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Chinatown funding condition upsets alderman

By CBC News
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A Calgary alderman says requiring organizers of a Chinatown celebration to account for every dollar it spends, which other community leaders have not been obliged to do, is a double-standard.

City council approved on Monday up to \$500,000 for a community celebration of Chinatown's 100th anniversary this summer, which will include area beautification and youth projects.

However, council added a requirement that organizers report back on exactly how much money is required and how that cash will be spent before the money is released. That condition has never been asked of other event planners in the past.

Ald. Ric McIver said the requirement is for greater accountability and transparency. But his council colleague, Ald. John Mar, saw it differently.

"This is different than the same level of accountability and the same transparency that we've seen on other communities and again I reference Forest Lawn, and I also reference the International Avenue, changes that we've made to Memorial Drive and things of that nature," said Mar.

'I wouldn't necessarily go so far as to say it's racist. I'm just saying that it's an unusual process.'
Ald. John Mar

"None of these things had to go through a double-vetting process."

Mar said he believes politics may have played a part in the requirement because a municipal election is coming up in October.

"I don't know why this community and this celebration is being singled out," said Mar, who is of Chinese descent. "I wouldn't necessarily go so far as to say it's racist. I'm just saying that it's an unusual process."

The Chinese community is fundraising for the event and other governments have yet to say whether they will also contribute.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart voted against the motion, explaining that the occasion is worth marking, but she's concerned about the lateness of the proposal and the lack of specifics.

Victor Mah, honorary chairman of the Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre, said the event is significant, not only to mark the centennial of the community, but also to highlight preserving the area, which is surrounded by downtown development.

"Because [Chinatown's] obviously particular location is something that I feel is always vulnerable," said Mah.

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