

Vancouver Chinese Society Legacy Program



Anchoring Changes, Reviving Traditions

The Vancouver Chinese Society Legacy Program, a proposed \$36-million rehabilitation of 12 Chinese Societies heritage buildings, is a key step towards the revitalization of Vancouver's historic Chinatown.

Vancouver City Council recently approved \$3.6 million to kick-start the program. We are now actively working with the Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association to seek financial support from potential funding partners, including the Government of B.C., the Government of Canada, charitable organizations and others, to secure the remaining program budget.

The Legacy Program provides an opportunity to anchor change in Chinatown and create a lasting cultural legacy that our city, province and nation can be proud of for generations to come.

Chinese Societies and their Cultural and Historic Roles

The Chinese Societies are non-profit organizations established by immigrants to provide social support and general welfare services to their members. Based on ideals of solidarity, mutual dependence and charitable services, the Societies have been a vital part of the Chinatown community for more than 100 years.



As a testament to their resourcefulness, Society members raised money from their members to construct their own buildings, the majority located in and around Chinatown. The buildings remain social hubs for the local Chinese-Canadian community, particularly for seniors and youth. They also still provide approximately 600 units of affordable housing, office and retail space, as well as host cultural activities and traditional festival celebrations.

The continued presence of the Societies in Chinatown was a key factor in the designation of Vancouver's Chinatown as a National Historic Site of Canada in 2011.

The Society buildings and their services, culture and traditions form the heart and soul of Chinatown and hold significant social and historic value.



Society Buildings in an Urgent State of Disrepair

Twelve Society-owned heritage buildings in Chinatown are over 100 years old and in need of major building upgrades. Maintaining and updating these heritage buildings is a significant challenge for the Societies.

Without a sustainable, long-term plan to renew the buildings and their operations, the buildings will soon reach a point where they will be unsafe and uninhabitable and their legacies will be lost.

This is a critical moment for intervention to reverse the trend of decline. Renewal of the buildings also presents an opportunity to engage the younger generation and increase memberships to better secure the future of the Societies.

Society Buildings at a Glance

Designated heritage structures

Total building area:
159,400 square feet

Residential:
50,200 square feet (31%)
184 homes

Commercial:
49,300 square feet (31%)

Society use:
56,900 square feet (36%)

Institutional use:
3,000 square feet (2%)

Chinese Society Legacy Program Features

The program's priority is to stabilize the buildings to maintain current uses, add in modest renovation to activate underused spaces and conserve heritage features. The \$36 million budget includes: \$29 million for stabilization and seismic upgrades, \$6 million to optimize building uses, and \$1 million for implementation and mentorship.

Program Objectives

- Rehabilitate the 12 society heritage buildings to protect these national heritage treasures and the traditions and culture they support.
- Stabilise and potentially increase much-needed **affordable housing** in the Chinatown community, particularly for seniors.
- Strengthen the **economy** of Chinatown by helping the buildings to provide retail, commercial and activity spaces and enhance Chinatown as an international tourist district.
- Foster the transfer of **culture and traditions** to younger generations of Chinese Canadians to enrich Canada as a multicultural society.
- Intensify the use of the buildings and increase resources for **capacity-building** of the Societies to ensure their future.

Working Together to Achieve Collective Impacts

The Chinatown Society Legacy Program is collaboration between the Province of BC, City of Vancouver, and the Chinese Societies and Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association. The program benefits greatly from Societies' readiness to participate.

Given the importance and uniqueness of Society buildings locally and nationally, funding for the rehabilitation needs to be collective effort that leverages resources from governments, as well as community and private sources.

For example, as part of its support for the program, the Government of BC has provided funding toward the Chinatown Senior's Housing Feasibility Study. The study is an extension of the Legacy Program, which will examine seniors housing needs and the ways in which the Society buildings play a role in supporting and strengthening the presence of Chinese seniors in the community and preserving heritage and culture in this National Historic Site.

With more than a century of history behind them, the Societies have deep ties in the community. Provided with the right tools and support, they will remain key contributors for the next century. The Legacy Program will work to ensure the longevity of these national heritage treasures and the traditions and culture that they support.

To Learn More

vancouver.ca/dtesplan
vancouver.ca/chinatown
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