

May 25, 2021
Re: Public Art Program
Chinese Canadian Collective

Dear Allison O'Connor and the City of Ottawa,

We are writing today in concern of the [\\$90,000 art project proposal](#) at Cambridge Street North and Somerset Street West. We recently became aware of this request for qualification and were deeply concerned about how the community has been involved and where resources are being allocated within the City.

We are concerned the City is duplicating the local BIA's investment to artwork in the area and that attempts such as these often lead to gentrification and is purposed solely in pursuit of prioritizing tourism and business over other long-standing needs and social issues.

While the art project could potentially "benefit" one artist or team and perhaps add another "visual interest" to the area, there is more we could do with these funds. The BIA has also already added multiple murals to the area — including several large-scale ones last summer. [Another \\$10,000 police mural](#) is also located nearby the proposed site and close to the Chinatown archway.

Consequently, this influx of murals has also created [a mash-up of things](#) in the area. We have also recognized the [lack of "diversity"](#) within the City's culture, arts and heritage department itself.

We primarily believe other organizations and residents in the neighbourhood would benefit exponentially from having these funds reallocated within other city departments as these concerns have — for the most part — remained unaddressed.

1. The nearby Cambridge Street Community Public School has been extremely underfunded for decades with notably low-enrollment and [possibility of closure](#). These funds could be better used if they were directed towards serving children, students, residents, schools or libraries nearby and could fund equipment such as laptops, computers, webcams, ergonomic electronics and wi-fi hotspots for those in need of these resources during the pandemic and stay-at-home orders. For example, about 100 residents could receive full equipment to own their own computers and related set-up for about \$1,000 each with this budget.
2. Grassroots organizations like [Overdose Prevention Ottawa](#) are working to respond to an emergency opioid and health crisis. We believe allocating funds to services such as these would be better used to help those marginalized by poverty and drug use in the area.

3. A local group has been [trying to raise funds](#) for 16 years in Ottawa to finance a Vietnamese museum in Chinatown. This while it also took the Chinese community almost 20 years to secure multiple pathways to fund the Chinatown archway in 2010 — including [finalizing \\$290,000](#) of in-kind donations from the City itself.
4. Additionally, we recognize that Asian-led organizations and residents in the area were not consulted or brought into conversations such as those surrounding the [\\$1 building](#) given to a large non-profit organization — which already runs eight other locations in Ottawa — in Chinatown in 2020. This occurred while many Asian-led organizations in the city have [not held dedicated spaces in the area](#) for decades, and also lack office space for their work with seniors and community members.
5. Amidst this latest wave of Sinophobia related to COVID-19, we know seniors are increasingly isolated and in need of services, and that Asian residents require more support during this time of increased racism. Many Asian-led organizations in Ottawa are also understaffed and underfunded and could use these funds to hire more employees to run social events and programming with their organizations and disseminate resources throughout the pandemic. This is also an important need as the Asian diaspora — especially women — faces [record high levels of unemployment](#).

These ongoing issues lead us to ask who is making these decisions at the City. What “community” is being consulted and why Chinese residents — referenced in the history portion of this request — are often not included in conversations about the Chinatown area itself.

Based on these concerns, we ask the City to cancel its project proposal and its call for artists — per its own clause of conditions — and instead work with Asian-led organizations, and residents in the area, about where these resources should best be allocated.