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City Response to COVID-19 pandemic in Chinatown

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to wide-ranging impacts on the Chinatown community including increased anti-Asian racism and hate incidents, food security, shortage of personal protective equipment, health risks and diminished economic activities.

In order to counter and lessen these impacts on the community, the City of Vancouver and various local groups and organizations have worked together and taken actions to address the challenges facing Chinatown and the local Chinese Canadian community.

Due to racist graffiti found at the Chinese Cultural Centre, the Park Board has provided temporary fencing to CCC to help minimize similar incidents. The Vancouver Police also added security camera and stepped up police presence in the area to combat the rise of racist incidents in the neighbourhood, which included the repeated defacing of the stone lions at the Millennium Gate.



Staff cleaning graffiti from one of the lions

Courtesy of Kelly Ip

To ensure accurate and timely information concerning the pandemic is available to Vancouver's diverse ethno-cultural communities, the City established a team of staff with knowledge and skills in various languages to provide important messages and information on the City website and also through the media in Chinese, Punjabi, Tagalog, Korean, Vietnamese, and Farsi etc.

A radio program townhall conducted in Cantonese was held for senior City officials to dialogue and respond to questions from community members to ensure they can access appropriate City information related to the pandemic and issues and concerns which have impacted the community. Further, staff also conducted outreach to Chinatown groups to gather feedback on the impact of COVID-19 on their members and organizations and for the City to be aware of the need for future support.

To improve safety and security on the streets, the City has provided funding to the Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association to increase security presence to 24/7 patrol. The funding support is continuing into the fall. This will complement existing initiatives such as the Community Stewardship Program, also funded by the City, and the upcoming Neighbourhood Watch program proposed by LSG.

In response to the food access challenges that low-income seniors in Chinatown face during the pandemic, the City's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) established a partnership with community groups, including the hua foundation, Chinatown Today and Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden to establish an emergency food delivery program which provided culturally appropriate food to over 250 Chinese seniors in Chinatown over a two-month period. The program was made possible by generous funding support from a private donor as well as from BC Housing.

Some key community-led actions in response to the pandemic include:

- HealthNotHate : a media awareness campaign initiated by LSG member Sonny Wong that features screen stars and media personalities and educates the public not to misdirect and misguide their hatred towards a particular people when that hatred should be directed towards a virus.
- A grocery delivery initiative by hua foundation, Yarrow Intergenerational Society for Justice, SUCCESS and Bao Bei Restaurant ensured Chinatown seniors were able to stay home and stay safe, with weekly delivery of packaged groceries, masks and important information on the pandemic.
- C19help.ca - an online resource that combats misinformation about the pandemic by providing credible information with multilingual translations via hua foundation and Bao Ve Collective.
- Donation of face masks by Chinatown organizations to the City including the Chinese Benevolent Association, Chinese Cultural Centre and the Mah Society of Canada. These masks were distributed to Downtown Eastside residents, seniors care homes and public transport agencies.
- The Chinatown Supper Club organized by the Youth Collaborative for Chinatown as part of the Canada-wide Takeout Wednesday campaign. The Club supported Chinatown eateries by offering free pick-up and delivery of 15-20 orders each evening.

Legacy Stewardship Group (LSG) Co-Chair and local organizations urge Ottawa to support Chinatown businesses and economy

LSG co-chair, Michael Tan, working with a number of Chinatown organizations and businesses, is calling on the federal government to provide financial assistance to support local businesses, workers, and arts and cultural organizations that are facing significant impacts from the current pandemic.

'Chinatown is experiencing a severe economic downturn due to the sharp drop in international and local tourists during the pandemic,' Michael S Tan said in a letter addressed to Federal Minister of Economic Development Melanie Joly and Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade Minister Mary Ng.

Other signatories of the letter included the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden, the Chinese Cultural Center, Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association and the Chinatown Plaza Tenant Association. Tan noted Ottawa has recently launched a number of support programs to help tourism-based facilities or areas in Vancouver, such as the Vancouver Aquarium (\$2M) and Granville Island (\$17M).

Chinese Canadian Museum launches temporary exhibition in Chinatown



Courtesy of Chinese Canadian Museum Society

Members of the public can now visit the Chinese Canadian Museum's first temporary exhibit titled "A Seat at the Table: Chinese Immigration and British Columbia" in Chinatown.

Located at the Hon Hsing Building at 27 East Pender, the exhibit offers a taste of how the Chinese Canadian Museum will share the historical contributions of Chinese Canadians and their continued role in the fabric of British Columbia and Canada.

The event explores the history of Chinese immigration and communities through individual narratives and opportunities to promote story sharing. It features interactive story panels, videos and audio to provide snapshots from Chinese Canadians' lives.

Mayor Kennedy Stewart said, "There is so much history and culture here in Vancouver. This is a great, affordable opportunity for people to learn more about the lives and experiences of the Chinese Canadians who shaped our city. I hope people come on down and check it out and enjoy Vancouver Chinatown."



"A Seat at the Table"

*Courtesy of Chinese Canadian Museum Society
continued on back page*

Working Group project proposals get green light from expert panel

Five Legacy Stewardship Group (LSG) Working Group priority projects and two external proposals have been approved for implementation following the completion of the adjudication process by an expert panel. LSG Working Groups spent up to six months developing these pilot projects to help support and advance the revitalization work in Chinatown.

The adjudicating panel was impressed with the work of the working groups and the process used to develop the projects.

The list of projects proposals are as follows:

LSG Working Group Projects

Fire Dragon Festival

A celebration of Chinatown resiliency and solidarity that aims to bring the community together through celebration, cultural activities and performances, food and the practice of heritage. The event encompasses a series of complementary initiatives that will strengthen awareness and education about Chinatown's cultural heritage.



Head of the fire dragon under construction

Courtesy of William Ma

Chinatown Food Festival

The project is a celebration of the culinary heritage and food culture of Chinatown. It aims to encourage residents and visitors to dine in Chinatown restaurants and/or purchase food and grocery for their at-home dining experience. In addition to restaurants, other businesses such as green grocers, meat and fish stores, bakeries, tea shops and herbal store will be invited to participate in the festival.

Research Study of Low-income Chinese seniors

The project aims to collect up-to-date data on the living conditions and support networks of Chinese seniors within the DTES, focusing particularly on those seniors living in privately owned SRO buildings. The project is supported by an advisory group comprised of seniors-serving organizations and academic experts.

Indigenous Education and Learnings through Storytelling

A two-part initiative aiming to build relations with Indigenous communities in DTES and to create awareness of intangible heritage in Chinatown through storytelling of non-profits and businesses that are vital to Chinatown's economy and cultural heritage.

Neighbourhood Watch Program

To enhance existing street safety by recruiting volunteers to act as eyes and ears on the street and to report incidences to a centralized source which can coordinate efforts with other security services, storefront businesses and interested local organizations and local residents.

External proposals endorsed by LSG

Solidarity: Bridging Arts, Building Resilience

By convening a group of Chinese Canadian and local Indigenous artists to work together and exchange ideas, this project proposes to create a much-needed intercultural dialogue and public education on wellness and recovery through art, history and culture.

Heritage Significance through story driven podcast

This cultural heritage project will tell the story of the intangible heritage of Chinatown through a cultural and culinary business – a Dim Sum business in Chinatown. The podcast will be conducted in Cantonese and English.

City launches survey to gauge pandemic impacts on non-profits

The City of Vancouver recognises the critical role that the non-profit and social enterprise sectors play in providing programs and services to community members in need, including those in Chinatown. These organizations will lead the move from social isolation to social resilience, and contribute greatly to rebuilding the social, cultural, and economic life of the city as Vancouver emerges from the pandemic crisis.

As part of the City of Vancouver's broad recovery planning, the City wants to gain a better understanding of the challenges, both immediate and still to come, facing the non-profit sector.

The Chinatown Transformation Team has taken initial steps to interview and survey a number of Chinatown non-profit organizations, including clan societies, to find out how their work has been impacted by COVID-19, how they have adjusted their work focus during this time, what are their immediate and longer term needs, and the impact the pandemic has had on the people and clients they serve as the sector moves into recovery. A report will be compiled based on the feedback and will be shared with the City and LSG.

While the City of Vancouver's financial position remains challenging, the information provided will inform the development of City-led actions, as well as assisting with advocacy to other levels of government

Singers wanted for new opera "Chinatown"

City Opera Vancouver, a professional chamber opera company, is looking for qualified Asian-Canadian singers to perform in a new opera scheduled to be staged in September 2021.

The chamber opera titled "Chinatown" is currently under development by librettist Madeleine Thien, together with Paul Yee as co-writer and Alice Ping Yee Ho as composer.

"Chinatown" is a Western opera, with significant elements sung in the Hoisan/Toisan dialect of south China, and with a fusion orchestra of Western and traditional Chinese instruments. Centred in 1961 but pivoting in time across several decades, it is a story of six Chinese Canadians and their families, set in Vancouver's Chinatown neighbourhood.

For information on submitting resumés and video materials for consideration for the roles, please contact Kattia Woloshyniuk, Auditions Manager, at auditions@cityoperavancouver.com

"A seat at the Table" continues

Visitors can learn how Chinese migrants and their descendants have found ways to earn a living, challenge systemic racism, connect with others, survive and thrive through hope and resilience.

The public can also add their personal story to the collection and share their experiences as Chinese Canadians, their interactions with other Chinese Canadians in their community or their experiences as migrants living in a new place.



Exhibit: "Restaurant dishes"

Courtesy of Chinese Canadian Museum Society

Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden reopens



Courtesy of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Garden

Visitors to Chinatown are now able to tour the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden from 11 am – 4pm Wednesday – Sunday following its re-opening in July.

The Garden, which was closed since March due to the pandemic, is currently hosting a third exhibition "Luminous Garden" by artist-in-residence Lam Wong. In collaboration with artist Glenn Lewis, the exhibition celebrates the concept of gardens from a spiritual and philosophical perspective and explores what inspires people to build gardens.

Visitors are required to book their tickets online at: <https://vancouverchinesegarden.ticketzone.com> and only those who have registered are permitted entry.



Courtesy of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Garden

They can choose to share their stories on camera, through in-person interviews, in writing or by placing a marker on a map. These stories will become part of the Chinese Canadian Museum's collection. As the exhibition travels throughout the province, it will continue to gather stories from each location throughout the province.

"A Seat at the Table" is a project from the Chinese Canadian Museum Society of BC, in collaboration with the Museum of Vancouver and the University of British Columbia. As the first offering from the new museum, the free event exhibit will be open Friday to Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and will run through 2021.

The temporary exhibit is made possible through the B.C. government's \$1-million grant to the City of Vancouver to support further planning for the Chinese Canadian Museum.

For more information on the Chinese Canadian Museum, visit: chinesecanadianmuseum.ca or email: info@chinesecanadianmuseum.ca