

# japantown task force, inc.

a planning, preservation, and development organization

## **JTF Board Meeting March 24, 2008 @ 6:00 p.m. Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan Planning Room Meeting minutes**

**Attendees:** Doug Dawkins, Denis Henmi, Caryl Ito, Tak Matsuba, Sandy Mori (President), Benh Nakajo  
**Staff:** Darryl Abantao, Bob Hamaguchi  
**Guests:** Alice Kawahatsu, Karl Matsushita, JK Yamamoto  
**Absent:** Stephen Engblom, Seiko Fujimoto, Mark Moriguchi, Rosalyn Tonai, Lisa Watada

**Meeting called to order: 6:04 p.m. by Sandy Mori, President**

### **A. Approval of Minutes: Meeting of January 28, 2008 & February 25, 2008**

### **B. SF Transportation Effectiveness Project – Jay Gordon, Ross Maxwell, & Peter Strauss**

Peter Strauss and Britt Tanner came before the Board a few months ago and were asked to come back to the March Board meeting to give an update. After conducting a ridership survey, data collection of loading/unloading times, 311 comments, emails, briefings with more than 50 customers, stakeholders and employees, the SF MTA feels they have a good basis of information to provide recommendations.

From the data they have collected, the TEP project has found the top priorities are improving reliability, reducing travel times, and updating Muni routes. The proposals would address Muni's structural budget deficit by making service more efficient and would reduce traffic congestion and pollution by attracting new customers.

The entire Muni service routes have been categorized as one of the following: Rapid Network, Local Network, Community Connectors, or Specialized Services. Rapid Network are the heaviest ridership lines with the most frequent service with service every 5 to 10 minutes. Local Network combines with the Rapid Network to create a core network with service every 10 to 15 minutes. Community Connectors fill gaps in coverage and connects to the core network with service every 15 to 30 minutes. Specialized Services augments all day service and addresses focused needs and include the Owl night service and express routes.

A Rapid Network example would be the 22-Fillmore that is proposed to be rerouted east along 16<sup>th</sup> Street to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street to improve connections to the Mission Bay. More frequent service all day would shorten the wait times and reduce crowding. During the AM peak time service would be every 6 minutes and every 7.5 minutes during midday.

Another Rapid Network example is the 38L-Geary Limited which would expand to operate 6 AM to 10 PM 7 days a week. This would increase service frequency and reduce crowding and shorten wait times. There would be no route change. The proposed frequency would be 5 minutes all day and 38-Local frequency would be every 7.5 minutes during peak times and every 12 minutes during midday.

A Local Network example is the 2-Clement. The Sutter Street transit lines 2-Clement, 3-Jackson, and 4-Sutter would be consolidated into the 2-Clement. Between Arguello and Presidio Avenues, the 2-Clement would be rerouted from California St. to Geary

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Boulevard. Service west of 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue would be discontinued due to low ridership and access to high quality service on the 1-California. Sutter Street frequency would increase during peak times from every 4 minutes to every 3 minutes, but would remain the same during midday at service every 10 minutes.

Bob Hamaguchi commented that the proposals show no service to the Outer Richmond district where a lot of community members reside. Peter Strauss responded that there are tradeoffs with the proposals. Currently there are buses running on every block, although we have very good services on Geary and California. We want to concentrate buses on those streets. The 2-Clement is only one block from Geary or California Streets. They propose only providing service for the 2-Clement to Presidio Avenue. The 2-Clement won't serve Clement from Presidio Avenue to 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and would only run until 8 p.m.

Karl Matsushita commented that a lot of people ride late in the evening until the current schedule of 1:30 a.m. People board the California bus during the daytime to travel downtown, Children's Hospital and Laurel Heights. If you take Geary, there is nothing there with hospitals or commercial districts. Matsushita suggested the 2-Clement to provide service on California at Laurel Heights. On Sutter Street, there are a lot of senior homes, retirement homes and assisted living. During the midday you have seniors who don't ride during the rush hour. There is a gap between the 2-Clement and 3-Jackson. Seniors pack into these buses and Matsushita is afraid there will be a serious accident if the bus drivers need to slam on the brakes.

Caryl Ito asked how the current situation for Muni staff is in terms of new funding to hire more supervisors and how is the shortage of drivers being addressed. Strauss responded that ideally the bus driver staff would be 150 drivers. Muni has increased their class size from 15 students to 30 students. The budget is not the problem, but rather the lack of qualified and trained drivers has been problematic. Current operators are working overtime because of the lack of operators. The current staff is being exhausted and they are working to improve their employment practice.

Denis Henmi asked if equipment reliability is an issue that impacts reliability. Strauss responded that two-years ago it was likely that a bus didn't show up because it was broken or had no driver. Today, the buses are not the issue, but they are still having trouble with the trolley cars. They have not made any decisions on any future fleet purchases because they are not looking to buy more. However, they did a pilot study with double-decker buses that was successful. If Muni wants to increase capacity, more buses would require larger garages. Having a double-decker bus would allow Muni to increase capacity without larger or more bus yards. Customers generally like them because they are fun to ride.

The TEP will be holding a series of workshops to hear feedback on the proposals and in early summer 2008 the proposals will be submitted to the SFMTA Board of Directors. Route changes can happen as early as July 2009.

## C. Report from Bob Hamaguchi, Executive Director

**Nihonmachi Little Friends / Kinmon Follow Up**— As discussed at the previous Board meeting, a meeting with Kinmon Gakuen was organized to understand the impacts for their decision for a change of use in the Kinmon Gakuen building. Bob arranged a meeting

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with Rosemary Dudley and Rachel Force, SF Planning Department; Mike Iwasaki, Kinmon Gakuen Board of Directors President; Shiz Mihara, Kinmon Gakuen Executive Director; and Ruth Todd, Page and Turnbull; and Bob attended this meeting. After this meeting, If Kinmon Gakuen chose to be historically designated; they may be able to go through less stringent building code and reduce costs for less than what SF Planning Code would normally require. Kinmon Gakuen committed to extend the lease for an additional year to give Nihonmachi Little Friends time to find another location.

**Financials / Funding Sources** – Not being able to expect any garage funding, Bob has worked with JCYC on existing funds and Planning Department money. They have concluded we will run out of money at the end of June and need to find funding beginning July 1, although Darryl can be funded through September. Sandy and Bob are looking to find a few short- term sources that would fill the Garage's past funding.

The budget Bob is proposing includes consultants for a media plan and merchant/business planning. In the past year, Bob has created a plan, but next year he would like to hire the consultants to implement the plan. Currently the hotels have a media plan, but Bob would like to incorporate the entire Japantown community as a whole. We need to understand who is coming, why, and how to advertise as a community. Richard Hashimoto suggested doing a study and partnering with the Visitor's Bureau/Japantown Merchants Association to promote the vibrant community and to preserve Japantown.

**Gerbode Proposal Draft** – The Gerbode funding proposal will be submitted next week. The proposal includes showing what JTF has achieved in the past two years and where he thinks JTF will be going in the next three years. The Better Neighborhood Plan is going to happen, but in the meantime while the community works on writing and developing a plan, we have a vibrant economy in Yoshi's Jazz Club, J-Pop Center, a newly renovated Kabuki Theater, Hotel Kabuki and Hotel Tomo. We need to improve the visitor experience by way of improving the maintenance and security in the neighborhood. The three-year Gerbode funding would help bridge this three-year gap before we see any results from the Better Neighborhood Plan.

**Better Neighborhood Plan Status** – The project schedule has been extended 3 months from June to September. The Japan Center has major issues involving the garage, DPT, BRT Study impacts and the timing and coordination of these agencies or projects. Ken Rich mentioned that before getting too deep into recommendations, other agencies should be involved and giving input.

With any development in the Miyako and Kintetsu Malls, we need to maintain our culturally relevant tenants. They may not include 100% of the existing tenants, but there should be financial and business planning for existing tenants.

At the March 11 focus group meeting, the 1481 Post Street project manager announced they will not be moving forward with the 400-foot tower. They used the focus group meeting to gather ideas for redesigning the project.

Sandy asked the board members if they felt JTF should respond to the recent Letters to the Editor submitted by Hiroshi and Nob Fukuda. Attending members felt it is important to present the facts and give periodic updates on what is going on in the plan.

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Bob emphasized the importance of the next phase that would be led by the Steering Committee and the Community. In order for the community to feel it is their plan, the community needs to feel confident the recommendations for the future are decided by the community and not by the Planning Department.

**Nihonmachi Terrace** – Nihonmachi Terrace held a meeting on March 12 and the following evening went before the WACAC with a strong focus on improving the tenant communications. JTF has been assisting in bringing attention to this remodel and ensuring the affordable housing for its current tenants. Linda and Alice are doing a great job in guiding the tenants association and engaging the tenants to participate and understand what is going on in their building. Linda and Alice will continue to work at keeping an open line of communication between the Tenants Association and the Nihonmachi Terrace Board of Directors.

Denis Henmi suggested speaking with Todco because they are starting on a 400-unit project that may assist in what worked or didn't work with outreach efforts to residents.

**Volunteers for Cherry Blossom Festival – BNP Office** – Bob will send out an email reminder to the Board and Advisory Committee seeking volunteers to help with the outreach during the Cherry Blossom Festival. The office space will be open from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on April 12, 13 and 19.

## D. President of the Board Report from Sandy Mori

**Funding Status** – In addition to the update Bob provided, Sandy mentioned that two other funding sources JTF will be pursuing is from PG&E and NUUMI. Sandy commented that if any Board members had any suggestions or contacts for potential funding sources to let Bob know.

**WACAC Issues** – Sandy has been attending WACAC and SFRA meetings. There was a sale of a property in the A2 at 1210 Scott Street next to a school. Originally this piece of land was supposed to be affordable housing, but a gym for the school will be built there. A deal was made for \$4 million to be put towards the Certificate of Preference program so the gym would be allowed to be built. The money is supposed to be used to set criteria of who can use the money for housing, however the list of who the certificate holders needs to be addressed.

## E. Other Business and Announcements

1. Community Calendar
2. Press Clippings
3. Community Clean Up Day – Saturday, March 29 - 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. – Peace Plaza

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.