



Planning and Land Use Committee Report

For the Meeting of December 11, 2014

To: Planning and Land Use Committee **Date:** November 27, 2014
From: Murray G. Miller, Senior Heritage Planner, Community Planning
Subject: **Heritage Designation Application #00143 for 612 Fisgard Street**
(Lee's Association Building)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommend that Council consider the designation of the Heritage-Registered property located at 612 Fisgard Street pursuant to Section 967 of the *Local Government Act* as a Municipal Heritage Site. This report fulfils the requirements of Section 968(5) of the Act.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present Council with information, analysis and recommendations regarding an owner request to designate the Lee's Association Building located at 612 Fisgard Street, within the Chinatown National Historic Site.

The following points were considered in assessing this Application:

- general consistency with the *Official Community Plan (OCP)*
- Statement of Significance
- Victoria's Heritage Thematic Framework.

The Application was reviewed by the Heritage Advisory Panel at its November 18, 2014 meeting and was recommended that Council consider the designation of the Heritage-Registered property located at 612 Fisgard Street.

BACKGROUND

Description of Proposal

An Application to designate the Heritage-Registered property located at 612 Fisgard Street as a Municipal Heritage Site was received from the Shon Yee Benevolent Association of Canada on November 3, 2014.

Zoning/Land Use

The proposed designation is consistent with the CA-3C: Old Town District and the predominant surrounding land uses.

Condition/Economic Viability

The exterior of the building, as viewed from Fisgard Street and as depicted in recent photographs, appears to be in sound condition.

ANALYSIS

The following sections provide a summary of the Application's consistency with the relevant City policies and guidelines.

Official Community Plan (OCP)

This Application is consistent with the OCP because it contributes to the goal of protecting and celebrating Victoria's cultural and natural heritage resources. In addition, a key strategic direction of the Downtown would be met by the designation of the Lee's Association Building as a Municipal Heritage Site because it would continue to conserve the historic character of Old Town and Chinatown.

Statement of Significance

A previously-prepared Statement of Significance describing the historic place, its heritage value and character-defining elements is attached to this report. When the attached Statement of Significance was written, it also included 614 Fisgard Street.

Victoria's Heritage Thematic Framework (the "Thematic Framework")

A key policy of the OCP includes the determination of heritage value using a values-based approach. In this regard, a city-wide thematic framework (OCP Fig. 12) was developed and incorporated into the OCP to identify the key civic historic themes. The Thematic Framework functions as a means to organize and define historical events, to identify representative historic places, and to place sites, persons and events in an overall context. The Thematic Framework recognizes a broad range of values under which city-wide themes can be articulated. A Heritage Value Assessment with additional consideration of the Thematic Framework was prepared in response to the current Application for designation and is attached to this report.

Resource Impacts

The applicant has indicated the intention to continue undertaking façade improvements and seismic upgrading. In order to apply for a Building Incentive Program grant, which is administered by the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust, the property must be designated as a Municipal Heritage Property. The same criterion applies to owners seeking to participate in the City's Tax Incentive Program.

CONCLUSIONS

The Lee's Association Building is a significant building in the Downtown as outlined in the Statement of Significance and in relation to Victoria's Heritage Thematic Framework. The Application for designation of the building as a Municipal Heritage Site is consistent with relevant City policies and will serve to strengthen the Chinatown National Historic Site. Staff therefore recommend that Council consider the designation of the Heritage-Registered property located at 612 Fisgard Street.

ALTERNATE MOTION

That Council decline Heritage Designation Application #00143 for the property located at 612 Fisgard Street.

Respectfully submitted,



Murray G. Miller
Senior Heritage Planner
Community Planning

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Deb Day
Director
Sustainable Planning and Community Development

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:



Jason Johnson

Date:

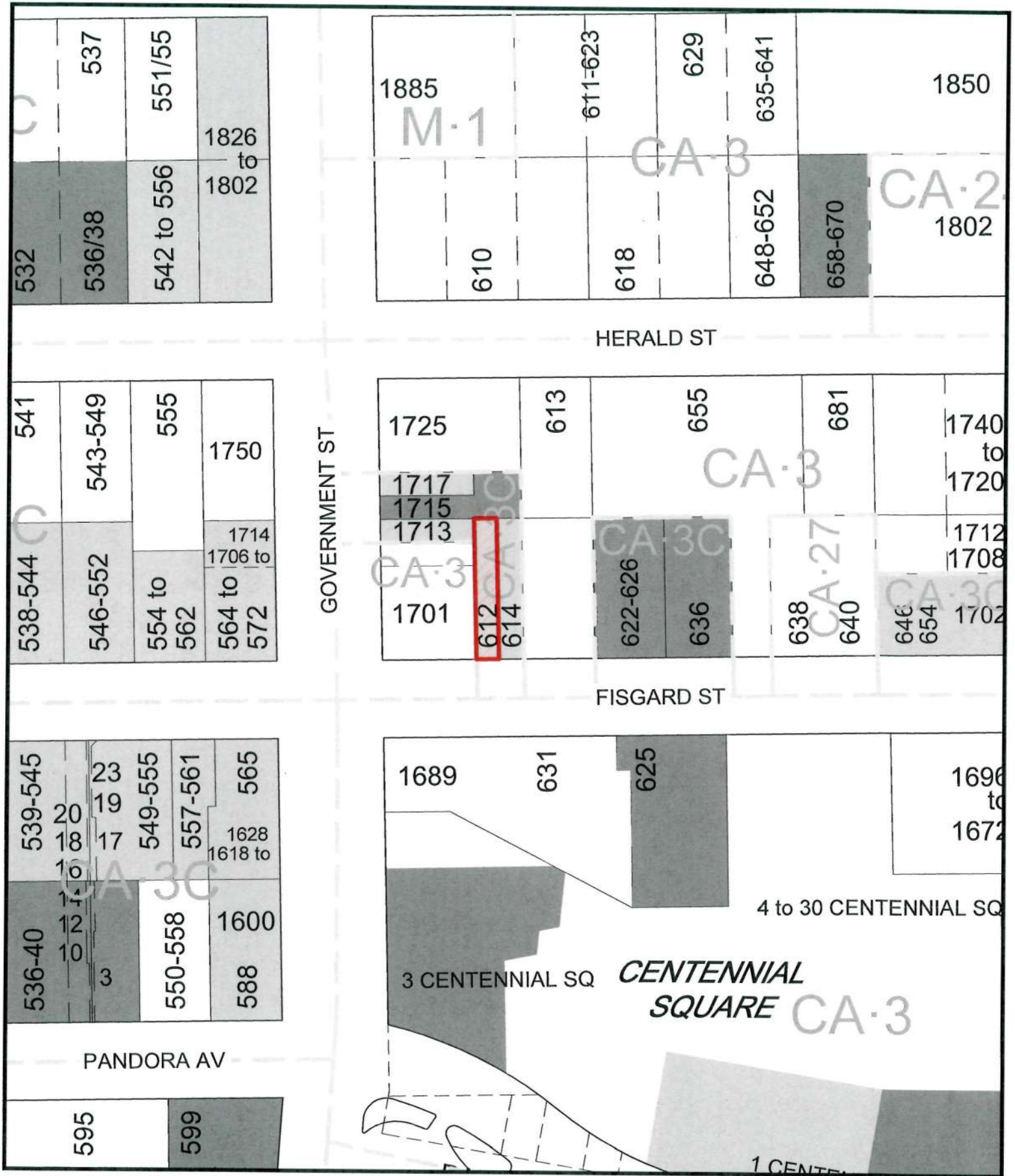
December 3, 2014

MGM/ljm

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List of Attachments

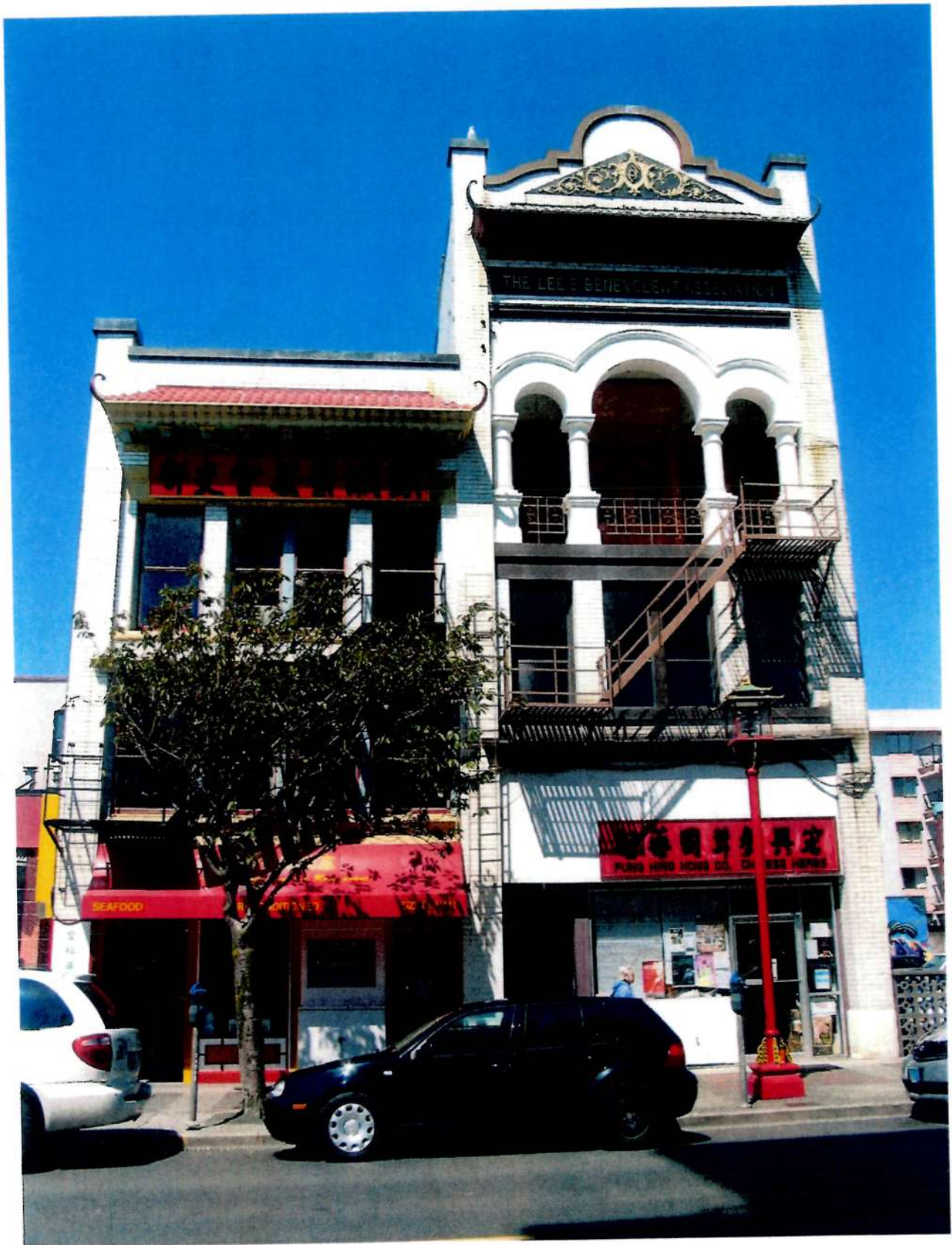
- Subject map
- Photographs
- Statement of Significance (Donald Luxton & Associates Inc., June 2008)
- Heritage Value Assessment - Victoria Heritage Thematic Framework Considerations (Extracted from the Statement of Significance prepared by Donald Luxton & Associates Inc., June 2008)
- Letter from the owner, date stamped November 3, 2014.



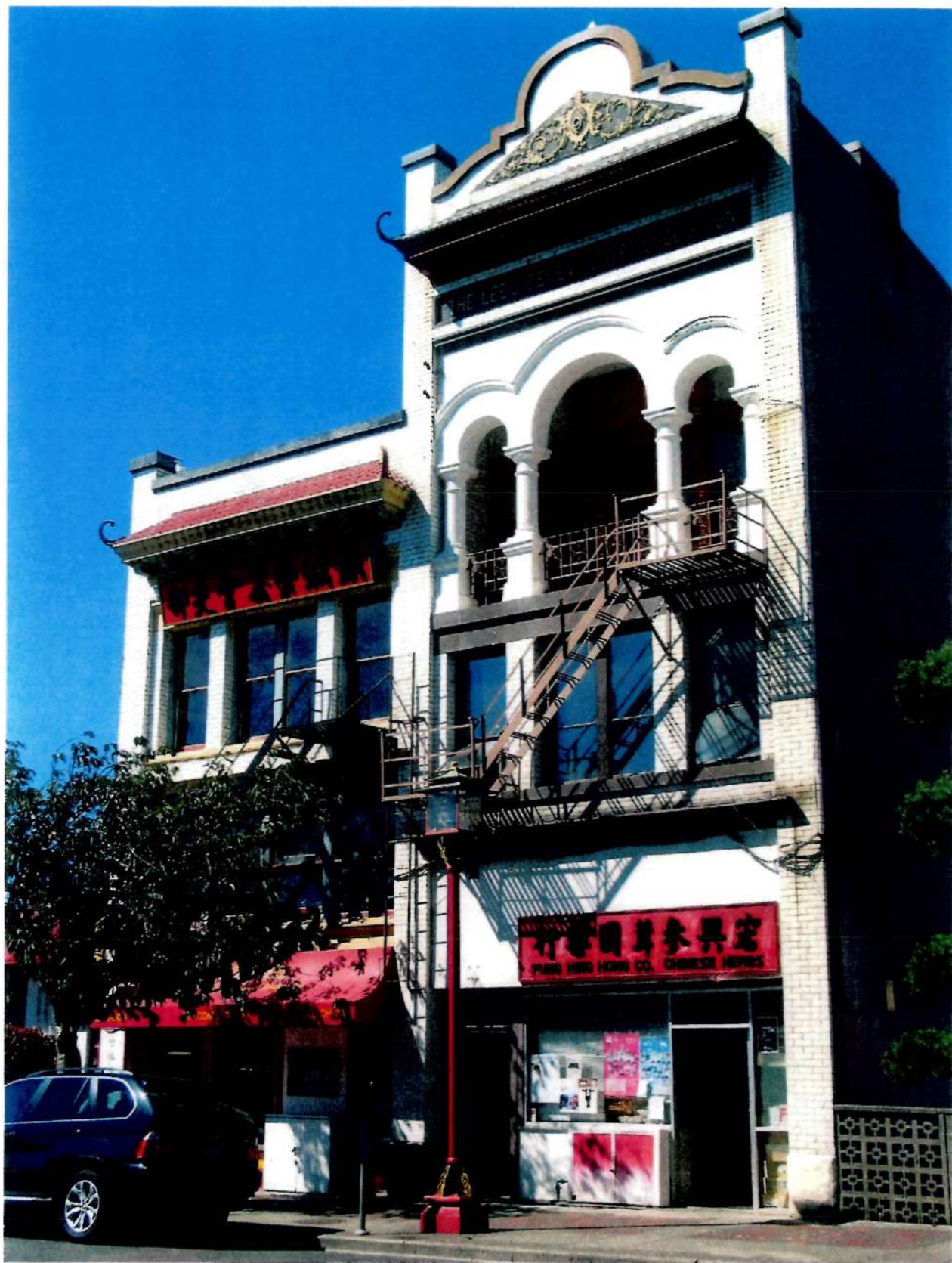
612 Fisgard Street
Heritage Designation #000143

Designated Registered





612 Fisgard Street (to the left)



612 Fisgard Street (to the left)

LEE'S ASSOCIATION BUILDING 612-614½ FISGARD STREET

Owners: Lee Mong Kow, Lee Dye, Lee Dan and Lee Wing Yew

Architects: Charles Elwood Watkins

Date: 1911

Description of Historic Place

The Lee's Association Building at 612-614½ Fisgard Street is a three-storey plus mezzanine structure, clad with white glazed bricks, in Victoria's Chinatown National Historic Site. The building consists of two distinct structures of different height that share a common party wall. Asymmetrical in massing, the building is distinctive for its upper floor recessed balcony with a tripartite arcade, projecting pantiled canopies and omega-shaped raised parapet.

Heritage Value of Historic Place

Lee's Association Building at 612-614 ½ Fisgard Street is valued as part of a grouping of early buildings that contribute to the historic character and urban pattern of Victoria's Chinatown National Historic Site, the seminal and oldest intact Chinatown in Canada. In the 1850s, exacerbated by political and social turmoil in China, thousands of Chinese migrated from a small region in the southern province of Guangdong to frontier gold rush sites in California, setting up a permanent base in San Francisco. In 1858, the Fraser Gold Rush spurred the movement of Chinese into Canada and the significant port town of Victoria was the primary point of entry into the country for the Chinese until the early twentieth century.

The building is further valued for its nearly continuous use by Chinese volunteer associations. These associations, or Tongs, had members with common ancestors and were established to protect the earliest Chinese settlers against Western intolerance and prejudice and opposing Chinese clans. Funding was obtained entirely by membership dues, gambling, opium dens and exiting fees. Volunteer associations usually had their own buildings, typically with meeting halls and offices on the upper floors and leased storefronts on the ground floor.

Merchant Lee Chung was the first Lee to arrive in Victoria, in 1859. By 1880 the Lee's Association was founded as a fraternal association. Six of the founding members were merchants, who helped less fortunate members of their community. In 1909, lots 602 and 603 were purchased by Lee Mong Kow, Lee Dye, Lee Dan and Lee Wing Yew; the building was constructed in 1911. Lee's Association occupied the larger structure while Lee Mong Kow used the smaller one as offices and living quarters.

Victoria's Chinatown is expressive of a duality in architecture and cultural landscape. Commercial building façades were designed by non-Chinese architects to project an image of assimilation to Western culture. In this context, Lee's Association Building is unusual for its overtly Chinese flavour. Comprised of two distinct structures, attached by a common party wall, the building has typical storefronts at the main level. The taller building to the east displays an elegant tripartite arcade and a recessed balcony. Both parts of the building feature pantiled Chinese-inspired eaves with upturned corners as well as name signage.

Western architects were hired to design buildings throughout Chinatown as the Chinese were shunned as professionals in building trades. Charles Elwood Watkins (1875-1942), a prolific Victoria architect, designed the Lee Association Building. In addition to commercial, institutional and residential projects elsewhere, he had numerous Chinese clients in Chinatown.

Character-Defining Elements

Key elements that define the heritage character of the Lee's Association Building include its:

- location on the north side of Fisgard Street, part of a grouping of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century historic masonry buildings in Victoria's Chinatown National Historic Site
- continuous commercial and institutional use
- siting on the front and side property lines, with no setbacks
- commercial form, scale and massing as expressed by its three-storey height, with 'cheater' storey, with two separate buildings connected by party wall, and storefronts facing Fisgard Street
- construction materials, including white glazed-brick cladding at front façade, parged brick side and rear walls, granite thresholds and cast-iron storefront columns
- Chinese features such as: the omega-shaped parapet with decorative triangular metal plaque inscribed with 1911 date; name sign "Lee's Benevolent Association"; recessed top floor balcony with tripartite arcade and Doric columns; sidewall chimneys; wall of wooden doors and windows in the meeting hall facing the balcony, with coloured glass in door; projecting, pantiled and bracketed canopies with upturned eaves
- windows such as 2-over-2 double-hung wooden sash windows
- internal staircase, with wooden wainscoting, leading to meeting room on the top floor

(Source: Donald Luxton & Associates Inc., June 2008)

The heritage value of the Lee's Association Building is summarized below in accordance with the Victoria Heritage Thematic Framework established in the *Official Community Plan*, as the conceptual framework for heritage value assessments and Statements of Significance.

Theme 1 – Coastal Settlement

Thematic Framework Subtheme 1.2: Multi-Cultural Origins

Many of the gold seekers who traveled through Victoria or remained in the city were not British or Anglo-American. In the 1850s, escaping political and social turmoil in China, thousands of Chinese migrants from a small region in the southern province of Guangdong arrived at frontier gold rush sites in California, setting up a permanent base in San Francisco. In 1858, the Fraser Gold Rush prompted the movement of Chinese from California to British Columbia and the port town of Victoria was the primary point of entry into the country for the Chinese until the early twentieth century. The Chinese began to settle to the north of the Johnson Street Ravine, which was physically separated from the rest of the emerging downtown commercial district, and established what would become Chinatown.

A further dramatic increase in the local Chinese population in the mid-1880s took place and many Chinese citizens who had been brought to Canada to work on the Canadian Pacific Railway moved to Victoria and Vancouver after the completion of the national system.

The Lee's Association Building has heritage value because it reflects the multi-cultural origins of coastal settlement in Victoria and it plays an important role in the cultural life of Victoria.

Theme 4: Community of Neighbourhoods

Thematic Framework Subtheme 4.2: Associations and Organizations

A variety of clubs and organizations have been established to provide mutual benefit, enrich community life and assist those in need. This subtheme focuses on the great variety of these social constructs - temporary and long-lasting, formal and informal, independent and allied with the government. This has included benevolent associations such as the Gee Tuck Tong Benevolent Association and the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association.

Chinese society was supported by a number of clan societies and associations. The most prominent at the time was the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, whose expressive building is extant and continues its historical function (554-562 Fisgard Street, John Teague, architect, 1885).

The Lee's Association Building is valued for its nearly continuous use by Chinese volunteer associations that were established to protect the earliest Chinese settlers against Western intolerance and prejudice. Further, the Lee's Association Building has heritage value because it reflects the variety of organizations that have enriched the cultural life of Victoria.

Theme 5: Cultural Exchange

Thematic Framework Subtheme – 5.1 Architectural Expression

Chinese merchants, many already established in San Francisco, played a leading role in the establishment and evolution of Victoria's Chinatown. Beginning in 1858, Chinese business people with financial support from San Francisco had opened stores located in wooden shacks north of the Johnson Street Ravine. Between the 1880s and the 1910s, a second wave of Chinese merchants arrived from California, consisting of groups of individuals or clans who pooled their resources to purchase land to create small businesses in new commercial blocks that replaced the original wooden shacks.

Victoria's Chinatown is expressive of a duality in architecture and urban form which has shaped its evolution as a cultural landscape. On each block, street façades link together, forming a wall that shields interior spaces. Narrow alleyways between and through buildings are linked to central courtyards which were the hidden location of various uses including accommodation and entertainment. This spatial configuration served the purpose of literally providing space for the Chinese community to follow traditional religion, kinship and economic practices behind buildings that were designed in Anglo-American architectural styles that symbolized assimilation to western culture. What remains of the original Chinatown is the oldest and most intact example in Canada and is a National Historic District.

The Lee's Association Building has heritage value because it is part of a grouping of early buildings that contributes to the historic character and urban pattern of Victoria's Chinatown National Historic Site, the seminal and oldest intact Chinatown in Canada.

(Source: Extracted from the Statement of Significance prepared by Donald Luxton & Associates Inc., June 2008)



October 15, 2014

Shon Yee Benevolent association of Canada, Victoria Branch
612 ½ Fisgard Street, Victoria BC
V8W 1R6

Mayor Dean Fortin and Victoria City Council
1 Centennial Square
Victoria BC
V8W 1P6

Re: Application for Heritage Designation

Dear Mayor and Council;

I am writing to apply for the following property to be designated as a Heritage Building:

Parcel Identifier: 006-389-252

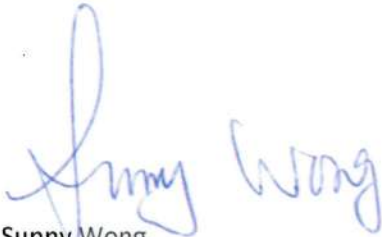
Legal Description: THE WESTERLY 19 FEET OF LOT 14 OF LOT 603, VICTORIA CITY, PLAN 2779

Civic address: 612 ½ FISGARD STREET, VICTORIA, BC, V8W 1R6.

As you are aware the property was built in November 25, 1910 and it has a very unique design from the other buildings. Our intention for the property is to continue to have façade improvements, and or, not limited to the building code improvements, new electrical systems, improve fire exits and seismic upgrade.

During our September meeting the issue was debated and the vast majority of our members approved to have the property designated as a Heritage Building.

If you require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at (250) 380-9839 or via email sunnywong07@hotmail.com. I look forward to hearing from you and council to approve our request.



Sunny Wong

Property Manager,

Shon Yee Benevolent association of Canada, Victoria Branch

Phone (250) 380-9839

Email: sunnywong07@hotmail.com

Enclosure:

Application for Heritage Designation

Land Title search