

Ludwig, Nicole

From: Violet Chan s.22(1) Personal and Confidential
Sent: Wednesday, May 24, 2017 8:26 PM
To: Public Hearing
Subject: 105 Keefer St and 544 Columbia St

May 24th 2017

Dear Mayor and Councillors
Vancouver City Hall

I am writing on behalf of the Vancouver Multicultural Society. We would like to express our full support for the above project in Chinatown, We engage all cultural backgrounds in our society. We are very excited about the prospect of having a space that every non-profit organisation can use for their activities and recreation.

There used to be lots of spaces available for Chinese non-profit societies of which some are provided by the City but are now no longer available.

In fact VMS used to have a place provided by the City since early 1970's until lately. As such we have been desperately looking for a new space for the last 4 years but there has been nothing suitable.

The proposed new building will be an ideal place for the group to meet and promote cultures from all backgrounds including the aboriginal people and refugees whom we have been in contact from time to time.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Regards,

Violet Chan
President
Vancouver Multicultural Society

City of Vancouver
453 West 12th avenue
Vancouver, B.C.
V5Y 1V4

Attention: Mayor and Councillors of the City of Vancouver

via email and hand delivery

May 23rd, 2017

Your Worship Mayor Robertson and Councillors of the City of Vancouver:

Re: 105 Keefer Street and 544 Columbia Street, Vancouver, B.C. (Chinatown)

I write to support the latest revision of the proposed building on the captioned address.

My family and I had chosen Metro Vancouver as our home since the mid-1970's and we have been operating a retail and wholesale business in Vancouver Chinatown since 1977. In the past 40 years, we were fortunate enough to acquire several properties in Chinatown and I had and am still having the pleasure of involving in community work such as but not limited to the Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association, the Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee and the Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Area Society. It is fair to conclude that I certainly witnessed the so-called ups and downs of Vancouver Chinatown in the past four decades.

What made Chinatown? Essentially it was the convergence of residents having the same ethnicity in an area who adopted their new lifestyle infused with their own Chinese culture. With residents came retail shops and services. Benevolent societies and clan associations followed as the population grew. Social services society, cultural centre and associations of various trades were next. In short, it all started with residents.

As Metro Vancouver grew and the society evolves, we witnessed the rise of several quasi-Chinatowns located in nearby cities such as Richmond and Surrey. Even Vancouver has its own quasi-Chinatown on Victoria Drive. As the Asian population grew and society continued to evolve, Asian groceries became widely available everywhere including mainstream supermarkets. No longer the exclusive supplier of Asian groceries, Chinatown had lost some of its allure. NAFTA resulted with the total closure of small-scale garment manufacturers nearby Chinatown which meant it lost all of the garment workers --- mostly of middle-aged Chinese ladies --- who daily shopped at Chinatown for groceries. What followed were the disturbing drug issues and its related social challenges that made matters worse. All through that time, there was no increase of residents for Chinatown. Consequently, with the lack of clients, many businesses had closed and moved out of the community. Several business-oriented association and society had implemented events to revitalize the community such as the Night

Market (the very first of its kind in North America) and the Chinatown Festival. All were met with success but the efforts were and continue to be a substantial undertaking.

The above clearly illustrates and highlights one essential component: for the long term sustainability of Vancouver Chinatown --- resident population is vital, particularly the marketable kind. For the past forty years, Chinatown had virtually no increase in resident population. And its residents are mostly of low income seniors. That is not to say; however; that this is a community that caters exclusively for the low income people; rather the community offered no choice for the more affluent crowd who wish to reside in Chinatown. This is an imbalance that needs proper addressing as it was not the people who denied the community; but rather the community who denied the people. The new marketable housing developments on the Northwest and Southwest corners of Main and Keefer had already proven the fact that upon availability, people would purchase, move in and call Chinatown home. These new residents are people of all ages, various income and ethnicity. This trend should be encouraged and should not be stopped. I can assure you that there are plenty of affluent seniors who are both willing and anticipating living in Chinatown when given the opportunity. They enjoy the ambience and the convenience and they feel related and connected to the community. And they will, of course, contribute to the community's economics.

There appears to be a reverse-xenophobia in Vancouver Chinatown of late and that is unacceptable. Many are flying the so-called flags of heritage preservation and promotion to curtail the influx of new businesses and new developments; particularly those that are non-ethnic-Chinese entrepreneurs and investors. This is absolutely absurd and in our multi-cultural society of today, it should not be tolerated whatsoever. One is not welcomed in Vancouver Chinatown when one is not Chinese? That is infringing on being racist! Vancouver Chinatown is not only for the ethnic Chinese; Vancouver Chinatown is for everyone; this is 2017! Canada is a multi-ethnic country and Vancouver's society mosaic is woven from the fabrics of its diverse multi-culturalism.

Let's be absolutely clear on the captioned site of the proposed development. When my family and I first set foot in Vancouver in the mid-1970's, the site had already been an abandoned gasoline and automotive service station. This means this site had not served any specific purpose or made any contributions to Vancouver Chinatown for more than forty years. This would be replaced by marketable housing units along with senior housing; some dedicated to low-income seniors; and storage facilities for the Chinatown community events. All of these versus an empty piece of unpaved and barren land; what is not to support on this proposal? The other alternative being the developer will adhere to the existing bylaws and simply construct a 9-storey building that is 100% marketable housing units and a total void of both the senior housing and the storage facility for the community events. If we want Chinatown to maintain its viability and long-term sustainability, the choice is outright obvious.

Let's now consider the feasibility and practicality. For the naysayers, they are claiming the proposed development would destroy the image of Chinatown and jeopardize its heritage. Some even say it desecrates the Memorial Squares of the Chinese Railroad Workers and Miners. So let's weigh the possible results: if nothing is done, then it continues to be left

unused and lay bare. If the proposal is accepted, literally more than one hundred people will populate the community. The economic benefits generated from these residents will be substantial. Senior housing as well as storage facilities for the hardware from the community events such as but not limited to the Night Market and the Spring Festival Parade will be provided. Let's be absolutely clear on one issue, no one is tearing anything down for this development; this property had been barren for the more than four decades; something that has positive contributions to the community will be built from an empty piece of land. Is that not beneficial to the community? As far as desecration is concerned, currently, there is a group who, again flying the cultural heritage flag, sets up several Mah Jong game tables at the Memorial Square on the weekends. Mah Jong, despite being a well-known Chinese game for leisure, is just as widely-known as being a form of gambling. In other words, a building adjacent to the memorial that will bring economic benefits and added social services to the community is a desecration while a Mah Jong game event which connotes gambling in front of the memorial is a cultural promotion? There appears to be a defiance of logic and common sense here.

I am not against heritage preservation nor am I disrespectful of Chinatown's unique character and culture. If anything else, how many of those who are against the proposal have continued to operate a business in Chinatown for 40 years? How many of those had invested in Chinatown through actual property acquisitions? How many had taken a leadership role in community work for over 22 consecutive years and continuing doing so today? How many had personally witness the evolution of Chinatown, for better or for worse, for more than four decades? I have always stated on many occasions that at any given opportunity, I welcome historical preservations and support a museum component in Chinatown. Chinatown, however, cannot thrive on the historical component alone and it should not and could not be just one large museum. We had all witnessed the failure of relying solely on historical preservations and being just a museum; not even a theme-park-like museum; that was not too long ago and it was nearby, it was known as Storyeum. So we should learn from our mistakes and never to repeat them. What actual benefits have Vancouver Chinatown garnered from the so-called historical and heritage preservations? Had any of the shop owners and operators seen an actual increase in their businesses as a result? We had also implemented several projects from the Great Beginnings' budget. Had we seen any true economic gains and real benefits for the community? Is this what Chinatown is all about --- a group of senior folks idling at their clan association housed in an old building which itself is slowly but surely crumbling to pieces; playing Mah Jong and reminiscing on their past and waiting for time to pass; or a bunch of radical youths setting up Mah Jong tables, arming with a hidden political agenda and wanting nothing but social housing for the low income crowd? While I admire the motivation of these youths, let's factor in pragmatism. Where is the funding going to come from to finance these housing? Some even say to purchase the captioned site and turn it into a dedicated senior homecare facility. Again, admirable proposal but who would be the financier? They want to preserve the community and its culture? Then perhaps they should encourage all their friends to come to Chinatown, each of them rents a store, opens a business that relates to some form of Chinese culture. That would be a more viable and realistic solution. Some of these radical youths were also behind the anti-shark-fin-soup movement. Consuming shark-fin is a Chinese culture; let alone its economic impact to some restaurants and dried goods stores; so why are they acting against it then? Of course, this is not about the consumption of shark-fins at all.

But it clearly demonstrates that these youths have a strong hidden agenda. And it begs the obvious question: what actual benefits have we witnessed from the past and current actions of these radical youths?

Someone of high profile who has been very active and outspoken of late has also been flying the same heritage preservation flag and opposing to the captioned proposed development and had gone as far as setting up a private foundation to fund the acquisition of Vancouver Chinatown's real estates. But based on this individual's purchases, we have yet to see any real positive results. In fact, we saw the negativity of having two business closures resulting from this individual's acquisitions. Many had also alleged that the same individual is spearheading and allying with the naysayers and the radical youths to oppose the captioned proposed development because this individual had lost on the bid to purchase this captioned land. So is there an ulterior motive to such opposition then? And if the allegation is true and with the proposal being rejected by Council, would such rejection inadvertently assist on achieving that individual's alleged goal then?

On a related note, the Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee (VCRC) should be rescinded. I had long cautioned the City Staffs several years ago, including one of the current senior-ranking managers, that the VCRC was a good concept but in actual practise there is a high risk involved and, ultimately, it will not be beneficial to the community. This is especially the case when City Staffs stopped their secretariat support years ago. Ideally, VCRC serves as a coalition of major associations of Vancouver Chinatown. Realistically, virtually no influential entities are involved in that committee. But it conveys a false impression that VCRC is a force to be reckoned and that its Chair has the final defacto say on matters pertaining to Chinatown. The first three Chairs of the VCRC had maintained the balance and lead the committee fairly and wisely. Can we say the same for today? And let's look at the other so-called members: using the VCRC as their stepping stones or platform, a good number of them had either spawned their own associations or personal business ventures but very few had actually contributed to the community without obtaining benefits for themselves first. Their motives; therefore; are primarily self-serving --- exactly as I predicted and cautioned the senior City Staffs on what VCRC would turn into. It is also interesting to note the active members of today's VCRC who definitely have an intriguing alliance on an issue --- namely, to oppose the captioned proposed development.

As your Worship and Councillors of the City of Vancouver may be cognizant of, there has been and continues to be a plethora of misinformation about the proposed development. Propagating false information, applying scare tactics and invoking fear on the vulnerable seniors that live in Chinatown so that they are falsely misguided to oppose the captioned proposed development is simply despicable! And yet I am witnessing these deplorable acts being conducted by several individuals on a weekly basis. They infiltrate clan associations, benevolent societies and even attempt on the business associations in order to carry out their agendas. I will admit that they are methodical and tactical on their approaches; but to prey on the seniors and to use them as pawns in order to achieve whatever the obvious and not-so-obvious goals of their own is simply being malicious, dishonest and dishonourable.

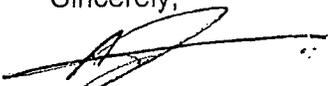
It was not too long ago when the community banded together and collectively supported the Historical Area Height Review proposal. Surely, we all have vivid memories of debating until 1:40am in the morning at City Hall with the usual Downtown Eastside crowd who want nothing but social housing for the entire East Van. They too are allegedly using scare tactics to spread propaganda and misinformation within the community to coax people to oppose the captioned proposed development. The City made the right decision on granting the HAHR proposal. This is the opportunity to augment and further implement that proposal. For those who opposed the HAHR, how many of them actually lived in Chinatown? How many of them actually own businesses or properties in Chinatown? How many of them have witnessed the evolution of Chinatown?

In summary, a proposal of this scale will no doubt attract many comments from those who support and those who oppose. From those who oppose, I welcome them to put forth a more feasible, viable and affordable solution. To ask the government to step in and acquire the land, to build a facility that generates no income and, in fact, requires more government resources to operate it is intangible and unrealistic. Chinatown is not a community that only caters to Chinese and Chinatown is not a district that only welcomes the low-income people and the senior folks. Chinatown is ready to embrace people of all ages, from all walks of life and with various income levels. Chinatown is not a relic; a museum component is welcomed but it is categorically not a museum. Chinatown should be a vibrant community that welcomes everyone: mainstream, other ethnic minorities and Chinese-descents alike. Chinatown welcomes investments: be they residential properties, retail and wholesale storefronts, professional services or clerical offices. There are sufficient properties within Chinatown that are protected by heritage preservation bylaws to ensure the unique characteristics of Chinatown are being properly upheld and maintained. There are also numerous attractions to ensure that tourists can and will feel Chinatown's distinctive ambience. We have arrived at a watershed with a proposal that will epitomize the dawn of the new Vancouver Chinatown; that Chinatown finally has a facility that offers marketable housing for everyone regardless of race, age and income; that offers senior housing; that offers facilities for community usage; that offers business opportunities via retail storefronts. These are all paramount to ensure the proper sustainability and the future of Vancouver Chinatown. The alternatives would be the status quo of a barren land for over forty years and counting; or a lower-height building that offers no additional benefits to the community other than providing residential quarters. As someone who was raised and educated locally and had just about seen and experienced it all from this community in the past four decades, I urge your Worship and the Councillors of the City of Vancouver to make the definitive decision: grant this proposal and start a new glorious chapter for our Vancouver Chinatown.

I am, of course, available for questions and discussions if you deem necessary.

Thank you very much for your kind attention and consideration.

Sincerely,



Albert Fok

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