

Chinese Reconciliation Process

Review of Council Minutes from 1926 to 1950

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide further information with respect to the historical record of relations of the City with its Chinese population. A previous report had covered the period from 1859 to 1926. This report continues that review until 1950.

At the time of the report to Council in the fall of 2009, staff recommended that the research portion of the work cease as the period up to 1926 had been covered and it was expected that there would not be further information available past that period.

Further research was conducted in July of 2011. The information obtained indicates that the period from 1926 to 1950 was not as acrimonious as that which preceded it but that poor relations still persisted between the City and its Chinese community.

Background

After the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1923 by the Government of Canada, the Chinese community in New Westminster declined in numbers and extent for the next 25 years as more buildings in the old Chinatown area were condemned by City officials and demolished or were purchased and torn down to make way for other uses. As a result, during the time period under discussion, most of the former Chinatown ceased to exist and the Chinese community became more dispersed throughout the City.

The City did not hire any Chinese workers during this time period. The Chinese were not allowed to vote until 1947 and 1948. A different form of discrimination made its appearance with the beginnings of the welfare state, as the City government advocated to the Province that only those of British descent were entitled to the same level of benefits as British subjects.

Analysis

The research (see attachment #1) indicates, as in the previous report, that the City's actions fall into following four categories:

- Employment Opportunities
- Land and Buildings
- City Regulations
- Requests to the Senior Levels of Government

Employment Opportunities

There is no evidence that the City hired any Chinese people as civic civil servants during this time period. While the use of the City's power to influence private employers is not as evident as previously, there is one recorded instance in which the City requested an employer to voluntarily agree to hire only white labour.

Land and Buildings

The City continued to enforce its regulations for structural integrity and fire and health standards. The City, as a result of these inspections, condemned a number of the remaining buildings that formed an important part of the western Chinatown, including the Sing Kee building and the Kwong On Wo building.

City Regulations

The only information on City regulations is that regarding the cemetery on Eighth Street.

Requests to the Senior Levels of Government

The City seemed to be concerned about the administration of the Mothers' Pensions and the Relief Work and appeared to argue for a lower standard for the Chinese and others of non-British background. These areas were under Provincial jurisdiction and it has not been determined if the City had any influence on the level of assistance available to non-whites. This determination is made more difficult because the Council rather than passing explicit resolutions referred these matters to the Mayor to take up with the Province.

Summary

In summary, the information available indicates that the City continued to discriminate with respect to employment and requests to senior levels of government, while it is more difficult to prove discrimination regarding lands and buildings and City regulations.

Conclusion

This research is supportive of the steps and actions in support of reconciliation with the Chinese community – i.e., “explore ways to further augment the research that has been completed to date.” It shows that the City continued to discriminate with respect to employment and requests to senior levels of government during the period from 1926 to 1950.

Attachment #1
Excerpts from Council Minutes for the Period 1926 to 1950

1929 February 06

Moved by Alderman Gifford and Seconded by Alderman Hogg and resolved that:

WHEREAS Mr. J. H. Watson, Chief of the Fire Brigade of the City of New Westminster and Mr. Harry Stewardson, City Engineer, have submitted a report to Council that the building known as the Kwong On Wo Block, situated on Lot 18, City Block 11, Map 2620, City of New Westminster is owing to the settling of the foundations of the said building, being in an unsafe condition and a menace both to the occupants of the said building and to persons who may be passing near the same:

AND WHEREAS Mr. J.A. Thomas, Fire Marshall for the Province of British Columbia has also examined the said building and has reported to this Council that he finds the same in an exceedingly dangerous condition in that the foundation of the said building has settled and the wall on the exposed side has a fracture from the foundation of the same to the top thereof and the wall is now overhanging at the top several inches and that it is obvious that with the wall and the foundations in such a condition the chimney must also be in a dangerous condition and may be the case of starting a serious fire if used:

AND WHEREAS the said Mr. J.A. Thomas, as Fire Marshall, has further reported that apart from the fire hazard there is a great danger this building will collapse and cause a serious loss of life and recommended that the Council take steps at once to have the said building vacated and demolished.

THEREFORE this Council hereby orders that the said building shall be removed, repaired or pulled down by the owner, agent, lessee or occupier thereof within thirty days after the service of this order has been effected by sending a copy of this order by return registered mail to the registered owner of the lands upon which such building stands and all to all other persons whose names appear on the records of the Land Registry Office, as having an interest in the said lands, and to the agent, if known, of the registered owner thereof, and to the occupier thereof, if any, the same to be sent to the last known address of each attached person herein referred to;

AND THIS COUNCIL DOTH FURTHER ORDER that in the case of default by the owner, agent, lessee or occupier of the said building to comply with this order within the above mentioned period of thirty days the removal, repair or pulling down of said building shall be done by Mr. Harry Stewardson, Engineer of the Corporation of the City of New Westminster at the cost of such owner:

AND THE COUNCIL DOTH FURTHER ORDER that if after the expiration of the above-named period of thirty days and after service of this order in manner hereinbefore mentioned, if default shall then have been in compliance with this order the said building or any part or material thereof shall be sold by auction or tender or by private

sale subject to the approval of this Council or shall be otherwise disposed of in the discretion of Council **CARRIED**

Source: City Council Minutes

1929 March 02

Harry Stewardson, Building Inspector, and J.H. Watson, Fire Chief, reporting that they have examined the premises known as the “Sing Kee” building, situated on Lot 20 of City Block Eleven, and find the same to be in a very dilapidated condition. The foundations have decayed, causing settlement with the result that the walls are out of true, flues defective and sanitary conditions in bad shape. The building constitutes a serious fire hazard and they recommend that the necessary steps be taken to order its demolition.

On motion, the recommendation of the Building Inspector and the Fire Chief was adopted and the City Solicitors be asked to give the tenants proper notice to vacate the building.

Source: City Council Minutes

August 19, 1932

James Greig, C.M.C. P.O. Box 156, Duncan, B.C., enclosing a copy of a resolution that their Council had passed at a meeting, held August 8, 1932, in connection with the paying of a Mother’s Pension to a Hindu woman. The resolution reads as follows:

WHEREAS the Province of British Columbia is at the present time paying a Hindu woman a Mothers’ Pension of \$62.50 per month - \$750.00 per annum, and

WHEREAS there are doubtless similar cases in other parts of the Province of like liberal payments to other Asiatic Mothers, and

WHEREAS it is a recognized fact that the cost of living has very materially decreased, particularly in regard to food and wood fuel – costs being down on the average 40% to what they were a few years ago

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Provincial Government be urged to review at the earliest possible moment the whole of the conditions under which Mothers’ Pensions are being granted with a view to:-

- (1) A general reduction in the scale
- (2) That such pensions be made applicable to British subjects only, the same is at present the case with Old Age Pensions
- (3) That no Asiatic be eligible for such pensions

AND that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the

Honourable the Premier

Honourable the Minister of Finance

The Legislative Member for this District

The Secretary of the Union of B.C. Municipalities
and Municipal Councils

AND that the later be requested to endorse the same and to forward to their respective Legislative members and urge that in view of the present financial conditions that action be taken along the lines suggested with as little delay as possible
On motion, the communication received and referred to the Mayor to take up while on his visit to Victoria and that Mr Greig be so advised.

Source: City Council Minutes

1934 April 23

The applicant's (Westminster Clear Cedar Mills) attention be drawn to the dyke reserve which exists between the property applied for and the waterfront, and also to be informed that owing to the concession granted in the purchase price it was not to be expected that any road extensions would be carried out or water mains extended at this time by the City. The applicants were to be requested to endeavour to employ white labour in as far as it is humanely possible.

Moved, seconded and carried that the recommendation of the Finance Committee be approved.

Source: City Council Minutes

1934 May 28

Before proceeding with the regular business of the meeting, His Worship Mayor Hume stated Mr. Thomas Furness, Superintendent of Works, Mr. E.A.S. Stokes and Mr. Jack Donald of the Relief Department were present.

Moved, seconded and carried that they be heard

Mr. Furness stated that were certain questions relative to the administration of relief which he felt should be drawn to the attention of Council. It was anticipated that a Government Investigator would shortly visit the City for the purpose of investigating all relief cases. At the present time, the Department was affording relief to certain men who were classed as key men and who were employed steadily by the City. This policy had been approved by Council in the past, but it was questionable whether the practice would be sanctioned by the Government. Mr. Furness stated he would appreciate instructions. There were a number of unemployable men who were really Benevolent Cases drawing relief, also the problem of the amount of relief received by Orientals. These matters of policy should be decided by the Council.

After a general discussion, it was

Moved, seconded and carried that the whole matter be referred to Council in Committee of the Whole to consider and take up with the Hon. A. Wells Gray, Minister of Lands, at as early a date as possible.

Source: City Council Minutes

1934 July 30

R.R.F. Sewell, Secretary-Treasurer, Union of B.C. Municipalities, Royal Oak, B.C. advising the Convention of the Union will be held at Kamloops on Wednesday, October 3, 1934 at 9:30 a.m.

Ald. Sullivan stated in his opinion the Resolutions Committee appointed by the Council should consider the advisability of submitting a resolution relative to Oriental encroachment in business areas of municipalities, where an increasing number of stores were being opened, and cite as an example Columbia Street in New Westminster.

Moved by Ald. Sullivan, Seconded by Ald. Robson

That the communication be acknowledged, His Worship the Mayor authorized to prepare data for the Convention of the Union and that they consider the matter of Oriental encroachment. CARRIED

Source: City Council Minutes

1934 October 29

Ald. Bowell, Comptroller, City, enclosing application of Mrs. Wilkinson for permission to rent a City owned property on Twelfth Street, also letter from the City Engineer as follows:

October 25, 1934

Ald. Bowell, Esq.,
City Comptroller,
City

Dear Sir:

With reference to the attached application of Mrs. Wilkinson for permission to rent a site on the corner of Auckland and Twelfth Streets for the purpose of running a garage (Small Supply Depot).

The building is at present located on a lot belonging to Law Soong and adjoining the site the City has for sale at Twelfth and Columbia Streets. We have no power to order the removal from its present site and I think this would be an excellent solution to the dif-

faculty. The absence of this building from its present location will effect a very material improvement.

Yours truly,
Harry Stewardson, City Engineer

Moved, seconded and carried the communications be received and the report of the City Engineer adopted.

Source: City Council Minutes

1934 November 26

Ald. Sullivan reported as follows:

“.....while in Victoria, we took advantage of the opportunity afforded us and advanced for discussion different phases of relief work upon which the City officials had entertained some doubt. In this connection, we raised the question of the relief allowance to Orientals who in some cases with large families are in receipt of actually more money than the head of that family would be able to earn if steadily employed. We were assured of Provincial Government backing in any policy inaugurated for reduction of Oriental relief allowance which is designed to equalize the allowance as between Oriental and white relief recipients accordance to the respective standards of living

Source: City Council Minutes

1938 January 07

City Engineer recommending demolition of four small shacks, occupied by Chinese situated in Lot 11 of City Block 23. Victoria Street, between Blackie and McInnes Streets which property had reverted to the City by tax sale.

Source: City Council Minutes

1938 September 06

J. Quan, President – The Chinese Benevolent Association, City, applying for permission to retain 40 lots of a group of 82, in the City Cemetery, from which bodies had been exhumed.

On Motion received and application granted

Source: City Council Minutes

1941 February 17

Messrs. Lidster & Allison, City Solicitors, re: Municipal Voters Lists, as follows:

“The writer also thinks it would be wise to draw the attention of the Department of Municipalities to the situation which may arise caused by the naturalization of Chinese, Japanese, other Asiatic or Indian. In view of the fact that while these persons may become British subjects by naturalization, Section 4 of the ‘Municipal Elections Act’ prevents them from voting at any election notwithstanding the fact that they may be entitled to be placed on the voters’ list.

Source: City Council Minutes

1943 August 05

Alderman S.L. Smith, Chairman – The Chinese War Relief Fund, City, requesting financial support

Source: City Council Minutes

1943 August 23

Chief Engineer, reported with reference to a time limit being placed on certain old buildings in the City, as follows:

“Following an inspection by the Fire Chief, the Fire Warden and myself, we would support to the Council that a time limit be placed on the following list of buildings for the reasons outlined;

Wooden buildings at the corner of Jemmett and Columbia Streets

There are four buildings in this group. Two of them are small buildings used as having quarters by Chinese peddlers. They are equipped with dry toilets and are old and decayed. They increase the fire hazard and should be removed as soon as possible...

On Motion received and the recommendations of the Chief Engineer be approved

Source: City Council Minutes

1943 August 23

Ald. Courtney, Chairman – Finance Committee, recommending that the request for a tag day on Friday, August 27 be granted to the Chinese War Relief Fund, as well as a tag day on Saturday, September 25 to the Norway Aid Committee.

Source: City Council Minutes

1945 August 06

Ald. Courney, Chairman – Finance Committee, reported a request had been received from St. Joseph's Oriental Hospital, Vancouver, B.C. for maintenance allowance for a Chinese resident.

Moved, second and carried the Chinese Benevolent Society be requested to assist

Source: City Council Minutes