

# japantown task force, inc.

a planning, preservation, and development organization

## JTF Board Meeting December 22, 2008 @ 6:00 p.m. Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan Planning Room Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Stephen Engblom, Denis Henmi, Caryl Ito, Jim Misener, Sandy Mori (President),  
Mark Moriguchi, Benh Nakajo, Rosalyn Tonai, Lisa Watada  
Staff: Darryl Abantao, Bob Hamaguchi  
Guests: Tilly Chang, Walter Kaye, Hiroshi Shimizu  
Absent: Doug Dawkins, Caryl Ito, Seiko Fujimoto, Tak Matsuba

Recognition of Quorum established by 8 members.  
Meeting called to order: 6:09 p.m. by Sandy Mori, President

- A. Approval of Minutes: Meeting of September 22, 2008  
Denis Henmi moved and Lisa Watada seconded a motion to adopt the minutes for the JTF Board of Directors Meeting on November 24, 2008.
- B. Congestion Pricing Proposal – Tilly Chang, SFCTA – As part of the Prop K sales tax, a San Francisco Mobility, Access and Pricing Study is being conducted. Beginning in 2004, it has been evaluating long range planning and funding while working with MTA, BART and Caltrain on the feasibility of congestion pricing.

Congestion pricing is a toll assessed of all vehicles entering certain areas of San Francisco. The toll is estimated \$3 from 6 to 9 a.m. and \$3 from 3 to 7 p.m. All current alternatives being considered would include Japantown within the toll boundary.

Congestion pricing is being considered for several reasons including

- current and future congestion conditions reduce competitiveness and quality of life,
- most dense urban areas do not have enough room to build more roadway or parking facilities,
- climate change is imperative with health and environmental impacts,
- highway trust fund bankruptcy is projected by end of FY 2009 with federal, state and local taxes covering between 40-60%, and
- the need to provide better and more options in a growing/changing population.

Congestion pricing aims to have faster and more reliable trips for all travels including pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers and public transportation users. These goals are achieved by improved traffic flow and road safety, lower vehicle emissions, new transit services and amenities, and additional revenue to be used to fund more and higher technology traffic signals, resurfacing of roads and investing.

In December 2008, there will be four public workshops. Following these workshops will be a board action to screen scenarios. In early 2009, scenarios will be refined and in the spring of 2009 there will be final recommendations, potential next steps, an implementation plan, program evaluation and an EIR.

Sandy Mori commented that Japantown has the concern that people come from all over the Bay Area to visit the community to shop at local businesses and to participate in community events and activities and a fee would be a deterrent. We are one of three remaining Japantowns in the United States and we are working diligently on cultural preservation. The more difficult we make it to come here, the less people will want to

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come.

Misener commented regarding the slide on user acceptance. He did not feel the survey 700 merchant responses was an representative sample because it did not include the drivers of the vehicles who would be assessed the toll. Chang responded that the system would need to be accepted politically. They are in the process of disseminating information. A final decision will be made after the study and EIR. Chang added that considering the current economy, researching at this time was recommended. Surrounding counties could block this idea in legislation. San Francisco has limited resources and this restricts the possible options to solve congestion problems for a scarce resource and a place that needs money.

Mark Moriguchi commented on the decision to choose Divisadero as a boundary as opposed to Van Ness. Moriguchi recommended the boundary be Van Ness because the area west of Van Ness is predominately small businesses that would be more severely impacted than downtown corporations. .

Misener asked for concrete examples of how the \$35 to \$65 million from congestion pricing would be used. Chang responded that Prop K generates \$80 million per year. MUNI has a budget of \$600-700 million but most of that is operating costs. They will need to decide whether to build more capital projects or reduce services.

## C. Report from Bob Hamaguchi, Executive Director

Financials/Funding Sources– There is no financial statement and will be emailed to Board members.

Better Neighborhood Plan Update – Tab 2 of the Board of Directors packet includes an update with revised schedule. We will complete the plan by the end of April. Planning Dept. is working hard on a draft plan. The steering committee has received the first draft of the transportation section. There is a series of meetings on historic preservation in January 2009.

Sandy added that for those of you interested in density, you are welcome to attend the next steering committee meeting on January 27, 2009 from 2 to 4 p.m. in the planning room. At the last steering committee meeting, 1481 and Sequoias attended to discuss why 1481 should not be high. The schedule is tight and we have already extended our deadline twice.

SFRDA Commission Approval – In tab 3 of the Board packet, a summary of the various tasks was included as part of the funding that was obtained by the SFRDA. Sandy Mori added that because the agency will be leaving Japantown in January 2009, justification to grant funding to JTF was difficult. The question about having a Community Benefit District needs to be finalized. The Fillmore Jazz District has a CBD and RDA funded that. Japantown needs to research the benefits and impacts of having a CBD. We need to look at the parameters and boundaries in a different way in the past. Education is extremely important and the funding will primarily be used to educate all of the property owners both large and small in the area.

Hamaguchi will put together a budget for FY 2008-2009 that was submitted to the Mayor's Office of Community Investment. He would like a subcommittee of the board to

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work with him on this budget. Hamaguchi will arrange a meeting in 2009 to meet with Lisa Watada and Mark Moriguchi.

Nihonmachi Terrace Community Meeting— On December 2, 2008 there was a community meeting at the Nihonmachi Terrace. There were 10 community people in attendance. There was a separate meeting for residents. They presented information on the housing bill to gain entitlements for their Section 8 approval to increase their bond and allow tenants to keep rent at existing levels. They hope to break ground for the first units in May 2009. They hope to have bond closing in April 2009 with Citibank committed to provide financing. There may be a few minimal tenant relocations offsite while their new unit are being refurbished. Depending on the condition of the units, almost all tenants will need to relocate within the project.

JAANC: Kanrinmaru 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee (Rosalyn Tonai) – The celebration will begin in April and continue through the year in 2010. At the meeting, there was discussion about exhibits, programming, cultural events, and endorsement behind Japantown vendors to support activities in the tea garden.

Tea Garden RFP – The RFP applications are due on January 5. There was discussion about having a tea house developed in Japan and disassembled to be redonated to the SF Japanese Tea Garden. Rec and Park Department has decided that this idea would be handled after the RFP was completed because proposals should not be disqualified because the tea house is not part of the RFP.

Neighborhood Works Training – Bob Hamaguchi thanked Rosalyn Tonai for introducing him to this federally funded program in Washington D.C. There were approximately 2,000 students with a small Asian representation. There was a survey of organizations about how you are ready to market your neighborhood. There was no discussion of historic or cultural preservation. The good news is that the BNP covers most of the topics covered in the class. Hamaguchi was surprised there was not an emphasis on the importance of a commercial core of a neighborhood.

JTF / JACL Youth Clean Up Day (Darryl) – On December 13, 2008 a group of youth from Eden JACL and members from the community swept the sidewalks and removed trash from the sidewalks. There were over 15 volunteers for the event and lunch was provided by JACL afterwards. Darryl Abantao is working with SFDPW to plan a series of clean up events in 2009. We are hoping there will be continued support from the businesses and organizations from the community to volunteer or donate a light lunch as appreciation to those who help maintain a beautiful community.

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

Geary BRT EIR Scoping Meeting – There was discussion about whether JTF should take a formal position to support or not support any of the various plan options. Misener commented that he has been attending the Geary BRT CAC meetings and we need a stronger representation of Japantown. The members on this committee are very passive and there has been no option that has received tremendous support. Hamaguchi commented that the BNP Steering Committee can point to a specific alternative. They have been involved and been monitoring the different alternatives.

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## E. Other Business and Announcements

1. Community Calendar
2. Press Clippings
3. Stephen Engblom appreciated working with fellow JTF Board of Directors for the past few years, but he was invited to the Board as a representative of 3D Investments. With 3D Investments recent decision to stop funding any new development for the next two years, he felt it would be appropriate to resign from the board. Sandy thanked him for his contributions and welcomes him to rejoin the board when 3D Investments decides to move forward.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.