



City of Delta  
COUNCIL REPORT  
Regular Meeting

To: **Mayor and Council**

File No.: **14035-20/DeIP**

From: **Mayor George V. Harvie**

Date: **December 10, 2020**

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**Recognition of the Komagata Maru**

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▪ **RECOMMENDATION:**

THAT the Komagata Maru storyboard be placed in the North Delta Social Heart Plaza.

▪ **PURPOSE:**

That the City of Delta recognize the tragic events involving the Komagata Maru in 1914 by placing a storyboard in the North Delta Social Heart Plaza.

▪ **BACKGROUND:**

The Komagata Maru was a Japanese ship chartered by a Punjabi man in 1914 to take 376 people from Calcutta to Vancouver in hopes of a better life. Upon arrival, apart from a few, passengers were prevented from disembarking while immigration laws were being challenged in the courts. In the end, the ship was escorted out of Canadian waters and returned to India where 20 passengers were killed by British authorities.

The tragic events of the Komagata Maru did not happen in Delta, but the event is part of the story for the South Asian community, many of whom live in Delta. Vancouver and Surrey have both recognized the tragic event through the placement of storyboards, street naming, and placement of a monument of remembrance. The Komagata Maru Society approached Delta to undertake recognition as well, not only to tell the story, but also to promote diversity and inclusion.

First proposed for Delview Park, the location was referred back to staff to examine the relevance of Delview Park versus other possible solutions in an effort to provide greater exposure of this event. After discussions with the City Manager and the Director of Parks, Recreation and Culture, as Mayor, I am requesting Council's support to place the Komagata Maru storyboard in the North Delta Social Heart Plaza.

**DISCUSSION:**

The North Delta Social Heart includes a variety of public facilities in one concentrated location. It attracts many visitors annually and will continue to be North Delta's gathering spot for the foreseeable future.

The Komagata Maru storyboard proposal has been developed and would have greater exposure in the North Delta Social Heart than Delview Park. The storyboard is proposed to be within the landscaped area of the North Delta Social Heart Plaza, near the corner of 84 Avenue and 114 Street as depicted (Attachment A).

**Implications:**

COVID-19 Implications – Staff will follow the Provincial Health Officer's orders when preparing the installation of the storyboard.

Foundation for the Future Implications – As part of the Recreation & Community Pillar, Delta will enhance the public realm and foster a sense of community pride. This project also includes work aligned with the Social Pursuit Pillar, as the project will promote awareness, diversity, and inclusion in our community.

Financial Implications – Funding necessary for the installation of the signs identified in this report is available in the 2020 Heritage Advisory Committee Interpretive Sign Program.

**CONCLUSION:**

North Delta Social Heart is a vibrant area containing many public facilities. Placing the Komagata Maru storyboard in this location will provide better exposure to the public of this tragic event.



George V. Harvie  
Mayor

**ATTACHMENT:**

A. Komagata Maru Storyboard and Location in North Delta Social Heart Plaza



Approximate location  
of Komagata Maru sign



## Remembering a Moment in History

# The Komagata Maru

### Looking Back at a Past Not Forgotten

British Columbia is well known as being a place of diversity, where people from around the world looking to call this land home are welcomed into our communities. Over a hundred years ago, this was not the case. On May 23, 1914, a boat carrying hundreds of immigrants from India to Vancouver became a focal point in the wider struggle against Canada's exclusionary immigration laws.

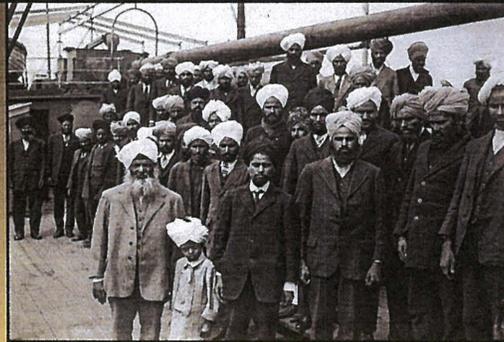
### Challenging Anti-immigration Laws

One of these laws was the continuous journey regulation which sought to restrict further immigration from India. In January 1914, a Punjabi man named Gurdit Singh Sirhali chartered the Japanese vessel Komagata Maru to take 376 people from Calcutta to Vancouver. The majority of the passengers were Sikh and all subjects of the British Empire. Gurdit Singh knew that such an act would provoke a response and hoped that Indian immigration to Canada could be opened up by forcing the issue.



### Unwelcome Arrival

Upon arrival in Vancouver Harbour on May 23, 1914, immigration officials led by Malcolm Reid prevented the Komagata Maru from being allowed to dock or its passengers from disembarking the vessel. Henry Herbert Stevens, a Vancouver politician, whipped up anti-immigrant sentiment and public opinion in Vancouver against the passengers.



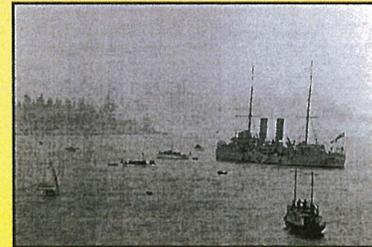
### Stalemate

Passengers were prevented from getting off the ship for months. Food and water were limited and conditions were worsening. A shore committee was established amongst supporters of the passengers to raise money to assist them and to mount a legal case that went before the British Columbia court of appeal. The court ruled in favour of the government's right to restrict entry to the passengers. Apart from a small number of exceptions, the majority of the passengers who had arrived on May 23 were to be deported.

### Departure and Aftermath

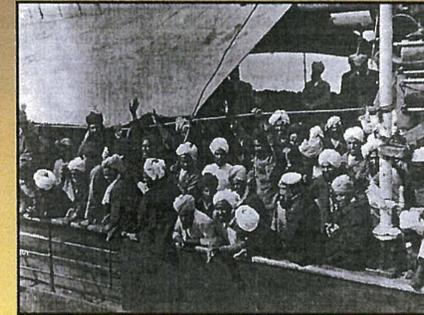
By July 23 1914, the Komagata Maru was escorted out of Canadian waters by the naval vessel HMCS Rainbow after having fought to secure provisions.

Upon its return to India, 20 passengers of the Komagata Maru were killed by British authorities. Many more were arrested.



### Apology

In May 2008, an apology for the event was given by the Province of British Columbia. That same year in July, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized for the federal government's role to a crowd gathered in Surrey. In May 2016, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau gave a formal apology in the House of Commons.



On June 10, 2020 Vancouver City Council apologized for its role in the Komagata Maru incident at the request of the Descendants of the Komagata Maru Society.

In 2020 the Descendants of the Komagata Maru Society and the City of Delta agreed that acknowledging the Komagata Maru incident would provide a meaningful opportunity for the community to reflect on systemic racism in Canada. In response, the City installed this interpretive sign so that residents may be better informed of the hardships and struggles that many went through in working towards creating a more tolerant multi-cultural community.