

Monday, March 16, 2026

Protecting Chinatown

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.

A companion motion 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"*, will be presented as a member's motion at city Council. This motion seeks to add additional recommendations to the draft Chinatown Planning Framework report presented to TEYCC on April 1, 2026.

Recommendations

1. City Council direct the Executive Director, Development Review, to consult with the Executive Director, Housing Secretariat, in completing the Chinatown Planning Framework and to ensure it considers opportunities to support the stability and growth of community, cooperative and non-market housing, including land trusts, in Chinatown, including Chinatown's existing stock of community and nonprofit owned housing.

2. City Council directs the Executive Director, Development Review to collaborate with the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning and the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to ensure that the final Chinatown Planning Framework adequately supports the proposed Chinatown Cultural District designation and to report back as part of the final Chinatown Planning Framework with:
- i) Any appropriate changes to the draft Chinatown Planning Framework, including any recommended changes with respect to land use, built form and massing, and to supports for mixed-use, or live-work forms of housing;
 - ii) Recommendations for the designation of West Chinatown as a Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA) and any other appropriate tools through which the city can support renovations, landscaping, and facade improvements to buildings in disrepair.
 - iii) Next steps for including inclusionary zoning for affordable housing in the Protected Major Transit Stations Areas in Chinatown, once the city is able to do so;
 - iv) Any appropriate changes to the draft Chinatown Planning Framework to address Public Realm, Open Space and Public Art as well as a strategy for Laneway Improvement and Animation; and
 - v) A procedure to ensure that the Chinatown Planning Framework and Cultural District designation are considered in the review of all development applications.



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