

# VANCOUVER CHINATOWN SOCIAL COHESION REPORT



We recognize that this research study takes place on the traditional, ancestral, unceded and occupied territories of the Coast Salish peoples, including the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Skxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwítulh (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations. This land was never relinquished by these Nations to Canada or British Columbia through a treaty or other means; it is sovereign and unsundered.

As settlers on this land, we recognize the complex, violent, multi-layered and ongoing histories of colonialism and dispossession, particularly around land and food sovereignty, that have directly benefited Chinatowns and Chinese settlers across the landmass known as 'North America'. Discussions about 'public space' and belonging cannot occur without critical engagement with histories of displacement and their ongoing legacies, and how they affect our relationships to the land. Note that for consistency and clarity, our use of a number of terms follow urban planning definitions, though we acknowledge the limits and violences deeply embedded within this terminology, and are grateful to the contributions of Indigenous scholars and community members whose work informs our own. Through our work, we hope to build capacity and spaces of learning that centre marginalized histories, voices, and lived experiences. This can only be achieved through constant and continued decolonial action.

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# ABOUT HUA FOUNDATION

hua foundation is a youth-driven non-profit based in Vancouver, Canada dedicated to bringing together the worlds of cultural heritage and social change with a socio-environmental lens.

Our mission is to empower youth in the Asian diaspora to fully participate in advancing social change through exploring our racialized identities and building resilience in communities.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social cohesion and strong networks are major factors in both the intangible heritage and culture, and the successful, active working business-to-business relationships in Vancouver's Chinatown. However, due to rapid change in the neighbourhood in recent years, community members have noted a shift in the cohesiveness of the neighbourhood, with polarization between newcomers and existing residents. Bearing witness to the reproduction of these patterns across the city of Vancouver provokes further questions about community health and the functioning of neighbourhoods on a city-wide scale.

Specific to Chinatown, rapid change has implications for the small business networks in the neighbourhood, which are an important part of Chinatown's history and carry out key functions (both social and economic) within the community.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To improve the community and stakeholders' understanding of the socio-economic challenges in Chinatown through a food systems lens;
2. To advance key actions for increasing social and community health in the neighbourhood based on findings of the study; and
3. To contribute to the public and academic understanding of Chinatown's changing food economy. In particular, furthering our collective understanding of the parallel Chinese food system that originated and continues to function as a key food system stakeholder in Chinatown and the Lower Mainland.



## METHODOLOGY

To measure social changes in Chinatown, we conducted a total of 32 interviews with business owners, split between 18 traditional and 14 non-traditional businesses. We also canvassed the neighbourhood to collect responses to 127 consumer surveys.

## POLICY CONTEXT

This report directly pertains to the following municipal documents relating to Chinatown:

- Chinatown Economic Revitalization Plan (2012)
- Downtown Eastside Local Area Plan (2014)
- Chinatown HA-1 and HA-1A Districts Schedule and Design Policies (Amended 2018)

There are also implications for the following City-wide strategies, which guide and inform key aspects of the neighbourhood:

- Greenest City Action Plan (2011)
- Vancouver Food Strategy (2013)
- Healthy City Strategy (2014)
- Resilient City Strategy (2016)
- Creative City Strategy (forthcoming)

## FINDINGS

What factors are at play in Chinatown's food economy?

- Systemic problems within the neighbourhood environment affect perceptions about Chinatown for potential visitors, customers, and business employees;
- Opening a small business is becoming increasingly challenging in the City of Vancouver, due to inconsistencies and delays in permitting processes, and high real estate and infrastructure costs;
- There are significant labour constraints, as the culturally appropriate and adequately skilled labour pool diminishes; and
- There is a growing disconnect between patrons of traditional and non-traditional businesses, implying the manifestation of parallel systems in a socio-cultural context.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Address the growing divide, and expansion of parallel systems in Chinatown, both in an economic and a socio-cultural context;
2. Implement and streamline policies and processes to encourage small business growth;
3. Develop an equity framework to better understand the needs of Vancouver's growing diverse communities;
4. Cooperate with all levels of government to address systemic issues facing vulnerable community members; and
5. Refine the application of existing policies and city-wide strategies, utilizing a culturally appropriate lens.



# Part I:

## INTRODUCTION



This research is funded by the City of Vancouver's Great Beginnings fund. This study will contribute to a greater understanding of the food retail landscape in Chinatown in light of recent rapid change within the neighbourhood. Our hope is to contribute directly to the promotion of community living, raising the capacity of the community, and fostering community pride in the neighbourhoods of Chinatown and the Downtown Eastside - embodying the themes of the Great Beginnings program.

Based on the recommendations of the Historic Discrimination Against Chinese People in Vancouver (HDC) apology process, the City of Vancouver is striving to strengthen relationships with the Chinese-Canadian community. The actions approved by Vancouver city council in 2017 inform the beginnings of reconciliation, rooted specifically in the recognition of living heritage and cultural assets in Chinatown. City staff and community members have identified the need to protect the human scale of the neighbourhood, particularly manifested in its historical small business networks, and how these contribute to the intangible culture and identity of the community.

Much of Chinatown's culture is related to food, as the local **Chinese** food distribution system has historically played an integral role in the success of Chinatown's economy. Due to racist policies that prevented Chinese settlers (and other settlers of colour) from participating in the mainstream food system, Chinese farmers and entrepreneurs built up their own system of food production and distribution networks **parallel** to the conventional system. Historically, Chinatown restaurants and other food related businesses have sourced a large percentage of their fresh produce, meats, seafood, and dried goods through this segregated parallel food system, often through long-standing business relationships and geographical proximity. However, Chinatown's businesses and population have shifted in the last decade from a majority Chinese population to one that is more diverse. The lack of integration between the Chinese and mainstream food distribution systems has been a major contributor to decreases in business success, and the closure of many cultural food assets in the neighbourhood.

### ***Chinese vs. Cantonese***

Throughout this report we utilize the term 'Chinese' as a generalized term, most often referring to members of the Cantonese diaspora, unless otherwise specified. We have chosen to do this for clarity and consistency, based on this study's focus on Chinatown, as a global nexus for the Cantonese diaspora in North America. We acknowledge, however, that Chinatown does not represent all of the diversity of 'Chinese-ness' nor is it/has it ever been exclusive to members of the Cantonese diaspora, but rather a diverse range of marginalized people.

### ***Parallel Food Systems***

A parallel food system refers to a food supply chain that operates outside of and in parallel to the mainstream local food movement. It represents one of the many pathways through which food moves from local farms to consumers. However, due to factors such as historic and contemporary racism, discrimination, as well as different language and cultural norms, parallel food systems are often underrepresented within the mainstream local food movement and have few points of intentional connection and collaboration. The Chinese food distribution system is a prominent example of a parallel food system in Metro Vancouver.



Building from the findings of hua foundation's *Vancouver Chinatown Food Security Report* (Ho & Chen 2017), where it is documented that the neighbourhood had lost 50% of its culturally appropriate fresh food assets between 2009 and 2016, this study aims to address the changing local food retail landscape in Vancouver's Chinatown. Through a food systems lens, this study will look into the roles and interactions between neighbourhood residents, those who work in the neighbourhood, and traditional and non-traditional businesses to better understand the challenges and opportunities in food retail and the local economy.

Due to the complexity of these issues across cultural, socio-economic, and historical lines, this study does not purport to solve the problems at hand, but aims to contribute to public discourse, and to inform long-range planning for the community, including the City's bid towards a UNESCO World Heritage Site designation for the neighbourhood.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To improve the community and stakeholders' understanding of the socio-economic challenges in Chinatown with a food systems lens;
2. To advance key actions for increasing social and community health in the neighbourhood based on findings of the study; and
3. To contribute to the public and academic understanding of Chinatown's changing food economy. In particular, furthering our collective understanding of the parallel Chinese food system that originated and continues to function as a key food system stakeholder in Chinatown and the Lower Mainland.

While our original objective was to analyze our findings through a food systems lens, this shifted throughout the research process as we found that the complex interactions within Chinatown, and the cultural nuances deeply interwoven into the business practices in the neighbourhood play a huge role in the local food economy. While our analysis still centres food, we acknowledge that there are additional social, economic, cultural, and other factors that require a further expansion of our understandings of food economies and the traditional food systems lens.

This research project focuses on the intersections of social cohesion and the food economy in Chinatown, and was implemented through collaborations with the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Land and Food Systems, and other community members.

This report summarizes the findings of qualitative interviews and surveys with business owners and patrons, and only begins to understand the role that rapid neighbourhood change plays in culturally and historically rich communities.



## BACKGROUND

Located in the City of Vancouver, British Columbia, on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples, Chinatown is sandwiched between the downtown core, the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and residential Strathcona/East Village neighbourhoods. While the entire metropolitan region has been highly contested throughout colonization, this neighbourhood in particular has complex spatial politics and social circumstances. While a majority of the following discussion refers specifically to the Chinese community in Chinatown, it is important to note that this space has always been shared by a wide variety of people, including other settlers of colour and Indigenous community members.

Vancouver's Chinatown, like many Chinatowns across North America was created out of discriminatory policies and attitudes towards Chinese settlers. As a global nexus for a large percentage of Chinese immigrants in Canada, this Chinatown, in particular, is the centre of many key networks, throughout the city, across the continent, and around the world. Behind these networks are histories of exclusion from the mainstream, and

as such, the neighbourhood holds a great deal of significance as a symbol of struggle and resilience for the Chinese-Canadian community.

### *Parallel Food Systems*

Excluded from professional associations (e.g. medical practices, pharmacy, law, and engineering), many Chinese settlers turned to agriculture and food service for employment. By the 1920s, approximately 90% of British Columbia's vegetables were produced and distributed by Chinese farmers (Anderson 1991, 111). Perceiving this as a threat to their own success, white settler Canadians lobbied for and introduced targeted policies and legislation intended to limit economic competition (Ho & Chen 2017, Phan 2011)<sup>1</sup>. The Chinese food distribution system emerged from these pressures, running parallel to the mainstream and unregulated by any official agency.

While ethnic communities are no longer barred, at a policy level, from participating in the mainstream food economy, the legacies

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<sup>1</sup> While not highlighted in this report, it is important to note that broader anti-Asian (and other racist) sentiment was experienced by other groups as well.

### **Accessibility**

Accessibility refers to the “degree of access” for a potential user of infrastructure or services. Addressing accessibility concerns requires intentional design to enable full and meaningful participation for a diverse range of users. This is typically regarded in terms of physical accessibility (e.g., curb cuts, ramps), but should also be applied to language, cultural specificity, and socio-economic status. In the context of Chinatown, this can mean multilingual signage, culturally appropriate and affordable food options, and inclusive gathering spaces.

### **Social Infrastructure**

In the context of our report, we use the term ‘social infrastructure’ to refer to the locally embedded social relations that provide services to community members, and carry out key functions within a social network. These are often not regulated or facilitated by official bodies, and usually arise organically when community needs are not met by official services and programs.

► *For full definition, see Appendix A*

### **Social Economy**

The social economy is made up of the interactions between various members and organizations, driven by solidarity and reciprocity, to meet the needs of a community. Social economies often emerge out of the failures of state intervention and the free market, and are difficult to define as they are deeply embedded in the specific social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts. They tend to be formally independent of the state, and contribute to a collective community well-being and high level of social cohesion.

of segregated food systems still remain. This manifests in the perpetuation of parallel food systems, not only in an economic sense, but along cultural lines as well. This has meant that the ability to obtain culturally appropriate goods relies heavily on existing segregated food distribution systems; many imported or culturally specific items are nearly impossible to procure within the mainstream food system. This becomes even more difficult for smaller, further culturally distinct streams, such as the Taiwanese food distribution system, which offer very different goods, and are far more fragile.

The discourse surrounding food security and **accessibility**, however, rarely addresses the ability to access culturally appropriate goods and produce. Food policy and strategies have a tendency to focus almost solely on access to fresh food assets, in a general sense, without recognizing the need for cultural specificity. Under a justice and equity framework, communities have the right to access culturally appropriate food options. While proliferation of ethnic food distribution systems have made access to these specific goods increasingly easier, local policies thus far have not formally recognized these systems

and their contributions to community health and wellbeing.

Due to the significant local Asian population and demand for culturally appropriate goods and produce, it has become relatively easy to obtain a variety of Asian products, from a wide range of cultures. This has contributed to Metro Vancouver’s reputation for having some of the best Asian food and restaurants outside of Asia. While these types of businesses are no longer spatially confined to Chinatown, the trade and distribution networks that they are a part of maintain roots in the area, including Produce Row in neighbouring Strathcona. Chinatown’s economic success is heavily dependent on these networks. In the past, a majority of restaurants and other food retail businesses in the neighbourhood utilized the local Chinese supply chain, due to long-standing relationships and ease of accessibility. This built up a **social infrastructure** and **social economy** that became integral to the success of many Chinese merchants and business owners. These networks and the social cohesion associated with them remain a critical element in the intangible heritage and identity in Chinatown.

As with many of the historical neighbourhoods in Vancouver, Chinatown has experienced rapid gentrification over the last ten years. New developments and land speculation in the neighbourhood have increased property values dramatically, causing the displacement of many long-term residents and businesses. As a result of hua foundation's 2017 *Food Security Report*, we have found that Chinatown had lost 50% of its fresh food assets between 2009 and 2016. As new businesses have moved in, very few have connected with existing networks. This is especially noticeable with a number of international and local chains entering the neighbourhood, bringing their own supplier chains. Compounding this is the aging out of legacy business owners, with a lack of succession planning, and a diminishing culturally appropriate and adequately skilled labour pool to continue day-to-day business operations.

The convergence of all of these factors provides a crucial moment to identify barriers and challenges, as well as explore opportunities to protect a key element of the intangible heritage of Chinatown.

## ***Gentrification***

Gentrification is a process of rapid spatial and social transformation, where people with higher incomes move into a lower income (and often historically marginalized) neighbourhood. This results in the displacement of existing residents, through the loss of demographically appropriate goods, services, and resources. This occurs through increases in land value, both commercial and residential, as the gentrifying neighbourhood becomes more attractive to those with greater economic and social capital. This develops at both a discursive and material level, each of which has effects on the other.

At a discursive level, this often manifests either in the tokenization of the presence and histories of the pre-gentrification population, or at worst, the complete erasure of their narratives. This is done either through framing gentrifiers' entrance into the neighbourhood as 'saving' or 'improving' the conditions in the area, or settler-colonial *terra nullius*-style narratives implying the fulfillment of a more 'productive' use of space. These frames are equally problematic.

The improvement narrative implies a lack of agency on the part of existing residents, and fails to recognize who benefits and who suffers from these changes. If 'better' (i.e. higher class) food options appear in a neighbourhood, is it truly an improvement if none of the existing residents can afford to eat there? On the other hand, *terra nullius*-style narratives contain biases about what constitutes productive or appropriate



use of land. Particularly in the context of Vancouver's DTES, with a relatively large Indigenous population, these reinforce violent settler-colonial notions of property and land ownership, utilizing the language and logic of the colonial frontier.

Materially, this contributes to a new sense of place. As people with higher socio-economic status enter the neighbourhood, so too do businesses that cater to their needs, displacing older businesses that are more economically and socially accessible to people in lower income brackets. These new businesses tend to be unwelcoming to the pre-gentrification population; these folks do not fit into the social or economic strata of the new clientele, and the businesses often charge significantly higher prices for similar goods and services. For those who are living at or below the poverty line<sup>2</sup>, these increases in costs can mean the difference between meeting their basic needs or not.

Additionally, higher policing rates and the criminalization of poverty are heavily associated with gentrification. Many lower-

<sup>2</sup> Note: We recognize the criticisms of the poverty line measurement; however, it is not within the scope of our research to fully address this topic.

income communities utilize public spaces as **third places**, as people living in these neighbourhoods tend to have limited access to private indoor meeting spaces. These practices may seem out of the ordinary for newcomers to the neighbourhood, leading to increases in police reports regarding loitering. Related is the privatization of public space through greater security presence, as well as encroachments onto sidewalks by businesses with patios and outdoor seating. These have implications for who 'belongs' in the neighbourhood, and who has the freedom to transgress and occupy these spaces, without being reported to authorities.

### *Third Places*

Third place is a sociological term referring to social spaces outside of the home ('first place') and workplace ('second place') where people tend to spend their time. These spaces are arguably important for community building and establishing a sense of place. These tend to take form in community centres, churches, schools, libraries, and parks, but in recent decades also online. Third places are often referred to as 'community living rooms,' providing spaces for social interaction. In this vein, third spaces are especially important for communities such as Chinatown and the DTES, as many who live in the neighbourhood do not otherwise have access to private social spaces.



In the context of Vancouver's Chinatown, this has further implications for the City of Vancouver's bid for a UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) designation. One of the primary criticisms of the WHS designation, and particularly those in urban settings, is that increases in tourist traffic can drastically affect the livelihoods of locals and alter their quality of life. In essence, this compounds the effects of gentrification.

### ***Policy Context***

Chinatown and its surrounding areas are guided by several neighbourhood plans and city-wide strategies. Neighbourhood plans include the Chinatown Economic Revitalization Plan (2012), Downtown Eastside Local Area Plan (2014), and the amended Chinatown HA-1 and HA-1A Districts Schedule and Design Policies (2018). There are also city-wide strategies including the Greenest City Action Plan (2011), Vancouver Food Strategy (2013) and the Food Strategy Action Plan for 2017-2020 update, Healthy City Strategy (2014), Resilient City Strategy (2016), and the Creative City Strategy (forthcoming). These strategies guide and support key aspects of the neighbourhood, including and beyond environmental, economic, social, and cultural sustainability.

While these documents have provided a policy framework to guide actions in the neighbourhood, there are several academic papers that analyze the contemporary issues that Chinatown is currently facing:

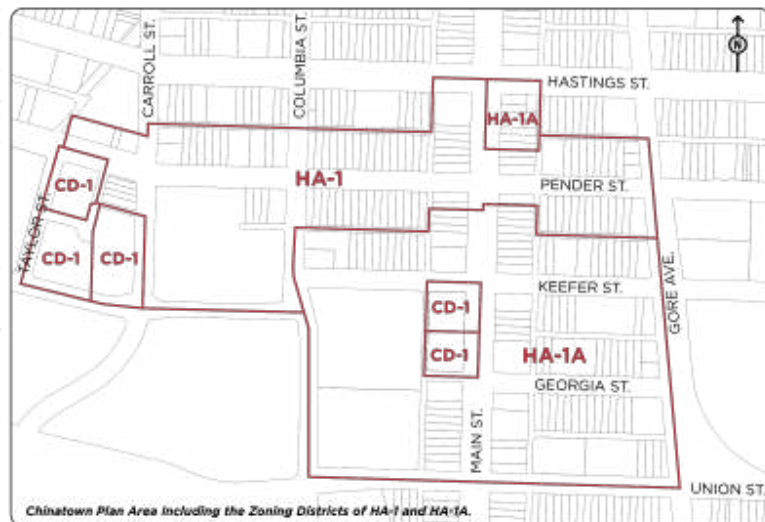
1. Wes Regan's 2017 thesis, "Density and Diversity: Considering the Impacts of Mixed-Use Development on the Retail Culture of Vancouver's Main Street focuses on retail gentrification and how economic factors impact cities and communities. Of particular interest to this report is Regan's research and discussion on the role of small independent retail as an expression of local culture and neighbourhood identity.
2. In her 2016 thesis, "The Well-being of Low-income, Monolingual- Chinese Senior Residents: The Impact of Disinvestment and Gentrification in Vancouver's Chinatown", Sophie Ellen Fung explores how gentrification has impacted low-income, monolingual-Chinese senior residents in the neighbourhood. This analysis is completed by taking the City's Healthy City framework and applying a "cultural, income, age and language appropriate lens." This is of particular interest as the needs of marginalized community members are often overlooked.
3. hua foundation's *Vancouver Chinatown Food Security Report* (2017) documented the loss of "Cultural Food Assets" and contributed to public discourse on parallel systems. Authors Angela Ho and Alan Chen discuss how culture is not formally recognized and thus not equally valued as a contributor to healthy communities.

Similar work is being completed by the City under the emerging Legacy Business study exploring how to support businesses that contribute to a neighbourhood's local culture and identity.

While this report does not specifically focus on housing, real estate or development, all three have large impacts on the identity and culture of a neighbourhood, inclusive of retail composition. This is of particular interest as the Northeast False Creek and False Creek Flats plans are finalized. Both border Chinatown and will bring significant opportunity but also risk to this complex, rich, yet fragile neighbourhood.

## METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on the Chinatown Historic Area as defined by the City of Vancouver as the region between East Hastings and Union Streets, from Taylor Street to Gore Avenue.



The fieldwork and data collection were split between facilitating interviews with business owners and conducting surveys with consumers, captured in the study site from March to June 2018.

A majority of our interviews with businesses comprised of qualitative questions regarding their experiences in opening and operating their businesses, and their relationships to and perceptions of the neighbourhood. Business owners were invited to participate in an informal survey by a pair of interviewers, in their language of choice: English, Cantonese or Mandarin. Owners were primarily approached at their respective businesses. Interviewees were asked a series of closed- and open-ended questions (Appendix C) to allow the owners the freedom to express themselves and their thoughts on the subject matter. Finally, all information was transcribed on paper on site to ensure owners' thoughts were accurately represented. In the making of this report, all responses were anonymized to protect the identities of these business owners.

Interviews were conducted during a span of three months across four identified types of food establishments. The decision to categorize the food establishments was key to understanding the different ways that the food economies of Chinatown coexist and intermingle. The different typologies and spread of respondents are as follows:

**Table 1:**  
**Typologies of Food Retail Businesses**

Restaurant/Cafe/Bakery	21
Greengrocer	4
Fishmonger/Butcher	5
Dry Goods	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>

\* Note: a number of businesses serve multiple functions, and classifications were made on business owners' self-identification, based on perceived majority of customer interactions

Businesses were approached from the period of 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm in order to avoid peak business hours for most of these establishments. Surveys ranged from 10-60 minutes depending on the availability of the business owners and the depth to which they chose to speak about the topics covered by the survey.

At the end of our collection period we obtained data from a total of 32 businesses, split between 18 **traditional** and 14 **non-traditional** businesses; noting that one such traditional business closed during the report-writing process.

### ***Traditional & Non-traditional business classification***

Businesses in the neighbourhood were classified based on their relationship to the historical functions and patterns of businesses in Chinatown. These tend to fall along the lines of 'newer' and 'older' businesses; however, there are a number of exceptions to this rule, hence our decision against temporal relationships for the classification system. To attempt to adequately capture the essence of these business classifications, we have chosen to use the terms 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' style businesses, acknowledging that this terminology is not perfect either:

Traditional style businesses in Chinatown refer to businesses that carry on key functions (social, cultural, economic) in Chinatown throughout its history; that is, as a retailer that provides culturally appropriate and low barrier access to goods and services for immigrant, low-income, and senior populations.

Non-traditional style businesses in Chinatown are relatively recent entrants to the neighbourhood ranging from food retail, to services, and business offices. These establishments differ from traditional businesses in that they have a higher barrier to access due to their business model and pricing of their products and services. Language, cultural specificity, and services are often English-only, and often have differing business practices that stem from cultural nuances.

► ***For full definition, see Appendix A***



Consumer surveys were collected to complement business data and identify food retail behaviours and patterns in consumption. The format of these surveys was a short 2-3 minute questionnaire, comprised of two parts: food retail behaviours and demographic data (Appendix D). In total, there were 23 questions. While complete surveys were preferred, respondents were not forced to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable and participation was entirely voluntary. Deliberate attempts were made to target a multitude of audiences: weekend mornings, weekday lunch hour, Chinese seniors, and those employed in the neighbourhood. At the end of our collection period, we obtained a total of 127 surveys.

These interviews and surveys inform the findings of this report.

## LIMITATIONS

Fieldwork was conducted in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin, depending on the language preference of the interviewee. All results were translated into English for data analysis purposes. While interviews and translations were facilitated by fluent speakers, there remains the possibility of translation error. All interviews were conducted by a minimum of two interviewers in attempt to mitigate this; however, with all interviews, there is potential for misunderstanding.

In addition, our results may be skewed based on the organizations and individuals who were willing to speak with us, whether due to time constraints or self-identified relationships to the neighbourhood. The questionnaire used in this study was intentionally lengthy as to cover the different necessary aspects of the food businesses and their economies within Chinatown. However, some business owners lack internal resources —such as time or staffing —to provide us with in-depth information. Therefore, accessing business owners for information gathering was a challenge. Additionally, while we spoke to a relatively large number of businesses, very few of them were property owners, who have very different relationships to the neighbourhood.

Due to the complex politics and controversial nature of the neighbourhood, regarding recent social phenomena such as gentrification, additional limitations include the potential for confirmation bias/social desirability effects, wherein non-traditional/‘new’ residents and business owners may either knowingly alter their answers to appease the interviewers or are unable to acknowledge their role in neighbourhood change. A number of interviewees (both business and consumer) made comments acknowledging some familiarity with hua foundation and our politics, as well as a hesitancy to provide sensitive information to affiliates of the City of Vancouver. Due to time and staffing constraints, intentional race-matching to increase the comfort level of interviewees was not feasible.

While a significant amount of effort was dedicated to capturing a wide audience, as noted previously in our Methodology section, some parts of the neighbourhood population are notably absent from our consumer surveys: residents both from new market condos as well as low-income and marginalized community members. While we recognize that these groups are all contributors to the community, due to time and capacity constraints we were unable to gain the reach and traction that we had hoped for, and recommend further work in engaging with these groups.

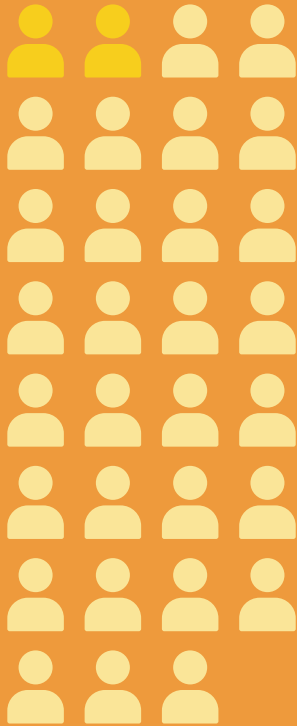
# Part II: FINDINGS

## INTRODUCTORY FINDINGS

In addition to three major areas where food retail in the neighbourhood have expressed challenges, the following statistics provide insights into property ownership, trends, business association affiliations, and interpretations of the “Chinatown character” provided by the interviewees.

- 1 *Ownership*
- 2 *Business Trends*
- 3 *Business Associations*
- 4 *Chinatown Character*

## Ownership

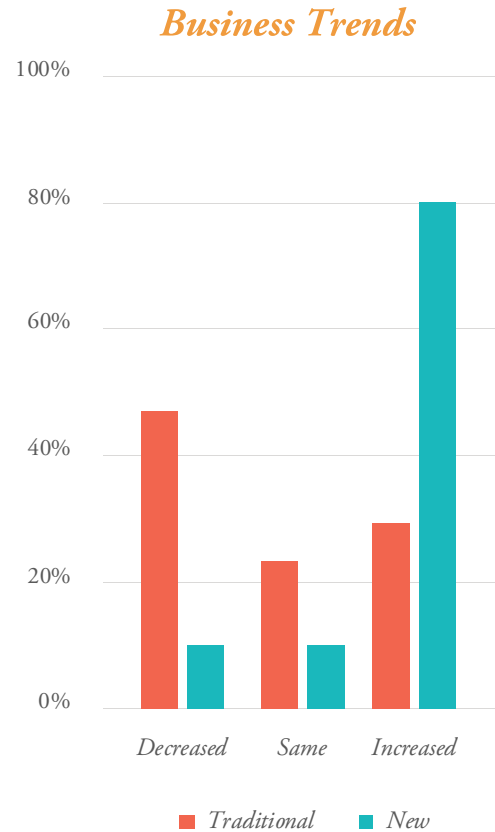


Only 2 out of 31 business owners interviewed own the property where their business is located; the other 29 lease from the property owner.

The majority of businesses self-identified as ‘independently owned’ with ownership structures ranging from a group of investors, co-owners, family-owned to sole proprietor.

## Business Trends

Business trends were solicited from interviewees on the following scale:



Eighty percent of non-traditional businesses identified that their business had “increased modestly” or “increased substantially” over the past 5 years (or since opening). Only one non-traditional business cited that their business had “decreased modestly” since opening; none identified as having “decreased substantially”.

This is in contrast to traditional businesses, where 47% identified a decrease in business over the past 5 years (29% identified that their business had “decreased substantially” and 18% “decreased modestly”).



Only one traditional business identified that their business had “increased substantially” over the same period. While our question was specific to the past five years, traditional businesses overall cited a significant decrease in the number of customers since opening/taking over the business. There were also comments made around how ecosystem impacts, such as safety concerns, empty storefronts, and construction contributed to less foot traffic in the area.

When asked what their customer base is, both non-traditional and traditional restaurants cited that a majority of their clientele are local residents and those employed in the neighbourhood. Fresh food retail (e.g. greengrocers, butchers, fishmongers) tend to have a higher proportion of local resident clientele. More specialized food retail such as dried goods stores and tea shops tend to have a more diverse mix of clientele; this could be attributed to the nature of the products sold requiring less frequent repeat purchasing over time (i.e. can be stored without spoilage). Our study did not ask interviewees to describe their clientele by perceived culture or race.

There are also trends in types of vending that contribute to sales opportunities. Over half of non-traditional restaurants cited that they had about 50% of their business revenue coming from the ‘take-out’ portion of their business. For many, this is facilitated by the recent proliferation of take-out delivery services. With the exception of food court restaurants, take-out did not amount to a significant proportion of traditional restaurants’ business.



## ***Business Associations***

From our interviews, we identified a desire for greater outreach, activities, and overall interaction with the Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Area Society (BIA). With only three businesses identifying as active members of the BIA, and a majority of businesses noting a lack of engagement or very little interaction with the BIA, there is an opportunity for them to better work with and serve the businesses in their catchment area.

The majority of non-traditional businesses we spoke to do not have affiliations with the BIA. Of the 14 interviewed, only one such business identified themselves as having a positive relationship with the BIA. The prevailing sentiment was that the BIA does not reflect non-traditional businesses, and thus does not serve its mandate to encourage and promote business in the neighbourhood. Several businesses noted that they had never met anyone from the BIA, and that there was a lack of communication and/or clarity about who their main point of contact should be. Many expressed an uncertainty as to what the BIA does/is supposed to do. In addition, concerns were expressed surrounding the process and lack of transparency in governance and finances. Those

that had attended the AGM in recent years felt clear divisions within the room, between non-traditional and traditional businesses, and felt that their voices were not heard.

Businesses east of Main Street expressed a desire for public festivities (such as the Lunar New Year Parade, stewarded by the Chinese Benevolent Association, and the Chinatown Night Market, managed by the BIA and VCMA) to rotate locations year to year, as a majority of events occur on the west side of Main, along Keefer and/or Pender Streets. Georgia and Union Street business owners often feel excluded from events.

***“I didn’t know there was a night market until the day before it happened”*** - *Non-traditional Business Owner*

Traditional businesses tend to have affiliations with the Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association (VCMA). However, only about half of these businesses identified themselves as active VCMA members, while only two of these businesses are active within the BIA. Other business associations also exist that span outside of Chinatown, but were not within the scope of this report.

### *Chinatown Character*

A majority of non-traditional businesses expressed that they would like Chinatown to be more “Chinese,” despite recognizing that their own businesses might not contribute to that character directly. Many business owners said that while Chinese businesses were crucial to the needs of the community and to conserving the intangible heritage of the neighbourhood, not all businesses opening in the neighbourhood need to be Chinese. That is not to say that all businesses are appropriate for Chinatown, but that they should still be culturally appropriate and/or support the needs of the existing community. There remains, however, a lack of consensus or clarity regarding what ‘Chinatown character’ is.

Several pieces of work have started to define Chinatown’s character, with significant contributions regarding the built form and physical environments. However, work to identify intangible characteristics have only begun relatively recently. Bodies of work including the Vancouver Chinatown Intangible Heritage Values Report (Heritage BC, 2015), and the City of Vancouver’s forthcoming Legacy Business report/study, along with the contributions of various heritage organizations, have all provided some insight into identifying and defining elements of Chinatown’s intangible character.



From our surveys and interviews, along with previous work, there is a certain sense of ‘Chinese’ history, a part of Vancouver distinctly different from the rest of the city, that is a part of this character. It is important to note, however, that the Chinatown community has never been made up solely of ethnic Chinese people, and thus, the neighbourhood’s intangible heritage characteristics (i.e. small business networks and associated social economy) cannot be attributed only to one ethnic group either. While Chinatown’s name points to the large population of Chinese (specifically Cantonese) settlers, there are deep historical ties and relationships to the local First Nations (such as the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh people), members of the African diaspora (Hogan’s Alley), Japanese settlers, South Asians, Southeast Asians, and other marginalized communities. This is especially true in the context of the food economy; from farm labour to business patronage, the success and growth of the Chinese food distribution system is due in part to the interactions between a wide variety of people.

Tying in the frameworks laid out by UNESCO’s *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003), this includes the recognition that these elements of intangible heritage “[contribute] to social cohesion, encouraging a sense of identity and responsibility which helps individuals to feel part of one or different communities and to feel part of society at large.” In addition, these elements must be rooted in the communities themselves, and “can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it—without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage.”

Further work building off of these frameworks would need to be completed to better define the facets of ‘Chinatown character,’ and how existing and new elements of the neighbourhood can contribute to it.



## MAJOR THEMES

Three major areas of feedback surfaced from interviews with businesses: surrounding neighbourhood environment; costs associated with start-up, operations, and maintenance; and labour. These concerns were shared between both traditional and non-traditional businesses.

- 1 *Neighbourhood Environment*
- 2 *Business Start-up, Operations, Maintenance*
- 3 *Labour*

## ***Neighbourhood Environment***

The most commonly mentioned concerns were those relating to the surrounding neighbourhood environment. Business owners expressed unease regarding personal safety (both for employees and customers) as well as the impacts on day-to-day business operations. These included, but were not limited to violence (both physical and verbal), health concerns (needles, human waste), infrastructure damage (vandalism, illegal dumping/tampering with dumpsters), and theft (during deliveries and from storefronts).

These concerns are perceived as costing the businesses directly, particularly in the case of replacing damaged property and time spent cleaning up, but also lost business opportunities through decreases in customers willing to come to their store or employees not wanting to work night shifts due to safety concerns.

While these are valid concerns, it is important to acknowledge that these vulnerable groups are part of the community, and regardless of the complex challenges that they may experience (ranging from homelessness, to poverty, disability, mental and physical health challenges, precarious or informal employment, and criminalization), they have equal right to access affordable and appropriate food.

The concerns raised by business owners are symptoms of broader systemic issues. When thinking about how to address these complex social issues, it is both unfair and ineffectual to lay the blame on those who experience it. By doing so, it further erases commonalities between low-income Chinese seniors and the wider DTES community. Many of the services in the neighbourhood benefit members of both groups, and access to low-cost and low-barrier goods and services, historically and currently existing in Chinatown, are necessary to the survival of the DTES community. Several Chinese seniors that we spoke to regularly use services at the Carnegie Community Centre and Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, and a large number of DTES community members rely on traditional businesses in Chinatown as third places, due to their own lack of private space. Acknowledging these overlaps and shared interests/concerns are key to the understanding that the success and thriving of Chinatown is closely tied to that of the DTES. Further work is recommended on exploring these relationships, as well as improvements in physical and mental health services, harm reduction programs, affordable housing, and economic opportunities (both formal and informal).

## ***Business Start-up, Operations, Maintenance***

Our interviews also touched on the economics of starting and operating a business in the neighbourhood. This ranged from structural upgrades, to bringing space up to code, change of use, permitting, equipment costs, furnishing, and ongoing maintenance.



### *Permitting*

Many expressed the cumbersome nature of the permitting process with the City. Businesses were often quoted a two- to four-week turnaround; however, based on interviews, it took anywhere between four and ten months to pass the permitting process with the City. This was often mentioned alongside a lack of standardization between inspectors and engineers (between groups and between individuals within each group).

There was also mention of how businesses could pay for City staff overtime to expedite the application process. Those who knew of this option were not in support of this approach as it creates a ‘two-tiered system.’ Smaller, independent business owners do not have the financial means to pay for this expedited permit process; it was seen as ‘unfair’ to them. Those who were able to take advantage

of this benefit admitted that the money that they paid to speed up the process did not end up being worthwhile in the long run.

***“The City is the biggest hindrance to small businesses growth. It doesn’t feel the crunch that businesses do.”***

*- Non-traditional Business Owner*

Experienced restaurateurs expressed how many of the vacant commercial spaces in the neighbourhood were on properties waiting to be sold and included a demolition clause. This precarious situation does not allow for businesses to properly plan, as the property owner (original or new) could exercise the demolition clause after the business had invested money and time setting up the space.

Additionally, traditional businesses experience considerable difficulty working with members of bureaucracies, such as City officials and health authorities. A majority of traditional business owners are not fluent English speakers. This creates hardships in many cases, both in regular check-ins with health authorities and at a higher level, conveying their needs and challenges to City staff.



### *Change of use, Upgrades, Maintenance*

Every upgrade (regardless of the scale of change) has additional City requirements that add to the cost of each alteration. Each utility change or upgrade (water, electricity, gas, or other structural) starts at \$100,000, on average. Upgrading older buildings has been cited as very costly. Yearly maintenance ranges from \$20,000-\$30,000 per year at a bare minimum.

***“You can open up for \$150,000 in a lot of places in Canada, like Toronto and Montreal; you can’t do that in Vancouver.”***

*- Non-traditional Business Owner*

New businesses, on average, invest \$500,000 to start their business. Several businesses cited figures just under \$1,000,000. The high range in costs are due to the types of food business, the types of equipment needed, and the infrastructure required to meet code. For example, establishments that require gas for cooking and the corresponding air ventilation/hood vents spend around \$250,000+ more for upgrades and equipment.



### *Property Taxes, Increasing Land Values*

A number of businesses expressed concerns surrounding the decreasing affordability in Chinatown. Property values nearly doubled between 2012 and 2016, as the population density of the neighbourhood has increased and development has intensified. In comparison to Vancouver’s municipal average, Chinatown’s real estate prices have increased at a rate that is five percent higher<sup>3</sup>. As noted previously in this report, a majority of businesses that we spoke to were not property owners, but held leases in their buildings.

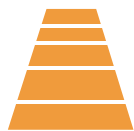
As a neighbourhood with lower than average commercial rental rates, the increase in property value has meant an increase in property taxes, which have been a challenge for many businesses, particularly older ones with smaller profit margins. This is because a number of businesses in the neighbourhood hold triple net leases wherein tenants agree to pay for all real estate taxes, building insurance,

<sup>3</sup> City of Vancouver Memorandum. June 22, 2018. Information requested on June 5, 2018 by Mayor and Council related to proposed development policy changes in Chinatown.

and maintenance. This means that, regardless of their own business trends, they are responsible for covering the costs of increasing land speculation value and the associated tax increases.

In addition to this, some traditional businesses noted an increase in pressure from landlords to move out, as the increase in property values has meant that they are able to command higher rents from new prospective tenants. A number of traditional businesses shared conditions attached to their lease renewals, such as set percentage rent increases and requirements to demonstrate revenue. This creates situations where businesses are not able to plan beyond their next round of lease negotiations as their ability to renew hinges on meeting these profit minimums. For businesses whose profit margins are already low because they cater to the needs of low-income residents this causes a significant degree of uncertainty and instability.

Increasing property values have also provided an incentive for property owners to sell their buildings. The last few years have given way to a number of lot assemblies along the Main Street corridor, with new large block developments. While all of them have provided ground-floor commercial spaces to the neighbourhood, almost all of the units added have wide frontages, very few of which activate the sidewalks. Not only are these developments out of character with the neighbourhood's historical urban design patterns, but these large frontages are inaccessible for small or medium sized businesses, in base lease rates, size, and associated taxes. Due to the large amount of capital investment required to open and outfit a business, and food-related ones to an even greater extent, the only businesses that can afford to fill these spaces tend to be local and national chains or franchises. These chain-retailers, which are almost always vertically integrated, tend to bring with them their own existing networks of suppliers, and are less likely to support the community in the same way that a small-scale/family run business might.



### *Road/sidewalk management*

Many businesses expressed a desire to see more car parking in the neighbourhood, specifically cheaper rates/free parking and more secure lots, as the availability of safe, affordable, and convenient parking remains an important factor for many of their customers. Some business owners noted a recent increase in street metered parking rates over the last few years. Additionally, anecdotal evidence suggests that if those that used street parking (meters

or free) overstayed their permitted time, Chinatown streets in particular were much quicker to be ticketed, compared to other neighbourhoods in the city. While Chinatown is somewhat transit accessible, it is important to note that a relatively large proportion of Chinatown consumers may have mobility issues that makes access to rapid transit challenging.

A large percentage of business owners also communicated delivery challenges relating to road management. A number of Chinatown businesses do not have reliable or accessible back alley loading zones (specific examples include those on Union Street), and those that do expressed safety concerns for delivery drivers, both in terms of personal safety and theft. This requires their deliveries to be made either on the street in front of their business or transported from some distance.

These challenges have also been exacerbated by ongoing construction, both in back alleys and on the street/sidewalks in front of businesses. In addition to blocking deliveries, a number of interviewees admitted that their business had suffered due to construction on lots immediately adjacent to their storefronts, whether it be from the diversion of foot traffic or construction-related noise and disruptions.



## Labour

There are severe labour challenges expressed by all businesses interviewed. Many businesses cite the cost of living in Vancouver, declining interest in 'laborious' jobs, and relatively low wages as reasons for the industry's labour shortage. For non-traditional businesses, a large percentage of those willing to work these jobs are students, leading to a high turnover rate. This trend is not unique to Chinatown, or the food industry.

*"I'm paying \$15-18/hour, plus tips, and I can't get anyone through the door."* - Non-traditional Business Owner



### Public perceptions of the neighbourhood

Both traditional and non-traditional businesses, primarily those involved in direct food service (e.g., restaurants, cafes, bakeries), highlighted the issue of the public perception of Chinatown. Many traditional business owners conveyed that they first established their businesses in Chinatown due to the heavy foot traffic and tight-knit community. Over time, there has been a significant decline in the number of people who are willing to work in the neighbourhood. While some business owners have noted some

improvement over the last few years, existing negative perceptions of the neighbourhood persist amongst those who do not visit Chinatown frequently.

*"People don't want to come anymore. Some even think it's too dangerous to work in this neighbourhood, and the only thing that would attract them is if we paid higher wages, but we can't afford that."* - Traditional Business Owner

These feelings were echoed by staff at non-traditional businesses, noting how many team members requested mid-day shifts where possible, rather than opening/closing shifts that may begin early in the morning or end late at night. One business owner regularly accompanies female staff to their cars after closing.



### Wages

There are many active informal economies in the neighbourhood. These informal economies keep businesses afloat and provide survival work for many members of the community. Further work needs to be completed to figure out how businesses can maintain their employee pool as well as provide food access to a



wide range of people in the neighbourhood. Some businesses are unable to provide higher wages for their labour. Traditional businesses that participated in this research cited wages as one of their greatest barriers to hiring new talent for both the front and back end of their businesses.

*“Everyone outside of Chinatown is paying their workers above minimum wage, and I just can’t afford to compete with that. I barely make a profit.”*

*- Traditional Business Owner*

Citing a decrease in foot traffic and the need for prices to be driven lower as some of the primary causes of lower profit margins, a large proportion of the traditional businesses in Chinatown are making a minimal profit. In fact, six of the traditional businesses that responded to the survey had other branches/affiliated businesses outside of Chinatown and conveyed that their other branches were making a majority of the profit needed to keep their Chinatown storefront open.

Non-traditional business owners, particularly those coming from/in tune with the mainstream culinary world, emphasized a loss of talent/brain drain to other parts of the country. Pointing to the high cost of living, as well as the amount of initial monetary investment required to open a restaurant in Vancouver, many up-and-coming chefs have left for other cities.



### *Language barriers*

Compounding this shortage of labour, traditional businesses have further challenges as they require a separate stream of labour based off of language ability. For example, it would not be possible for an individual without the appropriate language ability to work in a high pressure environment, such as a Cantonese-operating kitchen, regardless of applicable culinary skill level.

*"Employment Services of Canada are not helpful — they have stringent language requirements but it's for French and English only. That doesn't match local needs — I need to hire employees who can speak Cantonese, and who also have the skills for Chinese cuisines. My husband is the head chef, and he can only speak Cantonese. What can I do?" - Traditional Business Owner*

Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin, and other regional) language abilities are a necessity for the businesses in Chinatown for two important reasons: a large proportion of the Chinatown community and their customers speak Chinese, and the backend staff who help train the new staff communicate in Chinese. The majority of the labour pool for traditional Chinese businesses is also reaching a retirement age. There is an opportunity to alleviate time, network, and knowledge constraints of these operators by supporting them in finding successors, legacy planning, and other ways of business planning and support.



### *Lack of Cultural Knowledge Sharing Hub*

Traditional business owners expressed challenges in connecting with the newcomers to the community. Specifically, there is a strong disconnect with younger generations, which leads to barriers in entering the field or even participating in education programs about the highly specialized skills required to produce Chinese cuisines.

*"Nowadays, I can't find any young people who have an interest in being a Chinese butcher if they were raised here. It's hard and difficult work. You need to learn it from someone too." - Traditional Business Owner*

At the moment, a space for skills to be transferred to the younger generation does not exist for Chinatown. There is an intergenerational division preventing young people from engaging with traditional businesses' skilled workers.

This is especially concerning as continuing these practices is essential to ensuring that the next generation has the ability to engage with and pass on cultural knowledge and intangible heritage. In order for this to happen, it is important that young people and skilled workers in traditional businesses are given opportunities and spaces to interact with each other and actively participate in culture and knowledge sharing. Intentional and professionalized curation and creation of these spaces can induce the expansion of the pool of skilled labour, and possibly attract young people into struggling industries such as Chinese butchery.

## CONSUMER FINDINGS

To complement the results of our business interviews, we captured consumer surveys, both through targeted stakeholder groups (e.g., Chinese seniors, via partner organizations) and street canvassing. In total, we collected 127 surveys, with varying degrees of completion, during early Spring 2018.

The collection period has some effect on data; being too early for the summer/high season, a majority of respondents identified their relationship to Chinatown as either ‘working in the neighbourhood’ or ‘local visitors’ (those who live in the Metro Vancouver region, but outside of Chinatown). For long-range planning purposes, this sample demographic is ideal because it addresses the needs of people who regularly access local retail, dining, and services in the neighbourhood, rather than the tourist-driven equivalents.

Data was classified as ‘significant’ at or over 10% response rates, with some exceptions in categories where there were a large variety of responses and the distribution suggested that they were worth exploring further. This significance rating was chosen upon analysis, based on the distribution of responses.

### *Demographic Match*

From our survey, 58% of respondents were between the ages 16 and 35, consistent with census data from the 2016 Canadian National Household Survey (NHS), which names

30-to-34-year-olds as the fastest-growing age range in the neighbourhood<sup>4</sup>.

Despite our attempts to capture surveys from a wide audience, the demographics of survey respondents did not always reflect the census data for the neighbourhood. Data on ethnicity and visible minority populations, specifically, is less consistent between census and survey data. Census data shows 14% of the population as Chinese-identified individuals in the neighbourhood (a loss of 930 (-38%) from 2006), whereas 61% of survey respondents identified themselves as some form of ethnic Chinese. On the other hand, 16% of survey respondents<sup>5</sup>, compared to 48% of census respondents identified themselves as ‘not a visible minority’ or of European heritage. Anecdotal evidence from survey collectors corroborates these irregularities, as they noted a consistent ‘lack of white people’ on the streets during collection periods.

This may be explained by canvassing times, as a large percentage of non-traditional businesses are popular in the evenings, as opposed to traditional businesses, a majority of which tend to close by 6pm.

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<sup>4</sup> Canadian Census Data for this report was taken from 2016 National Household Survey, for two census tracts (9330057.01 & 9330059.06) that encapsulate Chinatown. This segment of the data also captures parts of the Downtown Eastside and Gastown neighbourhoods, but it is the finest grain publicly available data division. Comparative data (change over time) is taken in relation to the 2006 NHS, as there were major gaps in the 2011 NHS, due to budget cuts by the federal government.

<sup>5</sup> This is a rough estimate, as categorizations were inconsistent between survey and census

## ***Business Patronage***

While our survey asked about retail and services as forms of interaction, the overwhelming majority of people who patronize businesses in Chinatown most often access food retail outlets and/or dine-in at restaurants. However, the patronage is not distributed evenly across businesses in the neighbourhood. When asked to identify their top 3 most visited restaurants, a small number of traditional businesses<sup>6</sup> were very commonly referenced, while the rest had very few mentions overall. Due to their pricing, language accessibility, cultural relevance, and other factors, these businesses tend to serve a broad audience. We have defined these as ‘broadly appealing businesses’. This data is consistent with traditional businesses’ self-reported business trends, where only one such business noted a substantial increase in traffic over the last five years, while the rest saw either little change or a decrease in business over the same period of time. This points to a considerable amount of success for relatively few traditional businesses in the neighbourhood, having become ‘destination’ businesses, well-known and easily accessible to those outside of the hyperlocal Chinatown community, and one of the key concerns as less recognizable names close down due to declining business, as well as other factors.

<sup>6</sup> New Town Bakery & Restaurant, Goldstone Bakery & Restaurant, Maxim’s Restaurant, The Boss Bakery & Restaurant, Sun Fresh Bakery, and Phnom Penh Restaurant

Notably, based on surveys, patrons of non-traditional restaurants did not tend to visit traditional restaurants, and vice versa. Data was analyzed on a relational scale, where businesses were classified as either:

**TYPE A**  
*Non-traditional  
businesses*



**TYPE B**  
*Broadly appealing  
businesses*



**TYPE C**  
*Traditional  
businesses*

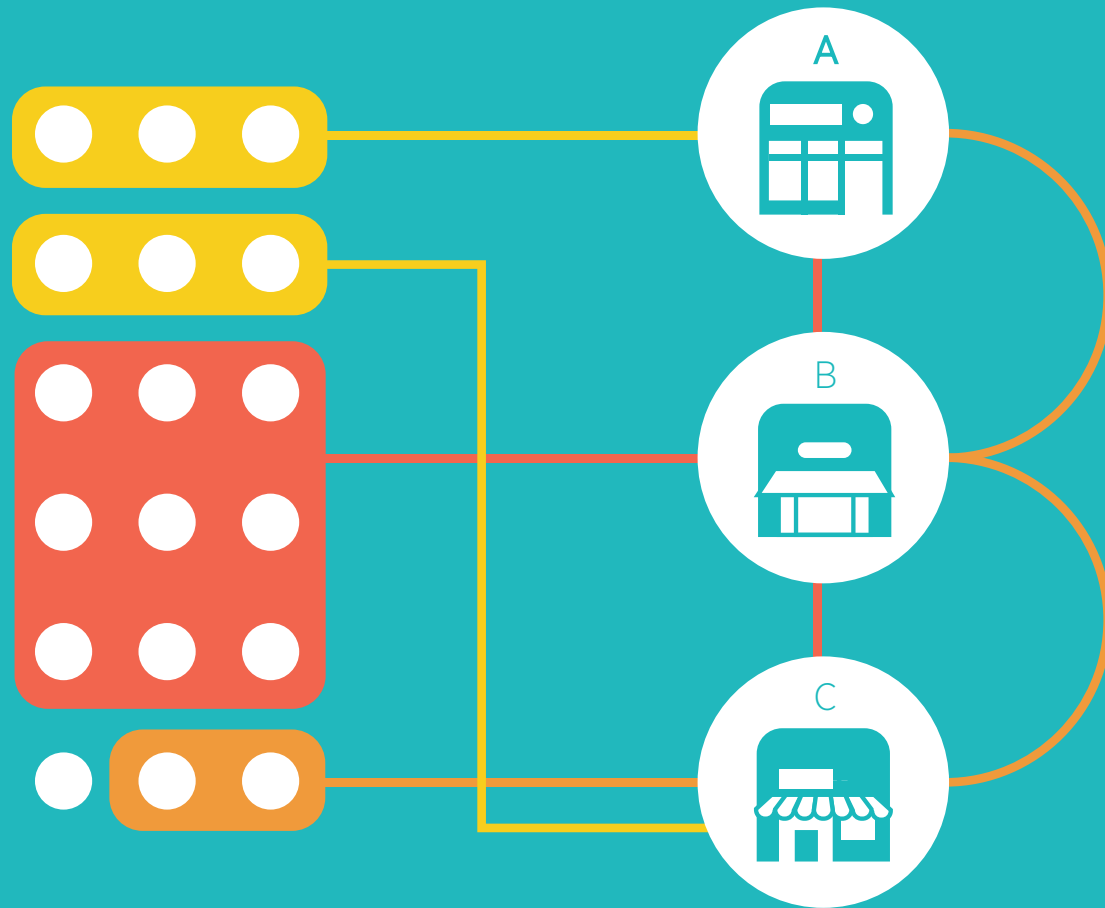


Within this classification structure, type A and type C businesses represent segregated parallel systems, whereas type B broadly appealing businesses tend to be more accessible to audiences across cultural, linguistic, and economic spectrums. A basic network analysis was performed to determine any patterns in business patronage. Based on these results we reached the following findings:

1/3 of respondents only visited one type of business (i.e. reinforce parallel systems)

1/2 of respondents visited businesses within one parallel group, as well as broadly appealing businesses

Only 11% of respondents actively crossed parallel systems



This suggests a significant division between patrons of traditional and non-traditional businesses, and a lack of social cohesion or integration between community members on a wider scale. Thus we can see the manifestation of parallel systems, not only in a business to business sense, but also in a socio-cultural context, showing an increasing social distance between groups within Chinatown. This polarization is of particular concern, as small businesses' survival is dependent upon the strength of the community in which they are situated, and their continued patronage. As older residents age out or are displaced from the neighbourhood, social division means that there will be fewer people to support the traditional businesses that contribute to the intangible heritage of Chinatown, and fewer people to support the low-barrier businesses that low-income community members and seniors depend on. On a broader level, this also means that diverse groups within the community have fewer opportunities to interact with each other, with serious consequences for social and community health. This poses the question: how can organizations encourage patronage across traditional and non-traditional business lines?

While consumers were asked to identify barriers to participation, due to our sample demographics, the most commonly named barrier to business access was convenience, as a majority of the people did not live in the neighbourhood, and had equally appropriate access to resources closer to home. Only 19% of respondents considered themselves residents, and

of those, when asked to identify more specifically where they lived, even fewer actually resided within the two census tracts that encapsulate Chinatown.

Similarly to restaurants, where people frequent grocery stores and food retail, a small number of shops received a majority of business. While this is partly due to the low number of fresh food assets remaining in the neighbourhood<sup>7</sup>, a significant number of respondents noted the types of goods available in the neighbourhood as a barrier to their participation. Based on interviews with a number of these food retail outlets, many business owners noted a lack of engagement from new residents, thus not knowing what types of goods to stock, to begin with.

Traditional business owners surmised that this could be attributed to a lack of familiarity with the layout and presentation of goods at traditional Chinatown businesses, being significantly different than a standard large-scale chain supermarket, and potentially leading to apprehension and reluctance to engage. One non-traditional business owner mentioned that they personally shop at Chinatown grocery stores, but could understand the initial hurdles for people unfamiliar with the process and style of interaction, on top of language barriers. These factors combined could potentially be overwhelming for people who are new to the neighbourhood. Non-traditional business owners that engage with traditional

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<sup>7</sup> See hua foundation's 2017 Chinatown Food Security Report

food retail businesses did not express significant problems traversing language barriers; however this comfort level was achieved through intentional introductions and persistence. This presents a feasible opportunity for similar actions to be taken with consumer groups.

### ***Current Perceptions & Chinatown's Future***

Survey respondents were offered the opportunity to respond to a number of questions in an open-ended format, regarding both the present and future of Chinatown. Responses were categorized into general themes, as well as whether or not they were positive, negative, or neutral.

When prompted to assess Chinatown's current 'food scene' as an open-ended question, the greatest number of responses referred to the amount of change in the neighbourhood over the last few years.

Upon analysis, responses were generally positive or neutral; however, value attribution varies, as often negative responses were in regards to changes in the neighbourhood. For example, six out of seven mentions of 'gentrification' were classified negatively, however, this does not necessarily reflect a negative perception of Chinatown as a whole. Of the responses that assigned value, whether positive or negative (approximately 55%), answers generally favoured traditional business and affordability, and did not favour change, 'westernizing,' or gentrification.

Survey respondents were also asked to rate on a five-point scale their relationship to both Chinatown's community and culture.



In total, 58% felt connected to the Chinatown community (either somewhat or very connected), while 63% felt connected to Chinatown culture.

When asked (unprompted) what types of food businesses they would like to see more of in Chinatown, survey respondents expressed a desire to maintain the existence of affordable options, grocery retail, and traditional businesses. Additionally, there was a strong preference for more (and more diverse) Chinese food options, with over 20% of respondents either noting a general desire for a variety of regional Chinese cuisines, or sometimes suggesting specific types of food/restaurants that are of Chinese cuisine.

Based on these responses, we see that people continue to conceptualize Chinatown as being Chinese, as broad and diverse as this group is, and want more culturally appropriate businesses in the neighbourhood; however, relatively few of the new businesses that have opened in the neighbourhood recently meet these criteria. Additionally, many of these types of businesses already exist, but are not patronized at the same frequency as 'destination' or 'broadly appealing' businesses.



# Part III:

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this report, we have observed the proliferation of parallel food systems, this time within the micro-context of Chinatown itself. There is a notable lack of crossover between businesses in the mainstream and Chinese food distribution systems. Where mixing happened, it was due to very intentional and proactive action, either sought out directly by new entrants, or by established business owners introducing new business owners to their local suppliers. This segregation was also observed in consumer business patronage, where a relatively small percentage of patrons to the neighbourhood transgressed parallel systems.

These trends are problematic on a general measure of social distance in Vancouver, but are especially significant for Chinatown, historically as well as for the present and future. The fact that this has occurred in Chinatown is particularly alarming, because the Chinese food distribution system (and even Chinatown itself) arose out of a discriminatory climate for Chinese business owners, and as a necessary means for survival. Exclusion and cultural norms reinforced a strong, resilient social economy between community members. These elements of social infrastructure are an integral part of the intangible heritage of the neighbourhood. With the segregation and displacement that has appeared in the rest of the region mirroring itself in Chinatown, a space that has historically been home to tight-knit social networks and diverse community members, this can be seen as a threat to that intangible heritage.

On top of cultural heritage conservation concerns, traditional-style businesses (both retail and services) provide basic needs that are low-barrier and accessible to many low-income people living in Chinatown and the DTES. While a large percentage of scholarship and public discourse, which inform the national imagination, advocate for the integration of communities and the disbanding of ethnic enclaves, it is clear from the experiences of a wide variety of Chinatown and DTES community members that the systems and supports in place to facilitate this integration are inadequate for the needs of many members of the population. This point of view also assumes a desire to integrate, and that it is the end goal of every successful community member. Painted as ghettoization, concentrations of poverty, and languishing immigrants, this colourful discourse has a tendency to erase the reality that ethnic enclaves provide immigrants and those with other barriers the opportunity to thrive in a lower risk environment, as well as comfort within cities where they are not always enthusiastically accepted. Ethnic enclaves allow space for agency and dignity, and fulfill the right to spatially proximate and appropriate resources.

To support the maintenance and conservation of these aspects of Chinatown's intangible heritage and culture requires multi-level support, from individuals, to businesses (both traditional and non-traditional), to nonprofits, to official government and regulatory bodies.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of our report, we have produced the following recommendations. These have been divided into three categories: addressing parallel systems, regulatory body support, and policy recommendations. While a majority of our recommendations remain tangible, there needs to be a larger discussion regarding the root causes and systemic issues in the neighbourhood, and how these might be addressed at a policy level.

## *Addressing Parallel Systems*

The following recommendations attempt to address the growing divide, at business to business, business to consumer, and consumer levels. These recommendations were determined based on our findings, including techniques and strategies successfully employed by some individuals and organizations in the neighbourhood. We suggest that stakeholder organizations and authorities, such as the Vancouver Chinatown BIA and Merchants Association, explore further approaches to encourage more cohesive purchasing and supplying patterns, as this was a common desire among businesses.

- Identify the needs of different community members to be better able to serve across parallel systems; leaving it solely to the free market will continue to gentrify the area and exacerbate existing cohesion problems.
  - Encourage greater participation and engagement from all businesses with Chinatown-wide events & festivities
  - Appoint a business ambassador to support the relationship-building process between traditional & non-traditional businesses, and to work directly with businesses on local procurement.
  - Implement cross-cultural marketing that is specific to programs and workshops, and engage across socio-economic and cultural lines.
- Establish cultural knowledge/skills sharing hub that works off of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) Article 14(a), where each State Party shall endeavour, by all appropriate means, to:
    - ensure recognition of, respect for, and enhancement of the intangible cultural heritage in society, in particular through:
      - (i) educational, awareness-raising and information programmes, aimed at the general public, in particular young people;
      - (ii) specific educational and training programmes within the communities and groups concerned;
      - (iii) capacity-building activities for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, in particular management and scientific research; and
      - (iv) non-formal means of transmitting knowledge;
  - Improve multilevel accessibility in both traditional and non-traditional businesses, based on the definitions of accessibility provided in Appendix A
    - One example of language accessibility issues can be found in Appendix B: Other themes - Signage Accessibility

## *City & Regulatory Body Support*

Through the recognition of the value of small businesses in regards to Chinatown's intangible heritage and culture, and moving forward as the City of Vancouver supports a bid for a UNESCO World Heritage Site designation, we suggest the following recommendations to attempt to mitigate the burden that small businesses take on. As per UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), we support the integration of Article 13(a) to "adopt a general policy aimed at promoting the function of the intangible cultural heritage in society, and at integrating the safeguarding of such heritage into planning programmes."

- Incorporate an Assets-Based Community Development framework into policy.
  - In particular, recognizing Chinatown's established social infrastructure and social economy as assets.
  - Direct external investments to strengthen and grow from these existing baseline assets.
- Work with stakeholders (e.g. BIA) on setting measurable goals towards the actions of the Vancouver Chinatown Economic Revitalization Plan after incorporating elements of intangible heritage and asset-based community development framework.
- Implement policies to reduce speculation & dampen property value inflation or other measures to improve tenureship of lease.
- Support traditional businesses in upgrades to physical infrastructure and technology.
  - For example, credit/debit card machines, and takeout delivery services, or similar programs to past beautification grants.
- Streamline/improve processes for permitting & inspection (including language accessibility).
- Establish a food-focused business incubator space (e.g. test/pop-up kitchen) to reduce barriers to small business startup.
  - Encourage and incentivize a focus on cultural specificity in kitchen set up and training programs.
- Provide assistance & resources to traditional businesses regarding succession planning.
  - Explore opportunities for implementing long-term sustainable and community ownership models such as cooperatives.
- Establish special economic zones for Chinatown and the DTES to recognize the unique cultural and social assets of these neighbourhoods.
  - Provide appropriate support services to traditional businesses.
  - Incentivize cooperation with culturally specific infrastructure.
  - Legitimize aspects of informal and survival economies.

## ***Policy Recommendations***

With the number of plans and strategies already in place for the neighbourhood, we recommend several nuanced approaches that work off existing policies along overarching frameworks to be applied to Chinatown, its UNESCO designation bid, and how we approach diversity, inclusion, and reconciliation as a city.

### **A. SHIFTING SYSTEMS LEVEL BELIEFS AND BEHAVIOURS**

#### **1. Development and application of an Equity Framework**

UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) calls for the "*[adoption of] a general policy aimed at promoting the function of the intangible cultural heritage in society, and at integrating the safeguarding of such heritage into planning programmes.*"

At a high level, we recommend that the City of Vancouver develop an equity framework to better include and understand the needs of Vancouver's existing and growing diverse populations. The topics discussed in this report do not exist in a vacuum, but rather have complex intersectionalities, which can only begin to be understood

from a framework of equity. For example, conversations about contributing to Chinatown's character must be rooted in an understanding of the cultural blindness of orientalism and racial stereotyping.

The equity framework would apply to all aspects of municipal governance, such as services, outreach and engagement, decision making, hiring, and other key functions of the City. Multiple forms of equity, such as gender, race, disability, and economic, should be taken into account.

This framework would include a holistic recognition of culture (beyond Arts & Culture) and from there, approach policy-making and implementation through a culturally appropriate lens. As discussed in our *Vancouver Chinatown Food Security Report* (2017), we recommend that the City recognize the importance of culture and enact culture as the 4th pillar of sustainability. Similar equity-based approaches can be found in UNESCO's definition of Intangible Cultural Heritage where culture "is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it—without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given expression or practice is their heritage." This speaks to the self-determination approach where a healthy community is one that has the right and the ability to shape their own present and future.



This equity framework will be critical in our collective work to further define Chinatown's intangible cultural heritage—a key part of the community's bid for a UNESCO designation. UNESCO states that intangible cultural heritage “has capital importance as it allows cultural diversity to be maintained through dialogue between cultures and the promotion of respect towards other ways of life.” The phrasing “other ways of life” comes from principles of recognizing that diversity is beyond a settler-centric celebration of perceived differences; it's about meaningfully working alongside diverse people towards empowering their autonomy and actualization.

This gives credence to the understanding that there should be more emphasis put towards the community's right to self-determine their future. Further work will need to be completed to design a tangible and measurable framework that covers the various forms of disparities that our communities face and hold.

## **2. Improve Social Cohesion and decreasing Social Distance**

As shown in this report, parallel economic and social systems exist and are pronounced in Chinatown. While there are multiple parallels in existence in all neighbourhoods to a degree, we believe that it is highly pronounced in this neighbourhood due to its demographics, history, and recent changes.

As identified in the Resilient Vancouver Phase One Engagement Report (2018), social cohesion and community connectedness were of key interest to the City. The engagement report explores several reasons as to why there are high levels of social isolation, including the “lack of understanding about Vancouver's history and cultural heritage.” This cultural blindness contributes to the reinforcement of injustices and inequitable flow of knowledge and resources.

To fully recognize historic ethnocultural spaces and parallel social and economic systems will:

- Meaningfully shift the orientation of policy from “Place-making” to “Place-keeping;”
- Support the maintenance and growth of Chinatown’s social infrastructure as something critical to residents, businesses, and other groups; and
- Broaden the definition of “food assets” to include cultural food assets for their role in ensuring residents have access to healthy, culturally appropriate, and affordable food, along with a place for community identity and social connection.

This approach should be applied across the city to historically significant and culturally specific neighbourhoods where there are clear parallels in social and economic systems.

We recommend that there be further public discourse to recognize the histories and relations with the Coast Salish peoples, along with Hogan’s Alley due to the community’s shared space and history.

As our findings showcased and we have discussed in our conclusion, integration is

not always possible nor is it ideal. Policies should start to recognize these parallels and their histories; measures of social cohesion and social distance both reflect the segregation that we rarely talk about as a city.

There are also UNESCO implications beyond just recognizing and valuing diversity through intangible cultural heritage; “within the context of globalisation, Intangible Cultural Heritage has capital importance as it allows cultural diversity to be maintained through dialogue between cultures and the promotion of respect towards other ways of life.” Intangible cultural heritage, as UNESCO states, will contribute “to social cohesion, encouraging a sense of identity and responsibility which helps individuals to feel part of one or different communities and to feel part of society at large.”

While several actions are discussed in the recommendations to “Addressing Parallel Systems,” we believe that focusing on increasing civic and public knowledge of our history and cultural heritage will result in an emergence of strategies and tactics that will reflect a more equitable reality.



## B. REFINEMENT AND REFRESH OF EXISTING POLICIES

### 3. Chinatown Economic Revitalization Plan and Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan

In the Memorandum issued on June 22, 2018 from General Manager of Planning, Urban Design & Sustainability, Gil Kelley, to Mayor and Council, an update was provided as to the status of implementation of the Economic Revitalization Strategy Actions in the Chinatown Neighbourhood Plan and Economic Revitalization Strategy (2012). While it was recognized that “many actions were completed or are underway,” there are key actions that have yet to be implemented that would support and alleviate some of the challenges identified within our research.

Specifically for Chinatown’s food retail environment, we recommend refinement of several of the strategic actions:

a. “Tenant recruitment strategy” could benefit from selective recruitment of businesses that would contribute to the Chinatown character that many of our business interviewees and consumers have identified as ideal additions to the neighbourhood. These were often described as “Chinese businesses” but further work would need to be completed to assess neighbourhood fit in regards to socio-economics and accessibility of these business.

- b. “Tenant retention strategy.” As with the experience of the BIA, the “lack of succession planning makes retention challenging.” Due to the contributions that traditional businesses make to the neighbourhood character, through intangible values with the social and cultural connections they hold, we recommend that a working group be formed to come up with options that the City, other levels of government, as well as other stakeholders can implement to assist with succession planning of these businesses. Namely, to explore how traditional businesses can succeed in becoming community- and membership- owned entities. Applying cooperative values can serve the community/membership as well as democratizing ownership and economics of the business.
- c. “Tourism and Marketing Strategy.” More specifically for Chinatown’s Marketing Strategy, we recommend actions including measures to build social and cultural relationships between traditional and non-traditional businesses. As our research has shown, there are missed intra-neighbourhood economic opportunities due to parallel and segregated economic and social systems. Marketing opportunities within the neighbourhood to businesses across cultural lines would contribute to neighbourhood connectivity. The external aspects of the Tourism and Marketing Strategy would also benefit from a more socially cohesive business environment in Chinatown.

- d. From our findings, there is also a desire from business operators for further “clean-up of public spaces with local business”. Current actions are not satisfactory based on our interview findings. This ongoing challenge can be attributed to larger systemic issues. We stress that ‘clean-up’ does not mean increasing police presence in the neighbourhood.
- e. Include a Community Economic Development strategy that is based entirely from a culturally and community specific lens. This recommendation includes legitimizing and uplifting the survival economy, informal economy, and other systems that have been pushed to the margins, with measures to increase opportunities for more equitable and inclusive employment.

While housing was not specifically researched for this report, housing has significant impacts on neighbourhood food retail and social environment. Market-based development in Chinatown and its surrounding areas have created and reinforced actors in parallel systems, economically and socially, for both businesses and consumers. These systems draw out the social distance between community members and limits the potential of socially cohesive communities to thrive. It is recommended that housing be addressed with culturally specific needs in mind, including culturally specific seniors housing. Development guidelines such as frontage, use, size of retail

units, and other zoning and permitting should be explored as ways to direct the types of businesses and ownership that will end up occupying retail spaces in the neighbourhood.

#### 4. **Systemic neighbourhood environmental issues**

To address safety concerns expressed by interviewees, there are several larger structural solutions such as increasing the number of safe and affordable housing units, access to health-focused treatment, and equitable employment opportunities. One short-term measure could be to install lighting on streets and in alleyways to help people feel safe during evenings and at night.

In the interim, reducing criminalization and stigmatization of community members would alleviate further social divides. Instead, we recommend an approach that allows them to thrive that takes an inclusive approach to housing, employment, social security, and access (services, food, other), which would require cooperative action by all levels of government and stakeholders.

Ultimately, a systems change approach would need to be applied to adequately address the root causes of these issues. As noted in the Resilient Vancouver Phase One Engagement report (2018), many of these issues are interrelated and solutions need to involve multiple city departments, all levels of government, and other stakeholders.



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# Appendices:

## APPENDIX A: TERMINOLOGY

### *Accessibility*

Accessibility refers to the “degree of access” for a potential user of infrastructure or services. Addressing accessibility concerns requires intentional design to enable full and meaningful participation for a diverse range of users. This is typically regarded in terms of physical accessibility (e.g., curb cuts, ramps), but should also be applied to language, cultural specificity, and socio-economic status. In the context of Chinatown, this can mean multilingual signage, culturally appropriate and affordable food options, and inclusive gathering spaces.

### *Chinese vs. Cantonese*

Throughout this report we utilize the term ‘Chinese’ as a generalized term, most often referring to members of the Cantonese diaspora, unless otherwise specified. We have chosen to do this for clarity and consistency, based on this study’s focus on Chinatown, as a global nexus for the Cantonese diaspora in North America. We acknowledge, however, that Chinatown does not represent all of the diversity of ‘Chinese-ness’ nor is it/has it ever been exclusive to members of the Cantonese diaspora, but rather a diverse range of marginalized people.

### *Parallel Food Systems*

A parallel food system refers to a food supply chain that operates outside of and in parallel to the mainstream local food movement. It represents one of the many pathways through which food moves from local farms to consumers. However, due to factors such as historic and contemporary racism, discrimination, as well as different language and cultural norms, parallel food systems are often underrepresented within the mainstream local food movement and have few points of intentional connection and collaboration. The Chinese food distribution system is a prominent example of a parallel food system in Metro Vancouver.

### *Social Distance*

Social distance is the measure of perceived closeness that members of different groups feel towards each other. These groups can differ by race, class, ethnicity, linguistic ability, and various other factors of identity and social constructs. These perceptions can affect the social cohesiveness and atmosphere of a neighbourhood, particularly if there is great social distance (polarization) within a small area.

### *Social Economy*

The social economy is made up of the interactions between various members and organizations, driven by solidarity and reciprocity, to meet the needs of a community. Social economies often emerge out of the failures of state intervention and the free market, and are difficult to define as they are deeply embedded in the specific social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts. They tend to be formally independent of the state, and contribute to a collective community well-being and high level of social cohesion.

### ***Social Infrastructure***

The City of Vancouver’s working definition of social infrastructure “refers to facilities and services that help individuals, families, groups, and communities meet their social needs, maximize their potential for development, and enhance community well-being.” From an urban planning lens, this includes both the ‘hard’ infrastructure (e.g. buildings) and ‘soft’ infrastructure (e.g., services and programs) that support the growth of human capital and enhance quality of life, equity, and social well-being.

In the context of our report, we use the term ‘social infrastructure’ to refer to the locally embedded social relations that provide services to community members, and carry out key functions within a social network. These are often not regulated or facilitated by official bodies, and usually arise organically when community needs are not met by official services and programs.

### ***Third Places***

Third place is a sociological term referring to social spaces outside of the home (‘first place’) and workplace (‘second place’) where people tend to spend their time. These spaces are arguably important for community building and establishing a sense of place. These tend to take form in community centres, churches, schools, libraries, and parks, but in recent decades also online. Third places are often referred to as ‘community living rooms,’ providing spaces for social interaction. In this vein, third spaces are especially important for communities such as Chinatown and the DTES, as many who live in the neighbourhood do not otherwise have access to private social spaces.

### ***Traditional & Non-traditional business classification***

Businesses in the neighbourhood were classified based on their relationship to the historical functions and patterns of businesses in Chinatown. These tend to fall along the lines of ‘newer’ and ‘older’ businesses; however, there are a number of exceptions to this rule, hence our decision against temporal relationships for the classification system. To attempt to adequately capture the essence of these business classifications, we have chosen to use the terms ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ style businesses, acknowledging that this terminology is not perfect either:

Traditional style businesses in Chinatown refer to businesses that carry on key functions (social, cultural, economic) in Chinatown throughout its history; that is, as a retailer that provides culturally appropriate and low barrier access to goods and services for immigrant, low-income, and senior populations. These businesses tend to be well established in the community (i.e. have been in operation for at least 10 years), local serving, and thus have strong social networks, including long standing relationships with community members. Traditional businesses in Chinatown often, but not always, have a Chinese (more specifically Cantonese) orientation. Tosi’s is an example of a non-Chinese traditional business.

Non-traditional style businesses in Chinatown are relatively recent entrants to the neighbourhood ranging from food retail, to services, and business offices. These establishments differ from



traditional businesses in that they have a higher barrier to access due to their business model and pricing of their products and services. Language, cultural specificity, and services are often English-only, and often have differing business practices that stem from cultural nuances. Non-traditional business networks are parallel to traditional businesses with the majority of their patrons being new residents of the neighbourhood or destination visitors. Some of these new entrants have been classified as ‘zones of exclusion’ by CCAP as they are not within the economic reach of low-income community members, and are often not culturally accessible to Chinese-speaking residents in the neighbourhood.

## APPENDIX B: OTHER THEMES

Our study found a number of other points of interest that did not fit into the scope of this report, but are of interest for further research. These include both additional challenges and further expansion on handful of recommendations listed within the report.

### ***Succession Issues***

A large part of the study focused on the continuation of these legacy businesses when the current owners and staffing retire and leave their businesses. Based on the responses, two paths exist for traditional business owners when retirement happens: passing the business on within the family, or selling it to an external party. However, there are various significant challenges to these solutions.

***“All the kids get educated. And then they don’t want to work in Chinatown — they want to work in an office job. And as a parent, I have mixed feelings; it’s a family business, but it’s a tough business too.”*** - Traditional Business Owner

Respondents mentioned that there is a loss of interest in the industry — particularly with the labour-intensive and service-oriented jobs that are associated with traditional businesses. Despite a wish for these business owners to pass their businesses on to their children, there continues to be a lack of interest.

***“My retirement plans involve my son overtaking this business. But a huge problem is that he doesn’t speak the language, and he doesn’t think that [this traditional Chinese food establishment] is his style. If he took it over, he would want to change it into something new.”***

- Traditional Business Owner

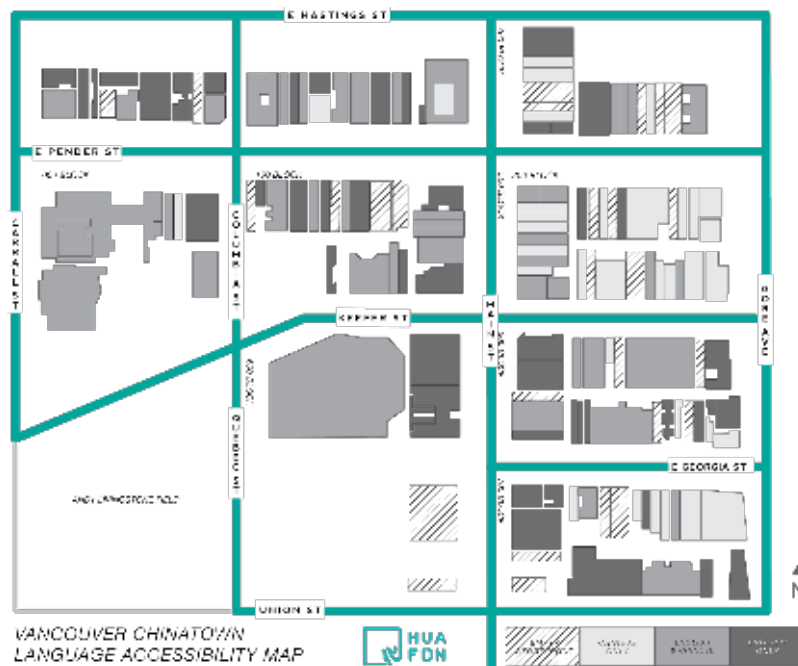
In cases where family members show interest in continuing on businesses, there is less desire to maintain the same operations and/or services. Rather, in some cases, family members are open to taking over the physical space, but attempting a new business instead.

When it is not possible to pass the business on in the family, owners discussed the possibility of selling the business onto an external party. Upon further probing, some business owners revealed that there are few prospects. Interested buyers are a part of an aging generation, as those who may be interested were likely amongst the existing staff.

Notably, during the time period of this study, one traditional greengrocer that we interviewed closed down their operations. During interviews, researchers got a sense that they would not be in business for much longer. A new, similar business (also a traditional-style greengrocer) opened following this, but with no ties to the original business; however, this is more of an exception, rather than the norm.

## *Signage Accessibility*

Based on field data collected in 2018 (Kimberley Wong, with adaptations), Chinatown has experienced a dramatic shift in language accessibility. This conclusion was determined through on-site data collection, categorizing ground-floor commercial/retail spaces as one of: Chinese Only, English & Chinese, or English Only, based only on visual cues and signage, noting that business turnover may affect the accuracy of data over time. It is important to note that the map resolution is based on buildings only, not individual units. Where buildings had multiple ground-floor commercial spaces, classification was based on a combination of factors: number of units per category and unit size.



What has historically been a multilingual neighbourhood has, in recent years, transformed such that a large percentage of ground floor retail spaces along the major Pender Street and Main Street corridors operate in English only. A majority of businesses that have opened within the past five years are inaccessible to the existing Chinese-speaking seniors population. Small concentrations of Chinese-accessible businesses remain in the block between Main & Gore and Pender & Keefer Streets, as well as along Georgia, east of Main Street. This has, to some degree, created notably different and segregated business zones. This mirrors very closely the lack of integration that we are seeing between newer businesses and older supply chain networks. In the most extreme of cases, one new retail space hired a security guard for their grand opening, and for a couple weeks after, with implications about the type of clientele that are welcome inside.

Among other concerns, language and signage remains a major barrier to access that can be solved with relative ease.

## APPENDIX C: BUSINESS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Open-ended questions

1. If you were to run into a friend you hadn't seen in ten years:
    - a. How would you describe your business?
    - b. How would you describe the location of your business?
  2. How long have you been in business at this location?
    - a. Did you have connections to this neighbourhood before opening your business
    - b. Why this neighbourhood?
  3. Property
    - a. Do you own or lease this property?
    - b. Upgrades/Infrastructure
      - i. Did your business put resources into upgrading the space to meet code? Infrastructure that is needed to operate (eg, higher gas output for stoves)
      - ii. If so, could you provide an estimate to the cost of that process?
  4. What are/were some challenges/barriers that you face as a business?
  5. What resources would you like to see/what would you have found helpful when you first opened your business here?
  6. How do you find your suppliers?
    - a. How long have you sourced from these suppliers?
    - b. Why have you chosen to source from these suppliers?
      - i. What were the deciding factors?
        1. Types of goods they offer are specific to business needs
        2. Quality of goods
        3. Service (delivery, language)
        4. Cost/value for money
        5. Long standing relationships
  - c. Have you considered buying from neighbourhood sources?
    - i. If yes (but don't currently do so), what prevents you from sourcing from them?
    - ii. If no, why not? Did you try to, how?
  - d. What % of suppliers are chinatown grocers/butchers/fishmongers/other?
  - e. Why/how did you develop relationship?
7. Do you know or interact with neighbouring businesses?
  - a. How so?
    - i. Business purchasing?
    - ii. Individual purchasing (lunch, coffee, etc.)?
    - iii. Partnerships?
8. What do customers like the most about your business?
9. Have you participated in neighbourhood cultural activities? How? If not, would you like to? What barriers have you faced?
10. What do you do that supports the neighbourhood?
11. How would you describe Chinatown['s food scene]?
12. What is your favourite thing about the neighbourhood?
13. What is your least favourite thing about the neighbourhood?

### Comparative data questions

14. Are you independently owned?
15. Are you planning on retiring soon?
16. Do you have a succession plan?
17. How many employees do you have? (Full time & Part time)
18. Approximately what percentage of your staff live in the neighbourhood?
19. What is the makeup of your clientele?
  - a. Local residents (i.e. Chinatown, Strathcona)
  - b. Local employees (includes Downtown)
  - c. Other Vancouver residents
  - d. Other Lower Mainland residents
  - e. Out of town tourists
  - f. Other
20. What are your perceived business trends (since opening)
  - a. Increased substantially
  - b. Increased modestly
  - c. Stayed about the same
  - d. Decreased modestly
  - e. Decreased substantially
21. What are your business hours?
22. What languages do your staff speak?
23. How would you classify your business? (Restaurant / Cafe / Bakery / Grocery / Other)
24. What is your main type of business interaction? (Point of Sale / Take out / Sit-down)

# APPENDIX D: CONSUMER SURVEY QUESTIONS



## CHINATOWN CONSUMER SURVEY

This study is to identify consumers' food retail behaviours from individual food security to what they would like to see more of in the neighbourhood.

**1. What is your connection to Chinatown? (Select all that apply)**

Resident (walking distance)    Work    Local Visitor    Tourist/non-local visitor

For Residents:

**2. One of the City's priorities is to improve access to fresh food assets within walking distance. What building do you live in/what is the nearest intersection?**

**3. When was the building that you live in built?**

Last 5 years    5-10 years ago    10+ years ago

**4. How long have you been coming to Chinatown on a consistent basis?**

< 1 year    1-2 years    3-4 years    4-5 years    5-6 years    7-9 years    10+ years    N/A

**5. On average, how many days per week are you in Chinatown?**

< 1 day    1 day    2-3 days    4-5 days    6-7 days    N/A

**6. Do you purchase goods and/or use services in Chinatown? What is your main/more frequent type of interaction? (Select one)**

Retail or services    Food retail (groceries, bakeries)    Drinks (coffee, happy hour)  
 Restaurant (eat-in)    Restaurant (take-out)  
 I do not interact with businesses/just touring or sightseeing

**7. On the map provided, please select the TOP 3 restaurants that you visit on a regular basis.**

**8. Do you shop in Chinatown for your regular grocery needs?**

If Yes, underline on the map the ones that you frequent.

If No, would you like to? What barriers prevent you from participating? (Select all that apply)

Service (e.g. language)    Types of goods available    Quality    Payment method  
 Hours of operation    Pricing    Other:

**9. Which of the following is the greatest influence in your decision to try a new restaurant?**

Social media    Food blogs/reviews    Word of mouth    Other:

**10. How would you describe Chinatown's food scene?**

**11. What types of food businesses (restaurants, markets, cafes) would you like to see more of in Chinatown?**



## CHINATOWN CONSUMER SURVEY

**12. How interested are you in connecting with Chinatown's history, community, and culture?**

Very interested    Somewhat interested    Neutral    Somewhat uninterested    Very uninterested

**13. How connected do you feel to the Chinese community in Chinatown?**

Very connected    Somewhat connected    Neutral    Somewhat disconnected    Very disconnected

**14. How connected do you feel to the Chinese culture in Chinatown?**

Very connected    Somewhat connected    Neutral    Somewhat disconnected    Very disconnected

**15. How old are you?**

< 15    16-25    26-35    36-45    46-55    56-65    65 +

**16. What is your gender?**

**17. What is your ethnic background?**

American    Chinese - Other    Middle Eastern/West Asian  
 African    European    South Asian  
 Canadian    Filipino    Southeast Asian  
 Chinese – Mainland    Japanese    Indigenous  
 Chinese – Hong Kong    Korean    Métis  
 Chinese – Taiwan    Latin, Central, or South American  
 Other:

**18. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

Less than high school    High school diploma    Bachelor's degree    Doctoral degree  
 Some high school    College/technical diploma    Master's degree    Vocational/trade certificate

**19. What is your occupation?**

**20. What was your household income last year?**

< \$10,000    \$10,000 - 19,999    \$20,000 - 29,999    \$30,000 - 39,999    \$40,000 - 49,999    \$50,000 - 59,999  
 \$60,000 - 69,999    \$70,000 - 79,999    \$80,000 - 89,999    \$90,000 - 99,999    \$100,000-149,000    \$150,000 +

**21. Do you own or rent your living space?**

Own    Rent

**22. What languages do you read? (Select all that apply)**

English    Chinese (traditional)    Chinese (simplified)    Not listed

**23. What languages do you speak? (Select all that apply)**

English    Cantonese    Mandarin    Other Chinese dialect    Not listed