

# Chinatown Tomorrow Planning Initiative: What we've heard so far

June 2024

The Chinatown Tomorrow team has committed to pausing at various points throughout the Chinatown Tomorrow consultation study to test our engagement strategy and share the data we've collected with community stakeholders and study participants.

With the planning study nearing the end of the engagement and data collection stage, we are sharing this interim report with study participants to provide visibility into what we've heard so far and to invite them all to share direct feedback and commentary on our engagement strategies and the insights we've collected so far.

**To submit comments or feedback on this interim report, please reach out to Patricia Cho, Planner, at [Patricia.cho2@toronto.ca](mailto:Patricia.cho2@toronto.ca) by the end of June.**

We are particularly interested in hearing from the community about the following:

1. Are there any questions you think we need to ask before we close out the study?
2. Is there anyone you think we should speak to before we close out the study?
3. Does this sentiment analysis and sample insights capture your thoughts about the issue topics below?
4. Are there issues and topics that we need to know about before we close out the study?

## A note about this interim report

This is not a final report. It isn't even a draft of a final report. The study team is waiting until we have as complete a data set of insights as possible before attempting to craft the narratives and contextual framing that will anchor the final report and recommendations to the City.

We are mindful of the need to avoid flattening or oversimplifying complexity in our interpretation of the insights we're collecting. Embedded in the data we're collecting are multiple, often conflicting narratives about the neighborhood's past and present. We want to note that the insight data we've collected so far and summarized in this report does not include anything resembling complete narratives and contextualization. The semi-raw data we're presenting here lacks the finer-grained historical context of Chinatown(s) in Toronto that is a crucial input to the process of collectively imagining the future of the neighbourhood. We also acknowledge that there are some demographic groups that have not been fully represented in the data and we are working on reaching out to these groups at the moment.

## Engagement strategies summary

The insight data we're sharing in this report have been gathered via a variety of events and touchpoints. Engagement is still ongoing, with several events scheduled for May, June, and July, including:

- Door-to-door outreach to businesses along Spadina Avenue and Dundas Street
- Additional small group interviews with social service providers, senior residents, and family associations in Chinatown
- CTAR participant social and review of findings
- Community exhibition

Below is a summary of engagement strategies we've used to-date.

### Walking Land Acknowledgement

A walking land acknowledgement occurred in the format of a walking tour on Saturday, December 16, 2023, 1:00-5:00pm. 15 story holders participated in the walking tour including representatives from First Story Toronto, and Chinatown community members – to share stories on the land. The tour began at First Nations House, 563 Spadina Ave. The group traveled south to Dundas, stopping to share stories at Silver Dollar; Scott Mission (former Bright Pearl Restaurant, Labour Lyceum); Wong Family Association building. The group traveled east on Dundas, stopping at the Chinese Bakery and traveled to Dundas and Elizabeth, the historic heart of the original Chinatown. Stories were captured as historical context to inform the study background and context, rather than insights within the database.

The group shared stories of resilience and resistance against colonial forces that have sought to erase the presence of both Indigenous and Chinese communities. Shared themes include self-governance and protection, self-determination and the ability to practice ceremony, the right to assembly, and mutual aid. Stories of historic solidarity speak of a hope for the future for Chinatown, anchored along Spadina Avenue (which derives its name from Anishnabeg word, Ishpaadina, meaning “the rise in the land”, which refers to the rise in land from the shores of Lake Ontario to the historic shoreline of ancient Lake Iroquois at Davenport Road). Ishpaadina, where many nations have gathered for millenia prior to colonization, lays the foundation for Chinatown-Ishpaadina, to continue to be a meeting place for many nations in the heart of the City.

## Online Survey

An online survey launched in November 2023 is being shared with community members at all events and via social media. The survey will remain open until the engagement phase ends and the team begins to write the final report to the City. We have received ~500 responses. Please note that only a small portion of these have been translated, analyzed, and included in the insights summary below.

## Chinatown Teahouse Launch Event

On November 25 2023, the team hosted a drop-in event at the Chinatown Centre where community members were invited to share their perspectives in 1:1 and small group facilitated discussions. [See event report.](#)

## Chinatown Advisory Roundtables (CTAR)

The Chinatown Advisory Roundtable (CTAR) is a series of four events where community members who either self-nominate or are nominated by their peers are invited to share their perspectives on specific topics in a small group setting of about 20 people. This format enables deeper conversations about specific issues and helps to surface complexity and nuance. Selection and framing of CTAR topics were based on early insights from the online survey and the Chinatown Teahouse. All four events have taken place as of this report writing.

1. CTAR #1: Public & Gathering Spaces - January 25, 2024
2. CTAR #2: Housing & Livability - March 5, 2024
3. CTAR #3: Chinatown's Culture - April 9, 2024
4. CTAR #4: Making it in Chinatown - May 28, 2024

## Small Group and 1:1 Stakeholder Interviews

A series of informal small group and 1:1 discussions have also occurred, with insights recorded and included in the insights database. These informal sessions include meetings with local community groups, church groups, family associations, service providers, and community activists and leaders. These have occurred on various dates throughout the study.

# Participant demographics summary

Our review of study participant demographics so far reveals that some targeted audience groups are currently underrepresented in the engagement to date, including:

- 2SLGBTQIA+
- Seniors 65+
- Business Owners/Workers
- School Groups/Youth
- Vulnerable Population
- Landlords

<b>Study participants as of March 2024 (196 participants)</b>		
<b>Resident - tenant</b> Resides in the neighbourhood as a tenant who rents their residence	18	9%
<b>Resident - homeowner</b> Resides in the neighbourhood as a homeowner who owns their residence	24	12%
<b>Newcomer / Immigrant</b> Has made Canada their primary country of residence but grew up elsewhere	58	30%
<b>Canadian-born East Asian diaspora</b> Has East Asian ancestry and was born and raised in Canada	45	23%
<b>Chinatown patron</b> Visits Chinatown on occasion but <u>does not</u> live or work there. Relatively low engagement with neighbourhood / community	37	19%
<b>Chinatown champion</b> Visits Chinatown frequently but <u>does not</u> live or work there. High engagement with neighbourhood / community	56	29%
<b>Community leader / organiser / activist</b> Actively participates in community and political organising in the neighbourhood	64	33%
<b>Native / Indigenous</b> Inuit, Metis, or First Nations	4	2%
<b>Landlord</b> Owns residential and/or commercial property in the neighbourhood	6	3%
<b>Business owner</b> Owns a business in the neighbourhood	14	7%
<b>Business worker</b> Works at a business in the neighbourhood	13	7%
<b>2SLGBTQIA+</b> Identifies as any of the following: Two spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual, or otherwise marginalised sexuality or gender identity	19	10%
<b>Marginalised</b> Is unhoused or precariously housed, undocumented, low/no income, or otherwise economically and politically marginalised	1	0.5%
<b>Male</b>	72	37%
<b>Female</b>	105	54%

<b>Study participants as of March 2024 (196 participants)</b>		
<b>Non-binary / 2S</b>	7	4%
<b>Youth</b>	6	3%
<b>Adult</b>	142	72%
<b>Senior</b>	43	22%
<b>Chinese-speaking (mono and multilingual)</b>	138	70%

The insights we've collected to date have skewed towards newcomers, Canadian-born East Asian diaspora, Chinatown patrons, Chinatown champions, and Community leaders. These audiences tend to be professionals, well-educated, and middle-class. We recognize that the Chinatown community's working-class, poor, and senior populations have not yet been adequately engaged in consultation events to date.

Consultation efforts in the Spring and Summer will be targeted towards these under-represented audiences to ensure the insights data reflect the perspectives of the whole community.

# Insights summary

For the purposes of this interim insight data review, insights have been summarized by issue code (i.e. “what are participants talking about”) and sentiment analysis (i.e. “how do they feel about it”). In each issue code heading is the number of collected insights (Count:XX) that pertain to that issue.

## Business - buildings, built form (Count: 98)

Insights related to commercial properties’ building formats, architecture, conditions, zoning, etc.

Sentiment		
Current state	Positive	10%
	Negative	20%
	Bivalent (both positive and negative expressed in one insight)	2%
Future vision	Concern	16%
	Hope	37%
	Neutral	14%

**Sentiment summary:** Heavy negative lean regarding the current state but preponderantly hopeful about the future. Opinions are very divided on what exactly the future should look like. There is tension between competing visions, for example, of an updated, shiny, newly developed Chinatown that attracts new people and investment vs. a Chinatown that retains its affordability and accessibility.

**Sample insights:**

- “I was disappointed at the malls and businesses when I first arrived. There's no good spot for photos. Believes that Chinatown Centre and Dragon City Mall are in decline and don't look great. Many of the older buildings are not being kept up, and that drives folks like professionals away.”
- “I feel that the goal should be to make the streets look like contemporary Asia - nicer spaces, big malls - ‘move with the times’. I would want to see the City give developers an outline to develop an entire block in a way that improves Chinatown.”
- “What makes Chinatown *Chinatown* is how mixed it is. You have to prevent land assembly, tall built forms, and create the ability for Chinatown to continue being itself.”

- “There is not enough space in Chinatown. If we build more underground parking lots and leave the ground for the development of large shopping malls or high-rise buildings, there will be more space for people to move around.”
- “I believe we need development that will commit to keeping the ground floor for small business use.”
- “When developing a neighbourhood, having amenities concentrated in one area with unifying architectural styles and design of buildings gives a sense of harmony and consistency that can give a recognizable identity to Chinatown. That type of pleasing aesthetic can attract tourism, investment opportunities, and commercial businesses for Chinatown to prosper.”

### Business - prices and quality of goods and services (Count: 156)

Insights about how much things cost in Chinatown (excluding housing/rent) and their quality/value to customers

Sentiment		
Current state	Positive	43%
	Negative	16%
	Bivalent (both positive and negative expressed in one insight)	9%
Future vision	Concern	8%
	Hope	19%
	Neutral	5%

**Sentiment summary:** Emphatic positivity about the convenience, variety, and affordability of goods, particularly groceries and restaurants, and hope that this aspect will be part of the neighbourhood’s future. Some negative sentiment related to the loss of culturally-competent medical care in the neighbourhood and perceived increase in prices.

**Sample insights:**

- “I would like to see a Chinatown that continues to be affordable for residents, business owners, and visitors, where everyone can feel welcome and can meet their needs.”
- “The concentration of Chinese food is good. I can always find what I want to eat. The cheap grocery stores should be preserved. I love Chinatown because it’s where we get culturally significant foods and groceries. The T&T popping up nearby has made things tighter, and my heart goes out to the mom and pop stores. The grocery stores here are important.”

- “[Chinatown is] rich in options for food and Chinese daily necessities at Chinese herbal medicine stores and Chinese supermarkets. The culture of Chinatown is something that you find nowhere else: things like decor and celebrations for Lunar New Year, grandmas selling their produce and snacks along the street. It also stands out as one of the few downtown neighbourhoods where groceries and other daily needs can still be met at an affordable price point.”
- “It feels that we need more commercial affordability so that professional services can be here – doctors, dentists, accountants, etc. I have to travel further now for some services like specialists. We need more nursing homes and are lacking facilities compared to the suburbs when it comes to elder care in Chinatown.”
- “In defining this vision of livability in the context of affordability, I’m thinking about seniors and how they’re doubling in population. There used to be a doctor who would go and re-up seniors’ meds so they wouldn’t have to walk to the office. Language barriers also prevent access, especially for seniors. There are so many services here but seniors don’t know that they exist and can’t walk there, and it’s all in English.”

### Business - survival and succession (Count: 103)

Insights about business turnover, comparison of past, present. future types of businesses and who owns/runs them.

Sentiment		
Current state	Positive	5%
	Negative	16%
	Bivalent (both positive and negative expressed in one insight)	4%
Future vision	Concern	35%
	Hope	34%
	Neutral	4%

**Sentiment summary:** Mostly future-oriented sentiments that are split between hope and concern - concern about the effects of gentrification and the viability of small, much-loved businesses in the future and hope that these will be preserved.

**Sample insights:**

- “Chinatown is cultural, physical to me. The stores and shops that have been family-run through generations. There are not as many of those now. House of Gourmet is one of



the last. We need to protect these. When an offer comes in for millions to buy the building, families don't want to keep running the restaurant.”

- “Businesses in Chinatown have had less tourism customers after COVID. We need more incentives to help businesses recover and put up a good face for tourism.”
- “Gentrification is scary for people, especially for people who have parents and grandparents living here. We've been seeing things disappear over time. We need a better understanding of what the community needs, what would make the space safer and better vs. coming in and assuming what the community needs and building a bunch of new buildings.”
- “I feel like Chinatown is a lot more internationalised, for better and worse. Better in the sense that there are a lot of innovations in shopping. For example, that Chinese fusion restaurant run by the Season 1 winner of Master Chef Canada. But at the same time, there are concerns about international money coming in that sort of displaces local residents. Someone who has been living here for 20-30 years will have less money than someone coming from overseas. I can see the same problem with long-term restaurants as well. If they came in the 90s, they may be looking to close up shop and they might not be able to survive an increase in rent, taxes, and cost of operations. I just checked down the hall in the food court of the Chinatown Centre. I remember it being a lot fuller and how half the places are closed. There's this change in generations and we need to make sure it's done well and ethically.”

**Business - overall environment, work, and market trends (Count: 264)**

Insights about the overall market for goods and services in Chinatown/Toronto, workforce/labour, policy environment (e.g. licensing, minimum wage laws, government supports/restrictions)

Sentiment		
Current state	Positive	12%
	Negative	25%
	Bivalent (both positive and negative expressed in one insight)	6%
Future vision	Concern	11%
	Hope	34%
	Neutral	4%

**Sentiment summary:** A broad category with divided sentiment. Feelings about the current state trend negative, while looking into the future there are strong, mixed opinions about what participants want to see in terms of the overall environment. There's repeated sentiment that governments at all levels need to invest in Chinatown, but polarised opinions about the future those investments should produce.

**Sample insights:**

- "I hope that the vitality of the community-oriented street culture will continue growing and the vitality of Chinatown (both in terms of businesses and services) will continue to grow. Mixed uses are important (new development, condos, etc.) as long as the balance does not displace those businesses and services that make a Chinatown unique. That means the policing of sidewalk uses also needs to be in check with the cultural norms in Chinatown."
- "[Chinatown is] famous for Chinese food, but the advantage has been decreasing as there are more and more Chinese shopping malls open in other parts of GTA. The seniors tend to come out to Chinatown everyday to mingle and hang out. Younger people come less, but they might come to Chinatown to shop at T&T and then go home. They need a reason to come down here."
- "Chinatown needs City-backed support in order to survive against the city densification plan and speculative land assemblies in the downtown core."
- "Toronto Chinatown is definitely a hidden gem that people are waiting to discover. It has huge potential and deserves to be carefully developed. Toronto Chinatown looks a bit behind other neighbourhoods. But its inner beauty is very impressive."
- "I would like to see more intentional planning to ensure that any future developments reflect the needs of local community members and people who access Chinatown for a range of cultural, social, and commercial needs."
- "Seeing new buildings that sit empty or empty plots of land that could otherwise be put to good use for community benefit is painful. Some parts need to be cleaned up and absentee landlords need to be held accountable. Several properties, including one at the corner of Baldwin and Spadina, and another two on Grange Avenue, lay empty and neglected. There are several places like this in Chinatown. They should be expropriated by the city and housing should be built. One of the properties has been like this for over 15 years."
- "I am strongly opposed to heritage preservation because I think it's used as cover for expropriation and it makes it more difficult for businesses to operate. I don't believe that the buildings themselves are particularly special or historic - they're identical to what's on Danforth between Pape and Victoria Park."

## Housing - buildings, built form (Count: 45)

Insights related to residential properties' building formats, architecture, conditions, zoning, etc.

Sentiment		
Current state	Positive	7%
	Negative	20%
	Bivalent (both positive and negative expressed in one insight)	4%
Future vision	Concern	27%
	Hope	33%
	Neutral	9%

**Sentiment summary:** Mostly negative sentiment about current state, with insights focused on lack of quality housing and critiques of new developments and supportive housing/shelters in the neighbourhood. Insights that are future-oriented comment mostly about concern that Chinatown's low-rise forms will be replaced by towers. Others are of the opinion that Chinatown's future hinges on transforming the built form and building taller/bigger.

### Sample insights:

- "I do have long-term concerns about the built environment. I believe down south there's a proposal for a very high, several thousand unit condo building. I'm not sure exactly if any of those units will be affordable. I do have long-term concerns about the buildings along the main street because they're made of brick. They can't be maintained forever and I'm concerned that one day this entire stretch might be deemed no longer up to code and torn down entirely. We would lose an entire section of Chinatown culture because Toronto loves condos."
- "I consider The Well to be a good example of a mixed community (live - work - shop) with high-rises, a mall, and offices. Developers need to do more of this, to create balance. Montreal is an example of a city where heritage building facades are preserved but still allow for new buildings and high-rise condos."
- "I'm curious about the idea of ownership of housing in Chinatown. There's a higher proportion of ownership in Toronto overall, but Chinatown has been more diverse in terms of its housing forms. With Chinatown becoming more wealthy, how would we preserve that?"

- “No more upscale developments like The Waverly or whatever was supposed to be built at St. Andrew and Spadina, it's ugly and embarrassing.”
- “I want to talk about the importance of private space. People move into the suburbs for yards and private space, which are not available in Chinatown.”

**Housing - affordability, real estate value, and displacement (Count: 165)**

Insights about residential real estate in Chinatown, including rent prices, land values, tenant/landlord relationships

Sentiment		
Current state	Positive	4%
	Negative	21%
	Bivalent (both positive and negative expressed in one insight)	4%
Future vision	Concern	32%
	Hope	31%
	Neutral	9%

**Sentiment summary:** Heavily negative sentiment about the current state of housing affordability in Chinatown. Participants recognize Chinatown as an historically working class neighbourhood that is rapidly losing its accessibility to lower income households, seniors, and families. Future-oriented sentiment is split between hope and concern, but there’s relatively strong agreement amongst participants that they want to see deeply affordable housing and fear that Chinatown is at risk of disappearing as a consequence of speculative development, land assembly, and densification.

**Sample insights:**

- “I like it, but it's becoming unaffordable to live here and more catered towards rich people rather than the people that make it culturally rich and vibrant.”
- “We need a long-term plan by the City to support the existing elderly and working class Chinese population from displacement and gentrification. Real estate speculation and land assembly will destroy this village in the city.”
- “I'm concerned that Chinatown is going to fall victim to rampant development and real estate speculation by developers who don't care about the local community.”

- “Maybe there will always be income differences, but at the baseline, nobody should be struggling to put food on the table and make sure that they have a roof over their heads. That is what breaks down social cohesion and our ability to be interconnected. I lived in student housing in Chinatown and it was affordable, but we got pushed out. I found it difficult to find another space in Chinatown and now I live in another neighbourhood.”
- “We know that the maintenance cycle of Chinatown’s buildings is coming to the end of life. We need diversity in housing offering to have social housing, diverse products and services, and also a nod to the cultural experience that makes Chinatown such an anchor.”

### Neighbourhood sense of public safety and policing (Count: 77)

Insights related to crime, police presence

Sentiment		
Current state	Positive	3%
	Negative	66%
	Bivalent (both positive and negative expressed in one insight)	4%
Future vision	Concern	20%
	Hope	8%
	Neutral	4%

**Sentiment summary:** Strong negative lean in the sentiment about the current state and concern about the future. Within that, there’s a variety of opinions about the causes of this sense of lack of safety. Some point to over-policing in the area making it unsafe for vulnerable community members, while others point to under-policing and the presence of shelters and supportive housing as the cause of safety concerns. Anti-Asian hate and traffic are also topics of concern. However, some participants emphasised that they do feel very safe in Chinatown as a result of its strong sense of community and high levels of foot traffic.

**Sample insights:**

- “We have windows that have been shot at. They must be pellet guns. I think overall, there's lots of foot traffic where we are and that keeps us relatively safe. I don't feel unsafe.”
- “There is a law and order problem. There are not enough police officers to patrol the streets.”

- “E-bikes and scooters are parked on the sidewalk. They make no sound when walking on the sidewalk. They are very dangerous and may hit people, especially the elderly.”
- “It’s discouraging that accessibility has not improved. Crime is disappointing. The area dies down after dinner time - where is the vibrancy later in the evening? I don't come to Chinatown unless I need to because public safety has gotten worse. I don't really dare to go out around 9-11pm when all the stores are closed.”
- “There needs to be a central organisation that manages the homeless people that makes Chinatown dirty and unsafe. Yonge Street Mission was a challenge for the community and brought homelessness and crime.”
- “During Chinatown vaccine clinics, many undocumented migrants (who work in Chinatown) were very scared to go to clinics due to police presence. Our communities are also very fearful of police due to systemic violence. Their voices are key to this study as the most vulnerable. It would be great to have no police presence at future events to ensure that people can feel safe to share thoughts and participate. Chinatown workers have also faced violence from municipal workers (eg: bylaw officers) so there is some pre-existing distrust with government programs. In order to build a place to share, I believe less intimidating police presence will be a big factor.”

### Neighbourhood sense of orderliness, cleanliness (Count: 91)

Insights related to cleanliness, order, and hygiene

Sentiment		
Current state	Positive	6%
	Negative	58%
	Bivalent (both positive and negative expressed in one insight)	13%
Future vision	Concern	6%
	Hope	19%
	Neutral	0%

**Sentiment summary:** Like public safety and policing, insight sentiment is mostly focused on the present state and mostly negative, but there are some voices of support for what is referred to as Chinatown’s more organic, informal, thriving streetscape.

**Sample insights:**

- “There's something disorganised and messy about Chinatown that makes it what it is. It's a living, messy place and it's an illustration that cities can thrive in ways other than being

neatly packed away. It's not a threat to safety - it's just a way of living. That is something that is unique and enjoyable about here - I love it.”

- “The roads in the back alleys are terrible, and the garbage is not properly disposed of. Chinatown gives the impression that it smells like garbage in the summer. Saw a dead rat in the street.”
- “It could be cleaner and tidy. The streetscape is lacking identity. Dragon city is too empty. I hope it can be more lively.”
- “When I hear ‘Chinatown’, I think of cheap products and food, architectural caricatures of Asian heritage symbols, and this societal pressure that it is 'dirty', 'unkept', and 'grimy', when it's not. On the opposite side of all of these perceptions is accessibility and inclusivity for all backgrounds, especially new Asian immigrants trying to find belonging.”
- “[My perception of Chinatown is] dirty, homeless, traffic, tense, and boarded-up businesses, but great food!”
- “I don’t like people setting up street stalls, which affects the appearance of the city.”
- “Part of the magic of Chinatown is what allows both homeless person/ Chinatown aunties / Purse lady / Phone cart person/ to co-exist on the street -- this accessibility/ability of Chinatown for anyone to be able use every square inch. For example, the guy who makes homemade rat traps. You don't need a store, you just need 5 sq.ft in Chinatown and you have a business. It's your street, you can claim it.”

### Neighbourhood sense of belonging and inclusion (Count: 154)

Insights about who feels like they belong and do not belong based on their language, culture, immigration status, class, race/ethnicity, religion, sexuality, etc.

Sentiment		
Current state	Positive	44%
	Negative	12%
	Bivalent (both positive and negative expressed in one insight)	4%
Future vision	Concern	3%
	Hope	21%
	Neutral	15%

**Sentiment summary:** Very strong positive sentiment related to this topic. Participants recognize Chinatown as a uniquely inclusive area of the city due to its history as a welcoming landing spot for immigrants of all origins (especially but not exclusively Chinese). The sense of belonging in Chinatown is considered to be one of the neighbourhood's defining characteristics and one of its most important assets.

**Sample insights:**

- "It's not only merchants here but lots of students living nearby. There are a lot of international students whose home is far away living in this area and are being served by this community."
- "Chinatown is relatable for anyone who has connection with the working class immigrant experience. The city never wanted these communities here and they're still here - that's a powerful, relatable story and makes Chinatown worth protecting and gives all of us hope."
- "Chinatown is actually a regional attractor - people from all across GTHA have a heart connection here and want to be here. It's a strength and a weakness. Those who live here have a different kind of connection. If you're not living here anymore your connection is nostalgic, but if you live here it's a living breathing thing. You don't want Chinatown to end up being a museum."
- "I hope that Chinatown can remain a home for all Chinese-Canadians, especially those who have never visited China or grew up speaking Chinese."
- "Chinatown is a convenient landing spot for newcomer. Being an 'arrival city' is an important function of Chinatown."
- "The intergenerational aspect of the neighbourhood is great. Having people in their 20s and 30s interact with elders is a cool aspect of Chinatown."
- "I feel a stronger connection to Markham and Scarborough, but there's less of a community in those places and you need a car. There's not a place there where I would go to connect with people, so Chinatown feels like that for me. It's different here."
- "I would like to be old here! I want to be a little old lady in the bakery who goes to the park and does dancing. I see so much personality in the seniors I meet here. They have freedom and independence here. Their space is here."
- "Overall I think I feel a mix of hope about things and having found a community here in the last few years. I feel excited about the fact that there are activities and art and malls happening again. I'm worried about ongoing sustainability, lots of fears that I share about how long we will be able to stay here, how will we create a vibrant community if we get priced out? The cool part about it is that there are small businesses and weird art and cheap eats, geared towards students and lower income and students. If this community can't sustain the affordability, that vibrancy will go somewhere else."
- "I feel a sense of belonging to people I know and have or will meet in Chinatown, that there is an ease in bonding with them over shared culture and history; and glad that there is a place in Toronto to preserve this belonging."



## Neighbourhood expression of identity and culture (Count: 308)

Insights related to perceptions of “Chinese-ness” of Chinatown, as well as the ways other cultures are expressed and experienced there

Sentiment		
Current state	Positive	31%
	Negative	9%
	Bivalent (both positive and negative expressed in one insight)	5%
Future vision	Concern	6%
	Hope	33%
	Neutral	15%

**Sentiment summary:** Strong positive and hopeful sentiment on this topic, with some worries about the neighbourhood’s cultural expression being threatened by pressure to cater to tourists and investors who may prefer a “theme park-ified” Chinatown vs. a living, breathing neighbourhood.

### Sample insights:

- “Our main concern is Chinatown redevelopment, especially as it relates to cultural preservation. Chinatown is a tourist area in other cities, but not here. We need to make sure we’re preserving the cultural side of this area. When we’re looking at redevelopment we need to negotiate with developers to make sure they’re preserving the culture. Regent Park is not the best example, but when they redeveloped it they did have to allocate low income units and that helped make sure that there’s now people with mixed backgrounds.”
- “I really value the spirit of Chinatown, the organisations like Friends of Chinatown, Planting Imagination, and the Chinatown Centre market. It’s a big part of the shared experience of being Canadian-born Chinese.”
- “The buildings are in various conditions. I’ve seen proposals to put up big decorative stuff but I’m not interested in that. There’s a fine line between preserving culture and getting into theme park territory. I personally don’t find it to be friendly if there’s architecture or things that are solely decorative and don’t contribute to peoples’ lives. I love a park bench or lighting fixture that is functional and also has a cultural element, but things that are purely just giant displays are not interesting.”
- “Chinatown is the people. The people make the destination. If I didn’t feel safe, like I belonged, I might not think of Chinatown so highly. I can say to anyone where my church

is and they have a sense of where that is. Just like when you say ‘St. Lawrence Market’ or ‘Kensington Market’. We’re so blessed to have the AGO, the schools. It’s a vibrant part of town with a wonderful history that should be preserved.”

- “I come to church here, my grandparents live here. My mom has a store here. I used to come and hang out here after school. It’s important to have a place where people can gather - that’s how we get culture. People need places to celebrate together. I hope that the future of Chinatown will continue to have those spaces to celebrate Chinese culture.”

### **Public space / public realm (Count: 174)**

Insights related to plazas, public art, street furniture, public assets (e.g. parks), public events/festivals, look and feel of Chinatown

Sentiment		
Current state	Positive	13%
	Negative	28%
	Bivalent (both positive and negative expressed in one insight)	9%
Future vision	Concern	5%
	Hope	38%
	Neutral	6%

**Sentiment summary:** Mixed feelings about the current state of public space in Chinatown but a lot of strong opinions about what participants would like to see. The lack of accessible third places for gatherings, recreation, arts, markets, and events is keenly felt. Public washrooms, seating, parks, and recreational amenities were also highlighted as being missing.

**Sample insights:**

- “I would like to have something here that’s more like St. Lawrence Market. We lack a focal place like a square. That little gate at Huron Square doesn’t do justice to how people congregate. A park or a visual attraction that would be a focal point would help, would be very welcome. Whether it’s the two gates like you have on Danforth in Greektown, or whatever. Not just for tourism, but for bringing the community together.”
- “I was recently trying to find a gym for our youth group, calling around all these places. Nobody had a gym. We ended up at Scadding Court after I called around 30 places. Those two malls we have (Dragon City and Chinatown Centre) - they’re so empty. I feel embarrassed to see that they’re all empty. Can we use them as a multipurpose space for youth?”

- “I would love to see more green public spaces where people can gather and be nurtured by the natural environment. Places for seniors to play chess, do tai chi, build community. Current spaces don't support that. The only place I can think of is Chinatown Centre, but nobody uses it for that kind of purpose.”
- “There's not enough recreation. Consider the density of this community. On a Friday night trying to find a place to host community activities has been really challenging. Friday night is the golden time for young people and they want to have some activities to do, but there's not enough places for them, definitely none that are big enough.”
- “I would like to see the area more pedestrian friendly for elderly and children, such as benches and public amenities. For example, San Francisco’s modular restrooms.”
- “I think there could be more usable public space. More parks (even small ones with a bench or two, some tables), and also city-funded public art.”
- “There used to be a teahouse on the 2nd floor of Chinatown Centre. The teahouse and the mall as a whole used to be a wandering place. It changed a lot over the last 10 years. It has now become very uninviting and dead, on purpose. They took away all the seating. Chinatown Centre needs to change.”

## Transportation and mobility (Count: 113)

Insights related to traffic, traffic safety, public transit, parking, and overall mobility.

Sentiment		
Current state	Positive	9%
	Negative	46%
	Bivalent (both positive and negative expressed in one insight)	5%
Future vision	Concern	4%
	Hope	26%
	Neutral	11%

**Sentiment summary:** Mostly negative sentiment about the current state of transportation and mobility, with common complaints focused on the need to improve pedestrian safety and accessibility and, to a lesser degree, parking and motor vehicle traffic. Sidewalk congestion in particular is a common complaint.

**Sample insights:**

- “Chinatown is missing walkability and accessibility. It has potential to be a walk-friendly district but the traffic has always been very busy. The core of vibrancy here is based on

its spontaneous market space and it also needs to be supported by a pedestrian-prioritised public realm.”

- “Having such a central, transit friendly, and walkable community is an amazing asset to Chinatown.”
- “Kensington Market has a strong pedestrian vibe and it does a lot for them there. In an ideal world, we'd just have Chinatown to ourselves [pedestrians].”
- “One of the most critical areas is the lack of parking. There's never enough. People come to Canada and settle in Toronto and move from the inner city to suburbs, and they need to drive.”
- “I feel threatened as a pedestrian walking along Spadina due to high-volume of traffic - there's 4 lanes of traffic plus the streetcar.”
- “I usually drive and find it very hard to drive in Chinatown. It's very difficult to find parking, there's a lot of traffic, people don't follow traffic rules, and electric bikes, bicycles, and scooters go on the pedestrian sidewalk. This all makes me very frustrated.”

### Community and social supports (Count: 251)

Insights related to public, nonprofit, and community groups that serve the community (religious and family organisations, community centres, shelters, etc.)

Sentiment		
Current state	Positive	20%
	Negative	20%
	Bivalent (both positive and negative expressed in one insight)	6%
Future vision	Concern	9%
	Hope	28%
	Neutral	15%

**Sentiment summary:** Balanced sentiment about the current state and hopeful leanings about the future. Insights on this topic focus on how many of Chinatown’s most important social and cultural institutions such as the Family Associations and community centres are little-known / under-resourced and hope for more cultural and intergenerational programming. In addition, participants express hope for better investment in supporting vulnerable community members who are unhoused or precariously housed/employed.

### Sample insights:

- “I do my shopping and socialising and activities here. I'm so happy to be here at an overall life level. The community itself has interesting infrastructure. There are spaces that are individually run on the backs of certain people and volunteers like artist-run spaces, and community centre classes, family association community events, volunteer work, and art stuff that's privately financed/run. It is a community built off of voluntary work and family work. Any way to sustain these things would be good, preserving the ability of people to create and animate spaces around here.”
- “The Family Associations were formed based on shared surnames, locality, and political affiliations. They provided many important functions, including money loans, legal advice, and settlement services. They are providing social services for residents making up for gaps that are currently being ignored by the City of Toronto. If Family Associations fail, then there would be an even bigger crisis in the area.”
- “The City has a role to play in ensuring the vitality of Chinatown! Please support local business, arts and services in Chinatown. Part of what makes Chinatown unique is that one can enjoy the culture and social atmosphere without paying for entry. The community spaces are just as valuable as the commercial spaces.”
- “The original founding story of Chinatown was about another diaspora group (Jewish Canadians) moving north and the Chinese community moving in. There was social housing built-in already. We aren't like other communities that say they don't want social housing. We do, we're just saying the City should give consideration to building and sustaining it in a way that supports the local social fabric. The housing challenges and homelessness are city-wide issues, not unique to here, but in Chinatown you have a unique opportunity to move ahead quickly with solutions for those issues.”
- “[The church] has an annual event called The Big Give where we curate items the community might want and give away a bunch of things. We partner with the Presbyterian Church Inner-city Mission to serve meals. Three times a year we raise money for a grocery gift card drive to provide some help to the neighbourhood. We hope that the City sees these things that we're trying to do and can support us with things like the fact that our building isn't fully accessible (the gym has stairs).”
- “The City has a social responsibility to the people living nearby. If there are vulnerable people, then the City of Toronto must support them. Instead, the City has been taking away benches and garbage cans to minimize loitering.”