

*Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee*

**SUMMARY REPORT FROM "WHAT'S NEXT FOR VCRC" WORKSHOP**

9:00 AM - 2:00PM; Saturday, March 8, 2013

Held at: Langara Golf Course Clubhouse

Facilitation & Summary by Doug Soo

**VISION RENEWED:**

*"VCRC... a collaborative voice for Chinatown Revitalization"*

**IMMEDIATE GOALS & ACTIONS**

Reinforce and re-endorsed the board leadership structure and succession processes

- Handbook is updated by September 2013
- Nominations slate for 2014 submitted and endorsed by September 2013

Extend personal invitations along with sharing of the vision of a revitalized Chinatown to potentially supportive allied organizations

- Recruit formal ongoing participation for October 2013 meeting

**A. BACKGROUND**

In September 1999, over 20 Chinatown community leaders met with representatives from the three levels of government to discuss issues and concerns regarding Chinatown. The following January, 16 of them attended a subsequent meeting initiated by the City to discuss the development of a program to address the identified issues. From this second meeting the *Interim Chinatown Revitalization Steering Committee* was formed.

In February 2001, the structure of the *Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee* was formalized with a complement of 22 regular members that included individual community leaders and representatives from business and community organizations. The mandate of the Committee was to work with the community to develop a vision and strategies that would assist the City in revitalizing Vancouver's Chinatown. The members were also called upon to broaden participation in developing these strategies and to generate community support for the adoption and implementation by the City. The VCRC was highly successful in fulfilling this expectation.

The VCRC was originally intended to function for five years. However the significant role and impact of the committee swayed the City to renew its funding support beyond the five years. Since then, although funding has long ceased, the committee has prevailed. Its role in advising the City continues to be valued. Through the strong network of supporters in Chinatown, the VCRC has established a reputation for being the clearinghouse and liaison for almost all matters that affect the historic area.

As the VCRC continues past its first decade of work, what should its role and priorities be for the future? Why should the organization continue to be a significant concern for the participants who are all busy people with countless competing demands? This workshop was organized and conducted to explore these and other important questions, and to chart the future for the VCRC.

## **B. PROCEEDINGS**

### **1. Introductory Remarks & Background of the Workshop**

**Henry Tom**

### **2. Workshop Process & Expectations**

Doug described the workshop process asking participants to pay particular attention to seeking the "right" questions to engage in dialogue as opposed to arriving in quick order to solutions and answers. More important than producing a new vision is the need to come to a common understanding and agreement on the key issues and challenges confronting Chinatown, and the role that VCRC may have in addressing them.

Participants identified the following expectations for the workshop, against which at the day's conclusion, may be used to evaluate the success of the event.

#### **"What do we want to have at the end of the workshop?"**

- A sense of commonality, especially a set of common values
- Directions for working together
- Succession plan on community building
- A set of priorities
- Energized participants
- A wide range of ideas
- A roadmap
- Agreement on inclusions & exclusions, vis a vis ideas, projects, challenges, etc
- Specific future projects, such as over the next 5 years

### **3. VCRC in Review**

**Henry Tom**

Moving to future requires a look at past and see what was learned. It also involves taking stock of present to derive an honest assessment of VCRC's capabilities, capacities, and potential. Using that information as the basis, a new future for the organization may be formed. With that in mind, Henry highlighted some of the past noteworthy achievements of VCRC. He referred to a handout that in the agenda package that summarized his presentation.

#### **Lessons Learned (from accomplishments)**

- Resources are scarce
- VCRC can draw on a multitude of talent and assets
- Willingness to engage in making substantive change
- Ability to come together
- Recognition that there are lots of resistance
- Conflicts are inevitable
- "Neighbours" do not appear to share common values of VCRC
- There are barriers within and outside of the community
- VCRC vision is congruent with numerous other groups in the city

### **4. Optional Futures for VCRC**

What are the possible paths? By the end of the workshop, one of the following options will be clearly established.

- 1. STATUS QUO - We're doing fine. Let's just keep on keeping on. "It ain't broke, so don't fix it." syndrome
- 2. SELECTIVE CHANGE - There are lots of existing positives and lots of room for improvement. Let's identify the important stuff and work on them

- 3. TRANSFORMATION - Things are so dysfunctional. We're heading down a destructive path so we better reform the organization entirely
- 4. CEASE OPERATION - Things are hopeless. I can't see a way to get better, let's cut our losses and focus our time to other vehicles

### **5. The Present VCRC - Assumptions and Perceptions**

Based on the pre-workshop survey question: "What do you think of when VCRC is mentioned?" the responses were categorized into the following Roles and Functions:

1. Information Collector
2. Resource & Reference
3. Convener & Forum Organizer
4. Advisory Body
5. Representatives of Interests
6. Advocacy & Education
7. Strategy/Goal Setting
8. Action Implementation
9. Social/Professional Network
10. Historical/Heritage Memory

In discussion groups, participants were instructed to rank the roles and functions by order of relevance and importance. Although rankings differ somewhat by groups, due to varying interpretations of the categories, there was an overall consensus that VCRC's status as an overarching entity with an inclusive philosophy was most highly valued.

### **6. The Meaning of a "Revitalized" Chinatown**

Having a clear and concrete end in mind is a pre-requisite to the formulation of a vision. Participants brainstormed, discussed, and submitted ideas on what a revitalized Chinatown might look like, knowing that:

- there is inherent tension in the meaning of revitalization, that infers both the revival of elements lost and paradoxically, encouraging significant change.

- the community is evolving... and

- the Chinatown of old will never come back as it was a particular point in history with all the extraordinary social, economic, and political circumstances that were extant. The "Chinatown Vision Directions" adopted by City Council in 2002 was provided for reference.

### **Images of a Revitalized Chinatown**

- Safe community (and public perception that it is)
- Safety and security at ALL times
- Sense of safety (eyes on the streets)
- Busy street activities
- More people on the streets - family-oriented neighbourhood
- Night activities, such as a market
- Nightlife (after 6 PM)
- More street-side activities, society organizations having events spilling into the streets (i.e., farmers' markets, food carts, buskers, block parties, etc)
- Youth activities are present with ongoing encouragement
- Multigenerational activities
- "Epicenter for Chinese Culture in Vancouver"
- Chinatown community centre
- Town square
- Museum (Asian heritage)
- Physical focal point that can be a graphic symbol (Pagoda?)

- Clean streets
- Greater integration with surrounding neighbourhoods - not be as insular
- Prominent Chinese components
- Increased green space (gathering spots to encourage mingling and spillage of activity)
- Greenery
- Greater infusion of locals, all races, and not just tourists - multilingualism
- Laneway utilization
- Look and feel of Chinatown - light, colour (neons), sounds (activities like music, mah jong playing)
- Revitalized neon signage
- Restored, rehabilitated and featured heritage buildings
  
- More residential
- Housing and seniors
- Diversity of housing
- Attract new mainland Chinese immigrants
  
- Thriving area for shopping and eating
- Full occupancy including second floors
- More successful businesses, not just traditional kinds
- Diversity of quality restaurants - Chinese, Asian, and other cultural offerings (a concentrated foodie area)
- Local independent business owners who embrace being in Chinatown
- City incentives for Chinese organizations to develop housing for Chinese seniors and new immigrants

## 7. The Current Reality

VCRC's ability to play a significant role in helping to achieve the revitalized Chinatown as envisioned:

### Strengths

- Community mobilization ability, based on:
  - not formally organized
  - non-partisan
  - strong respect from city council and staff
- Strong relationship/credibility with the city as an impartial voice
- Ability to convene
  - bring Chinatown organizations together
- Leadership
- Solidarity
  - Passionate critical mass

### Weaknesses

- Funding
  - No money to implement goals
- Legitimacy and relevance? (Does VCRC still have them? If yes, how to keep and grow?)
  - not formally organized (no succession and continuity plans)
  - no corporate ties to other organizations (participation is personality-based)
  - No strategic vision

## 8. Issues, Concerns, & Priorities

Participants offered comments on the key issues and challenges confronting VCRC:

- Unclear priorities
- Need concrete goal-setting with timelines
- Establish (one or more) concrete proposal & move it along
- After each meeting... what next? What can we do to move forward?

- Sustainability
- Planning succession
- Maintaining focus on revitalizing Chinatown and keeping historical aspects
- Motivating new residents/businesses to identify with and patronize Chinatown
- Preservation of cultural heritage (i.e., proliferation of non-Chinese businesses)
- Public awareness of VCRC
- Credibility of VCRC in community
- Not enough cooperation to put ideas into action
- Meaningful community/stakeholder engagement
- Encroachment of DTSE on to Pender Street
- Resolving the mental health & addictions on streets

Responses to the pre-workshop survey on the top issues, challenges, and opportunities produced many descriptive and passionate comments. For expediency, they were categorized into the following:

1. Succession/Sustainability
2. Funding/Resources
3. Participation/Involvement
4. Vision/Focus/Priorities
5. Bridging Gaps (between organizations, between Chinatown and the City/Public, between communities, etc.)

It was noted that concerns, issues and challenges offered at the workshop could be accommodated in the 5 categories except for "Resolving the mental health & addictions on streets"

### **9. Strategic Themes in addressing Key Issues and Challenges**

Distilling the ideas and comments offered throughout the day pointed to the following themes:

- Greater involvement - broaden invitations
- Continue and strengthen VCRC's role as a catalyst in the community and in relationship to City Hall
- Focus on outreach and advocacy opportunities to strive for the revitalized Chinatown as identified

### **10. Priorities: Essential Goals & Actions**

The Strategic Directions can only be achieved if the following Actions are implemented. Thus this is "the program" for the months ahead:

1. The uncertainty of succession is resolved...

Reinforce and re-endorsed the board leadership structure and succession processes

- Handbook is updated by September 2013

- Nominations slate for 2014 submitted and endorsed by September 2013

2. Key stakeholders not currently at the table are enlisted into the VCRC agenda

Extend personal invitations along with sharing of the vision of a revitalized Chinatown to potentially supportive allied organizations

- Recruit formal ongoing participation for October 2013 meeting.

### **11. VISION RENEWED:**

From the workshop, proposed was the following Vision Statement to guide VCRC actions and for VCRC to broadly promote for formal recognition at every opportunity:

"VCRC... a collaborative voice for Chinatown Revitalization"