

CHINATOWN STRATEGY - INITIATIVES AND PROGRESS

Recommendation

That the October 9, 2024, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE02329, 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 Move(s)	A Community of Communities	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Community Safety and well-being Arts and Culture Economic Growth
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 • Chinatown Vibrancy Fund • Community Safety and Well-being Strategy • Downtown Core and Transit System Safety Plan • Harbin Gate Relocation • Healthy Streets Operation Centre • McCauley Neighbourhood Renewal • Centre City Optimization Service 		
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 • December 6, 2023, UPE01709, Chinatown Strategy - Initiatives and Progress 		

Executive Summary

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

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- That Administration work with the Chinatown Transformation Collaborative and report annually highlighting initiatives and progress on the Chinatown Strategy.
 - Urban Planning and Economy report UPE01709 was received for information at the December 6, 2023, Executive Committee meeting.
 - This report is the 2024 report on the Chinatown Strategy.
- The Chinatown Strategy was revalidated in 2023/2024 and is no longer a draft document. Per Council direction in late 2023, the strategy was to include broader engagement with the community. This work was undertaken in collaboration with stakeholders that are critical in driving the success of the strategy's initiatives and aiding in the progress of its actions.
- A number of supports were in place in 2024, which contributed to the ongoing implementation of the strategy, including the Chinatown Transformation Collaborative (CTC), Healthy Streets Operations Centre (HSOC), infrastructure activities undertaken by Administration and the Chinatown Vibrancy Fund.
- The City maintains ongoing engagement with community stakeholders on the implementation of actions outlined in the Chinatown Strategy.
- Successful Chinatown Vibrancy Fund projects have been identified, and Administration will ensure that projects approved and funded are implemented in line with the pillars and outcomes laid out in the revalidated Chinatown Strategy.
- Administration and Chinatown Strategy stakeholders will develop a dashboard to measure progress towards identified outcomes, including safety and security, and economic growth.

REPORT

The Chinatown Strategy is a series of actions developed in collaboration with community stakeholders to directly address the key pillars established in the Chinatown Economic Development Plan created in 2014. The actions of the strategy include recommendations to support a thriving and resilient Chinatown. The Chinatown Strategy was originally presented to City Council in 2017.

In 2023, the City of Edmonton met with key community and business representatives, including the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA), the Chinatown Business Improvement Area (BIA) and the Chinatown Transformation Collaborative Society (CTC), to evaluate and revalidate the Chinatown Strategy. Action items were evaluated for their effectiveness and assessed on whether they still fit within the overall strategy given the changing context and challenges in the Chinatown area. This work led to the draft of a revalidated Chinatown Strategy that was presented to Executive Committee on December 6, 2023 (UPE01709 Chinatown Strategy - Initiatives and Progress). Executive Committee accepted the report for information and suggested Administration undertake broader community engagement on the revalidated Chinatown Strategy.

Current State

The City continues to provide ongoing support to community stakeholders in delivering the actions under each pillar of the revalidated Chinatown Strategy. Key projects to ensure strategic actions have been delivered include infrastructure activities undertaken by internal City departments, such as the Mary Burlie Park Renewal, the Harbin Gate relocation and the renewal

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of Chinatown as part of McCauley Neighbourhood renewal. These projects, as well as the implementation of the Chinatown Infrastructure Improvements composite profile, are integral to actions in Pillar D (Chinatown Infrastructure Capital Plan). The community partnerships strengthened via the Healthy Streets Operations Centre will continue to contribute to actions in Pillar A (Safety and Security). Activities undertaken by the CTC using their City provided funding target actions within each pillar. Lastly, projects undertaken by the Chinatown Recovery team span over all four pillars of the Chinatown Strategy, including inception of the Chinatown Vibrancy Fund.

Since the revalidation of the Chinatown Strategy, the City engaged the community on the new action items. Some action items are long term or ongoing in nature (such as advocacy) and may never reach a completed state. Other action items from the previous iteration of the strategy were completed or no longer relevant, and have been removed from the current strategy. A list of key activities undertaken by Administration to support strategy pillars is provided in Attachment 1. A list of key activities undertaken and provided by the CTC to support the Strategy through 2024, and its plans for 2025, are provided in Attachment 2.

Chinatown Vibrancy Fund

The Chinatown Vibrancy Fund supports the implementation of the Chinatown Strategy by building community cohesion, empowering residents, and bringing visitors into the area through festivals, events and cultural projects. The City administered the program by leveraging an evaluation team, the Chinatown Vibrancy Fund Advisory Committee (made up of local business owners, property owners, social agencies, residents and cultural stakeholders) and City staff. The Advisory Committee developed rigorous evaluation criteria that was applied in the Committee's final deliberation of projects, based on how effectively they could support implementation of the Chinatown Strategy. A report on the outcomes of one of the funded projects, the CTC's Dragon Festival, can be found in Attachment 3.

Chinatown Transformation Collaborative (CTC) Society of Edmonton

The CTC is a community organization dedicated to revitalizing Edmonton's Chinatown, making it a vibrant, inclusive and culturally rich community. The mission of the CTC is to oversee the implementation of the Chinatown Strategy by nurturing long-standing relationships and building new partnerships through programs and activities that support the vibrancy of Chinatown in Edmonton. Its strategic goals include community engagement and cultural preservation, economic development, and urban revitalization and sustainability. The goals are achieved through the organization's participation in cultural programs and events, youth engagement, business support services, investment attraction, public space enhancements and infrastructure projects.

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. To advance annual funding, an updated funding agreement was prepared that requires the CTC to provide its annual budget and business plan before the annual payments are released. The requirements for the business plan include details on how the CTC's planned spending aligns

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with the Chinatown Strategy and what partnerships in the community they are leveraging to complete the work.

Recent Achievements

The following items represent some of the tangible actions that have been undertaken in support of the Chinatown Strategy.

- The Chinatown Business Improvement Area (BIA) was able to successfully support four new businesses in Chinatown via the City-funded “Open for Business” grant.
- The Chinatown-Harbin gate project is funded and the design and build contracts have been awarded. The gate is expected to be complete by the end of 2026.
- Neighbourhood Renewal work continues with alleys in the Chinatown BIA footprint being completed this year and front streets scheduled for summer 2025.
- Concept design to support the renewal of Mary Burlie Park is advancing. Construction is currently scheduled to begin in spring 2025.
- Improved relations between many Chinatown stakeholders, including joint projects between the Chinatown BIA and the Chinatown CTC. Administration also acts as a liaison between various stakeholders, including social agencies, community groups, and business on a regular basis. This support also included partnership brokering provided by Administration for select groups.
- The City provides administrative support for events, festivals, navigating government agencies, examples include securing fireworks permits, providing support for grant applications from other organizations.
- Completion of broad community engagement for the Chinatown Strategy, including social agencies, formal and informal community groups, and businesses. This engagement was leveraged in the selection of the evaluation committee for the Chinatown Vibrancy Fund and included members of the groups listed above.

Next Steps

The Chinatown Strategy requires ongoing implementation support and collaboration between Administration, the CTC and other community and business partners. Administration will focus on supporting the distribution of the Chinatown Vibrancy Fund, execution of approved projects, and ongoing engagement with community stakeholders on the actions outlined in the strategy. Administration will also report on the success of the fund. The CTC is working to develop a tourism strategy that will aid in bringing more visitors to Chinatown and catalyzing the region for renewed investment and attraction opportunities. Administration and Chinatown Strategy stakeholders will develop a data dashboard in 2025 as a more robust and measurable system for strategy outcomes, including safety and security, and to share metrics with Council and the community.

Administration continues meeting quarterly with the CTC, the Chinatown BIA and the CBA to ensure shared accountability and coordination of the Chinatown Strategy action items. There has been noticeable improvement in relationships amongst key stakeholders, which resulted in collaboration on multiple projects in 2024. Administration is developing a quantitative pulse

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check survey that will establish a baseline for how stakeholders are working together and what can be done to further build on that foundation.

Administration and the CTC are committed to providing Council with annual updates on initiatives and progress towards the outcomes of the Chinatown Strategy.

Considerations

Despite the conclusion of pilot programs focused on safety and security in the area, the City remains committed to maintaining a strong and visible presence through existing resources. Community Standards Peace Officers (CSPO) will continue to be actively engaged through their downtown and general duty teams. These teams focus on addressing issues within the downtown core, including the Civic Precinct and Churchill Square, while safeguarding individuals and City assets while ensuring a continued presence in the community.

Edmonton Fire Rescue Services (EFRS) will maintain its role in responding to community needs through its district Fire Prevention Officer and Community Property Safety Team. These teams are equipped to handle inspections, fire code compliance, and address unsecured vacant properties that pose risks to the surrounding community.

Community Safety Liaisons will continue to work with community members and stakeholders, bringing a social lens to community safety concerns and working in partnership with the community to develop community driven solutions. Community Safety Liaisons will also continue to support system navigation of municipal and enforcement resources, conduct SARA (Scan, Analyze, Respond, Assess) projects, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and community safety presentations and education.

The Edmonton Police Service (EPS) will adjust its deployment models to remain responsive, continuing to collaborate with community partners to address challenges. EPS is also exploring continued joint deployments with Alberta Health Services (AHS) paramedics to provide integrated responses where needed. These coordinated efforts will ensure that key supports remain in place, reinforcing safety and security within the community during this transition.

Community Insight

Administration continues to meet with three key stakeholders - the Chinatown BIA, the CTC and the CBA - on a quarterly basis to monitor the implementation of the actions outlined in the revalidated Chinatown Strategy.

Over 2024, in support of Council's direction for broader engagement, Administration reached out to the broader community and to young professionals, including groups such as Friends of Chinatown, Centre for Culture and Race, members of Re:VITA (a local grassroots organization), community leagues and social agencies such as Bissell Centre, Radius Health, Hope Mission and Boyle Street Community Services.

During the engagement sessions, Administration stakeholders had an opportunity to review and provide input on the revalidated Chinatown Strategy and identify their role in the implementation of Strategy actions. Some of these stakeholders have also been included in additional engagement opportunities related to the implementation of the Chinatown Infrastructure

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Improvements composite profile, which includes streetscape enhancements in Chinatown, 97 Street, 107A Avenue and the redevelopment of Mary Burlie Park; the Harbin Gate relocation; and the Chinatown Vibrancy Fund projects.

All stakeholder groups engaged have affirmed that the revalidated Chinatown Strategy aligns with current needs of the community, and no recommendations were submitted regarding any revisions to the actions. Administration has finalized the revalidated Chinatown Strategy and included it as Attachment 4.

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.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified challenges the Chinatown area has been facing since the creation of the Chinatown Strategy. Pervasive negative perceptions of safety and security remains a major concern in the region, and it has contributed significantly to reduced visitor traffic in Chinatown, though the Chinatown BIA has indicated anecdotally that sentiment is starting to turn.. The City will continue to review opportunities to strengthen safety and security in Chinatown, increasing renewed interest and investment for the local economy and celebrating it as a cultural destination. The Chinatown Vibrancy Fund will be an important piece of this work by building community cohesion, empowering residents and bolstering tourism by bringing visitors into the area through festivals, events and cultural projects.

The revalidated Chinatown Strategy aims to address issues in a holistic way by ensuring that initiatives consider the needs of all community members, including marginalized population groups. The broader engagement on the strategy reaffirmed the actions outlined in the revalidated strategy. As progress is achieved, the City may re-evaluate the strategy in 2029/2030, and the re-evaluation plan will also include a GBA+ lens during development to ensure any barriers to inclusion are mitigated, or removed, to support equality of outcomes.

Environment and Climate Review

The Environment and Climate Screening form was completed, and no significant environment or climate interactions were identified to be associated with the project.

Attachments

1. Chinatown Strategy Implementation Update - Initiatives and Progress
2. Chinatown Strategy Chinatown Transformation Collaborative's 2024-2025 Key Activities - Initiatives and Progress
3. Chinatown Strategy Chinatown Transformation Collaborative's Dragon Festival Report - Initiatives and Progress
4. The Chinatown Strategy: Energizing a Prosperous Future 2024 - Initiatives and Progress