

From: "Johnston, Sadhu" <Sadhu.Johnston@vancouver.ca>

To: "Direct to Mayor and Council - DL" <CCDTMACDL@vancouver.ca>

Date: 5/6/2016 2:34:19 PM

Subject: Memo - RTS 11423 - Motion to designate a portion of Commercial Drive as Little Italy

Attachments: [Memo to MC - RTS 11423 Motion to designate a portion of Commercial Drive.pdf](#)

Dear Mayor and Council,

This memorandum responds to Council's motions of June 24, 2015 and April 6, 2016 regarding the recognition of the Italian heritage of a portion of Commercial Drive.

Short summary points of the memo are as follows:

- Consultation with the community has demonstrated a considerable (68%) level of support for the designation
- Staff will immediately work with the BIA and community groups to support the designation of "Historic Little Italy" for the eight blocks of Commercial Drive between East 4th Avenue and Charles Street
- Options to fund components to mark this area, including through the local BIA's annual budget, will be pursued.

If you would like more information, please contact Jane Pickering at 604.873.7456 or jane.pickering@vancouver.ca.

Best,

Sadhu Johnston

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VanRIMS No.: 01-9000-20

MEMORANDUM

May 4, 2016

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Sadhu Johnston, City Manager
Paul Mochrie, Deputy City Manager
Janice MacKenzie, City Clerk
Lynda Graves, Manager, Administration Services, City Manager's Office
Rena Kendall-Craden, Director, Communications
Kevin Quinlan, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office
Katie Robb, Director, Communications, Mayor's Office
Emma Lee, Director, Community Relations, Mayor's Office
Kent Munro, Assistant Director of Planning, Midtown Division

FROM: Jane Pickering, Acting General Manager, Planning and Development Services

SUBJECT: **RTS 11423: Motion to designate a portion of Commercial Drive as Little Italy**

Dear Mayor and Council,

This memorandum responds to Council's motions of June 24, 2015 and April 6, 2016 regarding the recognition of the Italian heritage of a portion of Commercial Drive. On April 6th, 2016, City Council directed staff:

[T]o separate the formal recognition and designation process for a portion of Commercial Drive as "Little Italy" from the Grandview-Woodlands planning process such that official designation of "Little Italy" on Commercial Drive can be achieved in time for "Italian Day on the Drive" in June 2016.

Work on this process has been underway since early 2016. To complete the process, staff undertook a community consultation to assess the level of support for the designation. The engagement exercise has demonstrated a considerable (68%) level of support for the designation, along with broad support for one or more physical components such as specialized banners and/or painted crosswalks to visually mark the area.

Based on these results, and work completed to date, staff will be proceeding to recognize the eight block section between Charles Street and East 4th Avenue as the geographic scope of the designation. Staff will work with the BIA and community groups to support the designation of "Historic Little Italy" in those blocks. It is noted that funding sources to implement this designation and/or to fund components to physically mark the area will need to be identified. Staff will work with the local Business Improvement Association (BIA) to explore funding options including through the BIA annual budget.

Council Direction

On June 24, 2015, City Council passed a motion to formally recognize a portion of Commercial Drive in recognition of the area's Italian cultural heritage, subject to consultation. At that time, Council directed staff to undertake this consultation in concert with the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan consultation.

On April 6, 2016, City Council passed a motion that directed staff to separate the Little Italy designation process from the Grandview-Woodland planning process - in order to allow an official designation to take place prior to "Italian Day on the Drive" - June 12, 2016.

Consultation Methods

To inform this matter and to focus the consultation process, City staff retained a local historian to conduct research into the Italian cultural history of East Vancouver. The intent was to gain a better understanding of the role, nature, and geographic scope of post-war Italian businesses specifically on Commercial Drive. Using City directories, the research produced transcribed listings of Italian businesses.

The primary consultation method used to assess community support for designating a portion of Commercial Drive as Little Italy was a survey. The survey also sought feedback on examples of public realm features that could be used to mark this designation. This latter question was based on the Commercial Drive Business Improvements Association's (BIA) stated interest in the possibility of one or more painted crosswalks, utility pole banners, and customized sign blades to supplement existing street signs.

The survey was openly available to the public throughout the period of April 7-24, 2016. Initially, the survey was distributed electronically via the Grandview-Woodland Community Plan listserv which has about 1,700 subscribers, and it was distributed more broadly via the City's Talk Vancouver platform. The survey was further promoted via Twitter and Facebook, and to selected stakeholder groups, including the Business Improvement Association.

The matter was presented to the City's Civic Assets Naming Committee on April 11, 2016.

Outcomes and Survey Results

The review of the Italian cultural history of Commercial Drive concluded that the primary geographic focus of Italian business interests was consistent with the BIA's suggested eight block section between Charles Street and East 4th Avenue (see diagram below). The Italian community certainly existed outside of that area but the greatest clustering occurred in that

section. Given this geographic focus, the survey sought feedback on the broad matter of designation as well as on the notion of a defined section of Commercial Drive.

At the close of the survey period, a total of 1,307 individual responses were received. Most respondents (78%) had a connection to the area in that they indicated that they used the amenities and services on Commercial Drive. One quarter of respondents lived in the Grandview-Woodland community, including on Commercial Drive. Six percent of respondents either owned a business or worked at a business on Commercial Drive. Six per cent of the respondents self-identified as Italian or Italian-Canadian.



Designation

Overall, the survey indicates broad support for the notion of designation. Nearly seven out of ten (68%) respondents either supported or strongly supported the proposal to designate and recognize the Italian heritage of Commercial Drive. When asked specifically about the eight blocks between Charles Street and East 4th Avenue, 64% indicated either support or strong support for designation.

The survey offered an opportunity for open-ended comments. Reasons for supporting the designation included:

- it would honour Italian immigrants and support the Italian community and their historic contribution to the Drive;
- general desire to celebrate cultural heritage in the city;
- branding of the area would enhance the area's identity in a way that visitors and tourists can understand;
- it will draw more tourists, build community and add character to the city.

The most common reason for not supporting the proposal was that designation would focus too much on one culture, whereas Commercial Drive has evolved to be culturally diverse, and continues to transition over time. A number of respondents felt that the area's Italian character peaked several decades ago and that the designation is less relevant today. Some concerns were raised about highlighting one culture or ethnicity when the Drive is home to so many different communities. Regarding the geographic scope suggested, there was general support except a few respondents suggested extending the area to be designated further north.

Public Realm Features

Respondents were asked for their level of support on potential public realm features tied to a designation to recognize the Drive's Italian heritage, namely street banners and a crosswalk design. On the matter of specific physical elements, 67% of respondents either supported or strongly supported street banners, while 60% supported or strongly supported a specialized crosswalk design.

Open-ended comments were diverse in opinion, with respondents expressing a range of personal preferences about the proposed designs. Those in support felt that these features were a fun way to bring colour to the street. Several respondents noted that they liked the concepts, but found the designs to be not very pleasing with some suggesting that the designs were "tacky," "kitschy," or seemed "too busy." There were some questions on how these features would be funded.

While the Civic Assets Naming Committee did not submit a consensus opinion on this matter, the discussion generated a number of comments. Generally, the comments and issues that arose at the April 11, 2016 Committee meeting were consistent with those provided by the public through the survey.

Conclusion

Council directed staff to consult and assess the level of support within the community for the designation of a portion of Commercial Drive to recognize its Italian heritage. This work is now complete and consultation with the community has confirmed a considerable level of support, along with broad support for one or more physical components such as specialized banners and/or painted crosswalks to visually mark the area. Currently, there are no allocated budgets for such "marker" components. Consistent with the approaches taken in other culturally designated areas, staff will liaise with the local BIA to explore appropriate funding sources which will include the inclusion of these expenditures within the BIA's annual budget.

Staff recommend that the geographic scope of the designation be well defined and that, based on the historical research, staff would concur that the eight block section between Charles Street and East 4th Avenue is an appropriate area to be recognized. Given that communities evolve and change both physically and culturally over time, and in recognition of the strong historic foundations of the Italian community on Commercial Drive, staff will now work to implement this designation of an eight block area as "Historic Little Italy".

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Pickering". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Jane Pickering
Acting General Manager, Planning and Development Services
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