



Heritage Vancouver

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February 23, 2017

Mayor Robertson and Vancouver City Council
453 W.12th Ave.
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor and Council,

Re: Revised Rezoning Application for 105 Keefer (December 12, 2016)

In our previous letter concerning the third development proposal for 105 Keefer, we asserted that despite the importance of form, it is but one aspect of the various considerations necessary when addressing places of historic, social, and cultural significance. We maintain our strong concerns over this disconnection and do not support the proposed project.

The site in question is an empty lot which does not fit into what is considered a typical heritage scenario in which a historic building is being torn down. Much has been made about this. Here we have a heritage matter where the concern is not what is coming down but rather, what is going up. The heritage value of the site is its importance in defining, maintaining, and safeguarding the character of Chinatown. This is not just visually and physically, but also socially and culturally as per agreed upon planning objectives for the area.

The function of the building going up is to complement and enhance the world within the site and around it. This is the interrelationship between tangible and intangible and it is important because it enables and fosters the cultural practices, rituals, daily interactions, and activities necessary for life that are relevant to the local community.

In our discipline, there is the practice of viewing heritage as an ecosystem. Sometimes it is more applicable than others. In this instance, we find it applicable, appropriate, and obligatory to treat Chinatown as such. Similar to the introduction of a new organism to an ecosystem, this is the introduction of an **additional** large development meant for a higher economic status into an existing, yet threatened, system of long-enduring networks, relationships, and cultural practices that is the basis of life to the local community. It needs to be ensured that this tangible and intangible heritage of the area is not eroded by development. Rather, it needs to be enhanced, strengthened, and made more vibrant through development. This is not only for the benefit of the local community but also for all those interested in experiencing the cultural life of Chinatown.

It has been pointed out numerous times by numerous parties other characteristics of importance aside design that are identified in the visioning and planning documents for the area. Some include:

- strengthening the cultural and historic fabric
- a diverse housing mix recognizing the importance of affordability and an aging population
- an authentic experience of Chinatown's culture and heritage through urban life, community and cultural activities, and inter-generational programming

In order to fulfill this visioning and planning for the past 17 years, does it not behoove projects to be more enriched than market housing units geared mainly towards those of higher economic status, up to 25 units for seniors, retail on the ground, minimal amounts of indoor community space, and architectural elements characteristic of Chinatown?

There is a passageway that has been introduced as a key change to the design that was shown on the UDP/CHAPC Response board at the January 10 Open House. On this board, the words "Spirit of Chinatown" appear under the passageway design element. We recognize that the applicant continues to put efforts into being responsive to comments regarding form and we also appreciate the fact that the project team and advisory committees such as the Urban Design Panel (UDP) are comprised of individuals of significant expertise. But perhaps in accordance to a more contemporary treatment of heritage in which experts and the local community - the ones who create meaning for the space - share the responsibility of safeguarding heritage, the community be allowed to participate in the design of the building. In doing so, there may be a more complete representation of the "Spirit of Chinatown".

Projects of this sort that are aimed at community interests exist in the world. We take this to be the intent of the following from **2.3 Height and Density, Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan**:

"these [public] benefits should meet the community's objective of innovative heritage restoration, cultural and affordable housing projects"

However, while recognizing Community Amenity Contributions (CACs) are required for such rezoning applications, we fear the current rules do not incentivize the innovative heritage, cultural and affordable housing projects that lead to the social outcomes that are needed by the community and the aspirations of area planning. Despite equal opportunity for feedback and response after each round, successive applications focus disproportionately on compliance with design guidelines in zoning and responding to the UDP; the revisions have not been accompanied by a similar attention towards appreciable social and cultural considerations voiced by the Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee, community comments, and planning documents (other than zoning regulations) which better capture the substance and intention behind the planning for Chinatown. It is necessary for the rules to motivate applicants to focus on the latter as well. The development policies for Chinatown are currently under review, and we hope that this issue can be addressed.

Given the above concerns, we cannot find this project supportable as currently proposed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bill Yuen', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bill Yuen
Manager, Heritage Vancouver Society

Cc Gil Kelley, General manager of Planning, Urban Design, and Sustainability
Yan Zeng, Rezoning Planner
Chinatown Planning Team