



多伦多唐人街社区土地信托 Toronto Chinatown Land Trust

Monday June 8, 2026

We are Kai Wong and Sara Constant, Co-Chairs of the Toronto Chinatown Land Trust. We are writing to advocate on the City of Toronto's responsibility to adequately fund and enact the Cultural Districts program and protect West Chinatown from cultural displacement and erasure, amidst aggressive development pressures and housing financialization.

The Toronto Chinatown Land Trust works to build community power in Chinatown through community land stewardship rooted in intergenerational connections to people and place. Our community land trust model is not just about taking property off the speculative market, it's about turning property back into Land: restoring and upholding stories, memories, intergenerational knowledge, relationships, and care work that give place meaning.

So what makes neighbourhoods like Chinatown, Little Jamaica, and Church and Wellesley so special? What is the magic formula that sustains the heartbeat of these cultural neighbourhoods?

Cultural districts are not merely the bricks and mortar of a particular heritage building or census demographic of a neighbourhood.

- It is the gardening grannies along Spadina who sell their winter melon and garlic chives
- It is the elders who meet for mahjong at their local family association community centre every Sunday
- It is the young queer who has just moved to the city going to their first drag brunch and finding community
- It is the largest enclave of Black-owned businesses in Canada—having created a thriving retail corridor in spite of systemic lack of access to bank loans and capital
- It is the multilingual pharmacist who can explain complicated drug interactions to an elder fluently in Cantonese, Mandarin and Vietnamese.

Behind every example we've given here is a planning or heritage policy opportunity to enable all of these things to thrive—or a lack of policy protection that will ensure their erosion. Businesses in these neighbourhoods contribute so much more than commercial goods and services: they are informal information and referral sites,

settlement services, tenant rights access, and cultural community hubs. These key pillars of social and cultural heritage must be recognized and protected.

To plan for its future, we must understand its past. The commonality of Little Jamaica, Chinatown and Church and Wellesley is in how these neighbourhoods were formed—in many ways, as a direct result of city neglect, harm or displacement.

Over time, this has led to fear of city interference and a deep, calcified mistrust in city processes, along with a self-preservation mentality to *'make it on our own and for ourselves'*.

To take Chinatown as an example: Chinese communities have had to navigate over 100 years of legislated racism. From the Chinese Head Tax and yellow panic to racist housing deeds and banking practices, from exploited labour to build Canada to pandering to white-gaze exoticism to attract tourism, Chinese communities in Canada have fought to build their own economic futures at a time when they faced intense systemic and institutional exclusion.

In 1947, Toronto City Council voted to demolish and forcibly expropriate the original Chinatown to build the current City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square. Chinatown business owners relocated their businesses along Spadina and to the east, in hopes of starting anew. In the face of overt exclusion, they created their own settlement services, providing housing and employment supports for newly arrived Chinese migrants. They funded their own micro-loan programs at a time when banks would not lend to them, and supported individuals to open or grow their cultural Chinatown businesses, or pay the rent or put food on the table. Long after racist banking practices ended, they continued these traditional forms of mutual aid- creating cultural programming, pooling money to collectively purchase buildings for community use, and offering subsidized rents for low-income Chinatown residents or cultural-serving businesses.

The mentality to do it alone or do it with trusted community is still baked into the logic of the Chinatown ecosystem. City bylaws, building codes, regulations, property incentives, tenant rights and economic supports are still largely inaccessible to Chinatown residents and business owners having to navigate complicated processes, hard-to-find information and language barriers. The system continues to exclude, and the mistrust continues to build.

For Little Jamaica, Chinatown and the Village, Cultural Districts planning should be a **framework for cultural redress**: where we begin to take accountability for the many ways that these communities have been purposely excluded, displaced or disadvantaged, and where we can begin to create equal opportunity to community wealth-building—an equitable pathway to prosperity, beyond the bare bones of survival.

Cultural Districts recognition is nothing without **real policy protections and adequate funding**. We are not staking our neighbourhood's futures on plaques and platitudes. The city recognized the threat of cultural displacement in 2020 and 2021, when the Cultural District Plan was first initiated. 5 years later, West Chinatown is still waiting for action. Years of study have not yielded explicit funding or strong anti-displacement policies in the West Chinatown Planning framework, or this Cultural Districts plan. We need a commitment to action NOW.

The Toronto Chinatown Land Trust strongly recommends that the city's Cultural Districts program adopts the following key elements:

- **Anti-displacement criteria to critically assess all incoming development** (similar to the equity scorecard named in the Mt Denis Community For All Action Plan passed by council in Dec 2025). Anti-displacement measures should ensure replacement-in-kind of any lost cultural space and/or net new deeply affordable housing
- **A robust set of cultural districts policy protections comparable to Heritage Conservation planning that mitigates the impact of cultural displacement and erasure**
- **A process to codify and include intangible heritage within the city's Heritage Conservation frameworks, to adequately acknowledge, value and protect social and cultural heritage**—as recommended by the Little Jamaica Cultural District Plan report from 2023
- **A properly-funded CIP that can lead to incentives, grants and funding for culturally responsive and legacy businesses**
AND
adequate funding for culturally responsive outreach and linguistic supports to ensure accessibility—if you are offering something and you don't tell anyone, that's not a real offering. If you are offering something and create a long complicated process to access it, that's not a real offering.
- **Capacity building and funding to enable community land trusts to act as local land and economic development stewards** to either acquire or provide technical assistance to commercial properties that are vital cultural assets to the neighbourhood

Like so many other examples of inequity, doing nothing in the face of aggression is complicity in the act.

In this case, city inaction in the face of aggressive development pressures and housing financialization is complicity in the disinvest, devaluation and displacement of Black, queer and Chinese cultural communities.

Funded, meaningful, and relevant Cultural Districts policy would be a trust-building exercise, an apology in the form of meaningful action, a city righting its wrongs of exclusion, and a sincere commitment to co-create an equitable, culturally responsive policy and planning framework to protect and preserve these unique neighbourhoods of resistance and resilience.

The city must demonstrate accountability with action, and work to repair past harm by protecting what communities have built in spite of it.

We deserve better.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Kai Wong', with a stylized, somewhat abstract form.A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Sara Constant', with a more fluid and cursive style.

Kai Wong and Sara Constant,
Co-Chairs, Board of Directors,
Toronto Chinatown Land Trust
<https://chinatownlandtrust.ca/>