SAVING OUR HAWKER HERITAGE · EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
BY UNCLE JAMES · A SILICON WOK PROGRAMME

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FOR THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS

SAVING OUR HAWKER HERITAGE

The Executive Summary: why the plan is needed and what it would do, in eight pages.

小贩文化 · Warisan Penjaja · உணவுக்கடை மரபு · Hawker Culture

GIVE FIRST · BUY SERVICES, NOT EXCLUSIVITY · LET THE BUSINESS CARRY SUCCESSION

Document 1 of Hawker Heritage. The Plan sets out each proposal and how it works; seven companion volumes hold the record, the money, the evidence, the levers, the method and the data.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY · A WORKING PAPER FOR PUBLIC DISCUSSION · VERSION 1.11 · NOVEMBER 2026

ES.1

What the Reassurances Leave Out

Singapore's hawker centres are busy. The food that made them famous is quietly going. I wrote this plan because I think both things are true at once, and because the second will not show up in any queue until it is too late to fix.

Hawker culture was inscribed by UNESCO in December 2020. Six years on, the people who carry it are nearing the end of their working lives – in 2018 the Minister expected more than a third of hawkers and their assistants to retire within ten years – and when a master retires, the stall is re-let and the centre looks as full as ever (Prologue, p. 5). The official figures are true as far as they go. Four of them need a second number beside them:

- **Occupancy is not transmission.** More than 95% of cooked-food stalls are let, and Singapore reports the culture as viable. Yet of 566 people who finished the classroom stage of the Hawkers' Development Programme (HDP, the Government's course for new hawkers), only 29 started a stall in a hawker centre, and no one counts the dishes at risk.[1]
- **The median (the middle figure: half are above it, half below) rent is the median of those still paying.** It has held near $1,250 for a decade. Entrants pay their bid, a median of about $1,800 in 2023, while the subsidised share fell from 53% in 2013 to about 30%.[2]
- **A flat median age hides an ageing trade.** The median hawker has been about 60 since 2018, because the oldest leave and too few arrive to move it; newcomers since 2013 entered at a median of 46.[3]
- **The hawkers who did not flag pay were the ones who stayed.** The Government's own committee heard in 2016 that low earnings were not the deterrent. The cooks whom the pay kept out were not in the room.[4]

[1] Periodic report to UNESCO, Dec 2024; MSE, Jul 2024; MCCY, 7 Oct 2026. [2] NEA, 4 Nov 2024; the tender regime, per parliamentary replies; Official Report, 12 Mar 2013. [3] Official Report, 19 Nov 2018; MSE, Nov 2024; NHB and MCCY, 17 Nov 2020. [4] Hawker Centre 3.0 Committee, Report, Feb 2017, p. 20. Ten such claims, each with what it leaves out, are in the Plan (§1.1, p. 7).

This is a market failure, not a lack of kindness. Each scheme Singapore already runs helps and then stops short of the stall. The cooking knowledge and the money are one problem, so the plan works on both (§1.2, p. 9, §1.3, p. 11). It is one plan, published as thirteen documents with three doors: this summary and the Plan for those who decide; the companion volumes for those who must make it work and want to check every number; and a short piece for the people who eat at the stalls.

ES.2

Three Facts

$1,470
A MONTH: THE MEDIAN FULL-TIME HAWKER WORKING ALONE, 2021, AGAINST $1,800 FOR A DELIVERY RIDER

$372
WHAT EACH BUSINESS DAY CLOSED FOR ILLNESS COSTS THE HAWKER AT A TYPICAL TENDERED STALL

$18,900
WHAT A NEWCOMER AT THE MEDIAN BID PAYS ABOVE NEA'S VALUATION IN HIS FIRST SIX YEARS

The pay has been measured once. In 2021 the median full-time hawker or stallholder working on his own earned about $1,470 a month before tax: below the poorest fifth of full-time employees ($2,200), and below the delivery riders ($1,800) and private-hire drivers ($2,000) whom the Platform Workers Act now protects. Granted, 2021 was a year of dine-in restrictions, and hawkers who employ an assistant are not in the figure. Still, it is the Government's own chart (MOM, in the Advisory Committee on Platform Workers' report, Nov 2022, Fig. 1.1; §1.1, p. 7).

The body is the business. Rent, fees and the assistant's pay go on when the stall is shut, so each day closed for illness costs the typical tendered hawker about $372; a rent waiver would save only about $48 of it, and six weeks away cost about $13,400, more than a third of his year (Follow the Plate, D.3, *One Plate, Six Landlords*). His 13-hour, six-day week comes to about 78 hours, well past the 55 at which the WHO and ILO (International Labour Organization) find the risk of stroke rises by 35% and of heart disease by 17%. The employee in the next kitchen is paid in full for 14 days' medical leave (Hawkers and Social Protection, C.5, *Work Dynamics Compared*).

The newcomer pays the bid. Take a stall won at the 2023 median bid of about $1,800 a month, where NEA's valuation is $1,450. Under NEA's rule since November 2024, he pays his full bid for the first three years, then the halfway point between his bid and the valuation for the next three, and the valuation itself only from the seventh year. Over those six years he pays about $18,900 more than the valuation. On a typical stall that leaves him about $8.01 an hour in his first tenancy, below the $11.64 of his own assistant (§2.2, p. 16; Follow the Plate, D.4.1, *How much rent can a stall bear?*).

And one cell is empty. Government keeps no register of hawker trades at risk (MCCY, 7 Oct 2026). The Regulars' List and a yearly count of the stalls at risk, which never names one, would fill it (§3.6, p. 28).

ES.3

Two Tiers, Stated Once

On paper a hawker in a public centre is a towkay. In every way that matters he is a worker: he must cook personally, cannot run more than two stalls, and has no business to sell when he stops. Yet the system protects him as neither. No one pays a share of his CPF (Central Provident Fund, Singapore's compulsory savings for retirement, health and housing), he has no injury cover and no paid sick leave, and his MediSave (the part of CPF that pays for health care) bill comes once a year, for the year before (Hawkers and Social Protection, C.4, *The Protection Matrix: Overlaps and Gaps*). Everything in the plan answers that, in one of two tiers, and each tier is paid for differently.

	THE FLOOR, FOR ALL HAWKERS	THE HERITAGE TIER
Who it is for	Every stallholder, celebrated or not: a hawker's life matters even where there is no famous recipe to keep.	The stalls that carry a dish worth keeping, the masters who want to teach it and the cooks who will carry it on.
What it is	Rent bands and a ballot, a table-cleaning fee subsidy, price freedom with Makan Vouchers for the households who need them, relief cooks, buying together, cover for the oldest, and in time the Protection Floor's savings and cover (Part II).	The Regulars' List, the Seed Bank's archive, Master Fellowships, apprenticeships, a stall for each graduate, the Taste Council, the Succession Mortgage, the Family Name Royalty and the Heritage Plate (Parts III–V).
Who pays	Mostly the State, through rules and a few Budget items. Those items come to about $234M over four years, including one round of Makan Vouchers, and 85% of that is vouchers diners can spend at any stall. Another 15% of what the plan spends over the four years ($3.00M) reaches every one of the 408 stalls at the pilot centres.	Gifts and the endowment: 57% of the plan's spend ($11.25M) goes to items only the 44 heritage-worthy stalls receive. About 83% of all the plan's spend is gift money. The successor pays for succession, out of the business.

Figures: the ledgers (the plan's year-by-year cost tables) and the ask, in the Budget Book; the voucher round is assumed to start in Year 1. The comparison with every other kind of worker: Hawkers and Social Protection, C.4 and C.6.

ES.4

Three Moves

1 · MAKE THE TRADE WORTH ENTERING

WHAT IT IS	Rent bands that are published, with stalls let by ballot. Price freedom for the cook, with Makan Vouchers for the households that need help, paid through the Community Development Councils' existing voucher system. A Relief-Hawker Corps, so a cook can take a day off without closing, using the two ways NEA already lets someone else run a stall. Buying together for cheaper supplies. Insurance first. And a Hawker Protection Floor, with the savings and cover other workers already have.		
WHO IT IS FOR	The floor: every stallholder at the pilot centres, and in time every hawker.	**WHO PAYS**	The State, for the fee subsidy and the vouchers; the endowment, for the Corps and the cover.
IN THE PLAN	Part II (p. 14): rent bands, §2.2 (p. 16); the Corps, §2.7 (p. 19); the Protection Floor, §2.11 (p. 22).		

2 · MOVE THE KNOWLEDGE BEFORE IT IS LOST

WHAT IT IS	A Regulars' List at every government centre of the dishes each neighbourhood wants kept. A Culinary Seed Bank that documents endangered dishes well enough to cook from, pays masters to teach as Fellows at their own stalls, and proves each record by having a relief cook make the dish on the master's day off. Every graduate gets a real stall, financed equipment and a top-up to their income for 24 months. And a Taste Council of retired masters that guards quality without cameras.		
WHO IT IS FOR	The heritage tier: the stalls with a dish worth keeping, and the cooks who will carry it.	**WHO PAYS**	Gifts and the endowment.
IN THE PLAN	Parts III and V (p. 26): the Regulars' List, §3.6 (p. 28); governance, §3.8 (p. 29).		

3 · LET THE BUSINESS PAY FOR SUCCESSION

WHAT IT IS	The Succession Mortgage lets the incoming cook pay the retiring one out of future takings, with a protected income of $1,500 a month so the payment never pushes a successor out; the Family Name Royalty gives the master's children a ten-year stake in the name; and the Hawkers Succession Scheme gets the money it lacks, so that a retiring cook is paid for the stall's goodwill.		
WHO IT IS FOR	Retiring masters, their successors and their families.	**WHO PAYS**	The successor, out of the stall's takings; the endowment carries the guarantee.
IN THE PLAN	Part IV (p. 31): the Succession Mortgage, §4.3 (p. 32); talking with the children, §4.7 (p. 34).		

All three start at two pilot centres side by side and in the open, Chinatown Complex and Geylang Serai: the 'Lighthouses (the first two pilot centres, Chinatown Complex and Geylang Serai)', because they go first. Chinatown Complex starts only after its repairs and redecoration, which are late. In Year 2 the plan adds Tekka, making three pilot centres, and goes to five at most. Each centre runs the whole chain, from master to apprentice to a graduate's own stall, and each opens only if its own hawkers agree. Going beyond five waits until an independent evaluator confirms that five tests are met across all the centres (§6.5, p. 40). Nothing in the plan asks the Seed Bank to run a centre, set a rent, licence a stall or watch anyone cook (§3.1, p. 26).

ES.5

What It Costs, and Who Pays

$19.68M	72.4%	$40M	0
FOUR YEARS, THREE CENTRES	REACHES HAWKERS DIRECTLY	ENDOWMENT TARGET	NEW STATUTES

The programme costs $19,683,808 over Years 0–3 at three centres, each costed from its own heritage stalls and size, in ledgers a hawker could read at the counter; 72.4% of it reaches hawkers directly (Part VII, p. 42). That is $4,693,468 more than in version 1.2, and I would rather say so plainly. Most of the rise is that apprentices are now paid the Progressive Wage (the pay ladder the Government sets for lower-wage jobs) for a stall assistant (the minimum MOM sets for that job), with employer CPF, for all eighteen months. The rest comes from three changes: the Fellowship no longer stops dead after its teaching year, the relief day is now a lawful working day, and each centre's orders are counted before it opens. Old Airport Road would add $5,586,777 and Maxwell $4,412,940.

The endowment pays part of each year's cost, not most of it. Each year it spends 3.5% of its value – $420K, $1.05M and $1.4M in Years 1–3 – and bridge grants (a temporary grant that covers a gap until the fund is full) of about $13.5M, raised before the fund is full, cover the rest. I have printed that gap rather than hidden it. From Year 4 that yearly spending, the Government's operating match (the Government's yearly grant towards running costs) and continuing gifts carry all three centres, and on the central assumptions no year runs short. That rests on how many new Fellowships each centre must fund, an assumption until the yearly count comes in, and I have printed how far it can move (§7.8, p. 45). If the campaign stalls once it has raised its first $12M, both Lighthouses keep running and Tekka waits.

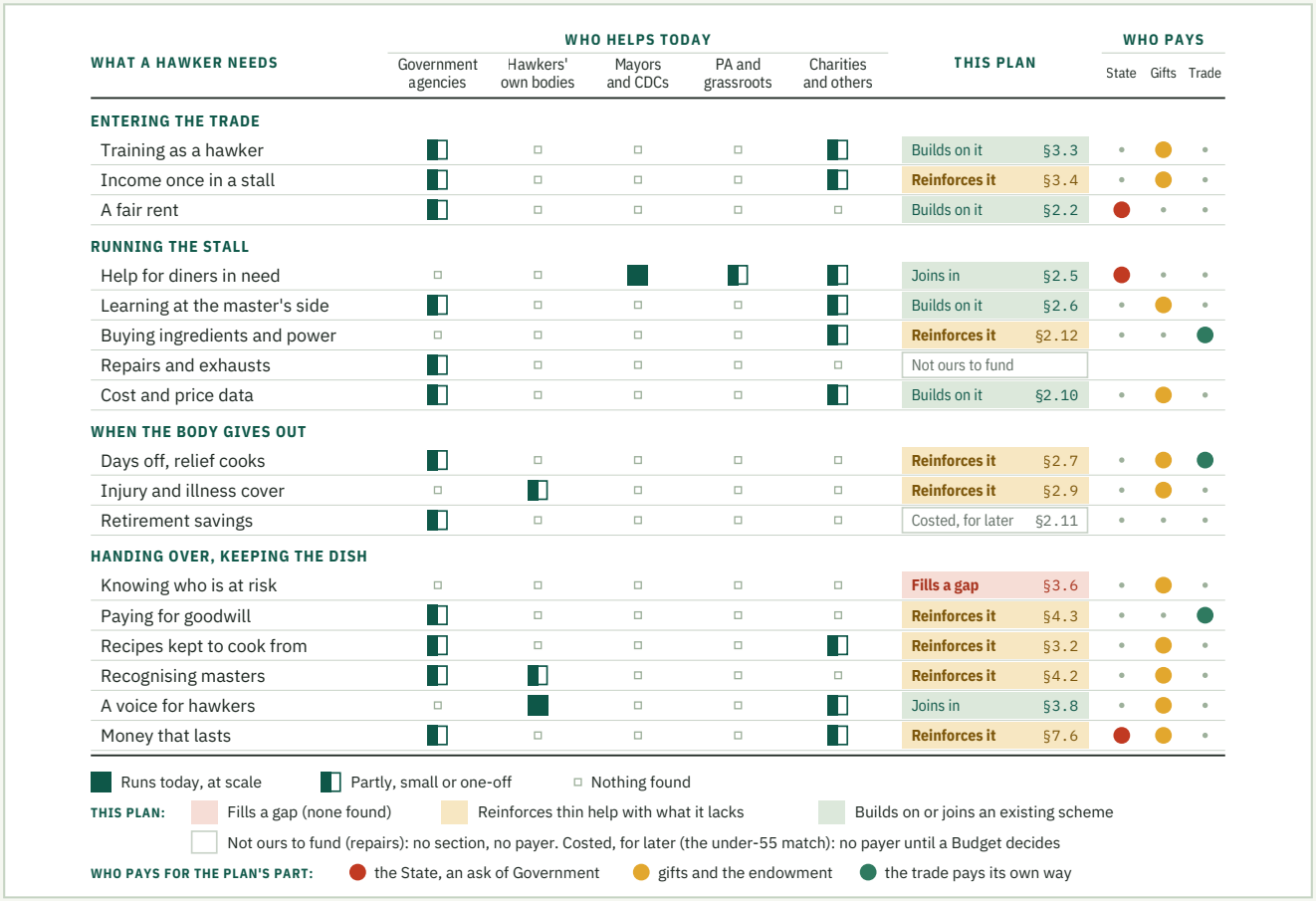


FIG. ES.1 · WHO HELPS HAWKERS TODAY, WHAT THE PLAN DOES ABOUT EACH NEED, AND WHO PAYS FOR ITS PART · THE REVIEW AND ITS SOURCES ARE IN THE RECORD, A.1.2–A.7

Read across the rows and a pattern appears. Hawkers' own bodies speak for the trade and honour a few masters each year, with an award, not a wage; the Mayors' CDC Vouchers (Government vouchers for every household) carry real money to the stall; charities pay hawkers for meals their beneficiaries redeem. Yet no scheme does any of these things. None pays a retiring hawker for his goodwill (what a stall's name, recipes and regulars are worth when it changes hands); the few private sales are one-off deals. None pays a master a year's wage to teach. None keeps his recipes in an archive good enough to cook from. None tops up a new cook's income for his first two years, sends a relief cook so a hawker can take a day off, or holds an endowment for the trade. Those gaps are this plan. One row is empty: knowing who is at risk, which no one counts today and the plan's yearly at-risk count fills from Year 1 (§3.6, p. 28). Repairs and exhausts already have owners in NEA (National Environment Agency, which runs the public hawker centres), the Town Councils and the stallholder; what is missing is help with a stall's own equipment between the Productivity Grant's phases. Where others already act at scale, the plan works through them, and much of it is not new. The Government's own panels proposed rents set in advance, bulk buying and keeping traditional hawker food in 2012 and 2017. Two Members, Leong Mun Wai and Hazel Poa, proposed a ballot for stalls in Parliament in 2024; §2.2, *Rent Bands & Ballot* answers the Government's four objections to it. Master-apprentice fellowships have run in France since 1994 (the Record, A.7). Most of the bill falls on gifts and the endowment. The State is asked for money in five places – its first gift to the endowment and the pool that matches gifts, an operating match, a round of Makan Vouchers, the tax given up on gifts and a table-cleaning fee subsidy at the pilot centres – and succession pays for itself.

ES.6

The Ask, and 30 June 2027

From Government the plan asks for a short list of decisions. Most are administrative – an agency can make them – and none needs a new law. They are: (1) to host the pilot centres; (2) to run rent bands and the ballot there; (3) to extend the Hawkers Succession Scheme; (4) to accept the relief notice and a named deputy, both under NEA's Joint Operator Scheme; (5) to re-tender cleaning contracts for tray return, with the hawkers' associations that hold them; (6) to score stallholder protection in HDB's coffeeshop tenders; (7) to bar compulsory designated suppliers at operator-run centres; (8) to name one recipient for the yearly at-risk count; and (9) to give hawker culture clear owners in Government, bringing back the 2018–20 UNESCO nomination committee (co-chaired by NEA, NHB and FMAS; FMAS itself is a standing federation) as a permanent body. Every Budget cost is named: the endowment's first gift and matching pool ($15M + $10M, once); a small operating match ($300K, $400K and $500K in Years 1–3); a round of Makan Vouchers (about $66M a year, a rough figure); a table-cleaning fee subsidy of $200 a stall a month at the pilot centres, at most about $0.98M a year at three; and the tax given up on donations, which donors can deduct at 250% of the gift (about $5.7M over the campaign). A retirement match for stallholders under 55 is costed, at up to about $4.1M a year in its basic form, and left for later. The whole ask fits on one page (§7.7, p. 43).

One date matters more than the rest. Singapore's next periodic report to UNESCO is due on 30 June 2027. UNESCO's form asks each State to describe "the demographics of practitioners" and "the severity and immediacy" of the threats to an element; the first report, in December 2024, named the threats and gave no count, and promised to improve "monitoring … the communities of bearers and practitioners" (§3.6, p. 28). So the count of stalls at risk should exist, at least in method, by the time that report is signed. I would ask MCCY (Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth) and MSE to name joint owners for it now. The plan's own count, from the Regulars' List, comes at the end of its Year 1; until then the report can carry the method and the Year 0 count of orders at the pilot centres.

WHERE I AM LEAST SURE

A fair rent is not yet a livable one, so the bands need the rest of the package beside them. The model rests on assumptions barely measured in Singapore, such as how diners respond to hawker prices. The protected income works only if it sits above the pay at which a successor walks away. And from Year 4 the number of new Fellowships each centre funds is a guess until the at-risk count comes in. Each is set out, with what to watch, in the companion volumes.

Where to go next (page numbers are the Plan's)

IF YOU ARE	START WITH
A minister or an MP	The Plan on one page (p. 2); seven rules, §1.5 (p. 13); the card at the head of each proposal in Book Two; the tests for growing, §6.5 (p. 40); and the ask, §7.7 (p. 43).
A policy officer	The card for your agency's proposal, then the volume it points to: the Record for what has been tried (A), the Budget Book for every line (B), Hawkers and Social Protection (C), Follow the Plate (D), Succession Economics (E), Method, Levers and Data (F), and the Technical Paper for the data and the simulations (G).
A hawker or a hawker's family	Who actually owns a stall, §2.1 (p. 14); the Relief-Hawker Corps, §2.7 (p. 19); the Succession Mortgage, §4.3 (p. 32); and talking with the children, §4.7 (p. 34).
A diner	The Prologue (p. 5); the Makan Vouchers, §2.5 (p. 18); the Taste Council, Part V (p. 35); and the *At your table* boxes throughout.
A funder or a journalist	Governance, §3.8 (p. 29); the endowment, §7.6 (p. 42); downside mode, §7.8 (p. 45); and what the public sees, §6.6 (p. 40).

Document Control

Document	Saving our Hawker Heritage — Executive Summary
This version	1.11 · 2 November 2026
Status	Working paper for public discussion
Stall	Stall 02 · Saving our Hawker Heritage, version 1.11. Its changes are recorded in the Plan Change Log (0P).
Initiated by	Uncle James
Contributors	None yet. The project began with one person and hopes to grow into a team that cares; contributors will be credited here by name.
Hawker Heritage	1 Executive Summary 1.11 · 2 The Plan 1.11 · A The Record 1.11 · B The Budget Book 1.11 · C Hawkers and Social Protection 1.11 · D Follow the Plate 1.11 · E Succession Economics 1.11 · F Method, Levers and Data 1.11 · G The Technical Paper 1.11 · S Sources 1.11 · Your Table 1.11
Source	`src/doc_1_executive_summary.html` in github.com/motochan/sg-hawker-heritage, tag `plan-v1.11`
Licence	CC BY 4.0 for the text and data; MIT for the model code
Independence	Hawker Heritage is an independent Silicon Wok programme. It is not affiliated with the National Environment Agency, the Housing & Development Board or any government agency, and it is not an official consultation. Model figures are estimates, not measurements.

Version history

VERSION	DATE	WHAT CHANGED	TAG
1.11	2 November 2026	Its own version: Saving our Hawker Heritage (the Executive Summary, the Plan and B, the Budget Book) is versioned and logged on its own, starting at 1.11; until 1.10 it shared one version with the Library. No proposal, figure or claim changes.	plan-v1.11
1.10	2 November 2026	Two stalls: the Hawker Library and the Saving our Hawker Heritage Plan, by Uncle James, a Silicon Wok programme; a graded estimate of what hawkers earn above the median, with a note in G.3, a line in D.1 and three uses in the Plan; no proposal or model figure changes.	—
1.9.3	1 November 2026	Plain that the time-bound body was the UNESCO nomination committee, not FMAS, which is a standing federation; MCCY's reply of 7 Oct 2026 stated exactly; a constructive tone towards NEA; no proposal or figure changes.	v1.9.3
1.9.2	1 November 2026	Uncle James on every cover, in place of the full name; no proposal or figure changes.	v1.9.2
1.9.1	1 November 2026	The site address and contact are Silicon Wok's; no proposal or figure changes.	v1.9.1
1.9	1 November 2026	The library is stewarded by Silicon Wok; no proposal or figure changes.	v1.9
1.8	31 October 2026	A pen name, Uncle James, and an anonymised note from the author; no proposal or figure changes.	v1.8
1.7	30 October 2026	Plain words: nine numbers settled and the 285 hardest sentences rewritten; no proposal or figure changes.	v1.7
1.6	30 October 2026	Four open calls settled: NEA already staggers the rent on assignment, so the HSS ask narrows to writing that stagger into the Scheme's terms; the 2012 Panel reported in April 2012; MOM's own rules answer the foreign-worker question, so it is recorded as a fact; and Liang Eng Hwa's 2018 question on hawkers managing their own centres is credited.	v1.6
1.5	29 October 2026	Three doors: the Plan cut from 72 pages to 44, with a card for every proposal; A becomes The Record; volume G, The Technical Paper, comes from the models; Your Table is for diners.	v1.5
1.4	29 October 2026	The record: the Government's own panels, Official Reports and UNESCO report read first, hawker pay ($1,470 a month in 2021) and a day shut for illness ($372) reckoned, ten reassurances answered, the count kept as distributions with one body to own it, the Regulars' List counted in orders with a Year 0 baseline, and the Government's match now covering part of the base (40%).	v1.4
1.3	29 October 2026	Grounded: the library's claims checked against sources (314 checked; corrections made where the evidence differed); four proposals change to fit the evidence; Follow the Plate adds the middlemen and the plate over time.	v1.3
1.2	28 October 2026	Restructured, with no change to any proposal, figure or claim, as a library of standalone documents: the Executive Summary, the Plan (the case and the proposals, Part VII in brief) and six companion volumes, A to F, each opening with who should read it, its bottom line and how it connects. The Main Paper and the Technical Paper end; their sections move, with new ids, into the Plan and the volumes.	v1.2

VERSION	DATE	WHAT CHANGED	TAG
1.1	27 October 2026	First revision: who already helps hawkers beyond Government, and where the plan joins, defers or fills (§1.3.1–§1.3.2); hawkers' protection compared with four other kinds of worker in the Executive Summary; the retirement match applies under 55, beside the existing scheme from 55; the pilot widens from one Lighthouse Centre to two Lighthouses from Year 1, Chinatown Complex and Geylang Serai, and Tekka from Year 2, five at most before the gate, each costed from its own heritage-worthy stalls and size: $14,990,340 over four years in two-part ledgers (operating and programme); the plan pays for no hawker-centre infrastructure, and apprentices learn at the master's side instead of in a prep co-operative; hawker-led Buying Circles (§2.12), a table-cleaning fee re-priced for tray return at the pilot centres and a named deputy for an hour a day join the package; a Heritage Watchlist (§3.6) opens at every government hawker centre from Year 1 and counts each year the stalls at risk, and from Year 4 each centre funds new Fellowships at a maintenance rate fed by that count.	v1.1
1.0	27 October 2026	First edition: one document in three papers, the Executive Summary, the Main Paper and the Technical Paper.	v1.0

Each stall of Hawker Heritage has its own version: the Hawker Library and Saving our Hawker Heritage. Until 1.10 they shared one. Versions are numbered major.minor. A new major version is a new edition, made with contributors or reviewers beyond the initiator; a minor version changes a proposal, a term or a headline figure, or restructures the documents by the initiator alone; a third digit marks a correction to wording or sources that changes none of them. A change to a source bumps every stall whose documents it changes. Each version is tagged in the repository, and its PDF can be rebuilt from that tag. The PDF's file name never changes; the version on the cover, in the footer and on this page is the one that counts. Every change since 1.0, with the sections it touches and why, is recorded in the Plan Change Log, Saving our Hawker Heritage — Version and Change Control Log, one of the thirteen documents.