



日本町の経済発展・計画・保存

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING & PRESERVATION OF JAPANTOWN

**NOTES FROM THE LAND USE/TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
OF THE JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE**

1765 SUTTER STREET

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2020

**BOARD MEMBER PRESENT:**

Rich Hashimoto, Alice Kawahatsu, Rosalyn Tonai, Glynis Nakahara, Sandy Mori

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Nina Bazan-Sakamoto

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Tomo Hirai, Paul Wermer, Karen Kai, Sophia Scherr (SFMTA, guest), Edgar Orozco (SFMTA, guest)

The meeting began at 6:05 p.m.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

SUTTER STREET TRANSIT SAFETY PROJECT

Sophia Scherr and Edgar Orozco from SFMTA provided a summary of proposed changes on Sutter Street from Gough to Fillmore. Proposal to restripe westbound lanes from 2 lanes to 1 lane and to alter the left lane pocket at Buchanan into a designated left turn lane. The change is tentatively scheduled for late Spring, early Summer 2020, depending on when the Steiner Street bridge is demolished since they don't want to make changes until after the correlating re-routing of traffic is completed.

Lanes are currently too narrow and therefore unsafe to accommodate buses, which straddle two lanes. It was brought to SFMTA's attention by Muni bus operators. Intention is to improve service and safety for the 2 and 3 lines. No removal of parking. In the past 5 years, there have been 7 collisions in the area due to narrow lanes, and 6 of them were Muni related. The left turn lane is also a safety improvement. In the last 10 years, 10 pedestrians were hit by left turning vehicles while crossing the southern crosswalk.

Lane widths will go from 9' to 16' westbound and 10' to 12' eastbound. Sutter westbound is part of the bike network which is why they want to go to 16' vs. standard 13' east and west. Richard asked if SFMTA is planning to put in a bike lane in the future and the Sophia indicated it was not a part of this project. Karen asked that Sophia and Edgar pass on to SFMTA that there would be opposition to a dedicated westbound bike lane on Sutter because it would create a serious safety hazard with all the community serving programs along that stretch.

Karen asked if the configuration of two lanes at Buchanan that will accommodate a left turn lane can be extended to the rest of the block since there are so many impacts on that stretch with the Center, NLF, and Kimochi etc. including drop off and pick up. She said that double parking will happen no matter what with all the drop off, pick up, and loading and unloading, including Buchanan hotel. She also noted that people were not noticed, including NLF and JCYC about the change. Sophia indicated that the previous project manager sent out information in February 2019 about the project to all addresses along the corridor and two blocks out. They didn't get any feedback.

They would be happy to meet with the organizations mentioned. Glynis will be forwarding contact info to them. Sophia indicated they will also be sending out a second mailer before the hearing notices go out. Information and flyers were also handed out at the Aki Matsuri in the Fall and they plan to do the same at the CBF. They are also coordinating with the Geary Rapid project channels.

Paul underscored the need for SFMTA to understand the complexity of the stretch between Buchanan and Webster with all the rideshare at the hotel, and drop off/pick up, service vehicles, and double parking for the activities happening, which are a reality.

Sophia asked if there was a need for more white zones that SFMTA can help with. Karen clarified that the white zone capacity exceeds the reality. Glynis pointed out that even if everyone followed the rules, there would still be a problem with traffic backing up along Sutter during times when drop off/pick up happens which is another issue/hazard. Sandy added there is added traffic with Kimochi vans related to the food service. Tomo pointed out that the issue of drop off/pick up and loading complexity was brought up when the bikeshare program proposed the Buchanan site at Sutter and it was not approved because of similar impacts. Richard noted that the stretch is maxed out but if there was an exception and more white zone could be added it might alleviate some of the problem.

Paul called attention to the need for better public hearing noticing and Edgar indicated that they are revising and improving the notices, etc. He also noted that there is no requirement for this project to go to public hearing and they are reaching out in good faith. Sophia said she's willing to give additional advanced notice before the notices go up.

Karen suggested that if the left turn lane configuration that's existing takes up almost half of the stretch between Buchanan and Webster, then would it be possible to maintain the existing configuration for the rest of the block? Edgar indicated that they will take it back to SFMTA and look into it for further exploration.

Sophia will send presentation info to Glynis to share out.

### JAPANTOWN CULTURAL DISTRICT

Nina announced that next week February 20 will be the focus group for the Land Use/Resilience and Glynis and Kenta have been working with her on figuring out how to facilitate the meeting. She wanted feedback and ideas. Glynis asked for input on the prompts 1 to 5 and also asked who was able to help facilitate at the meeting.

Nina said it would be helpful to get the word out to stakeholders and personal networks. Glynis noted that they also had a discussion about the actual focus groups noting that separating groups by association – for example merchants in one group and property owners in another – would yield more insight into the actual data but there are tradeoffs. Alice noted that the mixed groups in the Cultural Arts focus groups helped to enrich the conversations but that it may be different in this case.

Paul noted that regarding Question 2 about major development project, an equally important question is what needs to be done to prevent loss of existing businesses noting that wherever there has been major development existing small businesses have suffered and Japantown is

especially vulnerable because of the malls. Major development would be so disruptive it could be the end of existing retail here and cautioned that preserving the existing businesses is not a community benefit.

Glynis added that people generally think of community benefits as a kind of quid pro quo but that we should think of it holistically and the most important community benefit is for a project to be done right. That is the greatest benefit to the community benefit instead of thinking of it as the community will sacrifice this if the developer gives the community something else. She added that the Cultural District can help identify what will benefit the community the most. Karen added that community benefits should not be thought of as Christmas shopping but as an outcome of what the community defines as necessary and appropriate. Tomo said that community benefits need to be framed carefully because for example developers will say that their project is activating the sidewalks and that's a community benefit. Paul cautioned that the community should be educated so that they are not misled.

Karen noted that in the past community benefits that have been negotiated were not honored such as the use of the theaters for community events and at community rates. But that has not panned out. And in some cases, like the tenants association at 1600 Webster went to the Board of Supervisors to try and shut down the Nihonmachi Street Fair, developments can be threats to existing community events so there needs to be care so that

Nina needs the prompts to be finalized by Tuesday. Nina is in the process of figuring out if she will have a separate Japanese language group. Glynis will post the prompts on google docs for people to edit. Alice suggested there be a glossary to define words that people don't understand. Glynis asked if Resiliency could be a separate category but Nina said she doesn't think so. Nina said she would inquire again. Ros asked if there was going to be some kind of survey for more people to participate. Karen asked if there was a way for people to refer to JCHESS cause she thinks it would help to support a richer conversation. She also thinks it will help people to use it as a jumping off point so that CHHESS isn't redundant.

Paul said he's puzzled over the Environmental Sustainability. Glynis said she doesn't like to cover sustainability as a separate issue. She thinks its important to imbed it into all facets of discussion. She said she's struggling with Resiliency because its related to Land Use, but its super important and should have its own section. Paul noted that Resiliency has multiple components as well, such as economic resiliency, etc. Glynis noted that resiliency is important to Japantown because with a heavy senior population its extremely vulnerable. Paul pointed out that Resiliency could lead to a lot of off topic discussion. Glynis said we need to define Resiliency for Japantown. Everyone agreed that we can define Resiliency for Japantown as a community based planning and resources in the face of emergency. Ros wants it to also include economic resiliency.

Glynis will put it on Google docs for online editing.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

### BIKESHARE

Glynis reported that the bike rack is in place and asked if anyone had heard anecdotal comments. Alice noted that it was huge and she's glad it wasn't put on Buchanan. Glynis said when we

asked Baywheels why it was four parking spots long, they said that initially, two years ago, they said three because their intent was to put more than one station in Japantown. But when they realized it would only be one, they increased the size.

Glynis said the merchants and CBD were going to have a conversation with Baywheels to partner for promotions but she didn't know if that has happened. She will ask Rich. Gynis said she thinks the promotion is a coupon to shop in Japantown if they use the bike. Sandy noted that SFMTA has committed to moving the racks when there are festivals etc at their expense but that has not been put in writing and Richard Hashimoto is concerned about that.

Glynis said she thought Adrian had sent an email confirming that the racks would be moved at their expense. Ros and Sandy said we should get that in writing. Karen said both festivals should get assurances and they usually go through a process to get street closures. Glynis asked if the festivals get their permits from a different group or is it all SFMTA? Paul said he thinks its Bay Wheels that removes it – not SFMTA. Alice said they should remove it Thursday or Friday before the Sat festival.

Paul asked if we can ask Baywheels to come in and give us detailed utilization information. Karen suggested asking them for info 6 months out.

### GEARY TREES

Karen said there was a conference call Feb 7 with Amy Fowler and Dan MacKowski of DPW and Rich Hashimoto regarding what trees should be planted along Geary BRT stretch. There was some question about whether they wanted to plant cherry trees on the North side because there was a report that the trees there were not doing well and could be replaced with something else. The suggestion was they use London Plane Trees which is what is on the South side. But Karen said it doesn't have anything to do with Japantown.

The solution is that on the South side they'll augment Plane trees there. But on our north side, plant cherry trees and since the City has more responsibility for maintenance, they will dig the poor cherry trees out, replace them and maintain them with a three year guarantee. Karen said they also talked about planting them farther away from the curb since they get a lot of damage from opened car doors. Karen said they will plant a more resilient type of cherry tree "Higan Cherry". On the south side, they will also plant a cherry tree near the ramp of the pedestrian bridge.

Karen confirmed that the trees existing were part of the 150<sup>th</sup> celebration program. Alice noted that we need to make sure the placques remain. Karen said if a tree is replaced, they are aware and mindful of the need to preserve the plaques.

Karen said she has not heard any news about when the new crosswalk and median will go in. Alice said she attended a CBD meeting about the Geary project for Merchants. She said she had some concern about the closure of Geary on consecutive Saturday and Sunday when the Steiner bridge comes down and traffic will be re-routed to Post and Sutter. They didn't have an exact date targeted yet but it will be after the CBF. Alice recommended we have SFMTA to come to a LU/T meeting prior. She said it was a good meeting and MOEWD was there to talk about how they can support merchants with grants etc. so it was disappointing that not many attended. It was open to the public and Rich attended.

Glynis said if MOEWD could reach out to merchants more individually, it would be helpful. Alice said there was not Japanese translation. Tomo said initially, they wanted to demolish Steiner over a three day weekend to give them some leeway and thinks they should consider Memorial Day weekend. Alice said she was also concerned about a rodent problem since they'll be digging trenches to upgrade fiber optic.

The committee feels we need to have SFMTA come to LU to share information and details. Glynis will ask Rich to reach out to them to see if they will host a community meeting since Rich is on the CAC. Glynis will also reach out to Grace.

### SPECIAL AREA DESIGN GUIDELINES

Glynis reported that Maia Small from Planning reached out wanting to know when we want to pick up the SADG again to work on refinements and outreach. We had tentatively said March. Ros asked if they can share what they put together cause we have a lot of images and photographs to compile and share. The CBD also hired a photographer for promotions and will have good images too.

Glynis will schedule a separate meeting to reconvene in late March.

Glynis also said that Maia connected her with representatives from CCA who have a student group working on "Post Retail City". They're exploring a redefinition of ground floor uses and there's a SPUR workshop on the 20<sup>th</sup> (same day as the focus group). They want to use Japantown as a case study for exploring alternatives. Glynis hasn't had a chance to talk to the professors but thinks it's a wonderful opportunity. She doesn't think there's a down-side to it. Glynis will ask someone to come to the next meeting. She'll also invite them to the Land Use focus group.

### JAPAN CENTER MALL AD HOC COMMITTEE

Glynis reported that JTF will form an ad hoc committee on the Japan Center Malls. Sandy clarified that its not just the property that 3D owns but all the property owners of the complex that stretches from Laguna to Fillmore. She said she had a preliminary discussion with the Executive Committee about a committee that would have expertise in planning, legal issues, etc. Separately, Sandy had a conversation with Paul Osaki who is pulling together a community wide group to tackle the issues, but that JTF's committee would be more of a technical group but would collaborate with Paul's group.

Glynis shared that Jeremy is interested in joining the committee. Glynis asked if anyone can be on the committee? Sandy said that it won't be open to the public because they want technical expertise and they want to collaborate with the bigger group that Paul Osaki is putting together. Sandy said there will be representation from Land Use.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

None

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Ros said NJAHS will be receiving 6 CS students from Yale to do an externship in early March.

They've been tagged with doing an AR app of Japantown. Maybe something like Pokemon go. She's not sure what they're going to do and they only have one week. She's not sure what the details are but they're going to invite them to hang out and do a walk through targeting young people. She asked people to let her know if they want to have the students visit or hang out at their place.

Sandy reported that Rich Hillis has been named the new Planning Director.