

# REMAKING PLACE IN LITTLE SAIGON

A PROPOSAL FOR THE RETENTION AND EVOLUTION OF THE  
IDENTITY OF AN ETHNIC NEIGHBORHOOD IN VANCOUVER

by

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Remaking place in Little Saigon: A proposal for the retention and evolution of the identity of an ethnic neighborhood in Vancouver

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the degree of Master of Advanced Studies in Architecture  
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## **Abstract**

Small-business entrepreneurialism has been an important characteristic of the immigrant and ethnic identity in cities. The Vietnamese community in Greater Vancouver, Canada is no stranger to this. Small-business entrepreneurialism in Little Saigon along Kingsway has defined the Vietnamese Canadian experience in the city and the metro area for more than four decades. The thoroughfare has proven to be a place nurturing Vietnamese upward mobility as it offers economic opportunities to those with limited capital. However, the vibrant scene of Vietnamese and other ethnic businesses on Kingsway is being threatened by a rapid wave of redevelopments facilitated by urban policies and financial practices that pit the real estate market against ethnic neighborhoods. Today young Vietnamese have to become more creative and technologically savvy to circumvent the high costs of starting their businesses. This thesis, by reimagining the designs of the neighborhood, proposes several alternatives in urban policies and business financing options for the city, the local community, and financial stakeholders to curb the negative effects of redevelopment, uphold Kingsway's entrepreneurial spirit, and expand upward mobility among those with limited capital, including local Vietnamese.

## **Lay Summary**

This thesis uses the Vietnamese neighborhood, Little Saigon, along Kingsway in Vancouver, Canada as a case study in understanding how urban ethnic economic activities create space and culture in the city, and how redevelopments may hurt the neighborhood. This thesis reimagines the designs of the neighborhood to propose several alternatives in urban policies and business financing options. The goal is to achieve more culturally sustainable growth for the ethnic neighborhood in the future.

## **Preface**

This thesis is an original, independent, and intellectual product of the author's efforts, which gratefully builds on the work of the many researchers cited in the various fields which it addresses.

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Lay Summary .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Preface .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>List of Tables .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>List of Figures .....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>List of Illustrations .....</b>	<b>xiv</b>
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>xv</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>xvii</b>
<b>I. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. The Narrative of Little Saigon, Vancouver.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>II.1. A History of Vietnamese Canadians in Vancouver .....</b>	<b>10</b>
II.1.1. Fall of Saigon, Boat People, and Resettlement in Canada .....	10
II.1.2. Vancouver's Vietnamese Neighborhood .....	12
II.1.3. Subsequent Immigration Waves .....	14
II.1.4. Urban and Suburban Growth .....	16
<b>II.2. Little Saigon: An Ethnic Neighborhood .....</b>	<b>23</b>
II.2.1. Is Little Saigon an Ethnic Neighborhood? .....	23
II.2.2. North America's Little Saigons .....	25
II.2.3. Global and Local Processes of Vancouver's Little Saigon .....	26
<b>II.3. The Many Values of Little Saigon .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>III. The Threats of Redevelopments in Little Saigon.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>III.1. Land Use around Little Saigon .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>III.2. Recent and Upcoming Developments .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>III.3. Local Residential and Commercial Rent Prices .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>III.4. Flight of the Ethnic Businesses and Residents.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>III.5. Is Little Saigon Getting Gentrified? .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>IV. An Evolution of Little Saigon.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>IV.1. Ethnic Neighborhoods Protection and Promotion.....</b>	<b>62</b>
IV.1.1. Opportunities .....	62
IV.1.2. Design.....	65

IV.1.3.	Policy Alternatives.....	68
IV.1.4.	Financial Alternatives.....	69
<b>IV.2.</b>	<b>Ephemeral and Micro Retail.....</b>	<b>71</b>
IV.2.1.	Opportunities .....	71
IV.2.2.	Design.....	77
IV.2.3.	Policy Alternatives.....	83
IV.2.4.	Financial Alternatives.....	84
<b>IV.3.</b>	<b>Laneway 3.0 .....</b>	<b>87</b>
IV.3.1.	Opportunities .....	87
IV.3.2.	Design.....	90
IV.3.3.	Policy Alternatives.....	99
<b>IV.4.</b>	<b>Land Use Diversification in Residential Area .....</b>	<b>100</b>
IV.4.1.	Opportunities .....	100
IV.4.2.	Design.....	102
IV.4.3.	Policy Alternatives.....	106
<b>IV.5.</b>	<b>The Evolution of Little Saigon Design Summary .....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>112</b>
	<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>117</b>

## List of Tables

Table II.1. Population of Vietnamese origin in Vancouver, Burnaby, and Surrey from 1996 to 2016.....	18
Table II.2. Types of local processes in an urban ethnic neighborhood, Table, “Types of Ethnic Local Processes” in Jan Lin, <i>The Power of Urban Ethnic Places: Cultural Heritage and Community Life</i> , (New York, Routledge, 2010): 51, Table 2.1.....	27
Table III.1. Approximate retail area in recently built redevelopments in Little Saigon and their previous forms (Table by author).....	48
Table III.2. Approximate retail area in upcoming redevelopments in Little Saigon and their previous forms (Table by author) .....	50
Table III.3. Median residential rent in Cedar Cottage, home to Little Saigon, compared to that of Vancouver, Surrey, the metro area, and Canada. (Table by author, adapted from CMHC, “Housing Market Information Portal,” Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, accessed April 8, 2021, <a href="https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/en/TableMapChart/">https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/en/TableMapChart/</a> ) .....	51
Table III.4. A comparison of rent costs of 5 commercial units in and outside Little Saigon (Table by author) .....	52
Table III.5. Number of ethnic businesses in Little Saigon in 2010 and 2020 (Table by author) .....	56
Table III.6. Ethnic composition of Census Tract 9330032.00 which includes Little Saigon, from 1996 to 2016 .....	56

## List of Figures

Figure I.1. Location of Little Saigon and Kingsway in Greater Vancouver (Map by author) .....	2
Figure II.1. Visualization of the population of Vietnamese origin in Greater Vancouver by census dissemination area from 1996 to 2016, Data visualization by MountainMath, “CensusMapper” in MountainMath, “CensusMapper,” <i>MountainMath</i> , accessed April 7, 2021, <a href="https://mountainmath.ca/mountain_math/canada_census_map">https://mountainmath.ca/mountain_math/canada_census_map</a> . Courtesy of Jens von Bergmann and Sanyin Bekrich.....	17
Figure II.2. Map of religious institutions offering services in the Vietnamese language in Greater Vancouver (Map by author).....	19
Figure II.3. Map of supermarkets catered to Vietnamese customers in Greater Vancouver (Map by author) .....	20
Figure II.4. Map of Vietnamese restaurants in Greater Vancouver (Map by author) .....	21
Figure II.5. Map of Social services offered in the Vietnamese language in Greater Vancouver (Map by author) .....	22
Figure II.6. Diagram of the geography of Vietnamese economic activities around Little Saigon (Diagram by author).....	28
Figure II.7. Diagram of the variety of Vietnamese businesses in Little Saigon (Diagram by author).....	30
Figure II.8. Photos of the vibrant scene of Vietnamese commercial neighborhood on Kingsway (Photos by author) .....	30
Figure II.9. Photos of street signs and banners of Little Saigon (Photos by author) .....	34
Figure II.10. Photos of the Monument of Vietnamese Boat People - Refugees from Communism in McAuley Park (Photos by author).....	35
Figure II.11. Diagram of the Upward Mobility Model of Vietnamese in Greater Vancouver (Diagram by author).....	41
Figure II.12. Diagram of simplified intersectionality of Vietnamese economic participants in Greater Vancouver (Diagram by author).....	42

Figure III.1. Map of lane use in Greater Vancouver, Data visualization by MountainMath, “Metro Vancouver Land Use,” in MountainMath, “Metro Vancouver Land Use,” MountainMath, accessed April 7, 2021, [https://mountainmath.ca/land\\_use/map](https://mountainmath.ca/land_use/map). Courtesy of Jens von Bergmann and Sanyin Bekrich. .... 44

Figure III.2. Map of lane use in and around Little Saigon, Data visualization by MountainMath, “Metro Vancouver Land Use,” in MountainMath, “Metro Vancouver Land Use,” MountainMath, accessed April 7, 2021, [https://mountainmath.ca/land\\_use/map](https://mountainmath.ca/land_use/map). Courtesy of Jens von Bergmann and Sanyin Bekrich. .... 44

Figure III.3. Diagram of recently built and upcoming redevelopments in and around Little Saigon (Diagram by author) ..... 45

Figure III.4. Diagram of recently built and upcoming redevelopments, and recently renovated stores in Little Saigon (Diagram by author)..... 46

Figure III.5. Diagram of retail area in recently built redevelopments in Little Saigon and their previous forms (Diagram by author)..... 48

Figure III.6. Diagram of retail area in upcoming redevelopments in Little Saigon and their previous forms (Diagram by author) ..... 49

Figure III.7. Visualization of local property tax assessment in and around Little Saigon, Data visualization by MountainMath, “Vancouver Tax Density Map,” in MountainMath, “Vancouver Tax Density Map,” *MountainMath*, accessed April 7, 2021, [https://mountainmath.ca/mountain\\_math/vancouver\\_tax\\_density\\_map](https://mountainmath.ca/mountain_math/vancouver_tax_density_map). Courtesy of Jens von Bergmann and Sanyin Bekrich..... 53

Figure III.8. Diagram of ethnic businesses in Little Saigon in 2010 and 2020 (Diagram by author)..... 55

Figure IV.1. Diagram of the extended Upward Mobility Model of Little Saigon (Diagram by author)..... 60

Figure IV.2. Diagram of simplified intersectionality of Vietnamese “white-collar entrepreneurs” in Greater Vancouver (Diagram by author) ..... 61

Figure IV.3. Diagram of a corner on Kingsway (Diagram by author) ..... 65

Figure IV.4. Diagram of Kingsway street redesign (Diagram by author) ..... 66

Figure IV.5. Diagram of a street food market in a strip mall’s parking lot (Diagram by author) ..... 67

Figure IV.6. Diagram of a business inside a redevelopment’s micro retail unit (Diagram by author).....	77
Figure IV.7. Diagram of a business inside a shipping container (Diagram by author) .....	78
Figure IV.8. The dimensions of the “shophouse-on-casters” module (Diagram by author) .....	79
Figure IV.9. Diagram of customized options of the “shophouse-on-casters” (Diagram by author).....	79
Figure IV.10. Diagram of a business inside a “shophouse-on-casters” - open on the short side (Diagram by author) .....	80
Figure IV.11. Diagram of a business inside a “shophouse-on-casters” - open on the long side (Diagram by author).....	80
Figure IV.12. Diagram of an exploded “shophouse-on-casters” prefabricated module (Diagram by author).....	81
Figure IV.13. Diagram of the customizability of the “shophouse-on-casters” (Diagram by author).....	81
Figure IV.14. Programmatic diagram of a redesigned redevelopment with small retail units (under 1000 sqft) fronting Kingsway and micro retail units (under 300 sqft) facing laneway (Diagram by author).....	83
Figure IV.15. Photos of parking lots in the back of commercial buildings (Photos by author) .....	88
Figure IV.16. Photos of laneway blocks that are being “residentialized” (Photos by author) .....	88
Figure IV.17. Diagram of proposed names for laneways parallel to Little Saigon (Diagram by author).....	90
Figure IV.18. Diagram of laneway surface markings (Diagram by author) .....	91
Figure IV.19. Diagram of laneway activation in residential laneway blocks (Diagram by author).....	92
Figure IV.20. Diagram of laneway commercial program in the summer (Diagram by author) .....	93
Figure IV.21. Diagram of laneway commercial program in the winter (Diagram by author) .....	94

Figure IV.22. Diagram of redevelopment's micro retail units facing the laneway (Diagram by author).....	95
Figure IV.23. Diagram of pop-up shops or ephemeral micro shops (Diagram by author) .....	96
Figure IV.24. Diagram of a covered micro “flea market” (Diagram by author) .....	97
Figure IV.25. Diagram of an ephemeral market (Diagram by author).....	98
Figure IV.26. Photos of residential backyard structures along the laneways (Photos by author).....	101
Figure IV.27. Photos of triangular corner residential lots adjacent to Little Saigon (Photos by author).....	101
Figure IV.28. Diagram of laneway “shophouse” or mixed-use laneway house (Diagram by author).....	102
Figure IV.29. Diagram of laneway “shophouse” on intersecting laneways (Diagram by author) .....	103
Figure IV.30. Programmatic diagram of a mixed-use laneway house (Diagram by author) .....	103
Figure IV.31. Diagram of a business inside a laneway “shophouse” - half-width option (Diagram by author).....	104
Figure IV.32. Diagram of a business inside a laneway “shophouse” - full-width option (Diagram by author).....	104
Figure IV.33. Diagram of triangular “missing middle” or low-rise multi-family housing with laneway and corner retail units (Diagram by author).....	105
Figure IV.34. Programmatic diagram of a mixed-use triangular “missing middle” (Diagram by author).....	106
Figure IV.35. Diagram of potential sites on Little Saigon’s laneways (Diagram by author) .....	108
Figure IV.36. Diagram of a site-based program for Little Saigon’s evolution (Diagram by author).....	109
Figure IV.37. Diagram of pedestrian connectivity in Little Saigon’s evolution (Diagram by author).....	110

Figure IV.38. Diagram of four phases of the project implementation (Diagram by author) ..... 111

## List of Illustrations

Illustration II.1. Tet Lunar New Year Parade (Illustration by author).....	32
Illustration II.2. The inauguration of Little Saigon (Illustration by author).....	34
Illustration II.3. The Monument of Vietnamese Boat People - Refugees from Communism and the annual April 30 commemoration (Illustration by author) ...	36
Illustration III.1. Diagram of the growth and decline of an ethnic neighborhood (Diagram by author).....	57
Illustration III.2. Diagram of the demographic cycle in an ethnic neighborhood (Diagram by author).....	57
Illustration V.1. The possible future of Little Saigon (Illustration by author) .....	112
Illustration V.2. Perspective of laneway micro retail units in the urban context (Illustration by author).....	115
Illustration V.3. Perspective of laneway pop-up shops in the urban context (Illustration by author).....	115
Illustration V.4. Perspective of laneway “shophouses” in the urban context (Illustration by author).....	116
Illustration V.5. Perspective of triangular “missing middle” in the urban context (Illustration by author).....	116

## Glossary

<b>BIA</b>	Business Improvement Area, a commercial district in the city that is run by a non-profit group to promote and improve the local business environment
<b>Geography</b>	The location and boundary, in the context of this thesis, of the Vietnamese neighborhood in Vancouver
<b>Kingsway</b>	A historic thoroughfare connecting the British Columbian municipalities of Vancouver, Burnaby, and New Westminster
<b>Little Saigon</b>	The formal name designated for four blocks of Kingsway, Vancouver. But this name is used to describe interchangeably both the four blocks and the surrounding area with a high concentration of Vietnamese businesses and residents in East Vancouver.
<b>Metro</b>	Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). Greater Vancouver or Metro Vancouver is defined as a CMA by Statistics Canada.
<b>Redevelopment</b>	A new building development, typically high-density housing with some retail at grade, that requires demolition of existing building(s) and sometimes a rezoning permit
<b>ROV</b>	The former Republic of Vietnam or South Vietnam
<b>Sqft</b>	Square foot/feet
<b>Tenant Improvement Allowance</b>	An incentive by the landlord to attract prospective tenants such as money to retrofit or renovate the rental
<b>Triple Net Lease</b>	A lease agreement in which the tenant pays all the expenses of the property including property taxes, building insurance, and maintenance, in addition to rent and utilities
<b>Vancouver</b>	The name of both the municipality and the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). The Vancouver CMA is often referred to as Greater Vancouver or Metro Vancouver.
<b>Vietnam</b>	In this thesis, it means the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the nation reunified from North and South Vietnams.

**Vietnamese**

There are various definitions of a Vietnamese person. Census Canada records data on people with the ethnic origin of Vietnam, but there are many ethnic minorities in Vietnam besides the Kinh majority. One of the prominent groups within the Vietnamese Canadian community is the Hoa people or Chinese Vietnamese. There are also differences between citizens of Vietnam and citizens of Canada who identify as Vietnamese. In the context of this thesis, the term Vietnamese describes all of these groups.

**Vietnamese Businesses**

There are many definitions of what a Vietnamese business is. Businesses owned by Vietnamese, those offering services in Vietnamese language, those selling products catered to Vietnamese cultural consumption, those with signs in Vietnamese, etc. are all considered Vietnamese businesses in this thesis.

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# I. Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to use the Vietnamese community in Vancouver as a case study to understand how small-business entrepreneurialism feeds into the cultural place-making of ethnic neighborhoods. The thesis studies the social, economic, and political values of the Vietnamese neighborhood, Little Saigon, on the arterial street Kingsway in Vancouver, Canada and investigates the effect of the upcoming housing redevelopments along this street on the neighborhood's social and economic fabric. It also proposes solutions for more culturally sustainable growth for the neighborhood and Kingsway in the future.

In 2011, the British Columbian city of Vancouver officially recognized a part of Kingsway street as Little Saigon after a rigorous advocacy campaign by the local Vietnamese community. The historic commercial thoroughfare connecting the Eastern neighborhoods of Vancouver with the suburban municipalities of Burnaby and New Westminster has hosted Vietnamese economic activities for decades while Vietnamese Canadians have found a home in Cedar Cottage and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Since their arrival in Canada as refugees from the aftermath of the Vietnam War at the end of the 1970s, the Vietnamese community in Greater Vancouver has thrived and has left a mark on the metropolitan area. Kingsway, as marked in Figure I.1, has offered a fair supply of affordable commercial rental spaces, which has been crucial to the Vietnamese refugees. Vietnamese restaurants, beauty salons, grocery stores, tax services offices, medical clinics, auto insurance offices, auto repair shops, travel agencies, media stores, and even pool halls populating Kingsway and its adjacent streets have facilitated Vietnamese entrepreneurialism for decades. As more Vietnamese immigrants settled in the city, they have also found in the Kingsway area a place to find employment, housing, entertainment, legal assistance, social connections, and cultural celebrations.



Figure I.1. Location of Little Saigon and Kingsway in Greater Vancouver (Map by author)

Situated between the vibrant downtown area and more suburban parts of the metro, East Vancouver has seen less investment and development from the city and private developers, compared to other areas. There are many factors behind that. Vancouver's racist urban policies targeting marginalized communities throughout its history have kept many parts of East Vancouver economically depressed and ridden with high crime rates.<sup>1</sup> First with the Japanese and African Canadian communities until well after World War II, then with Indigenous and transgender sex workers in the 1980s. It has also been home to the city's working class and many ethnic communities from Europe such as Italians, Polish, Germans, Croatians, etc., and for decades it has attracted immigrants from South, East, and Southeast Asia. Since the 1980s, the city also reoriented its focus towards the downtown area and encouraged "Vancouverism." The flight of the residents and money to downtown left Kingsway with a stock of low-cost retail spaces in old, low-quality, and low-maintenance buildings, which presented opportunities to immigrant and refugee entrepreneurs of small businesses.

The ethnic reinvestment into these neighborhoods has attracted more residents and businesses of other ethnic backgrounds. In addition to the Vietnamese, the area has seen a high concentration of Chinese, Filipinx, and Korean residents. The effects of ethnic small-business entrepreneurialism on Kingsway have been transformative. For decades, Kingsway has been populated with signs in

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<sup>1</sup> John Mackie, "East Van Sheds Its Bad Rep and Emerges as Vancouver's Cultural Heart," *Vancouver Sun*, January 6, 2011.

Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean languages with a large number of small businesses, some of which are not often found elsewhere in the metro. Some very unique businesses include a dog daycare school, a telescope store, Buddhist worshipping materials stores, beauty salon supply stores, etc. And some unusually common types of business in the area include notary offices, massage parlors, beauty salons, grocery stores, travel agencies, tattoo parlors, cannabis shops, adult shops, and countless ethnic restaurants.<sup>2</sup>

Today, the consequence of ethnic small-business entrepreneurialism on Kingsway is highly visible in architectural forms. The street offers a variety of store sizes and shapes, and some stores are as small as 400 sqft (37 m<sup>2</sup>). The buildings also vary in size, and almost all are subdivided into smaller units, which effectively contribute to the emergence of unique small businesses to thrive. Which in turn renders a festivity of storefronts and signages, such as diverse colors, window displays, graphics, and languages, plastered all along the street. The urbanism of Kingsway is not only vibrant but also affordable, especially in an expensive city such as Vancouver. Though most of the buildings here are low-rise mixed-use developments that predate ethnic occupation, they currently resemble little to none of their past appearances. Above the ground floor are many office and apartment types that offer affordable rentals to the local community, especially those with lower to middle incomes, including immigrants, students, and young workers. The spaces of Kingsway and their occupants have formed a successful, if fragile, symbiosis.

Thanks to its diversity, flexibility, and affordability, Kingsway acts as a portal to upward mobility among the Vietnamese refugees who may have migrated to Canada without any means of support. They worked their way up to become entrepreneurs and afforded their children's education to have a better life because of Kingsway's offerings. However, this model of success did not become irrelevant when the refugees became well integrated into society. Subsequent Vietnamese immigrants also found economic opportunities on Kingsway and the other streets of East Vancouver. The Vietnamese community has substantially grown in size while their neighborhood has evolved its identity through different socioeconomic backgrounds of Vietnamese immigrants and of other ethnic groups. International students from Vietnam may find work in Vietnamese restaurants and grocery stores during their studies. Vietnamese immigrant women cook and sell their own Bánh Chưng from their East Vancouver homes during Lunar New Year to earn extra cash. White-collar second-generation Vietnamese Canadians quit their jobs to venture into the business of beauty salons and restaurants. These examples highlight that entrepreneurialism runs

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Luke and Dan Fumano, "Vietnam's Boat People: How Four Families Found Refuge in B.C.," *The Province*, October 4, 2015.

deep in the Vietnamese community and benefits many identities, not just refugees.

Vancouver itself has been home to various ethnic neighborhoods throughout its history. Chinatown, Japantown, Hogan's Alley, Little Italy, Greektown, Punjabi Market, and many Indigenous communities have contributed to the city's culture and economy since its early days. While the genesis of these ethnic places was mostly carried out by economic migrants and their boundaries were set primarily by systemic or cultural racism, the case of the Vietnamese neighborhood has been more nuanced. Little Saigon has been a "weaker" case of an ethnic neighborhood because of its plurality-minority status while it is strongly accepted as one by its co-ethnics and politicians. The first reason is that, unlike the contested history of Chinese or Japanese migration, both the Canadian government and the public supported the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees. And since their arrival, overtly racist practices in urban planning have become "unpopular." Secondly, the number of Vietnamese residents has never surpassed ten percent in the neighborhood and the number of Vietnamese businesses has also been a minority in the most concentrated part of Kingsway. Finally, the Vietnamese community, far from being galvanized by opposition and despite their small representation in the city, proactively pushed for the recognition of Little Saigon which was met with unanimous approval from the City Council.

The Vietnamese neighborhood is relatively young, as compared to other ethnic neighborhoods, which have changed drastically since their earlier heydays, as they have either bled co-ethnic residents and businesses to the suburbs or have been experiencing gentrification. However, the situation is less clear in Little Saigon, given its lower average commercial rents and higher stock of older developments. Simultaneously, local rents and property taxes in Cedar Cottage have been rising rapidly in recent years, along with the Vancouver metropolitan area. Recently, several rezoning applications, ranging from mid-rise to high-rise mixed-use developments with retail units at grade, have been approved in the area. As a result, these redevelopments often place more attention to their rental housing count while neglecting their retail elements, a finding to be further discussed in Chapter IV. As the number of retail units and the total retail area in the impending redevelopments are found to be at a loss compared to their previous developments, it is possible that ethnic businesses have also disappeared while high-end non-ethnic ones are moving in this area. Though these redevelopments have yet to break ground, the question of whether Little Saigon is experiencing gentrification has gained more traction.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Zachary Hyde, "Vancouver's Little Saigon Facing Gentrification?" *The Tyee*, January 29, 2020.

This thesis aims to demonstrate the effects of those redevelopments on Vietnamese entrepreneurialism in Little Saigon. It also highlights how Vietnamese entrepreneurs navigate these effects. Finally, by reimagining the designs of the neighborhood, it proposes several alternatives in urban policies and business financing options for the city, the local community, and developers to consider ethnic spaces in redevelopments, preserve Kingsway's entrepreneurial spirit, and extend upward mobility among those with limited capital, including local ethnic residents, immigrants, students, and young workers alike.

By learning from the opportunities already present within the Vietnamese community, the sites of Little Saigon and the currently available incentives from financial stakeholders, a set of designs is reimagined for the neighborhood. Specifically, the designs focus on various scales of the neighborhood, from the macro scale of the four blocks of Little Saigon to the micro scale of the individual unit. The designs also reimagine various typologies of buildings, ephemeral structures, and public spaces that encourage the local entrepreneurial culture to thrive and give more communal values to the neighborhood. Such typologies include the laneway surfaces, the redevelopment buildings, the underused parking lots of the existing low-rise developments, the residential areas adjacent to the commercial neighborhood, among others. A micro retail modular design, dubbed "shophouse-on-casters" is also included to bolster the retail affordability of the area. Then a set of policy and financing alternatives are proposed to the city and financial stakeholders to implement the designs. Both destination and local place-makings of the neighborhood are addressed in these alternatives.

## **Literature Review**

This thesis reviews several topics concerning ethnic neighborhoods throughout Chapter II. The first topic is the geographical identification and bounding of an ethnic neighborhood. Different theories are reviewed to apply to Vancouver's Little Saigon. The case for this neighborhood mostly rejects but occasionally reinforces these theories. It is then compared to other ethnic neighborhoods of the city and other Little Saigons around the continent. There are also sociological theories on the socioeconomic issues of ethnic communities. These theories generally hold in the context of Greater Vancouver's Vietnamese community. Scholarship on gentrification in ethnic neighborhoods is similarly reviewed to understand the effect of rapid redevelopments on Kingsway.

The thesis also reviewed the literature on contemporary urban planning, real estate, and entrepreneurial practices. Work on urban land use, alternative housing options, non-profit financing, ephemeral and micro retail, and e-

commerce is discussed and used in the recommendations for the evolution of Little Saigon.

Ethnic small-business entrepreneurialism has been a key focus in sociological and geographical research, spanning various scales, ranging from ethnic households to ethnic enclaves to the global economy, and varying from community to community. In her study of Mexican American entrepreneurship, Zulema Valdez argues that ethnic entrepreneurialism is tightly connected with the intersectionality of class and gender in the ethnic household.<sup>4</sup> Based on their research on the Iranian community in Los Angeles, Ivan Light et al. contend that the concepts of ethnic economy and ethnic enclave economy need to be separately understood and have profound implications for policymaking and place-making practices.<sup>5</sup> Yu Xie and Margaret Gough conclude in their research of various ethnic communities that economic participation in ethnic enclaves yields less favorable outcomes than in the mainstream economy.<sup>6</sup>

Urban sociologists and geographers such as Jan Lin, Joseph S. Wood, Jason Hackworth, and Josephine Rekers, among others, have offered insights into the influences the cultural and economic forces from host cities, global migration, and local ethnic communities on contemporary ethnic neighborhoods in North American cities. Lin considers forces of globalization and localization as not only threats but also opportunities to urban ethnic enclaves.<sup>7</sup> Wood has studied the phenomenon of ethnic suburbia and has associated it with the emergence of unique cultural identities.<sup>8</sup> Hackworth and Rekers have discussed the relationship of ethnic neighborhoods with urban policies and real estate economics, tying it to gentrification.<sup>9</sup> The theories are discussed in detail in Chapters II, III, and IV.

The majority of scholarly sociological and geographical work on urban ethnic places is abundant has rarely permeated the architectural discourse. For instance, because many architectural and urban design practices appropriate ethnic cultures and “disneyfy” ethnic neighborhoods. Chinatown gates in

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<sup>4</sup> Zulema Valdez, “Intersectionality, the Household Economy, and Ethnic Entrepreneurship,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, (09, 2016): 1618.

<sup>5</sup> Ivan Light, Georges Sabagh, Mehdi Bozorgmehr, and Claudia Der-Martirosian, “Beyond the Ethnic Enclave Economy,” *Social Problems* 41, (01, 1994): 65.

<sup>6</sup> Yu Xie and Margaret Gough. “Ethnic Enclaves and the Earnings of Immigrants.” *Demography* 48, (04, 2011): 1293.

<sup>7</sup> Jan Lin, *The Power of Urban Ethnic Places: Cultural Heritage and Community Life*, (New York, Routledge, 2010): 46-50.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph S. Wood, “Making America at Eden Center,” in *Urban Enclave to Ethnic Suburb*, ed. Wei Li, (University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Jason Hackworth and Josephine Rekers, “Ethnic Packaging and Gentrification: The Case of Four Neighborhoods in Toronto,” *Urban Affairs Review* 41, (02, 2005): 211.

London, New York, Sydney, and Vancouver all look the same. Other design practices have assisted the gentrification of such neighborhoods with designs disregarding the local ethnic place-making. Moreover, architects and urban designers, uninformed of local processes, have prioritized tourists and higher-income settlers at the expense of the locals, consequently leading to disintegration of the neighborhood's the social and economic fabric.

Conversations over the importance of incorporating sociological research into design have recently begun in academia. Architectural and urban planning academics, including Erica Allen-Kim, Willow Lung-Amam, Mohammad Qadeer, Sandeep Kumar Agrawal, and so forth, have focused on issues around ethnic neighborhoods in their scholarship to reach crossover academics-practitioners and the next generation of designers. Practicing architects, planners, and developers may now provide ethnic neighborhoods with creative solutions. In her research into the architectural history of the Vietnamese American communities, Allen-Kim discusses a wide array of issues that have direct consequences on their architectural landscape, namely economic and social wellbeing, municipal ethnic commodification, suburban development, real estate markets, gentrification, globalization, localization of war commemoration, and so on.<sup>10</sup> Qadeer and Kumar Agrawal examine Toronto's ethnic neighborhoods and assert that the general public can benefit from policies aiding ethnic communities.<sup>11</sup> In her investigation into immigrant-owned businesses in a suburb of Washington, D.C., Lung-Amam reveal how the local community confronts economic displacement through activism and negotiation with the authority and the developers.<sup>12</sup> Despite these emergent approaches to design of the built environment, mainstream design practices that are willing to tackle urban ethnic issues head-on remain scarce.

In hopes of contributing to this discourse, this interdisciplinary study applies contemporary urban sociology literature on ethnic neighborhoods to examine the practices of architectural design, urban planning, and real estate in the Vietnamese neighborhood of Little Saigon, Vancouver.

This thesis is also intended to encourage architectural and urban design practices to look beyond self-referencing designs and find inspiration in the ordinary places of the city. Cultural and socioeconomic issues are intertwined in the urban built environment and must not be ignored. By bringing social studies

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<sup>10</sup> Erica S. Allen-Kim, "Exile on the Commercial Strip: Vietnam War Memorials in Little Saigon and the Politics of Commemoration," *Buildings & Landscapes* 21, (02, 2014): 31.

<sup>11</sup> Mohammad Qadeer and Sandeep Kumar, "Ethnic Enclaves and Social Cohesion," *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 15, (02, 2006): 1.

<sup>12</sup> Willow S. Lung-Amam, "Surviving Suburban Redevelopment: Resisting the Displacement of Immigrant-Owned Small Businesses in Wheaton, Maryland," *Journal of Urban Affairs* (2019): 1.

on urban ethnic places in the discourse of architecture and urbanism, architects and urban designers can be empowered to design for the retention of the local social fabric and the evolution of the neighborhood's identity.

## Methodology

This thesis employs a mixed-strategy research method. The first strategy involves historical research of the Vietnamese neighborhood in Vancouver, employing data from the government of Canada and a local news archive on the neighborhood which is cited throughout this thesis. In particular, I retrieved data on Vietnamese refugees and immigrants in Canada from the former Employment and Immigration Canada in the 1980s and the government's research papers on the settlement patterns of Vietnamese immigrants and refugees. I also looked at census data on Greater Vancouver's population of Vietnamese ethnic origin posted on the Statistics Canada website, through individual data sets of Censuses 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2016. I utilized Mountain Math's Census Mapper software application for the visualization of the census data.<sup>13</sup> I additionally recounted efforts made by the community in recent years to get city officials to recognize Little Saigon and put permanent markers such as banners and signs in the area.

To understand the effect of recent and upcoming redevelopment on this neighborhood on the local businesses, I first reviewed the city's land use and urban design policies as well as real estate developers' contemporary practices. I then collected information on rezoning applications from the city's rezoning online portal. I also retrieved property tax data from the city's website and visualized them with MountainMath. I used satellite images from Google Maps to survey the dimensions of the existing buildings and their retail spaces.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, I gathered information on the local commercial rent online listings. To document ethnic businesses in Little Saigon, I made many physical site visits and used Street View tool on Google Maps.

Finally, I use design to connect the opportunities already present within the community and the city with a set of policy and financing alternatives. To do that, I first analyze the various opportunities the local community and society at large are taking to navigate through the changing ethnic entrepreneurial environment and the rising economic unaffordability in the city. Information on online and pop-up Vietnamese businesses was collected via local news articles and social media accounts of these businesses. Then I propose design scenarios that

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<sup>13</sup> MountainMath, "MountainMath Software and Analytics," *MountainMath*, accessed April 19, 2021, <https://mountainmath.ca/>.

<sup>14</sup> Google Maps, "Google Maps," *Google Maps* (Google), accessed April 19, 2021, <https://www.google.com/maps>.

mitigate the pressures of redevelopment in the neighborhood. Specifically, the designs focus on the scale of the four blocks of Little Saigon, a typical block's scale, typical buildings' scale, and the individual units' scale. The buildings' scale includes various typologies of buildings, ephemeral structures, and public spaces that address the entrepreneurial and local place-making of the neighborhood. Such typologies include the laneway surfaces, the redevelopment buildings, the underused parking lots of the existing low-rise developments, the residential areas adjacent to the commercial neighborhood, among others. A micro retail modular design, dubbed "shophouse-on-casters" is also included to bolster the retail affordability of the area. Then I propose a set of policy and financing alternatives to capitalize on the abovementioned opportunities and implement the designs. More specifically, I recommend policy changes in urban planning to ensure an appropriate supply of flexible and affordable retail rentals. Proposals dealing with the financial challenges to supporting small ethnic businesses and maintaining the character of ethnic enclaves include targeted incentives from different levels of government, developers, landlords, banks, credit unions, as well as non-profit organizations.

# II. The Narrative of Little Saigon, Vancouver

To understand the cultural and economic values of an ethnic neighborhood, it is necessary to revisit its genesis. In this chapter, a brief history of the Vietnamese neighborhood in Vancouver is provided, along with a discussion on its values to the community, the city, and the metropolitan area.

## II.1. A History of Vietnamese Canadians in Vancouver

### II.1.1. Fall of Saigon, Boat People, and Resettlement in Canada

The history of the Vietnamese in Greater Vancouver begins with the events following the end of the Vietnam War. The date April 30, 1975, marked the fall of Saigon, the surrender of the capitalist Republic of Vietnam to the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam. A reunited Vietnam was born in the following year as tens of thousands of high-ranking officials of the government of the Republic of Vietnam and those closely associated with the United States fled the country. Canada accepted 6,500 of these refugees between 1975 and 1976.<sup>15</sup>

By 1978, Vietnam had implemented a series of socialist economic reforms in the South that proved detrimental to the middle class, business owners, and Hoa people (ethnic Chinese Vietnamese), pushing tens of thousands of Hoa people to leave Vietnam for China, followed by a large exodus of Hoa and Kinh Vietnamese by boat, who were detained in refugee camps around Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. Hundreds of thousands perished at sea. More than a million were resettled.<sup>16</sup> From 1979 to 1980, the Canadian government ramped up its humanitarian effort and accepted 60,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. By 1985, 110,000 Vietnamese refugees had been resettled in Canada. The refugee resettlement program lasted until 1994, with a total of 130,000 refugees from the three Indochinese countries arriving by 1999. The implementation of the

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<sup>15</sup> Employment and Immigration Canada, *Indochinese Refugees: The Canadian Response, 1979 and 1980*, (Ottawa, Employment and Immigration Canada, 1982): 8.

<sup>16</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *The State of the World's Refugees, 2000: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action*, (New York, Geneva, UNHCR, 2000): 99.

internationally backed Orderly Departure Program helped directly resettle asylum seekers from Vietnam without resorting to risky boat travel. In the end, many refugees endured decades in refugee camps before getting resettled, while many others were repatriated to Vietnam.

The resettlement of Vietnamese refugees in Canada was a joint effort by the Canadian government and its people. They were initially dispersed across Canadian cities and towns based on funding and capacity. The largest metropolitan areas received the largest shares of refugees, but the dispersal was evenly carried out as more than half of the initial refugees were sponsored by private citizens, churches, and organizations.<sup>17</sup> 7,361 were resettled in British Columbia in 1979-1980. They were offered English and French classes, as well as assistance in housing, healthcare, education, and job finding. Many refugees were initially employed in unskilled labor jobs. The limit of public assistance to only one year since arrival in Canada and the large number of unskilled refugees created pressure to find quick blue-collar jobs. However, others with more resources were quick to open their businesses, which effectively propelled many Vietnamese into the middle class in a short time.

Over the following years since the 1978-1980 resettlement, Vietnamese left smaller towns for Canada's largest cities in search of better jobs and regrouping with more of their countrymen. Toronto and Vancouver doubled their shares of Vietnamese in Canada from 1981 to 2001, creating thriving Vietnamese neighborhoods in these metros.<sup>18</sup> Large East and Southeast Asian populations in these cities also help facilitate their integration. Many subsequent Vietnamese immigrants chose to settle in these metros as well.

After three decades since their arrival, Vietnamese refugees in Vancouver still had lower rates of English proficiency, high school graduation, and university completion than other immigrants and native-born Canadians.<sup>19</sup> Their employment rates became similar to other groups while their earnings are significantly less.<sup>20</sup> Research by the government of Canada show that Vietnamese Canadians in Vancouver are still located lower to middle on the economic ladder.

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<sup>17</sup> Employment and Immigration Canada, *Indochinese Refugees*, 13-14.

<sup>18</sup> Feng Hou, "The Initial Destinations and Redistribution of Canada's Major Immigrant Groups: Changes Over the Past Two Decades," *Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series*, (Statistics Canada, 2005), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Feng Hou, "The Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees Across Canada Over Three Decades," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46, (20, 2020), 6.

<sup>20</sup> Hou, "The Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees," 8.

## II.1.2. Vancouver's Vietnamese Neighborhood

East Vancouver has been home to many ethnic and immigrant communities since the genesis of the city. Dubbed “East Van,” it has hosted Japantown, Hogan’s Alley, Little Italy, Punjabi Market, among others throughout its history. However, racist urban policies before World War II have displaced many residents of these neighborhoods and kept many parts of East Vancouver economically depressed and with high crime rates for a long time.<sup>21</sup> These areas have offered a haven for those seeking affordable housings and economic opportunities such as the unhoused, prostitutes, young artists, radical leftists, and people of color. Because of their association with these marginalized communities, it has seen disinvestment for decades. Other parts of East Vancouver, including the Kingsway area, have been less ridden by disinvestment and home to the working class of the city. Many blue-collar ethnic communities from Europe such as Italians, Polish, Germans, Croatians, etc. have resided in East Vancouver. This area has nurtured the labor and leftwing movements throughout its history. Thanks to the affordability of housing and retail spaces, immigrants from South, East, and Southeast Asia have poured their investment into the neighborhoods of East Vancouver and aided the rise of the unique Vancouver Special.<sup>22</sup> The streets of East Vancouver started to be populated with ethnic and immigrant businesses since then.

Despite the ethnic reinvestment, East Vancouver has still been able to keep its affordability, compared to the western parts of the city. There are several factors. Crime reports on local news are still dominated by this part of town and it still has a large stock of old and low-maintenance buildings. Another factor is its suburban setting. Since the 1980s, the city has made a decision to reorient its focus towards the downtown area and encouraged mixed-use, high-rise, and sustainable development through urban planning and design, dubbed “Vancouverism.” As the downtown core became more “livable,” the demand for downtown living increases. This results in lower demand and lower rent in areas such as East Vancouver.

The affordability of Kingsway occurs naturally because of all its history of marginalized communities, its association with crimes and the working class, its reception of immigrants, and its neglect by Vancouverism. Indeed, the area has never been targeted by the city’s policies to keep it affordable or subsidized by higher levels of the government.

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<sup>21</sup> Mackie, “East Van.”

<sup>22</sup> Vancouver Heritage Foundation, “Booming Vancouver: The Beginning of the Vancouver Special,” *Spacing Vancouver*, September 11, 2013.

For decades, Vietnamese Canadians have resided in the neighborhoods of East Vancouver thanks to its previous affordability. Uncoincidentally, Vietnamese businesses have also taken advantage of the area's low rent and concentrated around local commercial streets, especially Kingsway, Fraser Street, and Victoria Drive. Originally an Indigenous trail and then a colonial wagon road, Kingsway is the main thoroughfare connecting the municipalities of Vancouver, Burnaby, and New Westminster. Since the arrival of the Vietnamese, the street has become a vibrant ethnic business enclave, shared by other ethnic businesses such as Chinese, Korean, Filipinx, South Asian, and Latin American. Vietnamese businesses on Kingsway include numerous restaurants, grocery stores, beauty salons, legal offices, media stores, to name a few.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, small-business entrepreneurialism has indeed allowed many in the working class to move into the middle class within one generation. Two of the most popular Vietnamese businesses on Kingsway are restaurants and nail salons. Nail care services in North America have been cornered by the Vietnamese for decades thanks to its undemanding licensing and high earning, thus rendering it attractive to those wanting to seek quick upward mobility. Orchid Beauty Centre, a nail salon by Vietnamese immigrants, was opened in 2000 and has now expanded to two other locations.<sup>24</sup> These businesses employ Vietnamese students who work part-time, some of which are on opening their own business in the future.

While many Vietnamese ventured into business, their children pursued higher education. As cited earlier, high school and university completion rates of Vietnamese Canadians have been increasing steadily, though they remain lower than those of native-born and other immigrant Canadians. Whereas many children of restaurant and beauty salon owners, and even waiters and nail technicians, became doctors, lawyers, engineers, realtors, appraisers, and so forth, they may end up opening their own business. For instance, the children of the owners of the Vietnamese restaurant *Pho Hoang*, despite attending universities to study health and medicine but ended up transforming their family business into an award-winning restaurant renamed as *anh and chi*.<sup>25</sup> Tammy Truong, the president of the former Vietnamese Business Association, started her career as a database analyst in the IT industry but eventually opened her beauty salon, as described on her blog.<sup>26</sup> Entrepreneurialism has effectively allowed many

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<sup>23</sup> Luke and Fumano, "Vietnam's Boat People."

<sup>24</sup> Thomas, Sandra. "Kensington-Cedar Cottage: Vietnamese Nail Salons Dominate Kingsway." *Vancouver Courier*, August 15, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Willem Thomas, "Anh and Chi Just Reinvented Vancouver's Vietnamese Restaurant Scene," *Vancouver Magazine*, June 16, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Elan Beauty Team, "How Tammy Got Started," *Elan Beauty Permanent Makeup and Hair Removal*, July 25, 2014.

Vietnamese to thrive in Canadian society not only within one generation but also over different generations.

### **II.1.3. Subsequent Immigration Waves**

Since the end of the 1980s, Vietnamese abroad and at home started to experience a different world. The Berlin Wall fell, the Soviet Union collapsed, Vietnam transitioned to a market economy and withdrew troops from Cambodia, and the U.S. and Vietnam relations were normalized. Vietnam-Canada relations, too, warmed up. In 1990, Vietnam reopened its embassy in Ottawa after its initial closure in 1981. In 1994, Canadian Embassy was opened in Hanoi. Recently, Vietnam opened its Downtown-Vancouver Consulate-General in 2013, the second diplomatic mission in Canada outside Ottawa.<sup>27</sup>

As a high-income country, Canada has been attractive to those from Vietnam, a former low-income but now lower-middle-income country. Besides, Canada hosts a large Vietnamese population which is important to those with limited proficiency in an official language and education. Thus, many non-refugee migrants from Vietnam still have a desire to move to Canada in search of a better life. Many Vietnamese subsequently came to Canada under the Family Reunification Program via sponsorship by their family members who initially came as refugees. Others moved to Canada via marriage to a Canadian spouse. Many of them often rely on the social network of their countrymen to find their first jobs. Vietnamese businesses have also helped provide new immigrants with these jobs. Immigration indeed has spurred the growth of this ethnic micro-economy of the city.

Other Vietnamese immigrate to Canada for higher education and skilled job prospects. Since the normalization of relations with the Western world, studying abroad in developed countries has been a commodity sought by the Vietnamese middle and upper classes. And Canada happens to be one of the top countries to attract Vietnamese students because of its high-quality education system, on the one hand, and the potential to secure a permanent residency, on the other. In 2018, Vietnam became the fifth largest country to send international students to Canada, with more than 20,000 student visa holders in the country, compared to 14,000 in 2017 and 600 in 2000. The recent uptick was attributed to the effect of Donald Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric in the U.S., which hosted almost 30,000

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<sup>27</sup> Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in Canada, "Chronology Vietnam - Canada Relations 1973 - 2018," *Vietnam Embassy in Canada*, accessed April 13, 2021, <https://vietnamembassy.ca/vietnam-canada-relations/chronology-vietnam-canada-relations-1973-2018/>.

Vietnamese international students in 2018.<sup>28</sup> However, as the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged much of the global study abroad market in 2020 and 2021, these numbers would likely decrease. In Vancouver and other British Columbian cities, Vietnamese student groups operate in various colleges and universities such as UBC's Vietnamese Student Society, Simon Fraser University Vietnamese Student Association, Langara College Vietnamese Student Society, to name a few. Vietnamese students are also employed in businesses run by Vietnamese Canadians during their studies. Though some students chose to return to Vietnam where their diplomas are more highly regarded, others would stay in Canada after their education and work in various private and public sectors.

The rise in Vietnamese international students and skilled immigrants poses an identity challenge to the Vietnamese of refugee backgrounds. Anti-communist rhetoric has alienated many newcomers who grew up in the pro-communist education system. The flags of the Socialist Republic and the former Republic are a source of national pride in the two communities but also a source of tension between them. Universities, colleges, and international food festivals have to be inclusive of both flags in their space to appease both sides.

Another source of contention arises from the diverging socioeconomic backgrounds of these two groups. Many refugees went through a prolonged period of poverty and dehumanization before they got back on their feet. Meanwhile, many international students and skilled workers come from middle-class and privileged backgrounds.

Though most Vietnamese from both camps rarely engage in direct confrontation, there have been occasional microaggressions in their interactions. The silent code of conduct has been an agreement to disagree as honored in the Canadian democratic traditions. Therefore, the majority of community has settled on an avoidance of discussion on Vietnamese politics as the best policy.

Those different immigration waves have further diversified the Vietnamese community in Canada. There is now a mixture of Vietnamese from various backgrounds - affluent and poor, white-collar and blue-collar, highly educated and unskilled, fluent and influent in English or French, Northern and Southern Vietnamese, anti-communist and pro-communist, for example. The Vietnamese entrepreneur class in Canada now includes those who spent most of their lives outside Canada and are open to more innovative business ideas learned from their hometown. Small-business entrepreneurialism is no longer represented by former refugees but also by to all Vietnamese who want to take risks.

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<sup>28</sup> Colin Singer, "Vietnamese International Students the Fastest Growing Study in Canada Cohort," *Canada Immigration News*, May 21, 2019.

#### **II.1.4. Urban and Suburban Growth**

Over the decades since resettlement, more and more Vietnamese have chosen to reside further away from Kingsway in East Vancouver. Census Canada shows an increase in the number of ethnic Vietnamese in Greater Vancouver in the last decade, from 26,100 people in 2006 to 34,915 in 2016. Along with their general population, Burnaby and Surrey have enjoyed a large increase in Vietnamese, from 2,450 to 4,050, and from 6,605 to 9,200 between 2006 and 2016 respectively, as detailed in Table II.1. However, the city of Vancouver still has the largest concentration of Vietnamese overall, increasing from 13,220 to 15,690 over the same decade. Most of the increases take place in areas throughout East Vancouver and North Surrey, as visualized in Figure II.1. There is also a significant increase of Vietnamese in Langley City and Langley Township.

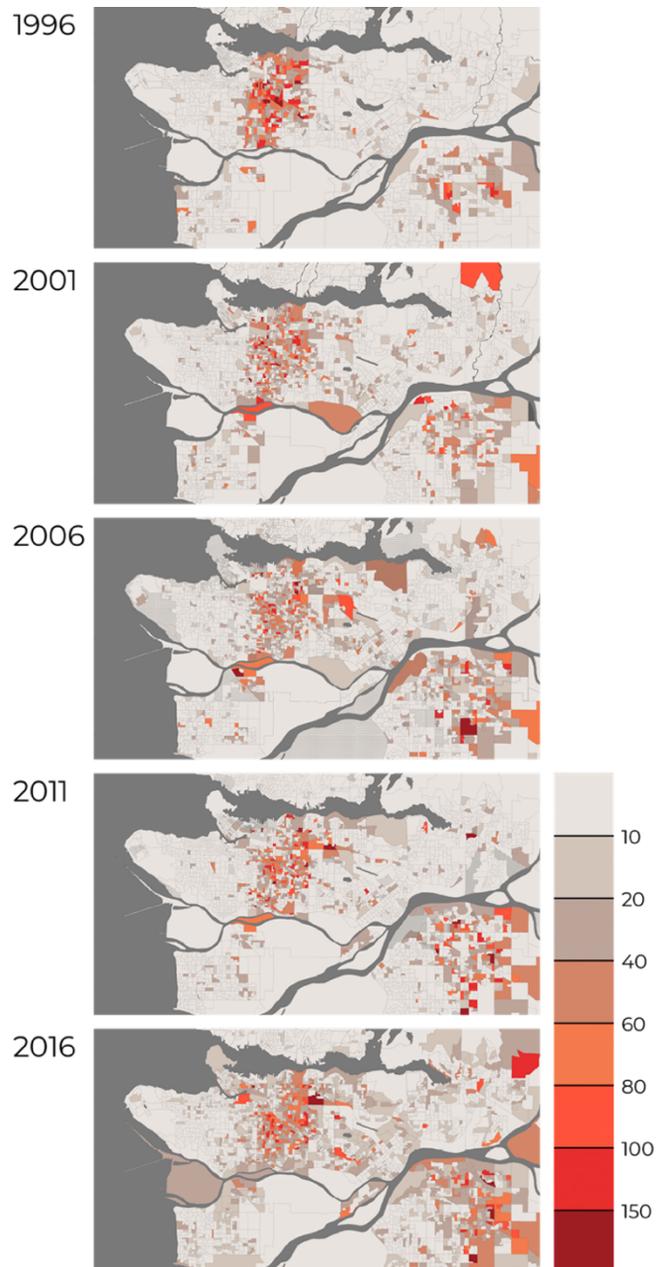


Figure II.1. Visualization of the population of Vietnamese origin in Greater Vancouver by census dissemination area from 1996 to 2016, Data visualization by MountainMath, "CensusMapper" in MountainMath, "CensusMapper," *MountainMath*, accessed April 7, 2021, [https://mountainmath.ca/mountain\\_math/canada\\_census\\_map](https://mountainmath.ca/mountain_math/canada_census_map). Courtesy of Jens von Bergmann and Sanyin Bekrich.

<b>Population of Vietnamese Origin in Vancouver, Burnaby, and Surrey</b>									
	<b>Vancouver</b>			<b>Burnaby</b>			<b>Surrey</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Pop.</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>% to Total</b>	<b>Pop.</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>% to Total</b>	<b>Pop.</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>% to Total</b>
1991	7785		1.6%	350		0.2%	995		0.4%
1996	12060	54.9%	2.3%	710	102.9%	0.4%	2270	128.1%	0.7%
2001	13530	12.2%	2.5%	2150	202.8%	1.1%	4280	88.5%	1.2%
2006	13220	-2.3%	2.3%	2450	14.0%	1.2%	6605	54.3%	1.7%
2011	14850	12.3%	2.5%	2985	21.8%	1.3%	8690	31.6%	1.9%
2016	15690	5.7%	2.5%	4050	35.7%	1.7%	9195	5.8%	1.8%

Table II.1. Population of Vietnamese origin in Vancouver, Burnaby, and Surrey from 1996 to 2016

Sources: Statistics Canada, "Table 1004351 J9102 - Population by Ethnic Origin (24), Showing Single and Multiple Origins (2), 1991 Census," June 1, 1993.

Statistics Canada, "Table 93F0026XDB96001 Population by Ethnic Origin (188) and Sex (3), Showing Single and Multiple Responses (3), for Canada, Provinces, Territories and Census Metropolitan Areas, 1996 Census," February 17, 1998. Distributed by Statistics Canada.

Statistics Canada, "Table 97F0010XCB2001001 Ethnic Origin (232), Sex (3) and Single and Multiple Responses (3) for Population, for Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2001 Census," January 21, 2003.

Statistics Canada, "Table 94-580-XCB2006001 Profile of Ethnic Origin and Visible Minorities for Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Divisions and Census Subdivisions, 2006 Census," April 2, 2008.

Statistics Canada, "Table 99-010-X2011028 Ethnic Origin (264), Single and Multiple Ethnic Origin Responses (3), Generation Status (4), Age Groups (10) and Sex (3) for the Population in Private Households of Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2011 National Household Survey," May 8, 2013.

Statistics Canada, "Table 98-400-X2016189 Ethnic Origin (101), Age (15A), Sex (3) and Selected Demographic, Cultural, Labour Force, Educational and Income Characteristics (651) for the Population in Private Households of Canada, 2016 Census," May 30, 2018.

## Vietnamese Religious Places

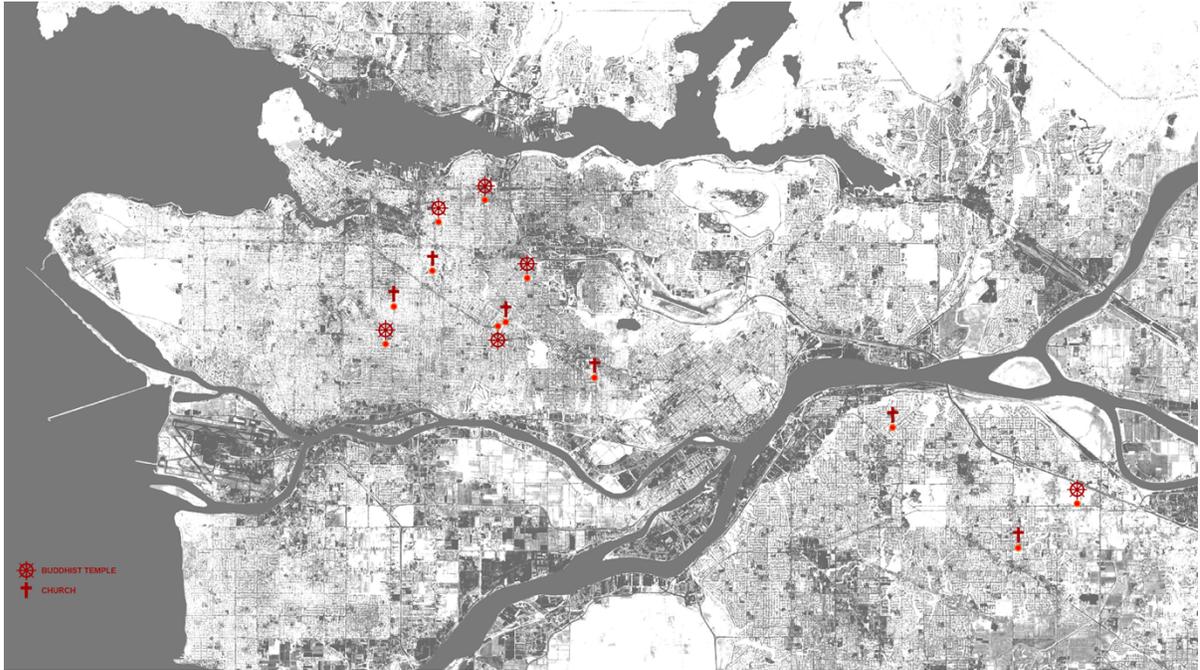


Figure II.2. Map of religious institutions offering services in the Vietnamese language in Greater Vancouver (Map by author)

As the Vietnamese population expands and moves Eastwards, so do their businesses and community spaces. Religious places are also located in Vietnamese areas. East Vancouver currently hosts five Buddhist temples and four churches, while North Surrey respectively one and two as mapped in Figure II.3.

## Vietnamese Supermarkets

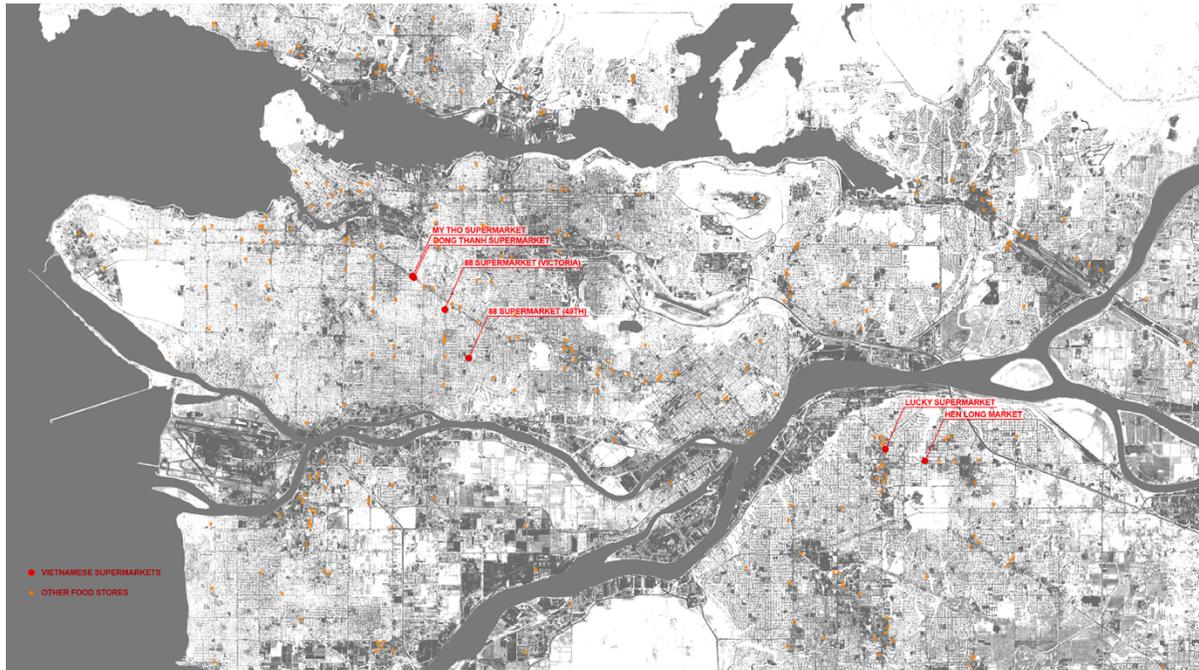


Figure II.3. Map of supermarkets catered to Vietnamese customers in Greater Vancouver (Map by author)

New Vietnamese supermarkets have been opened in those areas, notably 88 Supermarket in Killarney, Vancouver, and Lucky Supermarket in Whalley, Surrey as drawn in Figure II.3. These new supermarkets are tidier, more spacious, and more professionally laid out, compared to older ones in the Kingsway area. They also cater to suburban car-owning shoppers and actively participate in the gentrification of their respective areas. Before Lucky Supermarket moved into the Dell Shopping Centre in North Surrey, the strip mall was in a state of low maintenance. Not only did Lucky upgrade its storefront and the parking lot, but the surrounding area was also revitalized.

## Vietnamese Restaurants

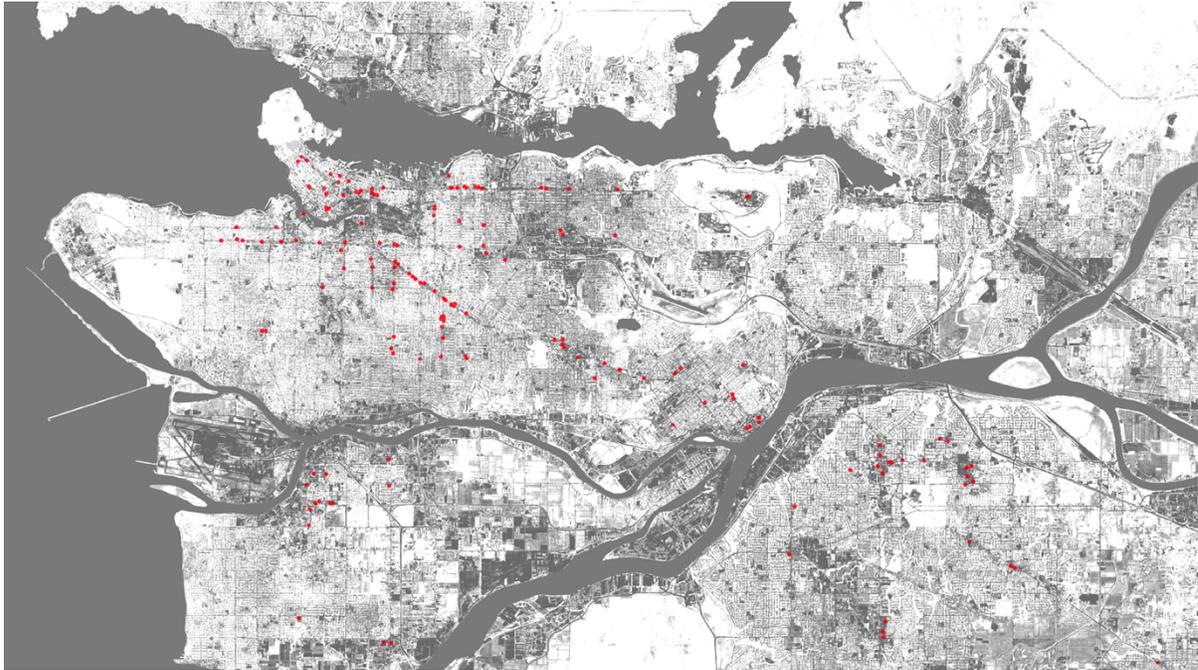


Figure II.4. Map of Vietnamese restaurants in Greater Vancouver (Map by author)

Vietnamese restaurants have not only moved East but have also populated many different neighborhoods all over the metropolitan area, which offer a diversity of Vietnamese eateries, from affordable banh mi bistros to high-end restaurants, from large establishments to ephemeral food trucks, as plotted in Figure II.4. Several restaurants have elevated their branding through interior design, marketing strategy, food quality, presentation, and services to appeal to customers of non-Vietnamese backgrounds or those of higher socioeconomic statuses. Many restaurants are equipped with chic interior design, elegant websites and social media accounts, trendy cocktails, and vegan options, which can be found in wealthier areas of Greater Vancouver. In Mount Pleasant, the long-running Vietnamese restaurant *Pho Hoang* was upgraded and rebranded as *anh and chi* in 2016. The new restaurant, which features contemporary designs and polished marketing campaigns with a short film about the story of the owners, hosts an alcohol bar and has won numerous restaurant awards.<sup>29</sup> *Do chay* is another example where the children of Vietnamese business owners have attempted to elevate their offerings with a modern twist. Its owners, the son and daughter of the owners of popular restaurants *Pho Thai Hoa* and *Green Lemongrass*, ventured into the upscale restaurant market with a Vietnamese vegetarian eatery on Kingsway in 2019 and another one in Yaletown in 2020.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Thomas, "Anh and Chi."

<sup>30</sup> Mia Stainsby, "Review: Do Chay, Take Two!" *Vancouver Sun*, September 16, 2020.

*Lunch Lady*, another elevated Vietnamese restaurant, had a lengthy marketing campaign capitalizing on Anthony Bourdain’s review of street food in Vietnam as it was rebranded from *Five Elements Cafe* in Grandview in 2020.<sup>31</sup> Other elevated Vietnamese restaurants include *Chi Vegan* in Kitsilano and *Com Vietnamese* in Brighouse, Richmond. These restaurants have capitalized on the hybridization of Vietnamese traditional culture and modern trends while evolving their humble refugee narrative. This point will be revisited and elaborated later in the thesis.

## Vietnamese Social Services

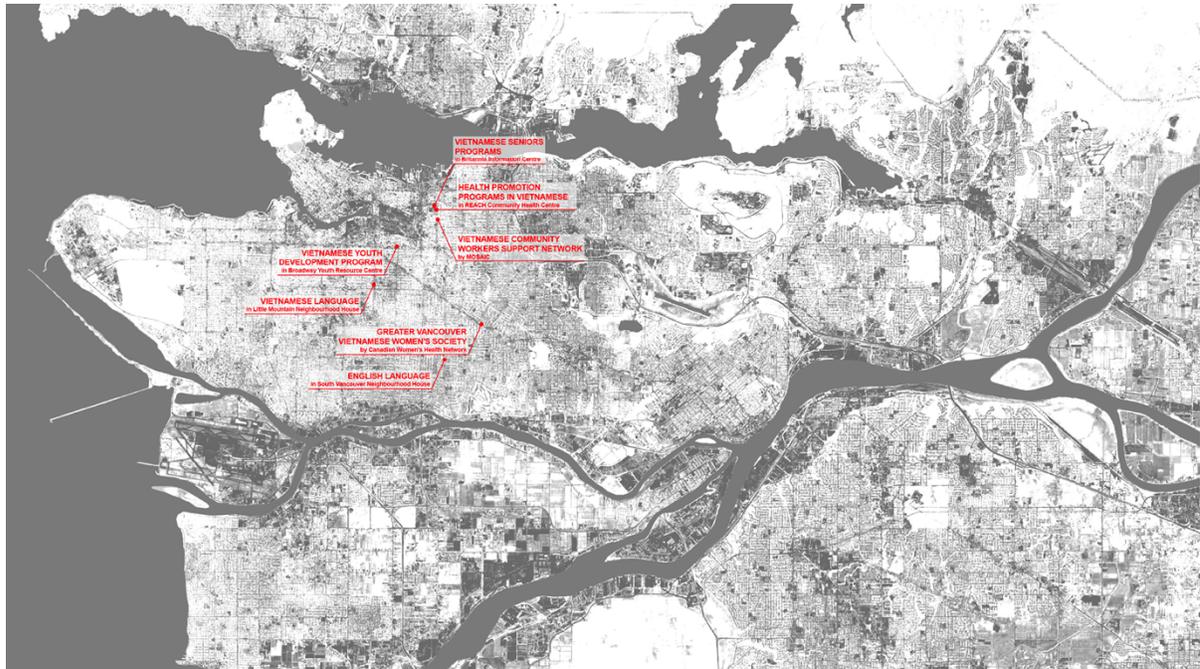


Figure II.5. Map of Social services offered in the Vietnamese language in Greater Vancouver (Map by author)

The Vietnamese community in Greater Vancouver has over the years developed a network of social assistance. Social services in the Vietnamese language such as programs for seniors, women, and youth are offered in several governmental and non-profit institutions. These places continue to concentrate within East Vancouver, as mapped in Figure II.5. For-profit services such as auto insurance, tax, and legal services with signage in Vietnamese are also found in the same area. Vietnamese signs are hardly found outside of East Vancouver, making this area even more attractive to new Vietnamese immigrants with limited English proficiency.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Morrison, “Bourdain’s Beloved ‘Lunch Lady’ Opening New Vietnamese Eatery in Vancouver,” *Scout Magazine*, February 13, 2020.

## **II.2. Little Saigon: An Ethnic Neighborhood**

### **II.2.1. Is Little Saigon an Ethnic Neighborhood?**

The city of Vancouver has seen various ethnic neighborhoods throughout its history. Chinatown, Japantown, Little Italy, Greektown, Punjabi Market, and many Indigenous communities have contributed to the culture and economy of the city since its early days. While the genesis of these ethnic places was mostly carried out by economic migrants and their boundaries were set primarily by racism, the case of the Vietnamese neighborhood is unique.

First, because the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees was supported by the Canadian government and the public, Canadians hold fewer grievances and display more compassion towards the immigration of Vietnamese. Since their arrival, they have not been subject to former overtly racist practices in urban planning. No laws were targeting Vietnamese identities such as those made against Japanese Canadians in the 1940s and sometime later.

Second, because the Vietnamese community's proactive push for the recognition of Little Saigon was met with unanimous approval from the City Council, it has been strongly accepted as one by its co-ethnics and politicians. However, the number of Vietnamese residents in the area has never been large enough to support their claim. In fact, the question of whether Little Saigon, Vancouver is a Vietnamese neighborhood has been a subject of controversy before its official conception. Many non-Vietnamese residents and businesses felt excluded. The objection went as far as "a 'Stop Little Saigon' petition signed by 100 local residents circulated and some residents continue to question the attention given to one group over others."<sup>32</sup> Their concern was supported by the fact that Vietnamese residents and businesses constitute only a minority of the neighborhood.

Since the arrival of the first Vietnamese refugees in Vancouver, the community has never made up more than 12% in any particular census tract. In particular, the census tract that contains Little Saigon, despite boasting one of the highest concentrations of Vietnamese residents, has never surpassed 10% of the total. The largest visible minority group in this tract has been the Chinese, and the second largest has been the Filipinx.

Different geographical models have been used to identify and bound ethnic neighborhoods. Logan et al. list various criteria that geographers have utilized

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<sup>32</sup> Jennifer Thuncher, "Kensington-Cedar Cottage: Rebranding of Kingsway Area to 'Little Saigon' Attracting Tourists," *Vancouver Courier*, January 7, 2014.

since the 1930s.<sup>33</sup> In Los Angeles, Armenians identified the neighborhoods of Hollywood and Glendale as their own in 1990 though they “made up only about 25% of [the] residents.” In 1990, the neighborhood of Flushing in Queens, New York was regarded as a Chinese one though the population was only 14% Chinese.

Hou and Picot used the “more than 30%” rule to define a visible minority neighborhood in 2003 in a study of Canada’s three largest cities.<sup>34</sup> Such neighborhoods are located in census tracts with 30% or more of the residents identifying with the same visible minority group. Qadeer et al. proposed a more refined set of criteria in 2010. They identified two types of ethnic neighborhoods: “a primary concentration in which more than 50% of the population of a census tract is of a specific ethnic background” and “a secondary concentration which refers to a census tract in which persons of a particular ethnic background are the single largest group, though not a majority.”<sup>35</sup> The Vietnamese neighborhood in Vancouver falls into neither of those definitions. That is because the metrics are calculated on the residential population.

A neighborhood's ethnic identity is sometimes not defined by its residents but by its economic activities. Each ethnicity often dominates a different sector of the economy, and many Vietnamese in Greater Vancouver work in entrepreneurial ventures and are linked with the commercial space. Other ethnic communities such as the Filipinx have many of their members employed in the healthcare sector. Furthermore, those who work, shop, and eat on Kingsway do not necessarily live there. For the Vietnamese, Wood argues, “The location of housing is less important than the location of shopping.”<sup>36</sup> Some Vietnamese choose to live elsewhere while gathering on Kingsway to connect to their roots. These qualities of Little Saigon effectively detach it from the interpretations of the census data.

On the four blocks of Kingsway from Windsor Street to Knight Street - officially designated as Little Saigon in 2013, Vietnamese businesses were the largest ethnic group, making up 38% of the total in 2010. If the “more than 30%” rule or

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<sup>33</sup> John R. Logan, Seth Spielman, Hongwei Xu, and Philip N. Klein, "Identifying and Bounding Ethnic Neighborhoods." *Urban Geography* 32, (03, 2011): 337.

<sup>34</sup> Feng Hou and Garnett Picot, *Visible Minority Neighborhood Enclaves and Labor Market Outcomes of Immigrants*, (Ottawa, Statistics Canada, Analytical Studies Branch), 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Mohammad Qadeer, Sandeep K. Agrawal, and Alexander Lovell, "Evolution of Ethnic Enclaves in the Toronto Metropolitan Area, 2001-2006." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 11, no. 3 (2010): 325.

<sup>36</sup> Wood, "Making America," 26.

the secondary concentration rule is applied in a commercial neighborhood, the Vietnamese claim of this neighborhood is legitimate.

## **II.2.2. North America's Little Saigons**

“Little Saigon” has been designated to many city districts around North America for decades. Vietnamese neighborhoods have transformed the suburban landscape of some of the largest metropolitan areas in the continent. From the suburbs of Los Angeles and San José to those of Houston and Washington, D.C., Little Saigons celebrate Vietnamese entrepreneurialism with vibrant strip malls and shopping plazas. Wood notes that “the most visible ethnic markers for many immigrant communities in these suburban locations, and certainly for Vietnamese, are clusters of retail activities.”<sup>37</sup> The identity of these places is familiar to the Vietnamese diasporic population but is remarkably unique in the cities they occupy.

The Eden Center in Falls Church, Virginia, a suburb of Washington, D.C., exemplifies how Vietnamese entrepreneurialism transformed the built environment. The Vietnamese community in this metropolitan area is the fourth largest in the U.S. Vietnamese retail shops in the Eden Center “are built up to the sidewalk, are low in profile, and have large ground-level openings reminiscent of retail strips in Vietnamese market towns and cities.” They, too, transformed a rundown big-box development into a thriving commercial center with a unique diasporic Vietnamese identity.

The name “Little Saigon” has been conceived as a tribute to the capital of the former republic, which was renamed Ho Chi Minh City after the Vietnam War ended. The identity of a Little Saigon is, therefore, closely tied to the anti-communist rhetoric of its occupants. Former ROV flags and war monuments have been made the mainstays in the architectural identity of North American Little Saigons. Allen-Kim argues that the politics of Vietnamese diasporic communities have a consequence on the urban design and place-making of Little Saigons.<sup>38</sup> She documents how war monuments have played a role in the spatial definition of Vietnamese suburban strip malls across American cities. Also stated in her research is the transient characteristics of these communities, which have helped retain the affordability of Vietnamese neighborhoods, but they have also kept them in a state of low maintenance and have made them an easy target for gentrification.

Little Saigon in Vancouver is distinctive, in comparison to the examples aforementioned. Its physical boundary and density are more modest than those

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<sup>37</sup> Wood, “Making America,” 23.

<sup>38</sup> Allen-Kim, “Exile on the Commercial Strip,” 31.

in Washington and Houston, which presents a challenge to the social cohesion of the community. Yet it also offers an opportunity for the community's integration with the rest of society and in turn more expansive economic prospects overall.

Besides the difference in size, the relationship between Vancouver's Little Saigon and its metropolitan context also defines its identity. This ethnic neighborhood's distance to the urban center pales compared to Eden Center and Houston's Little Saigon which are deep in their suburban areas of the cities. Literature on Vietnamese identity as part of the new suburban culture no longer holds in the context of Vancouver. Kingsway, once a suburban and automobile-reliant arterial road, is rapidly urbanizing. Strip malls, gas stations, car dealers, motels, and big-box retailers are being replaced with mid-rise and high-rise apartment buildings. The road becomes a street as foot traffic and transit connections increase. The buildings' retail shops fronting the street become sights of attraction for pedestrians and livable neighborhoods' amenities for the urbanite youth.

Another distinctive quality of the Vietnamese community in Vancouver is perhaps the blurriness of identities. Through my personal interactions with both former refugees and recent immigrants, I find that though the rhetoric of the War still presents challenges in the reconciliation between the most adamant members of the anti-communist and pro-communist camps, the relationship between the two groups is less antagonistic than in other prominent diasporic Vietnamese communities. Most younger members with refugee backgrounds are open to dialogue with those who come later. Most Vietnamese who grew up on the Vietnamese communist education system are also oblivious to the causes of both sides of the War. This presents opportunities for cooperation and common causes in the community. As the future of the Vietnamese community depends on younger generations, disagreement on the War will matter less in the process.

### **II.2.3. Global and Local Processes of Vancouver's Little Saigon**

As an ethnic neighborhood, Little Saigon has gone through different processes to concretize its footing in Vancouver. These processes reflect the community's values. From the agglomeration of Vietnamese businesses on Kingsway to the erection of a refugee monument and the transnational economics of succeeding Vietnamese immigrants, the neighborhood has been strengthened and weakened by these processes. The processes can be categorized into two groups - local and global processes.

According to Lin, whereas local processes are driven by the local community to benefit themselves, global processes involve projects that are externally funded

and appeal more to outsiders.<sup>39</sup> Global and local processes often go hand-in-hand in an urban ethnic enclave. Termed “glocalization,” these processes both hinder and enrich the development of the ethnic enclave through removal and renewal projects. Lin identifies six types of local processes: economic, historical, preservational, cultural, monumental, touristic as described in Table II.2. Many ethnic enclaves in Vancouver such as Chinatown, Japantown, Punjabi Market, Greektown, and Little Italy exemplify these local processes. Though the Vietnamese community in Greater Vancouver is relatively young compared to those communities, they have been quick and politically efficient in their localization efforts.

<b>Types of Local Processes</b>	
Economic	Growth of ethnic enclave economies comprising local “mom-and-pop” businesses, limited partnerships, and other “little box” enterprises
Historical	Spread of “little narratives” including genealogy projects, oral history projects, and ethnic history museums
Preservational	Saving and preserving local historic buildings of architectural merit and ethnic importance
Cultural	Growth of local ethnic theaters, ethnic arts scenes, ethnic culinary districts, and ethnic festivals
Monumental	Erecting of statues and monuments to ethnic leaders and local heroes
Touristic	Marketing of ethnic neighborhoods and locations for recreational and educational tourism, through walking tours, street signage, information kiosks, websites, and promotional campaigns

Table II.2. Types of local processes in an urban ethnic neighborhood, Table, “Types of Ethnic Local Processes” in Jan Lin, *The Power of Urban Ethnic Places: Cultural Heritage and Community Life*, (New York, Routledge, 2010): 51, Table 2.1.

### **Economic Process: Vietnamese Kingsway**

Vietnamese economic process has been the most documented in East Vancouver as well as in other Vietnamese enclaves in North America.<sup>40</sup> Not only Vietnamese but also other immigrant-owned small businesses have helped renew the once-neglected Kingsway and turn it into one of the most ethnically diverse commercial areas of the metropolitan area. Little Saigon, as the representative of the Vietnamese business agglomeration on Kingsway, extends far beyond just a few blocks, as visualized in Figure II.6.

<sup>39</sup> Lin, *The Power of Urban Ethnic Places*, 46-50.

<sup>40</sup> Luke and Fumano, “Vietnam’s Boat People.”

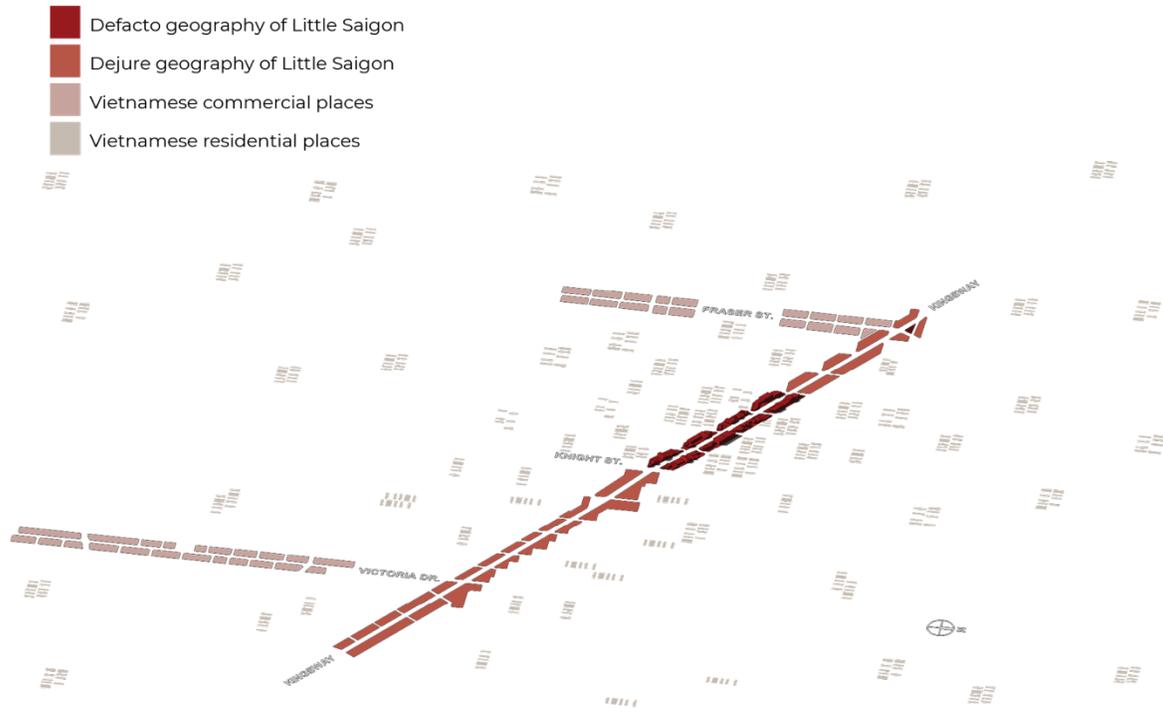


Figure II.6. Diagram of the geography of Vietnamese economic activities around Little Saigon (Diagram by author)

There are many definitions of what a Vietnamese business is. However, this thesis assumes a business as Vietnamese based on either one of the following criteria: (1) the business is owned by Vietnamese; (2) it offers goods or services in the Vietnamese language; (3) the majority of its goods or services are catered to Vietnamese cultural consumption, and (4) its signage is in the Vietnamese language. I believe ethnicity is fluid and complex, and there are many Vietnamese persons with mixed heritage. Likewise, a business can be owned by a Vietnamese but catered to non-Vietnamese while a non-Vietnamese owner may put up a sign in Vietnamese. There are also many different ethnic minorities within the country of Vietnam, and one of the major groups is the Hoa or Chinese Vietnamese. A lot of businesses with signs in Vietnamese are owned by Hoa persons. However, this thesis does not attempt to research the nuances of these different identities. Therefore, it makes no distinction between them and assumes all businesses that qualify one of the criteria abovementioned a Vietnamese business.

Vietnamese restaurants, beauty salons, grocery stores, tax services offices, medical clinics, auto insurance offices, auto repair shops, travel agencies, media stores, and even pool halls populating Kingsway and its adjacent streets have facilitated Vietnamese entrepreneurialism since the 1980s. As subsequent Vietnamese immigrants settled in the city, they have also found the Kingsway

area to be a place to find employment, housing, entertainment, legal assistance, social connections, and cultural celebrations.<sup>41</sup>

The area has also seen a high concentration of Chinese, Filipinx, and Korean residents, in addition to the Vietnamese. For decades, Kingsway has been populated with signs in Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean languages. There are a large number of small businesses, some of which are rarely found elsewhere in the metro, including a dog daycare school, a telescope store, Buddhist worshipping materials stores, beauty salon supply stores, etc. Other very common types of business that hardly concentrate elsewhere include notary offices, massage parlors, beauty salons, grocery stores, travel agencies, tattoo parlors, cannabis shops, adult shops, and countless ethnic restaurants.

The effect of Vietnamese entrepreneurialism on Kingsway has been highly visible in its architecture and urbanism. The street offers a variety of store sizes and shapes, as analyzed in Figure II.7. The buildings are also varied in size, and almost all are subdivided into smaller units, which effectively allows an abundance of unique businesses to thrive, and in turn results in a cornucopia of storefronts and signages, with diverse colors, window displays, graphics, and languages are covered all along the street, as shown in Figure II.8. Almost all buildings here are low-rise older developments. Kingsway today no longer has its earlier suburban characteristics with a mix of colonial-industrial influences. Most of the buildings are also mixed-use where one can find many office and apartment types above the ground floor, offering affordable rentals to the local community.

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<sup>41</sup> Carlito Pablo, "Best of Vancouver 2010 Communities: Flourishing Far from Vietnam," *The Georgia Straight*, September 22, 2010.

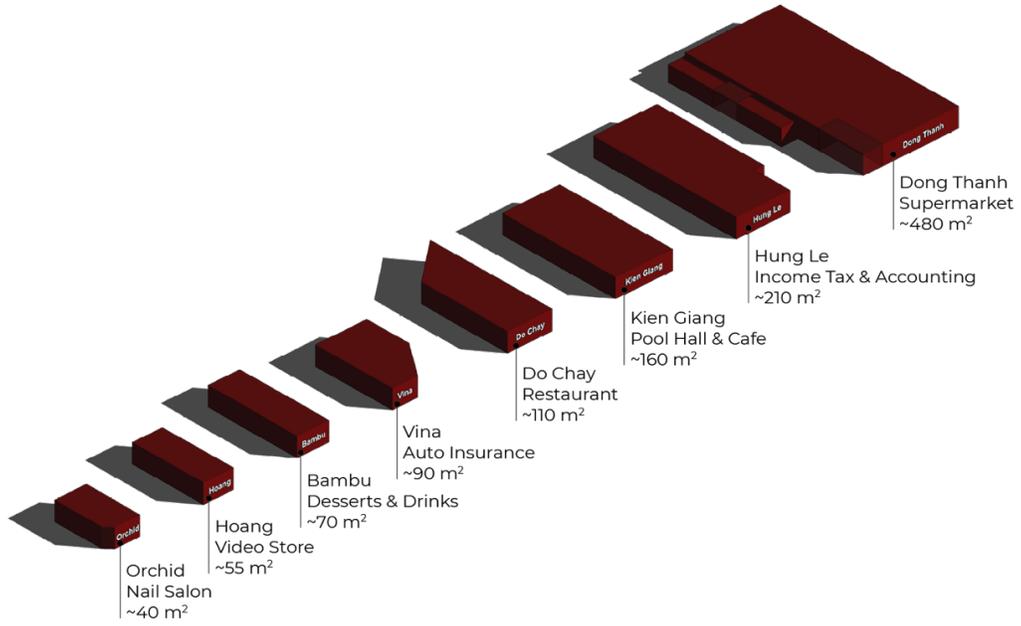


Figure II.7. Diagram of the variety of Vietnamese businesses in Little Saigon (Diagram by author)



Figure II.8. Photos of the vibrant scene of Vietnamese commercial neighborhood on Kingsway (Photos by author)

As the local Vietnamese population grew larger and their economic representation on Kingsway became more visible, the community discovered their political power in the city. Vietnamese have learned to band together to make their voices louder. This new power is an achievement and a contrast to their traumatic experience at the end of the Vietnam War when they were stripped of freedom, properties, and humanity. Local and national politicians have been pandering to Vietnamese Canadians to earn their votes in elections, often amplifying anti-communist rhetoric.<sup>42</sup> The new power has effectively given the Vietnamese in Vancouver the confidence to pursue their many localization projects beyond the economic process. These projects include the Tet Lunar New Year's Parade in 2011, the designation of Little Saigon in the same year, and the erection of the Monument of Vietnamese Boat People in 2017.

### **Cultural Process: Tet Lunar New Year's Parade**

One of the first steps that the Vietnamese community has taken to solidify their presence on Kingsway in East Vancouver is to celebrate of the Lunar New Year, or Tet, the most important holiday in Vietnamese culture. However, celebrating this day is not the same everywhere. In Vietnam, it is a statutory holiday that extends to a full week and is even observed for a whole month in some areas, whereas it is not practiced the same way in the diasporic communities. Tet in Canada is often observed within households, in small groups, or with other East Asian communities in Canada. In Vancouver, the largest Lunar New Year celebration is held by the Chinese community in Chinatown where there are dragon dances, firecrackers, and traditional treats.<sup>43</sup> The Vietnamese community has held their parallel celebrations but scattered around the metropolitan area. Vietnamese Buddhist temples offer their religious Tet services in their own spaces while secular Vietnamese hold entertainment events in community halls. Vietnamese student groups have similar events on their campuses. Even the Consulate-General of Vietnam has its celebration.<sup>44</sup>

The Vietnamese community in East Vancouver felt it was time they held a signature celebration in their neighborhood, in hopes of creating an annual public event in the same place in the years to come. In 2011, the Southeast Asian Cultural Heritage Society held a street parade to celebrate the Lunar New Year on the Kingsway section between Glen Drive and Clark Drive, which hosted the largest concentration of Vietnamese businesses in Vancouver. The parade took

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<sup>42</sup> Victoria News Staff, "South Vietnam Flag Flies in Victoria to Remember Liberation," *Victoria News*, April 30, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> CTV BC, "Chinatown Chinese New Year Parade," *CTV News*, December 17, 2010.

<sup>44</sup> Văn Anh, "Tổng Lãnh Sự Quán Việt Nam Tại Vancouver, Canada Mở Tiệc Mừng Xuân 2020 Cho Bà Con Kiều Bào," *Báo Thế giới và Việt Nam*, January 12, 2020.

place on January 30, 2011, labeled as the Annual Tet Lunar New Year Parade.<sup>45</sup> The parade featured Vietnamese traditional activities such as lion dances, costume pageants, martial art demonstrations, games, live music, as well as food.

Since 2011, no other parade has taken place in the same place due to the freezing weather on Lunar New Year's Day, which is around January and February. The Vietnamese community has continued the tradition of holding large gatherings by bringing them indoors. They held the 2020 Tet celebrations at Vancouver's Croatian Cultural Center and Surrey's St. Matthew Parish.

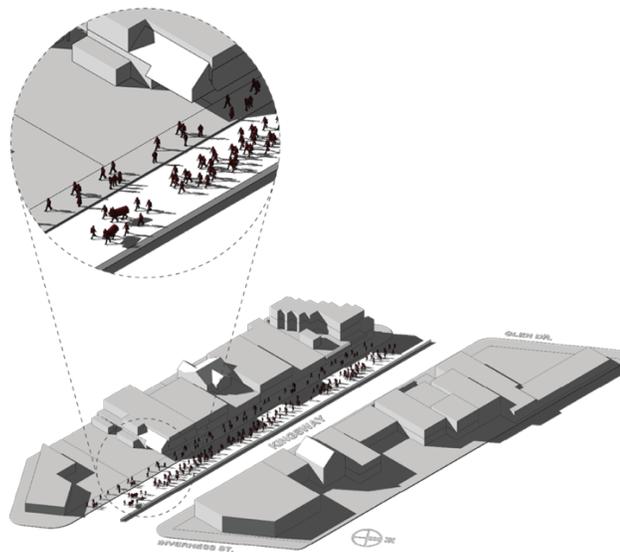


Illustration II.1. Tet Lunar New Year Parade (Illustration by author)

### **Touristic Process: Designation of Little Saigon**

With the success of the Parade, many in the Vietnamese community advocated for further concretizing a Vietnamese presence on Kingsway, following the footsteps of other ethnic enclaves in Vancouver. Tammy M. Truong, a local businesswoman, rallied Vietnamese businesses on Kingsway to form the Vietnamese Business Association of Vancouver. They organized a poll to recognize a part of Kingsway as a Vietnamese area with some suggested names, Little Saigon among them. The name, however, became a contentious issue, revealing cracks among the Vietnamese.<sup>46</sup> Many wanted to be inclusive of all regions of Vietnam in the name of the neighborhood, while others wanted to

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<sup>45</sup> Andrew Morrison, "Scout List: A Clever Scheme to Milk Vancouver of Its Coolness," *Scout Magazine*, January 27, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Tristin Hopper and Jeff Lee, "The Remembrance of the War Hasn't Healed Us Yet': Plan to Call Vancouver's Vietnamese Community 'Little Saigon' Refuels Old Tensions," *National Post*, December 4, 2011.

make a political point with the name Little Saigon, referencing the capital of the former Republic of Vietnam, as a defiant statement to the Communist government of Vietnam. The latter camp who formed the Little Saigon Vancouver Foundation went on to conduct a referendum on the name within the Vietnamese community and claimed overwhelming support for Little Saigon with over 3000 signatures.<sup>47</sup> They brought the idea to Councilor Kerry Jang who was also a resident of East Vancouver. Jang put it forward in a motion to the City Council in September 2011.<sup>48</sup> In October 2011, representatives of the Vietnamese community presented the case for the city to officially recognize Little Saigon. The video archive of the City Council meeting shows all of the councilors spoke glowingly of Vietnamese Canadians, their food, and their cultural and economic contributions to the city. The motion was later approved unanimously by the City Council. However, the geography of Little Saigon was to be decided later.

The urban design of Little Saigon included street signs at intersections and double banners on lampposts. The four blocks of Kingsway from Windsor Street to Knight Street, which saw the highest concentration of Vietnamese businesses, were decided by the community organizers to install signs and banners of Little Saigon. There were discussions on whether to have bilingual street signs, but English signs prevailed in the end. There has been little information about the design process of the signs and banners, but many features of the design are recognizable Vietnamese symbols. The design of one of the signs features the imprint of the Dong Son bronze drum - the symbol of ancient Vietnamese culture. Another sign features a symbol of the Ben Thanh Market - the commercial center of the former city of Saigon. The banner design features three red stripes on a yellow background representing the flag of the former ROV and again the bronze drum, as seen in Figure II.9. Present in all three designs is the name of the neighborhood - Kensington-Cedar Cottage, home to Little Saigon. The logo of "Little Saigon" is also stylized with a Canadian maple leaf symbol in place of the tittle in "Little." In addition to banners and signs, some street trees were replaced with new ones.

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<sup>47</sup> Thuncher, "Kensington-Cedar Cottage."

<sup>48</sup> Yolande Cole, "Kerry Jang Proposes 'Little Saigon' Designation for Area of Kingsway," *The Georgia Straight*, September 15, 2011.



Figure II.9. Photos of street signs and banners of Little Saigon (Photos by author)

On the left, the banners feature the red stripes of the ROV flag and the imprint of the Dong Son bronze drum. On the right, the sign also features the bronze drum. Present in both designs are the name of the city neighborhood and the stylized logo of “Little Saigon”.

The inauguration of Little Saigon took place on May 12, 2013, featuring a parade and speeches by leaders of the Vietnamese community as well as Councilor Kerry Jang and Mayor Gregor Robertson. The parade includes a march of former members of the ROV’s military branches, men and women in traditional Áo Dài, vehicles decorated with Little Saigon’s sign and ROV’s flags, and a makeshift boat on wheels representing the boat people’s narrative.

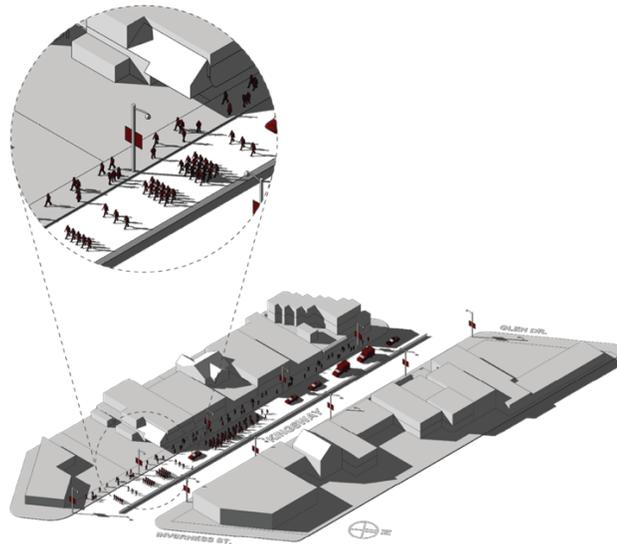


Illustration II.2. The inauguration of Little Saigon (Illustration by author)

## Monumental Process: Boat People Monument

In February 2016, the Little Saigon Vancouver Foundation proposed to the City to erect the Monument of Vietnamese Boat People - Refugees from Communism in McAuley Park at the Kingsway - Fraser Street intersection. It was approved unanimously by the City Council and was unveiled in October 2017. The Monument includes a bronze sculpture standing on a granite pedestal as photographed in Figure II.10. It was designed by the Vietnamese Canadian American artist Vivi Vo Hung Kiet who also designed other sculptures of the same theme in Ontario and California.



Figure II.10. Photos of the Monument of Vietnamese Boat People - Refugees from Communism in McAuley Park (Photos by author)

Since then, the ground in front of the Monument has become the site for many of the Vietnamese community in Vancouver to commemorate the fall of Saigon annually on April 30, also known as Black April Day or Journey to Freedom Day in Vietnamese refugee communities around the world.

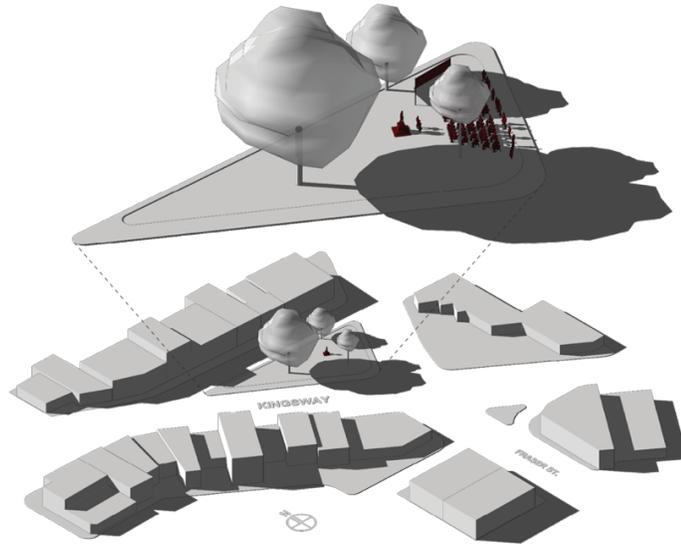


Illustration II.3. The Monument of Vietnamese Boat People - Refugees from Communism and the annual April 30 commemoration (Illustration by author)

This strategy of monumentalizing the initial hardships of Vietnamese Canadians relies on the enthusiasm among the community. However, it is not sustainable to ground the identity only in nostalgia as older generations will disappear and younger generations will disengage. Young Vietnamese have a distant relationship with the war, and increasingly many do not relate to the refugee experience. The next project of the Vietnamese community must look into the present and the future to address their economic needs and enthuse the youth.

The Tet Parade, the official recognition of Little Saigon, and the Monument present how the Vietnamese community has been making permanent footing beyond commercial activities in this section of Kingsway. Though these events do not take place frequently, they create an attachment of Vietnamese cultural and communal values to the place now called Little Saigon. These four blocks have become the symbolic center of Vietnamese happenings in Greater Vancouver.

### **Global Processes**

Little Saigon also operates under the weight of global forces of the city, the country, and the international economy. The globalization of Vietnam's economy presents a shift in the status of diasporic Vietnamese communities. Vietnamese Canadians of refugee background now find their priorities balanced with newer Vietnamese immigrants. Trades between Canada and Vietnam have softened the stance among politicians and corporations. Universities and colleges also have to balance between the recruitment of Vietnamese international students and the inclusion of Vietnamese refugees' descendants.

Little Saigon's hold onto anti-communist rhetoric may prove detrimental to its growth. New immigrants from Vietnam will disassociate themselves with Little Saigon in fear of retribution on their families back home by the Vietnamese government. Nostalgic projects such as the Monument will find a lack of enthusiasm among the younger members of the community in the future while the funding can be distributed in projects that help their immediate needs. The opportunity to attract private investments from the fast-growing economy of Vietnam into Little Saigon may also be missed because of its political baggage.

As more and more middle-class Vietnamese immigrate to Canada to study and work, the working-class and entrepreneurial identities of Vietnamese Canadians start to fade. Newcomers from Vietnam with English proficiency and education may find it easier to integrate and quicker to thrive in the general economy than their forebears. They do not need to depend on the ethnic neighborhood for their livelihood and may seek to live and work elsewhere, which also means that a lot of Vietnamese money is not spent on Little Saigon's properties and its surrounding neighborhoods.

Though middle-class Vietnamese represent a large share among the newcomers, there are also working-class Vietnamese and those with limited skills. They are also young and creative, and they also bring new offerings to the community and the city. Nevertheless, they may depend on Little Saigon and Kingsway for their employment, socialization, and legal assistance which will help them integrate into society at large. It will be another missed opportunity for Little Saigon if it no longer performs as a gateway neighborhood for these immigrants.

Descendants of Vietnamese refugees have been the most talked-about as the flagbearers of the Vietnamese culture in the diaspora. As seen in the stories of the owners of *anh and chi*, *Do Chay*, *the Lunch Lady*, and other elevated Vietnamese restaurants, Vietnamese identity can be modernized, hybridized with other cultures, and consumed as a lifestyle commodity. The global process is working at its highest potential in this case though the high-end price tags of the offerings alienate many. The hybridization of the Vietnamese culture in these businesses achieves a different status in the city while reaching a wider audience beyond the Vietnamese.

Because of the global processes spearheaded by the younger Vietnamese generations, the Vietnamese business community is seeing a new kind of growth around the city. The evolution of Little Saigon may depend on the adaptation of its values according to these young Vietnamese of different backgrounds.

### **II.3. The Many Values of Little Saigon**

#### **The Entrepreneurial and Cultural Center of Greater Vancouver's Vietnamese Community**

Commercial space and cultural space are often designed to be separated functions of the urban environment. One involves materialistic transactions while the other represents values beyond basic necessities. However, for the Vietnamese community in East Vancouver, the two concepts converge. Many businesses here offer not only services and goods but also cultural experiences. A Vietnamese person may get a manicure while chatting with the nail technicians, browse the supermarket while picking up incense sticks to light on Buddha's altar, or eat a bowl of Bún Bò while appreciating its special fusion of flavors and aromas. Retired men sip Cà Phê Sữa Đá while debating Vietnamese politics with their friends. Young employees of a dessert shop gossip about their parents while preparing Chè Ba Màu for customers. Little Saigon, thus, becomes a fusion place to sell, shop, consume, work, learn, play, socialize, and celebrate culture.

Furthermore, Kingsway has been the entrepreneurial and cultural center of Vietnamese in Vancouver since the 1980s. Vietnamese "cultural entrepreneurs" moved into the small retail spaces along the thoroughfare and created a vibrant commercial and cultural landscape. The small spaces of the low-rise developments allow them to experiment with various types of small business ventures. Vietnamese restaurants, beauty salons, grocery stores, tax services offices, medical clinics, auto insurance offices, auto repair shops, travel agencies, video stores, and even pool halls can be found throughout Kingsway and its adjacent streets. There are also many businesses not often found elsewhere in the metro. Some very unique ones include a dog daycare school, a telescope store, Buddhist worshipping materials stores, beauty salon supply stores, etc. Other common types of business that concentrate here include notary offices, massage parlors, beauty salons, grocery stores, travel agencies, tattoo parlors, cannabis shops, adult shops, and countless ethnic restaurants. Kingsway has established itself to be a place for Vietnamese to find employment, housing, entertainment, legal assistance, social connections, and cultural celebrations.

For many new Vietnamese immigrants, Little Saigon represents their first step into the Canadian economy. Little Saigon as a Vietnamese neighborhood works on different scales of the economy. According to Light et al., ethnic communities operate on a scale of "ethnic enclave economy" and an "ethnic economy" scale. The ethnic economy "is ethnic simply because the personnel (owners and employees) are co-ethnic" while the ethnic enclave economy runs on the "dual

labor market."<sup>49</sup> Which means that ethnic neighborhoods such as Little Saigon offer complicated employment opportunities to many of their co-ethnics. This complexity is expressed in the divergence of the earnings of ethnic employers, employees, and self-employed entrepreneurs. Xu and Gough also find that those who participate in the economy of ethnic enclaves earn less money than in the mainstream economy.<sup>50</sup> But it is also how immigrant and ethnic businesses manage to keep costs low and thrive on Kingsway. As many entry workers do not stay working long in these businesses, Little Saigon serves as an important transitory neighborhood where new immigrants learn to integrate and then break out into the mainstream economy. The connection of Little Saigon's economy with the those of the metro area and the world is strong and has profound implications for the local Vietnamese community.

### **The Only Vietnamese Neighborhood in Greater Vancouver**

Little Saigon is a unique Vietnamese place. Though the Vietnamese restaurant business has received the majority of the press in Vancouver, they do not make up the majority of Vietnamese businesses in Little Saigon or Kingsway. Rather, it is beauty salons, barbershops, grocery stores, tax services offices, medical clinics, car insurance offices, video stores, and pool halls that cater to the Vietnamese community's demands. Little Saigon represents all things Vietnamese for those who have limited English proficiency or are unfamiliar with Canadian society, especially seniors and newcomers. When the owners of the unique Vietnamese businesses retire and the co-ethnic clientele are well integrated into society, the types of business will also disappear. Vietnamese restaurants and nail salons alone cannot save the neighborhood. Little Saigon will face an existential crisis.

Declining ethnic neighborhoods are not new in Vancouver. Chinatown and Punjabi Market have been experiencing declines for years.<sup>51</sup> However, the Chinese and South Asian communities make up very large shares of the population in the metro area, and they have congregated in their respective new enclaves in Richmond and Surrey. The decline of these neighborhoods will not have significant consequences on their communities at large. However, for the Vietnamese, the loss of Little Saigon will mean a loss of the social bonds, belonging, and history in the city.

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<sup>49</sup> Light et al., "Beyond the Ethnic Enclave Economy," 66-67.

<sup>50</sup> Xie and Gough. "Ethnic Enclaves and the Earnings of Immigrants," 1293.

<sup>51</sup> Christopher Cheung, "Punjabi Market - Past, Present and Future," *The Tyee*, August 2, 2019.

## **A Place for Vietnamese Upward Mobility**

As explained previously, East Vancouver saw less investment and development from the city and private developers throughout the city's history because of many factors. The city's past urban policies targeting marginalized communities have kept many parts of East Vancouver economically depressed and ridden with high crime rates. It has also been home to the city's working class and many ethnic communities from Europe such as Italians, Polish, Germans, Croatians, etc., and for decades it has attracted immigrants from South, East, and Southeast Asia. Since the 1980s, the city also reoriented its focus towards the downtown area and encouraged "Vancouverism." The flight of the residents and money to downtown left Kingsway with a stock of low-cost retail spaces in old, low-quality, and low-maintenance buildings. That presented enormous opportunities to immigrant and refugee entrepreneurs of small businesses.

The large share of those low-cost retail spaces on Kingsway has proved crucial to immigrants, refugees, and the working class who often lacked financial and human capital to find upward mobility opportunities in Vancouver. This naturally occurring affordability makes the neighborhood more livable to those earning lower to middle incomes.

Because of its diversity, flexibility, and affordability, Kingsway acts as a portal to upward mobility among the Vietnamese, which was important to the humble beginning of Vietnamese refugees who lost everything in their journey. The refugees worked their way up to become entrepreneurs and afforded their children education to have a better life, thanks to the opportunities on Kingsway. As captured in Figure II.11, the "Vietnamese Upward Mobility Model" that Kingsway offers has three phases. At first, Vietnamese refugees started a business on Kingsway. Then they accumulated wealth from the profit of the business and afforded their children some education. Finally, they moved into middle-class life while their children went to work white-collar jobs.

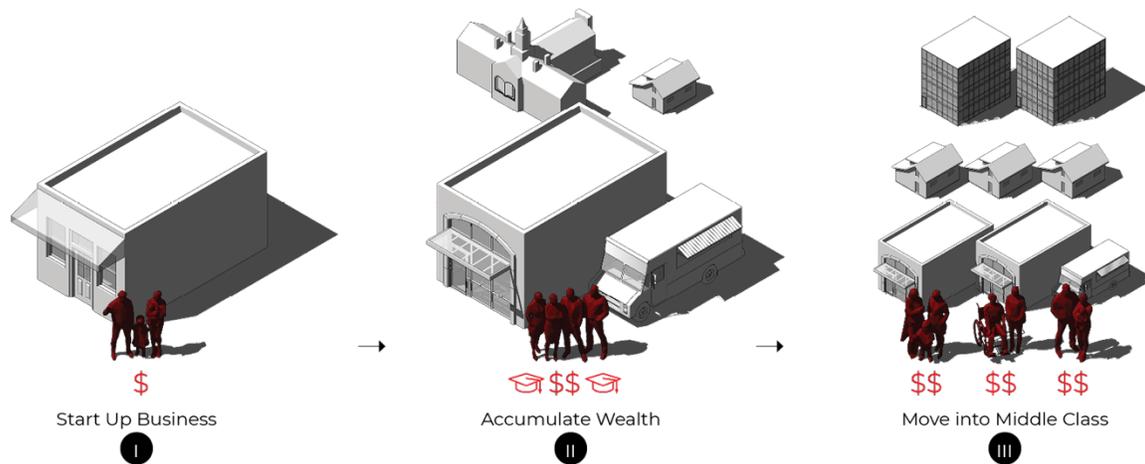


Figure II.11. Diagram of the Upward Mobility Model of Vietnamese in Greater Vancouver (Diagram by author)

The model follows a three-phase narrative: (I) Vietnamese refugees started a business on Kingsway; (II) They accumulated wealth from the profitable business and afforded their children's education; (III) They moved into the middle-class life with their children taking on white-collar jobs.

Although most refugees have become well integrated into society, the model of upward mobility did not cease to be effective. Subsequent immigration waves of Vietnamese also found economic opportunities on Kingsway and the other streets of East Vancouver. The Vietnamese community has grown substantially in size while their neighborhood has evolved its identity through different socioeconomic backgrounds of Vietnamese immigrants and of other ethnic groups. International students from Vietnam may find work in Vietnamese restaurants and grocery stores while studying to become white-collar workers. Vietnamese immigrant women cook and sell their own Bánh Chưng from their East Vancouver homes during Lunar New Year to earn extra cash. White-collar second-generation Vietnamese Canadians quit their jobs to venture into the business of beauty salons and restaurants. Entrepreneurialism runs deep in the Vietnamese community and benefits many identities, not just refugees. Kingsway, as an ethnic place, offers economic opportunities for Vietnamese from different socioeconomic backgrounds, as analyzed in Figure II.12.

Not all entrepreneurs are created equal. Refugees may find it harder to secure funding for their ventures than those who grew up in Canada due to cultural and language barriers. Immigrants who are sponsored through family reunification or married to Canadian citizens may find more favorable conditions to open a business than international students due to their immigration statuses.

Likewise, not all Vietnamese can become entrepreneurs. The household's socioeconomic status can either propel or diminish an ethnic worker's

entrepreneurial ambition. Zulema Valdez, in her study of Mexican American entrepreneurship, found that ethnic entrepreneurialism is tightly connected with the intersectionality of class and gender in the ethnic household.<sup>52</sup> This theory also holds in Vietnamese Canadian households. The middle-class status of the parents effectively allows their children to have a safety net and experience trials and errors in their business venture. Working-class families will be less likely to take big risks and more likely to settle for seasonal or small-time businesses.

This understanding of the intersection of class, ethnicity, immigration status, education level, and so on within the Vietnamese facilitates a more sensible approach to the issues around modern Vietnamese entrepreneurialism in Vancouver.

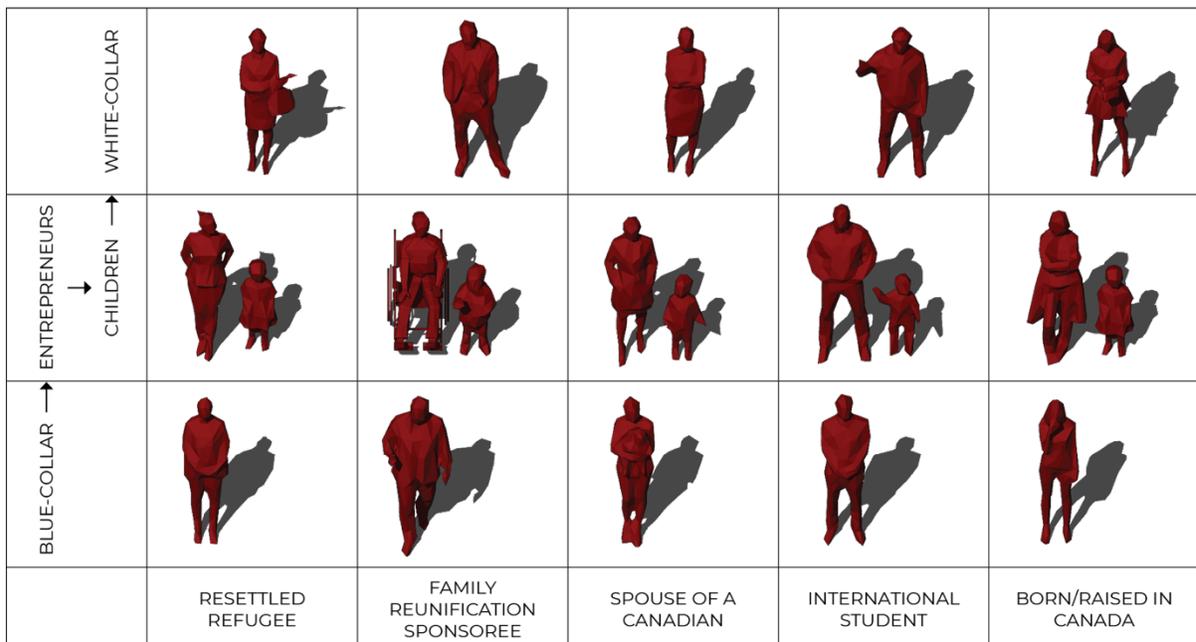


Figure II.12. Diagram of simplified intersectionality of Vietnamese economic participants in Greater Vancouver (Diagram by author)

This diagram shows how Vietnamese of different socioeconomic backgrounds are empowered by Kingsway to move from blue-collar jobs to entrepreneurial ventures while mobilizing their children into white-collar sectors.

<sup>52</sup> Valdez, "Intersectionality," 1618.

# III. The Threats of Redevelopments in Little Saigon

Before diving in the redevelopment applications, an important factor that contributes to the redevelopment craze in Little Saigon needs to be discussed, that is the land use of the residential blocks adjacent to the commercial blocks of Kingsway.

## III.1. Land Use around Little Saigon

Commercial spaces in East Vancouver are famously scarce.<sup>53</sup> This problem is especially visible outside the downtown area, as captured in Figure III.1. East Vancouver has only a handful of commercial streets that are often arterial. Kingsway is one of them. Outside of these commercial/arterial streets, the vast majority of the land is zoned strictly for single-detached housings, as seen in Figure III.2. Stepping off the hustle-bustle of Kingsway, one can immediately feel the suburban atmosphere. The city has for years sacralized the quietness of single detached residential or RS zones while encouraging redevelopment on arterial roads. This double standard creates pressure on low-rise commercial or mixed-use zones to develop housing. As housing demand in the city remains high and single detached zones are untouchable, developers flock to apply for rezoning on commercial/arterial streets such as Kingsway.

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<sup>53</sup> Neil Hamilton, "Are Vancouver's Property Taxes Killing Independent Businesses?", Western Investor, July 13, 2017.

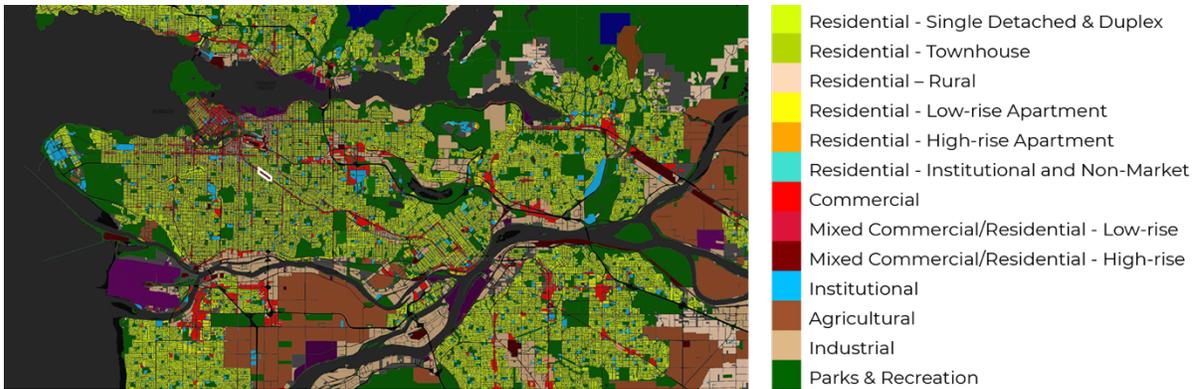


Figure III.1. Map of lane use in Greater Vancouver, Data visualization by MountainMath, “Metro Vancouver Land Use,” in MountainMath, “Metro Vancouver Land Use,” MountainMath, accessed April 7, 2021, [https://mountainmath.ca/land\\_use/map](https://mountainmath.ca/land_use/map). Courtesy of Jens von Bergmann and Sanyin Bekrich.



Figure III.2. Map of lane use in and around Little Saigon, Data visualization by MountainMath, “Metro Vancouver Land Use,” in MountainMath, “Metro Vancouver Land Use,” MountainMath, accessed April 7, 2021, [https://mountainmath.ca/land\\_use/map](https://mountainmath.ca/land_use/map). Courtesy of Jens von Bergmann and Sanyin Bekrich.

This map shows a divergence in land use on and off Kingsway. While the thoroughfare carries the weight of commercial and mixed-use developments, the vast majority of land around it is strictly zoned for single-detached housings. Little Saigon is marked with dash lines.

Although the passage of laneway house policy has proved effective in increasing density on single-detached housing areas, its application remains slow in comparison with mid-rise and high-rise redevelopments on arterial roads. The survey of the area for this thesis found a few laneway houses around Little Saigon, but their small supply is not enough to solve the housing demand of the neighborhood. Most of the solutions continue to lie in development on arterial roads.

## III.2. Recent and Upcoming Developments

In recent years, Kingsway has seen an influx of redevelopments. Most are low-rise, at four-story height. A couple of new high-rise buildings can also be seen. Fraser Street near Kingsway has also experienced rapid upgrades. Many more redevelopments are also in the work. The city of Vancouver's rezoning portal shows several low-rise and high-rise buildings are either in the application process or already approved.<sup>54</sup> These projects are dotting Kingsway and other streets with brand new apartments and shops as shown in Figure III.3. They have taken advantage of low-density lots that used to be car services shops, used car shops, big-box retailers, and strip malls. These sites often had large parking lots facing the street and thrived when Kingsway was more suburban.

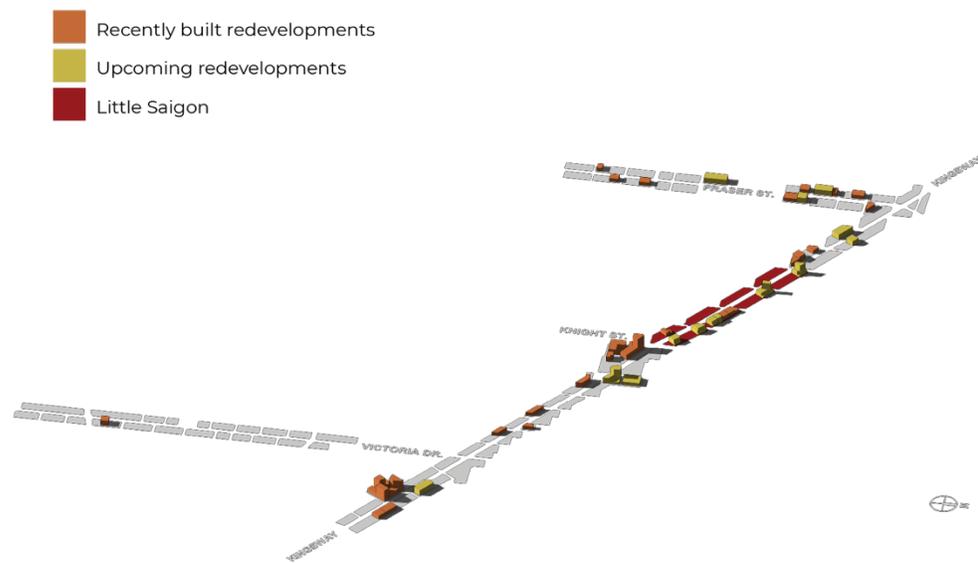


Figure III.3. Diagram of recently built and upcoming redevelopments in and around Little Saigon (Diagram by author)

In recent years, as Kingsway densifies, it runs out of those readily developable lands. New rezoning applications indicate that low-rise mixed-use buildings have increasingly become the target for redevelopment. The upcoming buildings are also taller. The median height now has six floors. Some even go up to 14 floors.

The four blocks of Little Saigon were slowly densifying in the first few years of the previous decade (Figure III.4). From 2011 to 2014, there were only four redevelopments here. Three of them are mixed-use developments with housing on the three upper floors and retail at grade, while one remains its commercial zoning. Together, they have 109 residential units and nine retail units. Two of the

<sup>54</sup> City of Vancouver, "Rezoning Active and Archived Applications," *Shape Your City Vancouver*, accessed April 7, 2021, <https://shapeyourcity.ca/rezoning>.

lots had sat leveled and undeveloped for years before they finally broke ground. Before site leveling, about six businesses occupied these lots.

Redevelopments have been picking up steam in Little Saigon since 2019. The city’s rezoning portal shows at least six projects are either still in the process of application or already approved, as diagrammed in Figure III.4. These projects will provide a total of almost 400 residential units and 14 retail units at grade.<sup>55</sup>

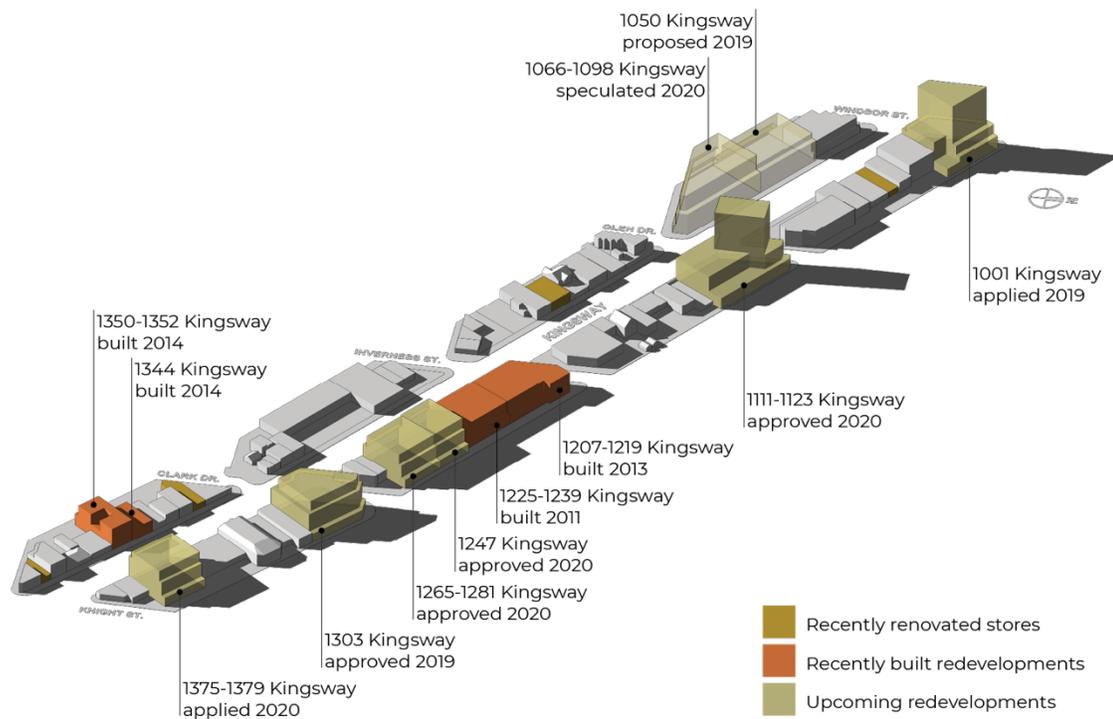


Figure III.4. Diagram of recently built and upcoming redevelopments, and recently renovated stores in Little Saigon (Diagram by author)

Uncoincidentally, five out of six upcoming redevelopments are also part of the Secured Rental Policy - dubbed “Rental 100.” Approved in 2012, this policy had not attracted much interest from developers until it was amended in 2019. In short, the policy encourages developers to build 100% rental units to receive many incentives from the city such as parking reductions, residential floor space waivers, smaller residential unit sizes, and no rezoning required for six-story height or lower.<sup>56</sup> Kingsway is among the piloted streets for the policy. Developers

<sup>55</sup> City of Vancouver, “Rezoning Active and Archived Applications,” *Shape Your City Vancouver*, accessed April 7, 2021, <https://shapeyourcity.ca/rezoning>.

<sup>56</sup> Marc Lee, “Vancouver’s Secured Rental Policy and the Battle over Density,” *Policy Note*, September 29, 2020.

have taken this opportunity to buy up assembly lots on the street and apply to redevelop at rapid speed.

Rezoning usually takes years to be fully realized. Six steps must be completed before a development can secure the building permit - enquiry, application, report and referral to public hearing, public hearing, zoning enactment, and finally permit applications.<sup>57</sup> The lengthy process often puts the community in a limbo. Established businesses in a rezoned development not only are uprooted but also take a longer time to be able to come back. Meanwhile, redevelopments in policies such as the Secured Rental Policy can be enacted more quickly because some types of redevelopment do not require rezoning. Even then, it still takes months to move through the bureaucracy and months under construction.

That policy and the wave of redevelopments have been lauded to add more affordable housing options to the overheated market of Vancouver. Since 50% of residents of the city are renters, it only makes sense that rental home developments are part of the future of housing. Yet what is currently overlooked in the conversation is the commercial space of these developments. Though all of these projects are mixed-use with retail units at grade, information about them is scarce. This thesis investigates the number and the size of these retail units.

By reviewing floor plans submitted in the rezoning applications, I found a large deficit in the number of retail units and the total retail area in the six upcoming redevelopments. This finding is especially counterintuitive since this type of redevelopment often replaces big-box retailers with smaller shops. Two of the recently built redevelopments in Little Saigon did just that. 1207-1219 Kingsway and 1225-1239 Kingsway replaced two large car services shops with seven small shops, as analyzed in Figure III.5. However, the total retail area of all four redevelopments was reduced by 5,500 sqft, as calculated in Table III.1. This is understandable since the type of business has changed. Auto garages accounted for larger space than medical clinics and vape shops.

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<sup>57</sup> City of Vancouver, "Rezoning," *City of Vancouver*, accessed April 15, 2021, <https://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/rezoning-applications.aspx>.

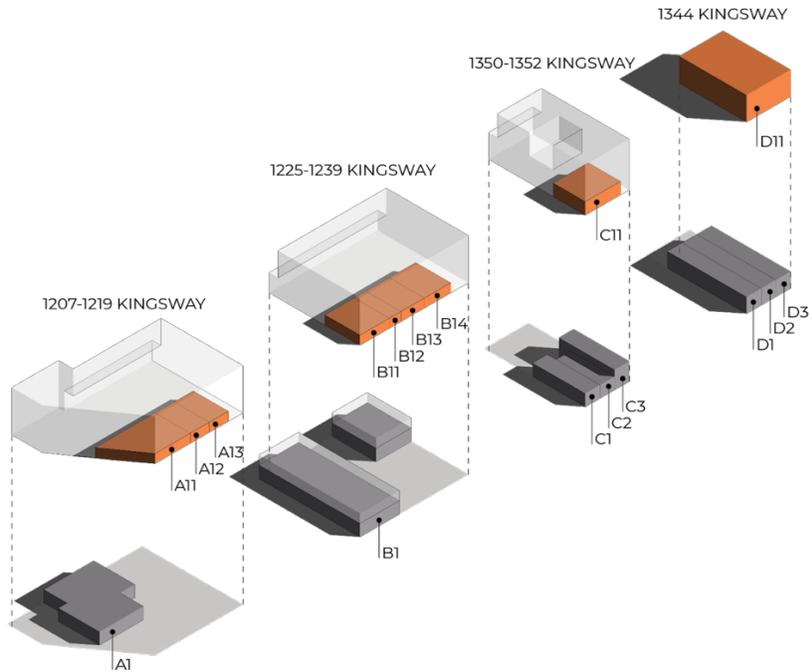


Figure III.5. Diagram of retail area in recently built redevelopments in Little Saigon and their previous forms (Diagram by author)

Approximate Retail Area of Recently Built Redevelopment (excl. Parking)						
Address	Previous Development			Built Redevelopment		
	Unit	Area (sqft)	Area (sqm)	Unit	Area (sqft)	Area (sqm)
1207-1219 Kingsway	A1	4,030	365	A11	1,900	180
				A12	800	70
				A13	800	70
1225-1239 Kingsway	B1	6,900	620	B11	1,250	110
				B12	500	40
				B13	1,000	85
				B14	1,150	100
1350-1352 Kingsway	C1	960	85	C11	1,400	130
	C2	800	70			
	C3	1,010	90			
1344 Kingsway	D1	1,440	125	D11	3,700	340
	D2	1,440	125			
	D3	1,440	125			
<b>Total</b>	<b>8 units</b>	<b>18020</b>	<b>1605</b>	<b>9 units</b>	<b>12500</b>	<b>1125</b>
				<b>Change</b>		
				All Units		+1 units
				Small Units ( $\leq 1000$ sqft)		+2 units
				Area (sqft)		-5520 sqft
				Area (sqm)		-480 sqm

Table III.1. Approximate retail area in recently built redevelopments in Little Saigon and their previous forms (Table by author)

In the six upcoming redevelopments, only one will replace car services shops - 1111-1123 Kingsway. Thus, there is a small opportunity to increase the number of retail units. The rest will build on the land of former small shops, as drawn in Figure III.6. That means they will mostly replace businesses that are spatially more economical than big boxes. If past redevelopments are comparable, upcoming ones should increase either the number of retail units or the total retail area. Yet both figures are reduced as in this investigation.

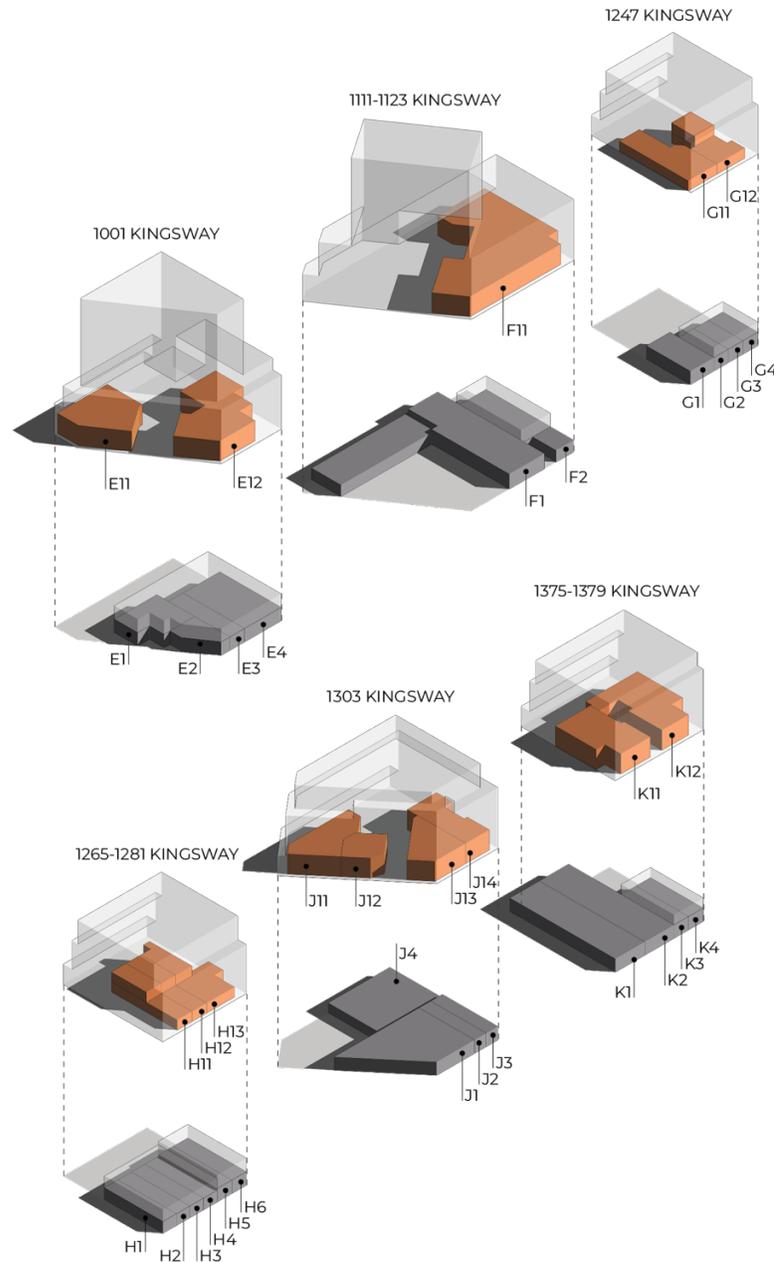


Figure III.6. Diagram of retail area in upcoming redevelopments in Little Saigon and their previous forms (Diagram by author)

The ground floor plans of the rezoning applications reveal that the upcoming redevelopments will reduce the number of retail units by 10 units and the total retail area by more than 10,000 sqft (860 m<sup>2</sup>), as calculated in Table III.2. It is also worth noting the number of small units which are smaller than or equal to 1000 sqft per unit. There is a loss of 14 such units in the redevelopment plans.

<b>Approximate Retail Area of Upcoming Redevelopment (excl. Parking)</b>						
<b>Address</b>	<b>Existing Development</b>			<b>Designed Redevelopment</b>		
	<b>Unit</b>	<b>Area (sqft)</b>	<b>Area (sqm)</b>	<b>Unit</b>	<b>Area (sqft)</b>	<b>Area (sqm)</b>
1001 Kingsway	E1	1,800	165	E11	2,600	240
	E2	850	75			
	E3	1,120	100	E12	3,750	350
	E4	2,810	255			
1111-1123 Kingsway	F1	8,030	730	F11	8,100	750
	F2	2,870	255			
1247 Kingsway	G1	1,280	115	G11	2,500	230
	G2	640	60			
	G3	640	60	G12	1,850	170
	G4	640	60			
1265-1281 Kingsway	H1	990	90	H11	1,500	140
	H2	990	90			
	H3	990	90	H12	1,500	140
	H4	990	90			
	H5	1,060	95	H13	2,500	230
	H6	1,060	95			
1303 Kingsway	J1	4,050	370	J11	2,000	190
	J2	810	70	J12	1,050	100
	J3	810	70	J13	1,500	140
	J4	4,300	400	J14	1,800	165
1375-1379 Kingsway	K1	3,860	355	K11	2,500	230
	K2	3,860	355			
	K3	960	85	K12	3,000	280
	K4	960	85			
<b>Total</b>	<b>24 units</b>	<b>46370 sqft</b>	<b>4215 sqm</b>	<b>14 units</b>	<b>36150 sqft</b>	<b>3355 sqm</b>
				<b>Change</b>		
				All Units		-10 units
				Small Units ( $\leq 1000$ sqft)		-14 units
				Area (sqft)		-10220 sqft
				Area (sqm)		-860 sqm

Table III.2. Approximate retail area in upcoming redevelopments in Little Saigon and their previous forms (Table by author)

When these redevelopments are completed, there will be a total loss of 10 retail units of 10,220 sqft (860 m<sup>2</sup>). Worth noted is the loss of small units which are smaller than or equal to 1000 sqft. Such units are highlighted in red.

In Chapter II, it was pointed out that retail size variety, including smaller units, was what enable immigrant and lower-middle-income entrepreneurialism,

especially that of Vietnamese Canadians. A loss of these units will have a profound impact on the social fabric of the neighborhood.

### III.3. Local Residential and Commercial Rent Prices

East Vancouver, for years, has been known for its stock of affordable residential and commercial rentals. However, rising land prices across the city are threatening the affordability of East Vancouver and particularly Kingsway. As demand goes up in desirable areas such as Downtown, West End, and Kitsilano, so does rent. Recently, businesses and residents displaced from these areas have ventured into East Vancouver and drive the cost up, making it less affordable for low-income residents and businesses. The migrating businesses are not entirely at fault since rising rent and land value are not a local problem but part of the global trend. Nonetheless, the increase in East Vancouver is indeed one of the most accelerated. Rent in its neighborhoods such as Cedar Cottage is catching up with the rest of the city (Table III.3). Though still not as expensive as neighborhoods to the West, it is no longer affordable for many.

As shown in Table III.3, median residential rent in Cedar Cottage (\$800) was slightly lower than that of Surrey (\$809) and slightly higher than Canada’s (\$775) in 2011. However, the neighborhood has a comparable price as the city’s median a decade later - \$1,450 and \$1,525 respectively. It is now higher than Surrey’s (\$1,209), and almost 1.5 times the national median (\$1,000).

Median Residential Rent					
Year	Cedar Cottage (Little Saigon)	Vancouver	Surrey	Greater Vancouver	Canada
2001	-	\$750	-	\$735	\$595
2006	-	\$850	-	\$815	\$680
2011	\$800	\$1,000	\$809	\$950	\$775
2016	\$1,051	\$1,240	\$925	\$1,150	\$859
2020	\$1,450	\$1,525	\$1,209	\$1,436	\$1,000

Table III.3. Median residential rent in Cedar Cottage, home to Little Saigon, compared to that of Vancouver, Surrey, the metro area, and Canada. (Table by author, adapted from CMHC, “Housing Market Information Portal,” Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, accessed April 8, 2021, <https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/en/TableMapChart/>)

This rise in residential rent has rendered the neighborhood less affordable for many longtime and prospective residents. As Vietnamese in Canada are in the lower to middle-income group, high rents will have a tremendous effect on their livelihoods. Homeowners may be spared, but renters such as new immigrants and youth are more likely to be discouraged to settle in their co-ethnic neighborhood.

Commercial rent is an even larger factor affecting Vietnamese livelihood. This thesis documents several comparable retail units on recent listings. This comparison reveals the divergence in price based on the size of the unit, age and location of the development, and its property tax. Older and smaller places with less traffic exposure are intuitively cheaper, which reinforces the fact that they are more accessible to entrepreneurs with less capital, many of whom are Vietnamese.

Table III.4 breaks down the numbers of those units. Between the two retail spaces on Kingsway with similar location and size, the newer one costs 35% more than the old one per square foot per year - \$54.75 over \$40.50. The spaces on Commercial St. and Victoria Dr. have the lowest rent per sqft per year in this table thanks to their locations, but their larger sizes make them more expensive. The space on Granville Island defies its age and charges a higher rate thanks to its popular location, enjoying a large amount of foot and vehicular traffic.

The optimal option would be a unit the size of the Kingsway ones, in the location of Commercial St. or Victoria Dr., and in a building as old as the Little Saigon one. Such a space could cost only \$32,300 a year or \$2,700 a month. This type of space was the one that facilitated Vietnamese upward mobility.

Commercial Rent					
Address	1312 Kingsway	978-998 Kingsway	3528-3532 Commercial St.	6591 Victoria Dr.	1540 Old Bridge St.
Area	Little Saigon	Cedar Cottage	Cedar Cottage	Victoria - Fraserview	Granville Island
Development Year	1933	2020	1987	1929	~1900
Basic Rent	\$30.00	\$35.00	\$27.00	\$25.00	\$37.00
Additional Rent	\$10.50	\$19.75	\$7.25	\$10.25	\$22.94
<b>Total Rent per sqft/year</b>	<b>\$40.50</b>	<b>\$54.75</b>	<b>\$34.25</b>	<b>\$35.25</b>	<b>\$59.94</b>
Area (sqft)	950	942	1,470	1,603	4,393
Area (sqm)	88.3	87.5	136.6	148.9	408.1
<b>Total Rent per year</b>	<b>\$38,475</b>	<b>\$51,575</b>	<b>\$50,348</b>	<b>\$56,506</b>	<b>\$263,316</b>

Table III.4. A comparison of rent costs of 5 commercial units in and outside Little Saigon (Table by author)

What is often neglected in the conversation on commercial rent is the fact that the tenants, rather than landlords, pay property taxes. The most common lease agreement in Vancouver is the triple net lease, in which the tenant pays all the expenses of the property including property taxes, building insurance, and maintenance - hence the additional rent in listings, in addition to basic rent and utilities. This practice puts another burden on commercial tenants while the landlords are guaranteed no loss, which can deeply impact tenants when a tax

hike is applied to the property due to rezoning. It should also be noted that residential renters are not subject to this practice, guaranteeing them a more stable expense.

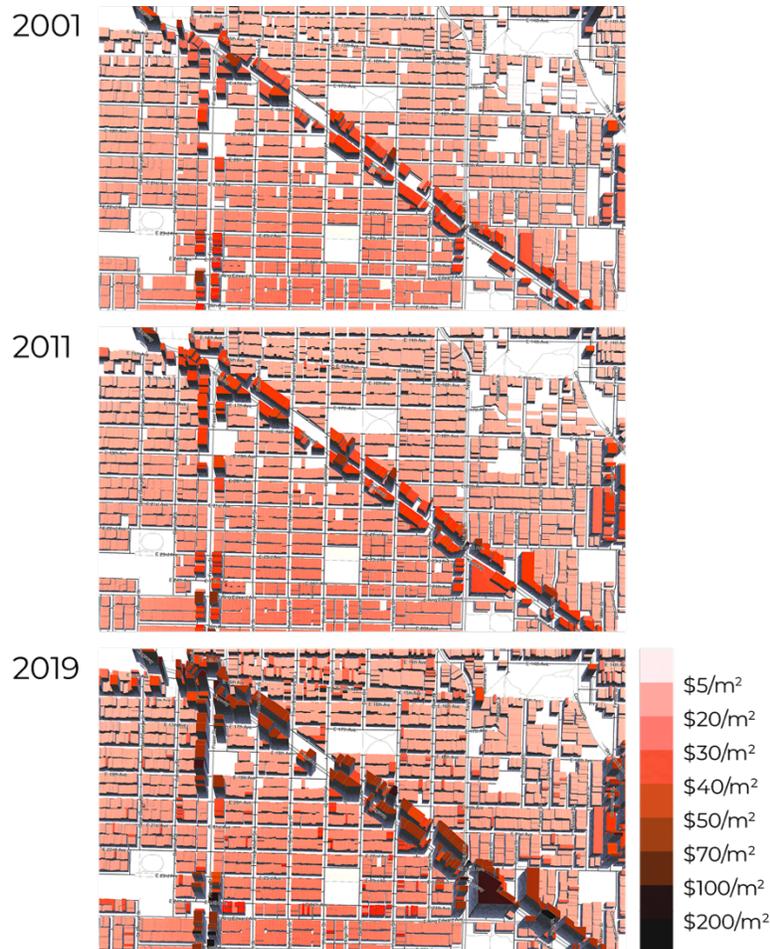


Figure III.7. Visualization of local property tax assessment in and around Little Saigon, Data visualization by MountainMath, “Vancouver Tax Density Map,” in MountainMath, “Vancouver Tax Density Map,” *MountainMath*, accessed April 7, 2021, [https://mountainmath.ca/mountain\\_math/vancouver\\_tax\\_density\\_map](https://mountainmath.ca/mountain_math/vancouver_tax_density_map). Courtesy of Jens von Bergmann and Sanyin Bekrich.

In Vancouver, not all property taxes are created equal. Commercial properties see much higher tax than residential ones do. In the past 20 years, commercial property tax has gone up significantly while residential property tax has mostly stayed the same, as visualized in Figure III.7. The tax increase directly affects commercial rent and raises the cost of running a business. Fortunately, the city of Vancouver has lowered taxes for commercial properties in 2020. It now has one of the lowest commercial property tax rates in the country.<sup>58</sup> However, considering

<sup>58</sup> Frank O'Brien, “Vancouver Posts Canada's Lowest Commercial Property Tax Rate,” *Business in Vancouver*, October 27, 2020.

the expensive land value in Vancouver, on which the tax is calculated, the number in dollars is not at all low in Canada.

Because of the issues discussed above, redevelopments threaten the economic narrative of many people in Little Saigon. Not only local business owners will be driven out due to high rent, but also new Vietnamese, immigrant, and young entrepreneurs will be deterred from starting up their businesses in Little Saigon. There are also many Vietnamese, especially elders, who rely on the community for translation and assistance in the Vietnamese language.<sup>59</sup> If these community services cease to exist, they may face difficulty navigating their neighborhood. Those who seek to connect to their cultural roots will also find a lack of Vietnamese authenticity of the place. The disintegration of the Vietnamese residents and businesses in Little Saigon will make the social fabric of the community even weaker.

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<sup>59</sup> Joanne Lee-Young, "Vancouver Groups Do Translations So Marginalized Workers and Businesses Can Access Government Aid," *Vancouver Sun*, May 14, 2020.

### III.4. Flight of the Ethnic Businesses and Residents

Vietnamese businesses are disappearing from the 4 blocks of Little Saigon. Out of nine retail units in four redevelopments built between 2011 and 2014, only two are currently hosting Vietnamese businesses, as diagrammed in Figure III.8. From 2010 to 2020, a quarter of Vietnamese businesses have disappeared, from 45 to 34 businesses, as calculated in Table III.5. That is a reduction from 38% to 27% of all businesses on the four blocks. Other ethnic businesses have largely stayed the same while non-ethnic businesses have gained 63% more. That's 19 more non-ethnic businesses or 39% of the neighborhood. As the threats of new redevelopments loom large, Little Saigon stands to lose more of its Vietnamese identity in the years to come.

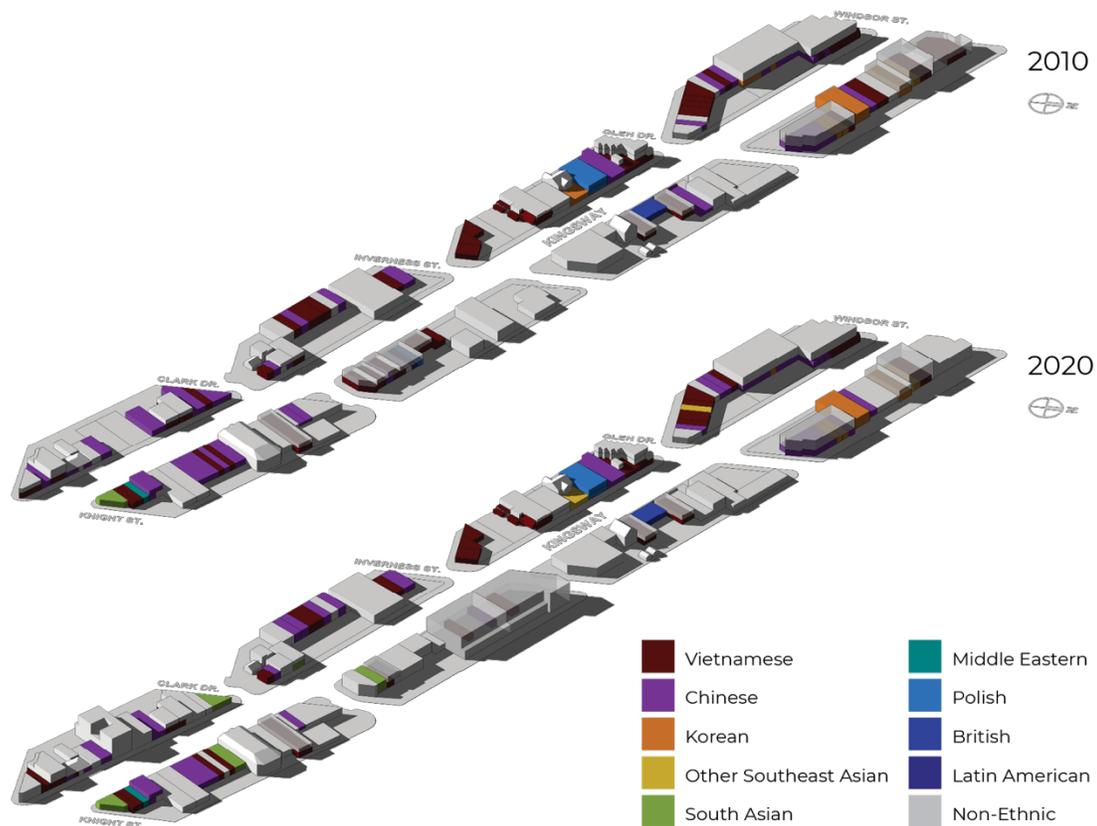


Figure III.8. Diagram of ethnic businesses in Little Saigon in 2010 and 2020 (Diagram by author)

Number of Ethnic Businesses in Little Saigon						
Ethnic Business	2010		2020		Change	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Vietnamese	45	37.5%	34	26.8%	-11	-24.4%
Chinese	31	25.8%	28	22.0%	-3	-9.7%
Korean	8	6.7%	5	3.9%	-3	-37.5%
Other Southeast Asian	1	0.8%	3	2.4%	+2	200%
South Asian	1	0.8%	5	3.9%	+4	400%
Middle Eastern	1	0.8%	1	0.8%	-	-
Polish	1	0.8%	1	0.8%	-	-
British	1	0.8%	1	0.8%	-	-
Latin American	1	0.8%	0	-	-1	-100%
Non-Ethnic	30	25.0%	49	38.6%	+19	63.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>		<b>127</b>		<b>+7</b>	

Table III.5. Number of ethnic businesses in Little Saigon in 2010 and 2020 (Table by author)

Census data also reveal a flight of ethnic residents from Census Tract 9330032.00, which includes Little Saigon and surrounding residential blocks, as shown in Table III.6. While the Vietnamese population has stayed under 10% of this neighborhood from 1996 to 2016, Chinese and Filipinx are leaving it. Residents of European descent who were a little more than a third of the area in 2001 are now almost a half of all residents. Though it is normal for a neighborhood to change its ethnic composition over time, it may border a problematic threat of gentrification and economic displacement by the racial majority. This is yet to be seen, but it is also important for the neighborhood to strategize against the possible gentrification.

Ethnic Composition of Census Tract 9330032.00										
Ethnicity	1996		2001		2006		2011		2016	
	Pop.	% to Total								
Vietnamese	430	6.2%	445	6.0%	695	9.6%	545	6.6%	675	7.4%
Chinese	2535	36.3%	2680	35.9%	2545	35.2%	2165	26.2%	2395	26.3%
Filipinx	640	9.2%	1030	13.8%	900	12.4%	1145	13.9%	880	9.7%
European	2730	39.1%	2605	34.9%	2595	35.9%	3400	41.2%	4340	47.7%
Others	652	9.3%	703	9.4%	500	6.9%	994	12.0%	808	8.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6987</b>		<b>7463</b>		<b>7235</b>		<b>8249</b>		<b>9098</b>	

Table III.6. Ethnic composition of Census Tract 9330032.00 which includes Little Saigon, from 1996 to 2016

Sources: Statistics Canada, "Table 1004351 J9102 - Population by Ethnic Origin (24), Showing Single and Multiple Origins (2), 1991 Census," June 1, 1993.

Statistics Canada, "Table 93F0026XDB96001 Population by Ethnic Origin (188) and Sex (3), Showing Single and Multiple Responses (3), for Canada, Provinces, Territories and Census Metropolitan Areas, 1996 Census," February 17, 1998. Distributed by Statistics Canada.

Statistics Canada, "Table 97F0010XCB2001001 Ethnic Origin (232), Sex (3) and Single and Multiple Responses (3) for Population, for Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2001 Census," January 21, 2003.

Statistics Canada, "Table 94-580-XCB2006001 Profile of Ethnic Origin and Visible Minorities for Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Divisions and Census Subdivisions, 2006 Census," April 2, 2008.

Statistics Canada, "Table 99-010-X2011028 Ethnic Origin (264), Single and Multiple Ethnic Origin Responses (3), Generation Status (4), Age Groups (10) and Sex (3) for the Population in Private Households of Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2011 National Household Survey," May 8, 2013.

Statistics Canada, "Table 98-400-X2016189 Ethnic Origin (101), Age (15A), Sex (3) and Selected Demographic, Cultural, Labour Force, Educational and Income Characteristics (651) for the Population in Private Households of Canada, 2016 Census," May 30, 2018.

### III.5. Is Little Saigon Getting Gentrified?

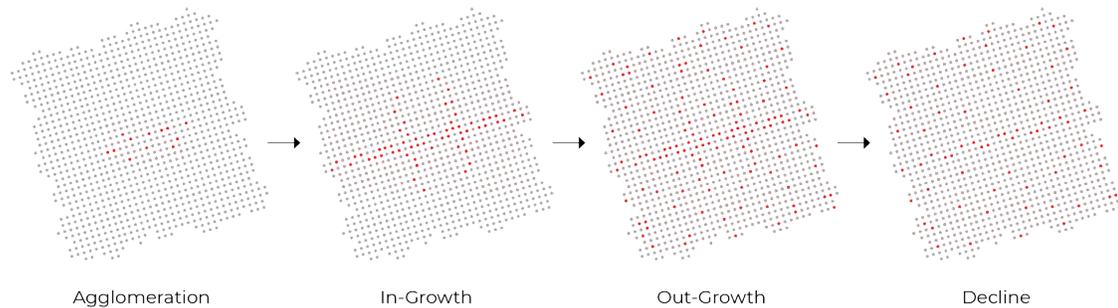


Illustration III.1. Diagram of the growth and decline of an ethnic neighborhood (Diagram by author)

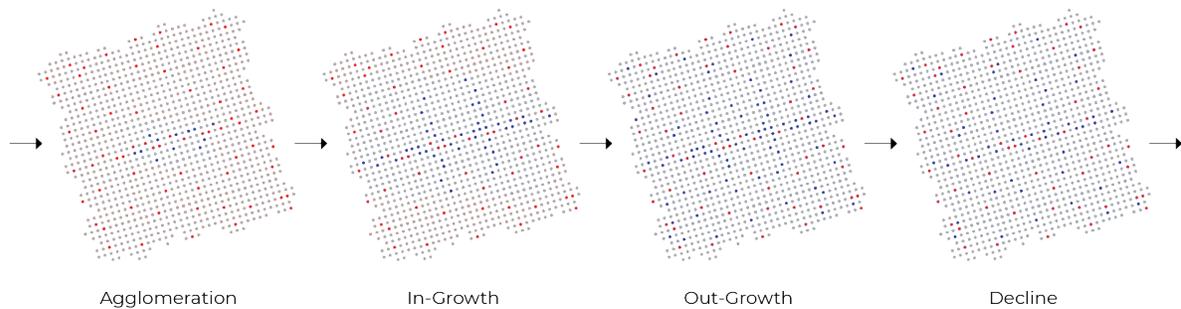


Illustration III.2. Diagram of the demographic cycle in an ethnic neighborhood (Diagram by author)

As one group disintegrates, a new group settles in.

Compared to Vancouver’s Chinatown, Little Italy, Greektown, and Punjabi Market, the Vietnamese one is relatively young. The older ones have changed drastically since their heydays. Chinese residents have opted to settle in the suburban municipality of Richmond where more than half of the population is of Chinese descent, leaving Chinatown in decline. Meanwhile, Italian Canadians have well integrated into Canadian society and their identity has blurred and blended. And South Asian residents and businesses have settled in suburban Surrey instead of Punjabi Market. Today, these ethnic neighborhoods are experiencing waves of redevelopment that threaten the livelihood of low-income ethnic residents.

Rents become unaffordable, and poverty is commodified for hipsters and tourists. Redevelopments in these areas were often met with pushbacks from activists.<sup>60</sup>

The situation is less clear in Little Saigon as the average commercial rents are still lower and the stock of older developments is higher than most parts of the city. However, as analyzed earlier in this chapter, local rents and property taxes in Cedar Cottage have been rising rapidly in recent years, making the place too expensive for low-income residents and small businesses to find a footing. Also, Vietnamese residents are not moving to the suburbs as many still choose to settle in East Vancouver. Today, Little Saigon is losing many of its established businesses while gaining many unaffordable rental spaces. The gentrification process started, but it has been slow. However, with a string of upcoming redevelopments, it is accelerating.

The conflict between gentrification and upward mobility in minority neighborhoods has also been a subject of sociological scholarship. As residents of such neighborhoods become upwardly mobile, they carry out localization projects to make their places safer, more attractive, and more livable. That inadvertently attracts more non-minority residents to settle in and drives the cost up, which in turn pushes the lower-income locals out. Likewise, when the city invests in such neighborhoods, it is paving a pathway to their gentrification. This theory holds in Little Saigon and many neighborhoods along Kingsway where recent beautification and cultural celebration projects have made it cleaner and drawn more tourists and hipsters to the area. That effectively brings more real estate investments and renders it unaffordable. How this conflict plays out in Little Saigon requires further analysis by sociological methods, but this paper only generalize it to take a closer look into its effect on the built environment.

Slow gentrification has been studied in ethnic neighborhoods in Toronto. As some of them have bled their ethnic residents to suburbs, luxury high-rise buildings are dotting their streets.<sup>61</sup> This creates a visual conflict as well as a policy one. Toronto and Vancouver both claim to celebrate multiculturalism but have done little to retain ethnic identities in their urban policies. Neighborhoods such as Little Italy may find an easier time navigating gentrification since their co-ethnic residents have become successful in various sectors of the urban economy and generously fund the projects of their community. For once-marginalized and low- to middle-income neighborhoods such as Chinatown and Little Saigon, they need all the help they can get from the city.

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<sup>60</sup> Nat Lowe, "Class Struggle in Chinatown: Ethnic Tourism, Planned Gentrification, and Organizing for Tenant Power," *The Mainlander*, July 16, 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Hackworth and Rekers, "Ethnic Packaging and Gentrification," 211.

This cooperation between policymakers, developers, and the community to mitigate the effects of gentrification is working in many places. In Wheaton, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C., immigrant and minority business owners and residents banded together to demand the city to address the impending gentrification of their neighborhood.<sup>62</sup> The city listened and conceded to several of their demands. However, the deal was not perfect since many businesses were left out since their profit margins did not meet the requirement to get official help. Despite that, many local businesses were able to remain and restructure in anticipation of the redevelopment.

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<sup>62</sup> Lung-Amam, "Surviving Suburban Redevelopment," 6.

# IV. An Evolution of Little Saigon

Though high rents and the threats of redevelopment have hindered Vietnamese economic activities in Little Saigon, there are opportunities that Vietnamese entrepreneurs and communities elsewhere have taken to circumvent their challenges. These movements, when carefully examined, can inspire creative solutions to retain and evolve the identity of the ethnic neighborhood.

Those opportunities have allowed the new Vietnamese Upward Mobility Model to emerge. In this model, the refugee identity has become less relevant while cultural hybridization is on the rise. Young Vietnamese entrepreneurs are taking advantage of their technological savviness to look for opportunities in the modern economy. The new entrepreneurial goal is no longer to move into the middle class but to succeed in the global market. The new model, as visualized in Figure IV.1, follows three phases. At first, young or immigrant entrepreneurs open a business in an affordable place while utilizing social media and e-commerce. Then they expand the business into a larger space in a trendier neighborhood with the help of an outside investor. Finally, they grow the business into a chain with an investment from a venture capitalist.

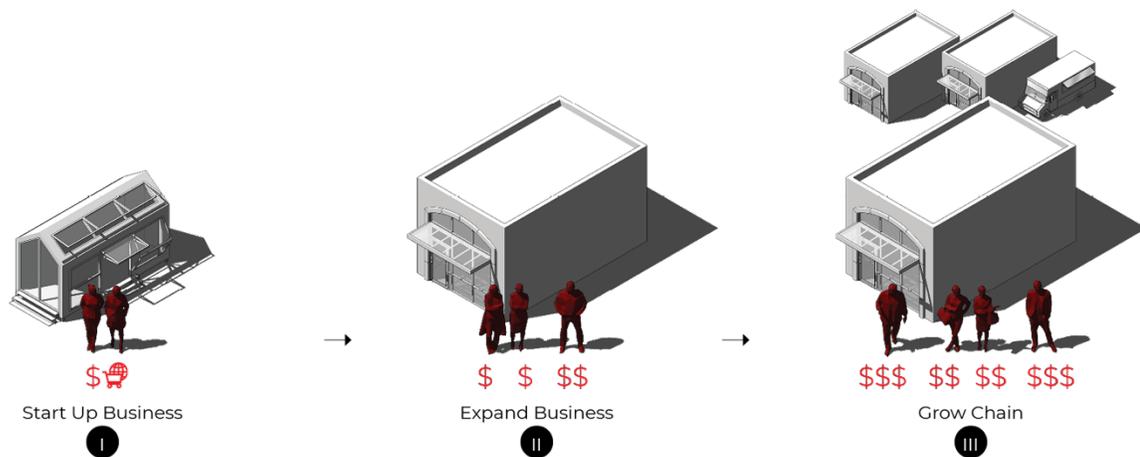


Figure IV.1. Diagram of the extended Upward Mobility Model of Little Saigon (Diagram by author)

The model follows a three-phase narrative: (I) Young or immigrant entrepreneurs start up a business in an affordable place and utilizing e-commerce; (II) They expand the business into a larger space in a more prominent neighborhood with the help of an outside investor; (III) They grow the business into a chain with an investment from a venture capitalist.

As the Upward Mobility Model is updated, the identities of the entrepreneurs also evolve. They include Vietnamese from different socioeconomic backgrounds, from unskilled immigrants to those with higher education and affluent family sponsors, as charted in Figure IV.2. Kingsway and Little Saigon still offer them an opportunity to start and grow their businesses of different types and scales.

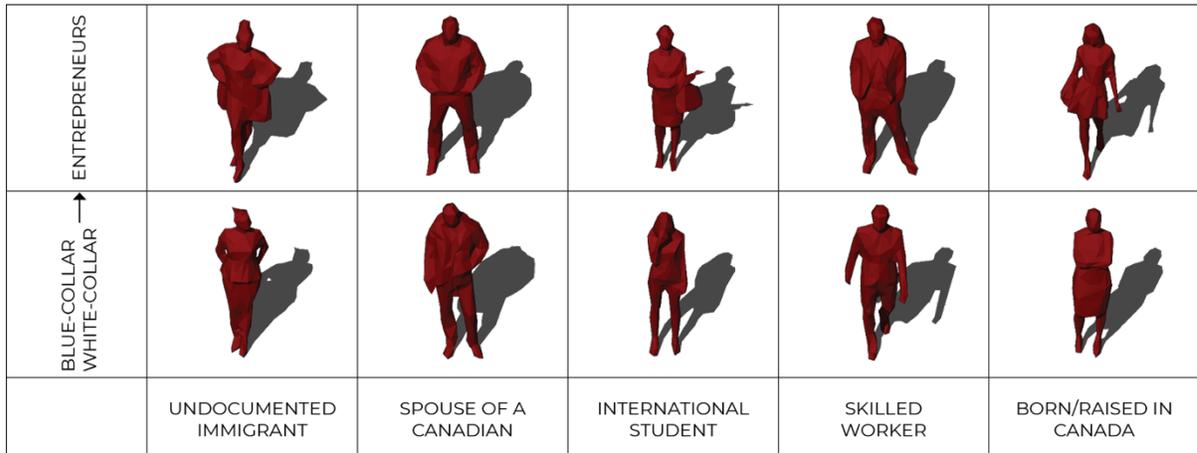


Figure IV.2. Diagram of simplified intersectionality of Vietnamese “white-collar entrepreneurs” in Greater Vancouver (Diagram by author)

## **IV.1. Ethnic Neighborhoods Protection and Promotion**

### **IV.1.1. Opportunities**

#### **Kingsway Urbanism**

The inequality in infrastructural investment between Kingsway and wealthier parts of the city needs to be addressed. The perception is that this ethnic and immigrant area does not deserve the free urban amenities of the neighborhoods of Downtown, Fairview, Kitsilano, and so on. However, the city's investment into this area can also diminish its affordability and accelerate gentrification. The balance between infrastructural improvement and gentrification is delicate, as briefly discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, the types of investment in the Kingsway area must be low-cost and must cater to the local needs.

Kingsway, as a rapidly urbanizing street, is full of missed opportunities for redesign. Despite the increasing densification, Kingsway still lacks some of the most basic urban amenities often seen in the downtown area such as bike lanes, bike racks, curbside patios, etc. There are strip malls with underused parking lots and curb cuts unfriendly to pedestrians. The only bus that runs through most parts of Kingsway does not come often enough. In the four blocks of Little Saigon, some crosswalks are more than 300 meters apart, compared to the average of 100 meters distance in the downtown area. The evolution of Little Saigon starts with the improvement of its infrastructure to address the needs of those who live, work, and shop there.

There are already spaces in Little Saigon that offer pedestrian and cyclist engagement such as the mini-plazas at the intersection of Kingsway and Clark Drive, and the slow street of Glen Drive. However, these moments are rare and need to be replicated.

The most important missed opportunity on Kingsway is its automobile-oriented urbanism. The rapid densification of the area calls for a mixed-mode transportation urban design which includes pedestrians and cyclists. This inclusion will attract more foot traffic to the area and contribute to its commercial vibrancy.

#### **Ethnic Neighborhoods Protection**

The city of Vancouver currently has five designated Historic Neighborhoods.<sup>63</sup> Chinatown is the only ethnic neighborhood on this list. Downtown Eastside can also be considered one since it used to host Japantown and Hogan's Alley and is

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<sup>63</sup> City of Vancouver, "Historic Neighbourhoods," *City of Vancouver*, accessed April 17, 2021, <https://vancouver.ca/news-calendar/historic-neighbourhoods.aspx>.

home to many First Nations residents. These neighborhoods dated back to the beginning of the city. However, many ethnic neighborhoods in the city are not protected such as Punjabi Market, Little Italy, Greektown, and Little Saigon. These neighborhoods are not as old as historic neighborhoods, but they have played a significant role in the city's culture and economy. This is an opportunity for the city to recognize their contributions and celebrate its multicultural urbanism. A new type of neighborhood protection must be considered to keep ethnic neighborhoods from eroding and disintegrating altogether.

### **Non-Profit Organizations**

Another opportunity to strengthen the ethnic presence in Little Saigon's commercial space is the formation of a Business Improvement Area (BIA). BIAs are "specially funded business districts" that are managed by non-profit groups of property owners and business tenants whose goal is to promote and improve their business district."<sup>64</sup> There are 22 BIAs in the city of Vancouver. The businesses and landlords in these districts pay an extra tax on their properties to fund projects that benefit their local business environment as a whole. BIAs such as the Downtown Vancouver BIAs have been responsible for projects such as the laneway transformations. There are currently two BIAs covering the beginning and end of Kingsway - Mount Pleasant BIA and Collingwood BIA. There is no BIA covering the section from Fraser Street to Rupert Street. If Little Saigon were a part of a BIA, it might be able to invest in its identity.

The closest Little Saigon came to forming a BIA was the Metro Vancouver Vietnamese Canadian Business Association (MVVCBA). This organization was founded before the Tet Parade in 2011 but was dissolved in 2015. However, their membership was not grounded on the geography of a business area, but rather on the ethnicity of the businesses. As suggested by its name, it covered the entire metro area, not just Kingsway.

The only group that is still in charge of taking care of Little Saigon, figuratively speaking, is the Little Saigon Vancouver Foundation who has been responsible for the lamppost banners in Little Saigon and the Monument of Vietnamese Boat People. They have held fundraising events and funded the designs for these projects. However, this group's funding is limited, and their concerns often focus on non-commercial projects for the Vietnamese community. A hybrid of the MVVCBA and the Foundation may be what is needed in Little Saigon. It can be an organization that promotes various businesses, including Vietnamese, from Fraser Street to Rupert Street.

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<sup>64</sup> City of Vancouver, "Business Improvement Areas (BIAs)," *City of Vancouver*, accessed April 13, 2021, <https://vancouver.ca/doing-business/business-improvement-areas-bias.aspx>.

Housing affordability organizations such as the Affordable Housing Societies have developed, owned, and managed “rental housing for low- and moderate-income families, seniors, and singles/couples” in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia.<sup>65</sup> These organizations have contributed to the retention of affordable homes through the rapid rise of housing costs in Greater Vancouver.

Another prominent organization in the metro area is the Community Land Trust. It is self-described as “a non-profit, social-purpose real estate developer and asset steward.”<sup>66</sup> It also targets low- to moderate-income households.

There are no such organizations for affordable commercial rentals. This is understandable because retail activities are not a basic need, and the lack of affordable commercial rent does not result in immediate health risks or the deterioration of living conditions. However, as explained throughout this thesis, entrepreneurialism is a vital part of the immigrant and ethnic communities, especially those in the low- to middle-income brackets. Therefore, it is just as important for non-profit organizations to invest in these places to retain their affordability. An organization dedicating to the supply of low-cost retail units can have a profound impact on Kingsway and other parts of East Vancouver.

### **Benefits for Developers and Landlords**

There are many benefits for developers and landlords to bolster their support for ethnic neighborhoods and ethnic entrepreneurialism. First, ethnic small businesses add cultural values to the properties and vary the offerings of the retail spaces. Second, supporting ethnic neighborhoods brings the developers and landlords ethical credentials. Third, it draws more foot traffic and customers to the neighborhood, boosting the local economy, which in turn benefit property owners. Finally, funding projects that help the neighborhood simultaneously increase the price of the properties and profit their owners in the long term.

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<sup>65</sup> Affordable Housing Societies, “About AHS,” *Affordable Housing Societies*, accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.affordablehousingsocieties.ca/about-ahs/>.

<sup>66</sup> Community Land Trust, “About Us,” Community Land Trust, accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.cltrust.ca/about/>.

## IV.1.2. Design

### Corner Mini-Plazas, Crosswalks, and Slow Street Plazas

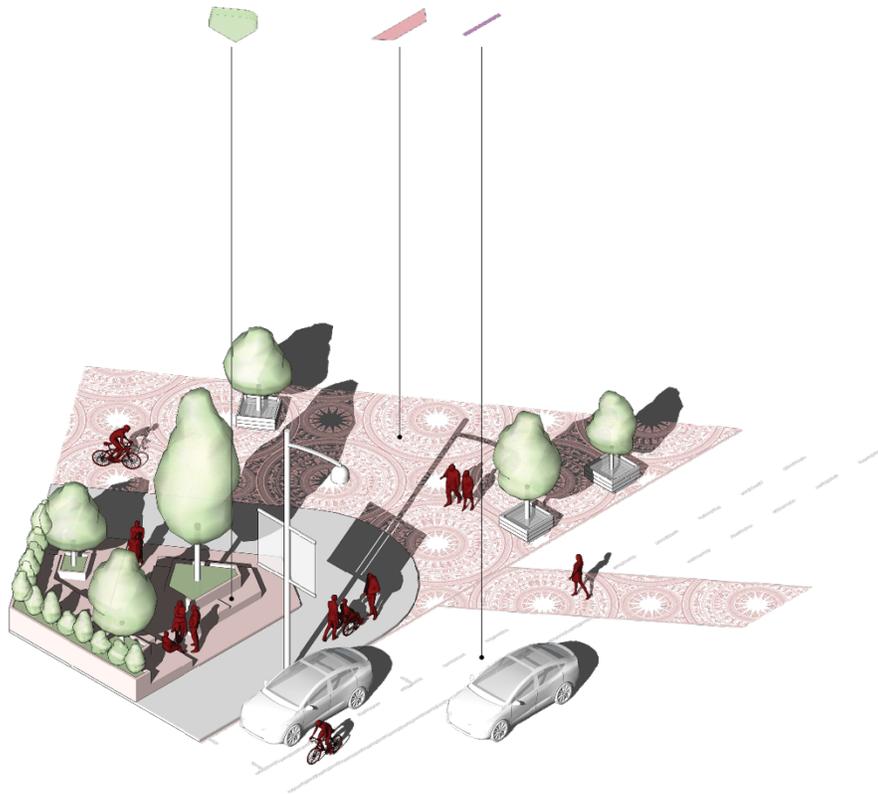


Figure IV.3. Diagram of a corner on Kingsway (Diagram by author)

Because of the diagonality of Kingsway, its intersection with the regular city grid creates many pointed or expansive corners on the sidewalk, some of which are turned into mini-plazas. Two of them are located at the Clark Drive and Kingsway intersection. In the four blocks of Little Saigon, there are several block corners that can be converted into mini-plazas. They include one at Glen Drive and Kingsway and two at Inverness and Kingsway. Each mini-plaza features a seating, vegetation, and an art installation by a local artist (Figure IV.3).

An additional crosswalk is created at the Inverness and Kingsway intersection to shorten the distance between two closest crosswalks, from more than 300 meters to less than 160 meters.

Glen Drive is currently a designated slow street which imposes the speed limit of 40 km/h. The area where Glen Drive meets Kingsway is converted to two plazas on each side of the thoroughfare, which are exclusively preserved for pedestrians and cyclists.

## Pedestrian and Cyclist Infrastructure

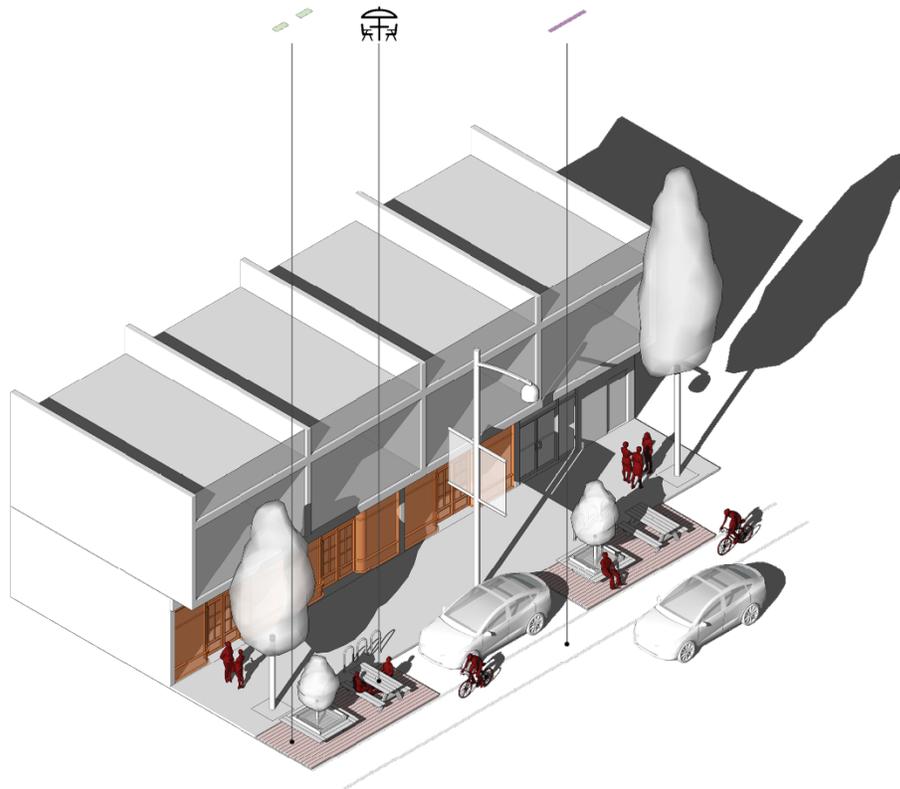


Figure IV.4. Diagram of Kingsway street redesign (Diagram by author)

The redesign of Kingsway will include bike lanes on both sides of the street and the substitution of curbside parking spots with restaurant patios and parklets (Figure IV.4).

## Strip Mall Markets

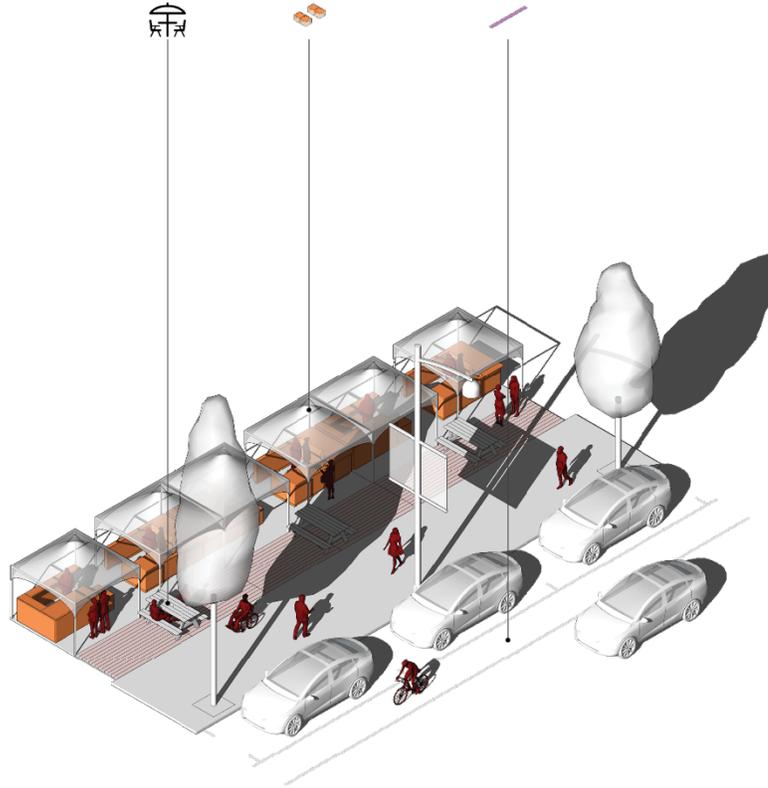


Figure IV.5. Diagram of a street food market in a strip mall's parking lot (Diagram by author)

There are many strip malls throughout the length of Kingsway. These developments have large parking lots fronting Kingsway that are underused. In fact, the four blocks of Little Saigon currently have four strip malls with such parking lots. This thesis reimagines the use of the parking lots as a fresh food market or a street food market during the summer (Figure IV.5).

### **IV.1.3. Policy Alternatives**

#### **Planning**

This thesis proposes a new street planning for Kingsway to prioritize foot traffic and include the cycling mode of transport, reorienting it from automobile reliance. Crosswalks are created on every block. Curbside parking is limited during the summer to allow for parklets and patios to occupy. Bike lanes are added throughout the length of Kingsway, from Main Street to Boundary Road, even extending to Burnaby and New Westminster. Slow streets are replicated while some parts of these streets are turned into exclusive pedestrian zones, especially near their intersection with Kingsway.

This proposal also involves TransLink, the public transit authority of Metro Vancouver conglomeration. It recommends expanding transit service on Kingsway by increasing the frequency of Line 19 and adding a RapidBus route along the length of the street.

The purpose of diversifying transportation modes and creating more public spaces is to bring more foot traffic to Kingsway, boosting the economics of its ethnic small businesses. That will not only help the local businesses but also the residents.

#### **Ethnocultural District**

The thesis also proposes a new set of initiatives that protects ethnic neighborhoods and encourages culturally sustainable development in these places. A new designation that meets halfway between a Historic Neighborhood and an official recognition needs to be put forward. Call them Ethnocultural Districts. This designation targets organic and distinctive ethnic neighborhoods that originated in ethnic entrepreneurialism and morphed into ethnic cultural centers. The purpose of the designation is to protect these neighborhoods from gentrification and promote their localization efforts. The neighborhoods include Punjabi Market, Little Italy, Greektown, and Little Saigon. They also include other smaller ethnic pockets such as Latino and Filipinx ones along Kingsway.

The Ethnocultural District designation is aided by the formation of a local board whose purpose is to review and make recommendations to the rezoning applications. This board is made up of local business owners, property owners, and longtime residents. They are nominated by the local community and appointed by the City Council. Effectively, they act as a mediator between the community, the city, and the developers.

Another mission of this board is to promote the retention of the local ethnic identity while welcoming its sustainable evolution. The board will voice their non-binding opinions on new redevelopments and businesses to promote small businesses and limit the number of national chains or franchises and non-ethnic businesses without local roots. This limit has been enforced in Granville Island, which is owned by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, administered by an appointed board, and operates as a company.<sup>67</sup> Though the new Ethnocultural District designation does not go as far as to grant veto power to the local community or allow them to be financially independent, it brings them in the conversation of the city-making process and encourages developers to seek consent from the community.

#### **IV.1.4. Financial Alternatives**

##### **Cedar Cottage BIA**

This thesis proposes a business improvement area for the Kingsway section in the Kensington-Cedar Cottage neighborhood, which covers Little Saigon. Recognizing the ethnic diversity of businesses in Little Saigon and along Kingsway, this BIA is inclusive of different ethnic backgrounds and types of businesses. It is named Cedar Cottage BIA.

The mission of Cedar Cottage BIA is to promote the local business environment through meaningful place-making efforts. These efforts include public spaces, permanent markers, ephemeral events such as the construction of parklets and plazas, crosswalk redesign, laneway transformation projects, design and installation of signs and banners, seasonal cultural markets, etc. The Cedar Cottage Business Improvement Association, which is responsible for the execution and management of these efforts, is created and funded by local businesses and property owners. The funding of the BIA needs to be further studied and determined by the tax levied on the local properties. With the formation of the BIA, Cedar Cottage's Kingsway will have a more reliable source of funding and an incentive for participation and solidarity of different ethnic cultures beyond the Vietnamese.

##### **Kingsway Community Land Trust**

Another proposal to retain the social fabric of the ethnic neighborhood is through a non-profit organization that provides low- to middle-income households with affordable retail spaces. This proposal requires a joint effort of many different actors, from local business owners, property owners, government grants, and

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<sup>67</sup> Granville Island, "Leasing Guidelines," *Granville Island*, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://admin.granvilleisland.com/leasing/how-to-lease/>.

donations from real estate corporations. Call it Kingsway Community Land Trust. The mission of this non-profit organization is to fundraise, purchase old buildings or empty parking lots along Kingsway, renovate them, subdivide their spaces into small and very small retail units, and lease these units back at an affordable price. The purpose is to secure a dependable supply of low-cost retail spaces on the street, effectively allowing small and underfunded businesses to remain and thrive.

The conditions to be accepted to rent in Kingsway Community Land Trust's retail units will be further studied to deter ungentle actors from profiting off this incentive. One of the conditions can be to limit the length of the lease. This can be as short as six months to one year. The limit allows businesses to start-up, build their branding, gain recognition, and move on to a new larger space. However, the lease is reviewed annually and can be renewed if the business adds to the values of the place.

## IV.2. Ephemeral and Micro Retail

### IV.2.1. Opportunities

#### Vietnamese E-Commerce

Ethnic communities no longer function the same way as in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century when much literature on urban ethnic enclaves was produced. They even behave differently compared to just over a decade ago. Social media have become ubiquitous and replace many physical activities in ethnic neighborhoods. Health information and legal assistance can easily be found via online “friends” and discussion groups. There are social media groups dedicated to particular identities or interests such as Vietnamese international students in UBC, Vietnamese foodies in Vancouver, or housings for Vietnamese newcomers in Greater Vancouver.

A *Facebook* group named “Group of Vietnamese in Vancouver” boasts almost 38,000 members as of April 2021. Another called “Hẻm Ăn Uống Vancouver” - meaning “Vancouver Eat and Drink Alley” - has 8,600 members while “Hẻm Nhà Trọ Vancouver” or “Vancouver Apartments Alley” is supported by 4,000. These groups are especially helpful to newcomers in Greater Vancouver who seek ways to connect to their cultural roots, especially their cuisine, and affordable housing options.

One no longer needs to find information on health, immigration, or taxes in the Vietnamese language in traditional community places such as supermarkets, coffee shops, and hair salons. Social media groups efficiently offer this voluntary help today. They are generally more responsive and involve fewer personal interactions with information seekers, which is preferred in the contemporary online culture. These groups have become a sort of bulletin board or community center where cultural events are advertised, real estates are promoted, employment openings and supermarket flyers are posted, international money exchanges are carried out, charities are fundraised, tax and hate crimes are reported, and countless commercial transactions are made.

Commercial activities regularly happen within those groups. This study found many small online businesses, mostly self-employed, that post their offerings on the groups daily. Offerings range from DIY makeup products to homecooked dishes and imported regional specialties from Vietnam. The groups have become a bustling marketplace for Vietnamese from all walks of life to participate in entrepreneurialism.

The most common type of business in social media groups is food catering. As argued in Chapter II, since food is an essential part of Vietnamese culture, the

commodification of this cultural product is universally welcome among the community. These businesses often do not have an established location, but rather make and sell foods from their own homes. Then they offer short-distance delivery or pickup outside their homes. Some businesses thrive on Lunar New Year by selling traditional treats such as Bánh Chung and Bánh Tét. Others only do it part-time and sometimes return by popular demand.

E-commerce has been around for decades. So have online classified advertisements and social media commerce. E-commerce websites, such as *eBay*, *craigslist*, and *Facebook*, have facilitated online commercial activities for years. However, what is unique about Vietnamese e-commerce in Vancouver is the ethnic identity and the transnational entrepreneurial behaviors that the vendors carry. Small-time transactions of services and goods on social media have taken Vietnam's economy by storm since *Facebook* became dominant in the country. This is the country whose informal economy takes up as high as 27% of its GDP in 2015.<sup>68</sup> Naturally, technologically savvy small-time entrepreneurs are quick to capitalize on e-commerce. E-commerce on *Facebook* and other social media sites has allowed Vietnamese small business owners to reach customers beyond their neighborhoods from their bedrooms.<sup>69</sup> This entrepreneurial behavior is then brought overseas to cities with sizable Vietnamese communities such as Vancouver.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated Vietnamese online entrepreneurialism. Though it has destroyed countless lives and disrupted the Canadian economy and social connections in the past year, it has also opened up new ways of running a business. Business owners in Canada have flocked to applications such as *Shopify* and *Uber* to sustain their businesses despite their resentment at the hefty commission fees. For Vietnamese informal entrepreneurs, it is almost natural for them to reject the middlemen's schemes and find a way to keep all their profit as they move online. Promoting their businesses and their products on gratuitous social media groups is a necessary way for small-time entrepreneurs to reduce the cost. The majority of Vietnamese online businesses discovered for the research of this thesis were started in 2020, after the first outbreak of the disease in Canada. The collapse of the service industry and the loss of minimum-wage jobs, especially among women, have pushed many to find

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<sup>68</sup> Nguyen Thai Hoa, "How Large is Vietnam's Informal Economy?" *Economic Affairs* 39, (01, 2019): 81.

<sup>69</sup> Nguyen Huu Phuoc Dai and Dang Thai Binh. "The Impact of E-Commerce in Vietnamese SMEs." *European Journal of Business Science and Technology* 3, no. 2 (2017): 90.

new ways of earning a living.<sup>70</sup> All of the businesses aforementioned are owned by Vietnamese women.

As modestly successful as online small-time entrepreneurs are at the moment, there will be challenges or even larger opportunities awaiting them ahead. Those Vietnamese social media groups are currently run by volunteers. When the groups grow larger, their maintenance lags, and members' interest wanes down, vendors may no longer find them useful in promoting their businesses. Successful vendors may even want to capitalize on their online reputation to open physical shops. The future of the Vietnamese neighborhood, as well as the metro at large, may lie in the breakouts of these online vendors. Policies, finances, and spaces must be designed to accommodate that.

### **Ephemeral & Micro Retail in Vancouver and the Vietnamese community**

One of the strategies landlords, including the city of Vancouver, have employed to make entrepreneurialism more affordable is micro retail. The metro area itself has a fair stock of seasonal and very small businesses. Food trucks, food carts, pop-up shops, farmers' markets, food markets, flea markets, micro retail have been around for quite some time. The downtown area has a few food trucks and stalls in its popular public spaces. Granville Island offers some unique pop-up retail units in addition to its larger anchors. The Richmond Night Market and the West End Farmers Market are famous marketplaces for small vendors during the summertime. The Downtown Eastside Flea Market welcomes the smallest size of vending with almost no entry barrier, allowing unhoused people to earn a living. The Parker Place in Richmond and the Crystal Mall in Burnaby host numerous Chinese businesses in micro units.

Despite the variety of ephemeral and micro retail places, the municipalities are also famous for their strict laws on where commercial activities can take place and for the small number of those places. Street food has been in high demand for years, but approved sites are scarce, and the city has struggled to approve new ones.<sup>71</sup> The waitlists to Granville Island and other marketplaces are long while the rent is virtually unaffordable for many as detailed in Table III.4 of the previous chapter.

There are also vacant retail spaces in new developments that are too large to attract any viable tenants. Such a project in Port Coquitlam has had its developer

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<sup>70</sup> Gillian Wheatley, "Pandemic Job Losses Threaten to Leave Women behind Permanently, RBC Warns," *CBC News*, March 4, 2021.

<sup>71</sup> Uytay Lee, "How Vancouver's Food Trucks Were Stalled by Regulations," *CBC News*, July 20, 2019.

apply for rezoning to subdivide those spaces into smaller ones.<sup>72</sup> Vacancies are not only seen in larger units but also prevalent in medium-large units in new developments. Well-funded developers of mid-rise and high-rise developments can afford to deprioritize the occupation of their retail spaces.<sup>73</sup> These spaces can sit empty for years until they find a tenant.

Meanwhile, many retail malls offer the opposite in the unit size spectrum. Chinese shopping malls in Richmond and Burnaby have the majority of their stores in micro sizes. Erica S. Allen-Kim discussed in length this phenomenon where transnational investment and migration from Hong Kong to Canada have shaped the size of the stores in these malls.<sup>74</sup> The spatial consequence is a vibrant marketplace filled with mom-and-pop ethnic businesses that offer affordable services. Micro shops elsewhere also serve as a unique addition to the city and bring economic equity to the retail landscape.<sup>75</sup>

In an expensive city such as Vancouver, micro spaces have become a reality for many. Micro and studio apartments have popped up around the city. Short-term retail leases - by hours or by days - have been trending in listings. Micro retail is taking a larger role in the entrepreneurial culture of the city. That has unique consequences in design, branding, and consumer experience.

Ephemeral retail has been trendy in the contemporary economy. Ghalia Boustani, in her studies of this trend since the 1990s, finds that “postmodern consumers are those continuously seeking meaning through their acts of consumption.”<sup>76</sup> That means contemporary consumers are looking not only for goods and services to consume but also the experience of consuming them. Therefore, an ephemeral consumption experience capitalizes on that by bringing novelty, uniqueness, and values to the brand. This is especially useful in the age of e-commerce. Boustani notes:

*[...] ephemeral stores represent a considerable opportunity for online businesses (pure players) that do not wish to have a permanent physical sales outlet or that wish to humanize the*

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<sup>72</sup> Jon Hernandez, “A Decade into Construction, Port Coquitlam Development Still Trying to Attract Businesses,” *CBC News*, March 17, 2021.

<sup>73</sup> Rachel Quednau, “What’s up with All Those Empty Commercial Storefronts in New Mixed-Use Developments?,” *Strong Towns*, December 14, 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Erica S. Allen-Kim, “Condos in the Mall: Suburban Transnational Typological Transformations in Markham, Ontario,” in *Making Cities Global: The Transnational Turn in Urban History*, eds. A. K. Sandoval-Strausz and Nancy Kwak, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 133.

<sup>75</sup> Rachel Quednau, “Low-Cost Pop-up Shops Create Big Value in Muskegon, Michigan,” *Strong Towns*, February 20, 2018.

<sup>76</sup> Ghalia Boustani, *Ephemeral Retailing: Pop-Up Stores in a Postmodern Consumption Era*, (Milton Park, New York, Routledge, 2020), 20.

*relationship with Internet users who do not have the chance to be in contact with the digital brand.*

The trend in pop-up stores has profound implications for online ethnic businesses. The opportunities that the online entrepreneurs aforementioned are presented in ephemeral retailing are enormous. The city and developers should take note.

Vietnamese entrepreneurs in Vancouver have also capitalized on micro retail trends and injected a modern twist into Vietnamese soul foods and drinks. NaMi Food Cart, selling Bánh Mì out of a trailer at the intersection of West Georgia and Granville streets, was opened in 2019 by a 23-year-old entrepreneur.<sup>77</sup> The business is also equipped with a sleek website and youthful photography on social media. Ca Phe Vietnamese Coffee House was a successful pop-up project by the Food Network alumnus Andrew Han, who went on to open his Kouign Café on East Pender Street.<sup>78</sup> The coffee shop plus bakery also has an elegant online branding. These businesses have shown micro retail can be both affordable and trendy at the same time while redefining their contemporary Vietnamese identity.

### **Incentives by Financial Institutions**

Historically and even today, financial institutions such as banks and credit unions have had a disreputable record of structural racism.<sup>79</sup> Entrepreneurs of color are often overlooked and offered less favorable deals than their white counterparts. Recently, these institutions have committed to offer several limited incentives to new immigrants and refugees who are unfamiliar with the financial system of Canada. Vancity, or Vancouver City Savings Credit Union, offers a wide range of incentives such as financial literacy lessons and loans to refugee communities.<sup>80</sup> BDC, or the government-owned Business Development Bank of Canada, offers loans up to \$50,000 and business mentorship to immigrant entrepreneurs with little to no credit history.<sup>81</sup> However, these loans are only offered to those with a permanent residency, limiting their potential to attract more young immigrant

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<sup>77</sup> CBC News Staff, "23-Year-Old Vancouverite Opens Vietnamese Food Truck," *CBC News*, May 26, 2019.

<sup>78</sup> Andrew Morrison, "Ca Phe Vietnamese Coffee House Pop-Up Launching Soon on East Pender St.," *Scout Magazine*, March 4, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> Falice Chin, "Rudeness, Lengthy Questioning and Discrimination: What Black Entrepreneurs Face When They Go to the Bank," *CBC News*, October 31, 2020.

<sup>80</sup> Vancouver City Savings Credit Union, "Vancity's Investment and Support for Immigrants and Refugees," *Vancity*, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.vancity.com/AboutVancity/News/Backgrounders/Immigrants/>.

<sup>81</sup> Business Development Bank of Canada, "Newcomer Entrepreneurs - Finance Your New Business," *BDC*, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.bdc.ca/en/i-am/newcomer-entrepreneur>.

entrepreneurs. As Vietnamese and other immigrants continue to settle in Vancouver, more flexible loans are needed to help incentivize the immigrant retail landscape of the city.

### **Incentives by Developers and Landlords**

Tenant Improvement Allowance has been a major incentive to businesses. Money to retrofit or renovate the commercial rental has been offered by many landlords to attract prospective tenants. However, that often comes with a catch as tenants are faced with long leases, often from three to five years. This is especially risky to young and small businesses who may not be able to secure enough loans to cover the rent cost that far into the future. This type of lease is usually found in new and larger developments where developers favor tenant retention to secure more loans from their financing banks. This leaves their retail spaces filled with franchises and chain stores that are not unique and less likely to have ethnic offerings. The future tenant recruitment needs diversification of incentives to accommodate businesses beyond the mainstream and the familiar, which in turn will bring cultural vibrancy to the place. A shorter lease with a lower Tenant Improvement Allowance is counterintuitive for developers and landlords, but it may encourage more small ethnic businesses to open.

In the residential real estate sector, there have been experimental incentives offered to first-time homebuyers. Anthem Properties made headlines in 2019 with a housing development in North Vancouver, offering the rent-to-own financing option to less affluent households.<sup>82</sup> This financing option has not been discussed in the commercial real estate sector. It may facilitate longer ethnic business retention and allow financial gain to business owners when they sell their properties. The downside of this option is that some businesses do not have a long-term outlook as far as 20 to 30 years. However, it may still be a lucrative investment as they can sublet the property to another business. In fact, some of the Vietnamese businesses that can remain in Little Saigon own their buildings.

### **Benefits for Developers and Landlords**

By increasing their retail spaces and downscaling them, developers of new redevelopment can effectively make more profit. Micro spaces can be charged at a higher rate per sqft than larger ones while the total rent is low, nonetheless.

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<sup>82</sup> Elisia Seeber, "North Van District Approves 481 Units in Two Major Developments," *North Shore News*, January 12, 2021.

## IV.2.2. Design

### Redevelopment's Micro Retail

This thesis proposes that new redevelopments should include micro retail units. These units can be as small as 210 sqft (20 m<sup>2</sup>), as shown in (Figure IV.6). It can accommodate a diverse range of micro businesses, from clothing stores to dessert shops. Developers and landlords can subdivide their existing retail spaces into these micro units and still make as much profit while the tenants have more affordable options.

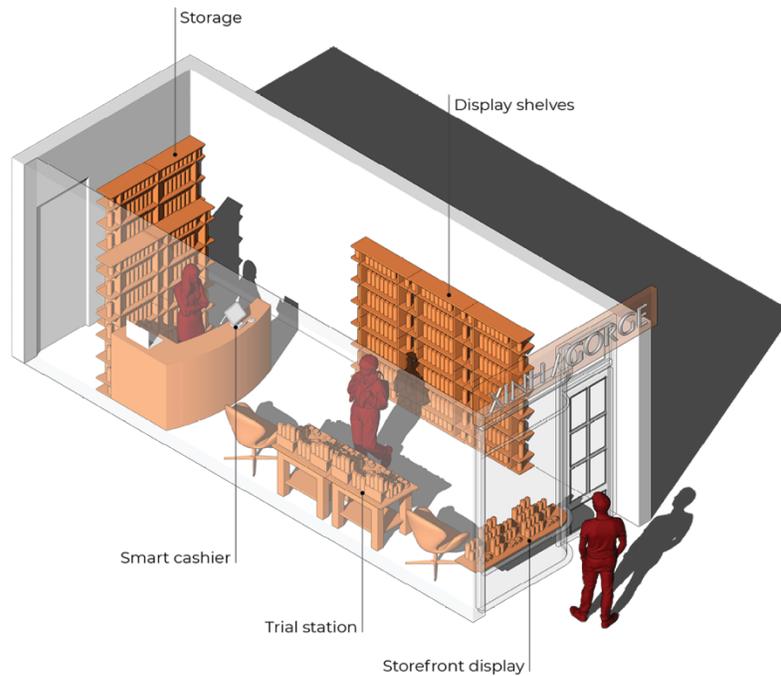


Figure IV.6. Diagram of a business inside a redevelopment's micro retail unit (Diagram by author)

## Pop-up shops

The underused parking lots on and off Kingsway present an opportunity for pop-up shops to fill. Each unit's usable area can be as small as 14 m<sup>2</sup> (150 sqft). They can be made of simple structures such as shipping containers, but these structures are only occupiable in the summer and removed during the winter due to their lack of insulation (Figure IV.7).

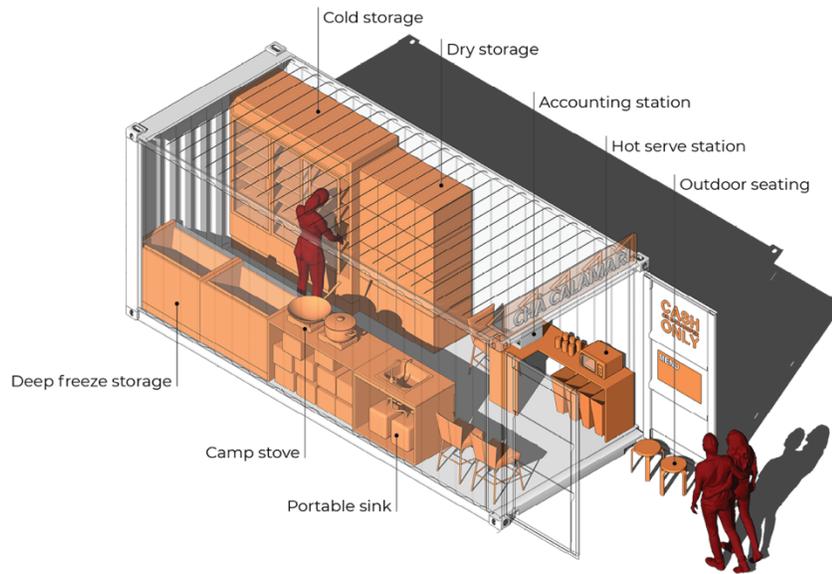


Figure IV.7. Diagram of a business inside a shipping container (Diagram by author)

## Shophouse-on-casters

A new type of pop-up structure is proposed to be occupiable year-round. The design of the structure is optimized to be economical, mobile, modular, and customizable. This new design is called “shophouse-on-casters”

The design starts with a modular shell (Figure IV.8). Each module is externally measured at 2.7 m (9 ft) in width, 6.2 m (20 ft) in length, and 3.7 m (12 ft) in height. Its usable area is approximately 14 m<sup>2</sup> (150 sqft). Then the final form can be customized into a variety of options (Figure IV.9). The first option is a micro shop open on a narrow side. This option fits in deeper parking lots (Figure IV.10). The second option is a micro shop open on the wide side for shallower parking lots (Figure IV.11). The third option is a larger shop made of two side-by-side modules and opens on a narrow side of a module. The fourth option is a longer shop made of two back-to-back modules and opens on the wide side.

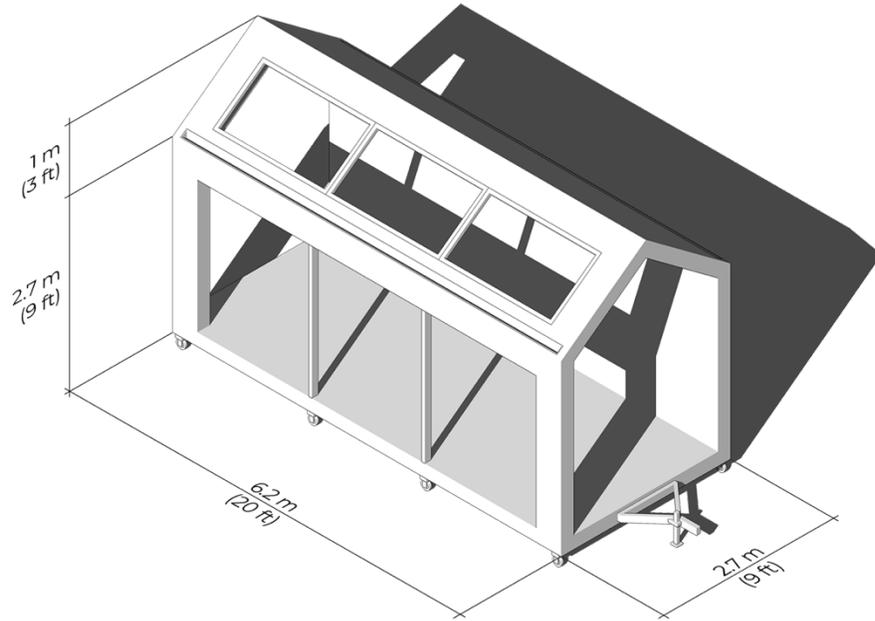


Figure IV.8. The dimensions of the “shophouse-on-casters” module (Diagram by author)

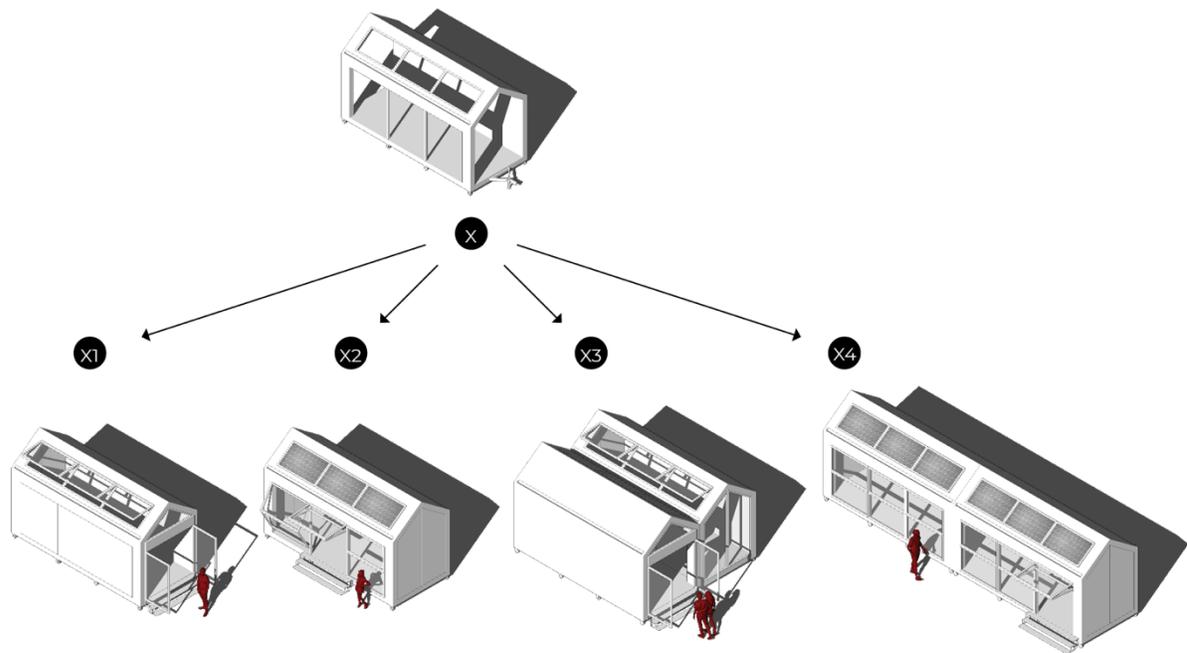


Figure IV.9. Diagram of customized options of the “shophouse-on-casters” (Diagram by author)

The original “shophouse-on-casters” shell (X) can be customized into a variety of final forms: (X1) a micro shop open on a narrow side; (X2) a micro shop open on the wide side; (X3) a larger shop made of two side-by-side modules and open on a narrow side; and (X4) a longer shop made of two back-to-back modules and open on the wide side.

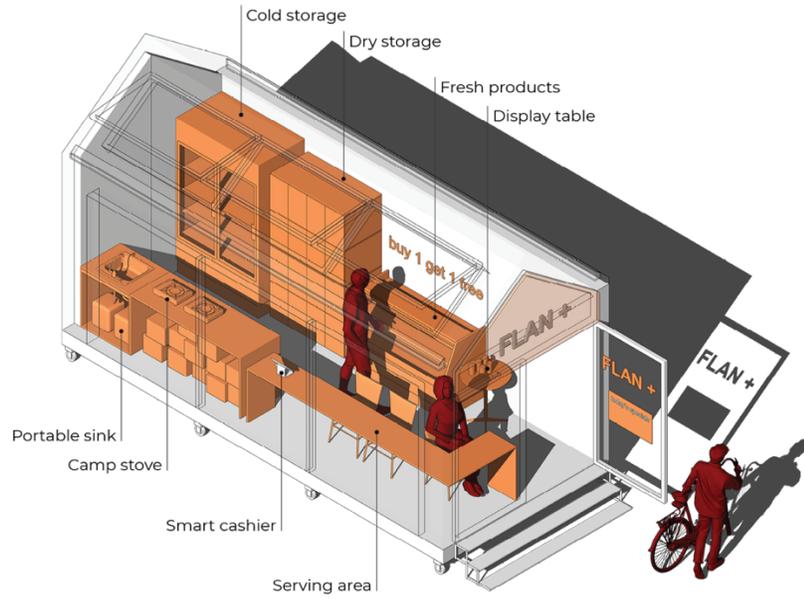


Figure IV.10. Diagram of a business inside a “shophouse-on-casters” - open on the short side (Diagram by author)

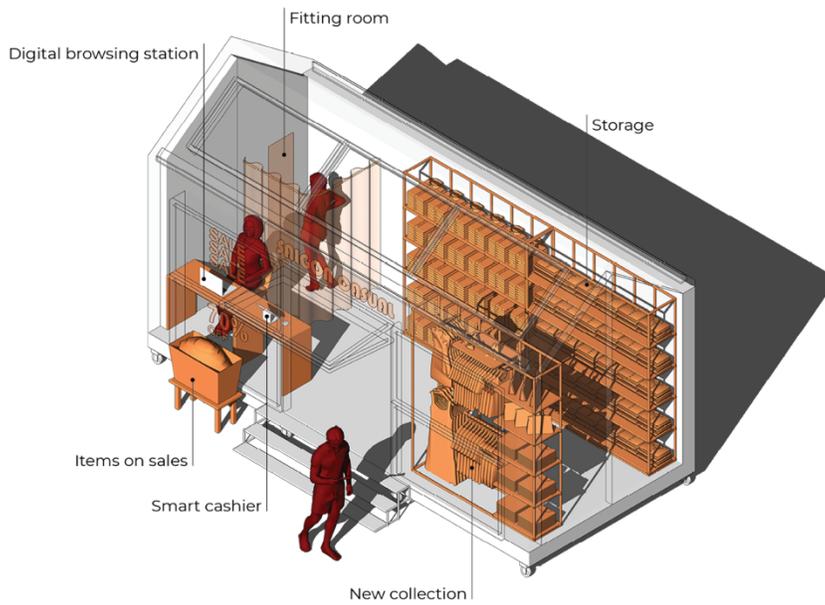


Figure IV.11. Diagram of a business inside a “shophouse-on-casters” - open on the long side (Diagram by author)

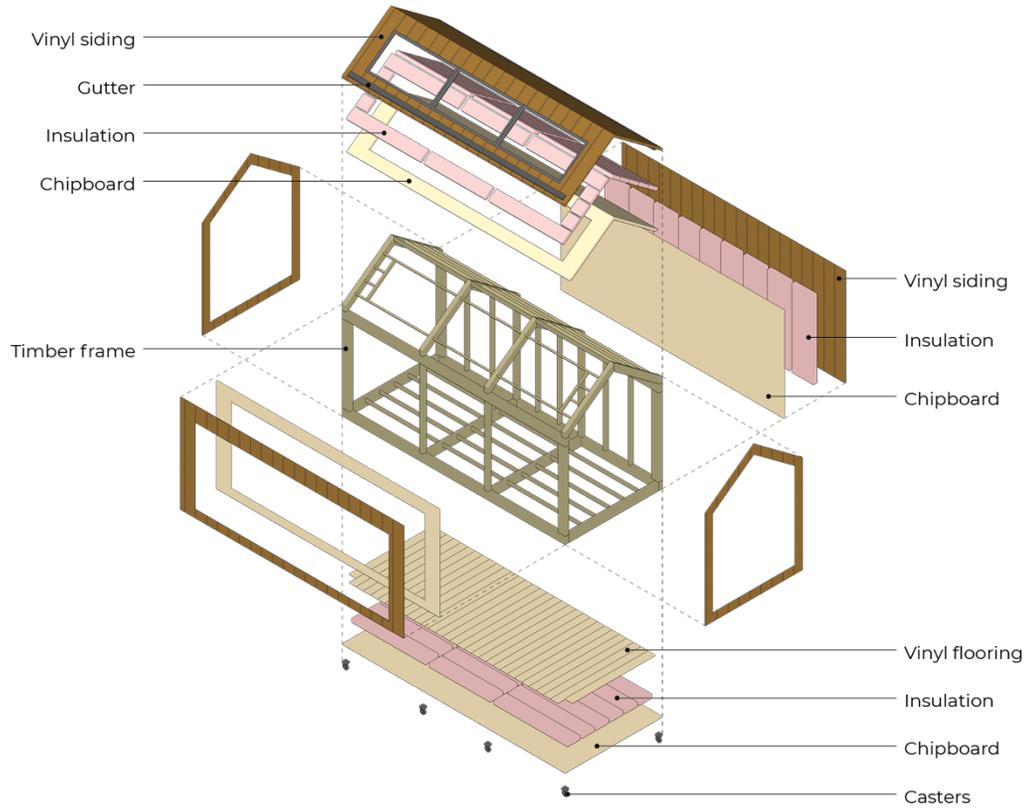


Figure IV.12. Diagram of an exploded “shophouse-on-casters” prefabricated module (Diagram by author)

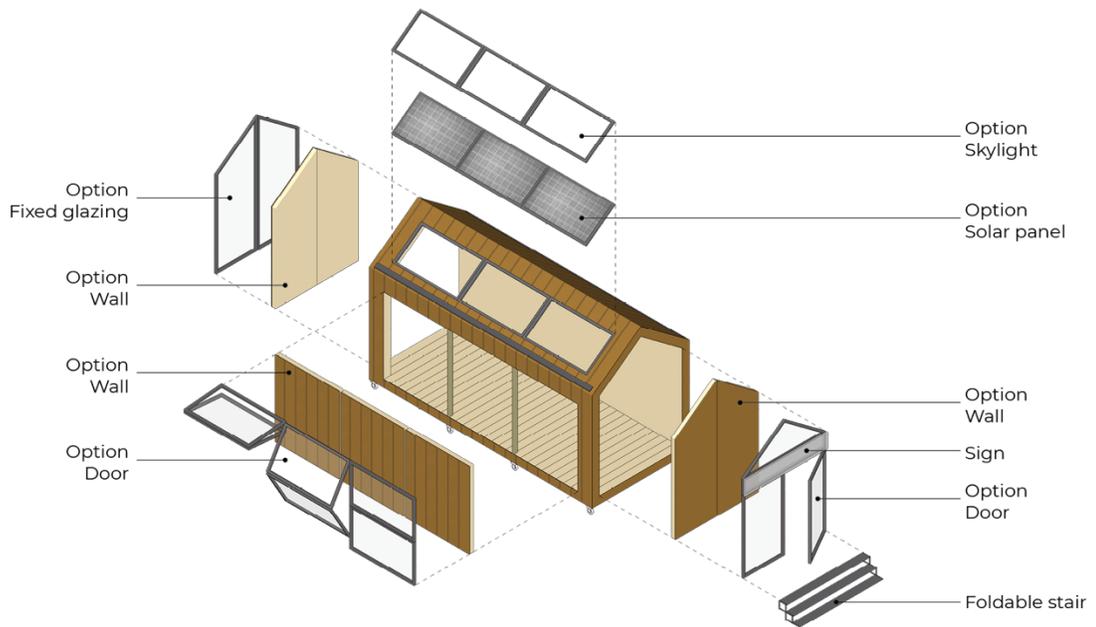


Figure IV.13. Diagram of the customizability of the “shophouse-on-casters” (Diagram by author)

The materials and assembly of the “shophouse-on-casters” are designed to be economical and easy to construct (Figure IV.12). The frame is made of standardized timber, whereas the envelope is vinyl and the interior finish is chipboard. Insulation is laminated between the wall layers to facilitate winter retail. Eight small casters are attached under the module, enabling its mobility. Heating and plumbing are not included and are solved by portable systems equipped by the vendor. Electricity is sourced from the host building, a portable diesel generator, or off-grid sources such as rechargeable batteries and solar panels.

The assembled module is open on three sides, allowing the vendor to customize it according to their needs or the site conditions (Figure IV.13). Each open side has options to create openings or opaque walls.

### IV.2.3. Policy Alternatives

#### Retail Requirements in Rezoning Application

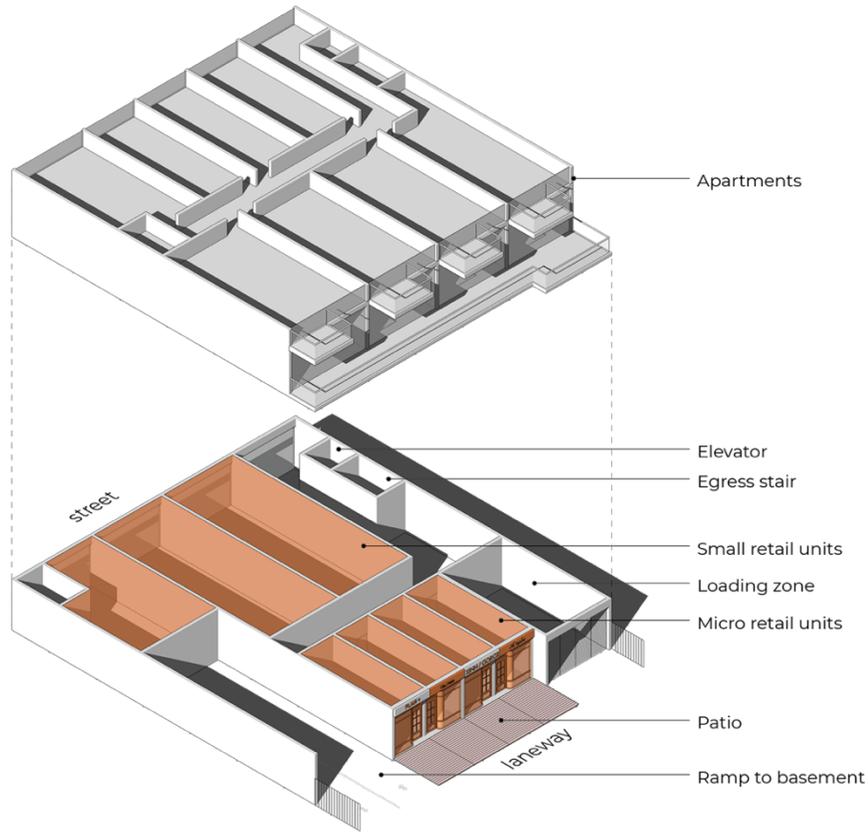


Figure IV.14. Programmatic diagram of a redesigned redevelopment with small retail units (under 1000 sqft) fronting Kingsway and micro retail units (under 300 sqft) facing laneway (Diagram by author)

Because many immigrant and ethnic businesses rely on the affordability of the small retail units, a regulation on the size of these units is needed. This thesis proposes a curb on the net loss of retail area in replacing developments. That means a cap will be put on how much reduction in retail area new redevelopments can put in their rezoning applications compared to the existing conditions. Currently, the total loss of retail area is estimated at 22% in the six upcoming redevelopments. An ideal percentage of loss needs to be studied, but every individual site can qualify for a different net loss based on the types of previous businesses. Low-density sites such as big-box retailers and car repair garages may qualify for higher net loss thanks to the changing needs of the neighborhood and the prioritization of businesses offering fresh foods and personal services.

As diagrammed in Figure IV.14, another cap is proposed on the net loss of total retail units and of smaller units (under 1000 sqft). The exact number will need to be further studied, and each site may qualify for a different number. The purpose is to retain a stock of affordable units and ensure spaces for small businesses. This cap also serves to offer redevelopments the alternative of extending retail spaces to the back of the building, facing the laneway.

### **Property Taxes in Commercial Rent**

The sky-high land values in Vancouver that have rendered commercial property tax unaffordable need to be addressed. The retention of small local businesses in the city depends on the affordability of the rent. This thesis proposes a further reduction in commercial property tax to allow these businesses to compete with national chains and franchises, keeping the retail landscape of the city vibrant, creative, and unique.

The thesis also proposes that the province and the city intervene in the practice of landlords having tenants pay for their property tax. One option can be to prohibit the practice altogether. Though landlords will increase the basic rent to cover the tax, this option will effectively allow tenants to enjoy a consistent rent throughout their lease contract. Another option is to set a maximum tax share in the commercial rent. This option presents an opportunity to craft a progressive taxing system for various types of retail units. Similarly to personal income tax, the tax share of the retail units will be lower for low-cost units while targeting other features such as environmental sustainability and efficient use of urban land (to limit wasteful parking lots).

### **Rent Cap**

The thesis also proposes that the city intervenes in the retail spaces of the already approved rezoning applications. The city can impose a temporary rent cap on some types of retail spaces to keep a supply of low-cost units. For example, small retail units (below 1000 sqft) in a new development are imposed a rent cap based on the local average for three to five years or equivalent to the first contract's length.

The details of the policies proposed above need to be further studied, but it is hoped to provide immigrant and ethnic businesses with much-needed help.

## **IV.2.4. Financial Alternatives**

### **Pandemic Recovery Stimulus**

The COVID-19 pandemic has hurt small businesses substantially in the past year and continues to damage them in the long term. Ethnic and immigrant

businesses are among them. A recovery stimulus from different levels of government is an opportunity to incentivize and rebuild the small-business vibrancy of cities across Canada. This thesis proposes a special incentive within this potential stimulus to target micro ethnic businesses. One option is to offer special loans with low interest for a limited time to all micro businesses. Another option is to provide prospective entrepreneurs with a small grant, enough to help start a micro venture.

This stimulus also incentivizes developers and landlords to prioritize affordable retail spaces for micro businesses by cutting taxes on their operations for a limited time. It will allow them to offer more favorable lease deals for their tenants. However, the exact amount of money the businesses, developers, and landlords can get needs to be further studied.

### **Tenant Improvement Allowance**

This thesis proposes a more flexible form of Tenant Improvement Allowance in which landlords can offer a lower or zero allowance, but tenants will have the option of a shorter lease such as one below two years. The purpose of this option is to allow small and micro businesses to lower their risk in the contracts while landlords reduce the cost of the initial incentive.

### **Rent-to-Own**

The rent-to-own option of financing a retail unit is proposed in this thesis. Developers need to attract and retain local small businesses in their development. This will ensure the variety of offerings in the neighborhood and tout the ethical reputation of the developers.

This financing option is appropriate for micro retail units which cost less overall and can be paid off in a short time. Perhaps instead of 20 or 30 years of mortgage, it may be reduced to only 10 years. Conditions may be created to deter ungentine buyers such as a moratorium on reselling or subletting for at least five years.

### **Ethnocultural District Reinvestment Loans**

An incentive from financial institutions such as banks and credit unions is proposed to bolster the economies of the ethnic neighborhoods. The Ethnocultural Neighborhood Reinvestment Loans offer a modest amount of money but with fewer requirements to encourage micro businesses to open in these neighborhoods, effectively targeting ethnic and immigrant businesses. This incentive will further advance the adoption of micro retail units in these neighborhoods.

## **Loans for Temporary Residents**

This thesis proposes a new type of loan from banks and credit unions for entrepreneurs in Canada beyond citizens and permanent residents. These entrepreneurs are temporary residents with a Canadian prospect. They include recent graduates of Canadian universities, graduate students and graduate degree holders, those with a work permit, and those currently in the process of being permanent residents. This type of loan will allow young talents who cannot realize their entrepreneurial ideas because of their immigration status to use their creativity and add value to the Canadian economy and multiculturalism.

## IV.3. Laneway 3.0

### IV.3.1. Opportunities

#### Laneway 2.0 and Laneway Transformation

Laneways have been a subject of discussion even before the passage of laneway house by-law in Vancouver. The by-law was conceived as a solution to densify single detached residential zones while keeping the urban fabric of low-rise zones intact.<sup>83</sup> The West End Community Plan goes even further in advocating for low to mid-rise residential infills on underused parking lots facing laneways, dubbed “Laneway 2.0,” among other planning features.<sup>84</sup> Laneways in this neighborhood have been named in anticipation of becoming streets in the future. The laneway of the future will be attractive and livable, not just a driveway for trucks and dumpsters.

There has also been an effort to “activate” laneways. The Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association has funded laneway transformation projects such as Alley Oop, Ackery’s Alley, Eihu Lane - Canvas Corridor, snékwem lane since 2017.<sup>85</sup> However, these projects only enliven laneways of the Downtown neighborhood in a superficial and touristic way. They did little to address the use of the laneways that benefit the locals. After the hype of a newly completed project dies down, the laneway returns to be an empty passage with some splash of paint. Downtown is also one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city. Such projects can hardly be replicated in less affluent neighborhoods such as those in East Vancouver.

#### Little Saigon’s Laneways

Little Saigon’s laneways are, in fact, full of opportunities. There are numerous underused parking lots along the laneways parallel to Kingsway (Figure IV.15). Most of these parking lots are less than half full for most of the time during the year. Many are also in a state of disorganization and sometimes insanitation. Shipping containers are also found to be used as storage in these parking lots. Besides, because of the diagonality of Kingsway in the city grid, adjacent residential lots have wasteful acute corners, and some have very long backyards while others have no access to a laneway. Meanwhile, new mid-rise

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<sup>83</sup> City of Vancouver, “Laneway Housing,” *City of Vancouver*, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/laneway-houses-and-secondary-suites.aspx>.

<sup>84</sup> City of Vancouver, “West End Community Plan,” *City of Vancouver*, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/west-end-community-plan.aspx>.

<sup>85</sup> Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association, “Laneways,” *Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association*, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://www.dtvancouver.ca/what-we-do/placemaking-and-public-spaces/laneways/>.

redevelopments often have residential units open to the laneway, typically in the form of townhouses (Figure IV.16). That exposes their windows to the unpleasant sight of dumpsters and messy backyards of their neighbors. These laneways, thus, offer a site to rethink urbanism in this area of the city. Adding commercial functions to laneway spaces can expand the retail area and take the pressure off developments on Kingsway while transforming the laneway itself into a public space that is more active, green, pedestrian-friendly, and facile to upkeep.



Figure IV.15. Photos of parking lots in the back of commercial buildings (Photos by author)

Most of these parking lots are underused most of the time during the year and are in a state of disorganization and sometimes insanitation.



Figure IV.16. Photos of laneway blocks that are being “residentialized” (Photos by author)

These laneway blocks have a high number of residential units facing the laneway, especially townhouses in new development, but lack the sight and feel of a residential neighborhood. They are also less lively and often closed off from the laneway.

## **Benefits for Developers and Landlords**

Owners of older developments can benefit from leasing out their underused parking lots, which not only brings them more revenue but also draws more traffic to the area, which in turn profits the existing tenants and increases the value of their properties.

Developers of new developments can profit from converting the ground floor of the laneway townhouses into retail spaces as the commercial rent per sqft is often ten to twenty times higher than residential rent.

### IV.3.2. Design

#### Laneway Names and Surface Treatments

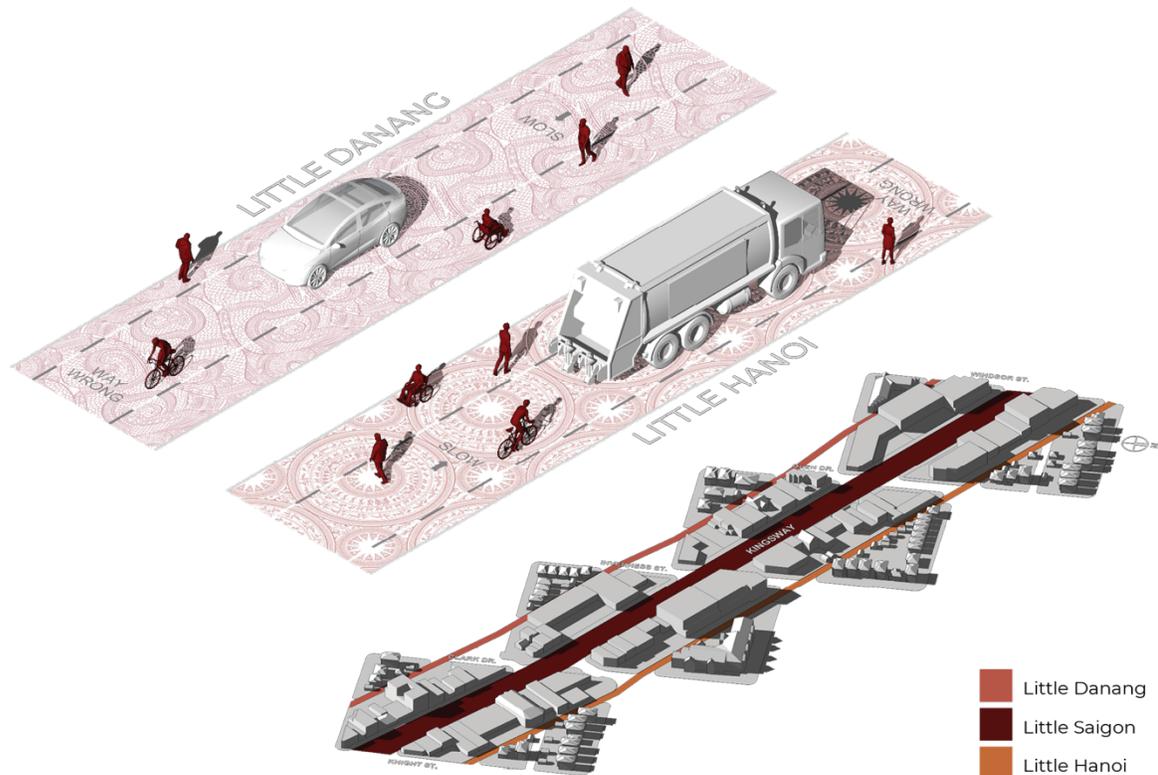


Figure IV.17. Diagram of proposed names for laneways parallel to Little Saigon (Diagram by author)

Laneways can be named to celebrate the cultural diversity of Kingsway. Every few blocks of laneways can have a different name. Suggested names are Little Hanoi, Little Danang, Little Quezon, Little Kowloon, Little Busan, Little Ludhiana, Little Katowice, Little Guadalajara, etc. The two laneways to the North and South of Little Saigon can be named Little Hanoi and Little Danang.

Laneways are decorated with various types of surface treatments that resonate with their names. For example, the surface of Little Hanoi can be painted with the symbol of the Dong Son bronze drum, while Little Danang can feature the decorative patterns of the Champa's Makara stone sculpture (Figure IV.17).

## Laneway Pedestrianization

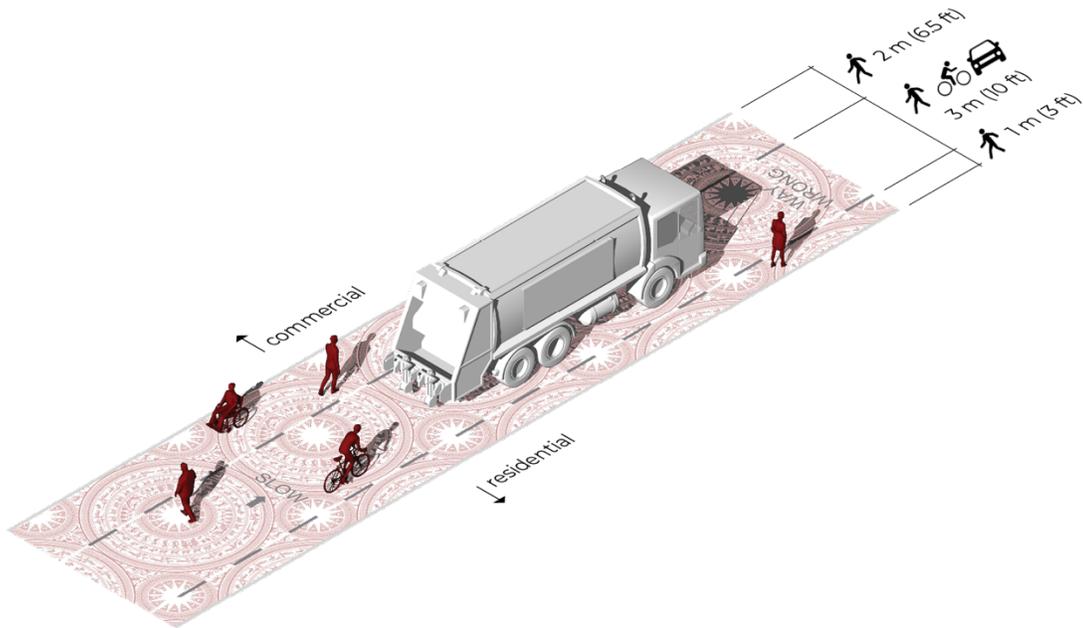


Figure IV.18. Diagram of laneway surface markings (Diagram by author)

The laneway is marked for pedestrian, cycling, and vehicular right of way (Figure IV.18). Three lanes are created: The first is a two-meter (6.5-foot) wide pedestrian lane closest to the commercial lots. The second is three-meter (10-foot) wide one-way lane and shared between motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians alike; and the last is a one-meter (3-foot) wide pedestrian lane closest to the residential lots. The laneway is also designed to accommodate garbage collection with designated corners for dumpsters and bins on the pedestrian lanes. A speed limit is enforced in the shared lane to ensure the safety of the pedestrians.

Though the shared lane is only three-meter wide, the laneway is still able to accommodate service and utility vehicles such as garbage and fire trucks. These vehicles will be granted the right of way over pedestrians during their operation. This also means the pedestrian lanes must be cleared of objects that can obstruct the trucks. An exception for non-utility vehicles to use the pedestrian lane is when they need to pass a stopping vehicle in front of them.

The details of laneway pedestrianization need to be further studied to ensure a smooth operation of all transportation modes.

## Laneway Localization

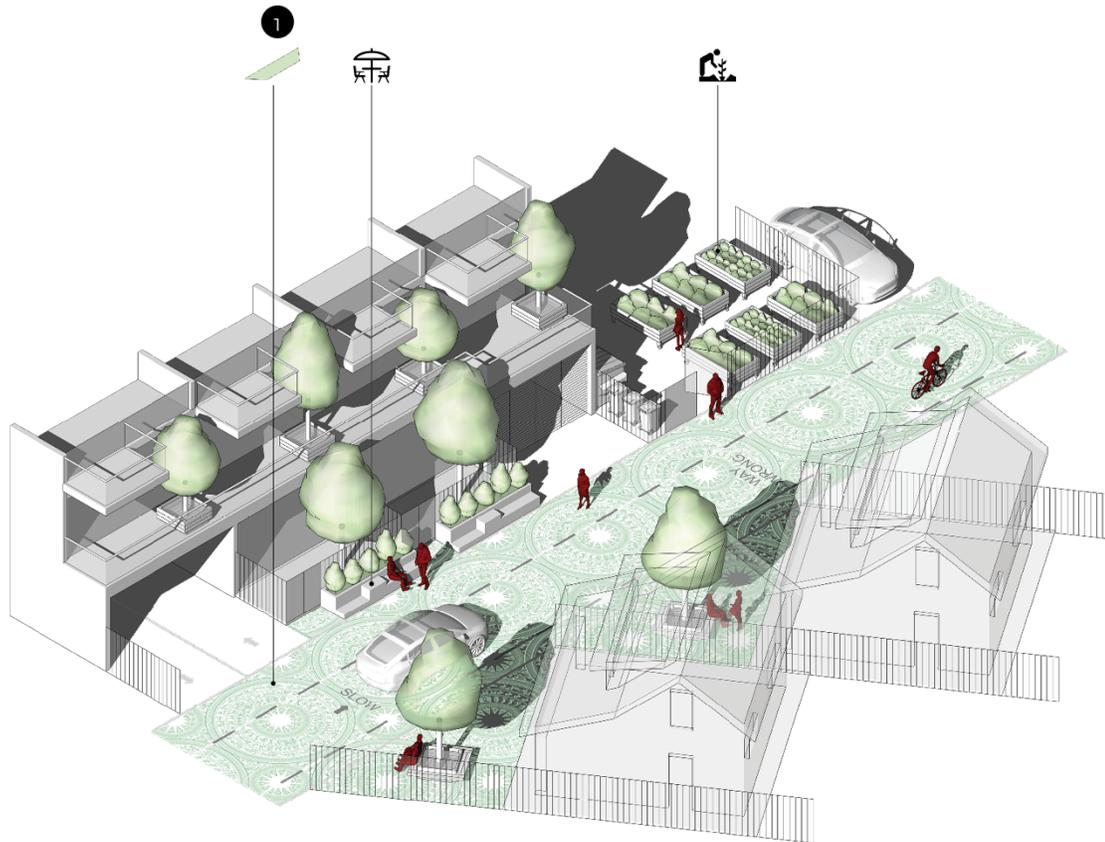


Figure IV.19. Diagram of laneway activation in residential laneway blocks (Diagram by author)

Some laneway blocks are seeing a “residentialization” transformation as housing such as townhouses, apartments, and laneway houses are built to face the laneway. However, there has been little effort to make these laneways cleaner, more accessible, and more livable. This thesis proposes a laneway localization as a new way to address the “residentialization” of the laneway and a countermeasure against laneway activation seen in Downtown.

Three main ideas of laneway localization are pedestrianization, greening, and programming for local activities. These ideas include residential laneway surface treatment, right of way markings, the addition of pedestrian right of way, vegetation, and public seatings, as well as an encouragement to set up community gardens in the underused parking lots in the back of the commercial buildings (Figure IV.19).

## Laneway Commercialization

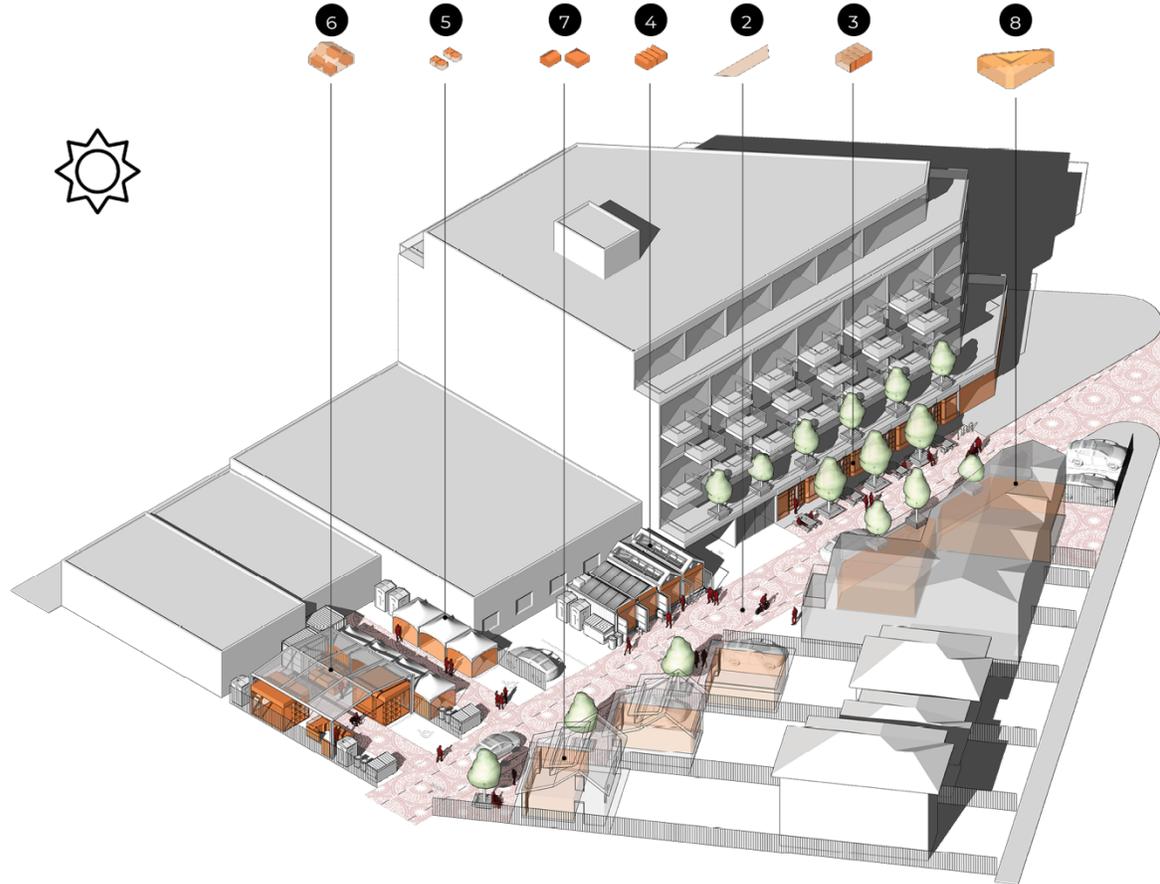


Figure IV.20. Diagram of laneway commercial program in the summer (Diagram by author)

Laneway commercialization encourages various parties to take part in making the laneway a shopping street (Figure IV.20). The laneway is pedestrianized and beautified and invites adjacent lots to set up retail shops along it. A variety of retail typologies are designed to feed the laneway’s commercial vibrancy. New mid-rise redevelopments have micro retail shops facing the laneway. Underused parking lots are occupied by pop-up shops, ephemeral markets, and micro “flea markets.”

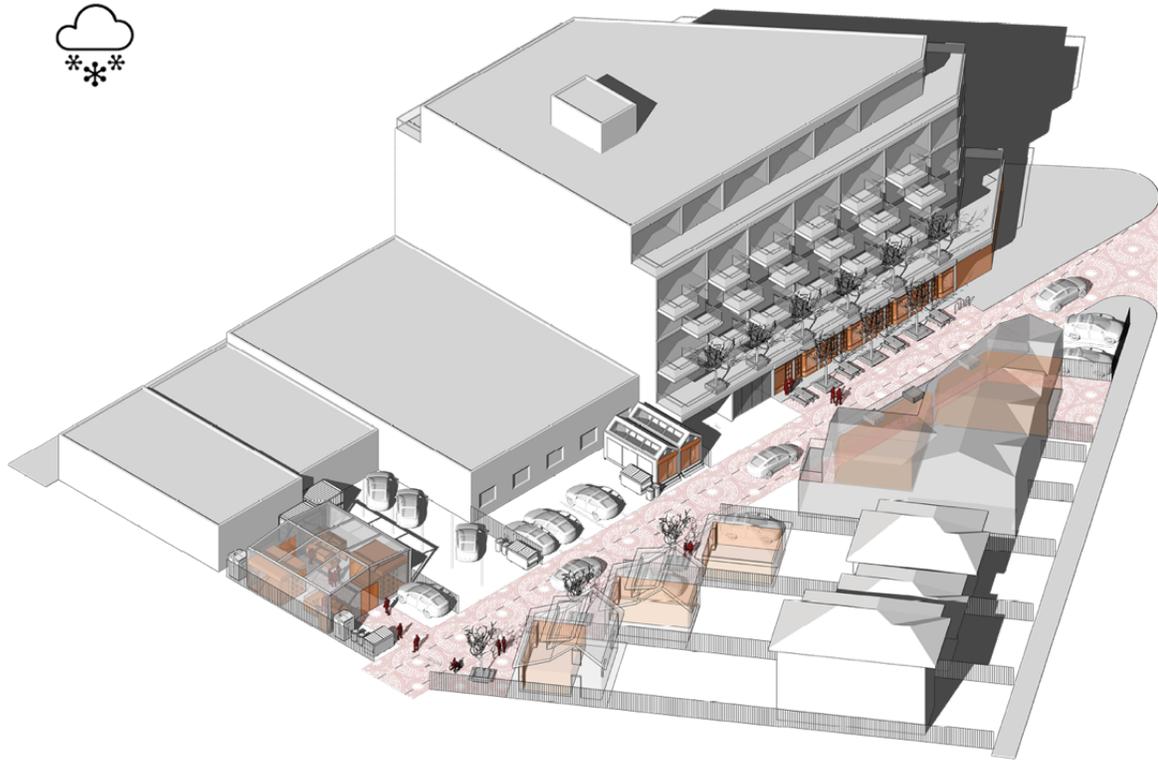


Figure IV.21. Diagram of laneway commercial program in the winter (Diagram by author)

In the winter, the laneway sees a slightly less commercial program due to the cold weather (Figure IV.21). Retail typologies such as uninsulated pop-up shops and ephemeral markets are cleared while versatile typologies such as the micro “flea markets” roll down their curtain and turn the heater up during this season.

## Redevelopment's Laneway Retail

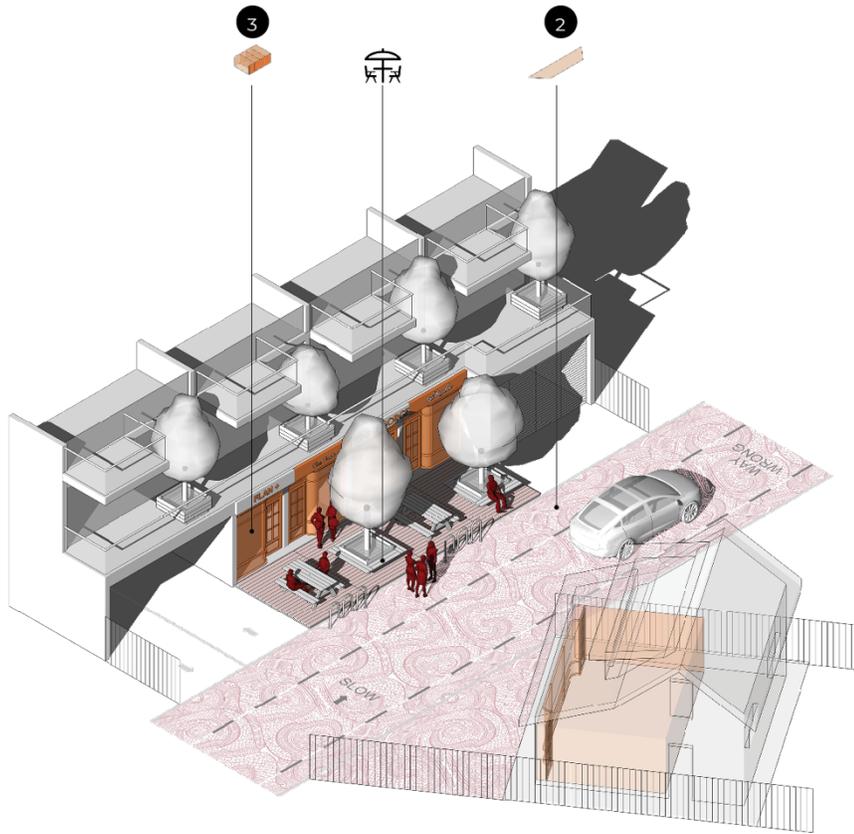


Figure IV.22. Diagram of redevelopment's micro retail units facing the laneway (Diagram by author)

These retail units replace the ground floor of the typical townhouse residential units seen in the recent and upcoming redevelopments (Figure IV.22). The townhouse front yards are substituted for a patio serving the customers and the public alike. The redevelopment still has larger shops open to Kingsway while a public passage connects the laneway with the street.

## Pop-up shops

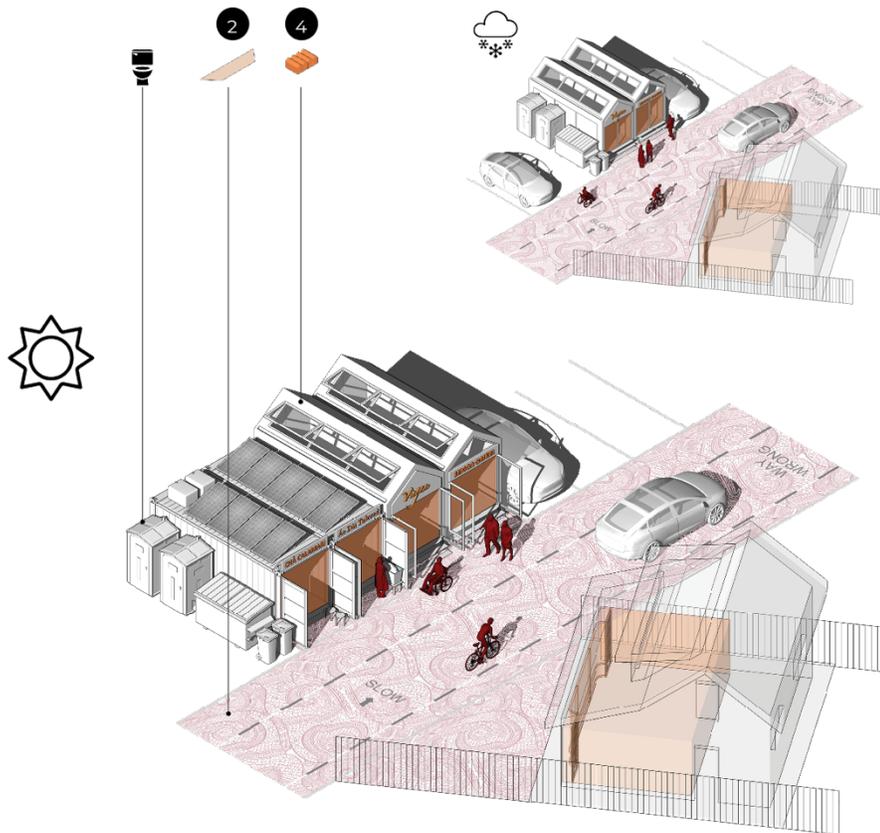


Figure IV.23. Diagram of pop-up shops or ephemeral micro shops (Diagram by author)

Pop-up shops occupy the underused parking lots of the laneways (Figure IV.23). They are economical, mobile, modular, and customizable. Each unit's usable area is approximately 14 m<sup>2</sup> (150 sqft). Two types of structures are used for these shops: shipping containers and "shophouses-on-casters." Shipping containers are not occupiable in the winter due to their lack of insulation while "shophouses-on-casters" can be used year-round. When the shops form into a plurality, portable restrooms also are added to serve the vendors.

## Micro “Flea Markets”

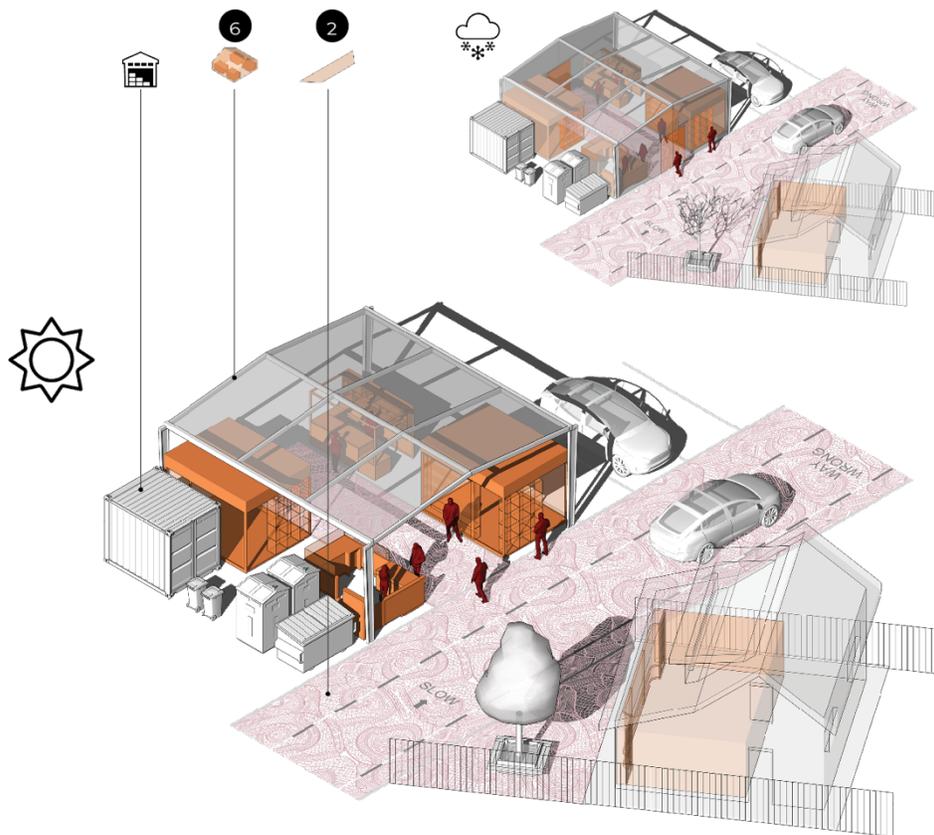


Figure IV.24. Diagram of a covered micro “flea market” (Diagram by author)

The market fits into an underused parking lot on a laneway (Figure IV.24). The enclosure is made of a temporary structure often seen in warehouses or outdoor concerts. To keep warm in the winter, the market turns into a retail “greenhouse” by rolling down its insulated thermal curtains and using patio heaters. There are also pop-up storage and portable restrooms serving vendors and patrons alike.



### **IV.3.3. Policy Alternatives**

This thesis proposes Laneway 3.0 as the latest evolution of Vancouver's laneways. Laneway 3.0 includes sets of regulations - the commercialization and localization of the laneways adjacent to arterial roads. Laneway commercialization encourages new mid-rise redevelopments on the roads to include commercial spaces facing the laneway. This feature of the bylaw also allows residential secondary units and backyard structures to be converted into retail spaces. It also incentivizes the beautification and pedestrianization of these commercial laneways through surface treatments and landscape design.

Laneway localization means the laneways are designed as a public space for the local community. It includes greening, pedestrianization, and activity programming to encourage the livability of the more residential laneways. Laneway localization targets laneways where there are a large number of laneway-facing housing units such as laneway houses, redevelopments' townhouses, and upper-floor apartments.

Laneway commercialization and localization are approved based on specific sites. Sites will be determined through a complete neighborhood design to ensure the strategic planning of the destination and local functions.

## **IV.4. Land Use Diversification in Residential Area**

### **IV.4.1. Opportunities**

#### **Land Use on Arterial Peripheries**

As discussed in Chapter IV, the sacrosanctity of single-detached residential zones has put pressure on densification on the arterial road's commercial zones. Indeed, the residential zones surrounding Kingsway present an opportunity to develop denser housing typologies and adding commercial spaces.

Debates on the “missing middle housing” in North America have revealed the missed opportunities to effectively increase the density of residential zones and allow even developments in all parts of a city. Scholars have argued that cities need to diversify their housing stock to reduce waste of land while densifying low-rise neighborhoods.<sup>86</sup> The city of Vancouver has also encouraged this type of development in some parts of the city, but it has yet to catch up in much of East Vancouver. My survey of the Little Saigon area found a few townhouses and low-rise apartment buildings in the residential zones. However, the majority of recent “missing middle” developments still happened on arterial roads. Again, the pressure is mounted on Kingsway and surrounding commercial streets such as Fraser St. and Knight St.

#### **Triangular residential blocks**

There are also opportunities in the laneways that are currently not zoned for commercial activities. Because of the diagonality of Kingsway in the city grid, adjacent residential blocks are cut into triangular shapes. The residential lots are then divided into a variety of shapes. Some lots have very long backyards while others have no access to a laneway (Figure IV.26). Corner lots have wasteful acute angles that cannot be built on (Figure IV.27). These are opportunities to develop unique housing types and corner retail in the residential area.

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<sup>86</sup> Christopher Cheung, “Take a Video Tour of Vancouver's 'Missing Middle' Housing Projects,” *The Tyee*, March 27, 2017.



Figure IV.26. Photos of residential backyard structures along the laneways (Photos by author)

Because of the diagonality of Kingsway, adjacent residential lots are cut into uneven lengths and acute angles. Some lots even have very long backyards.



Figure IV.27. Photos of triangular corner residential lots adjacent to Little Saigon (Photos by author)

The diagonality of Kingsway also cuts adjacent residential blocks into triangular shapes that leave the corner lots with unbuildable corner surfaces and no backyard.

### **Benefits for Homeowners and Developers**

Homeowners can profit from renting out their secondary units to commercial tenants in a much higher rate than to residential ones. Meanwhile, owners of the corner lots can make profit from selling their properties, and developers can assemble a few of these lots together to build a denser development.

## IV.4.2. Design

### Laneway “Shophouses”

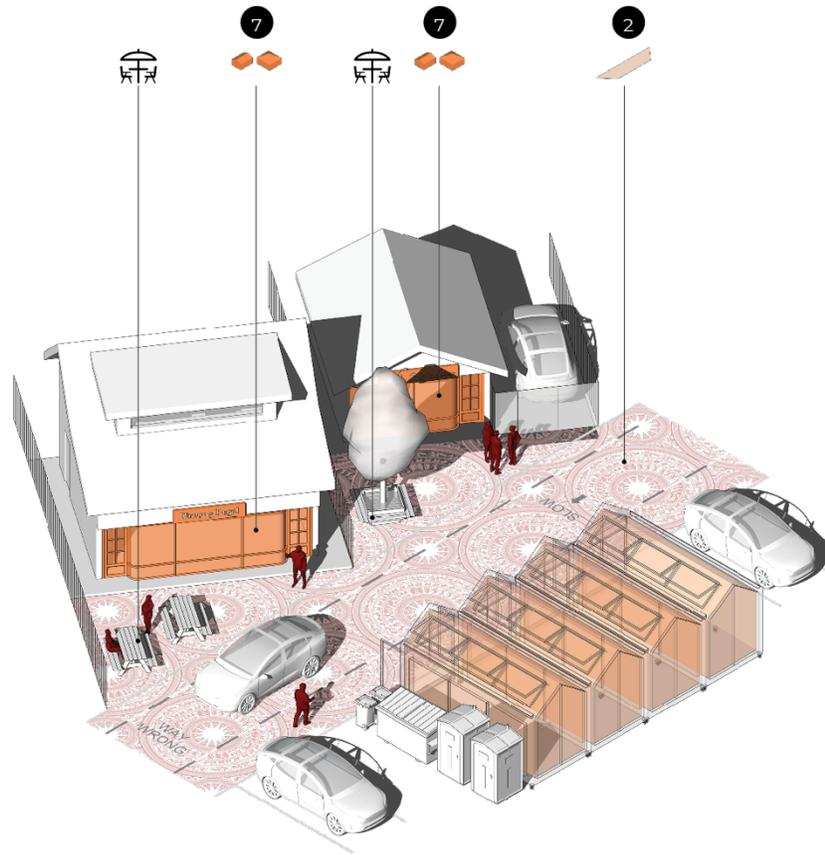


Figure IV.28. Diagram of laneway “shophouse” or mixed-use laneway house (Diagram by author)

Laneway “shophouses” are located in the back of the residential lots adjacent to Kingsway (Figure IV.28). They include laneway houses with upper floor residential units and retail at grade, unused parking garages converted into shops, and other backyard structures such as sheds accommodating retail activities.

Two blocks on the Little Hanoi laneway - between Windsor St. and Glen Dr. and between Clark Dr. and Knight St. - have short connecting laneways. These laneways follow the regular city grid and can also accommodate a few “shophouses” (Figure IV.29).

Laneway houses that have retail at grade can still accommodate a small residential unit on the upper floor (Figure IV.30). The retail space can fit two micro units at grade (Figure IV.31). Another option is to maximize the commercial frontage of the laneway house but manage to save some space for the residential unit in the back which is connected to the upper-floor space (Figure IV.32).

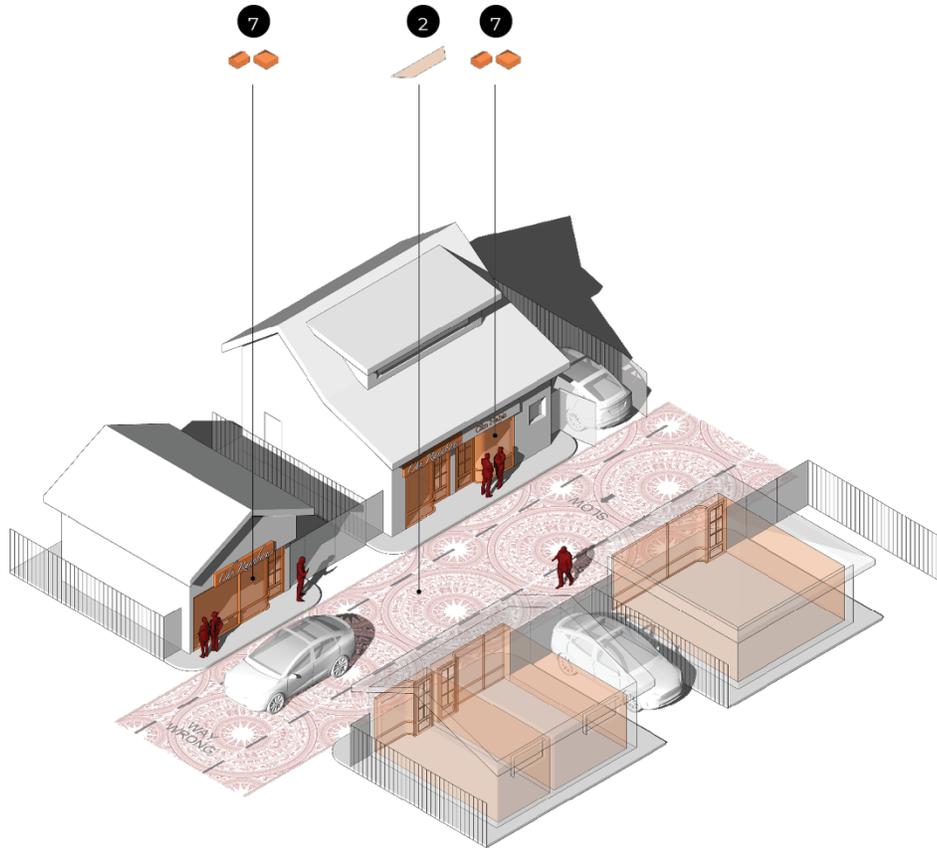


Figure IV.29. Diagram of laneway "shophouse" on intersecting laneways (Diagram by author)

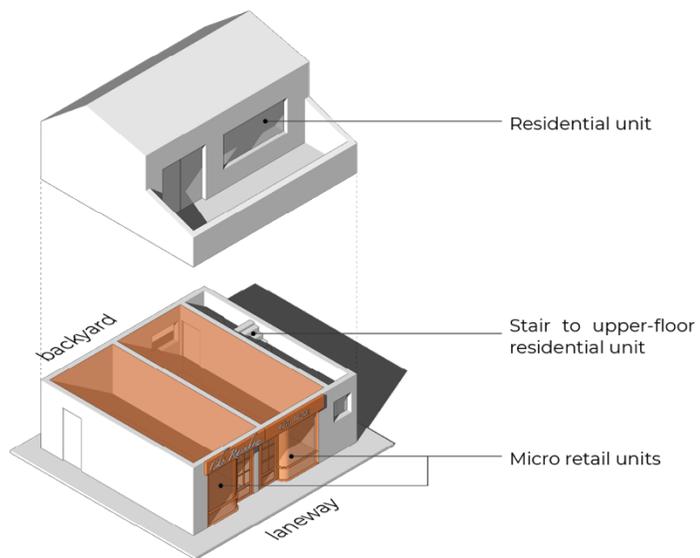


Figure IV.30. Programmatic diagram of a mixed-use laneway house (Diagram by author)

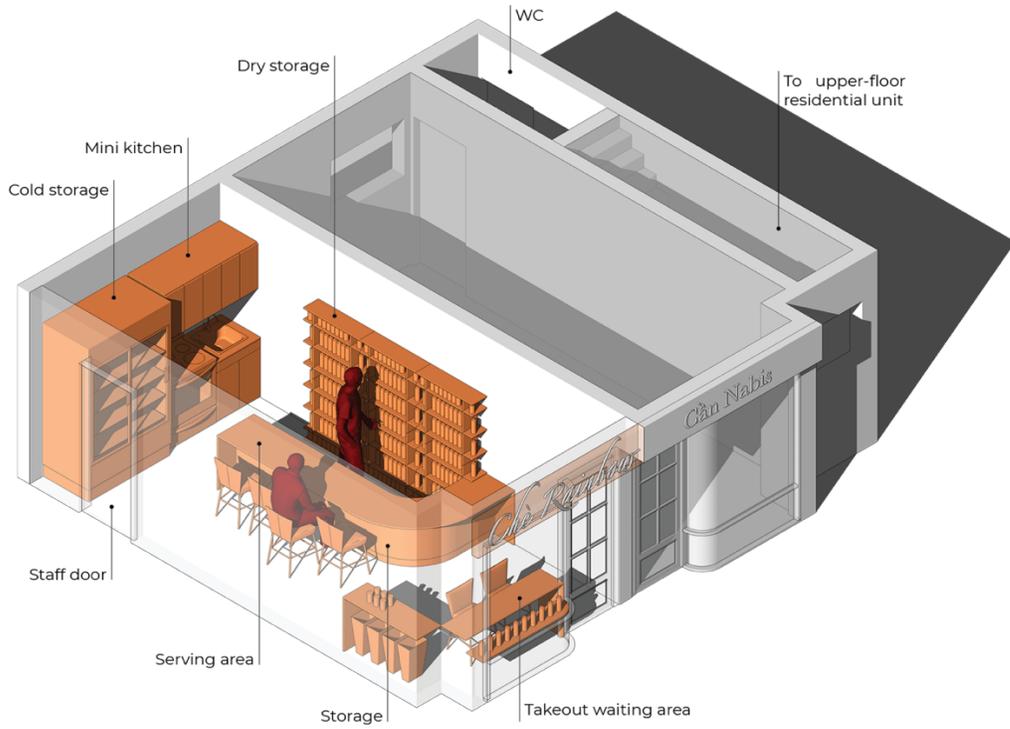


Figure IV.31. Diagram of a business inside a laneway “shophouse” - half-width option (Diagram by author)

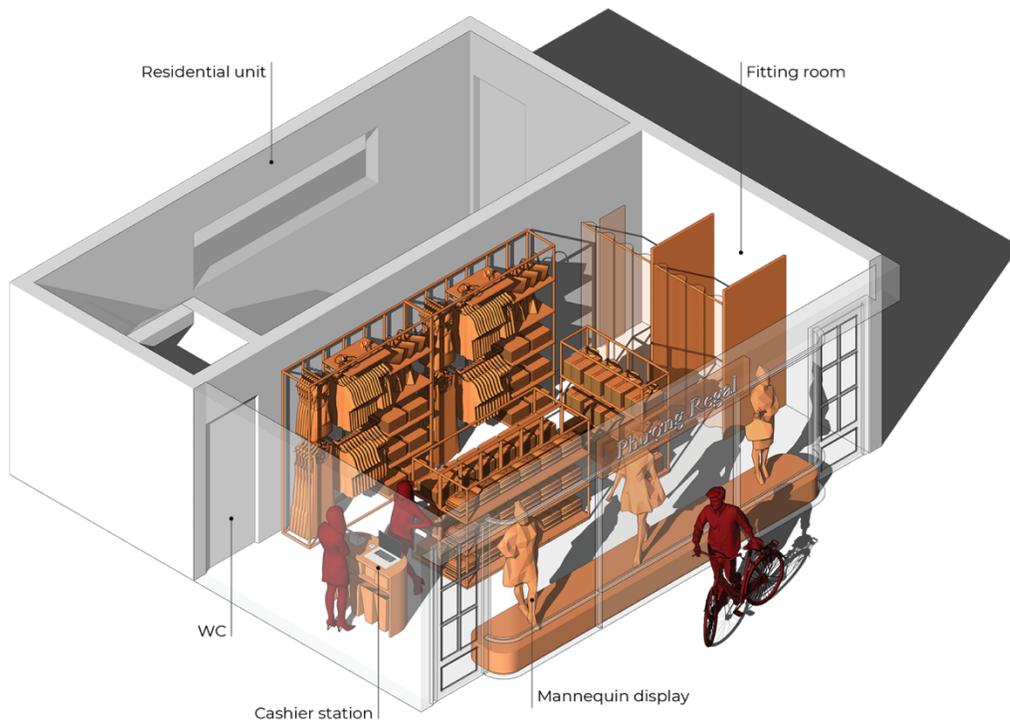


Figure IV.32. Diagram of a business inside a laneway “shophouse” - full-width option (Diagram by author)

## Triangular “Missing Middle”

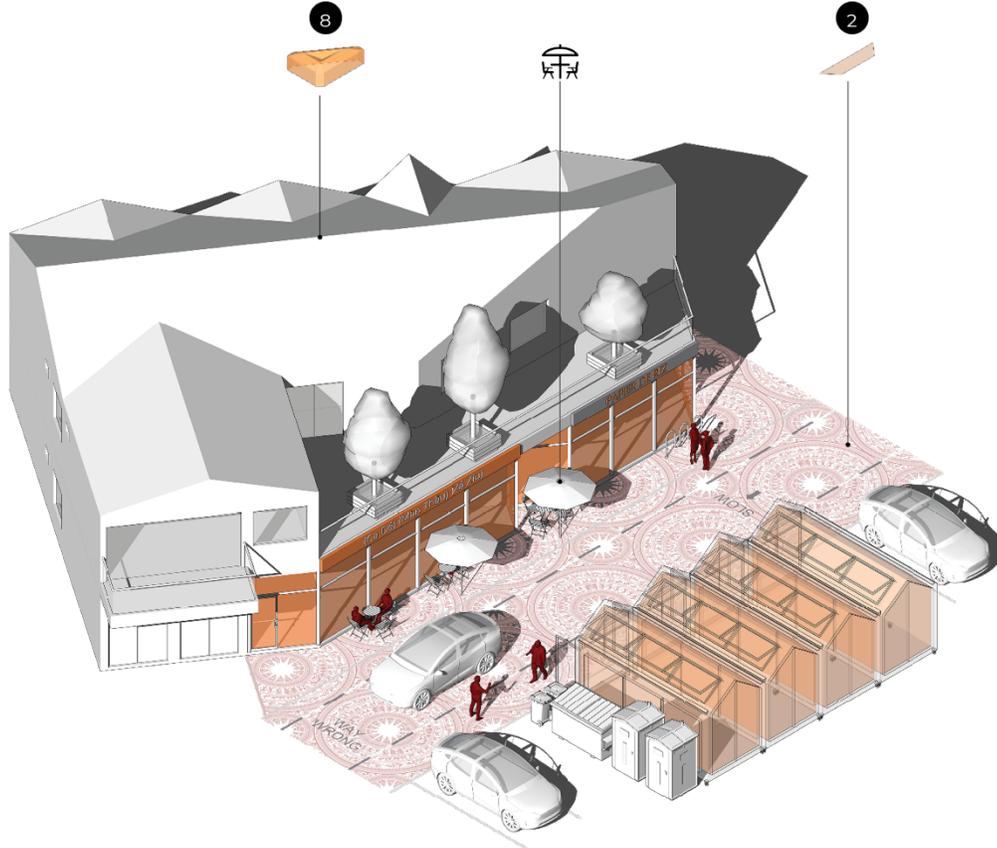


Figure IV.33. Diagram of triangular “missing middle” or low-rise multi-family housing with laneway and corner retail units (Diagram by author)

This thesis proposed a housing typology that is unique to its site. The triangular corner lots in residential blocks and be assembled with two or three adjacent lots to form a low-rise multi-family housing complex (Figure IV.33). This typology has the same height limit as the rest of the residential neighborhood which is two floors. It can increase the density without disrupting the fabric of the neighborhood.

These buildings not only harmonize with their context but also make use of the acute-angled corners created by the diagonal Kingsway. They also offer retail spaces at grade facing the laneway and at the corner (Figure IV.34).

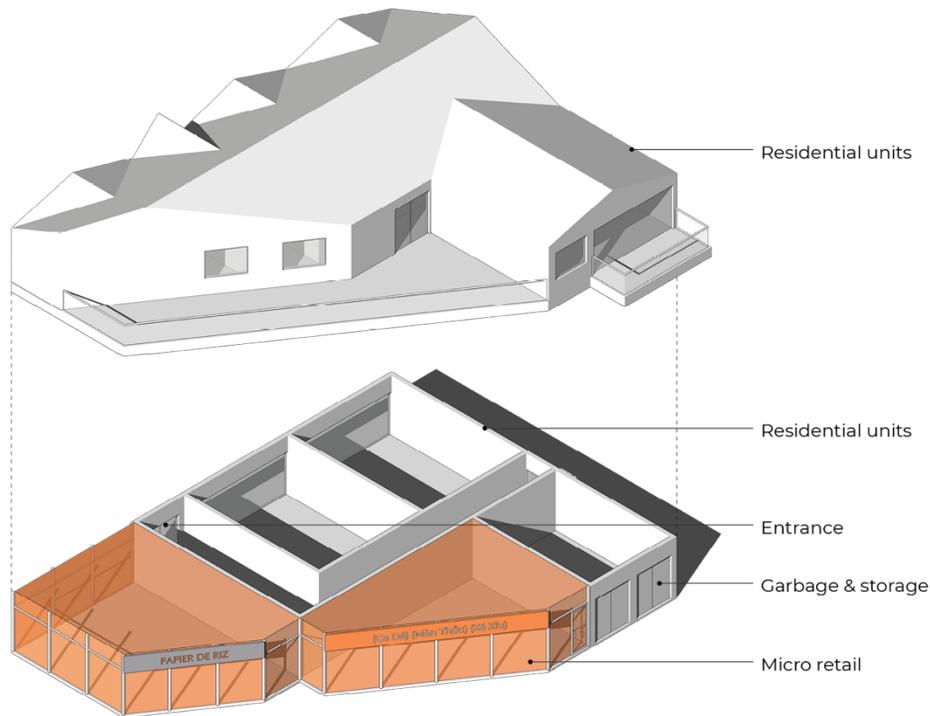


Figure IV.34. Programmatic diagram of a mixed-use triangular “missing middle” (Diagram by author)

### IV.4.3. Policy Alternatives

This thesis recommends rezoning the residential blocks adjacent to arterial blocks to a new commercial district schedule. This new schedule, suggested to be named C9, borrows the language from the city’s C7 and C8 schedules whose purpose is to “encourage the transition of a predominantly industrial and commercial area into a mixed-use community with a strong residential component, while respecting the needs of existing development.”<sup>87</sup> Instead, C9 encourages the transition of a predominantly single-detached residential area on the peripheries of an arterial road into a mixed-use one with a strong commercial component and a harmony with the existing residential context in scale and form.

This proposal is appropriate for Kingsway where many residential blocks are cut diagonally into triangular shapes with unusable acute corners and overly long middle lots. This schedule effectively allows more small-scale mixed-use developments such as two-story apartment buildings with retail at grade to be

<sup>87</sup> City of Vancouver, “Zoning and Land Use Document Library,” *City of Vancouver*, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/zoning-and-land-use-policies-document-library.aspx>.

built. The commercial component of C9 also encourages single-detached houses, duplexes, townhouses, etc. to convert parts of their space into retail rentals. Possible convertible spaces include basements and garages, which have so far been encouraged to host secondary housing units. The types of businesses allowed in the retail spaces include convenience stores, street food joints, fashion shops, bookshops, etc.

## IV.5. The Evolution of Little Saigon Design Summary

### Potential Sites

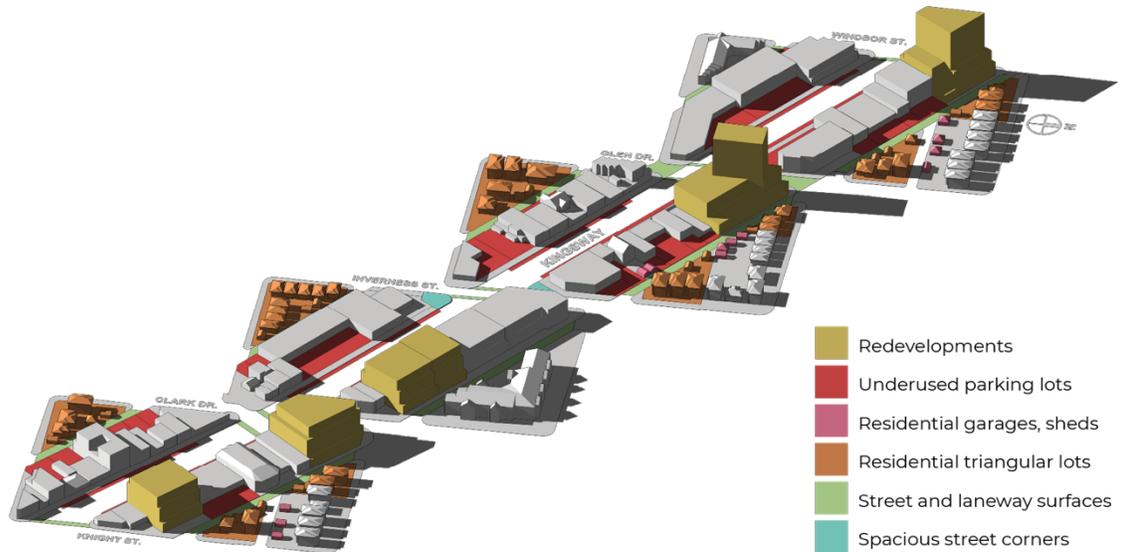


Figure IV.35. Diagram of potential sites on Little Saigon's laneways (Diagram by author)

The potential sites for design interventions in Little Saigon include upcoming redevelopments, underused parking lots, residential backyard structures, triangular corner residential lots, the surfaces of the street and laneways, and spacious street corners (Figure IV.35).

## Program of Little Saigon's Evolution

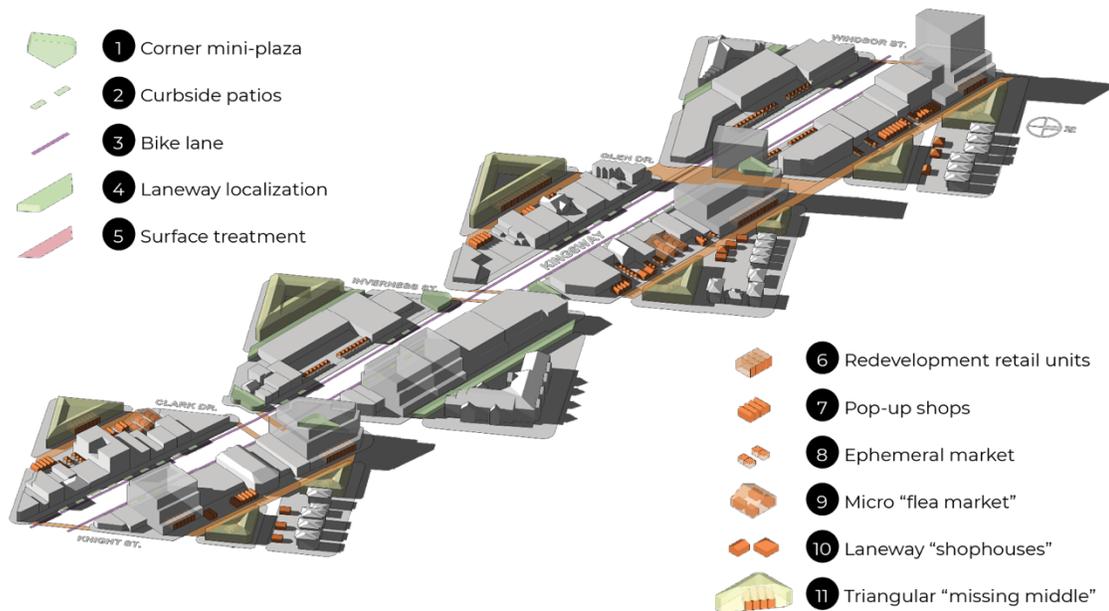


Figure IV.36. Diagram of a site-based program for Little Saigon's evolution (Diagram by author)

In this diagram, eleven basic laneway programmatic typologies are identified: (1) Corner mini-plaza; (2) Curbside patios; (3) Bike lane; (4) Laneway localization; (5) Surface treatment of commercial laneway blocks; (6) Redevelopment's laneway micro retail units; (7) Pop-up shops; (8) Ephemeral market; (9) Micro "flea market"; (10) Laneway "shophouses"; and (11) Triangular "missing middle."

Based on the characteristics of the sites on the laneways of Little Saigon, eleven laneway design typologies are identified (Figure IV.36). The first is corner mini-plazas. The second is curbside patios. The third is bike lanes. The fourth is laneway localization in residential laneway blocks. The fifth is the surface treatment of commercial laneway blocks. The sixth is the laneway-facing micro retail units of new redevelopments. The seventh is pop-up shops. The eighth is ephemeral markets. The ninth is the micro "flea markets." The tenth is laneway "shophouses" or commercial laneway houses. Finally, the eleventh typology is triangular "missing middle" or low-rise multi-family housing with corner retail.

## Pedestrian Connectivity of Little Saigon's Evolution

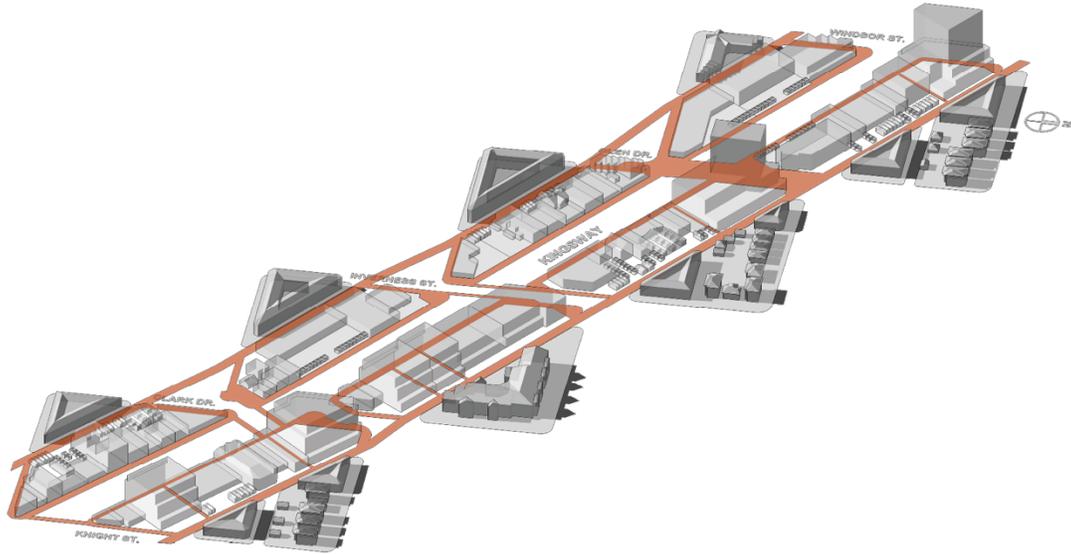


Figure IV.37. Diagram of pedestrian connectivity in Little Saigon's evolution (Diagram by author)

All four blocks of Little Saigon are now connected through a network of pedestrian paths that include sidewalks, crosswalks, laneways, passages through redevelopments, and so on (Figure IV.37).

### Phasing of Little Saigon's Evolution

The implementation of the laneway has four phases based on their feasibility (Figure IV.38). Phase one includes laneway localization, commercial surface treatment, and redevelopments' laneway micro retail units. Phase two adds ephemeral retail such as pop-up shops, ephemeral markets, and micro "flea markets." Phase three consists of laneway "shophouses." Finally, phase four sees the implementation of triangular "missing middle" projects.

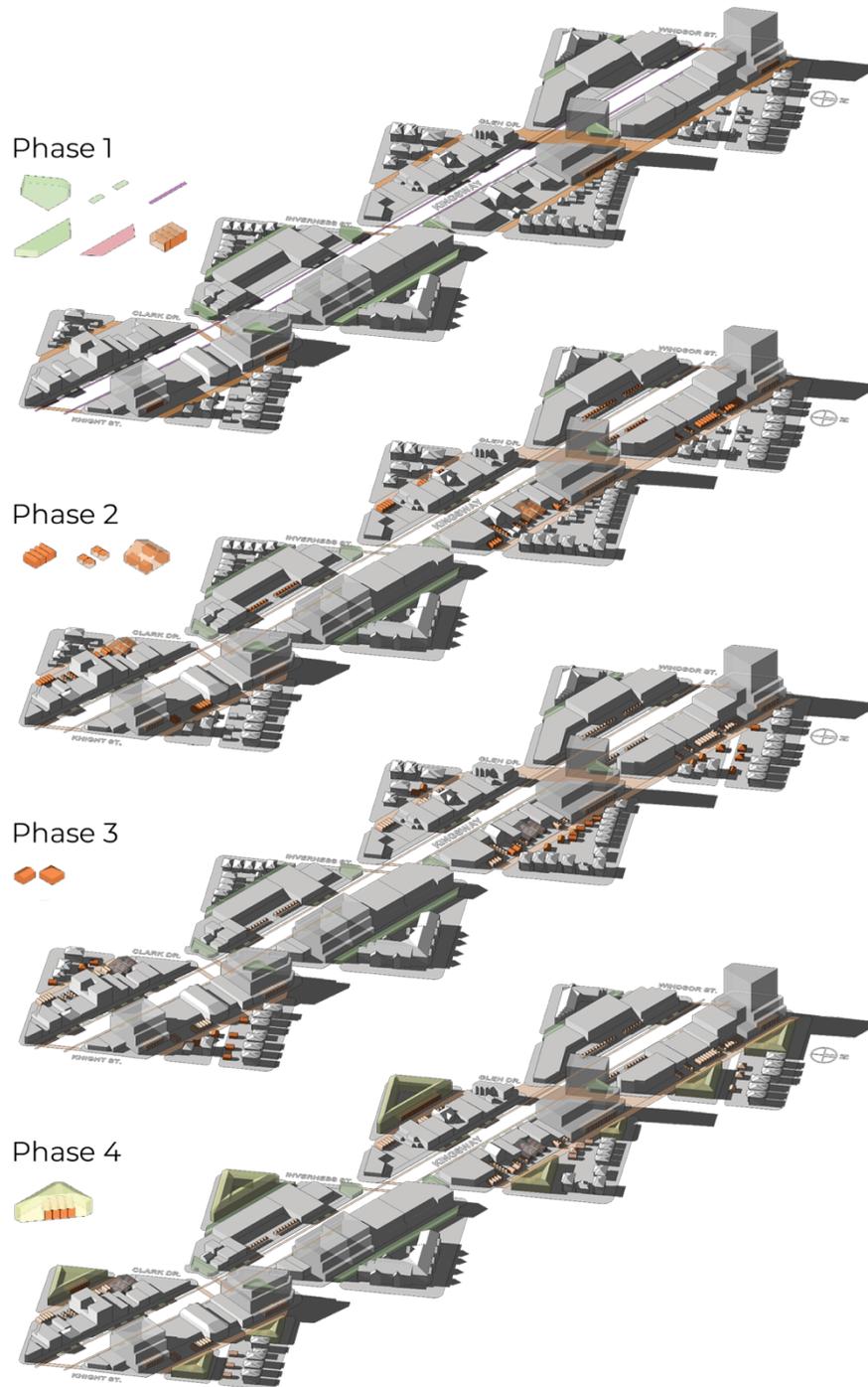


Figure IV.38. Diagram of four phases of the project implementation (Diagram by author)

Phase 1 includes corner mini-plazas, curbside patios, bike lanes, laneway localization, surface treatment, and redevelopments' laneway micro retail units; Phase 2 adds pop-up shops, ephemeral market, and micro "flea market"; Phase 3 consists of laneway "shophouses"; and Phase 4 sees the implementation of triangular "missing middle."

# V. Conclusion

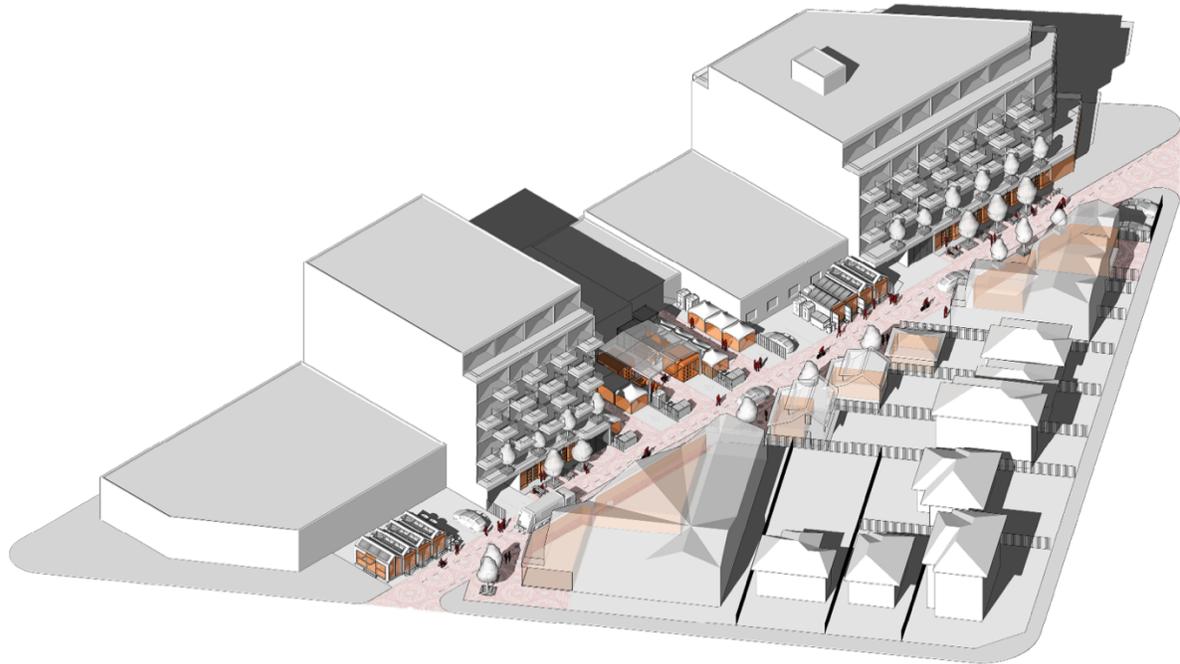


Illustration V.1. The possible future of Little Saigon (Illustration by author)

Since coming to Vancouver as refugees at the end of the 1970s, the Vietnamese community has thrived and has left a mark on Kingsway, the city, and the metropolitan area. Thanks to the cheap rents of the thoroughfare, Vietnamese refugees who initially lacked financial and human capital found opportunities to thrive in their new home country. The naturally occurring affordability of Kingsway has facilitated Vietnamese entrepreneurialism and has offered a path to upward mobility for many of them ever since. As more Vietnamese are moving to Greater Vancouver, they continue to find Kingsway to be a place that helps them climb the economic ladder while connecting to their cultural roots. However, the area's ethnic entrepreneurialism and social fabric have exacerbated in recent years due to the effect of local high rents and redevelopments, thereby threatening the disintegration of Little Saigon as the Vietnamese community knows it.

As detailed in the previous chapter, there are several recommended actions that the city, the Vietnamese community, and other stakeholders can take to retain the ethnic presence of Little Saigon and evolve its identity. These recommendations start with the reimagination of the neighborhood through

design and result in a proposal of urban policies and financing practices that prioritizes small businesses and the local community.

These recommendations can be implemented on two scales. On the larger scale, it requires the provincial and municipal interventions in the rezoning approval process, specific design guidelines for redevelopment, the practices of developers, landlords, and financial institutions alike. Specifically, the Laneway 3.0 regulations, the land use of single detached residential zones, the curbs on retail area and units in new redevelopments, the protection of ethnic neighborhoods, and the rent cap on some units can be done through the City Council. The economic stimulus and the curb on triple net leases can be legislated on the provincial level.

On a smaller scale, it will require a combined effort of the community, the financial stakeholders, and the individual entrepreneurs themselves. From the ephemeral market events and the paintwork of the laneways to the incentives of developers, landlords, banks, and non-profit organizations, multifarious private approaches are preferred to ensure the uniqueness of the neighborhood and the diversity of its offerings.

Though much of the research in this thesis focuses on Little Saigon and the local Vietnamese community, its implication can reach far beyond that. Many of the proposed changes detailed in the previous chapter can be applied to various neighborhoods with a high concentration of ethnic residents and businesses. They may also inspire changes for such neighborhoods in other Canadian cities as well as other parts of the world. Though the local forces and actors are slightly different, such neighborhoods include Punjabi Market and Filipinx Collingwood in Vancouver, where businesses and residents may band together to reimagine the future of the place. It is a future where the neighborhood not only retains its identity but also evolves to include hybrid identities, such as ones that fuse traditional offerings with digital marketing or lifestyle branding.

On a macro level, this thesis also aims to encourage architectural and urban design practices to look beyond self-referencing designs and find inspiration in the ordinary places of the city. Cultural and socioeconomic issues are intertwined in the urban built environment and must not be ignored. This thesis, for example, adds the sociological and geographical theories on urban ethnic entrepreneurialism to the design of urban space, architectural forms, and the economic forces behind them. By bringing social studies on urban ethnic places in the discourse of architecture and urbanism, architects and urban designers can be empowered to direct their designs towards the retention of the local social fabric and the evolution of the neighborhood's identity.

I recognize that the proposal of this thesis advocates for the harmonious partnership of many different parties. But it does not depend on all parties working together at the same time. The proposal is meant to provide various recommendations that can be taken at different time frames and sites. In doing so, if one recommendation is struck down, another can be considered. It is hoped that only half of all recommendations are needed to achieve the desired effect. Then ethnic neighborhoods in all places can implement these recommendations in a unique combination that is specific to their situations, and cities will continue to shine as multicultural hubs.



Illustration V.2. Perspective of laneway micro retail units in the urban context (Illustration by author)



Illustration V.3. Perspective of laneway pop-up shops in the urban context (Illustration by author)



Illustration V.4. Perspective of laneway “shophouses” in the urban context (Illustration by author)

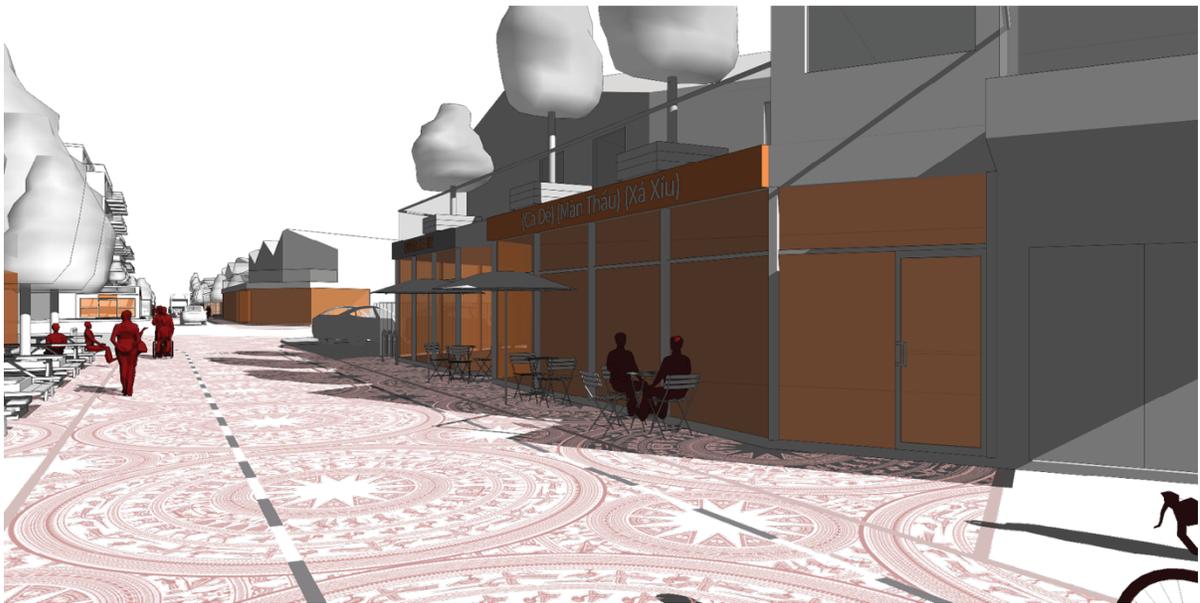


Illustration V.5. Perspective of triangular “missing middle” in the urban context (Illustration by author)

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