Over the last decade, the City and the Chinatown community have worked together to encourage revitalization through public realm improvements, community and economic development projects, and by creating building opportunities to increase the resident customer base to support existing businesses and generate investment in the neighbourhood. These efforts are now bearing fruit and early signs of revitalization are emerging in the form of development applications and new businesses. Yet the challenges for the local economy remain significant, with a high number of vacant storefronts in rundown buildings, failing businesses and a negative public image of Chinatown as unsafe and out of date.

This is a critical moment in the evolution of Chinatown to ensure revitalization continues, is socially and economically sustainable, and maintains and renews the cultural and heritage fabric of the neighbourhood. The Economic Revitalization Strategy, described here builds on all that has been learned over the last decade of community development work in Chinatown and identifies the key short-term and medium term actions to support the development of a new, vibrant Chinatown in the years ahead.
BACKGROUND

In 2010 Council directed staff to identify economic revitalization strategies with a particular focus on immediate actions for business retention, expansion and attraction. At Council’s direction staff engaged the resources and expertise of the Vancouver Economic Commission (VEC), the Vancouver Chinatown BIA (VCBIA) and the Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association (VCMA) to develop the plan.

Objectives

- Focus on actions that can be implemented in one or two years
- Support existing organizations in promoting Chinatown
- Engage the community in plan development and implementation
- Create a sense of excitement to attract investors and customers

Consultants Findings

Economic development planners from San Francisco, AECOM, were hired to lead the community consultation, undertake neighbourhood-level research and provide strategic recommendations. The Chinatown community was engaged through a public forum attended by 230 community members, a survey of 77 businesses, and interviews with over 40 key stakeholders. AECOMs’ recommendations came from analysis of the local and regional economics, direct feedback of the community and their experiences with the revitalization in Chinatowns in other cities.

Business Climate (key findings from survey)

- 64 percent of businesses reported a decrease in revenue over the past three years (08-11)
- 43 percent of businesses have been operating for more than 15 years and 23 percent of businesses have been operating less than 5 years
- Client base: 58 percent local residents, 21 percent Lower Mainland residents and 12 percent tourists

AECOM synthesized the economic analysis, community feedback and survey findings and identified the following issues:

Challenges

- Chinatown needs to modernize and broaden its product offerings
- Old line retailers and restaurateurs are not keeping up with changing times
- Need more people on the street at night and on weekends
- Revitalization strategy must lead with restaurant sector – that’s the heart of Chinatown
- Needs to be clean and safe
- Involve younger community members in decision-making roles and pass leadership to the next generation

Key Strengths and Opportunities

- Local market area (2 blocks from Pender and Columbia) is growing faster that the city and the region (30% pop. increase – 01/06)
- New residential development in Chinatown; opportunities generated by the Viaducts, False Creek & the Flats
- Cater to new and existing residents (e.g. fresh/organic grocery stores and quality affordable restaurants)
- Improve the restaurant sector – make Chinatown a culinary and dining destination again
- Build on the rich historical and cultural attractions. Renovated heritage buildings + revitalized laneways = unique, walkable neighbourhood (competitive advantage)
- Growing Asian population across the region = potential client/visitor base to re-introduce to Chinatown

A Community Strategy

AECOM’s findings were presented to Chinatown community partners in December 2011 and strategy areas were further refined. Community partners identified the following priority interventions for immediate action:

- Modernize and broaden the product offerings of retail, services and restaurants and retain key cultural and low-income serving businesses
- Support restoration of the society and heritage buildings
- Support capacity building in existing organizations to take advantage of new economic opportunities
- Make the laneways and streets dynamic and interesting to attract locals and visitors, especially evening and weekend customers
- Improve Chinatown’s marketing and tourism strategies
Develop tactical tools that will assist merchants and landowners to diversify and intensify the mix of retail/commercial activities in the neighbourhood that will complement the culture of Chinatown, while modernizing the mix to appeal to the growing base of new residents, as well as to a broader customer base across the region including tourism markets. Promote opportunities to attract the growing genre of new technology-based businesses and start-ups that find cultural and even edgy neighbourhoods appealing, and ensure this strategy integrates with initiatives in neighbouring areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPOSED ACTIONS</th>
<th>LEAD ORGANIZATIONS</th>
<th>IMPLEMENTATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Tenant Recruitment Strategy**  
Develop a retail-mix inventory and profile on the current and changing customer base, and develop a strategy to meet the needs of current and future markets. Strategy will inform:  
• BIA business development workshops/outreach  
• zoning and development recommendations  
• BIA and VEC outreach to realtors and investors  
• marketing and tourism campaigns | • Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association  
• Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association  
• Vancouver Economic Commission | • Research & strategy development late 2012/early 2013  
• Implementation 2013-2015 |
| **Tenant Retention Strategy**  
Business training and education workshops and outreach to support existing businesses | • Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association | • Workshop/outreach - starting Jan. 2013 |
| **Tourism and Marketing Strategy**  
Coordinate marketing between existing organizations and undertake capacity building to modernize marketing and branding strategies, including:  
• one-stop Chinatown website  
• earned media & social media campaigns | • Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association (convene Working Group)  
• Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association  
• Tourism Vancouver  
• Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Gardens | • Strategy development - late 2012/early 2013  
• Strategy Implementation - 2013/2014 |
| **Vacant Storefronts Strategy**  
Implement a sustainable window improvement program for vacant storefronts in Chinatown | • Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association | • Strategy development - Fall 2012  
• Implementation - Jan 2013 |
Strategy 2. Historic Neighbourhood Revitalization

Retain, revitalize and leverage the unique cultural and heritage assets of Chinatown to provide a long-term economic advantage. Build on the Society Building Planning Grant Program currently offered to Society Heritage Buildings by investigating innovative financing tools to enable the renovation of these key historic and cultural serving buildings. Ensure that the achievement of National Historic Site designation is optimized by identifying marketing, tourism and investment opportunities to be leveraged. Support capacity and youth leadership development within key cultural organizations. Work with community organizations and groups who want to develop culturally appropriate seniors housing in Chinatown to identify future opportunities for collaboration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPOSED ACTIONS</th>
<th>LEAD ORGANIZATIONS</th>
<th>IMPLEMENTATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Restoration of Society heritage Buildings</strong></td>
<td>• Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association</td>
<td>• Immediately via working group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore innovative financing tools to leverage additional investment in restoration of these important cultural assets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optimize national Historic Site Designation</strong></td>
<td>• Tourism Vancouver • Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association • Chinese Cultural Centre</td>
<td>• Immediately via marketing working group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support local arts, cultural organizations and heritage groups to maximize opportunities for new community investment and the development of new program services and attractions. Link to marketing and tourism opportunities in Strategy 1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership Development</strong></td>
<td>• Parks Board - Neighbourhood Houses • SUCCESS • Benevolent Societies</td>
<td>• Immediately via leadership/youth working group • First project - 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify opportunities to support youth leadership and capacity development in local organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seniors Housing</strong></td>
<td>• Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association • Vancouver Chinatown Foundation</td>
<td>• Strategy development - 2012/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify opportunities to increase seniors housing development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Laneways have a history in Chinatown of being places of commerce and innovation – small hole-in-the-wall restaurants and businesses once flourished on Market Alley, between Pender Street and Hastings Street. Laneways today offer potential for creative exploration and innovation, to provide dynamic pedestrian connections, new public spaces and in the long-term new retail and commercial spaces. Revitalized laneways can support local businesses by creating something unique and inviting and generating a greater sense of safety for local residents and visitors. Building on all the effort and success in improving the cleanliness of Chinatown over the last decade these efforts need to be sustained while new opportunities for improvement are sought out by the community.

### PROPOSED ACTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPOSED ACTIONS</th>
<th>LEAD ORGANIZATIONS</th>
<th>IMPLEMENTATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Laneway Revitalization Strategy</strong></td>
<td>• Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee</td>
<td>• Laneway Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop with the community a strategy for immediate and long-term revitalization of Chinatown’s laneways. Identify specific projects and opportunities for:</td>
<td>• Architecture for Humanity Vancouver</td>
<td>- Implementation spring/summer 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• temporary street events or installations</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Comprehensive Laneway Revitalization Strategy - 2014/2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• dumpster-free pilot project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• policy and regulation changes to facilitate retail and commercial uses on laneways</td>
<td>• Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association</td>
<td>• New clean-up project - 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clean-up public spaces with local businesses</strong></td>
<td>• Window display program for vacant storefronts.</td>
<td>• Window display program for vacant storefronts - 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NEXT STEPS

Leadership & Implementation

The success of the 3-Year Economic Strategy is contingent on commitment, leadership and follow-through from the Chinatown community and the City. As an economic strategy, focused on retaining and attracting local businesses, the key leaders in implementation are the Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association and the Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association. The City and the Vancouver Economic Commission will need to provide strategic support to these organizations as projects are developed and implemented. Other partners who will participate in the development of strategies and projects include, but are not limited to, the Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee, the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Gardens, SUCCESS, Tourism Vancouver, Chinatown Heritage Society Building Association, the Vancouver Chinatown Foundation and Architecture for Humanity Vancouver.

Lead organizations will begin immediately to develop the projects identified in the different strategy areas and these projects will be shared with the broader DTES community through the planning roundtables in the fall of 2012. The action plans will provide useful case studies and concepts to inform the broader discussions underway as part of the Local Area Planning Process. Staff will continue monitoring its implementation and provide Council with regular progress reports.
REFERENCES


Copyright Notice: The Census data published here are copyright material provided to the City of Vancouver by Statistics Canada. They are reproduced with the permission of Statistics Canada. They may not be further reproduced without prior approval.


COUNCIL REPORTS

Chinatown Vision and Chinatown Community Plan

Chinatown Community Plan: Summary of City Council Policies and Directions (April 20, 2010, RTS 6478)

Historic Area Height Review: Conclusions and Recommendations (January 19, 2009, RTS 8079)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20100119/documents/rr2a.pdf (PDF)
vancouver.ca/hahr (website)

Chinatown Community Plan: Progress Report (December 12, 2006, RTS 6113)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20061212/documents/a3.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown Community Plan (February 15, 2005, CC File No.8102)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20050215/p3-full.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown Vision (July 23, 2002, RTS 2783)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/020723/rr2.htm

Heritage Incentive Programs

Transfer of Density (ToD) Program and Heritage Building Rehabilitation Program (HBRP) Review (July 28, 2009, RTS 7281)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20090728/documents/csbu1.pdf (PDF)

Status Report on the Heritage Building Rehabilitation Program for Gastown, Chinatown and Hastings Corridor (November 1, 2005, RTS 4565)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20051101/documents/a1.pdf (PDF)

Heritage Incentives Implementation for Gastown and Chinatown (July 10, 2003, RTS 3222)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20030710/pe3.htm

Property Tax Incentives for Heritage Properties in Chinatown (October 30, 2002, RTS 3060)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/021105/P2.htm


Chinatown Society Buildings Rehabilitation Strategy

Chinatown Society Buildings Rehabilitation Strategy Update and Extension of the Society Buildings Planning Grant Program (Phase II) (May 21, 2009, RTS 8097)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20090521/documents/csb3.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown Society Buildings Rehabilitation Strategy (February 14, 2008, RTS 6114)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20080214/documents/pe1.pdf (PDF)

Public Realm Projects

Market Alley Commemoration Project (December 17, 2009, RTS 8400)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20091217/documents/penv1.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown Yue Shan Society Courtyard Improvement Project (July 21, 2009, RTS 8226)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20090721/documents/a11.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown Plaza Parkade Neon Lighting Project (July 22, 2008, RTS 7510)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20080722/documents/a27.pdf (PDF)

Carrall Street Greenway Detailed Design and Implementation (July 13, 2006, RTS 5800)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20060713/documents/pe3.pdf (PDF)

Carrall Street Greenway Concept Design (April 28, 2005, RTS 4246)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20050428/pe8.pdf (PDF)

Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden Society Education and Presentation Centre (December 2, 2003, RTS 3717)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20031202/a11.htm

Chinatown Millennium Gate (September 20, 2001, RTS 2260)
vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/010920/pe4.htm

Chinatown Memorial Square Place Marker, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Park and Courtyard Improvements (July 26, 2001, RTS 2217) vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/010726/peA1.htm
CHINATOWN ZONING DISTRICT SCHEDULE AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

HA-1 and HA-1A District Schedule (Chinatown)
vancouver.ca/commsvcs/BYLAWS/zoning/ha-1&1a.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown HA-1 Guidelines for Designated Sites
vancouver.ca/commsvcs/guidelines/C018.pdf (PDF)

Chinatown HA-1A Guidelines for Non-designated Sites
vancouver.ca/commsvcs/guidelines/C019.pdf (PDF)

OTHER CITY OF VANCOUVER PLANS AND POLICIES

Downtown Eastside Economic Revitalization Plan (June 24, 2008, RTS 4480)
vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/20080724/documents/pe2.pdf (PDF)

Metro Core Jobs and Economy Land Use Plan: Issues and Directions (July 10, 2007, RTS 6805)
vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/20070710/documents/rr1.pdf (PDF)

Downtown Eastside Housing Plan (Published 2005)
vancouver.ca/cyclerk/cclerk/20050524/documents/rr2report.pdf (PDF)

Downtown Transportation Plan: Public Summary Report (Published 2005)
vancouver.ca/dtp/pdf/DTP2005.pdf (PDF)

Vancouver Agreement
http://vancouveragreement.ca/TheAgreement.htm (website)

Downtown Eastside Community Development Project
vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/dtes/project.htm (website)

Central Area Plan (December 3, 1991)
vancouver.ca/commsvcs/guidelines/C028.pdf (PDF)