

Public Space Management Framework - What We Heard Report

The City engaged a diverse cross-section of the Chinatown community, ensuring representation from cultural, business and social sectors:

- Cultural and Community Societies: Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA), Mah Society, Toi Shan Society, Chinese Free Masons, Ukrainian Federation of Edmonton, Chinese Graduates Association of Alberta (CGAA) and the Edmonton Chinese Garden Society.
- Business and Revitalization Groups: Chinatown Business Improvement Area (BIA), Chinatown Transformation Collaborative (CTC), RE:VITA and Longevity Guild.
- Social Agencies and Outreach: Bissell Centre, Hope Mission, Mary Burlie Family and Boyle Street Community Services.
- Safety and Coordination Partners: REACH Edmonton who facilitates the Chinatown Safety Council.
- Grassroots and Youth Collectives: Aiya Collective and Chinatown Friends.

The framework is built upon four core pillars mandated for investigation: year-round activation, cleanliness and maintenance standards, community partnerships and safety interventions.

Year-Round Activation

Community groups emphasized that activation must move beyond large, infrequent festivals toward consistent, "micro-programming" that sustains foot traffic.

- Consistency over Scale: Strong preference for regular events, such as weekly Mahjong nights, bi-monthly cultural exhibits like "Journey of the Horse" and the expansion of the successful "Chinatown After Dark" night markets.
- Youth and Family Focus: Proposals include a "Little Champs" community sports program launching in Spring 2026 and nine-man volleyball tournaments to engage families in multi-use spaces like Mary Burlie Park.
- Infrastructure and Venue Capacity: Requests for a larger community hall, as current venues are overbooked, often forcing major cultural celebrations to move to suburban malls.
- Business Rebalancing: Significant concern exists regarding the "over-saturation" of pharmacies and convenience stores (an 18:1 ratio to restaurants), which the community groups feel attracts social disorder rather than quality commercial traffic.

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- Targeted Promotion of South Chinatown: There is a specific request to promote South Chinatown as a cultural and historical hub, distinct from the business-centric North Chinatown.
- Advertising and Grant Support: Smaller societies highlighted a need for free or affordable advertising support (via the City or Explore Edmonton) to reach broader audiences. Additionally, many face language barriers and require a dedicated liaison to help identify and write grants for operations.
- Educational Heritage Focus: Beyond festivals, activation should focus on teaching Chinese history and heritage to ensure the legacy of overseas Chinese settlers is preserved.
- Parking Incentives: To attract visitors, partners suggested creative parking solutions, such as keeping parking free in South Chinatown or partnering with nearby malls (like Kingsway) to shuttle visitors into the area.

Community groups also identified the 97th Street Bridge (overpass) as a critical opportunity for transformation from a perceived barrier into a community asset.

- Gateway Installation: Use the bridge as a physical gateway by installing "Welcome to Chinatown" banners or permanent artwork. Bring back the original Harbin Gate to the community and activate it as a potential gateway to the community.
- Pedestrian Activation: Repurpose the bridge into a public promenade where residents can sit and have coffee, creating a safe walkway that connects Station Lands to Mary Burlie Park.
- Promenade Concept: Implement the "Elevated Promenade Concept," incorporating cultural design elements to improve visual appeal and encourage tourist foot traffic in South Chinatown.

Cleanliness and Maintenance Standards

Cleanliness is viewed as a prerequisite for safety, yet community groups feel current efforts are hampered by funding constraints and a lack of coordination.

- Professionalized Daily Cleaning: Overwhelming support for a City-funded, professional daily cleaning team—potentially hiring community members with lived experience—to handle biohazards and litter daily.
- Snow Management on Redeveloped Streets: Wider sidewalks on 98th Street and 106th Avenue have created an unsustainable snow-shoveling burden for local nonprofits; City-managed removal is requested to prevent traffic issues on narrowed roads.

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- Donation Waste Management: A permit or registration system is proposed for independent aid groups to ensure they are responsible for waste removal and provide washroom access.
- Sanitation Infrastructure: Demand for secure, "bear-proof" industrialized waste bins and managed public washrooms to address public sanitation issues.
- Integrated Cleanup and Outreach: A proposal was made to create a trained cleaning team that also performs outreach, de-escalation and "informal tour guide" duties to provide better value for money than siloed services.
- Alleyway Infrastructure: Specific maintenance focus is needed for back alleys in South Chinatown, which are often neglected compared to street frontages.
- Commercial Waste Coordination: Businesses suggested coordinating commercial waste bins to achieve economies of scale and better control alley odours and dumping schedules.

Community Partnerships

Success depends on a unified governance structure that moves away from fragmented communication and concentrated funding.

- Inclusive Representation: The City should ensure smaller societies and diverse cultural groups beyond dominant narratives have an equal seat at the table.
- Agency Responsibility: Social agencies receiving City funding should be held strictly accountable for the cleanliness and safety of the public spaces immediately surrounding their properties. In addition, some groups wanted the City to explore duplication of social services.
- Capacity Building: Requests for a dedicated liaison to help smaller organizations with language barriers identify and apply for security and operational grants.
- Professional Mediation: A central suggestion was to hire a professional mediator to bring together over 23 community groups to resolve internal "egos" and work toward common goals.
- South Chinatown Integration: Groups in South Chinatown feel isolated from the existing Business Improvement Area (BIA) and require a facilitated discussion on how to better represent their specific interests.
- Funding Transparency: Smaller groups expressed frustration regarding the concentration of funding in large festivals and called for more equitable grant sharing.

Safety Interventions

Community groups identified a severe trust deficit, with many businesses feeling the current response is insufficient to deter crime or social disorder.

- **Beat Policing and Visible Patrols:** Strong advocacy for permanent "Beat Cops" assigned to specific areas to build familiarity and presence, rather than infrequent car patrols.
- **Community Care Teams:** Advocacy for non-armed outreach teams on foot, trained in de-escalation, first aid and cultural sensitivity (ideally Mandarin/Cantonese/Vietnamese speaking).
- **The HSOC Review:** Significant frustration regarding the discontinuation of the Healthy Streets Operation Centre (HSOC) pilot without clear alternatives; community groups requested a review or renewal of this multidisciplinary approach.
- **Restorative Justice:** Interest in a Community Service Restitution Program where individuals committing minor offences (vandalism, graffiti) repair the damage rather than solely receiving fines.
- **"Beat Cop" Training Specifics:** The request for beat policing includes a desire for officers to be multi-disciplinary and multilingual, with specific training in cultural humility and trauma-informed care.
- **CCTV and Security Grants:** Smaller organizations specifically requested funding for closed-loop cameras and alarm systems to protect their facilities from frequent break-ins.
- **Business De-escalation Training:** There is a need for the City to provide training for business owners on how to safely handle intoxicated individuals without defaulting to a 911 call.
- **Multilingual Emergency Services:** Advocacy for further investment in multilingual 911 and 211 services, as non-English speakers often feel more "heard" and better treated through 211.

Estimated Costs for Proposed Initiatives

All cost estimates are expressed in Canadian dollars (CAD) and are planning-level estimates based on comparable City of Edmonton programs and service models. Only initiatives that are in the purview of the City have been priced out. Safety and security was one of the major themes in all of the discussions; however, the proposed approaches to building a more safe community varied among the groups. Preference for enhanced cleanliness and maintenance standards was equally desired as year-round activation of the Chinatown but were less prioritized compared to safety interventions. The following proposed initiatives are presented in the manner to highlight this prioritization.

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Safety Interventions

Initiative	Estimated Annual Cost	Assumptions	Responsibility
CCTV and security grant program	\$3.3M* (one time)	Small grants to organizations/businesses	Chinatown Recovery and Community Safety Liaisons
Dedicated Community Safety Liaison (1 FTE)	\$120,000	Salary and benefits	Social Development, Community Safety

Cleanliness and Maintenance Standards

Initiative	Estimated Annual Cost	Assumptions	Responsibility
Daily professional cleaning team (7 days/week)	\$610,000 - \$910,000	4-6 FTEs including biohazard training	City Operations, Parks and Roads Services
Secure industrial waste bins (capital and servicing)	To be determined	The City does not currently provide the service and would need to tender it	External contract
Managed public washrooms (2 units)	\$350,000 (one time for prefabricated washroom unit)* plus \$330,000/annum for 2 attendants working 14 hrs/day \$60,000-\$84,000 for renting and servicing of a mobile washroom with 2 stalls	Includes attendants, cleaning and monitoring	Facility Planning Design, Integrated Infrastructure Services

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Year-Round Activation

Initiative	Estimated Annual Cost	Assumptions	Responsibility
Micro-programming	\$400,000 – \$600,000	40–60 small activations per year at \$6k–\$10k each	Chinatown Recovery Team
Dedicated grant and language liaison (1 FTE)	\$90,000 – \$120,000	Salary and benefits range for client relations specialist	Chinatown Recovery Team