

Presentation Notes  
105 Keefer Notes for DP Board  
Nathan Edelson Jun 15, 2023

For 15 years, I was the City's Senior Planner for the Downtown Eastside and Chinatown.

I have had an opportunity to meet and work with many community leaders and have come to have a genuine respect for the hard work that so many have contributed.

Several years ago, like many local residents and almost all Chinatown organizations, I spoke in opposition to the proposal for 105 Keefer. The DP Board made what at the time I felt was a very important decision to turn down that application.

Since then, conditions have gotten worse. The pandemic, uncertainties in the real estate and financial markets as well as increased racism and violence have contributed to a sense that almost any development is better than none.

That said, after a great deal of thought, I cannot support the proposed design or the uses outlined in this proposal.

This project is located on one of the few remaining prominent sites in the neighbourhood. It is directly across from the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Garden and adjacent to the Chinatown Memorial Square. It will become an import entrance to this community which is of national significance

- Its design requires fine grain architecture to respond more closely with the area's historic character;
- At 6.5 FSR, this is a bulky building; if approved, this amount of FSR should come with significant community benefits
- Retail spaces should to support smaller traditional businesses and services that are at the heart of Chinatown's cultural context

If the Development Permit Board decides to approve this application, conditions should be added to ensure it adhere as much as possible to the recently approved zoning guidelines so its character enhances rather than detracts from nearby cultural amenities.

I am especially concerned about the treatment of the Keefer Memorial Square. The statue design was supported by local residents and community organizations to portray a railway worker and a soldier.

Through it we and others learn that many Chinese workers came to Gold Mountain as indentured servants to escape grinding poverty in China. They built the railways, mines and infrastructure that ensured that British Columbia would be a vibrant part of Canada.

To do this essential work under terrible conditions, they formed family associations to provide housing and other supports for immigrants from different villages. Granting sanctuary for the poor in a culturally familiar community is central to the historic character of Chinatown.

This is not reflected in a building that has 100% market condos and no obligation to provide affordable commercial or needed social services.

Instead, these expensive dwellings will likely contribute to rising land values and further gentrification and displacement of low income residents and moderate income workers who are essential to the neighbourhood's commerce and community services.

We also learned that soldiers of Chinese descent fought in two world wars before they had the right to vote. They formed strong relations with First Nation soldiers that helped each other survive.

Council supported "a redesign of the Keefer Memorial Square and reimagining it as a future gateway to Chinatown as part of the North East False Creek planning and development process."

In effect, this square is a sacred space in Chinatown and it should be showcased by any adjacent development as a contribution to reconciliation to Chinese as well as indigenous people. The detail design and uses of the adjacent buildings should "recognize international best practices by adopting a community values based approach encompassing historical, cultural, aesthetic ... and spiritual values."

Thus heritage is not simply about buildings, but about the communities that built and occupied them. It is the sense of community – bringing young and old, people of different ethnic groups, cultural values and incomes together- should be at the heart of what the City, the developer and people who support or oppose this proposal commit to doing.