



JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE

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 / RING CENTRAL MEETING
THURSDAY, APRIL 8, 2021

COMMITTEE MEMBER PRESENT:

Jeremy Chan*, Glynis Nakahara*, Alice Kawahatsu*, Karen Kai, Kenta Takamori*, Lori Yamauchi*, Linda Walsh, Paul Wermer, Tomo Hirai, Rich Hashimoto*

STAFF PRESENT:

Susie Kagami

OTHERS PRESENT:

Kenya Wheeler, Hank Wilson, Emily Nichols, Jackie Funasaki, Nehama Rogosen, Derek Tahara

* Japantown Task Force Board Member

The meeting began at 6:00 p.m.

STAFF/COMMITTEE UPDATES:

JAPAN CENTER MALLS

Glynis reported that Daryl Higashi will be presenting on the topic of housing at the next Ad Hoc Committee meeting on Monday.

NEW BUSINESS:

PARKING METER EXTENDED HOURS - Hank Wilson, SFMTA

Kenya Wheeler and Hank Wilson presented on the parking meter proposal. They will extend meter hours past 6pm. They will also remove time limits on the meter.

They said that meter hours are intended to help businesses by keeping spaces available for customers while businesses are open. Several neighborhoods already have extended parking meter hours, including Fisherman's Wharf, Embarcadero, South Beach, Mission Bay, Portreto Hill (18th St), and various metered parking lots. Meter hours were set in the 1940s based on a 9am-6pm schedule, as opposed to a City that is open during evenings and weekends.

The City's goal is to hit a target occupancy of 60-80%. From 9am-6pm, the average occupancy is ~65%, while from 6pm-10pm, it's 85%. On Sundays, occupancy is 85% without meters, and 69% with meters. For Japantown, they said that extended meter hours may increase usage of the Japan Center Garage. It was noted that constant circling disrupts public traffic and MUNI.

For their timeline, they will determine appropriate neighborhoods, then do a phased rollout starting in Summer 2021 alongside a customer education campaign. They will start with warning notices and not issue tickets immediately.

Check sfmta.com/modernmeterhours for more details.

Paul noted that extended meter hours will impact Residential Permit Parking (RPP) zones and stress out residents. He also said he personally supported the project.

Karen asked what other neighborhoods are being considered for the extended parking meter proposal. She also asked if any of these other neighborhoods are subject to congestion pricing. She noted that the combination of extended parking meters and congestion pricing may discourage people from coming to Japantown. Kenya said they are still putting together the list of neighborhoods, and that congestion pricing has a much longer timeline. Kenya has discussed with the Fillmore. Nehama noted that as Geary BRT continues to develop, public transit will become more robust. Hank noted that people coming to Japantown by car are not driving from the congestion area; for example, they are coming from the Richmond or San Mateo. Also, the congestion pricing may be in place during rush hour, so it may not interact with extended parking meter hours.

Karen noted that on Sundays, that there are many nonprofit and church activities. Also, many people commute to Japantown from outside the City, so the Geary BRT improvements would not apply to them.

Jeremy commented that Japantown has a quiet nightlife and questioned why the extended parking hours might be necessary. Hank said there is some activity that could still be served by extended parking meter hours. Also perhaps, if parking is easier to find in the evenings, then perhaps more people will go.

Hank also noted that the extended meters rates are based on demand. If the demand is low, the rate could go down to as low as 50 cents an hour.

He also noted that Rich has discussed how the Garage is often at not 100% capacity, and that we should instead direct people to the garage. Hank said that if the meters match the garage hours, then it will discourage circling for parking and encourage patronage of the garage.

Lori asked what the target occupancy rate and what the criteria is for neighborhoods. Kenta said it includes having a mix of evening activities (ex. in Japantown, there are restaurants, movie theater etc.) and an interest in merchants having these tools. Lori asked if SFMTA would consider only extending hours on weekday evenings, and not on Sundays.

Ros asked if there are any financial goals for the metering. Kenya said no targets have been set, but they are looking at measuring sales tax as a way of measuring small business patronage. He also noted that the City has had shortfalls in revenue, and that this may help to address it.

Kenta commented that it is not his personal experience that 6pm-10pm has a high occupancy rate. At that time, it is pretty empty and easy to find parking. Hank said that they do have data and will share it with the committee, although the data is 10 years old.

Emily Nichols noted that the current meter hours are often not enforced (based on her personal observation), and that that issue should be addressed before exploring extended metered parking.

Rich noted that this proposal has been made to the Japantown Merchants Association and the Japantown CBD, and both are supportive of this proposal. Rich also noted that the Japan Center Garage lost the partnership with the CPMC parking, which resulted in a huge drop in

revenue. He had to furlough all of his staff. He also noted that the Garage has a validation program that could be used to support nonprofit events.

CD COMMUNITY LAND PLANNING

Glynis discussed the upcoming community land panel next Thursday, April 15. It will include panelists from Little Tokyo Service Center (they organize a community investment fund), and Chinatown Community Development Center.

Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/japantown-communityh-land-panel-tickets-149082077507>

Paul asked if the event will be recorded and made public. Susie said she will look into that. This will be the first of several events.

Glynis noted that Nina has asked the committee to engage and collaborate with the Cultural District on this topic. Lori noted that this is a key strategy in the CHHESS. Lori said it would be helpful for attendees to come prepared with questions and perhaps even send them to Nina and Susie to give in advance to the speakers. She also reported that Brandon is working on collecting data on how much land in Japantown is owned by Japanese Americans, focusing on the 6 blocks of the Cultural District. Having a baseline pulse will help us decide what our future goal should be. Susie noted that Brandon's map will also help to label the maps so we can more easily discuss the various property units.

Paul noted that Paul Osaki led a working group / research on land trusts in Japantown (the Burlington Report). Jeremy suggested it be sent out to all of the registrants for Thursday's event.

See the Burlington Report here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/10-FdcQO5A4MieqwGH1kSFg304RwqMIA8/view?usp=sharing>

Kenta noted he is now an advisor and investor in the Little Tokyo fund. Kenta noted that he is not sure how applicable that model is to Japantown, and that Little Tokyo also isn't quite sure either. Kenta noted that it really takes someone to grab the bull by the horns and help lead the project.

Karen asked if the Cultural District has discussed the land trust strategy with Paul Osaki, as otherwise there is a huge gap in community information and community connection. Karen suggested expanding the mapping to beyond just the six blocks due to the differences in commercial and residential property and land acquisition. For example, a land trust may be more useful for a historic building, while a community development corporation might be better for a larger scale commercial building. Karen said she was interested in learning how these other organizations identified the problem and defined their goals, because Japantown is still at that foundational step.

Tomo also noted that buildings outside of the 6 blocks are also sometimes at risk, such as the Buddhist Church of America building that was at risk of being sold.

Ros noted that as an EBALDC board member, she has offered to have the community learn more about EBALDC's community properties.

Glynis noted that the Center had previously established a non profit community development framework. She also commented on other land acquisition strategies outside of community investment funds, land trusts, and development corporations.

Three asks of committee:

1. Sharing the Burlington Report to all registrants of the April 15 event (provided that it is okay with Paul Osaki to share with everyone)
2. CD should check in with Paul and make sure he has an active role in this process
3. Expand Brandon Quan's mapping project to go beyond the 6 blocks of Japantown

Glynis will communicate these asks with Nina and Steve.

The committee will brainstorm more specific questions to ask with Nina and Steve.

Karen noted that we as a community should also be prepared for emergency moments when land acquisition modules may not be fully established.

Kenta noted that there may be people entering this topic for the first time, and that it's okay if the event also has an educational component.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

CITYWIDE INITIATIVES - HOUSING ELEMENT, SFMTA TREE REMOVAL, CONGESTION PRICING, SF CLIMATE ACTION PLAN, TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Glynis reported on the Housing Element community meeting. SF Planning prefers that if we do a future focus group, JTF take the lead, because they get "better results." Glynis will find out what month they would like to do that.

Karen reported that for the SFMTA Tree Removal, the administrative judge ruled that the tree would be removed. Cherry trees will be planted on the north side. Plain trees will be planted on the south side by the Laguna street stop. Today was the last day to appeal, and someone has appealed. Karen reported that some concern was expressed that these 8 smaller trees do not match up to one large tree (Monterey Cypress).

Glynis reported on the second community congestion pricing meeting. Based on our input from the first meeting, they relocated the boundary from Laguna to Van Ness. Van Ness south to Fulton. West to Laguna. South to 14th St. Connects to Mariposa.

Kenta was pleased that they addressed our concerns and the proposal no longer splits Japantown in two.

Lori noted that the congestion pricing is looking at 6am-9am and 3:30-5:30pm on weekdays. \$12.50 per vehicle. There would be some sorts of means based mechanism that adjusts the fees based on means.

SF Climate Action Plan: we held a Japantown community meeting / listening session for this topic.

Paul stressed that the next phase of the plan should be subject to public comment and review. Right now it is a to-do list, but does not explore the broader impacts of those to-dos (ex. increasing housing, but lacking analysis of impact on transit and businesses). Paul suggested asking the City about when the next update will be issued / next part of the dialogue will happen/

Kenta reported on the Transportation Element hearing. They have a draft of 10 principles that guide the policy, but Kenta said they are basically broad value statements that most people would agree with. The specific draft policies will be more important to analyze, and the outreach for that will occur in Spring 2022.

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY - WORKSHOP + POST/OCTAVIA SAFETY

Linda and Alice reported back on the pedestrian safety training. The next step is to look at what areas have not been analyzed / collected data from. Japantown is the second highest neighborhood for pedestrian injuries/deaths. Unfortunately, putting in a stop light will cost \$1 million, but there are also other options like stop signs and bulb outs to implement.

Alice also reported back on a meeting with Sequoias/Cathedral Hill. Our letter campaign and petitions (JTF, Kimochi, JARF, etc.) attracted the attention of Supervisor Preston and Captain Yep. Captain Yep had plain clothes officers observed that crossing and confirmed it being a safety risk.

The next step is to collect more data, including daylighting, speed guns, and stopping rates. They are interested in recruiting youth groups in Japantown. Walk SF can loan speed guns to us.

Once a date is established we will work to share it at the board meetings.

It was noted that Sutter and Webster may also be a troublesome intersection.

CCA: COMMON GROUND COLLAB

Glynis reported back on the second smaller workshop on Monday, April 5. The projects are still rough, and we gave a lot of feedback. Ros offered gallery space, which CCA is excited to make use of. Beau made minor comments on the MOU, and it will be signed soon.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Karen announced that this weekend and next weekend (April 11/12 and April 17/18) is the virtual Cherry blossom Festival. The Queen Program is on April 11. There will also be Hanami in the Plaza for outdoor dining and flower viewing. The "Kizuna" calligraphy was designed by Reverend Kawahatsu.

The meeting adjourned at 8:02 p.m.

The next meeting will be at 6:00 p.m., May 13, 2021 online at Ring Central.