

# (RE)VISIONING WINNIPEG'S CHINATOWN: *A critical analysis of settler-colonial revitalization*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After decades of disinvestment, Winnipeg's Northwest Exchange District and Chinatown are the focus of recent revitalization initiatives led by non-governmental planning organizations. The intent of this Capstone project is not to provide an in-depth analysis, nor critique of the recent *Development Strategy*. By comparing organizational mandates, jurisdictional boundaries, and stakeholder perspectives, I argue the voices and interests of those experiencing homelessness, Indigenous People, and other non-Chinese BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) are marginalized and missing from the planning process, placing them at risk of displacement.

Participants consisted of representatives from community organizations (COs), non-governmental planning organizations (NGPOs), and housing- and homelessness-focused non-profit organizations (HNPOs). Data from emotional mapping and semi-structured interviews was analyzed through a perspective informed by gentrification literature and settler-colonial literature. All participants saw a need for reinvestment in Chinatown and the Northwest Exchange. However, most participants, especially COs and HNPOs, expressed concerns about changes that would displace their community, residents, and/or client base. Social issues, such as homelessness and poverty, are only worsening and similar urban renewal initiatives in the past have done little to improve circumstances for the city-centre's inhabitants. There was a desire for Chinatown to be an inclusive and multi-cultural space; but some participants discussed conflicts around how physical representations can exclude those who do not identify with its branding. Lastly, the current and historic Indigenous inhabitants of the area and Indigenous-led grassroots movements are concealed and erased by a lack of representation in the *Development Strategy's* key policies.

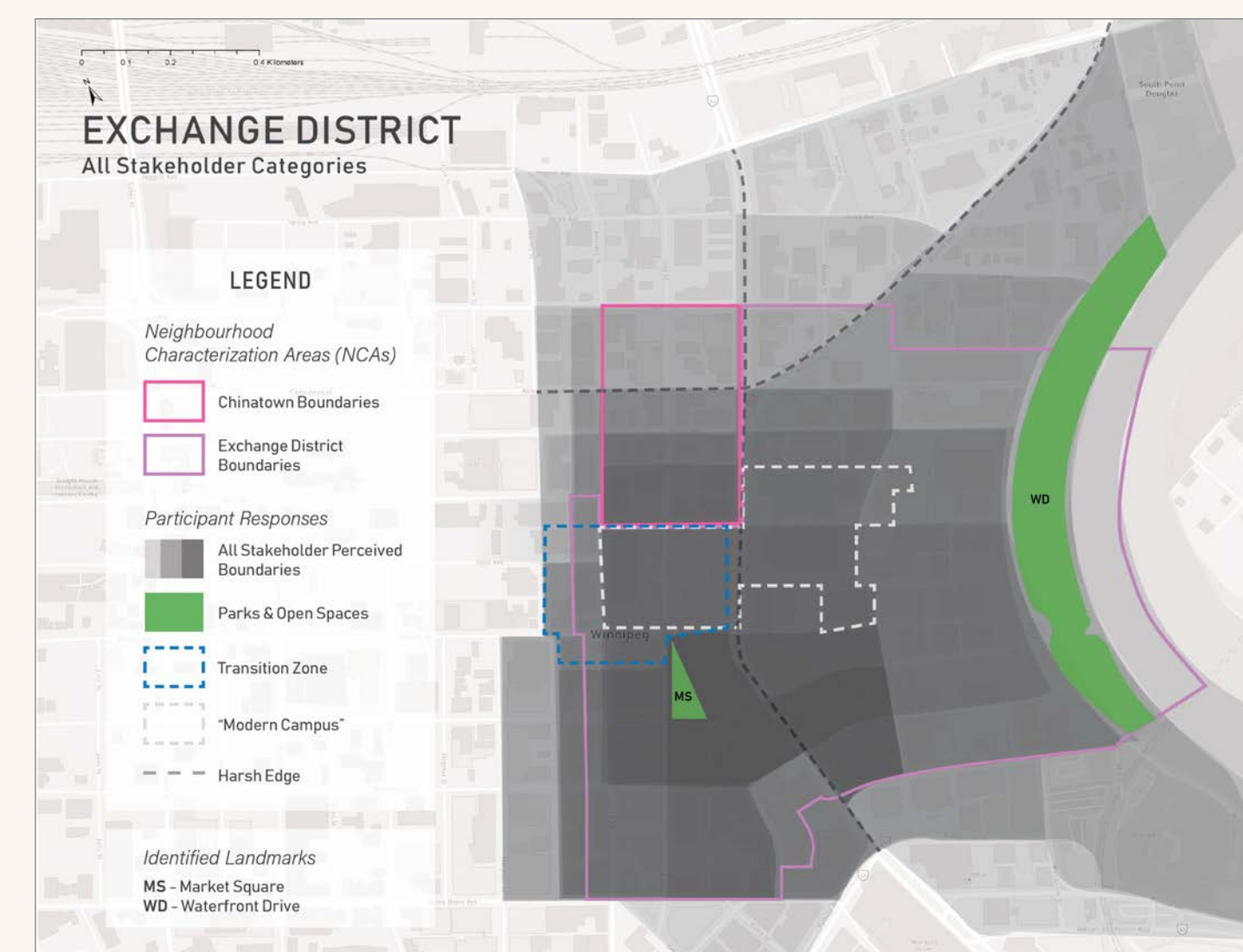
Based on these findings, a plan for the area's social development is needed, created through partnerships between COs, HNPOs, and NGPOs, but led by Winnipeg's official planning department. Indigenous people should be recognized as inhabitants of the space and strategies should be incorporated to address aspects of Indigenous homelessness. These strategies should be led by Indigenous people, but with support from the City and other organizations.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS, KEY FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

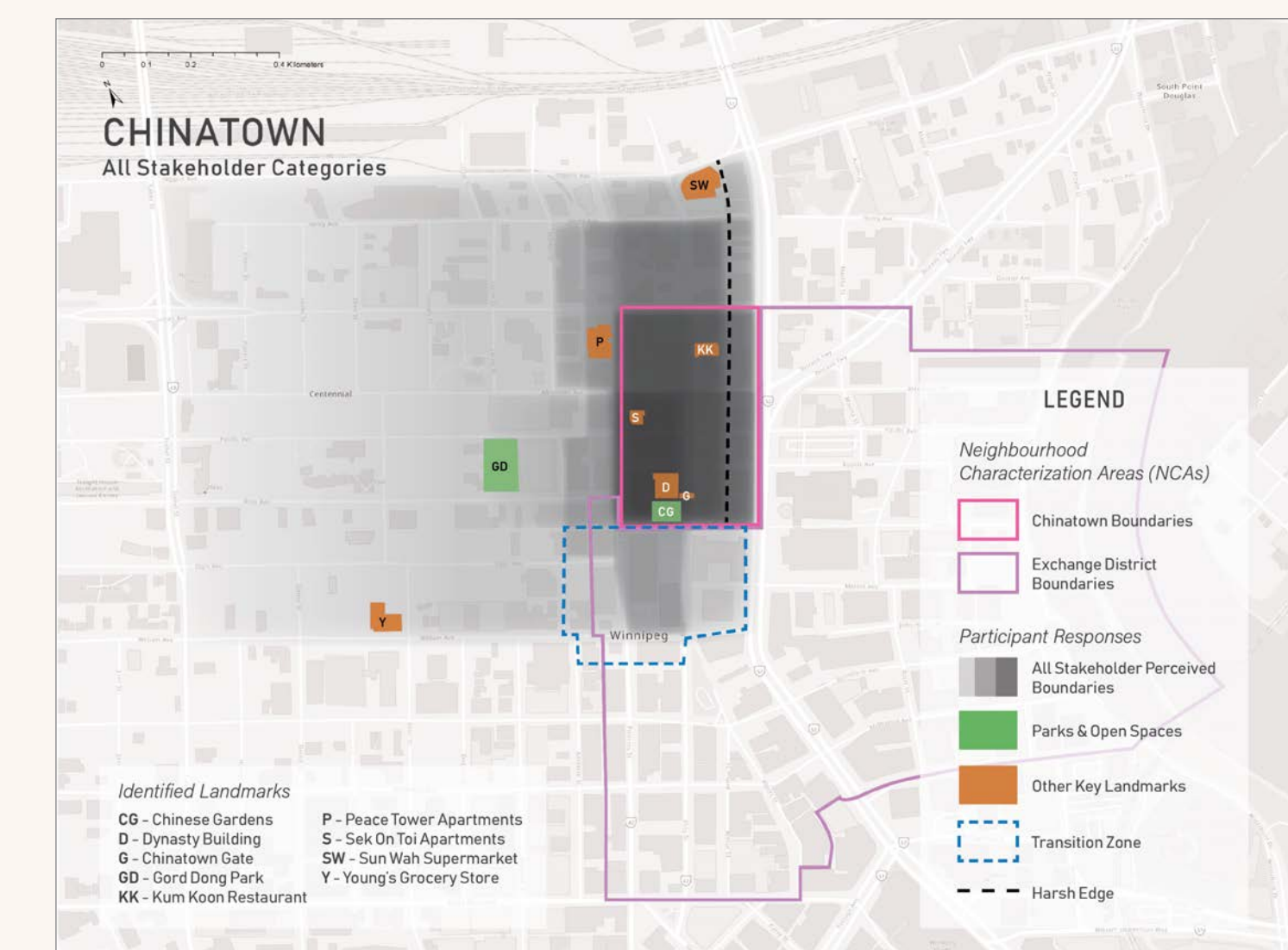
### Q1:

What are the similarities and differences in how different stakeholder categories\* define, perceive, and experience Winnipeg's Exchange District and Chinatown?

\* Community organizations, non-governmental planning organizations, and housing- and homelessness-focused non-profit organizations



1. The Exchange District was generally defined by its historic buildings, offices, and spaces of entertainment. While participants identified sub-districts within the Exchange, most saw it as a cohesive, identifiable neighbourhood.
2. Chinatown was strictly defined by its Chinese-businesses (particularly restaurants) and Chinese-themed architecture. Participants used metaphors like "drops of water" or a "gap toothed smile" to describe how the area feels disconnected.
3. Participants described limited interactions between residents and between organizations located in separate areas. They also described limited foot traffic between neighbourhoods. Areas of disconnect roughly followed boundaries of planning regulations and/or organizations' scope.



### Q2:

What gaps exist in planning for Chinatown and its vicinity? What perspectives have been marginalized or are missing from the area's dominant planning processes?

1. COs, NGPOs, and HNPOs want Chinatown to develop in a way that is multi-cultural and inclusive. However, by being branded as a Chinese-centric place, its name and character can present a different message of exclusion. Without conscious efforts of communicating and connection, newcomers, Indigenous people, and other non-Chinese BIPOC may not feel welcomed by the space. However, COs described limited resources (i.e., time, administrative, and financial) to do so.
2. COs and HNPOs are hopeful for change in Winnipeg's Chinatown and the Northwest Exchange, but are cautious that their respective populations may be displaced. Issues faced by the inhabitants in the areas are complex and cannot be solved by physical revitalization alone. A broader social plan is needed; however, this is beyond the scope of COs, HNPOs, and NGPOs.

“If that's not a name that attracts me, where I feel like I could belong, maybe if I don't feel welcome. Even if they would welcome me, I probably wouldn't go.”

### Q3:

How might Chinatown develop in a way that reflects the needs of its current inhabitants and of those in its surrounding areas?

1. Address Indigenous Peoples' historic and ongoing displacement and dispossession from their Lands, including Winnipeg and its Downtown, and the settler-colonial structures in place that contribute to these ongoing processes.
2. Expand the scope of consultation to include organizations and inhabitants just outside the planning area's vicinity. The perspectives of those experiencing homelessness and non-Chinese BIPOC should be included and actively sought out.
3. Create a plan to address the social development of Chinatown and its surrounding neighbourhoods. The plan should be grounded in an Indigenous perspective on homelessness, and should seek create opportunities for connection between the area's diverse inhabitants (e.g., along racial, class, and generational lines).

“Physical is important to people. All citizens need to see something that represents their history, and their cultures, their languages, and their architecture.”

## KEY TERMS

### Displacement

- A process, rather than a point-in-time event. Includes being physically displaced from an area. Also includes symbolic displacement (losing connection with a space) and exclusionary displacement (losing the ability to participate in a space).

### Inhabitants

- Individuals and households who live and/or work in the study area. Includes those who are experiencing homelessness.

### Indigenous Homelessness

- Understood as being the direct result of settler-colonialism and the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous People from their Lands. A holistic view that extends beyond being physically homeless.

## METHODS

### Participants

- 5 COs, 3 NGPOs, 3 HNPOs (11 participants total)
- 3 participants identified as working for Indigenous organizations
- 3 self-identified as Chinese-Canadian.
- Located in or near the study area.

### Emotional Mapping

- Participants mapped where they perceived the boundaries of the Exchange District and Chinatown to be.
- Responses were amalgamated into separate maps per area and per stakeholder category.

### Semi-structured Interviews

- Questions were grouped into three parts: 1.) organization's scope and mandate; 2.) PARK analysis of Chinatown; and, 3.) experience of their residents and/or client-base.