

TO: MAYOR & COUNCILLORS
FROM: GENERAL MANAGER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
SUBJECT: **APOLOGY FOR HISTORIC DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PEOPLE OF CHINESE DESCENT**
PURPOSE: To seek Council approval to hold a formal apology event and implement reconciliatory actions to address the City's historic discrimination against people of Chinese descent.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT a Special Council Meeting and event be held on November 15, 2025, to formally apologize for the City's historic discrimination against people of Chinese descent, as outlined in Section 3.0 of the report titled "Apology for Historic Discrimination Against People of Chinese Descent" dated June 10, 2025; and

THAT staff be authorized to implement the reconciliatory actions outlined in Section 3.0 of this report.

1.0 POLICY SECTION

Commemoration of Burnaby's unique history and acknowledgement of the contributions of community members from diverse cultural backgrounds are supported by the following policies:

- Draft Official Community Plan (2025);
- Burnaby Corporate Strategic Plan (2022);
- Burnaby Social Sustainability Strategy (2011); and
- Burnaby Anti-Racism Framework (2024).

2.0 BACKGROUND

On February 27, 2023, 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.

The findings from the community consultation are contained in a report titled "What We Heard – Findings from Community Engagement on Reconciliation for Historic Discrimination Against Chinese Canadians" dated February 25, 2025. Council approved the report's recommendations, authorizing staff to prepare recommendations to Council to support a formal apology.

This report outlines recommendations for a formal apology and includes proposed actions to advance reconciliation for historic discrimination and address its legacy.

3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

Between October 2023 and October 2024, a robust community engagement process was delivered by Burnaby Family Life (as host of the Burnaby Intercultural Planning Table), with support from staff. Engagement included a survey, community dialogue sessions, focus groups, a special meeting with historic family representatives, and one-on-one interviews. Engagement was planned and implemented with input from a community-based Chinese Canadian Reconciliation Advisory Group. The engagement surfaced a desire for the City to recognize the hardship that early Chinese settlers faced, including discrimination by the District Municipality of Burnaby. There was strong support for the City apologizing for its historic discrimination, as well as taking actions to reconcile past actions and address the legacy of historic discrimination.

Community members who belong to Chinese diaspora communities continue to face anti-Asian racism in Burnaby and note that there are very few public historical representations of Chinese Canadian settlers who contributed to Burnaby's development. Examples include a lack of Chinese Canadian namesakes for streets or civic facilities, and a lack of awareness by many that early Burnaby settlers included people from Asia. 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.

Increasing the visible history of people of Chinese descent was identified as an important way to honour the early settlers who faced hardship, and to present a more accurate history of Burnaby.

Participants also identified actions the City could take to acknowledge past harms, and to commit to building a future that is safe and welcoming for all community members. Suggested actions include supporting access to intercultural education, 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-focused to create a strong sense of belonging for community members of all cultural backgrounds in Burnaby.

Based on the engagement findings, a plan for a formal apology is outlined below, along with proposed actions and commitments to address the legacy of historic discrimination, as well as continued support for Burnaby's development as a diverse and welcoming community.

3.1 Formal Apology

Engagement with the community resulted in development of a draft apology framework, which has been included in Attachment 1 to this report, and was previously shared with Council in the February 25 report titled "What We Heard – Findings from Community

Engagement on Reconciliation for Historic Discrimination Against Chinese Canadians.” The framework provides content that can be included in the apology, as well as guidance on how to deliver the apology.

The proposed plan for the apology event is outlined below:

Staff will coordinate with the Mayor’s Office to prepare a formal apology, which is proposed to be delivered at a Special Council meeting on November 15, 2025. The Special Council meeting will be part of an hour-long event that will include an official welcome and territorial acknowledgement, presentations to share the background and purpose of the event, and the convening of a Special Council meeting where the apology will be read in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin. The event will close with an opportunity for attendees to share refreshments and connect with one another.

November 15 is the date proposed for the apology because of its proximity to Remembrance Day. This year marks the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The proximity of the apology to Remembrance Day provides an opportunity to highlight the contributions of Chinese Canadian veterans to the war effort, and to recognize the important role that veterans played in advocating for rights for Chinese Canadians after the war, including the right to vote.

The proposed venue for the Special Council meeting is the Crystal Ballroom at the Hilton Vancouver Metrotown, located at 6083 McKay Avenue. The venue provides adequate seating for the 200+ attendees anticipated to attend, is easily accessed by transit, and is significant for its location adjacent to Crystal Mall, which is an important contemporary cultural space for many members of Chinese diaspora communities. The location also holds historical significance, as the present-day Crystal Mall site was previously owned by Burnaby’s Larry and Kathy Lee who operated the iconic Dragon Inn restaurant. Further information on the Lee family and the restaurant are included in Attachment 2.

The Hilton Vancouver Metrotown is also proximate to Civic Square and the Bob Prittie Metrotown Library, which creates opportunities for pre-event public programming.

3.2 Actions and Commitments

The community engagement activities that took place between October 2023 and October 2024 drew hundreds of community members who provided input into the work of shaping the apology and proposing reconciliatory actions.

Participants in the engagement process expressed a high level of support for a formal apology from the City 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 redress for historic wrongs and address the legacy of historic discrimination.

Attachment 3 of this report outlines the proposed actions and commitments the City could undertake as part of the apology. The suggested actions include specific

deliverables, such as events, publications, and programs. The actions fall within the three themes identified through community consultation:

- Increase the visibility of Chinese Canadian history and culture in public spaces;
- Facilitate activities to preserve and share Chinese Canadian culture and history; and
- Reduce barriers and encourage inclusion.

Attachment 3 also identifies existing City policies that support a long-term commitment to diversity and inclusion, and policy work in progress that provides opportunities to embed inclusion, equity, and anti-racism in the work of the City going forward. Community members expressed that the apology should include a commitment to ensure similar harms do not take place in the future: using the City's policy tools to embed the lessons learned from examining this chapter of Burnaby's history is a powerful opportunity to commit to a future as a welcoming and inclusive community.

4.0 COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A communications plan is being developed to raise public awareness of the apology event. Staff will ensure that members of historic families and community members who participated in engagement activities will receive email invitations to attend.

A long-term plan for communicating with the community for events, programs, and other initiatives related to the actions is also being prepared. This plan is included in the actions outlined in Attachment 3, and costs for implementation are outlined in Attachment 4, which identifies financial considerations.

5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Costs for the apology event are included in the 2025-2030 financial plan. Estimated costs for implementing the proposed actions in 2026 through 2031 are included in Attachment 4 to this report. With Council's adoption of the recommendations of this report, financial resources to support the proposed actions will be advanced to Council through the draft 2026-2031 financial plan.

Respectfully submitted,

Lee-Ann Garnett, Deputy General Manager, on behalf of E.W. Kozak, General Manager
Planning and Development

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Proposed Apology Framework
Attachment 2 – The Dragon Inn and the Lee Family
Attachment 3 – Proposed Actions and Commitments
Attachment 4 – Estimated Costs for Proposed Actions

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

This report was prepared by Lisa Codd, Planner 2, and reviewed by Rose Wu, Planning Assistant 3, Lily Ford, Planner 3, and Johannes Schumann, Director Community Planning.

The proposed actions and commitments were generated by a cross-department project working group consisting of staff from Planning and Development, Corporate Services, Parks, Recreation, and Culture, Community Safety, the Burnaby Public Library, People and Culture, and the Customer Service Centre. The content of Attachment 3 and Attachment 4 included with this report was reviewed by the department heads of these departments and divisions.