

Calgary



Chinatown Cultural Plan

Summary

Introduction

The **Chinatown Cultural Plan** is Calgary's first neighbourhood-specific cultural plan. Working together with the new **Chinatown Area Redevelopment Plan**, this Cultural Plan honours those who have made Chinatown what it is today, and will help ensure Chinatown remains a vibrant place to live, visit, work and do business for generations to come.

Why a cultural plan for Chinatown?

Chinatown is one of Calgary's most distinctive cultural communities, with a long and important history to the city, region and nation. The Chinatown community has been the leading voice in its desire to see the evolution of the neighbourhood be anchored in its culture, with development approached respectfully and through a cultural lens.

The **Chinatown Cultural Plan** builds upon Chinatown's cultural strengths to sustain and improve the quality of life for its residents, while welcoming visitors and newcomers.

What this plan does

The **Chinatown Cultural Plan** outlines the strategic directions for advancing and investing in Chinatown's cultural future — including cultural experiences and programs; spaces, facilities and amenities; and legacy businesses and tourism. It provides guidance for setting priorities, forming partnerships, assigning roles and securing resources.

This Cultural Plan also informs and complements the **Chinatown Area Redevelopment Plan** by introducing cultural considerations for use in the planning process, including for new development and public space improvements. The objective is to ensure that new developments do not come at the expense of Chinatown's culture, but instead contribute to what makes this neighbourhood such a special place.



Key themes

Five key themes and areas of opportunity emerged from the community engagement. These themes provide different perspectives – or vignettes – on the rich culture of Calgary’s Chinatown and how it can best be strengthened. The key themes give structure to the **Chinatown Cultural Plan**, and help to organize the recommendations for strategies and actions.

In the next sections, each theme is defined to include strategies and actions.



A. People, voices and experiences



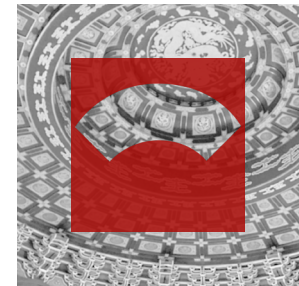
B. Culture, creative and learning



C. Food, merchants and tourism



D. Housing, health and social purpose



E. Places, spaces and natural environment

THEME A

People, voices and experiences

Tomorrow’s Chinatown is a community that celebrates its diversity, and offers people harmony and a sense of belonging. Community members have very personal connections to Chinatown. Despite being small, Chinatown generates a lot of activity, with different groups represented. From those who call Chinatown home to those establishing their roots – like the seniors who make Chinatown their living room, and new immigrants and youth looking to (re)connect with their heritage – the diverse voices contribute to a rich, dynamic culture.

**STRATEGY A1:
Bring cultural groups together**

Chinatown is a place of cultural significance where legacies are celebrated, safeguarded and passed on. Sharing culture with others is a way to welcome people in to participate and contribute, and to strengthen understanding between different cultures and identities.

Actions

- A1.1 HONOURING CONTRIBUTIONS
- A1.2 LANGUAGE ACCESSIBILITY
- A1.3 CHINATOWN ‘REACHING OUT’
- A1.4 CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONS

**STRATEGY A2:
Build bridges across the generations**

Chinatown’s elders and seniors have many things to say and advice to give to the next generation. Youth are looking to reconnect to their heritage, but experience challenges in making the connection. Genuine dialogue and friendship need to be fostered across age groups.

Actions

- A2.1 INTERGENERATIONAL TALKS
- A2.2 HANDS-ON LEARNING
- A2.3 YOUNG LEADERSHIP
- A2.4 MULTI-GENERATIONAL CO-OP

**STRATEGY A3:
Improve the city-community relationship**

Chinatown and The City both hope for a strong and fruitful relationship. To advance this, conversations need to be had about what caused damage to the relationship in the past, and about the need and advantages of more diverse representation in The City’s practices.

Actions

- A3.1 PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT
- A3.2 CULTURAL TRAINING
- A3.3 IMPLEMENTATION AGREEMENT
- A3.4 ANTI-RACISM COMMITMENT

THEME B

Culture, creative and learning

Tomorrow’s Chinatown is a community known for its artistic production, creativity and opportunities for cultural learning. Culture is a strong builder of connection and community within the urban area of Calgary. The Chinese community in Calgary is unanimous in its hope that Chinatown be the centre for Chinese culture. Nurturing the neighbourhood’s capacity for artistic production, creativity and cultural learning represents a great opportunity to bring more people to Chinatown and share in its cultural richness.

**STRATEGY B1:
Expand cultural programs and activities**

By adding new cultural programming and expanding existing offerings, there is an opportunity to attract those who are not familiar with the Chinese culture and younger people who want to learn more about their culture. Support for Chinatown’s cultural practitioners is also desirable.

Actions

- B1.1 NEW, YOUNGER AUDIENCES**
- B1.2 CULTURAL EDUCATION**
- B1.3 CHINATOWN CELEBRATIONS**
- B1.4 CHINATOWN ARTS COLLECTIVE**

**STRATEGY B2:
Secure more space for culture**

Chinatown needs more space to develop, express and celebrate its culture. Better use can be made of existing, underutilized spaces; private and public, indoor and outdoor. Securing new spaces would give additional ‘canvas’ to cultural activities that have citywide appeal.

Actions

- B2.1 NEW PURPOSEFUL SPACES**
- B2.2 ACTIVATED SOCIETY BUILDINGS**
- B2.3 SPONTANEOUS SPACES**
- B2.4 CULTURAL CANVAS**

**STRATEGY B3:
Unlock potential of the Cultural Centre**

The 中華文化中心 Chinese Cultural Centre’s landmark architecture and many cultural experiences make it a gateway into Chinatown for locals and tourists. It is also clear that there are more possibilities to tap into, making it time to explore how to unlock the Centre’s full potential as a cultural destination.

Actions

- B3.1 ARTISTS SUPPORT PROGRAM**
- B3.2 WEST AND EAST PLAZAS**
- B3.3 CITY OF CALGARY PARTNERSHIP**
- B3.4 SUCCESSION PLANNING**

THEME C

Food, merchants and tourism

Tomorrow’s Chinatown is a community valued for its independent businesses that offer cultural food, shopping and tourism experiences. The memory of Chinatown is deeply rooted in its independent business community and the cultural food, shopping and tourism experiences it offers. Many small businesses in Chinatown were started by immigrants out of their savings and built up despite setbacks. Children of family-operated businesses know very well how hard their parents worked and the sacrifices they made to provide a better life for them.

**STRATEGY C1:
Support existing and legacy businesses**

Chinatown’s small, independent stores and its strong food culture are assets to cherish and build on. Longstanding, family-operated businesses give the area its appeal and personality that cannot be replaced. Efforts should be made to sustain this legacy for future generations.

Actions

- C1.1 LEGACY BUSINESS PROGRAM
- C1.2 BUSINESS SUCCESSION SUPPORT
- C1.3 ATTRACTIVE STOREFRONTS
- C1.4 COLLECTIVE STORYTELLING

**STRATEGY C2:
Attract new enterprises and concepts**

New, exciting additions to the retail mix would make for a more complete experience for today’s residents, and bring younger and non-Chinese groups into the community. Grocers, fresh foods, fashion, nighttime businesses, and fusions of modern and traditional, East and West are desired.

Actions

- C2.1 ACTIVE RETAIL RECRUITMENT
- C2.2 NEW BUSINESS INCENTIVES
- C2.3 CULINARY EXPERIENCE HUB
- C2.4 CULTURAL INDUSTRY

**STRATEGY C:3
Create a year-round visitor experience**

Chinatown is one of Calgary’s biggest opportunities to offer a genuine cultural destination. New, daily experiences are needed to attract visitors regularly and year-round. This can be enhanced by integrating with other downtown experiences and attractions to create a seamless journey.

Actions

- C3.1 STREET ECONOMY
- C3.2 CHINATOWN EVERYDAY
- C3.3 DESTINATION CHINATOWN
- C3.4 WELCOMING TO ALL

THEME D

Housing, health and social purpose

Tomorrow’s Chinatown is a community that provides residents the housing and support services they need through all life stages. The Chinatown community is unique in that people both in and outside the neighbourhood are passionate about the area and share a desire to be part of something bigger than themselves. In Chinese culture, community responsibility and civil society come before profit and personal gain, and family and community gathering are important. You are here to honour those before you and propel those after you.

**STRATEGY D1:
Invest in an all-generation community**

Chinatown could become a community where young people, families and seniors live together, find their home and take care of each other. Investments in additional housing, amenities and services are required to make Chinatown a complete community for all generations.

Actions

- D1.1 MULTIGENERATIONAL LIVING
- D1.2 ACCESS TO HOUSING
- D1.3 CULTURAL HEALTH CARE
- D1.4 PLAY AND EXERCISE

**STRATEGY D2:
Contribute to the lives of all Calgarians**

Chinatown has always been a welcoming place for Chinese and Asian immigrants; it also has much to contribute to the lives of all Calgarians. Other newcomers looking to find their place in society, or those seeking equity and representation, need Chinatown in their lives as well.

Actions

- D2.1 CENTRAL NEWCOMERS POINT
- D2.2 FULFILLING VOLUNTEERING
- D2.3 ANTI-RACISM ADVOCACY
- D2.4 COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

**STRATEGY D3:
Sustain the traditional tongs and societies**

Chinatown’s tongs, benevolent and family associations played a crucial role in the lives of Chinese immigrants, their families and descendants. As time passed, their original purpose no longer aligns with contemporary needs. A re-imagination is needed to sustain their important legacy.

Actions

- D3.1 LEGACY ARCHIVE AND CENTRE
- D3.2 MODERNIZED PROGRAMS
- D3.3 RELIABLE RENTAL INCOME
- D3.4 COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

THEME E

Places, spaces and natural environment

Tomorrow’s Chinatown is a community that expresses its culture, history and stories in the **physical environment**. Chinatown was established in its present location in 1910, after being displaced twice. Its resilience is a point of pride within the community. There is no other Calgary neighbourhood that has such strong expressions of its culture in the built environment. One knows immediately they are in Chinatown through the unique styling and accents of lanterns, lamp posts, Chinese language signage and other cultural markers.

**STRATEGY E1:
Design streets for culture and people**

Chinatown can lead the way and show Calgary what it means to reclaim streets for the needs of people, business and culture. A consistent, people-oriented street design will add life and vibrancy, and communicate to people that they have entered a distinct cultural community.

Actions

- E1.1 ACCESSIBLE DESIGNS
- E1.2 EAST-WEST CONNECTIONS
- E1.3 PEOPLE-ORIENTED STREETS
- E1.4 CULTURAL LANDSCAPING

**STRATEGY E2:
Revive heritage to benefit community**

Chinatown’s heritage is captured in historic buildings, but also in its streetscapes, languages and culture. As built heritage sites are revitalized, the way buildings and streets are used must be considered at the same time so that these sites remain meaningful and accessible to the community.

Actions

- E2.1 BALANCED HERITAGE TOOLS
- E2.2 CHINATOWN’S ‘HISTORIC BLOCK’
- E2.3 REVEAL OF HIDDEN HISTORIES
- E2.4 COMMUNITY-OWNED HERITAGE

**STRATEGY E3:
Strengthen Chinatown’s contours**

Many of Chinatown’s places with untapped potential are located at its edges. By activating and strengthening these spaces with culture, Chinatown can become more visible and distinct, and make better connections to the riverfront as well as East Village and Eau Claire neighbourhoods.

Actions

- E3.1 PARK AMENITIES
- E3.2 ENTRANCE MARKERS
- E3.3 CULTURAL GARDEN
- E3.4 WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE

Implementation

The **Chinatown Cultural Plan** identifies the aspirations, strategies and actions to strengthen the culture of Chinatown. The next step is to initiate the implementation. The City wants to sustain a dialogue with the community to move forward as partners with the recommendations, and direct our combined resources towards the most impactful, meaningful ambitions.

A plan is only as good as the positive impact it generates. To make sure that the **Chinatown Cultural Plan** leads to the desired results, we have identified an implementation approach that rests on these three elements:

1. Work plans

Work plans will be developed to help transition the Cultural Plan to implementation. These plans will prioritize goals and ambitions, while translating them into achievable actions with assigned stewards. They will serve as living documents that can be updated to ensure responsiveness to changing priorities and alignment with available funding. These plans will serve as the vehicles for project sustainability and collaboration moving forward.

2. Community stewardship

The culture of Chinatown is the accomplishment of its people. It is under their stewardship that this culture can best be sustained and prepared for future growth. The Chinatown community needs to be supported in its role as cultural stewards. In line with this, the Chinatown Advisory Group will have to transform into a community-led structure that chairs its meetings, and proposes its own agenda, projects and priorities. Other ways to empower the community must be explored as well, such as training and capacity building, and access to research and (digital) tools.

3. Celebrate and reflect

Developing and nurturing a culture of celebration and evaluation is another key component of creating a fruitful collaboration with the Chinatown community. To maintain healthy partnerships, we need to create a habit of ongoing celebration and evaluation where everyone involved in the Cultural Plan can celebrate their relationship as well as the achievements (big and small) themselves. This kind of work is demanding and we need to be mindful of the wellbeing of those involved.

**This is a summary of the Chinatown Cultural Plan.
The full 56-page plan is available at calgary.ca/chinatown**