

COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCILLORS

SUBJECT: "WHAT WE HEARD" - FINDINGS FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ON RECONCILIATION FOR HISTORIC DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHINESE CANADIANS

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT staff be authorized to prepare recommendations to support a formal apology for historic discrimination against Chinese Canadians, as outlined in Section 3.0 of the report titled “‘What We Heard’ – Findings from Community Engagement on Reconciliation for Historic Discrimination against Chinese Canadians”, of the Community Heritage Commission meeting, dated February 13, 2025;

THAT the work of the Chinese Canadian Reconciliation Advisory Group in providing advice for community engagement be acknowledged by Mayor and Council, and appreciation expressed for their contribution to the project; and

THAT a copy of this report be advanced to the Social Planning Committee and the Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee for information.

REPORT

The Community Heritage Commission, at its meeting held on February 13, 2025, received and adopted the *attached* report to share findings from the community engagement process on reconciliation for historic discrimination against Chinese Canadians and to seek authorization to prepare recommendations for a formal apology.

On behalf of the Community Heritage
Commission,

Councillor D. Tetrault
Chair

Councillor R. T. Lee
Vice Chair

TO: COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION (CHC)

FROM: GENERAL MANAGER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

SUBJECT: **“WHAT WE HEARD” – FINDINGS FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ON RECONCILIATION FOR HISTORIC DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHINESE CANADIANS**

PURPOSE: To share findings from the community engagement process on reconciliation for historic discrimination against Chinese Canadians and to seek authorization to prepare recommendations for a formal apology.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT staff be authorized to prepare recommendations to support a formal apology for historic discrimination against Chinese Canadians, as outlined in Section 3.0 of the report titled “What We Heard” – Findings from Community Engagement on Reconciliation for Historic Discrimination against Chinese Canadians”, dated February 13, 2025;

THAT the work of the Chinese Canadian Reconciliation Advisory Group in providing advice for community engagement be acknowledged by Mayor and Council, and appreciation expressed for their contribution to the project; and

THAT a copy of this report be advanced to the Social Planning Committee and the Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report shares the findings from community engagement on the topic of reconciliation for the City’s historic discrimination against Chinese Canadians. The report also seeks Council’s authorization to prepare recommendations to support a formal apology for historic discrimination against Chinese Canadians.

1.0 POLICY SECTION

Commemoration of Burnaby’s unique history and acknowledgement of the contributions of diverse community members are supported by the following policies:

- Official Community Plan (1998);
- Burnaby Social Sustainability Strategy (2011); and
- Burnaby Anti-Racism Framework (2024).

2.0 BACKGROUND

Historical research to uncover the stories of the diverse communities that have contributed to the development of Burnaby has revealed information about the histories of early Chinese Canadian settlers, and of the historic discrimination they faced from all levels of government, including the District Municipality of Burnaby (now the City of Burnaby). In October 2022, staff were asked by the Community Heritage Commission to prepare a report summarizing the discriminatory laws, regulations, and policies of the City of Burnaby that had discriminated against people of Chinese descent and provide recommendations for a community consultation process in support of reconciliation, including a formal apology.

A summary of the City's historical discrimination against people of Chinese descent is provided below, as well as the subsequent direction received from Council to engage with the community on the topic of a formal apology for historic discrimination against Chinese Canadians.

2.1 Historic Discrimination Impacting People of Chinese Descent

People of Chinese descent began settling in Burnaby in the 1890s, and engaged in a wide range of economic activities, including forestry, agriculture, and domestic work. Many also established businesses in the early 20th century, including laundries, green grocery stores, farms, and piggeries. They often leased land from European landowners due to restrictions that largely prevented them from owning land.

Chinese Canadians experienced discrimination from all levels of government, in addition to social restrictions due to pervasive anti-Asian racism. Discriminatory actions by the Municipality of Burnaby between 1892 and 1947 included activities that restricted the ability of Chinese Canadians to earn a livelihood in Burnaby and made it difficult for them to own land; there are also several examples of Council endorsing petitions from Burnaby residents and organizations, and from other local governments, to advocate for other levels of government to introduce discriminatory laws. Further information about the City's discriminatory practices, and the histories of early Chinese Canadian community members, can be found in Attachment 1.

Council took steps to begin dismantling Burnaby's discriminatory framework in the 1940s. On August 4, 1947, Council approved a resolution to the Union of BC Municipalities advocating for updating the *BC Municipal Elections Act* to enable South Asian and Chinese citizens to vote. Later that year, the prohibition against Chinese and South Asian citizens from voting in provincial and municipal elections was removed.

2.2 Council Direction

At its February 27, 2023, meeting, Council adopted a recommendation of the Community Heritage Commission (CHC) to implement a framework for community consultation to support acknowledgement of, and a formal apology for, historic discrimination against Chinese Canadians (Attachment 1).

The framework identified two reports to be advanced to Council: this "What We Heard" report, which shares engagement findings and outlines suggested next steps to advance an apology, and a final report. With Council's approval of the recommendations of this report,

staff will prepare a final report, which will include recommendations for actions to support reconciliation, including a proposed plan for a formal apology to take place in fall 2025. The final report would be advanced directly to Council in the spring of 2025.

It is noted that the February 27, 2023, report stated that both reports would be advanced to Council through the CHC. This report proposes advancing the next report directly to Council, as the bi-monthly CHC meeting schedule conflicts with the timing of key steps to achieve the apology in fall 2025. To maintain involvement of CHC and Social Planning Committee members it will be recommended that a copy of the final report be forwarded to the CHC and Social Planning Committee for information.

3.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement was guided by input from the Chinese Canadian Reconciliation Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) and delivered by Burnaby Family Life as the host of the Burnaby Intercultural Planning Table (BIPT), with additional input and support from staff.

Many of the participants in the engagement were aware of apologies and apology processes previously undertaken by the Government of Canada (2006), Province of BC (2014), City of Vancouver (2018), and City of New Westminster (2010) to apologize for historic discrimination against Chinese Canadians. Knowledge of these previous processes shaped expectations, including that the City of Burnaby's process would be grounded in historical research and would include a formal apology issued by Mayor and Council that includes a commitment to future actions.

Burnaby's engagement process and findings were also shaped by Burnaby's unique historical context and community character, and the timing of the process. Specifically, Burnaby's process was shaped by the community's hyper-diversity, the timing of the engagement following the COVID-19 pandemic, and by an interest in seeing the City actively promote intercultural and intergenerational understanding.

- **Hyper-Diversity:** From the earliest period of settlement, newcomers from throughout the globe made their homes on the unceded lands we know today as Burnaby. Burnaby's history does not include the development of ethnic enclaves where a concentration of people from a specific cultural group established homes and businesses.

While engagement for the apology processes in neighbouring New Westminster and Vancouver surfaced a high level of interest in the preservation and commemoration of Chinatowns, engagement findings for the Burnaby process indicate support for an approach that would identify and recognize spaces throughout Burnaby that are culturally and historically significant to Chinese Canadian community members, in order to raise the visibility of Chinese Canadian history and culture.

- **Post-pandemic Engagement:** Burnaby's process was shaped by its timing, taking place in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise in anti-Asian racism that occurred during the pandemic. A desire to see the City address anti-Asian racism and discrimination against racialized community members more broadly was identified as a high priority throughout the engagement.

- **Intercultural and Intergenerational Understanding:** Engagement activities revealed a desire to see the City implement actions to promote intercultural and intergenerational understanding, with the goal of Burnaby being a community where people are knowledgeable about the cultures and traditions of their neighbours. There was a strong interest in actions that are future-oriented to create a strong sense of belonging for community members of all cultural backgrounds in Burnaby.

Further information on the engagement process and its findings are provided below.

3.1 Community Engagement Program Delivered by BIPT

A robust program of community engagement took place, guided by the work of the Advisory Group, and delivered in partnership with BIPT. This work began with the recruitment of the Advisory Group to provide input and advice to staff in developing a communications and engagement plan. The Advisory Group has provided input to staff and BIPT on the implementation of the engagement activities. A list of Advisory Group members with brief biographies has been provided as Attachment 2. As the community engagement phase of the work has now been completed, this report includes a recommendation to Council to acknowledge the work of the Advisory Group and extend appreciation for their contribution.

Outreach and engagement were delivered in Cantonese and Mandarin as well as English, with printed materials available in English and translated into simplified and traditional Chinese. Activities included a survey, two community dialogue sessions, six focus groups, and five in-depth interviews. A meeting was also hosted to get specific input from members of Chinese Canadian families with a deep historical connection to Burnaby, as the descendants of community members who were directly impacted by historic discrimination.

A summary of engagement activities is included in Attachment 3.

3.2 Engagement Activities Delivered by Staff

Public input was also requested through a survey hosted at Burnaby.ca. The survey was launched on October 17, 2023, and results were tabulated on July 23, 2024. 45 responses were received, with the majority of respondents self-identifying as Chinese Canadian or as a member of a Chinese diaspora community. The priorities identified by survey respondents were incorporated into the proposed actions for reconciliation that were prioritized at the second community dialogue hosted by BIPT.

City staff were engaged with the process through a staff survey and a lunchtime learning event. The staff survey was launched on April 8, 2024, and closed on May 12, 2024. The lunchtime learning event was held in the Council chambers on April 9, 2024, to encourage participation in the survey, and to share historical background on Chinese Canadian history in Burnaby and historic discrimination, including Bylaw 4 that prohibited employment of Chinese and Japanese workers by the municipality and its contractors.

75 responses were received to the staff survey. The survey results indicated a high level of support for providing staff with learning opportunities about the diverse cultural traditions of City staff, and Burnaby's history of past discrimination and its journey toward equity and

inclusion. The staff who completed the survey also indicated a high level of awareness of City learning resources available to staff and the community, including exhibits and publications at the Burnaby Village Museum, digital resources on heritageburnaby.ca, and through the Heritage Planning program (including the Chinese Canadian History in Burnaby resource guide).

Staff also developed a set of pop-up banners for display at the City's Canada Day events in 2023 and 2024 to mark the centenary of the *Chinese Exclusion Act* of 1923. The banners provided background on the *Chinese Exclusion Act* and other discriminatory legislation that targeted Chinese Canadians, Chinese Canadian history in Burnaby, and Burnaby's Chinese Canadian Reconciliation process.

3.3 What We Heard: Apologizing for Historic Wrongs

Engagement activities that took place between October 2023 and October 2024 included asking participants about whether they felt the City should apologize for its historic discrimination, and to share what they felt should be included in an apology.

This feedback was used to develop a draft apology framework (Attachment 3), which was discussed with the Advisory Group members and representatives of Burnaby's historic Chinese Canadian families at an engagement session in April 2024, and further refined with their input. The apology framework was also shared with the attendees of a Community Dialogue session held in June 2024, and at a joint workshop for the Community Heritage Commission and Social Planning Committee in October 2024.

The structure of the proposed apology framework is to acknowledge, recognize, apologize, and commit to ongoing actions. The proposed framework provides content that can be included in an apology, as well as guidance on the delivery of the apology. It also proposes that the apology include a commitment to immediate actions and to long-term commitments to address the legacy of historic discrimination against Chinese Canadians and other racialized community members.

3.4 What We Heard: Actions and Commitments

Engagement participants expressed a high level of support for a formal City apology for its historic discrimination against people of Chinese descent living in Burnaby between 1892 and 1947. The engagement also identified actions the City could take to promote reconciliation for historic wrongs and address the legacy of historic discrimination.

Suggested actions include increasing the visibility of Chinese Canadian history and culture in public spaces, facilitating activities to preserve and share Chinese Canadian culture and history, addressing anti-Asian racism, and reducing barriers and encouraging inclusion for community members of all backgrounds.

In the context of this work, an action is a specific deliverable, such as an event, publication, or program. A commitment is a lesson or value that will extend past the timeframe of the apology and its associated actions.

A summary of proposed actions and commitments generated through community engagement is included as Attachment 4. The actions generated through the engagement process provide many options that can be considered. Further work is required by staff to consider the actions and commitments the City could undertake as part of the formal apology. Recommended actions will be included for Council's consideration in the upcoming final report.

3.5 Community Heritage Commission and Social Planning Committee Workshop

A workshop was held in October 2024 for members of the Social Planning Committee (SPC) and the CHC. The workshop was authorized by Council at its September 25, 2023, meeting, in response to a recommendation of the CHC. This workshop was separate from the engagement activities organized by BIPT, which took place after BIPT had prepared their final report. A summary of the feedback received in that workshop is included here, to supplement the community engagement findings.

The Commissioners and Committee members in attendance were provided with an opportunity to participate in the same engagement activities that took place at the June 2024 Community Dialogue sessions. The activities were designed to solicit input into the proposed apology framework and facilitate review and prioritization of suggested actions generated through the previous community engagement activities.

The strongest level of support from the attendees was for actions related to increasing the visibility of Chinese Canadian culture and history in Burnaby. Support was also expressed for actions to facilitate activities to preserve and share Chinese Canadian culture and history, and actions to reduce barriers and encourage inclusion for community members of all backgrounds.

The discussion included the suggestion that "reconciliation" may not be the correct term to describe the work, and that alternate language (such as "redress") could be used to underline that the apology is an opportunity to remedy historical wrongs. Moving away from the term "reconciliation" could also help to differentiate this work from the City's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. This feedback will be considered as a communications and engagement plan for the next phases of the work is developed.

Members present at the meeting also discussed the potential of the City to use policy and other levers unique to local government to redress historic discrimination and its legacy. Such actions could include updates to agriculture and food security policies to support the contemporary agricultural community, which include descendants of Chinese farmers impacted by historic discrimination as well as farms run by community members representing diverse cultural roots. Redress for historical wrongs and their legacy could also include committing to ensuring the planning of public spaces will consider how such spaces can facilitate cultural practices and be welcoming to diverse community members.

The input from the workshop will be considered by a cross-department project working group that has been formed to consider the engagement findings and identify actions and long-term commitments for the consideration of Council.

3.6 Future Communications and Engagement

With Council's adoption of the recommendations of this report, the report would be posted on the City's webpage dedicated to the Chinese Canadian Reconciliation Framework. It is anticipated that members of the Advisory Group will remain engaged in the work and provide input to staff on planning for the apology.

No further engagement is planned in relation to this specific report. A communications and engagement plan would be a component of the plan for a formal apology.

4.0 NEXT STEPS

With Council's adoption of the recommendations of this report, staff will develop a plan for the formal apology event and recommended actions and long-term commitments for the consideration of Council. A report outlining a proposed event plan and recommended actions and commitments would be advanced to Council in spring 2025.

5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Funding for the planning and execution of a formal apology event is included in the 2025 operating budget for the Planning and Development Department. Financial considerations for the implementation of actions and commitments will be included in a future report.

Respectfully submitted,

E.W. Kozak, General Manager Planning and Development

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Framework for Reconciliation with Burnaby's Chinese Canadian Community (2023.02.27)

Attachment 2 – Chinese Canadian Reconciliation Advisory Group Members

Attachment 3 – Chinese Canadian Reconciliation Project Community Engagement Final Report – September 2024

Attachment 4 – Proposed Actions and Commitments for Further Consideration

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

This report was prepared by Lisa Codd, Planner 2, and reviewed by Daniel Chen, Planning Assistant 3, Rose Wu, Planning Assistant 3, Lily Ford, Planner 3, Johannes Schumann, Director Community Planning and Lee-Ann Garnett, Deputy General Manager.