

## **Japantown Community Plan – Draft Introduction (June 2012)**

### **To the Reader:**

Thank you for taking an interest in the future of San Francisco Japantown. This neighborhood is one of only three historic Japantowns in the nation that remains intact as a thriving and viable cultural and historic entity. Members of the Japantown community have been working to assure that Japantown continues to maintain its integrity and vitality and continues to preserve and carry forward the story and lessons of the Japanese in America to future generations. We welcome your input and involvement in this effort.

### **The purpose of this report is to:**

1. Explain where we are in the development of the Japantown Community Plan (JCP): What has been done to date, where we are, and what will happen moving forward.
2. Clarify what components of the JCP San Francisco agencies (Planning, Recreation and Parks, SFMTA, DPW, etc.) would need to implement, and what components the Japantown community and stakeholders are responsible for implementing or enabling.
3. Present and outline of the recommendations that the Japantown Organizing Committee has developed based on community feedback at the various public meetings, and subcommittee research and discussion. These recommendations, as amended based on community feedback to this outline, will be the basis for the revising the 2009 Draft Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan<sup>i</sup> to create the Japantown Community Plan for presentation to the Planning Commission.

### **Community Review and Feedback**

The Japantown Organizing Committee presents here the following DRAFT recommendations for the community's consideration, review and possible modification before they are included in the formal JCP to be presented to the Planning Commission for approval and implementation. We believe that these recommendations accurately reflect the community's expressed concerns for the continuation of San Francisco Japantown as a vital and true cultural community. Nonetheless, we wish to confirm that the draft recommendations do enjoy community support and to incorporate any changes the community wishes to make to the draft recommendations before they are incorporated into the final JCP.

## **SAN FRANCISCO JAPANTOWN COMMUNITY PLAN**

### **Background - Where We Are, How We Got Here**

#### **Phase I – Planning Begins (2006 – 2009)**

In Fall 2006, the City formally initiated a community process for the development of a Better Neighborhood Plan to guide the future of the San Francisco Japantown community and neighborhood. The City's action responded to concerns raised in the wake of the Kintetsu mall and hotel property sales; the impending sunset of Redevelopment Agency jurisdiction over the community, with the return of that area to Planning Department jurisdiction; and the start of planning for the Geary Bus Rapid Transit project.

In mid-May 2009, the Planning Department issued its Draft BNP to the public. The Draft BNP generated considerable comment at the Planning Commission, principally because the community had not been given adequate opportunity to review the plan and to analyze its recommendations, particularly as to the potential effects of the proposed large-scale development in and around the community. Accordingly, on June 25, 2009, after acknowledging the effort leading to the Draft BNP, the Planning Commission referred the Draft BNP to the Japantown community for its in-depth review and analysis and, with the Planning Department's aid, development of desired potential changes to the proposed plan. (Resolution No. 17911.)

## Phase II – Community Review and Plan Development (2009 – Present)

Following the Commission's action, the Japantown community entered into a transitional period marked by a shift from a Planning Department-based process to one driven by community priorities, with the Department's assistance. A more broadly-based Organizing Committee, which arose out of the former community Steering Committee, established four working committees – focusing on Cultural Heritage, Land Use-Built Form, Economic Development-Japan Center, and Public Realm-Transportation – whose membership and meetings were open to the public in order to review, analyze and recommend changes to the substantive premises and provisions of the Draft BNP. Beginning in September 2009, the Organizing Committee initiated a series of community meetings to seek ongoing public input on the full range of preservation and planning issues facing the community. In August 2010, the community's process was ratified and formalized through then-Supervisor Mirkarimi and Planning Department Director John Rahaim. From May-September 2011, through a series of professionally facilitated public meetings, the Organizing Committee presented its working committees' recommendations to the community for review, comment and approval.

### **Premises of Community Review**

After considerable thought, discussion and community input, the Japantown Organizing Committee articulated the following premises guiding its review of the Draft BNP and formulation of planning recommendations on behalf of the Japantown community:

(1) As its overarching goal, the San Francisco Japantown-Japanese American community wishes to honor its cultural heritage by ensuring that it survives and thrives as a culturally authentic and economically vital center of the Bay Area Japanese American/Japanese community.

(2) The Japantown community has both the right and the need to control its future. The Japanese-American community's history, from the beginning of the Japanese experience in the United States, and continuing through the disruption and diminution of Japantown created by San Francisco's poorly-implemented Redevelopment programs, establishes the need for the Japantown Community to have responsibility for developing the JCP.<sup>1</sup>

(3) The Japantown Community review process would build on the work done in creating the 2009 Draft Plan, using public reviews of the 2009 Draft Plan to identify what changes are needed, and, as appropriate, draft new recommendations on how best to revise the 2009 Draft to meet community needs. The resulting JCP recommendations would be reviewed with the broader community during its development, permitting time for community feedback before formal presentation for approval to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

#### Context for Recommendations

The recommendations that emerged from the Phase II work had a significantly distinct focus from the Draft BNP. The recommendations are discussed in detail in the sections that follow. Appendix \_\_\_ provides a comparison of the recommendations in the Draft BNP to the recommendations of the proposed Japantown Community Plan (JAC).

The four community goals for the planning process remained the same. The community feedback from Phase II indicated that the premise that large scale development, particularly of the Japan Center and along the Geary corridor, was strongly disfavored because of the likelihood that such development would deestroy the intimate, fine-grained community sensibility that has enabled Japantown to endure as a culturally and historically distinctive neighborhood. Other ideas surfaced, such as the creation of a community land trust that could preserve not only historical and cultural resources, but support the small scale and cultural commercial resources of the community. Reflecting these new approaches, the Organizing Committee re-articulated an overall Mission for the Japantown Community Plan:

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to Redevelopment, this history includes (a) the denial of citizenship, and therefore a political voice, to the Issei (first generation immigrants); (b) the denial of the Issei's ability to own most real property under the Alien Land Law; (c) federal immigration restrictions and closures, which disrupted the Japanese American communities' natural growth; and (d) the forced removal of the entire west coast Japanese/Japanese American population from their communities and their imprisonment in desolate internment camps during WWII. Most recently, Redevelopment profoundly affected Japantown by disrupting the vital community that had revived itself after the WWII Internment, destroying Japantown as a Japanese American residential community, removing much of the existing housing stock, depleting the existing small businesses serving the community, and vesting a major portion of community property in a few corporate landowners.

**Our mission is to protect and sustain San Francisco Japantown as an historically diverse, culturally authentic, thriving and livable community into the future.**

This mission is based upon the four goals identified in the 2009 Draft Plan and supported by community consensus.

**Goal 1: Cultural Heritage**

Develop programs for securing a future for San Francisco Japantown as the historical and cultural heart of the Japanese and Japanese American community

**Goal 2: Commercial Vitality**

Develop programs for securing a future for San Francisco Japantown as a thriving commercial and retail district that nurtures and supports small local businesses and culturally relevant commercial community.

**Goal 3: Residential & Institutional Uses**

Secure Japantown's future as a home to residents and community-based institutions that contribute to its existence as a distinctive neighborhood with a significant cultural and historical identity.

**Goal 4: Physical Features**

Secure Japantown's future as a physically attractive and vibrant environment that is in harmony with and contributes to its cultural and historical heritage.

The JCP is organized around these goals, rather than around planning measures, in order to emphasize the purpose of the JCP as a tool for preserving social heritage, rather than as a tool limited to its more traditional planning role only for regulating Japantown's physical setting.

The Organizing Committee has identified five key initiatives and one required enabling step that requires ongoing community involvement in order to assure implementation of the JCP:

Substantive Initiatives:

1. Creation of a formal **Social Heritage District** that recognizes and supports culturally important features - both physical and social - of Japantown (Goal 1);
2. Creation of a named **Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District** by combining the current NC-2 and NC-3 districts in the Japantown SUD, with NCD zoning controls adapted to Japantown's specific needs and objectives (Goal 2);

3. Implementation of **Japantown Design Standards** to guide new construction, renovation and public space improvements (Goal 1,2, 4);
4. Implementation of a **Community Benefit Program**<sup>2</sup>, establishing a mechanism to receive funding from development impact fees (Goal 3);
5. Establishment of a **Community Land Trust** or similar entity that can own property and provide a variety of services to Japantown (Goal 1, 2).

Continued Community Action for Implementation

Assure funding and completion of the **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)** process as determined to be appropriate for the Japantown Plan by Planning's Environmental Planning Division. This may or may not involve a full EIR.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.sf-planning.org/index.aspx?page=2425>, accessed 31 May 2012

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<sup>2</sup> A Community Benefit Program is not the same as a Community Benefits District (CBD), Community Benefit Program funding comes from sources such as development impact fees levied on new development in the district, and does not impose fees on property owners in the district as a CBD does,