

CHINATOWN ENGAGEMENT

Phase 1 What We Heard Report

September 2016

Executive Summary

The Planning Chinatown project is focused on working with Calgary's Chinese community and other stakeholders to understand the issues, opportunities and outcomes that are important for preserving Chinatown's unique cultural identity and history, while ensuring revitalization of the area supports a vision for Chinatown that is sustainable, thriving and culturally vibrant.

The project was initiated by a City Council referral motion on April 11, 2016. This motion directed City staff to:

- develop a community-wide, City-led engagement process that identifies, through a scoping report, key work to be addressed in a new Chinatown Area Redevelopment Plan and identifies preliminary topics, issues and aspirations conveyed by a range of stakeholders;
- provide a supplementary planning report to Council on the subject application CPC2015-183, with recommendations, as appropriate; and,
- coordinate with the ongoing current engagement projects in Chinatown including the Chinatown Retail Strategy, Green Line Project and Centre City Guidebook.

Between May and August of 2016, the City of Calgary led a variety of engagement activities as part of the initial phase of engagement. This feedback is being used to help create draft principles, which will be part of the engagement process in phase 2, which will occur in September 2016.

During the initial phase of engagement, nearly 2,000 participants shared over 3,700 ideas in response to our questions in phase 1.

Process

During the initial phase of engagement, nearly 2,000 participants have contributed over 3,600 ideas to the engagement questions. The engagement methods for feedback collection during phase 1 include:

- An information session on May 26, 2016. This presentation provided initial information about the project and asked for community views on Chinatown.
- An online survey via the Planning Chinatown website
- A sounding board (on 3rd Avenue at 1st Street SE)
- 8 on-street engagement events in Chinatown
- 2 indoor engagement events
- 1 face-to-face session at T&T supermarket northeast

- 18 Stakeholder Interviews
- E-mail correspondence

The Planning Chinatown process was communicated through a number of channels including:

- Sounding Board
- Mail dropped postcards distributed to tenants, neighbours, passersby
- The Planning Chinatown project website
- A targeted Stakeholder letter via City of Calgary
- Social media
- City Events Vehicle
- E-news updates
- Community Newspaper Advertisements
- Local Radio Advertisements

To engage the community informally on the street, three oral languages (English, Cantonese and Mandarin) and three written forms (English, Simplified and Traditional) were provided. In addition to English speaking staff, a Cantonese and a Mandarin speaker were both on-hand at most events. All of the information boards during the engagement process were provided in English, Simplified and Traditional Chinese to allow stakeholders to participate in the language of their choice. In addition, the project website and related engagement questions were provided in English and Simplified Chinese.

What we asked

The engagement questions asked were framed around the Chinatown of today and the Chinatown of the future. The questions asked for each were:

Chinatown Today

1. Why is Chinatown special to you?
2. What are the most important issues facing Chinatown today? How do you think we can address these issues?

Chinatown Tomorrow

3. Think about the future of Chinatown. What are you most worried about?
4. As Calgary evolves, how can we plan for changes in Chinatown while preserving the character of the community?
5. Imagine your ideal Chinatown 20 years in the future. What does it look like? How does it feel?

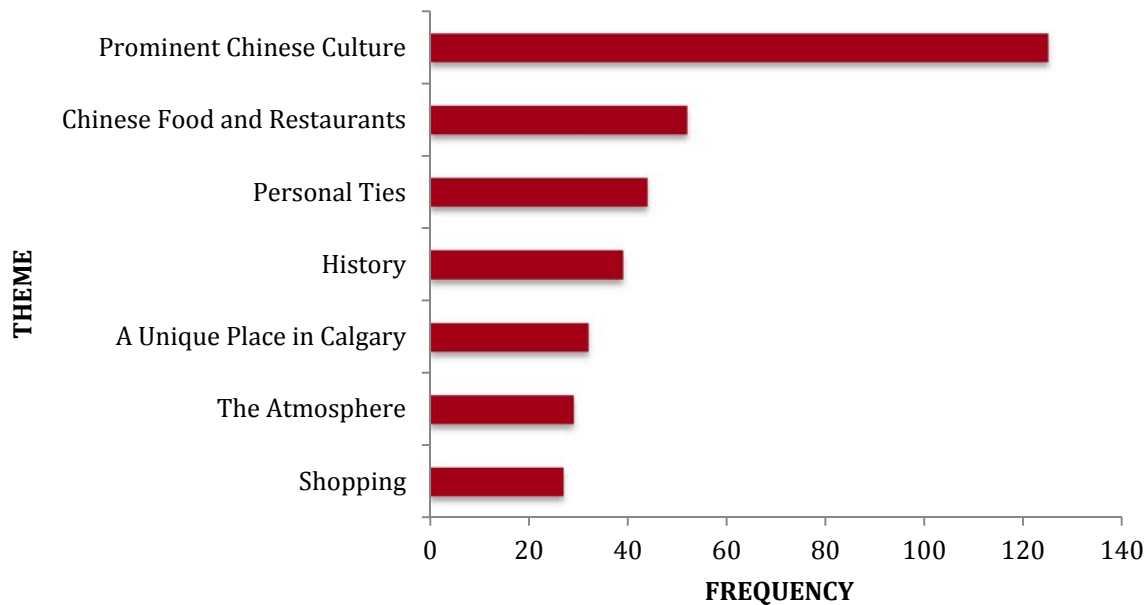
What We've Heard

The following charts summarize the feedback that was collected from the community through all methods of engagement. The charts highlight

opportunities and challenges facing Chinatown today and in the future. This snapshot highlights the top themes emerging in response to each question and is not a conclusive reflection of all input received.

The following charts display both the top themes that were heard for each question and the popularity of each theme by frequency. Verbatim quotes are also shared to highlight some of the responses received for the engagement questions.

Why is Chinatown special to you?



The most popular response heard in reply to why Chinatown is special to people today is that it has a visual look and feel that reflects the culture of the Chinese-Canadian community. This prominent identity creates connection and ties to the space for people in many ways. For some, it's a place that resembles a home from their past, for others a hidden attraction in their vast city.

The next most popular themes to emerge in response to this question were Chinese food and restaurant options as well as having personal ties to the community. Known by many as the go-to place for Chinese food, the reputation of these and other Asian inspired speciality dishes were top of mind for people who offered input. Personal ties referred to the connections people have with Chinatown on an emotional level, usually associated to memories or tradition. Chinatown is special for some because this is or was their home or their regular place to meet with family and friends. For others, it is seen as a symbol of the Chinese experience in Calgary.

Examples of comments received on this question include:

“While a site of past discrimination and an important reminder of the past, I think it also has potential for the future to be a bridge between cultures.”

“It’s a nice break from the westernization of Calgary’s downtown core, architecturally and historically.”

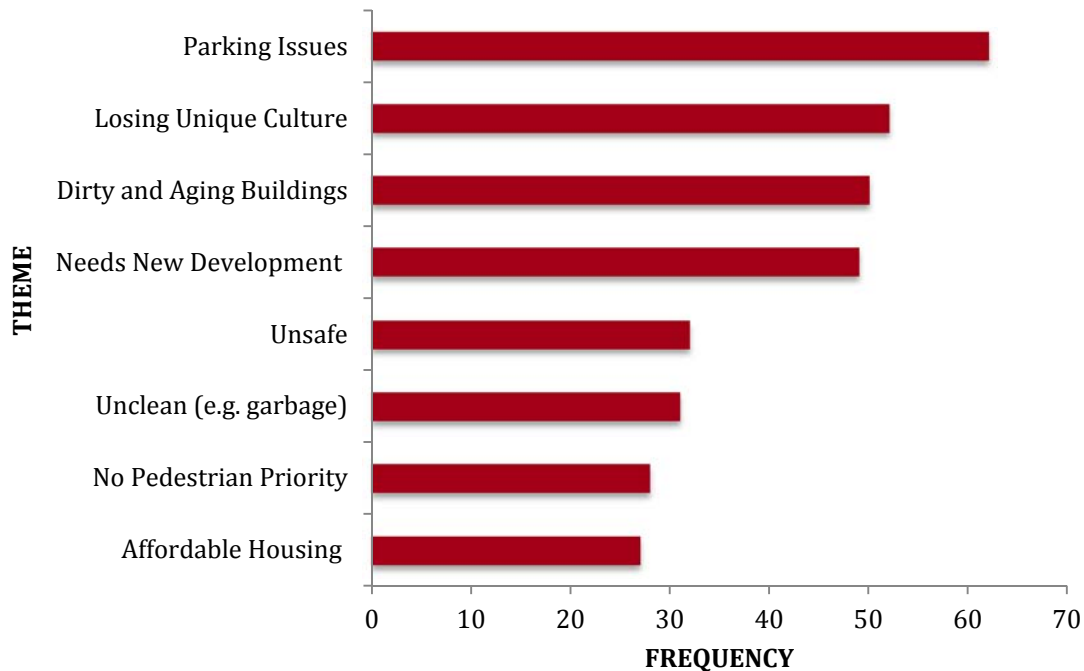
“It is a home or a place that resembles home for a lot of Chinese descendants”

“Chinatown provides a different aspect to the city, it gives Calgary a more cultural feel.”

“It’s has a unique set of stores that are not found anywhere else in the city”

“I feel at home, a very warm feeling”

What are the most important issues facing Chinatown today? How do you think we can address these issues?



Parking emerged as the area of highest concern in Chinatown today. This issue stemmed from two main arguments – lack of parking spaces and the high cost of parking. The lack of parking discussion highlighted activities, such as illegal parking and over parking, which limits the access and availability of parking spaces.

The next most popular themes heard was that Chinatown were losing unique culture and having dirty and aging buildings. The first, losing unique character,

ran in parallel to prominent Chinese culture being what is special about Chinatown, however there are strong feelings that culture is being lost, mainly through westernization. More cultural character via architecture was strongly recommended. In terms of existing structures, many are perceived to be dirty, old and even derelict. Most people want to see these cleaned up inside and out.

Many other thoughts and ideas about issues in Chinatown were shared including:

“Fear the crime, especially the Car Park.”

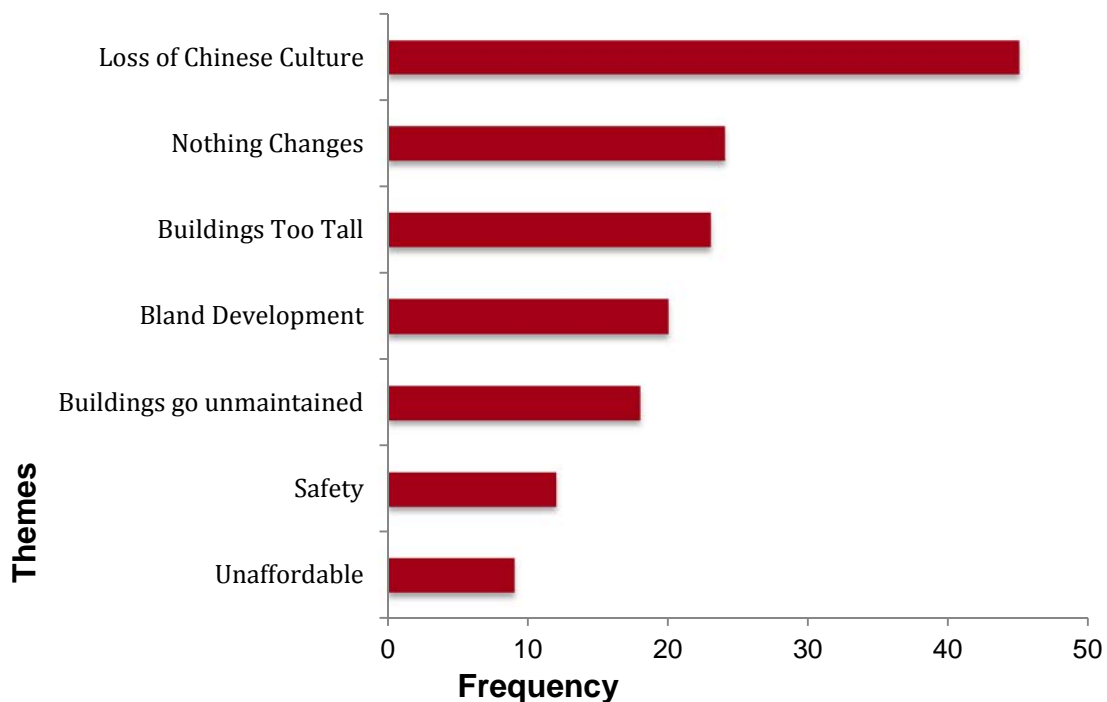
“Safety (walkability)”

“I think Chinatown needs a major clean up! The stores and malls are run down, streets are always dirty, it definitely doesnt feel like a clean part of downtown. Its unfortunate because location is great, and i love the chinese culture.”

“Driving is an issue, people running stop signs.”

“We need to build more low-rent housing, smaller suites, with necessary everyday facilities but not too many sports facilities that the elderly won’t use”

Think about the future of Chinatown. What are you most worried about?



Similar to the responses heard about issues today, the worry for the future is the potential loss of elements that make the reflect the Chinese culture. Many participants also expressed concern for Chinatown being in stagnation or decline due to a lack of growth in population and development of buildings and

businesses. There is some worry that without replenishing Chinatown for the next generation there will be no desire for people to move there in the future.

Other comments around people's concerns for the future of Chinatown included:

"Stagnation. Little has changed here the last decade or so. Needs to evolve."

"Any changes should follow the ARP (height, density, character)."

"Public safety. More secure. Theft. worry about getting beat up"

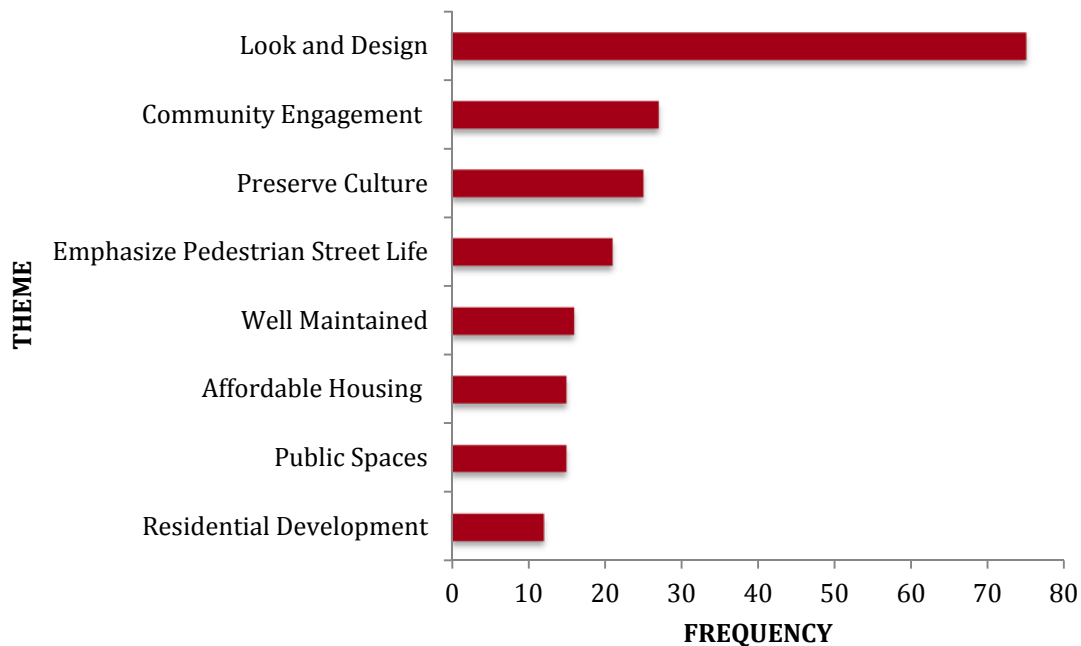
"Need more residential presence. Critical mass to support commercial."

"Cheap bland buildings that have no architectural controls and are not well kept."

"Lack of maintenance and upgrade leading to a shabby section of town, or subsumed into the city as a whole losing its identity."

"Chinatown is a residential with minor ancillary commercial but office highrise. Worry about high rise taking over."

As Calgary evolves, how can we plan for changes in Chinatown while preserving the character of the community?



The look and design of Chinatown was the most prominent theme heard for this question. There were many sub-categories to this theme, with 'being unique and representing culture' and 'proper building design' coming in as the top two most heard. Other popular comments included 'improve streetscape,' 'build what is

allowed under today's policies,' 'repair and restore buildings,' and 'provide a mix of uses.'

Keeping community members involved and offering platforms for their voice in planning now and throughout any future work would also be a big win from the perspective of the public.

Additional comments around future character included:

"Involve the local community and businesses. Community engagement initiatives like this one."

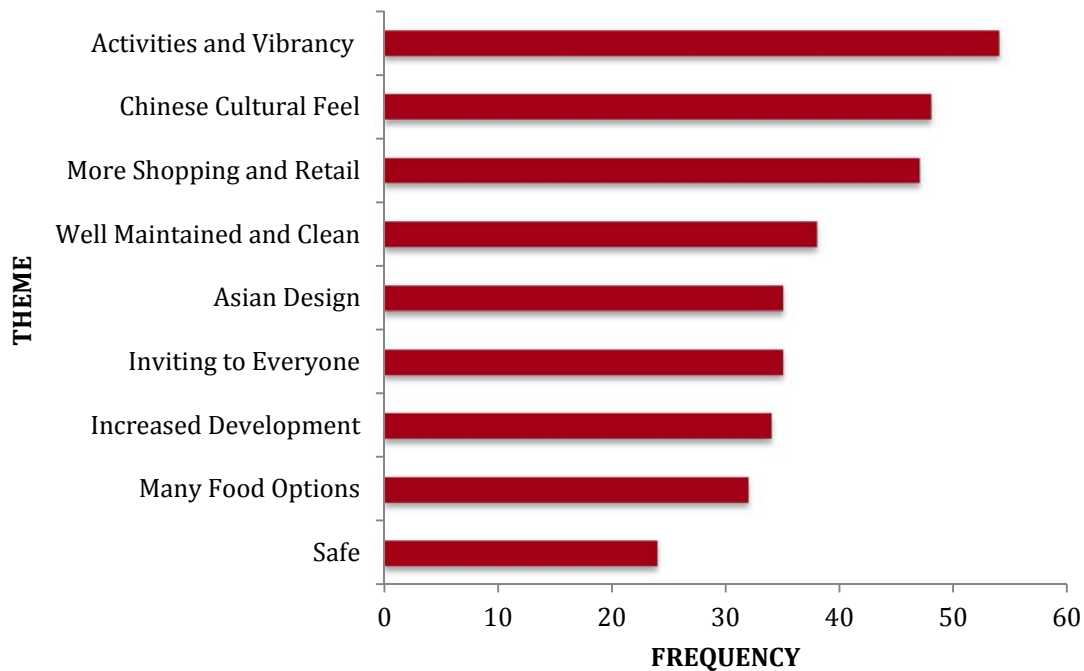
"Work with the residents of Chinatown to maintain their culture and still allow for expansion."

"Work to accommodate code changes without bankrupting places, recognize historical and cultural importance of the area."

"Holding of Chinese culture, signs with Chinese characters"

*"Need outdoor spaces for public meeting / cultural festivals & celebrations
important cultural aspect"*

Imagine your ideal Chinatown 20 years in the future. What does it look like? How does it feel?



The future aspiration for Chinatown is that it is a place that has many happenings, both formal and passive. Participants want Chinatown to be a place that people want to be, but also a place people stay for a range of reasons. In

addition to this, having a Chinese cultural feel was very common in response to participants' opinion of the future. Maintaining Chinatown as a place that is distinctly Chinese, or in the opinion of some distinctly Asian, can be done via the built form, preservation of historically valuable space and offering multiple uses and activities. Nearly as common a response was shopping and retail, mainly in correlation to having more options available — particularly Asian foods and goods.

Other comments about what an ideal Chinatown would be included:

“Safe, vibrant, bright”

“Cleaner. Some buildings need to be spruced up - prettier.”

“It needs new development to attract business otherwise it will be a dying Chinese seniors’ enclave.”

“Diverse mix of commercial and apartments”

“Maintain small merchant shops, but build new development that matches downtown w/ Asian architectural integrity”

“Chinese lanterns hanging, pretty Chinese art.”

“Chinatown would be an upbeat, welcoming attraction that emits a luring vibe for any resident or tourist who pass by.”

“Plants! And make it a place everyone feels welcome”

“Tons of good eateries and food courts that provide a variety of Asian food! A place to celebrate not just Chinese, but Asian culture!”

“A safe, clean area free of crime, traffic, bad food, cluttered retail stores....”

Next Steps

The team is now using the feedback received from phase one to inform the development of draft guiding principles for Chinatown. The second phase of public engagement will commence on September 18, 2016 and run until October 2, 2016. During this phase, the Planning Chinatown team will be engaging the community through workshops, open houses and online to obtain feedback on the draft principles, ideas for what visual examples are appropriate for Chinatown and to hear views on the land use application at 3 Avenue SW and 1 Street SW.

To stay connected to the Planning Chinatown project, please visit our website at www.engage.calgary.ca/planningchinatown.