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January 21, 2010

Mayor Gregor Robertson and Council
Vancouver City Hall
453 W. 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor Robertson and Councillors,

Re: Heritage Area Height Review: Conclusions and Recommendations

Heritage Vancouver is a strong supporter of the City's efforts to revitalize Chinatown, the Hastings Street corridor, Victory Square and Gastown, and we gratefully acknowledge the sensitivity to built heritage which is evident in the Heritage Area Height Review: Conclusions and Recommendations report. While we are comfortable with the proposed introduction of higher mid-density buildings along the Hasting Street corridor, we cannot, however, support the concept of landing density in Chinatown, or any heritage density source site area. We also recommend that heights in Chinatown HA1 or HA1A should not exceed 75 feet. The proposed new ceiling for unique projects is contrary to the purpose of existing design guidelines and policy that seek to preserve the special character of Chinatown streetscapes, and the area's potential commemoration as a National Historic Site, which is currently under consideration.

We commend the City on its past successes in heritage conservation that have been enabled through incentives under the Transfer of Density Program and the Heritage Building Rehabilitation Program. This leadership in reinvestment tied to heritage conservation has contributed to the attraction of tourists, local businesses and residents to Vancouver's birthplace. The City's incentives have paid dividends many times over by leveraging private sector investment that would not otherwise have occurred, and these progressive programs have proven how rehabilitation, infill and adaptive re-use can sensitively renew historic sites and neighbourhoods that are suffering from disinvestment.

As recognized in the terms of reference for the Height Review, the heritage value of historic districts is dependent on the retention of their character-defining features. While there are examples of relatively taller buildings, in relation to current zoning, in the historic area, the proposal of extremely out-of-scale height in Chinatown, Gastown, the Hastings Street corridor and Victory Square is not appropriate to define the termination of street views, nodes of high activity, boundaries or other related functions. This is because the role of historic buildings in the historic precinct is to serve as landmarks, not a backdrop to new architecture that "punctuates" the skyline.

In response to the need to balance housing needs and heritage conservation, Heritage Vancouver could support the proposed increases in height for the three identified sites, as the basis for a Historic Area Rezoning Policy tied to a broad strategy of expanded heritage protection and sensitive infill. We also encourage the City to pursue the selection of receiver sites in the Downtown core, where form and character is radically different from the historic precinct and where greater density could be more easily absorbed and supported.

Heritage Vancouver supports the revitalization of the historic precinct for the enjoyment of all residents and visitors to Vancouver. Key to realizing this goal is that the City of Vancouver must recognize that these early neighbourhoods are civic treasures, and need to be retained and rehabilitated rather than redeveloped. There are obvious steps that would follow from a complete understanding of the value of the historic city core:

- ◆ **Expanded heritage protection:** provide “Historic Area” protection for all of the neighbourhoods that make up the “historic precinct”;
- ◆ **Strategic infill:** follow the Gastown Management Plan and develop similar policies for other sections of the historic precinct; and
- ◆ **Reinvest in economic and social vitality:** reconsider the effective freeze on transfer of density and create new heritage conservation tools to encourage owners and developers to improve heritage buildings and convert upper storeys to housing.

We look forward to working with Council on viable solutions to growth pressures and housing needs that also maintain and enhance the presence and value of the historic precinct.

Sincerely



Donald Luxton, President
Heritage Vancouver

cc. Jessica Chen, Senior Planner, Central Area Planning Branch
Marco D’Agostini, Senior Planner, Heritage Group
Richard Keate, Chair, Vancouver Heritage Commission
Brent Toderian, Director of Planning