

---

**Presentation on the Plan d'urbanism et mobilité Montréal 2025 (PUM)  
Submission by the Chinatown Round Table of Montreal and the JIA Foundation**

Date: September 22, 2024

**PREAMBLE**

The Montreal Chinatown Round Table and the JIA Foundation recognize that Chinatown is situated on unceded territory called Tiohtià:ke by the Kanien'kéha and Mooniyang by the Anishinaabeg, and historically, it was a meeting place for many Indigenous nations. We recognize our historic debt towards Indigenous peoples and support all efforts to decolonize our relationship.

**PART I**

OUR HISTORY

The creation of the Montreal Chinatown Round Table (RT) and the JIA Foundation in 2022 is the culmination of a long struggle to preserve Chinatown, with more recent mobilization beginning in 2018. Its demands and struggle are still carried by the community and remain in constant evolution.

In 2019, faced with uncontrolled development and the rapid and intensive gentrification of Chinatown, the Progressive Chinese of Quebec, an anti-racism group, petitioned the City of Montréal to hold a public consultation so that an official development plan could be drawn up for Chinatown. The Chinatown Working Group (CWG) was created to mobilize members of the Asian community and experts in various fields. These consultations lead to the adoption by the City of Montréal of the 2021-2026 Action Plan for the Development of Chinatown. The action plan proposes the creation of a multi-sector table (orientation 4), to consolidate the collaboration and concerted actions of the neighborhood's residents, users, merchants and socio-community players, which led to the establishment of RT. JIA Foundation was also founded by the members of the CWG with a mandate to foster Chinatown's cultural heritage.

MISSION OF THE MONTREAL CHINATOWN ROUND TABLE

The Montreal Chinatown Round Table ensures the quality of life and environment, and the recognition and enhancement of all components of the cultural and heritage landscape of

Montreal's Chinatown. It ensures that the voices of individuals and community, economic, cultural and associative players are heard, amplified and taken into consideration, with a view to developing Chinatown on a human and inclusive scale.

### MISSION OF THE JIA FOUNDATION

The JIA Foundation envisions a Montréal Chinatown where the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Asian diaspora is conserved and enabled to thrive. It fosters Chinatown's cultural heritage through education, space activation and community-driven approaches to real estate. The JIA Foundation is a non-profit organization in Québec with a mandate to protect and promote the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Montréal's Chinatown and we do this by:

- Activating underutilized Chinatown spaces.
- Guiding strategic policy, programs and initiatives to protect the history of Montréal's Chinatown and foster equitable development and community ownership solutions.
- Empowering the Asian diasporic and working-class community of Montréal's Chinatown to develop expertise, capacity, and tools to map-out, secure and advocate for the neighbourhood's future.
- Engaging diverse groups, organizations and governments in ways that are inclusive, culturally relevant, art/storytelling-based and intergenerational.

### **PART II : ANALYSIS<sup>1</sup>**

The PUM is an impressive plan that tackles the goals set out in the Montreal 2050 vision plan with much innovation and reflection.

There are two main concerns in the PUM plan for Chinatown: the intensification levels assigned and the average density minimums. The combination of these two policies might undo the Amendment to the urban plan for Chinatown adopted by the City of Montreal in January 2022 and the height and density controls adopted in February 2022 without clearly articulated alignment of policies. These hard fought controls in the Amendment were enacted to reduce speculation pressures and protect this recognized area of great heritage value and allow for development of plan d'implantation et d'intégration architecturale (PIIA) to better plan development in this area.

Due to proximity to rapid transit lines, Chinatown is considered by the PUM to be ideal Transit Oriented Development, with a target density of 400 units/hectare. The intensification levels currently proposed in the PUM could potentially double the height and density in many areas in Chinatown with the exception of areas around de la Gauchetière. The average density

---

<sup>1</sup> The Montreal Chinatown Round Table and the JIA Foundation wish to thank the Urban Laboratory class (URBS333) at Concordia University under the supervision of professor Donny Seto for their contribution to this analysis.

minimums of 250 and 400 proposed in the PUM in combination with the assigned intensification level will likely lead to higher development pressures that the control enacted in 2022 were designed to reduce.

This is disappointing and counterproductive. The Amendments adopted by the city in 2022 were done after a thorough and wide consultation by the OCPM with a diverse array of residents and Chinatown stakeholders, the overwhelming majority of whom supported the amendments to give concrete protection to the historic infrastructure of Chinatown. We urge the Commissioners to review the submissions to the OCPM consultation that was the object of its report on [Montreal's Chinatown](#) published on October 27, 2022. We hope that the final PUM adopted will not erase the efforts of years of mobilization and progress by the Chinatown community for heritage protection.

### **PART III: OBSERVATIONS AND CONCERNS**

#### **i) Observations**

Other than the above concern, the remaining Montreal 2050 outlines a vision where Chinatown could be a model neighborhood that responds well to all the orientations identified in the PUM.

Chinatown has long been a vibrant and walkable neighborhood, well-served by public transit (including popular bus lanes on St. Laurent, de Bleury, and René-Levesque, and 3 metro stations - St. Laurent, Champs de mars, and Place d'armes) and marked by a dense built environment. It is a mixed-use area, home to many legacy small businesses and non-market housing that serves Chinese seniors and workers (although rooming house tenants are vulnerable to evictions).

The main founders of Chinatown, i.e. the family and benevolent associations, being one of the main lines of defense against speculative real estate, are still central components to the sense of a collective community life, which include a panoply of cultural and social organizations, as well as social service and religious institutions.

Characterized by the two vibrant main streets, rue de la Gauchetière and boulevard St. Laurent, filled with historic buildings, Chinatown's strong identity that makes it an invaluable part of Montreal's urban fabric was recognized by the provincial government's heritage designation and the municipal government's actions to classify and protect Chinatown as a historical site.

#### **ii) Concerns**

However, Chinatown currently stands at a crossroads. While the Montreal 2050 Plan recognizes Chinatown as an "emblematic neighborhood," it is often overshadowed by the Ville-Marie and Old Montreal.

Despite its density, there is a high vacancy rate within the neighborhood, according to the Altus report, "Étude de la structure commerciale du Quartier chinois (2022)" and IRIS report "[Quel](#)

[modèle du développement pour le Quartier chinois de Montréal \(2023\)](#)". However, filling in vacancy through new condominium developments, luxury hotels or office buildings does not fill the dire lack of community infrastructure.

The newly built structures also lack connection to the community and gradually change the sense of community. Although a mix of social classes sharing the same geographical neighborhood can be a good model, the purely market-driven approach, especially one which erases the existence of Chinatown in marketing campaigns, only serves to alienate and eventually may push out more vulnerable residents with a strong attachment to Chinatown as a heritage site, resulting in a weakened Chinatown identity.

Since the living communities that live and congregate in Chinatown are essential to Chinatown's unique immaterial heritage, it is imperative that these communities have access to basic facilities to improve quality of life.

With the closing of the YMCA provided for Chinatown in the Guy Favreau Complex, the neighborhood lost its only publicly accessible gym which was frequented by youth and seniors alike, both locally and from other parts of Montreal. Social and cultural groups such as tai chi and martial arts students, seniors' classes, and youth organizations have much difficulty in accessing spaces to run their activities. For example there is even a senior's French class that squats on the public tables inside the Guy Favreau Complex to hold their weekend lessons.

There are very few public places in general for people to congregate and do social activities, there is no library for knowledge to be shared, and apart from the Sakura gardens which have been a battleground between housed and unhoused residents, Chinatown is one of the many examples of environmental racism, where there is very little green space.

Community organizations that provide services have a hard time to maintain their ownership of the space or have access to affordable spaces. The Chinese Family Services of Greater Montreal which owns the building that was the site of the previous Cultural Centre, has been the target of sinophobic attacks, resulting in the organization's dual challenge to maintain minimal community and social services and finding enough income to pay for the maintenance of its building.

Chinatown is historically a neighborhood founded and inhabited by a marginalized community but an exclusive and restrictive definition of 'residents' and 'security' as well as lack of services and the housing crises have pitted housed and unhoused residents against each other. Chinatown has received no specific resources to help with cohabitation issues. There is an increasing intolerance based on class and race among housed and unhoused residents.

The Heritage Designation and the Chinatown Action Plan have been steps in the right direction. It is very encouraging to the Chinatown community that the Action Plan has been supporting RT and a number of major initiatives by the JIA Foundation. However, with the ending of the Action Plan, it is crucial to continue this work, with a particular focus on enhancing community infrastructure.

A mixed-use social housing project on the Clark Street city-owned site presents an opportunity for innovative community-driven development. Similarly, the community garden project has demonstrated success on city land but requires a more permanent solution beyond its current three-year term. Chinatown House has been a focal point for educational and cultural activities, and securing a long-term space for this initiative is essential for sustaining intergenerational engagement in the neighborhood.

In line with the intensification objectives of Montreal 2050, we advocate for a strategy that prioritizes adaptive reuse of existing buildings, careful infill development that respects the neighborhood's heritage context, and equitable development models supporting community-driven revitalization. This approach will ensure that Chinatown remains not only a model neighborhood but also a thriving community that retains its historic and cultural significance.

With Montreal 2050, we hope it will further the work that was started by the City and community's work in its implementation of Chinatown Action Plan. By fostering community infrastructure, safeguarding affordable spaces, and embracing a sensitive approach to development, the city can honor Chinatown's past while securing its future.

#### **PART IV: RECOMMENDATIONS**

In consideration of the [Chinatown Development Action Plan](#) (2021- 2026) and Heritage Protection initiatives, the Montreal Chinatown Round Table and the JIA Foundation submit the following recommendations for the PUM 2050:

- It is encouraging that the city, through the implementation of the different orientations of the Chinatown Development Action Plan, has been supporting the operations of the Chinatown Round Table and a number of major initiatives by the JIA Foundation. However, as the Action Plan nears its end, it is important to continue the work and bring the plan up to the next level by prioritizing developing much needed community infrastructure such as community spaces, affordable housing and green spaces.
- The Altus report found that 38% of commercial space on Clark street is vacant, the highest in Chinatown and IRIS has a specific section on this street that used to be one of the main historic arteries of Chinatown. The announcement of the City of Montréal regarding the purchase of the third lot reserved for a social housing project with potential cascading effects on commercial and social development could be pivotal to the revitalization of Clark street. It is important for the City to work with the community towards timely implementation of the project.
- After years of lobbying, this summer, the City has partnered with the Montreal Chinatown Round Table and Green Chinatown Montreal to launch the successful Kahéhtaien Lumb Garden on land owned by the city. An intercultural project designed in consultation with the Project Autochtones du Québec (PAQ), this is the first Asian-Indigenous garden in Québec. Chinese senior residents have become critical volunteers to cultivate this garden

while the PAQ uses it sporadically for its events. However, the lease for use of the land is only for 3 years in total so it is important to start planning for a permanent home.

- From the [Chinatown Reimagine Forum](#) to numerous exhibits, workshops and conferences, the Chinatown House program created by the JIA Foundation has showcased original and creative uses of vacant or under-utilized community spaces. The programming has been wildly successful in attracting numerous youth, seniors, LGBTQ+ communities, adoptees, Asians and non-Asians alike to take ownership of Chinatown since last fall. Going forward, Chinatown House will need a space to continue providing the educational and cultural intergenerational activities.
- With the closing of the Cultural Centre in 2014, the community lamented the loss of a library space, a space for cultural performances and social gathering, and the possibility of using part of it as a museum. However, with the appearance of protected heritage buildings on the market and numerous under-utilized historic buildings in Chinatown, we hope that one of the levels of government will make some acquisitions to address the numerous needs of the Chinatown communities.
- When heritage designation was announced by the Ministère des communications et de la culture, the Minister had commented that the designated objects were a beginning of heritage protection for Chinatown. As documented in the [Etude de l'évolution historique et caractérisation du Quartier chinois](#) (2022) by Luce Lafontaine, architectes, numerous buildings of historical interests were not included in the MCC's heritage classification; therefore it would be essential to continue the work of recognizing and protecting Chinatown history which is also Montreal and Québec history.
- With the objective of intensification in Montreal 2050 to support growth, it is very critical for the City to also focus on: 1) form-based densification that support the existing fine-grain pattern; 2) adaptive reuse of existing buildings that are key to the human scale experience of the neighborhood; 3) careful infill development that respect the heritage context, unlike the current new development that are usually out of scale and characters; and 4) equitable development models that can support community-driven approaches to development and facilitate increased community equity and ownership in real estate.

## **PART V: CONCLUSION**

Our past years of experience of partnership with the City of Montréal leading up and beyond heritage protection for Chinatown has been generally positive, having succeeded in accomplishing many milestones. Essentially, the most interesting points of discussion remaining to define together is “What does development look like in a living heritage site ? What does economic development look like in a heritage site ? What does social development, cultural development and urban planning look like in a heritage site?” The JIA Foundation has

inventoried some examples of best practices from other Chinatowns, but it has been an eye-opening journey to answer these questions with the City of Montreal.

We hope that this paper will provide some guidance to the question, “What should the PUM 2050 look like for Chinatown ?”

We look forward to answering this question by continuing the work that was started by the City and community's work in its implementation of Chinatown Action Plan.