

Presentation Notes
105 Keefer Notes for DP Board
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Along with Jessica Chen, I am speaking in opposition to this proposal.

Jessica and I are former City Senior Planners for the Downtown Eastside and Chinatown and worked in the inner city for many years. We have decided to speak out in support of the many seniors and young people who are working so hard to support culturally appropriate development in Chinatown.

Part of our opposition to this proposal is consistent with that raised by the [Chinatown Historic Advisory Planning Committee](#) and [Save Chinatown YVR](#):

- This is one of the few remaining prominent sites in the neighbourhood. It is directly across from the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Garden and will become an importance 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; red boxes and glass façade on upper floors do no respect the area's historic character
- Density – at more than 6.5 FSR, this is a very bulky building; this amount of FSR should come with significant community benefits
- Some of the retail is too large and likely too expensive to support smaller traditional businesses and services that are at the heart of Chinatown's cultural context

Perhaps more importantly, this proposal was rushed through in advance of the [proposed regulations and guidelines](#) that are being considered by the City that will likely further restrict height and density and define character more clearly.

Given the current proposal, we are especially concerned about the treatment of the Keefer Memorial Square. We worked with Wendy Au and others to secure the funding and community support for a culturally appropriate feature adjacent to 105 Keefer. The design chosen by local residents and community organizations to portray a railway worker and a soldier within the limited funds available at that time.

Through these efforts we learned 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 conditions that can only be described as the results of racism, they formed family associations to house and provide 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. Indeed, these expensive units will likely contribute to rising land values and further gentrification and displacement of low income residents.

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 and formed friendships that – in addition to discrimination through which Chinese people could only farm on Musqueam land - help bind the communities to this day.

There is a report going to Council this week on [Historical Discrimination Against Chinese People in Vancouver](#). As part of reconciliation, it recommends “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. This is all the more true as the NEFC Plan will call for the demolition of the viaducts and creation of a major entry to Chinatown along Columbia. Given the cultural significance of the square, the detail design of the building adjacent it should be suspended until we better understand the changes that will be taking place along this portion of the neighbourhood.

There are many design reasons why this project should be turned down in its current configuration. But perhaps more importantly, the reconciliation report recommends that the City apply for UNESCO Heritage Status for Chinatown. This and [Heritage Vancouver’s letter of opposition to the proposal for 105 Keefer](#) and the National Heritage Register “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.

As many speakers have noted, this proposal does not respect the historic culture of the heritage area its proponents proprot to help. Chinatown needs affordable housing, especially for a diversity of Chinese seniors and others suffering from poverty as well as culturally appropriate businesses, health and cultural services.

In addition to a better understanding of what heritage should mean, we would suggest that the City adopt several changes to its procedures in light of the many days of public hearings, open houses, other consultations and the recent Council discussions and zoning decision:

1. Public engagement must be structured in a way that protects the rights of all people to voice their opinions. This is an essential part of freedom of speech and it may be necessary to develop appropriate procedures. That said, we have not witnessed the young people with whom we have been working participating in such behavior.
2. We would also note that honourable public engagement also carries a responsibility for speakers to identify their interest in a proposal (eg. nearby resident or business person, employee or contractor, member of a relevant organization, interested citizen, etc.).
3. When Council refuses a rezoning and the City is embarking on a review of relevant policies impacting that site, development applications should not be accepted without the explicit permission of Council until the review is completed and emerging policies are approved or rejected.
4. When individuals whose first language is not English wish to speak, there should be opportunities for simultaneous translation (through headphones and microphones) or additional time allocated to ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak, to understand and to answer questions.

By way of closing, we would note that the report on Discrimination Against Chinese People identifies several City officials who stood up to oppose racist policies that were intended to

- Stop Chinese and Japanese children from attending school
- Confine Chinese owned businesses to certain parts of the city
- Restricting trade licenses to “Orientals”

We believe there are enough reasons to refuse this application based current as well as emerging City policy.

However, if you are uncertain about whether these reasons are enough, we would urge you to read the report on Discrimination Against the Chinese and decide what kind of public servant you would like to be – one who hides behind the details of regulations or one who has the judgment and the courage to support reconciliation and a new generation of Chinese Canadians and their elders who want to work with the City and others to protect and expand culturally appropriate development and practices in what can be recognized as a world living heritage community.