

**COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION**

TO:           MAYOR AND COUNCILLORS

SUBJECT:   **COMMEMORATIVE STRATEGY FOR CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT**

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. **THAT** Council receive this report for information.
2. **THAT** Council forward this report to the Social Planning Committee and Parks, Recreation and Culture Commission for information.

**REPORT**

The Community Heritage Commission, at its meeting held on April 13, 2023, received and adopted the attached report providing information on the City's strategy to commemorate the centenary of the *Chinese Exclusion Act*.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor D. Tetrault  
Chair

Councillor R. Lee  
Vice Chair

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**TO:** CHAIR AND MEMBERS  
COMMUNITY HERITAGE COMMISSION

**DATE:** March 30, 2023

**FROM:** GENERAL MANAGER  
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

**FILE:** 77000 05

**SUBJECT:** **COMMEMORATIVE STRATEGY FOR *CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT***

**PURPOSE:** To provide information on the City's strategy to commemorate the centenary of the *Chinese Exclusion Act*.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. **THAT** the Community Heritage Commission receive this report for information.
2. **THAT** the Community Heritage Commission forward this report to Council for information.
3. **THAT** the Community Heritage Commission recommend that Council forward this report to the Social Planning Committee and Parks, Recreation and Culture Commission for information.

**REPORT****1.0 INTRODUCTION**

At its June 9, 2022 meeting, Council approved a report recommending an increase in the scope, budget, and timeline for a book on the history of the contributions of Chinese Canadians to the development of Burnaby. The report noted that publication of the book would be planned as part of the City's approach to commemoration of the centenary of the introduction of the 1923 *Chinese Exclusion Act*, and that a strategy for commemorating the centenary would be advanced to Council through the Community Heritage Commission (CHC).

Subsequently, at its February 23, 2023 meeting, Council approved implementation of a framework for reconciliation with the Chinese Canadian community for historic discrimination by the City of Burnaby. As it is anticipated that community engagement for the reconciliation process will generate suggestions that could shape the City's commemoration of the *Chinese Exclusion Act*, this report outlines commemorative activities planned for 2023 only; plans for 2024 will be developed after consultations have been initiated for the reconciliation process, to allow community engagement to shape the City's approach to commemoration in 2024.

## 2.0 POLICY CONTEXT

Commemoration of Burnaby’s unique history and acknowledgement of the contributions of diverse community members are supported by several City policies including the *Corporate Strategic Plan* (2022), the *Burnaby Social Sustainability Strategy* (2011) and the *Official Community Plan* (1998).

## 3.0 THE CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT

On July 1, 1923, the Government of Canada’s *Chinese Immigration Act of 1923* (“*Chinese Exclusion Act*”) became law. The Act banned migration to Canada by all but a small handful of people of Chinese origin, and separated many residents of Canada from family members living in China. The Act also required all people of Chinese descent living in Canada to register for a Chinese Immigration (C.I.) certificate with the federal government within one year.

C.I. certificates were identity documents issued by the Government of Canada exclusively to Chinese residents. They served as identification, an immigration landing document, and also as receipts for paying the Head Tax.

The *Chinese Exclusion Act* required that those with an existing C.I. certificate re-register with the federal government. Those who had not been previously issued a C.I. certificate were required to register for a new document known as a C.I. 45. Most registering for this document were Canadian-born Chinese Canadians. Anyone who failed to register would face enforcement as of July 1, 1924.

Registration papers issued to Chinese Canadians, including the C.I. 45, had to be carried at all times. The document, which identified that “this certificate does not establish legal status in Canada” was a reminder that even Chinese Canadians born in Canada did not have full rights of citizenship.

Because the *Chinese Exclusion Act* came into law on Dominion Day (now known as Canada Day) in 1923, and enforcement of the registration requirement began on July 1, 1924, many in the Chinese Canadian community began referring to July 1 as “Humiliation Day” and refused to participate in Dominion Day celebrations.

The Act was repealed in 1947 as the result of advocacy by Chinese Canadians who called for full rights of citizenship in recognition of the contributions of Chinese Canadians to the war effort during the Second World War.

## 4.0 COMMEMORATING THE CENTENARY OF THE CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT

The centenary of the *Chinese Exclusion Act* spans the one year period between the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Chinese Exclusion Act* becoming federal law (July 1, 2023) and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of enforcement of the Act’s registration requirements on July 1, 2024.

As federal legislation, the *Chinese Exclusion Act* impacted Chinese Canadians across Canada including residents of Burnaby. The legislation was part of discriminatory legislation targeted at

Chinese Canadians that was introduced by the federal government, provincial governments (including the Province of BC), and municipal governments (including the Municipality of Burnaby). Commemorative activities in Burnaby will acknowledge the centenary of the *Chinese Exclusion Act* and its impact on Burnaby's Chinese Canadian community members.

The City's commemoration of the centenary will emphasize that:

- The *Chinese Exclusion Act* is an example of discriminatory legislation that significantly impacted Chinese Canadians across Canada, including Burnaby community members.
- The City of Burnaby acknowledges that formation of discriminatory policies and systemic racism in the past impacted Chinese Canadian community members, and is committed to advancing reconciliation with Burnaby's Chinese Canadian community.
- Burnaby's Chinese Canadian community was resilient in the face of racism and discrimination, and helped to build the diverse community we value today.

The City's commemoration will recognize the centenary as a historical event with national importance, while focusing on its significance and impact to Burnaby and its residents.

## **5.0 COMMEMORATIVE ACTIVITIES FOR 2023**

Commemorative activities planned for 2023 include:

### **5.1 Chinese Canadian History Publication**

A publication that highlights stories of Chinese Canadian contributions to Burnaby's development is nearing completion, and will be officially launched in 2023. The book is a culmination of a multi-year research project approved by Council and advanced through the CHC. The launch of the book will provide an opportunity for the City to reflect on the *Chinese Exclusion Act* and other discriminatory legislation that impacted Chinese Canadian community members, while highlighting the resilience of Burnaby's Chinese Canadian community.

### **5.2 Launch of the Reconciliation Process**

The reconciliation process approved by Council at its February 27, 2023 meeting includes formation of an advisory committee to provide advice to staff on the consultation process, and initiation of community consultations in fall 2023. Launching this work during the centenary of the *Chinese Exclusion Act* is an opportunity to acknowledge the City's own role in the formation of discriminatory practices and policies that impacted Chinese Canadians, and share its commitment to reconciliation. The official Canada Day events at Burnaby Village Museum and Edmonds will provide an opportunity for the Mayor and members of Council to commemorate the centenary and highlight the City's reconciliation work.

### **5.3 Communicating the Significance of the Centenary**

The City will publish historical background information on the *Chinese Exclusion Act* in English, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese on the City's website to share the historical

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From: General Manager Planning and Development  
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significance of the centenary. Social media posts will also be shared on the City's social media channels throughout 2023 to acknowledge the *Chinese Exclusion Act*, communicate the reconciliation process, and share information about Burnaby's Chinese Canadian history. Remembrance Day 2023 will include highlighting advocacy work by Chinese Canadian veterans to gain full citizenship rights for Chinese Canadians after the Second World War. Social media posts will be created for circulation in conjunction with the following dates:

- May: Asian Heritage Month and Day of Action Against Asian Racism (May 10)
- July: Centenary of the *Chinese Exclusion Act* becoming law (July 1)
- November: Remembrance Day (November 11)

## 6.0 COMMEMORATIVE ACTIVITIES FOR 2024

Commemorative activities will extend into 2024, to include the centenary of implementation of the Act's enforcement requirements on July 1, 1924. Activities for 2024 will be developed after consultations have been initiated for the reconciliation process, to allow for community input.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

This report outlines a communications strategy for the City's commemoration of the centenary of the *Chinese Exclusion Act* by the Government of Canada. The strategy includes marking both the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Act became a law of Canada on July 1, 1923 and of the initiation of the enforcement of the Act's registration requirements on July 1, 1924.

It is recommended that the report be received for information by the CHC, and that the CHC forward the report to Council with the recommendation that Council forward it to the Social Planning Committee and the Parks, Recreation and Culture Commission for their information.



for: E. W. Kozak, General Manager  
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

LC:sa