



**Washington State Commission
on Asian Pacific American Affairs**
Improving the lives of Asian Pacific Americans

October 3, 2022

Dear Executive Constantine and Councilmember McDermott,

The Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (CAPAA) is concerned about the impact of proposed developments in Seattle's Chinatown International District (CID) as well as the process leading to their implementation. CAPAA's role is to improve the lives of Asian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (ANHPI) Washingtonians by identifying and examining issues affecting ANHPI communities and promoting changes to policy and programs that will improve their quality of life. The legislature has also charged CAPAA under RCW 43.117.080 with establishing relationships with local governments as necessary to promote equal opportunities and benefits for ANHPI Washingtonians. Members of our diverse ANHPI communities from across Washington state have voiced concerns about proposed developments in and near the CID with propensity to damage the historical integrity and vitality of this neighborhood.

The CID has long served as a cultural anchor for ANHPI communities statewide. Washington was once rich with historic Chinatowns in Pierce, Spokane, and Yakima Counties. Due to a history of systemic racism, exclusion and erasure, Seattle's CID is now the only remaining Chinatown in Washington State and the Pacific Northwest. People of Asian ancestry from various walks of life have built businesses and homes in the CID, defining the neighborhood as a vibrant showcase of ANHPI heritage and history, with art, restaurants, festivals, and cultural institutions such as the Wing Luke Museum. If Washington wants to keep its promise as a welcoming place for minorities and immigrants, then we must keep the CID strong. We must break a cycle of systemic racism whereby minorities are displaced from their historic homes and businesses.

CAPAA's concerns stem partly from our September 17th public board meeting where we heard Commissioners and community members from across the state express their concerns about plans in the CID to demolish historic buildings in order to expand the Sound Transit center, and to concentrate homeless shelters in and around the CID in a volume disproportionate to any other neighborhood in Seattle and King County. Community members are asking why the County is placing an unequal and heavy burden on this vulnerable neighborhood to alleviate countywide transit and homelessness challenges, and doing so without gaining prior community input. Community members worry that these developments will eviscerate the character of the neighborhood and exacerbate existing socio-economic disparities.



**Washington State Commission
on Asian Pacific American Affairs**

Improving the lives of Asian Pacific Americans

Of particular concern for community members is the community engagement process - or lack thereof - that treats directly impacted communities as an afterthought. Considering community input and using it to inform an approach to address our regional challenges will only lead to better strategies and more equitable outcomes. Disregarding input, or not creating a meaningful avenue for it to be provided in the first place, does harm to vulnerable communities and people historically excluded from decision-making processes. The Metropolitan King County Council recently held a meeting to discuss the “megaplex” shelter project but did not provide translation services for over 200 Cantonese speakers. This type of inadequate engagement threatens to repeat historical injustices, as a form of displacement and disenfranchisement of minority businesses and homes akin to redlining and internment.

We implore your offices to suspend project advancement until there has been a robust community input process. Facilitate an ***inclusive*** process to plan a ***more equitable solution*** to addressing the needs of all the populations directly involved, including CID residents, businesses, and those experiencing homelessness. It is imperative these community members ***all*** have their needs met.

Sincerely,

Toshiko Hasegawa
Executive Director

Nam Nguyen
Chair

Cc:

CAPAA 1st Vice Chair Lydia Moira Faitalia (King County)
CAPAA 2nd Vice Chair Julio Diaz (King County)
CAPAA Commissioner/Port of Seattle Commissioner Sam Cho (King County)
CAPAA Commissioner Lalita Uppala (King County)
CAPAA Commissioner Ekkarath Sisavatdy (King County)
CAPAA Commissioner Va'eomatoka Valu (King County)
CAPAA Commissioner Kendall Kosai (Pierce County)
CAPAA Commissioner Chongsun Abbott (Pierce County)
CAPAA Commissioner/Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu (Whatcom County)
CAPAA Commissioner Carrie Huie Pascua (Yakima County)
CAPAA Commissioner Ping Ping (Spokane County)