

To: OCPM
Re. Quartier Chinois de Montréal

2 June 2022

Dear fellow citizens,

I am writing in response to the call for written opinions about the future of Chinatown in Montreal. I am a professor of architectural history at Concordia University, and the director of the “Right to the City” (2014-17), “Urban Witnesses” (2018-19), and “La Ville extraordinaire” (2020-2024) research projects, which invite students and the public to learn about the history of Montreal from the perspective of its citizens and their lived experiences of the built environment. La Ville extraordinaire is a federally-funded initiative, through which our team has gathered over 100 interviews to date with older citizens, including members of Montreal’s Chinese community.

It does not take an expert to see that treasured landmarks and culturally-specific districts are in danger of demolition, destruction through neglect, or “renoviction” all over Montreal. **Chinatown offers an unparalleled opportunity for Montreal to take a different approach to protecting and promoting the tangible and intangible heritage of our culturally diverse city.** This approach is highly overdue: urban development in and around Chinatown over the past 60 years has already compromised its spaces and character. Land and buildings were expropriated to make room for Place des Arts (1961-63), the headquarters of Hydro-Québec (1962), the Ville-Marie Expressway (1970), Complexe Desjardins (1976), and the Montreal Convention Centre (begun 1977). And let’s not forget Complexe Guy-Favreau, which took 1/3 of Chinatown’s footprint. Together these and more recent projects have stripped the neighbourhood of important shared amenities, such as churches, parks, schools, as well as domestic architecture and places of work. As well, these changes have diminished Chinatown’s identity as a distinct district within the downtown area. Our interviews for Ville extraordinaire show that these losses have been keenly felt within the Chinese diaspora in Montreal, who have seen the heart of their community slowly and deliberately eroded.

After decades of neglecting the character and the built environment of Chinatown, the City of Montreal launched the Plan d'action pour le quartier chinois, and provided \$2 million in initial funding last year. I applaud this decision, and the equally positive news in January 2022 that Chinatown would now receive a formal heritage designation and protections at both the provincial and municipal levels. But what this means in practical terms is that **there must be no building or development in Chinatown without close consultation and approval of the Chinatown Working Group and heritage and preservation experts who are affiliated with the**

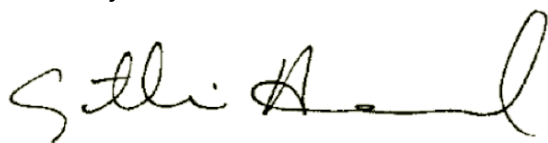
Chinese-Montreal community. These individuals have already identified the need to understand and respect several core aspects of Chinatown, including:

- the spatial character of Chinatown's Family associations, in particular the buildings that the associations own, their interiors and contents, which are irreplaceable and representative of the community;
- Chinatown's unique cultural landscape as a model and guide for future planning;
- the modest scale and historic character of Chinatown's buildings, including smaller lots and smaller storefronts

Simply put, all new developments must respect and be bound to these qualities, as they are a successful recipe for human-scaled urban planning and development; they promote walkable urban spaces, and sustainable communities.

We have lost too many historic buildings and culturally-specific spaces in Montreal to real estate speculation, urban "renewal", and a failure to understand the value of the existing built environment for those citizens who have made our neighbourhoods what they are. More high-rise condo towers, wind tunnels, culturally void streetscapes, and global chains are absolutely NOT what Chinatown - or Montreal - needs. I have no desire to visit or spend money in such a Chinatown. Let us not do to this important neighbourhood what was done to the Red Light district, Griffintown, Shaughnessy Village, and so many other *quartiers*. I urge the City of Montreal, and all decision-makers in this matter, to respect the voices and history of Chinese-descended Montrealers. This community is vitally engaged with Chinatown's built environment, its history, and its future. They are thus the visionaries we need to keep our downtown area vital, approachable, and distinct. They must be the leaders in what comes next for this irreplaceable neighbourhood in Montreal.

Sincerely,



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