



NOTICE OF MOTION

Protecting Chinatown as a Cultural District

Moved by: Councillor

Saxe

Malik

Seconded by: Deputy Mayor

SUMMARY:

Chinatown is an important part of Toronto's cultural landscape, serving people across Toronto and attracting large numbers of visitors, both tourists and local residents.

Toronto's first Chinatown was largely displaced through expropriation for today's City Hall. Many displaced residents and businesses moved to what is now Toronto's West Chinatown, centred on Dundas Street between McCaul and Spadina and on Spadina Avenue between College and Queen. This area is home to the highest concentration of Chinatown societies and legacy businesses that originate from the Canadian Chinese Exclusion Act and head tax era. Chinatown later evolved with major waves of immigration from Southeast Asia, including Indochinese Designated Class refugees.

Today, many diasporic East and Southeast Asian Toronto subcultures make their home in Chinatown - creating a distinct Chinatown identity and Asian-Canadian cultural experience found nowhere else.

Many local Chinese and Indochinese-owned and -operated businesses in Chinatown are fighting a battle against the potential loss of the character, identity and roots of their neighbourhood. As owners age, commercial and residential rents rise, and developers buy up land, a growing number of much-loved community institutions, Chinatown societies, and small businesses have shuttered their doors. In addition, many Chinatown elders, carriers of community traditions and practices, have quietly moved away seeking lower rents.

Community groups and projects such as the Toronto Chinatown Land Trust have therefore formed to stand with local businesses and residents to preserve what they love in Chinatown. Without a City of Toronto sustainability plan, our Chinatown could wither away.

This motion is based on Council's precedent for the protection of minority cultural districts in 2020.MM24.36, *Supporting Black-Owned and Operated Businesses and Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Eglinton Avenue West's "Little Jamaica"*.

Recommendations

1. City Council request the Government of Ontario to introduce rent control legislation for commercial units in Chinatown to protect small local businesses from unfair increases to their rent.
2. City Council request the Government of Ontario to require property owners in Chinatown to provide local and independently owned and operated businesses with a first right to rent retail spaces upon transfer of land.
3. City Council request the Government of Ontario to require property owners in Chinatown to provide current tenants a 15-day first right to offer to purchase residential and/or retail spaces which are offered for sale.
4. City Council recognize West Chinatown and the remaining strip of First Chinatown as the Chinatown Cultural District, an area of cultural significance and importance to the City of Toronto.
5. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, and the Executive Director, Development Review, to consider additional resources necessary as part of the 2027 Budget to prepare a draft Cultural District Plan for Chinatown.
6. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with the Chief Planner, City Planning and Executive Director, Development Review and community partners, to report to the Economic and Community Development Committee in 2027 on the progress of the comprehensive Cultural District Plan for Chinatown, along with consideration of any additional resources required to complete and implement a plan that:
 - a) Integrates Planning and Cultural Heritage planning elements including, alignment with existing planning studies, identifies heritage assets (e.g. community institutions, legacy businesses) and commemorates the contribution of Chinatown societies and associations;
 - b) Advances economic vitality and supports the sustainability of culturally significant businesses;
 - c) Enhances public realm and community use by expanding culturally relevant programming and partnerships as appropriate;
 - d) Identifies short-, medium- and long-term implementation actions and explores public and private partnerships and funding opportunities;
 - e) reviews opportunities to make space for street vending as part of Chinatown's cultural heritage practices;

- f) identifies and commemorates the rich history and contributions of Toronto’s Chinatown Societies, often referred to as Clan or Family Associations;
- g) identifies opportunities to work with community members and organizations such as Cecil Community Centre, University Settlement, Scadding Court Community Centre, the Toronto Chinatown Land Trust, and the Chinatown Business Improvement Area to expand culturally focused events and initiatives that celebrate Chinatown’s cultural heritage;
- h) clarifies culturally accessible practices for city-led consultations in the Chinatown Cultural District, including multilingual signage, interpretation, and criteria for honorariums; and
- i) requires city staff working in the Chinatown Cultural District to be informed of the historical discrimination and subsequent redress policies that created Canada’s Chinatowns, including Chinatown’s migrant workers’ history and past displacements.

7. City Council direct the General Manager, Transportation Services to accept this motion as a nomination for a Neighbourhood Streets Plan, in consultation with the TTC, the Toronto Parking Authority, and the local community that:

- a. enhances pedestrian, cycling and transit access with a focus on reducing automobile dependency, and the unique needs of senior cyclists in Chinatown;
- b. considers how to accommodate delivery e-bikes in Chinatown, recognizing that they provide critical revenue for small food businesses, and seeking urban design solutions that protect delivery gig workers as well as other pedestrians and cyclists;
- c. addresses existing and future commercial loading and parking needs, and
- d. aligns with the new Cultural District Plan and Retail Strategy.

8. City Council direct the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards and the Executive Director, Housing Secretariat, to develop culturally appropriate education and awareness resources to support multi-tenant housing operators in Chinatown to come into compliance with multi-tenant housing standards.

9. City Council request the Toronto Parking Authority Board of Directors to give a high priority to completing planned safety and other upgrades to the Chinatown (Larch Street) parking garage in 2026.