



City of Vancouver
Vancouver City Hall
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC, V5Y 1V4

Via email: ccclerk@vancouver.ca

January 26, 2024

ATTENTION: City Clerk

Dear City of Vancouver:

Re: Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement
Area Renewal Proposal

Please accept this letter as a formal objection to the proposed Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Area (VCBIA) renewal in 2024 on behalf of The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA). The BCCLA is the oldest and most active civil liberties organization in Canada, with a mandate to promote civil liberties and human rights in BC and across Canada. The BCCLA office is located in the VCBIA, and in this capacity we write to express concerns about the future goals, tasks, and focus of the VCBIA, as identified in a brochure produced by the Vancouver Chinatown BIA Society (the "Society") circulated with the Notice of Proposed Renewal for the VCBIA (the "Brochure"). In light of the majority of the priorities expressed in the Brochure, we are opposed to the VCBIA renewal.

The Brochure discloses a clear intention to increase police presence and surveillance within the VCBIA. In particular, sections "A: Community Safety" and "B: Place Making" of the Brochure reflect the Society's intent to collaborate extensively with the Vancouver Police

Department by increasing monitoring and patrolling, reporting “suspicious” members of the public to law enforcement, and introducing the “latest technology and methods for crime prevention”. These police approaches often lead to unnecessary harm and criminalization of community members, rather than fostering a sense of safety, community, culture, and shared values. In addition, the implementation of heightened surveillance and police monitoring, potentially including algorithmic policing technologies, is in tension with the human rights and civil liberties of residents, workers, volunteers, and tourists of Chinatown. According to Canadian law, all individuals have the right to privacy, freedom of assembly, and freedom from unreasonable searches by law enforcement and their agents. These rights do not appear to have been considered in the Society’s renewal plan.

Regrettably, the proposed VCBIA renewal does not adequately respond to the safety needs of all members of the community. Policing and surveillance mechanisms, like those proposed by the Society, disproportionately affect marginalized and vulnerable populations. As the VCBIA is geographically part of the Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood, there is a large presence of community members in Chinatown with multiple marginalizations and experiencing challenges, including poverty, precarious housing, substance use, mental and physical health, and over policing. The Chinatown BIA also includes Hogan’s Alley Block, a historical neighbourhood for people of African descent, with current community members seeking redress for displacement. Given this community context, the Society’s emphasis on policing and surveillance threatens to reduce safety and escalate oppression for diverse community members by exposing them to further displacement, over policing, and the attendant higher risk of criminalization. While the VCBIA aims to reduce crime, research and statistics prove there are alternatives to policing when it comes to improving community safety. These approaches are best developed in consultation and in partnership with residents, particularly those most vulnerable. Further investment in policing and surveillance mechanisms means a reduction in funding for community services and resources that address root issues, health, and safety for everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to place the BCCLA's perspective on the proposed renewal of the VCBIA before you. We respectfully request that the VCBIA renewal be denied until, and unless, the Society revises its plans to better serve all stakeholders and uphold individual freedoms.

Sincerely,

BC Civil Liberties Association