that if signage is not part of the proposal, it could request that the application be brought back. The Committee could encourage large format or neon signs. The discretionary component could be defused off into the variance process.

- xviii. Consider the application of canopies for weather protection and how it applies to signage, and how signage can complement street lighting and a sense of safety.

The consultant group will return to the Committee in early summer, possibly June, for additional discussion.

Next meeting:

DATE: May 14, 2013
TIME: 5:30 pm
PLACE: Chinese Cultural Centre Boardroom, 50 East Pender Street

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 pm.

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