



Economic Revitalization Strategy

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of vacant storefronts in rundown buildings, failing businesses and a negative public image of Chinatown as unsafe and out of date.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

- Family Associations are not suited to be real estate developers or to undertake major renovation involving financial risk
- Modernize the Cultural Center and Museum to be an attraction while preserving its neighbourhood serving aspects
- Preserve the historic buildings that define Chinatown's streetscape
- Cater to day to day needs of local residents – organic/fresh grocery stores and restaurants
- Encourage business owners to greet customers with friendly and welcoming attitude
- Renovated heritage buildings and the pedestrian scale of the neighbourhood could provide a unique competitive advantage in the long term

Key Strengths and Opportunities

- Local market area (2 blocks from Pender and Columbia) is growing faster than 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

Strategy 1. Thriving Business District

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.

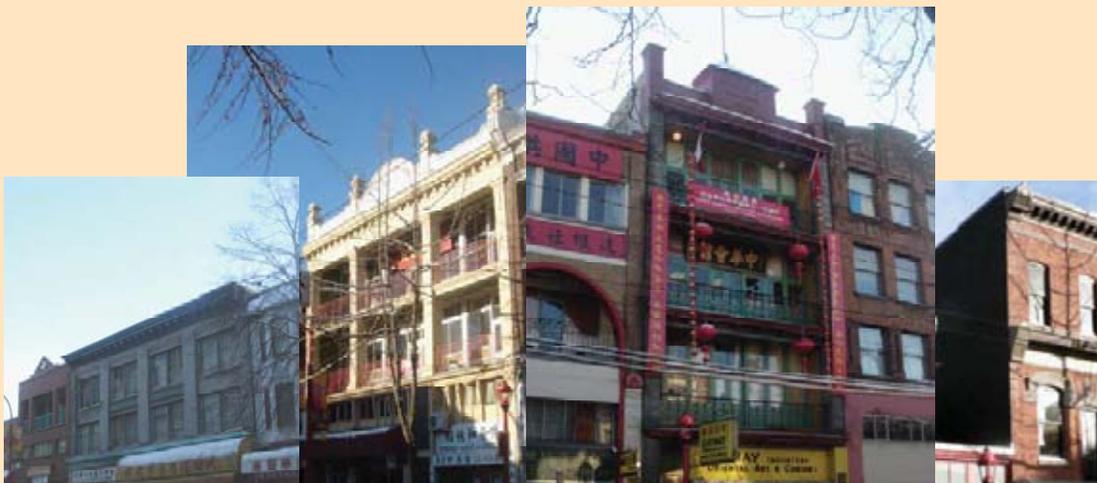
PROPOSED ACTIONS	LEAD ORGANIZATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION
<p>Tenant Recruitment Strategy Develop a retail-mix inventory and profile on the current and changing customer base, and develop a strategy to meet the needs of current and future markets. Strategy will inform:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BIA business development workshops/outreach • zoning and development recommendations • BIA and VEC outreach to realtors and investors • marketing and tourism campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association • Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association • Vancouver Economic Commission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research & strategy development late 2012/early 2013 • Implementation 2013-2015
<p>Tenant Retention Strategy Business training and education workshops and outreach to support existing businesses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop/outreach - starting Jan. 2013
<p>Tourism and Marketing Strategy Coordinate marketing between existing organizations and undertake capacity building to modernize marketing and branding strategies, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one-stop Chinatown website • earned media & social media campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association (convene Working Group) • Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association • Tourism Vancouver • Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Gardens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy development - late 2012/early 2013 • Strategy Implementation - 2013/2014
<p>Vacant Storefronts Strategy Implement a sustainable window improvement program for vacant storefronts in Chinatown</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

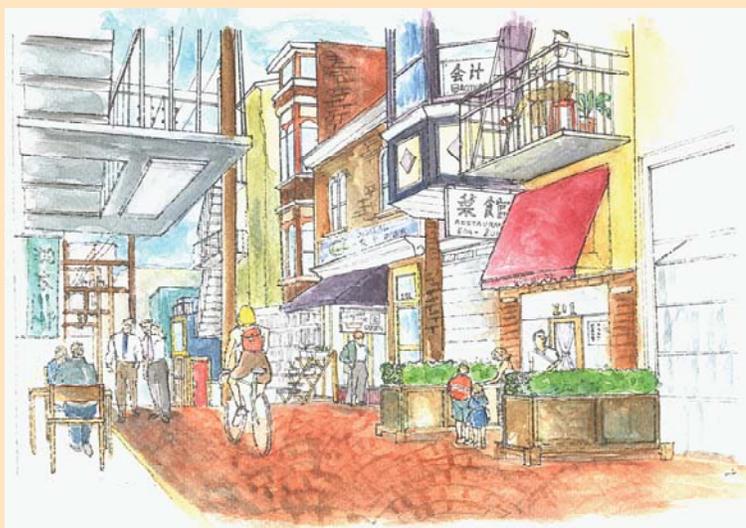
PROPOSED ACTIONS	LEAD ORGANIZATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION
Restoration of Society heritage Buildings Explore innovative financing tools to leverage additional investment in restoration of these important cultural assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Immediately via working group
Optimize national Historic Site Designation 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Tourism Vancouver •Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association •Chinese Cultural Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Immediately via marketing working group
Leadership Development Identify opportunities to support youth leadership and capacity development in local organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Parks Board - Neighbourhood Houses •SUCCESS •Benevolent Societies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Immediately via leadership/youth working group •First project - 2013
Seniors Housing Identify opportunities to increase seniors housing development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association •Vancouver Chinatown Foundation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Strategy development - 2012/2013



Strategy 3. Vibrant Public Spaces

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	LEAD ORGANIZATIONS	IMPLEMENTATION
<p>Laneway Revitalization Strategy Develop with the community a strategy for immediate and long-term revitalization of Chinatown's laneways. Identify specific projects and opportunities for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • temporary street events or installations • dumpster-free pilot project • policy and regulation changes to facilitate retail and commercial uses on laneways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee •Architecture for Humanity Vancouver 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Laneway Project - implementation spring/summer 2013 •Comprehensive Laneway Revitalization Strategy - 2014/2015
<p>Clean-up public spaces with local businesses Build on existing City and community initiatives to improve neighbourhood cleanliness (e.g. awning improvements, micro-cleaning, Keep Vancouver Spectacular) with additional neighbourhood clean-up events and implement a sustainable program for window displays in vacant storefronts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •New clean-up project - 2013 •Window display program for vacant storefronts - 2013



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.

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