

CHINATOWN STRATEGY - INITIATIVES AND PROGRESS

Recommendation

That the December 6, 2023, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE01709, be received for information.

Requested Action	Information Only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Urban Places		
City Plan Values	THRIVE		
City Plan Big City Moves	A Community of Communities	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Arts and culture Economic Growth Community safety and well-being
Corporate Business Plan	Transforming for the Future		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinatown Infrastructure Improvements • Chinatown Recovery Fund • Community Safety and Well-being Strategy • Downtown Core and Transit System Safety Plan • Harbin Gate Rehabilitation • Healthy Streets Operation Centre • McCauley Neighbourhood Renewal 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 2, 2014, CR_1279, Chinatown Plan • July 6, 2016, CR_3509, Chinatown Plan - Economic Development Report Findings • June 20, 2017, CR_4290, Chinatown Plan - Chinatown Strategy • April 30, 2018, CR_4983, Chinatown Strategy Implementation and Budget 		

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Previous Council/Committee Action

At the January 31, 2023, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration work with the Chinatown Transformation Collaborative and report annually highlighting initiatives and progress on the Chinatown Strategy.

Executive Summary

- The Chinatown Strategy was developed in collaboration with many community groups and individuals that are critical to drive the success of the strategy's initiatives and aid in the progress of the actions presented in this report.
- The COVID-19 pandemic intensified challenges the Chinatown area has been facing and brought additional difficulties to the area, including increased public disorder and crime.
- A number of mechanisms are in place to support implementation of the strategy, including the Chinatown Transformation Collaborative (CTC), Healthy Streets Operations Centre (HSOC), McCauley Neighbourhood Renewal, Chinatown Infrastructure Improvements composite profile and the Chinatown Recovery Fund.
- To ensure that the strategy initiatives reflect the changing contexts and challenges, Administration held multiple sessions with stakeholders throughout 2023 to revalidate the strategy. During these sessions, the strategy was updated to reflect the current social, political and environmental state of the area.
- Administration and Chinatown Strategy stakeholders are developing a logic model for revalidated strategy implementation to track and monitor progress on its initiatives.
- Administration will meet with the CTC, the Chinatown Business Improvement Area (BIA) and the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA) quarterly to deliver the revalidated Chinatown Strategy action items.

REPORT

The Chinatown Economic Development Plan was created in 2014 to:

- evaluate the current state of the local economy in Edmonton's Chinatown,
- examine leading practice examples of successful Chinatowns from other cities and
- recommend a course of action to boost socio-economic development.

The evaluation also included significant consultation from community members through public meetings, workshops, economic research and multi-stakeholder interviews and ground-floor retail surveys to better understand the opportunities and challenges of the area from an economic development perspective. This research and analysis resulted in a series of economic development recommendations to advance the resiliency of Chinatown. The Urban Interface Plan and Chinatown Strategy were developed to support these recommendations.

The Chinatown Strategy is a series of actions developed in collaboration with community stakeholders (which formed the Chinatown Community Economic Development (CCED) Task Force) to directly address the key pillars established in the Chinatown Economic Development Plan. Members of the CCED Task Force represented the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA), the Chinatown Business Improvement Area (BIA), the Edmonton Chinese Young Leaders Council

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(ECYLC), other business stakeholders and City liaisons. The actions of the strategy include programmatic and placemaking recommendations to support a thriving and resilient Chinatown.

Administration worked with members of the CCED Task Force to map out 2018 activities, confirming community commitment to the strategy implementation. At the time, each participating organization acknowledged limitations in capacity and mandate challenges for any single existing organization to implement all the required Chinatown Strategy actions. Different mechanisms for implementation were considered, and the CCED Task Force recommended that Chinatown Strategy implementation be a community-led initiative best directed through a new non-profit society. On April 30, 2018, Executive Committee received an update on the Chinatown Strategy (CR_4983 Chinatown Strategy Implementation and Budget) and directed Administration to prepare a business case for 2019-2022 seed funding for a non-profit society to implement the actions identified in the Chinatown Strategy. As a result, the Chinatown Transformation Collaborative Society (CTC) was formed in 2018 to provide a broader governance and community leadership network.

After five years of work toward the implementation of the strategy, the City of Edmonton convened key community and business representatives, including the CBA, the BIA and the CTC, to evaluate and revalidate the Chinatown Strategy originally presented to City Council in 2017. Action items were evaluated for their effectiveness and examined to determine if they still fit within the overall strategy, given the changing context and challenges in and around the Chinatown area. This work led to the draft of a revalidated Chinatown Strategy (Attachment 1).

Current State

The Chinatown area is historically complex and has become even more so since the COVID-19 pandemic, which created additional challenges and pressures, including a surge in anti-Asian racism.¹ Disproportionate crime and social disorder remain in the area, contributing to the perception that it is less safe than other neighbourhoods.² The neighbourhood has multiple social services agencies and is a location where many individuals experiencing homelessness gather. Stakeholders raised concerns that the increasing concentration of encampments results in significant safety and security issues, and these factors have added pressure in implementing the strategy. The added external pressures have escalated tensions between stakeholders, including social service providers, and may prevent cooperation between some of these groups.

The Chinatown Strategy is a framework of actions for future community economic development that is integrated and inclusive, and addresses the expressed needs of the community. The initiatives from the draft revalidated strategy will focus on four pillars that were identified by the participating stakeholders, including Safety and Security, Business Diversification, Celebrating Chinatown as a Cultural Destination and a Chinatown Infrastructure Capital Plan. These pillars align with The City Plan through supporting 97 Street as a primary corridor (i.e. a major, vibrant and prominent urban street designed for living, working and moving) as well as the Centre City district as a Priority Growth Area.

¹ Stop Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) Hate Reporting Centre: <https://stopaapihate.org/>

² SafeCityYEG Map: <https://data.edmonton.ca/Social-Impact/SafeCityYEG-Map/5nbb-audf>

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The original strategy contained an additional development pillar, Governance and Community Leadership Network; however, the actions were based on activities to be undertaken by the CCED Task Force, which disbanded once CTC formed to become the main driver for the strategy implementation. The stakeholders mutually agreed to remove this pillar from the strategy during a June 2023 engagement session, acknowledging that governance remains an important aspect of the success of the strategy, though it is no longer a distinct development pillar. Stakeholders reinforced the importance of their involvement in governance discussions to determine the appropriate structure going forward. These discussions will be integral for delivering on the updated draft strategy and its remaining pillars.

The City provides ongoing support to community stakeholders in delivering the actions under each pillar of the Chinatown Strategy. There are multiple mechanisms in place which ensure that strategic actions are being delivered, including:

- Activities undertaken by the CTC using their annual global budget
- Development of the Downtown Core and Transit System Safety Plan that launched in 2022
- Establishment of the Healthy Streets Operation Centre (HSOC)
- Renewal of Chinatown as part of McCauley Neighbourhood Renewal
- Implementation of the Chinatown Infrastructure Improvements composite profile which includes streetscape enhancements in Chinatown, 97 Street, 107A Avenue and the redevelopment of Mary Burlie Park
- Centre City Servicing Pilot
- Chinatown Recovery Fund
- Harbin Gate relocation
- Annual reporting to City Council on the progress of the Chinatown Strategy

Chinatown Transformation Collaborative (CTC) Society of Edmonton

- The CTC is invested in economic recovery, growth and safety for not only businesses and agencies in Chinatown but also those living in and visiting Chinatown.
- The society works to enhance opportunities and leverage the efforts of partners that effectively advance collective economic development goals through clearly defined roles.
- During the 2023-2026 budget deliberations, City Council approved a \$1.2 million multi-year service package with funding for the CTC to continue implementing actions of the Chinatown Strategy.

Since the development of the original strategy, nine action items have been completed, three have been deemed no longer necessary, and two have been re-shaped into a new action in the revalidated strategy. The remainder of action items, many of which are in progress, will carry over into the revalidated strategy. A list of completed activities undertaken to support the development pillars of the Chinatown Strategy to date is provided in Attachment 2.

Next Steps

The Chinatown Strategy requires ongoing implementation support from Administration, the CTC and other community and business partners. Through Healthy Streets Operation Centre (HSOC) activities the City will continue to concentrate on strengthening the safety and security development pillar. This will allow CTC to focus on activities that catalyze the Chinatown region

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for renewed interest and investment and celebrate it as a cultural destination. Administration and Chinatown Strategy stakeholders are also developing a logic model for revalidated strategy implementation in order to track and monitor progress on its initiatives (through measures and actions).

Administration and the CTC will continue to provide Council with annual updates on the initiatives and the progress on the Chinatown Strategy. As Administration tracks implementation of the Chinatown Strategy, if action items are identified that are not able to be completed within existing budgets, Administration may bring forward an unfunded service package to be considered as part of a future supplemental budget adjustment.

In 2024, Administration, the CTC and community partners will undertake the actions listed in Attachment 3. Administration will be meeting quarterly with CTC, BIA and CBA to ensure shared accountability and coordination during this complex undertaking.

Community Insight

Administration met with three key stakeholders - the BIA, the CTC and the CBA - throughout 2023. There was one bilateral session with each group held in March 2023 and four sessions (May 11, May 12, June 2 and June 29, 2023) where members from all three groups were present. Attendance at these sessions ranged from 12 to 20 people.

During these sessions, stakeholders and Administration identified actions that were complete, actions that are no longer needed and actions that are still important. The groups conducted a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, identified a large range of additional stakeholders, shared their experience with the changing conditions in the area and provided recommended actions that will help achieve the goals set out in the strategy. The What We Heard report is available in Attachment 4.

The Neighbourhood Empowerment Team (NET) and HSOC Community Safety Liaisons also provided advice and recommendations. These groups conducted Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) audits to increase security in the area. They are well connected with social services agencies and community groups in such a way that they are able to share concerns from these groups.

GBA+

The Chinatown Strategy focuses on fostering economic development, promoting cultural preservation, enhancing community engagement and ensuring sustainable urban planning. The initiatives of the strategy are meant to remove the barriers to equity and ensure that a marginalized business community is able to enjoy equality of outcomes seen by other Business Improvement Areas in Edmonton.

While the economic situation for Chinatown was not ideal when the strategy was developed, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified many challenges the area has been facing. At the beginning of the pandemic, the residents and business owners were targeted with anti-Asian racism, public health orders reduced the number of visitors to the area, and an increased number of people started seeking the social services that are concentrated in the area.

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To ensure that the new challenges and barriers are addressed within the Edmonton Chinatown neighbourhood, the Chinatown Strategy was evaluated in 2023. Quarterly meetings with key stakeholders, including CTC, BIA and CBA, will monitor progress on the ongoing implementation and successes of the strategy actions. As progress is achieved, the City may re-evaluate the strategy in 2026, and the re-evaluation plan will also include a GBA+ lens during development to ensure any barriers to inclusion are mitigated or removed and to support equality of outcomes.

The Chinatown Strategy was not intended to directly address the needs of the homeless population. Its premise is to ensure economic vibrancy of the Chinatown area; however, increased numbers and concentrations of encampments has created added pressure on strategy implementation. Both the Chinatown BIA and the CTC regularly attempt to engage the homeless population through the Chinatown Safety Council and by building bi-lateral relationships with specific service providers such as Hope Mission, Boyle Street Community Services and others.

Attachments

1. The Chinatown Strategy: Energizing a Prosperous Future (Draft)
2. Chronological Report of Actions for Strategy & Recovery
3. Upcoming Action Items
4. Chinatown Strategy Revalidation Group Sessions - What We Heard Report