

Ottawa

Room 930, Confederation Building
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Tel/Tél: 613-992-6030
Fax/Télec: 613-995-7412



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Constituency

2572 East Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC V5K 1Z3
Tel/Tél: 604-775-5800
Fax/Télec: 604-775-5811

Jenny Kwan

Member of Parliament for Vancouver East
Députée de Vancouver-Est

May 23, 2023

The Honourable Ahmed Hussen
Minister of Housing
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Via email: HDI.Minister-Ministre.LDI@inf.gc.ca

The Honourable Ravi Kahlon
Minister of Housing
Room 248 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Via Email: HOUS.minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Hussen, and Minister Kahlon,

Open Letter re: Renewal of affordable housing in Vancouver's Chinatown (105 Keefer Street site)

I write you today to raise concerns about the future of the 105 Keefer Street site, in the heart of Vancouver's Chinatown.

This key site for several years has faced the threat of private market redevelopment pressure, and a development permit application that was rejected in 2017 comes once again before the City's Development Permit Board late this month.

Neighbourhood residents, those with deep connections to Chinatown, and community activists alike are deeply concerned that, if this development proceeds, loss of this site to private market redevelopment would be devastating to the community. As noted on Heritage Vancouver and the National Trust's endangered places lists, gentrification and lack of affordable housing is having profound impacts on the community, as heritage businesses, families and low-income seniors are priced out. The need for a socially and culturally appropriate development for this site is more urgent than ever.

Instead, many have urged that the City instead seek alternative creative solutions for the site, such as a land purchase by the City or land swap, to facilitate a solution that is in alignment with the will of the neighbours, led and managed by community organizations who work together to determine the area's future.

The discussion of the 105 Keefer Street site pertains to a unique and irreplaceable national heritage jewel with monumental cultural and historical significance.

Jenny.Kwan@parl.gc.ca
JennyKwanNDP.ca

By way of historical context, Vancouver's Chinatown is the largest in Canada. It was established back in the 1890s and is amongst the oldest Chinatowns. 105 Keefer is directly adjacent to the Chinatown Memorial Square, which houses the historically significant monument to commemorate the Chinese railway workers and WWII Veterans. This Memorial depicts the history of Chinese Canadians in Canada and is profound in its meaning to our community. It is also surrounded by the Chinese Cultural Centre, the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Garden, and the Andy Livingstone Park; all of which are important cultural sites and spaces for the Chinatown community.

The distinctive and beautiful buildings in the community, constructed by benevolent associations to help fellow community members, are living monuments to both the struggle and resilience of the people of this community. Many of the historic buildings continue to serve the community today as gathering places, activity spaces, and homes for Chinese Canadian seniors.

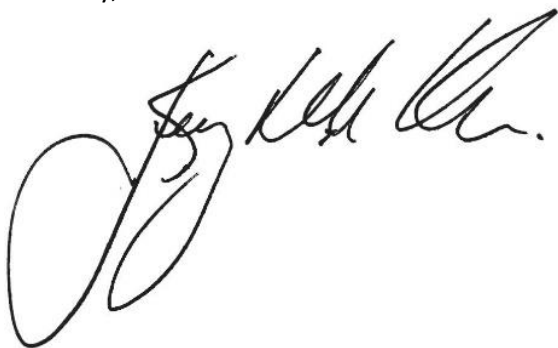
The COVID-19 pandemic, its devastating and often fatal impacts on the lives of elders in our community, the hardships faced by small businesses in its wake, and the incitements of anti-Asian racism and targeted acts of hate have beleaguered the community and raised even higher barriers of difficulty to maintaining the inherent character of the Chinatown neighbourhood. Affordability, homelessness, availability of amenities, and financial insecurity for the many low-income inhabitants of Chinatown has worsened. Despite historic Chinatown's status as a national historic site, it remains at great risk.

I have already written City of Vancouver Mayor Ken Sim and Vancouver City Council to ask that the City engage in discussions with the proponent to discuss such alternative solutions. Since the City of Vancouver owns a number of valuable city sites, I have urged that Council request staff to review and bring forward a short list of sites that might be suitable for consideration of a land swap.

I write to ask you, Ministers, if you could also please work together, with the City and with community groups, to facilitate a land swap or to assist in purchasing this site for social housing. This would go a long way to protect Chinatown as a site of not only cultural preservation, but also as a progressive and inclusive Chinese Canadian neighbourhood that fully supports the health, housing and social needs of the many low-income people, especially Chinese Canadian seniors, that call Chinatown home.

I thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter, and will look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenny Kwan', written over a large, stylized circular scribble.

Jenny Kwan
Member of Parliament for Vancouver East

Cc: Hon. David Eby, K.C.
Premier of British Columbia
Via email: premier@gov.bc.ca