



## Heritage Vancouver

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Dear Mayor and Council,

We will be speaking against the development rezoning proposal. You may know us as the organization that puts out an annual Top10 Endangered List. Last year we put Chinatown on our list- it was number three.

I want to start by making some comments about heritage conservation. We are not talking about the conservation of an empty lot, nor the freezing of a place in time, nor are we talking about the type of heritage conservation that people like Edward Glaeser are against. That heritage obstructs progress, limits new building and growth.

Now heritage is in a phase in our City with the Heritage Action Plan Updates in which there is a broadening of the values to beyond historic and aesthetic. A contemporary approach to heritage fully recognizes the state of the world. There are immense pressures on cities with population increase, inequality, issues with rights and access to the city, environmental threats and so forth. This contemporary approach to heritage deals with all these issues in a holistic manner. It recognizes layers over time not just one moment in the past. Development and heritage can coexist together and is mutually reinforcing.

In this case, that would mean a building that responds to the context not just visually, but extends to how people have used the land and inhabit the area, so that they can live a way of life that they value. Heritage has broadened from management of the built environment to management of change for living communities. When we speak of conservation here, it refers to using the new development to conserve the values of Chinatown which are important. The building is part of the whole where everything is interdependent.

These principles can be found in UNESCO guidance such as the Vienna Memorandum, Florence declaration, and the Historic Urban Landscape approach. If these principles are applied, this building pretty much violates most of these principles and best practices. It fails to respond to the social, cultural, and heritage context.

I would like to read a short excerpt from a City of Ottawa commissioned report on Byward Market. I will let you know where I am going with this shortly. Byward Market is the earliest heritage area in the City of Ottawa.

*“Bars, night clubs and restaurants dominate the ByWard Market and have come to define the district more than the public market. Resident’s needs are losing ground over tourist’s needs. Despite the ByWard Market’s rich history, the public market, which formed the identity of the area and helped it become the City’s number one tourist attraction, is at great risk. The market is struggling to keep farmers and fresh food retailers while other uses, such as bars and restaurants, predominate and are displacing these historic uses... We believe that if nothing is done, the City is in danger of losing the public market forever... Ironically, what drew tourists and residents alike to the ByWard Market was its authenticity and gritty feel, but over time the uses have shifted and now the area is threatened to look and feel no different from any other commercial district.”*

I read the excerpt because:

1. It is similar to what we are dealing with here in Vancouver Chinatown.

2. The group that the City of Ottawa commissioned to do this report is Project for Public Spaces which you may know as the group that put on the placemaking conference last year here in Vancouver. PPS is not a heritage organization. Nonetheless, they speak about continuation of historic uses and identity of an area.
3. PPS is concerned with placemaking- creating vibrancy and activity. Nonetheless, they make a distinction between activity that is contextual and activity that is not contextual.

With respect to Chinatown, there is a distinction between revitalization of the geographic piece of land which is bordered by Columbia, Hastings, Gore and Union vs the revitalization of Chinatown which is not only a historic area but a living community.

Here it is in the Chinatown plan:

*“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.”*

and

*“To remain economically competitive, it must do so without losing its culture and heritage - assets that define its identity and set it apart from other neighbourhoods”*

So it does not appear that this development fits the context.

It was brought up the other night what the City could do to help Chinatown. One thing city could do which is simple and virtually no cost is to enforce it's policies for Chinatown.

There are high standards with respect to innovation and heritage in the Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan.

*“The higher buildings in Chinatown were for the specific purpose of economic revitalization while also considering heritage values. These sites are also expected to provide public benefits, and the rezoning policy specifies these benefits should meet the community's objective of innovative heritage restoration, cultural and affordable housing projects. For every supported higher building, a significantly higher standard of architectural and urban design excellence will be required.”*

We look at innovative buildings and innovative heritage all the time, this is not one of them. With the financial imperatives of the developer, it seems challenging for this building to be innovative.

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