



# City of Richmond

## Report to Committee

**To:** General Purposes Committee **Date:** May 14, 2015  
**From:** Cecilia Achiam **File:** 03-0900-01/2014-Vol  
 Director, Administration and Compliance 01  
**Re:** **Update on Signage on Private Properties**

### Staff Recommendations:

That:

1. Option 2: "De-cluttering without a language provision" which entails the continuation of outreach effort and updating Sign Bylaw No. 5560 be approved. The Sign Bylaw update will include de-cluttering without a language provision and addressing non language related regulatory gaps; and
2. Staff be directed to review the Sign Permit Application fees and bring an update to the Consolidated Fees Bylaw No. 8636 for consideration by Council along with the new Sign Bylaw.

Cecilia Achiam  
 Director, Administration and Compliance  
 (604-276-4122)

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
<b>ROUTED TO:</b>	<b>CONCURRENCE</b>	<b>CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER</b>
Community Social Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Community Bylaws	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Law	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>REVIEWED BY STAFF REPORT / AGENDA REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE</b>	<b>INITIALS:</b> 	<b>APPROVED BY CAO</b> 

## Staff Report

### Origin

This report is in response to the Council resolution of October 27, 2014, as follows:

*That:*

- 1) as a priority, staff consult with the sign owners to encourage more use of the English language on their signs;*
- 2) staff engage in a broad public consultation on the language on signs issue;*
- 3) the language on signs issue be referred to the Intercultural Advisory Committee, the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, the Richmond Chinese Community Society, and other appropriate business associations for comment;*
- 4) staff compile relevant information on the effect of the sign issue on community harmony that would be necessary to support adoption of a bylaw regulating language on signs should that option be considered in the future; and*
- 5) staff report back to Council within 6 months on the effectiveness of the measures identified in recommendations 1, 2, and 3 for Council to determine if a bylaw needs to be considered.*

At the October 27, 2014 meeting, City Council had indicated that the priority approach to the language on sign issue during the six months outreach initiative would be to promote community harmony through inclusion and open communication vs. an enforcement based approach. In addition to following Council direction throughout the public engagement process, the City engaged external expertise to fully address Council's referral. The Simon Fraser University - Wosk Centre for Dialogue was engaged to plan, implement and moderate the public workshop to address item 2 of the referral, and the University of British Columbia (UBC) was contracted to conduct research on community harmony/social cohesion and linguistic landscape in diverse communities to address item 4 of the referral.

### Analysis

#### 1. Consultation With Sign Owners

A pilot outreach initiative was undertaken. This involved deployment of temporary staff, fluent in Mandarin, Cantonese and English, who conducted site visits to businesses in the City Centre area (Sea Island Way to the north, Garden City Road to the east, Granville Avenue to the south, and Minoru Boulevard to the west), and parts of Bridgeport Road and River Road, to promote community harmony by encouraging the inclusion of English on signage and advertisement, and to remind businesses about sign permit requirements under the current Sign Bylaw.

Additional visual inspection was completed by Bylaw Officers in commercial centres in the Steveston and Hamilton areas. No business signage solely in another language other than English was found in these areas (Figure 1).

Sign inspections commenced on December 17, 2014 and are still ongoing. For the purposes of this report, the data hereunder reflects inspections conducted up to May 1, 2015, totalling 73 inspection days. Staff completed over 1,500 visual inspections of business signage and conducted over 850 door to door visits with business operators who did not have valid sign permits for their business signs. There were only 13 business signs at these premises that are solely in a language other than English (Figure 2).

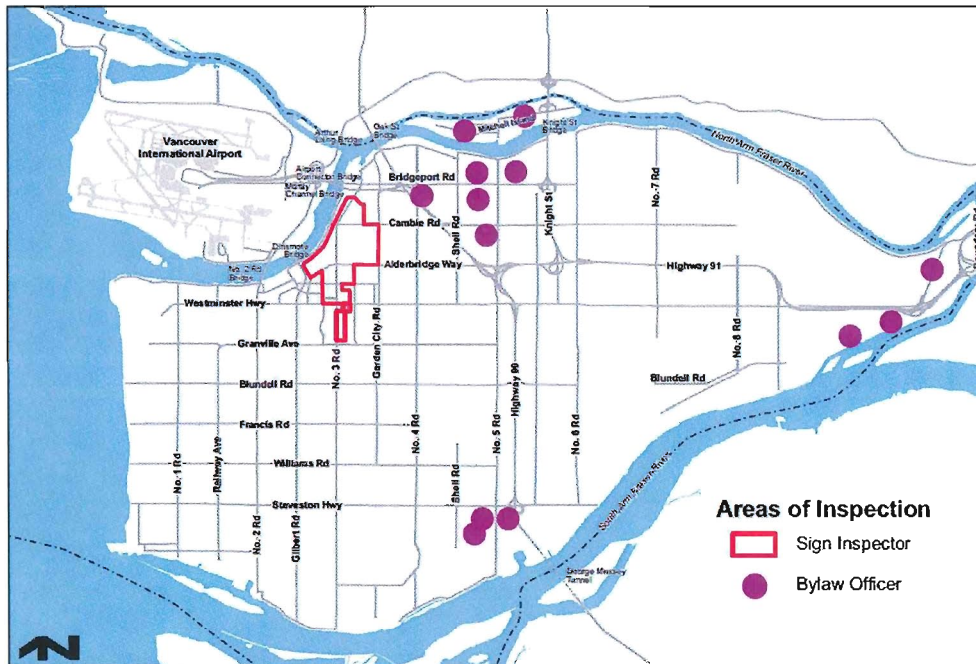


Figure 1: Areas of Inspection Map

Area	Estimated No. of Businesses Requiring Inspections <sup>1</sup>	Businesses that had Signs Visually Inspected	Businesses without Sign Permits <sup>2</sup>	Door to Door Meetings with Business Operator <sup>3</sup>	Sign Permit Applications Received <sup>4</sup>	Businesses with Language Issue Based on Current Sign Bylaw
City Centre <sup>5</sup>	2,000	1,394	868	784	504	13
Outside City Centre <sup>6</sup> (beginning March 20, 2015 only)	855	156	103	93	93	0
Total	2,855	1,550	971	877	597	13

Figure 2: Inspection Summary from December 17, 2014 to May 1, 2015

<sup>1</sup> Source: Business Licence data excluding those for home occupations, and businesses that do not require sign permits because they are located in the interior of a structure (e.g. stores inside a shopping mall).

<sup>2</sup> Approximately 60% of signs visually inspected do not have a sign permit.

<sup>3</sup> Door to Door Meeting with Business Operator means that the sign inspector, after having conducted a visual inspection of a sign, met with the business owner/manager/employee in person to discuss the City's sign permit requirement and/or to request that their sign be modified to include or incorporate more English wording.

<sup>4</sup> Businesses may have submitted more than one sign permit application. The increase in the number of applications received is not attributable alone to outreach efforts.

<sup>5</sup> Sea Island Way to the north, Garden City Road to the east, Granville Avenue to the south, and Minoru Blvd. to the west.

<sup>6</sup> Primarily Bridgeport Road and River Road.

Since winter 2014, staff began notifying all Richmond “commercial businesses” (excluding home business and home-based businesses which are exempted from the Sign Bylaw), through the year round Business License renewal process, regarding the sign permit requirement and encouraging them to include at least 50% English content on signs. Of the over 10,000 commercial business license holders with storefront premises, over 50% have received the notification to date. By December 2015, all commercial business license holders will have been notified. A special insert in both English and Chinese with City contact information has been produced for this purpose to ensure that language is not a barrier to communication with commercial businesses.

As a result of these combined efforts, a total of 597 new sign applications have been received as of May 1, 2015. More sign permit applications are anticipated to be submitted. The majority of these new applications rectify the current situation whereby existing signs have been installed without a sign permit.

One finding from the pilot outreach initiative is that posters and other advertisement material are not regulated under the current Sign Bylaw. In addition, signs on construction sites advertising the development or construction services, for sale, and for lease signs erected in some residential areas also do not require a sign permit. Some of these materials are in a language other than English. An abundance of these signs that are either clearly noticeable on storefront windows or visible in some residential neighbourhoods in the City are significant contributors to “visual clutter” and contribute to the perception of a proliferation of non-English “signage”. As an example, the City of Surrey incorporated “de-cluttering” provisions into the Surrey Sign By-Law No. 13656 in July 2013 to address some similar concerns from its community.

2. Broad Public Consultation

All of the material related to the language on sign issue including the staff report to Council, the consultant reports from UBC and SFU, as well as videos, will be made available on the City’s website at <http://www.richmond.ca/busdev/signs/community.htm> after the presentation to Council.

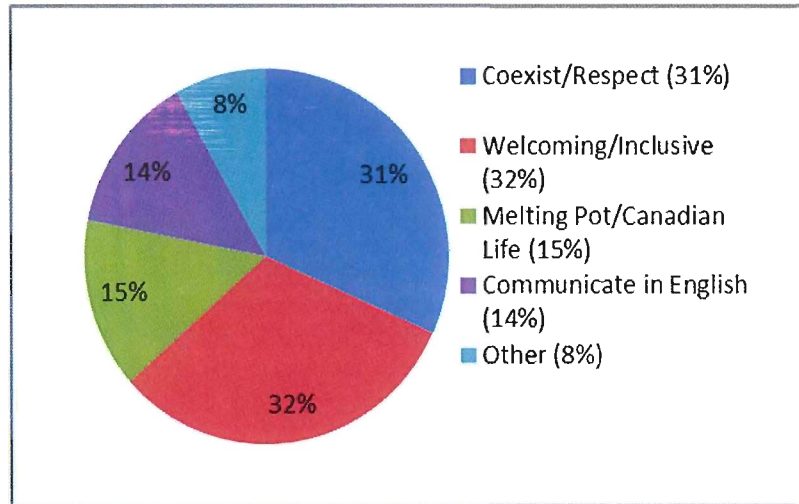
The City’s outreach and engagement efforts included the following:

- Approximately 100 people attended a community workshop, moderated by the SFU Centre for Dialogue, which was held on Thursday, March 12 from 6:30- 8:30 p.m. at the John M.S. Lecky UBC Boathouse, 7277 River Road. Workshop participants heard about Richmond’s efforts to promote and strengthen community harmony, explore the topics of language on signs and community harmony and share their own perspectives on the topic. *Attachment 1* provides a summary of the workshop. The SFU Centre for Dialogue also produced a short video from exit interviews of the attendees at the workshop.
- In addition to the community workshop, community members and groups were able to obtain more information on the program and respond to an online survey via the City’s online discussion platform at LetsTalkRichmond.ca from March 6-

<b><i>Outreach Numbers:</i></b>	
<b><i>Input Opportunity Since Council Referral</i></b>	<b><i>Response</i></b>
<a href="mailto:Signsconsult@richmond.ca">Signsconsult@richmond.ca</a>	24 emails received
Let’s Talk Richmond	260 responses
Sign Workshop on March 12, 2015	100 participants
Sign Companies	79 contacted in writing
Community Consultation	Over 1000 face to face meetings
	10 community partners/ agencies meetings

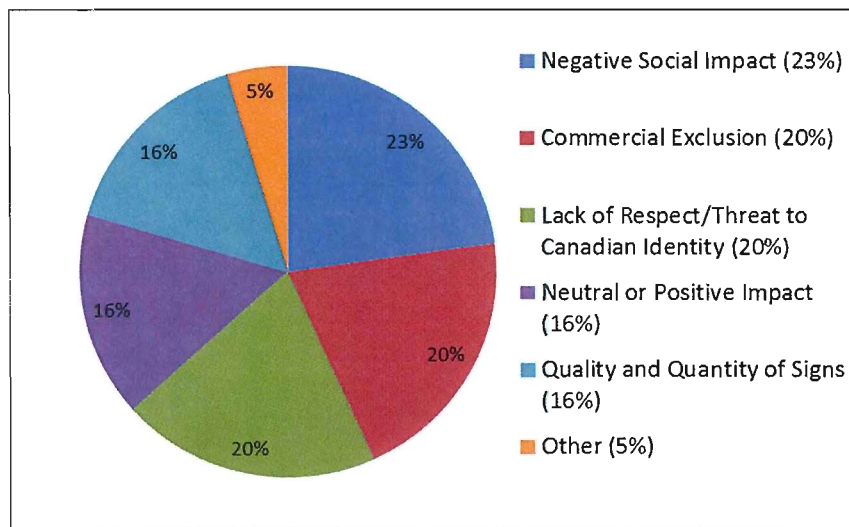
20. A total of 260 responses were received to the online survey. A Summary is provided in *Attachment 2*.

The three questions posted on the LetsTalkRichmond discussion platform were:



1) *What does community harmony in Richmond mean to you?*

The survey verified the complexity of defining community harmony. Key themes identified included: coexistence, working towards common goals, understanding differences, embracing different cultures, contributing to a welcoming and inclusive environment, reciprocal obligation of host community to welcome newcomers and for newcomers to integrate and assimilate, and ongoing communication. In many of the responses, there was an element of unease that the once European majority was becoming a minority and invisible. The feeling of uneasiness manifested in part by the presence of foreign languages on signs and the perception that foreign languages are taking over the urban landscape.

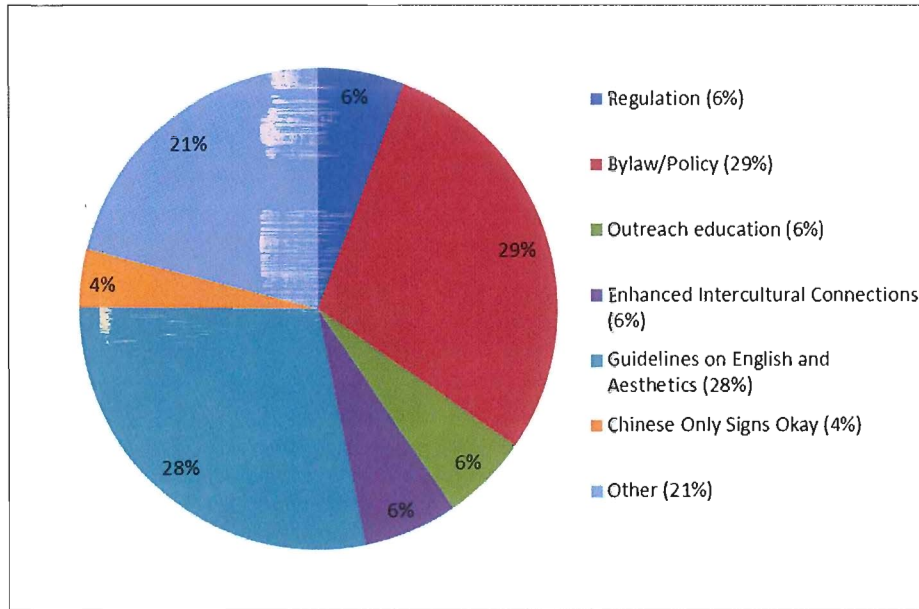


2) *How do you feel about the signage in the community? Does it affect your quality of life?*

Some respondents referenced the negative impact experienced through the perception of foreign language on signs as these signs elicited feelings of exclusion, and disconnect from the surroundings. Some respondents felt that non English signage displayed a lack of respect for Canada and the Canadian identity.

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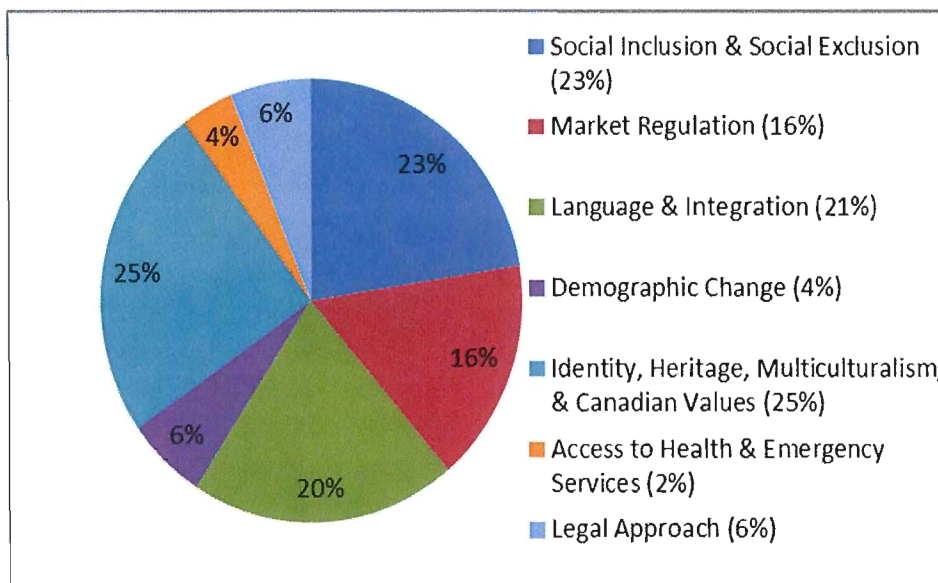
No responses were received indicating that having English on signage would have a negative impact.



3) Please share any additional comments that can assist the City of Richmond in developing future recommendations and measures related to language on signage.

Nearly 60% of the respondents favoured some form of guidelines/bylaw/policy to provide clear expectations for business owners to follow in terms of the use of language and aesthetics of signage. Many suggested that the official languages (i.e. English) should be visually prevalent, however, need not be the sole language on signage.

- Comments were also received via email to [signsconsult@richmond.ca](mailto:signsconsult@richmond.ca) or by mail or hand to Richmond City Hall. These comments are summarized in *Attachment 3*. A total of 24 emails were received. The scope of the responses in the email submissions was wide-ranging as they were not limited to the questions posted in Let’s Talk Richmond. The chart below illustrates the emerging themes from the emails



- 79 sign companies were contacted in writing throughout the region as well as their provincial and national organizations to inform them of Council's direction to encourage the inclusion of 50% English content in future sign applications.

This initiative resulted in active interest by the Canadian Sign Association and specifically the Association's BC Chapter. An Association representative attended the public workshop and provided valuable comment from the industry's perspective. Staff will continue to consult with the Association on any future signage related initiatives.

- Meetings were held and correspondence sent to some local property management companies to explain the purpose of the outreach program and to provide information/support to assist in their communication with the business operators.

These meetings were triggered by feedback from some business owners/operators at strip malls who indicated that they were not aware that a separate sign permit would be required. They were under the impression that their monthly management fees included all necessary permits.

- Extensive media coverage on television, radio, print and digital kept the interest on this issue active throughout the consultation period.

### 3. Referral to Advisory Committee and Community Partners

- As directed by Council, staff consulted with the Richmond Intercultural Advisory Committee, Richmond Chamber of Commerce and the Richmond Chinese Community Society.

On February 23, 2015, Council approved the 2012-2015 Richmond Intercultural Strategic Plan and Work Program (RISPWP) prepared by the Richmond Intercultural Advisory Committee (RIAC). Support for the City initiative regarding language on signage was one of the actions cited in the work program which contributes to the RIAC mandate:

*"To enhance intercultural harmony and strengthen intercultural co-operation in Richmond."*

The RIAC Chair participated in the community workshop as a member of the panel. Other RIAC members also attended the workshop.

- Staff also met with or consulted by mail or email with other community/business partners such as the Chinese Federation of Commerce of Canada, Chinese Real Estate Professionals Association of BC, the Canadian Sign Association, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., local builders, sign companies and property management firms to promote community harmony by including 50% English in any signage.
- Other national organizations such as the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, the Laurier Institution and the Civic Education Society reached out to the City as a result of their mandate/programs. The general feedback from these organizations include:
  1. The issue on language on signage is the "tip of the iceberg" on community harmony/cohesion.

2. Encourage a common language (English) in signage, in addition to any language, to be inclusive and to promote community harmony.
  3. The use of outreach to disseminate information and dialogue to promote intercultural understanding is preferable to enforcement alone.
4. Relevant information on the effect of the sign issue on community harmony

The City engaged Elanna Nolan (PhD student) and Dr. Daniel Hiebert from UBC with speciality in community harmony/social cohesion to perform academic research to address Council's referral to "compile relevant information on the effect of sign issue on community harmony that would be necessary to support adoption of any bylaw regulating language on signs should that option be considered in the future".

The executive summary of the report "Social Cohesion and Visual Landscapes in Richmond" by Elanna Nolan and Daniel Hiebert is provided in *Attachment 4*.

The UBC Study (Study) examined the ethnicity/country of origin of Richmond over time. This review also included an analysis of media and written submissions to the City. Some of the key observations regarding the inter-relationship between super-diversity and social cohesion include:

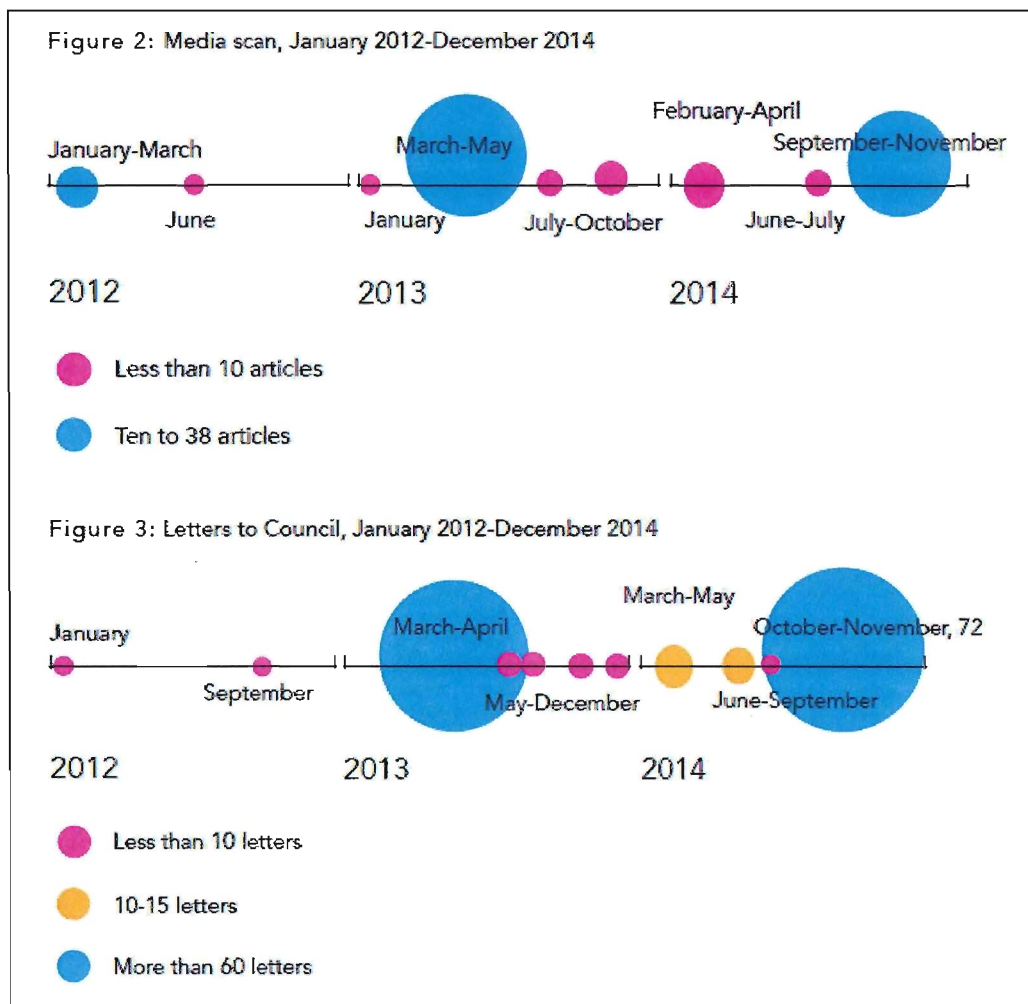
- *"There is often a tendency to see diversity in terms of ethnicity or country-of origin, however, in so doing it can be easy to miss details that shape the contours and textures of every day experiences. The concept of super-diversity helps us see the various population details, such as language, religion, age, immigration stream, that are often overlooked when we talk about diversity based on country-of-origin or ancestry. Recognizing super-diversity in Richmond reveals the multiple groups, communities, and cultures that make it a unique and vibrant city."*
- In the Canadian context, social cohesion has been distinguished from multiculturalism. Seen as complementary to multiculturalism, social cohesion can be interpreted as providing a vision of what social relations under multiculturalism might look like, but ultimately it does not tell the full story of the successes and failures of a super-diverse society.
- Research around signage in public spaces (i.e. linguistic landscapes) revealed that *"illegibility, or an inability to read all that is written in the linguistic landscape, can produce feelings of anxiety and alienation. This experience goes both ways – for official and non-official languages."* Most believe that social inclusion and a sense of belonging are prerequisites for immigrant integration. However, some scholars believe that inclusion is not exclusively the result of official-language proficiency.
- Much of the research around signage in public space (i.e. linguistic landscapes) focuses on super-diverse cities where citizens speak multiple languages. The Study noted that today:
  - 70% of Richmond's population identifies as being "visible minority".
  - There are 161 ethnicities represented in Richmond.
  - Over 60% of Richmond's population are immigrants to Canada.
  - About 90% of the population can speak English.



- The analysis of the media and written submissions to Council from January 2012 to December 2014 indicated that the media has reported the signage issues in a fairly balanced way overall. Public opinion, on the other hand, can sometimes be emotionally charged and “expressed with a tone that is more emotive and sometimes antagonistic.” The issue often engages questions of home, belonging and recognition.

Emergent themes across the 98 media reports and 166 written submissions to Council between January 2012 to November 2014 are consistent and include:

- Social inclusion and exclusion
- Regulation of language on signage
- Demographic change
- Identity politics, heritage, multiculturalism, and Canadian values
- Health and safety concerns
- Legalistic approach to a by-law
- Federal immigration policy
- Immigrant integration and language



There are a couple of important things to note in summarising the 166 submissions received over a three-year period. First, they do not represent 166 concerned citizens, necessarily:

- Of the 166 objections to foreign language on signs, 19 per cent (31) were sent by a single individual.
- More than half (91) of the submissions came from individuals who had previously objected (i.e. sent more than one objection).
- In seven per cent of the submissions (11), the text was repeated exactly.

These points serve to highlight both that objections to the foreign language on signage is not necessarily as widespread as it might first appear, but also, that for some citizens this issue is very important to them, to which their commitment to continued or coordinated campaigning is testament.

Following Dr. Hiebert's methodology, staff continued to analyse the written submissions (284 from Let's Talk Richmond and emails from [signconsults@richmond.ca](mailto:signconsults@richmond.ca)) and media coverage (over 30 spots on television, radio and newspapers) from December 2014-March 2015. The major themes (noted on page 7 of this report) remain unchanged.

## Summary of Key Findings

### 1. Legal Analysis

The following two excerpts are from a legal opinion obtained from Sandra Carter of Valkyrie Law Group LLP previously in response to a Council referral from October 14, 2014 regarding the City's ability to regulate signage and mandate a percentage of English on signage on private property are included for completeness of information:

"In our opinion, a bylaw which imposed an English language content requirement, whether or not in addition to another language, would violate section 2(b) of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* ("Charter") by infringing on the right to freedom of expression. It is not certain whether that infringement would be justifiable under section 1 of the Charter as being a reasonable limit on the right to freedom of expression. In order to be justifiable, the City would need to establish there is a compelling or sufficiently important issue to be remediated, that the City has the necessary legal authority to impose a restriction or condition on the content of signs, and that the proposed restriction or condition is both proportional to the issue to be remediated and only minimally impairs freedom of expression. Courts will be more likely to support the validity of a restriction on freedom of expression if the regulator has undertaken both relevant studies of the issue and engaged in broad public consultation."

**"...To be justifiable as a limit on a Charter freedom, the City would need to establish that compelling health, safety, economic or social welfare objectives are at stake. A strong factual basis would need to be established that requiring English on signs would correct or achieve a significant and important problem or purpose which is not being met in the absence of that regulation."**

## 2. Outreach

- The pilot outreach efforts yielded result with respect to compliance amongst business operators to obtain sign permits. Before the outreach initiative, the City received 250-300 applications annually on average. The City has received 597 new applications for sign permits as of May 1, 2015 since the outreach initiatives began in December, 2014. All sign permit submissions to date include English wording on their signs.
- For signage/posters that do not currently require a Sign Permit, the outreach process achieved only moderate success in encouraging the inclusion of English on business signage. The cost and/or inconvenience for replacing signs/posters were the most commonly cited reasons for maintaining status quo.
- In response to feedback from some of the business operators visited and input from the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, the City prepared new multilingual information packages on starting a small business in Richmond, in consultation with the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, to help ensure businesses are aware of regulatory requirements including the need for sign permits. The Chamber is using this as a resource for their members and hard copies have been handed out to business operators during sign inspections. This brochure is also available on line at <http://www.richmond.ca/busdev/econdev/access.htm>.
- There is potential to collaborate with national agencies, such as the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF) to strengthen community harmony through their “Our Canada 2015-2017” initiatives to celebrate Canada’s 150 years as a nation “by building awareness and understanding of Canadian values, promoting good citizenship, and deepening a sense of belonging for all Canadians.” Administration & Compliance Department staff and Community Services Division staff will collaborate to follow up on community harmony/cohesion initiatives arising from the language on signage initiatives that support the City’s Social Development Strategy and/or the Richmond Intercultural Advisory Committee Work Plan.

## 3. Outdated Sign Bylaw

- Staff received general feedback from businesses and the sign industry that the City’s Sign Bylaw is outdated. While changes to the Sign Bylaw will not include any language provisions, efforts to de-clutter will be strengthened and embedded in the Bylaw. The update to the Bylaw will address deficiencies in the definition section; accommodate trends in sign technology and respond to business needs (e.g. electronic signs, multi-faceted free standing signs, etc.); additional types of signs to be regulated; correct errors and omissions and clarify inspection responsibilities.
- The City’s sign permit fees are relatively low when compared to neighbouring Metro Vancouver municipalities. Fees for some types of signs are less than 50% of the fees charged by Burnaby, Surrey and Vancouver, for example. An increase in permit fees will help with cost recovery of any enhanced sign outreach initiative/application processes provided that the City continues to streamline application process to ensure reasonable processing time. The BC Sign Association has cited that it is desirable for sign permit processes to be both simple and clear.

#### 4. Signage and Community Harmony

The reports from the community workshop and UBC, and feedback from Richmond citizens, confirm the complexity of the link between public signage and community harmony.

The UBC report concluded that:

*“As measures of social cohesion cannot tell the full story, neither can linguistic landscapes be used to correlate degrees of integration of immigrant publics, or be seen as indicative of exclusive and anti-social intentions. As such, linguistic landscapes cannot accurately be used as a platform for measuring degrees of social harmony.”*

Based on findings from academic research, requiring English on signage does not appear to be an effective means to achieve community harmony.

#### 5. Enforcement Gaps

- Currently there are not any staff resources specifically dedicated to inspect business signs after installation to verify that the signs are in compliance with permits issued. This was previously handled through building inspections and is currently managed on a compliant basis. The updated Sign Bylaw will have to consider the issue of enforcement as this enforcement gap was well known in the sign industry and could have been a contributing factor to the proliferation of illegal signs.
- Dedicated resources in the City are needed to continue the outreach effort. In addition to fluency in English, the ability of City staff to read Chinese and speak Mandarin and Cantonese are critical in breaking down the language barrier during site visits.
- Current practice is to rely solely on professional letters of assurance to ensure structural integrity, proper installation and safety of signs rather than via site inspections by Building Inspectors as per Sign Bylaw. The necessary permits or assurances are not always obtained.

#### 6. Visual Clutter

Based on inspection in the City Centre and other business areas, very few regulated business signs are in a language that is solely non-English (13 signs or <1%). Nonetheless, the perception of a growing presence of foreign language in the “visual landscape” is real as some of the posters and decals adhered to the storefront windows or sandwich boards (not permitted) contain languages other than English.

Including a “de-cluttering” provision in the Sign Bylaw will go a long way to minimize visual clutter in storefront windows in the future.

#### 7. Use of Language

The UBC Study noted that Richmond has 161 ethnicities and associated languages and dialects. The majority of Richmond residents can speak English and use English as a working language.

Options for Council Consideration

Based on the key findings and staff analysis, the three options to address the language on signs issue and compliance with the Sign Bylaw are as follows:

	<b>Option 1 (status quo)</b>  <i>(Not Recommended)</i>	<b>Option 2 (De-cluttering)</b>  <i>(Recommended)</i>	<b>Option 3 (Minimum English Requirement)</b>  <i>(Not Recommended)</i>
<b>Service Delivery</b>	Discontinue outreach and return to the practice of inspections and enforcement conducted on a complaints basis.	Continue with outreach efforts to improve compliance with Sign Bylaw to promote community harmony.	Continue with outreach efforts to promote community harmony and use enforcement to improve compliance with the Sign Bylaw. Use regulation to require the use of English as a common language on business signage.
<b>Sign Bylaw</b>	No change to existing Sign Bylaw.	<p>Repeal of the existing Sign Regulation - Bylaw 5560 (1990) and creation of a new Sign Bylaw to address regulatory gaps and emerging signage technologies/needs and to include a “de-cluttering” provision to control visual clutter.</p> <p>The new bylaw will be accompanied by the development and production of new communication tools (e.g. brochures, video on line) to educate on the benefits of “de-cluttering” storefront windows, and the benefits to community harmony by including English as a common language for communication.</p>	In addition to the changes from the “de-cluttering” option, include a requirement of a minimum of 50% of the copy area on business signs to be in English.
<b>Staffing</b>	No additional staff resources required.	Continuation of the outreach initiative for one year with one Temporary Full Time (TFT) Sign/Business License Inspector position to encourage the inclusion of English on business signs and to improve compliance with Sign and Business License Bylaws. Staff will report back after one year (Summer 2016) of implementation of the community outreach on results and cost effectiveness of the program for Council consideration on whether to further extend the outreach	Creation of one Regular Full Time (RFT) Sign/Business License Inspector position to continue outreach efforts and enforcement to promote compliance with the Sign and Business License Bylaws.

	<b>Option 1 (status quo)</b>  <i>(Not Recommended)</i>	<b>Option 2 (De-cluttering)</b>  <i>(Recommended)</i>	<b>Option 3 (Minimum English Requirement)</b>  <i>(Not Recommended)</i>
		program.	
<b>Timeline</b>	N/A	One year	Continuing
<b>Sign Fees</b>	No change to fees structure.	Fees structure will be reviewed and modified accordingly.	Fees structure will be reviewed and modified accordingly.
<b>Pros/Cons</b>	<p><b>Pros:</b> No additional resource requirement and no change to the Bylaw or application, inspection and enforcement processes.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> This approach does not address the functional issues related to the outdated Sign Bylaw. Examples include the lack of ability to address the posters that is causing “visual clutter”; deficiencies in the Definition section (e.g. interior vs. exterior signs) and difficulty to enforce.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> This approach does not build on the momentum achieved during the outreach project nor does it respond to the ideas collected from the public consultation. The City will continue to inspect business signs/signage issues based only on complaints.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> This approach will likely lead to lost revenues from sign permit fees due to non-compliance.</p>	<p><b>Pros:</b> This approach addresses the visual clutter caused by posters and other promotional material that are not currently regulated under the Sign Bylaw. It extends the pilot project having Sign Inspectors fluent in Mandarin, Cantonese and English to continue to ensure that signs are installed based on approved permits and to continue proactive outreach.</p> <p><b>Pros:</b> The outreach along with improved regulations provides clarity while maintaining a “user friendly” interface to encourage cultural harmony.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> This does not address the expressed desire by some community members to require the inclusion of English on signs.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> Additional resources will be required and there is no guarantee that all businesses will voluntarily include English on signage.</p>	<p><b>Pros:</b> The approach addresses the visual clutter caused by posters and other promotional material, and the erection of non-English signs language which are currently not regulated under the Sign Bylaw. This approach will provide clarity of the City’s intent to enforce the inclusion of English on all business signs on a going forward basis and eliminate reliance on voluntary compliance to modifying unilingual signs.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> This approach is highly regulatory and the business community may not receive this alternative as positively as other proposed options.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> Potential legal challenge related to the Charter of Rights and Freedom.</p> <p>See Legal Analysis above. It is anticipated that fees for external counsel related to a legal challenge will be in the range of \$40,000-\$50,000 not including any appeals.</p>
<b>Financial Impact</b>	There will be no financial impact.	It is anticipated that redrafting of the Sign Bylaw including the use of external expertise (policy and legal), public consultation, communication and accompanying collateral material will result in a one-time cost of \$120,000 which can be funded through general contingency. The Temporary Full-Time Business Licenses/Sign Inspector	The cost for redrafting the Sign Bylaw will be similar to Option 2 resulting in a one-time cost of \$120,000 which can be funded through general contingency. The funding of the Regular Full-Time Business Licenses/Sign Inspector position would be submitted for consideration in the 2016 Budget. Similar to option 2, the Business Licenses/Sign Inspector

	<p><b>Option 1 (status quo)</b>  <i>(Not Recommended)</i></p>	<p><b>Option 2 (De-cluttering)</b>  <i>(Recommended)</i></p>	<p><b>Option 3 (Minimum English Requirement)</b>  <i>(Not Recommended)</i></p>
		<p>position can be absorbed by the Divisional budget through gap funding for existing vacancies.</p> <p>The Business Licenses/Sign Inspector proposed may be partially recovered from increased revenues from sign application fees and fines and improved collection of Business License fees.</p>	<p>proposed may be partially recovered from increased revenues from sign application fees and fines and improved collection of Business License fees.</p> <p>In addition to the cost estimate noted above, if a legal challenge ensues, then it is anticipated that fees for external counsel will be in the range of \$40,000-\$50,000 excluding any appeals.</p>

**Financial Impact**

The financial impact of Option 2 is estimated to be \$120,000 which can be funded through general contingency. This one-time expenditure will support the use of external expertise (policy and legal) for the drafting of the Bylaw, public consultation, communication and accompanying collateral material to improve the Sign Bylaw and promote community harmony. (See table above for details). Any unspent funds will be returned to the general revenues.

Staff will report back after one year (Summer 2016) of implementation of the community outreach on results and cost effectiveness of the program for Council consideration on whether to further extend the outreach program.

If the updating of the Consolidated Fees Bylaw No. 8636 to bring sign application fees and fines up to par with other jurisdictions is endorsed, the City will be able to bring in additional revenue to offset any additional cost to implement the options.

**Conclusion**

Option 2 represents a balanced approach without infringing the Charter of Rights and Freedom. The continuing outreach initiative will reinforce efforts to promote the use of English as the “working language” in Richmond to support community harmony, and the creation of a new Sign Bylaw with a “de-cluttering” provision will help address issues associated with visual clutter on storefronts.

The City's pilot project indicates that public outreach and regular enforcement increases compliance with the Sign Bylaw. Public consultation and research undertaken illustrate that the issue of use of language on signage is indicative of a much deeper concern in the community around community harmony, social cohesion and Canadian values. To address these complex community issues, an approach that focuses purely on enforcement should be considered a last resort. The City already has many strategies/initiatives to promote community harmony (e.g. Richmond's Social Development Strategy, the Richmond Intercultural Advisory Committee, grants to community agencies, support of faith and inter-faith organizations etc.). Cooperation/collaboration with the multitude of government agencies and community partners working on inter-cultural issues is already a priority of the City and should be continued.



Cecilia Achiam  
Director, Administration and Compliance  
(604-276-4122)

- Att. 1: Summary of March 12, 2015 Workshop prepared by Dr. Joanna Ashworth, The Simon Fraser University
- 2: Summary of survey response from [www.LetsTalkRichmond.ca](http://www.LetsTalkRichmond.ca)
  - 3: Summary of email received from [signsconsult@richmond.ca](mailto:signsconsult@richmond.ca) or by mail or hand to Richmond City Hall
  - 4: Executive summary of the University of British Columbia report titled "Social Cohesion and Visual Landscapes in Richmond" by Elanna Nolan and Dr. Daniel Hiebert



**City of Richmond Community Workshop // March 12, 2015**

# **PUBLIC SIGNAGE and COMMUNITY HARMONY in RICHMOND**

## **REPORT**

Submitted to City of Richmond

By Dr. Joanna Ashworth and Associates

Senior Dialogue Associate, Wosk Centre for Dialogue  
Simon Fraser University

April 17, 2015



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Thanks to Sam Bradd, Graphic Recorder for Illustrations;  
Donaleen Saul for Writing Services;  
& Michelle Vandermoor for Report Design

## INTRODUCTION

### *"Today We Are On A Path For A Better Quality Of Life In Richmond"*

On the evening of March 12, 2015, over 100 citizens gathered at the John M.S. Lecky UBC Boathouse to listen, learn and offer their ideas about how to address Richmond's public signage in a way that contributes to community harmony.

City staff opened up the gathering by noting the broad cross-section of people present, including City Council representatives, Mayor Malcolm Brodie and Councillors Chak Au, Bill McNulty and Carol Day; members of the Richmond Intercultural Advisory Committee; The Laurier Institute; the Canadian Race Relations Council; representatives from the business and non-profit sectors; and other concerned citizens of Richmond.

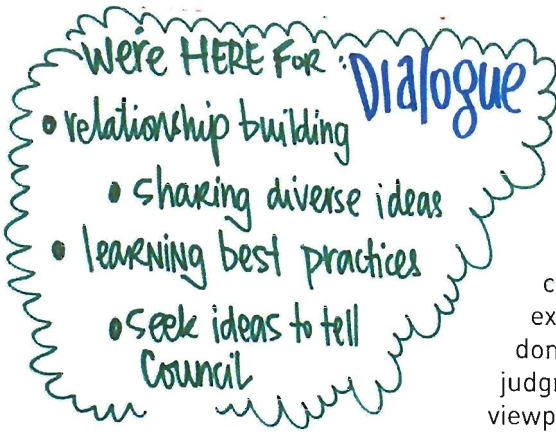
Using the metaphor of a scale, City staff emphasized that, in creating cultural harmony in its approach to business signage, the City of Richmond is attempting to balance two domains. The first is plans and policies, which would include the Richmond Social Development Strategy and Official Community Plan, and the second is regulations and other measures such as the sign by-law, education, and outreach.

#### **City staff then highlighted the evening's four broad objectives:**

- To increase opportunities for understanding and relationship among cultural groups.
- To welcome a respectful exchange of diverse viewpoints from members of the community on the public signage issue.
- To learn from best practices in other jurisdictions.
- To seek recommendations for action from the community for Richmond City Council's consideration.



## "We're Here To Create Something New"



Senior Dialogue Associate at the Work Centre for Dialogue at Simon Fraser University, **Dr. Joanna Ashworth**, the moderator of the workshop, acknowledged that "This is a difficult conversation" with a lot of emotion surrounding it.

To foster a fresh flow of ideas and to spark new conversations, she suggested that people make an extra effort to step beyond the typical polemic that can dominate public meetings, and to suspend their pre-judgments, let go of certainty, and temporarily relax their viewpoints.

Joanna advocated respectful listening, but admitted that, "Respectful listening is extremely hard work because it requires that you put the speaker in the foreground and your desire to express your ideas in the background."

While encouraging people to share their views, she asked them to also be mindful while doing so: "When you speak, be aware of the potential impact of your words on others."

To set a collegial tone and building on the principles of intercultural connections, she invited participants to share stories of how they welcome one another - to their homes, their community and or their workplaces. In small groups, people spoke of simple kindnesses like saying hello and making eye contact, offering a cup of tea or a beer, bringing muffins to someone new in the neighbourhood, inviting neighbours to a barbecue, and walking each others' kids to school.

Some spoke of misunderstandings such as not removing footwear in a "no shoes" home or confusing guests accustomed with more formality with the message, "Make yourself at home." Others shared their discomfort at not feeling welcome by newcomers to Richmond and no longer feeling at home in their community.

In hearing some of these stories, Joanna observed that, "It seems that there's a real desire to welcome others, although sometimes we don't feel welcome and other times our efforts to welcome aren't understood."

## VIDEO

### *"If We Bring People Together They Will Flourish"*

**Simon Fraser University Creative Media Services** presented a short video featuring a series of "streeter" interviews of Richmond residents who described Richmond as "peaceful," "friendly," and "convenient." One interviewee said, "I love the diversity of it... All different kinds of cultures. I like the Nature, there's a lot of green space. There's really a lot of things to like about Richmond."

When asked about their views on Chinese signage in Richmond, a range of views were expressed. One young newcomer was "overwhelmed by Chinese signage at first," but then said "Chinese is the dominant culture here, so it kind of makes sense." Another young woman thought that there should be other languages on the signs to encourage non-Chinese-speaking people to come to the city. In interviewing Chinese-speaking residents, one said, "Some Chinese, some English, that's better" and another said he preferred signs in both languages, "so people know what the business is about." A resident who'd lived in Richmond since the 1980s said, "I think everyone should just get along. I don't think (signage) makes that big of a difference."

Those interviewed felt that creating community harmony required bringing people together in various ways – community outreach programs, informal chats at Tim Horton's, and festivals "that can draw everybody together (so we can) get to know each other and understand each other."



# WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CREATING COMMUNITY HARMONY

4

*“We Want Richmond To Be The Most Welcoming, Inclusive And Harmonious Community In Canada”*

Chair of the Richmond Intercultural Advisory Committee (RIAC), **Diane Tijman**, informed the gathering of RIAC’s work in creating harmonious community in the city. As a proud citizen of Richmond, and District Curriculum Coordinator of English Language Learning & Multiculturalism, at the Richmond School Board (RSB), Diane shared her delight in regularly receiving new families from all over the world. “It’s a joyful job.”

She also spoke of RIAC’s broad Council-appointed representation that embraces community services, education, seniors, youth, the disabled community, law enforcement, health services, the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, as well as six members from the general public.



She went on to describe how this diverse group of 18 citizens addresses issues referred to it by City Council and provides information and recommendations to Council and community stakeholders regarding intercultural issues and opportunities. Their mandate is to “enhance intercultural harmony and strengthen intercultural cooperation in Richmond” and to promote pride in and acceptance of Canadian values and laws, respect for diverse heritages and traditions, and participation in community life.

Diane mentioned many recent RIAC projects, including the January 2015 **City of Richmond Diversity Symposium**, which brought together community leaders and staff to share information on community building; a **National Aboriginal Day celebration** in City Hall in 2014; and the May 2013 **Richmond Civic Engagement Forum**, which brought together diverse sectors to focus on community cohesion. She also drew attention to the *City of Richmond Newcomers’ Guide*, which is available in English, Chinese, Russian, Punjabi, and Tagalog, and provides up-to-date information about the city, its government and the services provided by different civic and community organizations.

Diane emphasized that creating community harmony is a many-faceted undertaking that requires facilitating partnership among Richmond’s many community stakeholders, educating themselves and others on the meaning of culture and diversity, extending information and welcome to newcomers, and providing opportunities for the city’s many cultures to learn and celebrate together.

## 5

## SEEKING A SHARED VISION ON COMMUNITY HARMONY

*“A Good Community May Have Conflicts. Acknowledging These Conflicts Can Lead To Harmony.”*



To engage the participants in reflecting on what they had heard in the video and the presentation on the work of Richmond Intercultural Advisory Committee Joanna then posed the following question to the group: **“What does community harmony mean to you?”**

The resulting response was dynamic with many people putting forth their views. Some spoke about what it meant to them personally, with sentiments like “feeling welcome,” “feeling at home,” and “a feeling of belonging.” Others took a more abstract view with words like “empathy,” “inclusive of everyone,” “respectful of every culture and individual,” and “shared experiences.”

Still others moved into the governance sphere and emphasized “Consistency. Council needs to apply bylaws equally and consistently.” Related to that was the view, “We all live in the same box. Respect the rules. Live in harmony.”

A resident of Chinese origin pointed out that, “In Chinese culture, ‘harmony’ needs many sounds. This creates resonance.” Supporting that perspective, another said, “Harmony implies differences; it’s about acknowledging and respecting differences.” A third participant added, “A good community may have conflicts. Acknowledging these conflicts can lead to harmony.” A fourth participant offered a related view, “not unity by conformity, unity in diversity.”

A longstanding resident emphasized “the ability to communicate,” pointed out that “‘communal’ comes from the same root as ‘communicate,’” and concluded that “a shared language is fundamental to creating community.” In a similar vein, a participant said, “It’s important to understand that English and French are Canada’s official languages.” Another said, “Multiculturalism is entrenched in Canadian constitution but that doesn’t mean that anything and everything goes.”

This discussion suggested a need to find a meeting ground between residents who welcome diversity and those who seek greater uniformity. As one participant put it, “We need to develop our capacity to manage conflict and differences.”



# THE CITY OF RICHMOND'S ROLE IN ADDRESSING THE SIGNAGE ISSUE

6

## *"City Council Has Consulted Broadly With The Community"*

City staff provided an overview of citizens' concerns about signage and the City's efforts to address them.

Noting some residents' discomfort with the number of signs that are in languages other than English, and with the non-English ads, flyers and promotional materials in the mailboxes, staff explained that the City has no jurisdiction over material that comes in the mail and that the bylaw limits the types of signs that it can regulate.

City staff informed the group that Richmond's Sign Bylaw #5560 applies to exterior signage and rezoning/development signs but not to those on the inside of windows of places of businesses, in the interior of shopping centres or in bus shelters. It also does not apply to directional, "For Sale", "For Lease", and related types of signs. Any amendment to the bylaw applies on a "going forward" basis only and existing signage will not be required to comply.

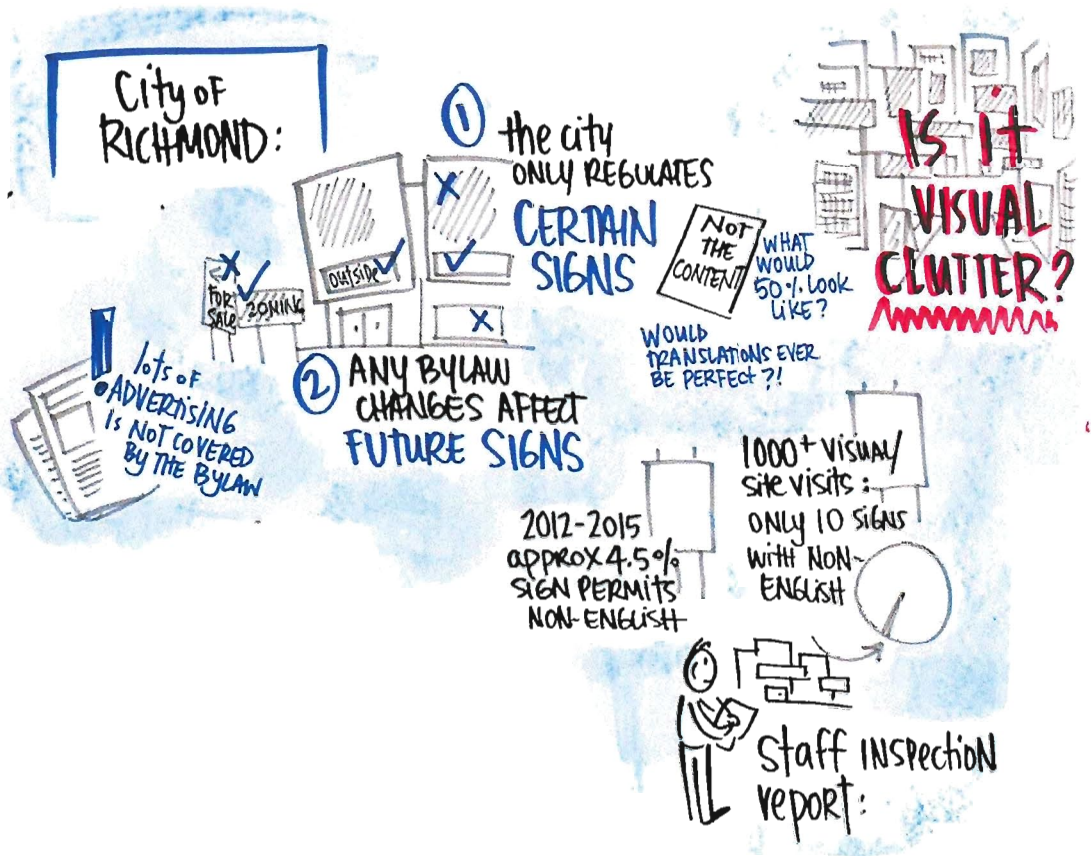
Staff said that there are penalties for not meeting bylaw requirements, but that the City has preferred to employ an educational outreach method to a punitive approach. Asking people to include English in their signage at the sign permit stage has been more effective in encouraging the inclusion of English on signage, as has intervening when new business license applicants require a sign permit and when they are renewing their business licenses.

Staff said that City Inspectors' door-to-door campaign to educate businesses on the importance of having signs that all citizens can understand and on the City's sign permit requirement has also been successful in generating sign permit applications. Non-English-speaking business people have been informed of City Council's message that not including English on their signs can lead to losing 50% of their potential customers, and most of these business people have indicated that they will include or provide additional English in future signage. Of the City's inspection visits to over 1000 places of businesses, only 10 signs had no English on them at all. The rest were in both English and Chinese with some size variance.

Staff also pointed out that the City has established [www.richmond.ca/signage](http://www.richmond.ca/signage), a webpage which provides research and background information on the signage issue and ongoing efforts to address it. It has also created an on-line, three-question signage and community harmony survey to which all residents can respond. They can also email their responses to [signsconsult@richmond.ca](mailto:signsconsult@richmond.ca) or they can post them on [Letstalkrichmond.ca](http://Letstalkrichmond.ca).

City staff said that overall, the majority of people consulted wanted some English language requirement in business signage. Staff also drew the group's attention to some related signage concerns, notably poor translation and visual clutter. Concerning the latter, staff mentioned the City of Surrey's de-cluttering campaign and recently updated bylaw, which limits all signs to 25 per cent of a business' storefront windows.

The group was informed that staff will be presenting a report on the signage issue to City Council this Spring.



# LEARNING FROM OTHER CITIES THAT HAVE FACED CONFLICTS OVER SIGNAGE

7

*“All Found Ways To Turn Challenges  
Into Opportunities”*

The next presenter, Dr. Dan Hiebert, Professor of Geography at UBC, has studied the signage issue extensively and, with PhD student, Elanna Nolan, has prepared a study, “Social Cohesion, Diversity and Lessons Learned From Other Jurisdictions.” He affirmed his and his co-author’s neutrality on the issue, saying that neither lives in Richmond and neither is about to suggest what Richmond should or shouldn’t do.

Dan began by debunking “The Big Myth,” which is that Richmond is divided into two cultural/language groups – Chinese and British. In reality, there are 165 different ethnic groups in Richmond and 77 different languages. **To flesh out the picture, he offered the following facts:**

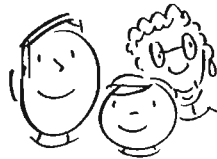
- 62% of Richmond’s 190,000 residents are immigrants
- Since 1980, 94,000 immigrants, approximately 50% of which are ethnic Chinese, have come to Richmond
- Approximately 90% of the population can speak English; 10% cannot
- 12,000 people living in Richmond, most of whom are Chinese, work in a language other than English
- 108,000 people speak English in the home; 82,000 do not

Dan informed the group that from 1980-2011, 21,000 immigrants came to Richmond through the Business Class category. Immigrants entering Canada through this category are required to start a business as a condition of entry. He explained that it is likely due to this immigration stream, and a concentration of Economic immigrants in Richmond, that we see a proliferation of businesses operated by merchants for whom English is an additional language. He went on to explain that a commercial district with Chinese-dominated signage is common worldwide and is symptomatic of a global Chinese diaspora of 40 to 50 million people. He then described three multi-ethnic communities, similar in character to Richmond, who have successfully addressed similar challenges.

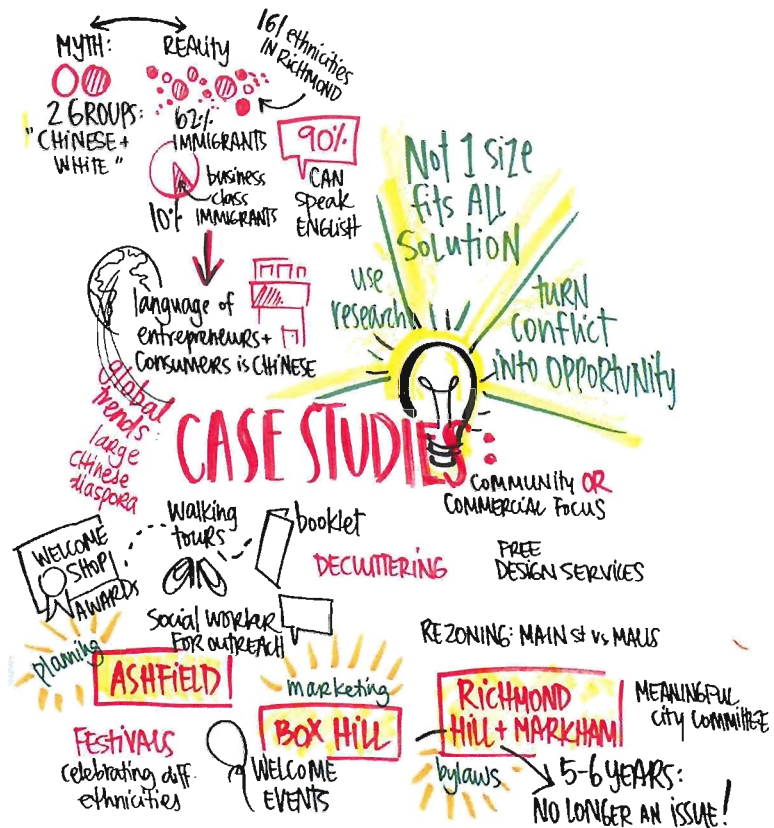
Professor Dan Hiebert: DATA:



RICHMOND:



LIVING WELL WITH DIVERSITY



Fifty percent of the population of **Ashfield**, near Sydney, Australia, is foreign-born and its “Anglo-Celt” community, many of whom are elderly, complained that Ashfield no longer felt like home. City council took a social planning approach and hired a social worker of Chinese origin to mediate concerns and to encourage Chinese merchants to be more welcoming and inclusive to residents.

Other initiatives included free translation services; a “Welcome Shop Day” to introduce the public to Chinese commercial areas; walking tours with visits to restaurants, herbalists, etc.; and “Welcome Shop Awards” for aesthetically pleasing signage. Council also produced a booklet in both Chinese and English that explained Ashfield’s socio-cultural policies and strategic plans.

The City Council of **Box Hill**, a high-density suburb of Melbourne, had been receiving complaints about the “changing character” of the population and the plethora of Chinese signs. Council took a commercial approach to resolving the issue and funded “Annual Harmony Day” to showcase Box Hill’s ethnic diversity, and funded separate festivals for its larger cultural groups.

In addition, they hired a multilingual consultant and initiated a “Shopfront Improvement Program” with a focus on decluttering. The program included discounted translation services and free graphic design to assist merchants in creating more attractive signs.

Comparable in population to Richmond, **Richmond Hill and Markham**, Ontario, have a diverse population, 55% of which are immigrants and nearly half of which are Chinese. Sixty-five percent of Richmond Hill’s citizens speak a non-official language in their home.

Responding to complaints from long-term residents about Asian-themed malls and visual clutter, Richmond Hill used its municipal powers and enacted a sign bylaw that required 50% of the text on all commercial signs to be in English or French. They also rezoned areas near residential communities as “not for mall building” and encouraged more “Main Street” commerce (as opposed to malls.).

In addition, they established a Race Relations Committee to listen to people’s complaints. Because it included three Council members along with other community representatives, the committee had the political clout to act on the recommendations arising from their Diversity Action Plan.

As a result, Richmond Hill and Markham were able to manage what had been a pressing issue in the 1990s such that it became a non-issue within five to six years. Today, Richmond Hill and Markham enjoy considerable condo and commercial development with a mix of both Asian and North American-style malls, including the largest Asian-Western-style mall in North America.

**Dan identified a number of key lessons from this survey of the three communities:**

1. Different communities require different solutions. Ashfield’s solution was oriented toward social planning, Box Hill favoured marketing and economic planning, and Richmond Hill and Markham chose a blend of legislation, zoning, and race relations.
2. All solutions required a serious investment of time, energy and money on the part of the municipality.
3. A combination of top-down and bottom-up initiatives proved effective.
4. All three communities established structures to encourage dialogue.
5. All three communities commissioned research to understand issues and to help design solutions.
6. All three communities found ways to turn their challenges into opportunities to improve residents’ quality of life and to promote understanding among cultures.

## 8

## IDEAS FOR ACTION

### *“Despite Disparate Views And Interests At Our Table, There Was A Shared Genuine Interest In Finding Solutions.”*

Inviting the group to share their views on the ideas offered by Dan and other presenters and fellow participants, Joanna kicked off a plenary discussion with this question: **“From what you have heard tonight, what ideas inspire you and how might they contribute to intercultural harmony?”**

The table responses, an informal show of hands and the posted notices indicated strong support for more robust bylaw regulation of signage, although other than calls for “more teeth” and “consistency” on the part of some participants, few were explicit about what the amendments would consist of.

Some felt that more data was required to ensure that bylaw amendments would reflect the realities of the community. Another urged that the City work with the business community to arrive at a workable bylaw: “The [Chinese business community] want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.”

There was also a call for leadership on the part of City Council, “Council needs to set a vision and lead us toward it, as opposed to trying to please everyone.” Long-term residents were clear: “We need signage legislation to show that the City is invested in this issue and is prepared to protect English as the hegemonic language.”

Those who were specific about bylaw regulation tended to favour the Richmond Hill and Markham solution – i.e., requiring 50% of the text on commercial signage to be in English or French.

A large number of people favoured a decluttering initiative. Box Hill’s Shopfront Decluttering Program with its discounted translation services and free graphic design appealed to many. One individual suggested having a contest of best business signs. “Richmond citizens can vote on the best signs.”

Few participants considered bylaw regulation to be sufficient to address the issues. As one participant said, “The law is a blunt instrument. Analysis is required. Voluntary compliance is preferred.”

One viewpoint that surfaced frequently was the idea that signage is symptomatic of a deeper division in the community. As one participant expressed it, "Signage is the tip of the iceberg and can be resolved through good governance. We need social cohesion and respect." Another put it more bluntly, "We live in a community in which white people and ethnic Chinese people discriminate against one another. They should get it together. There should be more love."

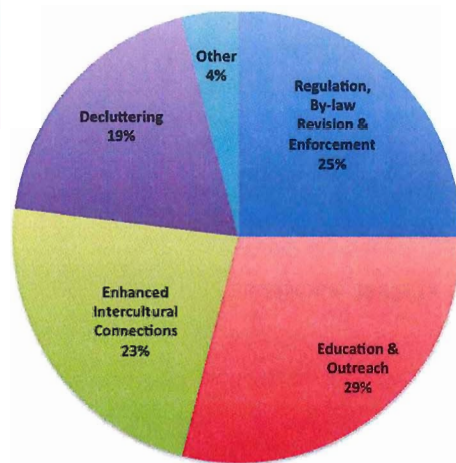
Most attendees recognized the multidimensionality of the problem and supported more education, outreach and intercultural enhancement. According to one attendee, "The bylaw discussion is a red herring. Ideas of intercultural events and resources for immigrants solve the core problem."

Apart from Box Hill's effective approach to decluttering, a number of people also appreciated its cultural outreach initiatives – i.e., hiring a multilingual consultant and funding festivals involving a number of ethnicities.

Initiatives like open house shopping days were also favoured. Support was expressed for the Ashfield model with an emphasis on more social-cultural initiatives such as a Chinese social worker, walking tours, and welcoming events.

FIGURE 1

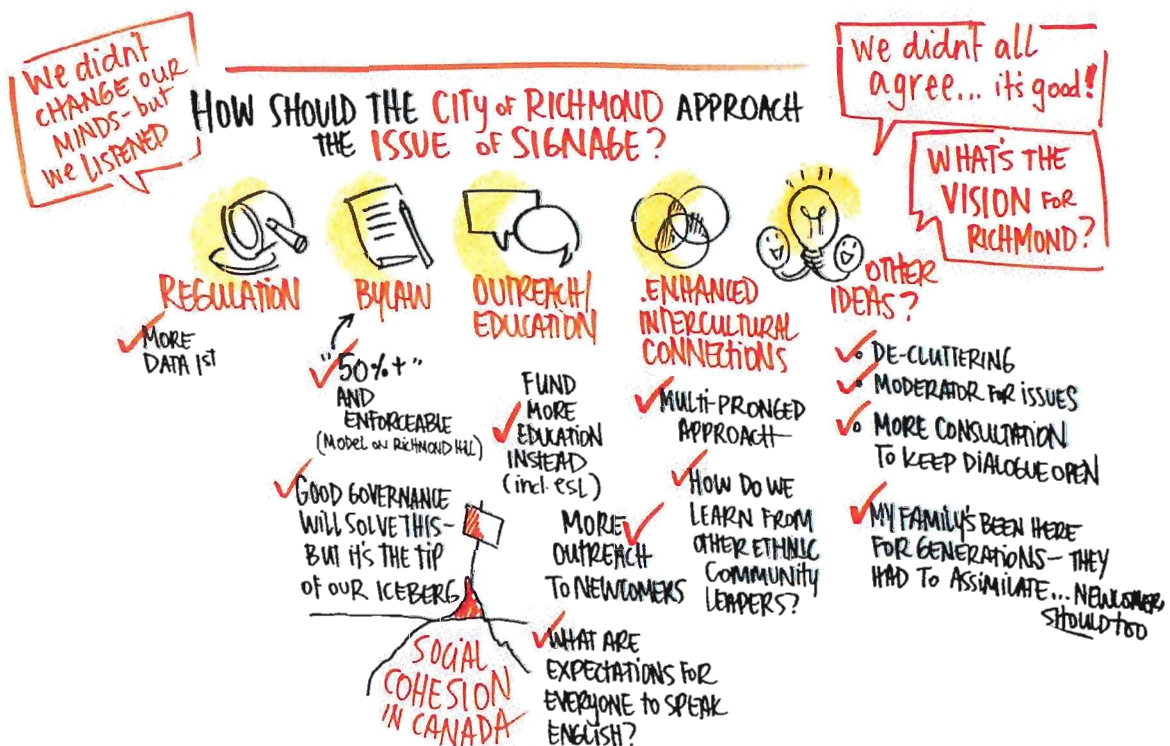
*75 responses were collected from participant post-it notes. These have been categorized according to their support for different solutions.*



As a way of strengthening intercultural relations, one person suggested funding summer students to create plasticized "cheat sheets" of common English consumer-oriented phrases to assist non-English-speaking business owners in communicating with English-speaking customers.

There was a persistent call among some participants for respecting the existing culture ("Newcomers need to respect those who built the community.") and for making learning English mandatory among younger newcomers, although not among the elderly.

While there was support for funding more ESL and citizenship programs, one spokesperson said, "It's not just about ESL. It's about outreach, breaking down the silos of communities, bringing people into the community."





## NEXT STEPS

### *“There’s A Lot Of Potential For Really Interesting Change In Richmond.”*

Despite the divisions evident in the comments, by meeting’s end, there was a prevailing sense of optimism about the possibilities for resolution. As one spokesperson admitted, “We haven’t changed our minds but we have begun to understand one another in new ways.” One person was surprised that the signage issues “was not as difficult to discuss as I thought it would be.” Another was gratified to discover “that it is possible to have a reasonable discussion and to really ‘hear’ all parties.” A third person said something similar: “I learned that a reasonable response can be had among a diverse group of people over a contentious issue.”

According to people’s comments on the feedback forms, they also gained a greater understanding of what signs can and cannot be regulated, of the diverse nature of Richmond’s population, of the city’s current efforts to improve community harmony, of how other cities have successfully addressed a similar problem. They also learned that the actual percentage of signs with no English on them is not as high as they had originally thought.



An important new understanding shared by one participant had to do with “the feelings of being excluded on the part of long-term residents.”

In concluding remarks, City staff expressed how impressive participants’ enthusiasm and energy had been and how evident the shared desire was among those present to bring signage and cultural harmony together.

The overarching message from the meeting was that more discussion is needed, that a creative, multidimensional approach is essential, and that devising as many formal and informal ways as possible to bring disparate groups together is necessary.

## I Agenda



**Community Workshop Agenda**  
6911 No. 3 Road, Richmond, BC V6Y 2C1

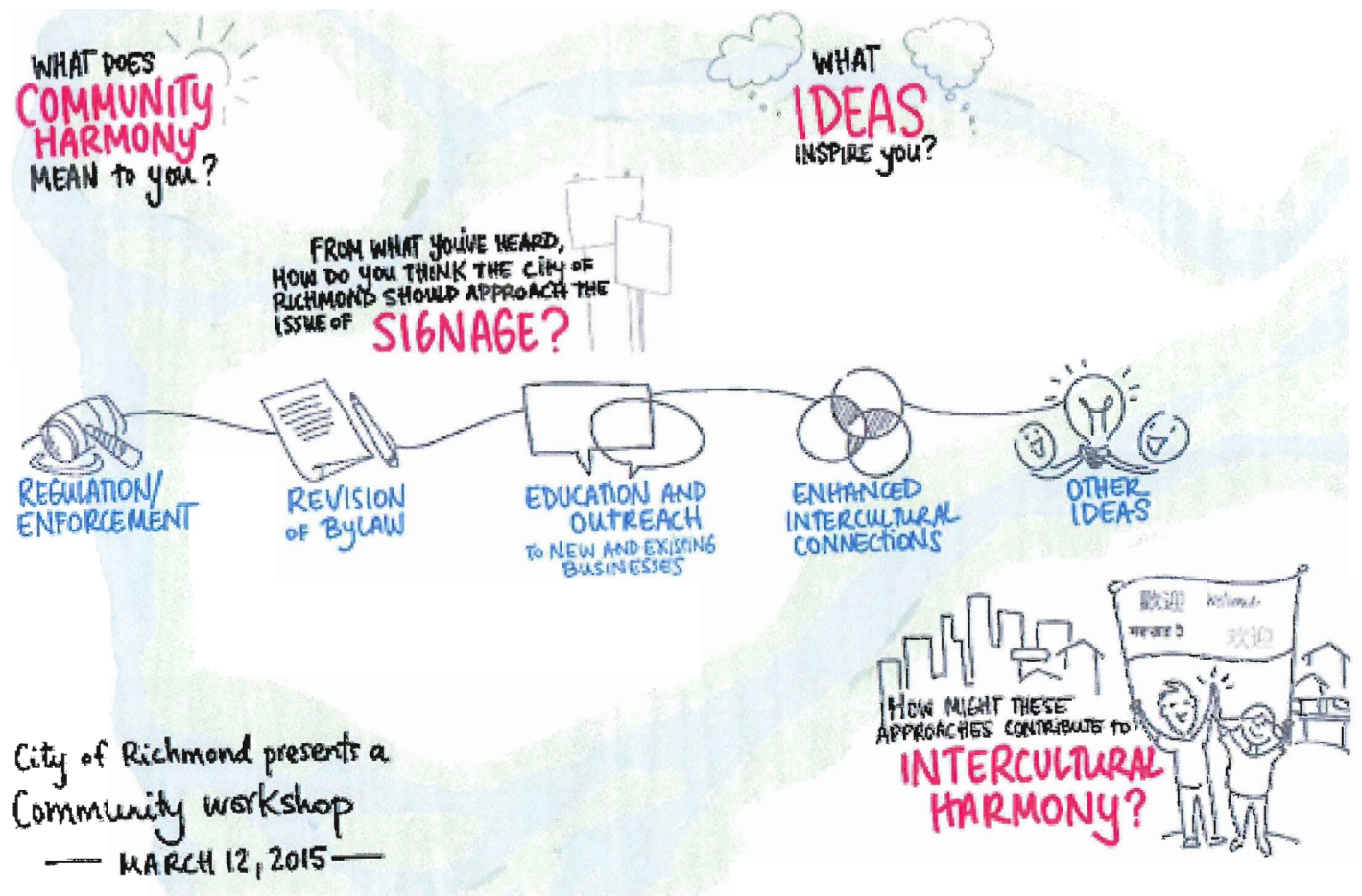
### Signage and Community Harmony in Richmond

Thursday March 12, 2015  
6:30-8:30 p.m.

1. **Welcome, Goals of the Workshop and Setting the Context**  
*John Foster, Manager, Community Social Development, City of Richmond*
2. **Guidelines and Overview of the Workshop**  
*Dr. Joanna Ashworth, Senior Dialogue Associate, Work Centre for Dialogue, Simon Fraser University, Workshop Moderator*
3. **Video: Living in Richmond, Non-English Signs & Creating Community Harmony**
  - Produced by Simon Fraser University Creative Media Services
4. **Presentation: The Work of the Richmond Intercultural Advisory Committee**
  - What do we know about creating harmonious community? *Diane Tijman, Chair Richmond Intercultural Advisory Committee*
5. **Moderated Plenary: Seeking a Shared Vision on Community Harmony**
  - What does community harmony mean to you? What ideas inspire you? *Dr. Joanna Ashworth, Facilitator*
6. **Presentation: The Role of the City in Addressing the Signage Issue**  
*Cecilia Achiam, Director, Administration & Compliance, City of Richmond*
7. **Presentation: Living well with diversity: Learning from other cities that have faced conflicts over signage**  
*Dr. Dan Hitchert, Professor of Geography, University of British Columbia*
8. **Small Group Discussion & Report Out: Ideas for Action**
  - From what you've heard so far this evening, how do you think the City of Richmond should approach the issue of signage?
  - How might these approaches contribute to intercultural harmony?
9. **Closing Remarks**  
*John Foster, Manager, Community Social Development, City of Richmond*
10. **Next Steps: Feedback Forms & Report**  
*Dr. Joanna Ashworth, Moderator*

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## II Map of Workshop Questions



## III Post-Its Responses To Workshop Questions

### What does community harmony mean to you?

- “compassion respectfully helpfully”
- “being respectful of each other irrespective of culture, language, religion”
- “intercultural harmony is a two-way street”
- “understanding which values are cultural”
- “respect for self, others, other values”
- “understanding what fixed and what are cultural values”
- “conflict resolution, not peace at any cost”
- “separate the sign issue from racism”

### General Comments

- “Bylaws aren’t the only way. It’s better to explore other options. UBC research was very helpful”
- “Being inclusive is positive for the bottom line”
- “After 40 years, we don’t feel welcome or included any longer here.”
- “After (addressing) signs, where else will it go? There is still racism.”
- “Consider safety in emergency situations where communication is a problem.”
- “Countering public apathy (on so many topics)”
- “I want to feel welcome at all businesses.”
- “Can’t get into the real estate market. Lost sense of community.”
- “problem is immigrants settle in major areas and spread out.”
  
- “Root is unnecessarily high immigration policy.”
- “[need] greater analysis of issue.”
- “Signage is the tip of a big iceberg in Richmond. This is about waves of immigrants NOT WANTING to integrate into Canadian society in general and Richmond community specifically.”

- “As an English speaker, what about my Charter of Rights?”
- “Create a desire to include non Chinese speakers in all aspects of community. Common language.”
- “I don’t understand why people come to our country and don’t respect English.”
- “Identify and establish what are our ‘Canadian values’”
- “50% of business lost if signs strictly one language.”
- “When no English [speakers] feel excluded.”
- “Include everything in business and speak to size.” [?]
- “Sign regulation won’t work.”
- “signage by-laws are weak to nonexistent in this municipality”
- “how do we educate people who speak limited English to understand our way of living and culture”
- “The main problem is communication through language. One language for everybody.”
- “to promote intercultural harmony, we need to have Chinese business community reach out to Canadian-born residents.”
- “Language issue makes it difficult and makes it hard to be inclusive”
- “Copy Richmond Hill and Markham. That’s what we need.”
- “None of the examples (of successful approaches) presented relied solely on a by-law.”

#### **Support for regulation/enforcement**

- “size of signs; French and English; regulation at all levels of government – municipal, provincial and federal”
- “rezoning of residential and commercial areas. More main street.”
- “regulate interior and exterior signs”
- “regulate a wider category of signs (e.g., in front of single houses), which are often Chinese only”
- “We need signage legislation to show that the City is invested in this issue and is prepared to protect English as hegemonic language”
- “if there’s a penalty, then enforce it. Otherwise it’s useless.”

### **Support for revision of by-law**

- “renew the by-laws and give them teeth. This will result in harmony.”
- “enact a by-law in both English and French and apply it consistently.”
- “Bylaws contribute to cultural harmony by being applied consistently.”
- “signs need to be 50% English/French or other language”
- “create a by-law”
- “Have a decluttering by-law” (counted under “by-law” not “decluttering”)
- “Bylaws 50% English. Regulate more signs than done now.”
- “Sign bylaw 80% minimum English/French
- “Start with some basic rules around signs with 50% + English as a basis”
- “comprehensive sign by-law”
- “create by-law”

### **Support for Education and Outreach**

- “education”
- The law is a blunt instrument. Analysis is required. Voluntary compliance is preferred.”
- “Richmond should stay the course of using persuasion to influence more English signage.”
- “More English learning services for immigrants”
- “More citizenship classes/services for new immigrants”
- “education at licensing level”
- “talk to business owners about respect for all”
- “encourage businesses with programs and encourage them to understand how they make the community feel”
- “public education”
- “education, consultation, encouragement”
- “Education. Outreach.”
- “Merchant education”
- “outreach help. Encourage English usage.”
- “Reaching out to business.”

- “Education is key.”
- “Education and outreach”
- “A regulatory regime is dictatorial and costly and would only affect approximately 4.5% of existing signs (and zero new signs are non-English only). Outreach and education are key and more effective.”

### **Support for Enhanced Intercultural Connections**

- “Fund summer students to do plasticized cheat sheets (translating) English (consumer-oriented) phrases (e.g., “How much is that?”) into other languages.” (Intercultural)
- “The bylaw discussion is a red herring. Ideas of intercultural events and resources for immigrants solve the core problem.”
- “willingness to change. Empathy, dialogue, openness.” (Intercultural)
- “Participation in community events (e.g., open doors)”
- “Increase interaction/contact amongst different cultures.”
- “Cultural share. Food fair.”
- “Universal welcome sign in business windows.”
- “Bring people together.”
- “Cultural ambassador/social worker to work with businesses.”
- “Reframe thinking and approach. Instead of advising businesses of their potential loss of business, emphasize the importance of letting people feel included. Welcome ALL PEOPLE. Do not exclude non-Chinese speakers.
- “free translation of signs, menus, etc. would be a great start. Or at least discounted translation” (intercultural)
- Support for “Other” (including combined approaches)
- “Create City Immigrant Affairs office.” (other)
- “Make learning English mandatory.” (other)
- “Ashfield model. Social worker welcoming shop owners; walking tours; booklet; welcoming events; decluttering. (Intercultural + decluttering)
- “Change must be dialogical. A sign bylaw unilaterally imposes a dominant culture on a group. Festivals, education, welcoming tours and outreach build the capacity of the entire community to appreciate other cultures.” (Intercultural + Education & Outreach)
- “Immigrants are generally aware that English is important in Richmond and want to connect with the community. Services like accessible ESL classes, translation services,

tips on marketing, cards with common English translation will be most effective.”  
(Outreach/Education + intercultural)

- “Try the approaches of other cities with similar populations – free translation services, education and outreach is a very good approach because most Chinese/other immigrants can’t learn English.” (education/outreach + intercultural)
- “Box Hill – commercial focus; decluttering; multilingual consultant; festivals involving a number of ethnicities; free graphic design” (decluttering + outreach)
- “Use Richmond Hill as an example. Establish by-law + race relations committee.” (bylaw + intercultural)
- “bylaw is not the most effective solution. Education, persuasion is. An open house shopping day is a fabulous idea.” (education + intercultural)
- Reaching out to business and encouraging English signs along with Chinese if wanted. Double-sided bilingual signs should also be enforced. Force will never create harmony (no bylaw). Intercultural committee = expensive.” (enforcement + outreach)
- “Address clutter”
- “clutter limitation is worth investigating.”
- “decluttering will help immensely”
- “have a contest of best business signs. Richmond citizens can vote on the best signs”
- “declutter to decrease the perceived volume of single language signage”
- “declutter: window signs/ vinyl...Limit the text to a specific amount – i.e., 25%
- “declutter!”
- “decluttering has some merit”
- “encourage decluttering”
- “shop front improvement program”
- “Appearance.”
- “active integration (long term approach) of immigrants into Canadian society” (other)



# IV Graphic Illustration of Community Workshop Ideas





## Data Summary: Language on Signs

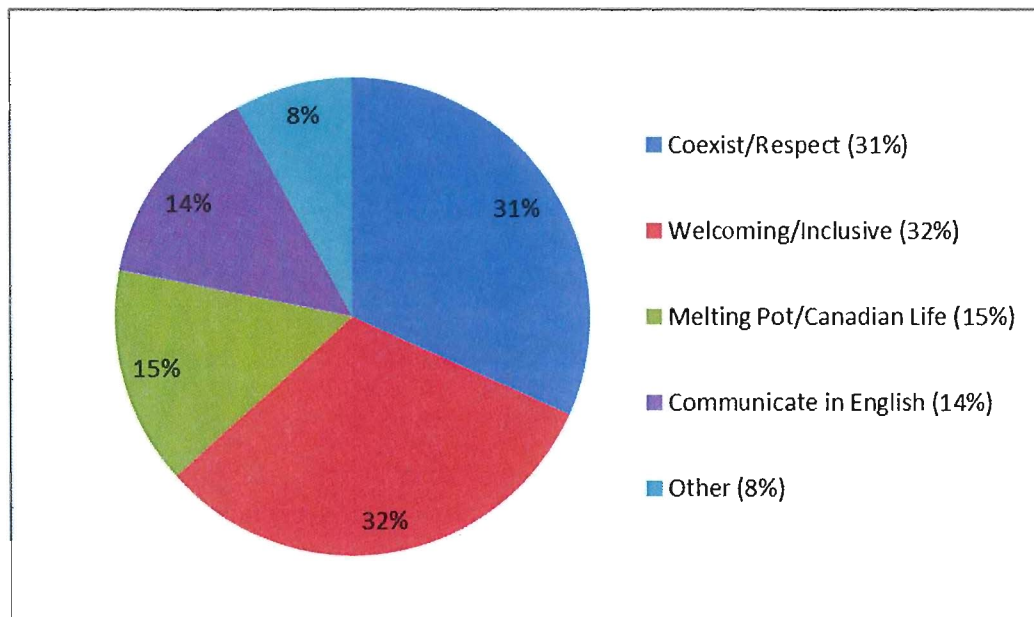
### Let's Talk Richmond Survey

The City implemented a multi-pronged public consultation process between January 30 and March 20, 2015 to gauge community perceptions on the language on signs in Richmond. The community was invited to have their say and provide their thoughts on the language on signs issue through mail, email, an online survey hosted at Let's Talk Richmond, or by attending a community workshop hosted by the City.

This document provides a brief overview of the observations from the responses received through the online survey. The survey was offered in English and Chinese, however all responses received were in English.

A total of 260<sup>1</sup> responses were received to the online survey. The summary below includes paraphrased findings to provide a flavor of the diversity and spectrum of responses and is not intended to present verbatim feedback received.

#### 1) What does community harmony in Richmond mean to you?



31% of the responses were related to community harmony being about the coexistence of people from different cultures in a community. Descriptions included a community where everyone works towards achieving the same goals, respecting one another, and conflict is avoided.

<sup>1</sup> The survey had 3 open ended questions, not all respondents responded to each question. 260 is the number of responses received to the questions with the most responses.

Almost as many responses were received (32%) where community harmony was described as a process where community members make a conscious effort to understand one another and each other's differences, embrace each other's cultures and contribute to a welcoming and inclusive environment. Many expressed the opinion that welcoming was not a one way street where host community residents were required to extend a welcome to newcomers/immigrants. They indicated that there was an obligation on the part of newcomers to welcome and integrate with the host community members as well.

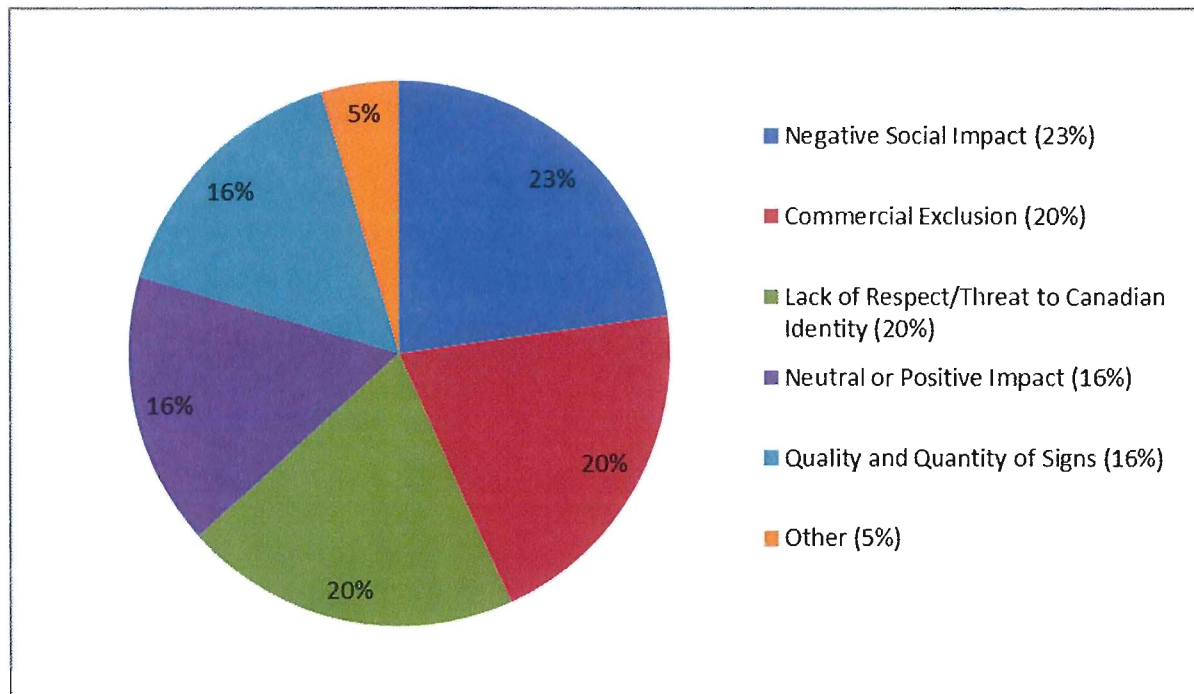
Another 15% of the responses envisioned community harmony to be achieved only if immigrants and newcomers assumed and assimilated to Canadian values and ways of life. That is learning and speaking English, and putting their cultural practices and mother tongue aside to replace with that of Canada's - in essence equating community harmony to an environment of a "melting pot".

Close behind at 14%, indicated community harmony was about communication, more specifically, about the ability of community members to be able to communicate with one another in English. Those with this perspective believe that without communication, and without being to understand one another, that community harmony is not possible as not being able to communicate in English creates silos and mini "Asian communities".

Concepts of respect, lack of conflict, welcoming and inclusiveness were the dominant opinions received in the responses. A strong notion within the responses was that coming to Canada was a choice on the part of immigrants; therefore they should assimilate and adapt to the Canadian way of life, and assume a Canadian identity.

There was an element of fear in many of the responses that immigrants were taking over Richmond and the once European majority that founded this Country was becoming a minority and invisible in the very Country they created. As a consequence, non-official languages are beginning to take over the landscape that should belong to the official languages of Canada.

## 2) How do you feel about the signage in the community? Does it affect your quality of life?

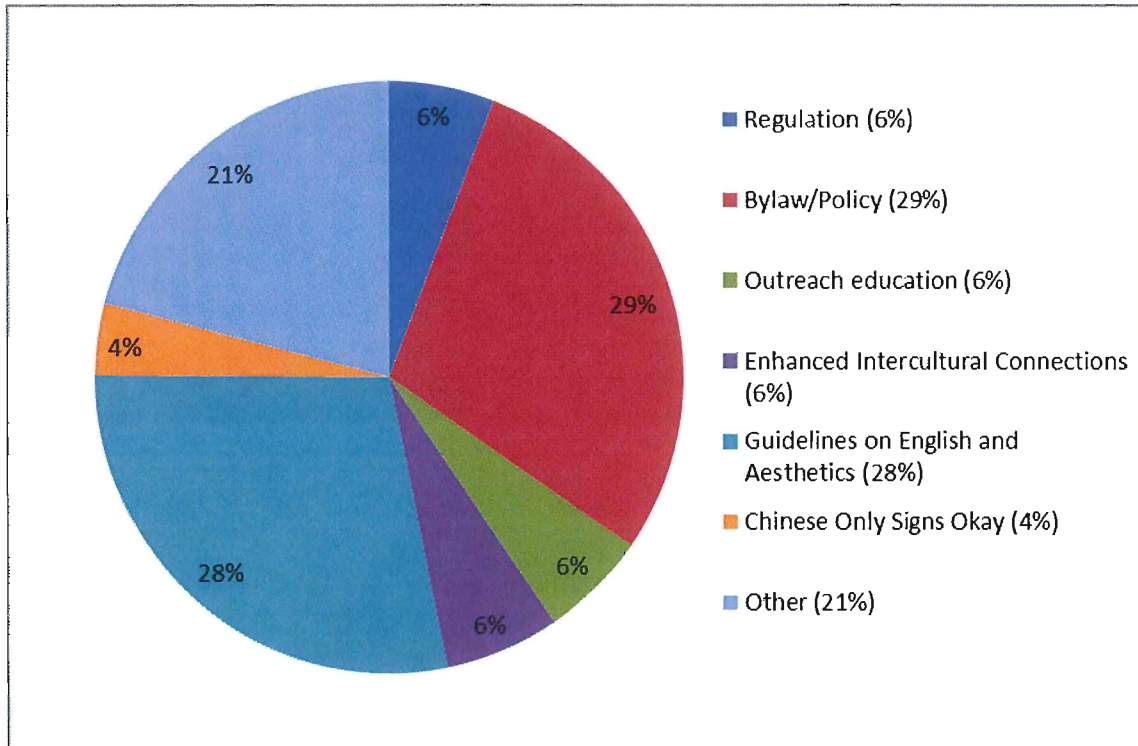


23% of responses referenced the negative impact of language on signs to the quality of life of a community, a few spoke of personal experiences resulting in negative emotional consequences for them. Personal feelings of social exclusion from the community, and feelings of not being welcome in specific areas of the community were prevalent among those noting a negative impact of language on signs. A few responses noted a disconnect from surroundings that is experienced when an individual is not able to read the signs around them.

20% of the responses noted that language on signs led to commercial exclusion or a feeling that they were not wanted or welcome as consumers in a particular store. Not being able to read the business sign also created a lack of understanding of what services a store was offering.

Another 20% of responses were of the opinion that signage that was not in English displays a lack of respect for Canada and Canada's way of life, and a threat/negative consequence to Canadian identity. A message that resonated among many of the responses was that seeing signs in a language other than English made community members feel like they were no longer in Canada, and that Richmond is being transformed into having an Asian feel rather than a Canadian feel.

**3) Please share any additional comments that can assist the City of Richmond in developing future recommendations and measures related to language on signage.**



The top 2 categories of recommendations (29% and 28% respectively) were Bylaw/Policy and Guidelines on English Aesthetics.

Responses noting the need for some form of guidelines were suggesting that the City take some form of action that would provide clear expectations for business owners to follow in terms of signage. Although the majority specifically noted the need for guidelines on the use of one of the official languages (English and/or French), some also referenced the need for guidelines around visual elements and aesthetics of signs. There was a sense that signs were not visually appealing, and too large. In some cases, it was noted that signs presented a visual clutter to the community and guidelines needs to be implemented to eliminate this clutter.

Bylaw/Policy responses were related to those specifically noted that a Bylaw or formal policy dictating the requirement and mandatory use of English on signs be implemented by the City. Many suggested that English (or any one of the official languages) need not be the sole language, and that another language could be included on a sign, but in much smaller font.

The themes of Outreach and Education, and Enhanced Intercultural Connections were each noted in 6% of the responses. Several responses noted that education on community harmony and the Canadian way of life was essential to include as part of the solution.

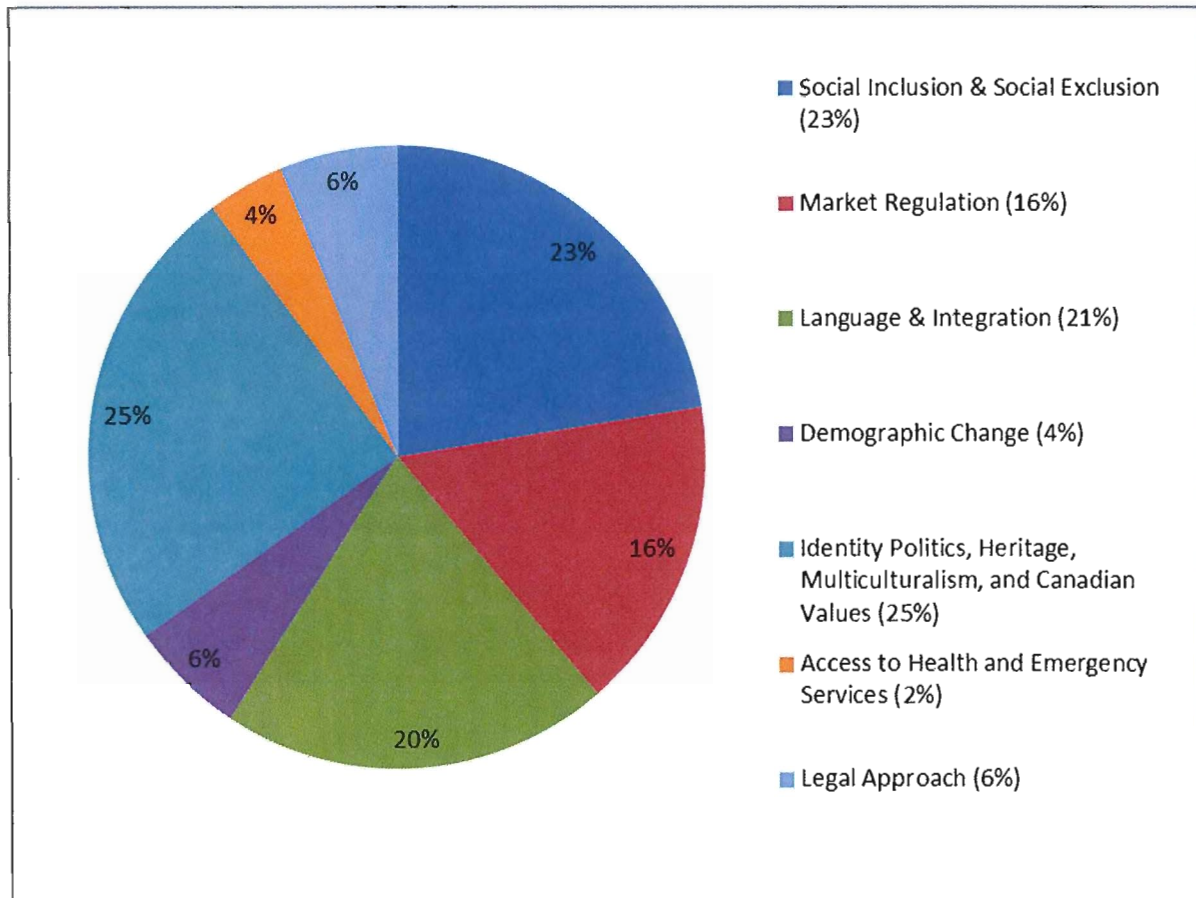
A small minority (4%) felt that Chinese only signs are okay. That is a business owners prerogative to promote to their target market as they wish. As well, some felt that language specific signs were a sign of the multiculturalism in our community, and therefore should not be seen as an issue but rather embraced.

## Data Summary: Language on Signs

### Emails received through signs consult email address

The City implemented a multi-pronged public consultation process between January 30 and March 20, 2015 to gauge community perceptions on the language on signs in Richmond. The community was invited to have their say and provide their thoughts on the language on signs issue through mail, email, an online survey hosted at Let's Talk Richmond, or by attending a community workshop hosted by the City.

This document summarizes the submissions received through the email address ([signsconsult@richmond.ca](mailto:signsconsult@richmond.ca)) created for this engagement process. A total of 24 emails were received<sup>1</sup>. The figure below illustrates the emerging themes from the emails. To provide context to these themes, included below are verbatim examples of responses received. No names have been included to the examples to protect confidentiality.



<sup>1</sup> This does not include the propaganda that forwarded to the City through this email. These items were not seen as a community member providing their thoughts on the issue of language on signs, and therefore not included in this summary.



1) Social inclusion and social exclusion are expressed in two ways – non- English signage excludes “host society” (belonging, recognition and heritage, market participation) versus non-English signage prevents populations from participating as they choose in the market and in everyday life. The argument of multiculturalism and the Canadian welcoming of newcomers are expressed in many instances with the analogy of a “two-way-street”, and applied to both sides of the “for” and “against” City regulation of signage.

*“As Canada has only two official languages, signage should be in both English and French. If a company wants to add another language - so be it, however English or French should be the dominant language.*

*I was born and raised in Vancouver, spent a lot of time in Richmond and moved to Richmond in 1990. I refuse to patronize shops where Chinese is the dominant language on signage as I have found that I am ignored or treated very shabbily. This is Canada, not Hong Kong or China. There are a great many people who do not speak either Chinese dialect who are being excluded by this immigrant class. This is reverse discrimination. Would we be allowed to act as they do if we moved to their "home" country - I think not.*

*I was in Superstore the other day and a young cashier of Asian descent was serving the customer in front of me. The Asian customer began speaking to the young lady in one of the Chinese dialects and when the young lady advised that she did not speak that Asian language, the customer was very rude. Where does this woman think she lives.....China?*

*While this is supposed to be an open and free society specific immigrants are trying to make it a closed one solely for their benefit, not for the benefit of all Canadians.”*

2) Market-regulation is another theme that is employed to make a case that markets will self-regulate and in time English language will increasingly be used in signage in order to access a broader market share.

*“Here is an example: there is a business that sells chicken feet, coagulated pig blood, cow stomach, duck tongues, and duck necks, etc. Those foods are popular in Chinese speaking community. Will English speaking local residents ever think about purchase foods? Very likely, no. In this case, since the majority, if not all of its customers are Chinese, it is very natural for the business owner to make Chinese more prominent in their business signs because he or she wants to get as many customers as possible. Assuming all of a sudden, Chinese speaking customers change their appetites and do not eat those foods anymore and on the other hand, English speaking customers start to love those foods and buy them like crazy, what will the business owner do? Any rational business owner will change their former Chinese prominent signs to English prominent or English only signs. That is the power of market.”*

3) Language & integration are raised as a key issue for consideration of an amended signage bylaw. Language is interpreted as a marker of integration, and therefore non-English signage is seen to be a sign of failure to integrate. An argument is also presented in this way for a “tough-love” approach, in which English language is enforced in order to assert the primacy and common language of English (and French) in Richmond, and Canada.

*“I personally think that English should be on every sign, public or private. Not having English on signage, menus and the like is divisive, especially now that native english speakers are in the minority of Richmond's population. I wouldn't have a problem with another language alongside english, either larger*

*or smaller depending on their preferences. These immigrants are not being encouraged to integrated into our community if they can live their entire lives here without speaking a word of English. We should encourage them to integrate, and this would be a good first step. Having both languages—English and Chinese—on signage would encourage inclusion in businesses primarily serving Chinese.”*

4) Demographic change is cited by many, and is framed by some with a narrative of “Asian Invasion,” of loss of what was seen to be a British heritage, and the perceived development of enclaves and ghettos.

*“As a Canadian born citizen I embrace our diverse culture. I feel it makes us richer human beings by understanding our differences. However, myself and many Canadian born citizens I know (regardless of our family backgrounds) feel that there is a disrespect of the Canadian culture and our strong identity when you see an overwhelming amount of influence of other countries growing here and no recognition of the official Canadian languages.”*

5) Identity politics, heritage, multiculturalism, and Canadian values are raised both to defend freedom of expression through a lens of multiculturalism in a position against regulation; and in the affirmative by depicting the undoing of Canadian identity and values that is, in some cases, understood as the foundation of the signage issue.

*“It is incomprehensible that English speaking Canadians in Richmond have to fight to keep the official language of the country on signage. Canada is a land of immigrants - we have integrated into our communities joined by a common thread, the English language. Canadians also pride themselves on being an inclusive society, welcoming newcomers. Now it appears that some newcomers don't have enough respect for the rest of us to include the common language of Canada (as well as the international language of commerce) on their signs. This is very disturbing. More disturbing is that to date this issue has been of little importance to our public officials.*

*For those non Chinese speakers who still choose to live in Richmond, this issue must be resolved. All signs posted in public places should be readable by all residents in the community by equally including one of the official languages of Canada.”*

6) Provision and access to and by health and emergency services are used to present a case for English as primary, and signage regulation by the City.

*“No one seems to have mentioned that English on signage allows emergency services to find businesses faster when they are responding to calls for service when time is of the essence.*

*It is incredibly hard to find a business by name on a street or in a strip mall when one cannot read the signage and can only go by tiny street number lettering on the corners of buildings or on inconsistent places near the units in question. All emergency services have English language in common.*

*In an emergency, every second counts so clear signage with at least the business name displayed prominently in English is essential. No one really cares what language today's lunch special is displayed in.”*

7) Taking a legal approach, some cite the Charter of Rights & Freedoms and in so doing, make an affirmative case for the right to enforce official language, and an opposing case is made with the logic of freedom of expression, in whatever language one chooses.

*"I feel the regulation of signage does relate to the Charter of Rights portion that states, **The City would need to establish that compelling health, safety, economic or social welfare objectives are at stake to justify a limit on the Charter freedom**", in that the social welfare of all our citizens doesn't benefit all if you see the dividing line that has been created by signage in areas that don't "feel" welcoming to all citizens. This has already created rifts with residence and many have left the city because of the frustration they feel and being "over run" with other countries values. (yes, economics has played a factor, and a higher population of Asian immigrants, but my children and some of their friends (heritage being very diverse) feel that in order for them to have opportunities for their future they have to leave because many of the jobs they see advertised say that "speaking Chinese is an asset" so they know that the opportunities here are fewer and fewer."*

## Executive summary.

### *Social Cohesion and visual landscapes in Richmond*

Research prepared for the City of Richmond

Elanna Nolan & Daniel Hiebert

*April 2015*

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## Introduction

Following a referral from City Council in October 2014, City staff have been directed to undertake a comprehensive study and consultation regarding what has come to be known as the Richmond “signage issue.” Coinciding with the lead up to the November 2014 City election, Council’s directive follows a period of public interest and demand that the City take greater action to regulate signage language. In October 2014, the City received sixty-one letters and emails from the public requesting that the City take action and enforce English as the priority language on all signage (and in many cases advertisements). While regulation of advertising is beyond the City’s jurisdiction, exterior commercial signage does require submission of an application for permit.

At present the Sign Bylaw (No. 5560) regulates the size, design and location of exterior signage. A permit is required prior to installation (Figure 1). Signage not covered in the Sign Bylaw includes interior signage (i.e. posters placed on the inside of a window, menus, mall signage, etc.), directional signs, property lease and sale signs, along with some others. Council have directed City staff to study the issue of language on signs, undertake public and stakeholder consultation and to compile critical and relevant information on the effect of signage issues locally and afar, to assist Council in determining if a bylaw or some other strategy would be most appropriate.



Figure 1. Only signs on the exterior of the building are regulated by the Richmond Sign Bylaw (No. 5560). Advertising and promotional material are not regulated under the Sign Bylaw.

## Background for this report

Concern over the language used in commercial signage is by no means a new issue. However, it has gained particular momentum on two occasions over the past three years: in March 2013 with the submission of a 1,000 signature petition requesting that Council introduce a Sign Bylaw condition of two-thirds of text in English language on all signage; and in October 2014 in the lead-up to the most recent City election. Between the letters and the news coverage, a common narrative has emerged connecting “rapidly” changing demographics and the ethnic make up of the City of Richmond with concern over a lack of immigrant integration.

A survey of news media and letters to Council reveal a gap between perceptions of demographic change and the demographic reality of the City of Richmond. In the report, we present data that shows this discontinuity, and busts some of the “myths” that have become the basis of many expressions of concern. However, we also acknowledge that this “myth” is still meaningful. It provides insight into the ways in which some citizens of Richmond are experiencing feelings of social exclusion, isolation and a lack of recognition.

We see the signage issue as involving two sets of concerns. In the foreground are issues related to the symbolic nature of visuals in the urban landscape of Richmond, specifically focused on the regulation of text in public and commercial spaces. In the background, we identify issues that frame this particular concern; these include questions over how visual landscapes represent people, history and culture in Richmond, as well as raising questions over the nature of intercultural engagement and social cohesion in Richmond.

It is important that we make clear, that while we seek to address the above listed issues, we are not legal scholars. As such we can only recognize the legal backdrop of the signage issue as they relate to the protection of freedom of expression as outlined in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. With this legal backdrop in place, we have investigated the signage issue in relation to a mandate and commitment by the City of Richmond to enhance intercultural harmony and strengthen intercultural cooperation in Richmond (RIAC 2011). It being beyond our capacity to advise, we limit our contribution in this way. Put simply, we do not seek to offer “solutions” or specific regulatory recommendations, rather to provide resources to support thinking through the signage issue.

## Project structure & methodology

The research questions that guided this research study included:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between visual and linguistic landscapes with multiculturalism, social cohesion, and community harmony?
2. How can we think about the role of local government, in terms of these relationships in a super-diverse city?
3. Are there examples of urban governance and regulation/non-regulation of visual/linguistic landscapes that could cast light on the challenges faced by the City of Richmond?

The research was carried out in three parts:

- Part One* Mapping super-diversity in Richmond and seeing the signage issue: Demographic context and discourse analysis, including review of news media and letters to Council
- Part Two* Literature review: Multiculturalism, social cohesion, and community harmony in the linguistic landscape
- Learning from cities afar: An international jurisdictional scan
- Part Three* Bringing it all together: Synthesising research, lessons, and reflections

## Super-diverse Richmond

There is often a tendency to see diversity in terms of ethnicity or country-of-origin, however, in so doing it can be easy to miss details that shape the contours and textures of every day experiences. The concept of super-diversity helps us see the various population details, such as language, religion, age, immigration stream, that are often overlooked when we talk about diversity based on country-of-origin or ancestry. Recognizing super-diversity in Richmond reveals the multiple groups, communities, and cultures that make it a unique and vibrant city.



### *Longstanding diversity in Richmond: 1981-1996 to today*

- In 1981 there were just over 96,000 people living in Richmond. Roughly ten per cent of the population were born in an Asian country.
- By 1996 the population of Richmond had grown to 148,000 people. Just under half of the population self-identified as a visible minority, and a third of the total population as Chinese-Canadian.
- 1981-1996 was a period of profound demographic change in Richmond. The proportion of almost 90 per cent “white” Canadians became a ratio of roughly 50 per cent, to a respective 50 per cent visible minority population.

Over the past twenty years, demographic change has been more incremental, leading to what is now a ratio of 70 percent visible minority. In terms of the pace of demographic change, the past twenty years has been far less profound than what happened between 1981-1996.

- Today in Richmond, 70 per cent of the population identifies as being “visible minority” and over 60 per cent of the population are immigrants to Canada.
- There are 161 ethnicities represented in Richmond.
- These figures represent a history of immigration to Canada and settlement in the City of Richmond, a testament to national immigration policies, along with a policy of multiculturalism since 1971.
- Since 1980, the largest number of immigrants has arrived through the Economic class, as skilled workers and business class applicants and family members (requiring them to start a business).

The majority of Richmond residents can speak English and use English as a working language.

- About 90 percent of the population can speak English (19,800 cannot).
- 57 per cent of residents speak English ‘most often’ at home.
- 43 per cent of residents speak a different language most of the time.
- Richmond residents are able to speak 77 non-official languages in total.
- 11 per cent of residents work in places where a non-unofficial language is used most of the time.

## Media scan and letters to Council

Media reports on the signage issue have been concentrated in three key moments (Figure 2): January-March 2012, March-May 2013 (coinciding with a Petition to Council for Bylaw), and September-November 2014 (coinciding with

the 2014 City Election). These key moments are repeated in the survey of letters to Council (Figure 3).

Overall the signage issue has been reported in a fairly balanced way. Pro-regulation articles (particularly letters to the editor and editorials) are generally expressed with a tone that is more emotive and sometimes antagonistic, compared to other reports. This highlights the emotional nature of the issue – an issue that engages questions of home, belonging, and recognition.

Figure 2: Media scan, January 2012-December 2014

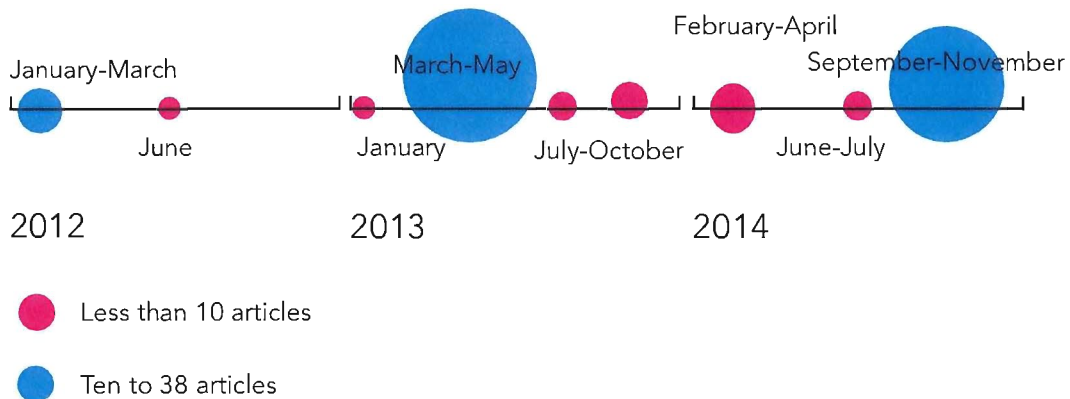
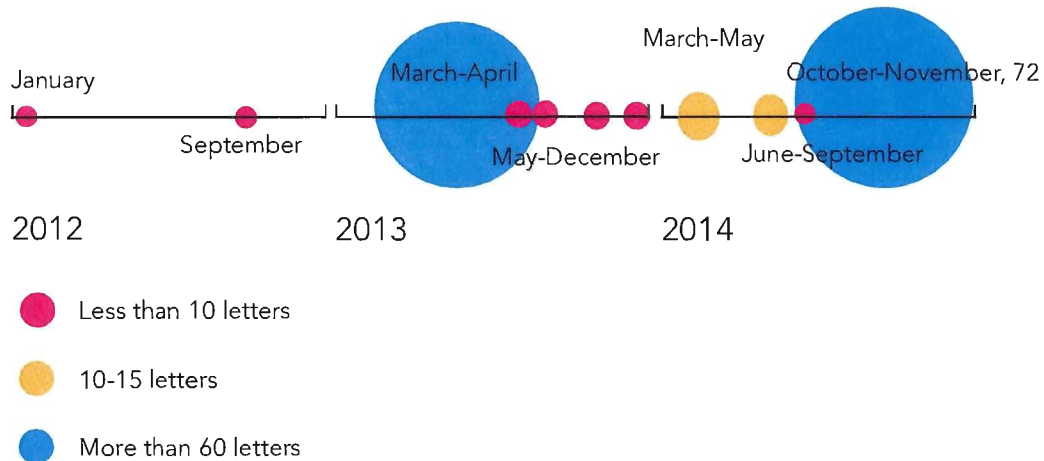


Figure 3: Letters to Council, January 2012-January 2015



The emergent themes across the media reports and letters to Council include:

- Concerns over social inclusion and exclusion
- Market self-regulation of language on signage (i.e. in order to attract a larger market share, merchants will advertise in official language/s)

- Concern over demographic change
- Identity politics, heritage, multiculturalism, and Canadian values
- Health and safety concerns
- Legalistic approach to a by-law
- Federal immigration policy
- Immigrant integration and language

## Learning from the research

The concepts of intercultural harmony and social cohesion have not been defined in ways that are universally accepted. We therefore begin by sketching out the origins of these concepts, in light of Canada's policy of multiculturalism, some of the debates over the efficacy of multiculturalism, and a turn toward language such as social cohesion and community harmony.

- Pioneered in Canada in the 1970s, multiculturalism recognizes the great ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity as a defining national characteristic. It outlined, invested in, and regulated diversity through social services, language training, resourcing, and legal infrastructure focused on countering discrimination and through practices supporting the recognition and celebration of difference.
- During the 1990-2000s there has been vigorous debate in Canada and elsewhere over the efficacy of multiculturalism as a policy and as a concept.
- Arguments circulate in academic research and policy discussions over the question of whether multiculturalism has led to polarized societies and citizens living "parallel lives" – communities divided with little contact between ethno-cultural groups.
- This allegation has not 'migrated' to Canada, and multiculturalism continues as an important part of Canadian social policy and national character.
- Social cohesion has been distinguished from multiculturalism largely in the way it focuses on membership to a national community, for instance, membership to a Canadian community of citizens, rather than focusing on difference. Over the past twenty years there have been ongoing debates in the literature over the definition of social cohesion and the best ways to measure it.
- In a super-diverse society, evaluating social cohesion does not always account for the different experiences between immigrant and native-born Canadians, challenges faced in immigrant settlement, and the barriers faced by newcomers to social, political, and civic participation.

- Seen as complimentary to multiculturalism, social cohesion can be interpreted as providing a vision of what social relations under multiculturalism might look like, but ultimately it does not tell the full story of the successes and failures of a super-diverse society.

Much of the research around signage in public space (a.k.a. linguistic landscapes) focuses on super-diverse cities where citizens speak multiple languages.

- Most of the research is on the problem of *under-representation* of immigrant groups and their languages on signage, and the domination of official languages.
- Increasing prevalence of English language has led to the linguistic dominance, worldwide, of English language on signage. In many countries English language is seen as a symbol of modernity, progress and “international panache”.
- Language is encountered in a myriad of ways in the visual landscapes of our everyday lives. Of the various ways (i.e. graffiti, marketplace, consumer goods, street signs, etc.), most are outside the jurisdiction of most City administrations.
- Linguistic landscapes are rarely static; they shift and change over time with flows of migration and other processes of change. What we see today will inevitably be different to what we saw fifty years ago, and what we will see fifty years from now.
- Illegibility, or an inability to read all that is written in the linguistic landscape, can produce feelings of anxiety and alienation. This experience goes both ways – for official and non-official languages.
- Some scholars argue that social inclusion and a sense of belonging, connectedness, and acceptance, are prerequisites for immigrant integration, including official-language proficiency (i.e. inclusion is not exclusively the result of language proficiency). For immigrants in the process of learning official languages, seeing familiar (mother-tongue) language in the linguistic landscape contributes to a sense of recognition, welcome and belonging, which can support integration into the host society.

## Learning from cities afar

Each of the cities presented in the report are unique, with specific geographies, social issues, economic contexts, immigration regimes, and more. These case studies do not so much present strategies that can be picked up and dropped into the Richmond context. Rather, they reveal some ways cities around the world are seeing similar challenges of planning for and managing diversity.

### #1 *Ashfield, NSW, Australia*

Ashfield had become known as an ethnically “Chinese” city/area. Elderly Anglo-Celtic Australian residents complained to Council that they felt displaced and that there is a lack of inclusion and belonging in the Ashfield landscape. Council’s response was comprehensive, beginning with a research partnership with a local University, and was followed by a series of socially oriented interventions. The issue was effectively resolved in just one year. Interventions included:

- Appointing a Chinese-origin social worker to mediate concerns and encourage merchants to be more ‘welcoming’, ‘inclusive’
- Free translation services for merchants
- Instituting a ‘Welcome Shop Day’ to introduce general public into ‘Chinese’ commercial areas
- Walking tours with visits to restaurants, herbalists, etc.
- Welcome Shop Awards (for ‘de-cluttering’ and signage), with clear suggestions on aesthetics
- Booklet (in Chinese and English) explaining socio-cultural policies/strategic plans of the City

### #2 *Box Hill, VIC, Australia*

Box Hill is an Activity Centre in Greater Melbourne, Australia, with a so-called distinctive “Asian character.” It is a site of significant growth, and higher density residential and commercial development. While some complaints have been received by Council that echo those in Richmond BC, they have been successful at developing an approach that has been celebrated as inclusive. This strategy was developed and informed by research commissioned by the City, which drew on examples of “best practice” from the City of Richmond, BC. Interventions have been economically and market-focused, and include:

- Community events to showcase diversity in the area (i.e., acknowledge many groups)
  - Annual 'Harmony Day' with performances, foods, music, etc.
  - Festivals for several of the larger groups
- Shopfront Improvement Program
  - Encouraging de-cluttering of shop-fronts
  - Multi-lingual consultant hired
  - Free consultation offered to merchants on graphic design, and discounted translation services

### #3 *Richmond Hill & Markham, ON*

A signage bylaw has regulated language on signs in Richmond Hill since November 1990 (50:50 official:non-official language). However, in the mid-1990s controversy began to develop in Richmond Hill and neighbouring Markham, relating to the rise of so-called "Asian themed malls." Strategies employed by City staff in Richmond Hill and Markham during this time involved a combination approach that included:

- Using municipal powers to diffuse immediate tensions
  - Sign bylaw, 1990 (50%+ English/French required)
  - Encouraged more 'Main Street' commerce
  - Re-zoning land near residential areas from commercial to residential use
  - Pushing malls away from residential areas
- Race Relations Committee established, supported by a *Diversity Action Plan*
  - Includes 3 Council Members
  - Developed procedures to consider complaints
  - Has power to make 'actionable' recommendations

It took 5-6 years de-escalate, and today, the controversial sites have been developed with residential condominiums, which have dissipated tension. Markham is also home to the largest Asian mall in North America, and is slated for further development in coming years, with the addition of the Remington Centre, more North American in style.

## Conclusions

As measures of social cohesion cannot tell the full story, neither can linguistic landscapes be used to correlate degrees of integration of immigrant publics, or be seen as indicative of exclusive and anti-social intentions. As such, linguistic landscapes cannot accurately be used as a platform for measuring degrees of community harmony.

In one of the letters to Council, an individual suggested that the proliferation of Chinese language on signage in Richmond was a sign of things to come calling it the proverbial “canary in the coal mine.” The author goes on calling for Richmond to take action and set an example for the rest of Canada.

The author of this complaint presents the canary in the coal mine with an ominous tone. However, we see the signage issue as an opportunity for Richmond. It is an opportunity for the City to demonstrate leadership, to recognize Richmond as a super-diverse city, committed to a vision of multiculturalism and community harmony, with a basis in open dialogue. As the public workshop demonstrated, there is community will to engage in difficult conversations, and with appropriate guidance the City and its citizenry can continue to address more of the important “background issues” that have given rise to calls for a new signage by-law.

We might ask to what degree should the City administration play a proactive role in framing and outlining what it might mean to live in Richmond? How can a shared vision be crafted in collaboration with Richmond’s citizenry? We hope that by providing some context and research on the relationship between signage and the social life of super-diverse cities, the City and its residents will have some new tools and frames of reference to undertake these conversations as they come to choose a best course of action, moving forward.