

# Downtown Eastside Special Enterprise Program Summary of Achievements (2023)



As of December 2023, City Council has approved a total of **\$845,000** to four community partners assisting with the implementation of the program.

The following summary provides an update on the projects and lessons learned from the community partners during the second year of the program implementation.

## 1. BUSINESS SUPPORTS/CAPACITY BUILDING

Two community partners are assisting the City with the implementation of this program component, the Vancouver Chinatown Foundation for Community Revitalization (VCF) and the Vancouver Chinatown Merchant Association (VCMA). Both VCF and VCMA collaborate with key Chinatown community leaders to build relationships with Chinatown's businesses, encourage their participation in the program and help retain businesses and services that are important to the community.

### 1.1 VANCOUVER CHINATOWN FOUNDATION

VCF is a local non-profit organization dedicated to building a more resilient and inclusive community in Chinatown by promoting the well-being of those in need while preserving Chinatown's irreplaceable cultural heritage. VCF is spearheading the capacity building component of the program by working alongside a diverse group of merchants to understand their unique challenges and provide tailored supports to help them navigate the modern business landscape.

VCF leveraged the City's SEP funds to secure financial support from the Provincial Government and create the **Chinatown Impact Fund**. This fund provides businesses with financial resources to undertake projects that will further their growth, contribute to the vibrancy of Chinatown and achieve the goals of the SEP.

There were five streams of support: digital marketing, traditional marketing, human capital, physical improvements, and web design and e-commerce. An information package (English and Chinese) was shared to businesses and non-profit organizations with an overview of the SEP and an application form. VCF staff met with interested business to understand their needs and goals. Applications were reviewed to ensure they meet eligibility requirements and criteria. If successful, VCF and the interested businesses/non-profits will sign



VCF's outreach package in English.

an agreement that lays out the funding requirements and deliverables. Beneficiaries were required to submit an impact report one year after the support period to gain insights into the results and outcomes.

A total of 21 businesses expressed interest in the program, but only 12 were ready to work with VCF (Table 1). Three out of eight businesses participating last year continued receiving supports in 2023, and nine new businesses received supports in 2023. Most businesses requested supports for physical improvements to make the storefront more attractive to clients.

**Table 1. List of Chinatown businesses supported in 2023.**

Business Name	Types of Support	Description
1. Forum Home Appliances	Digital marketing	A long-term marketing plan with videos on the social media channels
2. Bamboo Village	Physical improvement	Awning replacement
3. Fuling Gifts & Houseware	Physical improvement	Awning replacement
4. Good Luck Entertainment Centre Ltd	Physical improvement	Sign replacement
5. Private & Co.	Physical improvement	Upgrades to the lighting fixtures
6. Say Hey Cafe & Deli	Physical improvement	Awning replacement
7. Sino United Publishing	Physical improvement	Façade improvements and awning replacement
8. THIS Gallery	Physical improvement	Installation of a rolling shutter gate
9. Chi Shing Trading Co Ltd	Physical improvement	Glass panel replacement
10. Sam's Pharmacy Ltd	Physical improvement	Awning replacement
11. Ai & Om Knives	Physical improvement	Back gate replacement
12. Centre A	Website & e-commerce	Revamping their website



Exterior of THIS Gallery at 268 Keefer Street BEFORE rolling shutter gate installation.



Exterior of THIS Gallery at 485 Main Street (now located at 268 Keefer Street) BEFORE rolling shutter gate installation.



Exterior of Chi Shing Trading Co at 255 Union Street before glass panel replacement.



Exterior of Chi Shing Trading Co at 255 Union Street AFTER glass panel replacement.

## 1.2 VANCOUVER CHINATOWN MERCHANTS ASSOCIATION (VCMA)

In order to advance the economic revitalization of Chinatown, City Council approved a total of \$35,000 from SEP funds to the Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association (VCMA) in October 2023. The purpose of this funding is to support the VCMA's strategic planning and build their capacity to support the retention of Chinatown's heritage businesses. This project is being implemented with the assistance of Dunefield Consulting and it is expected to be completed by the end of 2024.

## 2. ACTIVATION OF VACANT SPACES IN CHINESE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY BUILDINGS

The City partnered with the Strathcona Business Improvement Association (SBIA) after the successful renovation of the commercial retail unit owned by the Kong Chow Benevolent Association of Canada, and the retention of the heritage business Kam Wai Dim Sum.

Between 2021 and 2023, the SBIA and Dunefield Consulting worked together with the Chinese Nationalist League Society (CNLS) to renovate a vacant ground floor commercial unit at the Kuomintang Building. The work included renovation of one out of two vacant storefronts located at 525 Gore Avenue. The purpose of the renovation was to bring the space to a 'clean slate' and make it available for community-serving uses. Dunefield Consulting provided consulting services to the Society on financing, property management and planning.

The unit has now been brought back to a clean and empty shell. Dunefield Consulting is helping the Society to recruit a suitable local entrepreneur or community-serving tenant. A brochure was developed by the consultants and distributed in Chinatown to promote the newly renovated space. Approximately 15 candidates visited the space, of which three have expressed interest. Once a tenant is selected, they will be responsible for their own tenant improvements.



Exterior of the Kuomintang Building at 525 Gore Avenue.



Interior of vacant space during renovations at 525 Gore Avenue.

### 3. ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE VACANT OR UNDERUTILIZED SPACES

The City partnered with the Community Impact Real Estate Society (CIRES) to assist with the implementation of this component of the program. CIRES works with Exchange Inner City (EIC) and Hessey Consulting + Architecture (HCA) as a team of consultants working with property owners, social enterprises, community-serving and non-profit organizations to achieve legal occupancy of a vacant storefront unit in the DTES/Oppenheimer District (DEOD).

A second privately-owned vacant site was activated (Table 2):

**Table 2. Description of Pilot 2**

Tenant	Mission Possible	Location	748 East Hastings Street
<b>Size</b>	950 ft <sup>2</sup>	Lease	5 years + 5 years renewal option. CRU offered to CIRES for a 1-year term on Mission possible decision not to exercise the renewal option.
<b>Use</b>	Employment Readiness Program Women’s Team. The space is comprised of a retail component, an ancillary office, a training space, an office admin space, and secured parking space. The program provides full-time and part-time employment and employment training for neighbourhood residents and those typically excluded from the traditional workforce.		
<b>Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment opportunities for 5 FTE permanent staff and 24 program participants to be trained and employed in the space annually.</li> <li>• Program participants identify as having a disability (44%), a person of colour (55.4%), and identify as Indigenous (25%).</li> </ul>		



Exterior of the site BEFORE renovations at 748 East Hastings.



Exterior of the site AFTER renovations at 748 East Hastings.



Interior of the site BEFORE renovations at 748 East Hastings.



Interior of the site AFTER renovations at 748 East Hastings.

Two applied research were completed:

1. **Commercial Rent Affordability**, which explores four different models of creating commercial rental affordability for community-serving organizations.
2. **DTES Development Forecast** to learn and understand factors related to development on a site-by-site basis inside of the program target area. The research was done to identify sites suitable for targeted investment and partnership development related to new developments.

Two additional vacant sites (total of 2,788 ft<sup>2</sup>) are undergoing renovations:

1. **East Van Roasters at 16 West Hastings** – location offers secured tenure for chocolate production expansion and increases peer employment opportunities. The project is in the building permit application and processing phase.

## 2. DTES Neighbourhood House at 547 East Hastings –

The space will be the temporary site for the DTES Neighbourhood House while their permanent space at 573 East Hastings is being renovated. Once the renovation of Neighbourhood House’s permanent location is completed, the 547 East Hastings site will be provided to another community-serving tenant. The project is in the design and planning phase.

Initialism	Definition
CNLS	Chinese Nationalist League Society
CIRES	Community Impact Real Estate Society
DTES	Downtown Eastside
DEOD	DTES/Oppenheimer District
EIC	Exchange Inner City
FTE	Full-time Employee
HCA	Hessey Consulting + Architecture Inc.
SBIA	Strathcona Business Improvement Association
SEP	Special Enterprise Program
VCF	Vancouver Chinatown Foundation
VCMA	Vancouver Chinatown Merchant Association