



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 (VIA RING CENTRAL) THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2019

BOARD MEMBER PRESENT:

Jeremy Chan, Glynis Nakahara, Alice Kawahatsu, Kenta Takamori, Rich Hashimoto

STAFF PRESENT:

Nina Bazan-Sakamoto,

OTHERS PRESENT:

Linda Walsh, Karen Kai, Judy Hamaguchi, Christina Cho Yoo, Christopher Roach, Paul Wermer, Bob Rusky, Tomo Hirai, Sheffield Hale

The meeting began at 6:00 p.m.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

ADDITIONAL LUT COMMITTEE MEMBER

Bob Rusky looked at the by-laws. Vote by teleconference is allowed at the board level, so we will follow that at the committee level.

It was moved by Paul Wermer and seconded by Karen Kai to nominate Tomo Hirai as a committee member.

The motion was approved unanimously by Jeremy Chan, Paul Wermer, Bob Rusky, Karen Kai, Rich Hashimoto, Linda Walsh, Kenta Takamori, and Glynis Nakahara.

Tomo was told to attend next Wednesday's board meeting in case the board has any questions. It was discussed that a board member should follow up with JTF staff about how the board meeting will be publicly announced, such as by list serve, website, social media, etc.

SUTTER STREET TRANSIT SAFETY PROJECT

Amy Fowler punted the question back to Sophia. Sophia said the project is no hold due to shelter in place. Glynis forwarded it to concerned communities folks like Kathy Inamasu.

There are no further updates at this time.

JAPANTOWN CULTURAL DISTRICT

Nina reported that the draft will be released May 22

There will be two focus groups tomorrow (Friday May 15). One is a 1pm statewide meeting with all 4 Japantowns about resilience and best practices, inspired by the Covid-19 pandemic. A

second focus group at 4:30pm will look at regenerative, resilient futures (the seventh topic).

For the statewide meeting, Nina shared the list including SF, San Jose, Sawtelle, and Little Tokyo. It is being convened by Nina.

3 guiding questions:

1. How are Japantowns adjusting to the New Normal
2. What does resiliency in your community look like?
3. How role does J-Town play in mitigating crises?

Judy commented that Nichi Bei recently shared articles reporting on how San Jose and Little Tokyo and how they're dealing with the crisis.

There is also an SF community orgs committee dealing with the Covid-19 issue to gather / coordinate / exchange resources, fundraising campaigns, etc. It includes JCYC, NJAHS, Nichi Bei, JACL, JCBD, JTF, and Jon Osaki has been a main driver. The committee has met 3 times so far, and is looking to coordinate and not step on each others' toes. The meeting group isn't that formal, but the fundraising efforts are more formal. One fundraising effort is driven by JTF / JCBD, and the other by the Japantown Foundation. The two are aiming to raise \$800,000 in total. The committee has also served as a way for different aspects of Japantown (mechants, CBD, nonprofits, etc.) to report back in one place. The consortium is going to host a Town Hall meeting on May 27, but has not been advertised yet. The consortium is next meeting on the 19th.

Karen asked what this money is being raised for, and how it will be distributed.

It was commented that the 1pm statewide meeting was organized a week ago and intended to be small, but ballooned into a larger group. For parity's sake, it might be helpful to have more Japantown leaders. Nina reported that some other SF Japantown leaders have been invited, including Ros, Jon, Paul, and Steve Ishii. Glynis asked if other board members could / should attend.

Glynis commented that if the takeaways of this meeting are shared broadly, it could benefit everyone. Brandon will be taking notes for the meeting, and the session will be recorded.

Karen asked about incorporating Supervisor Preston's office.

RETAIL APOCALYPSE - CCA STUDIO PRESENTATIONS: ABBY ROCKWELL AND ELLIOT GORMAN

Christopher and Christina presented on Retail Apocalypse (the students were not able to attend the meeting).

They taught an advanced urban design studio at CCA (California College of the Arts). The goal was to study what is happening to retail in San Francisco / globally, and broadly plan for the future. They ran a workshop at SPUR discussing retail / ground floor at these different sites, looking at topics like property., governance, programming, space, and surface.

Two students worked on Japantown. Working under the assumption that the Japan Center Mall would be developed, the students analyzed how upzoning / larger scale development could be used to benefit Japantown. The projects understood Geary as a "massive chasm / scar" between Japantown and the Fillmore and how to address it.

From the SPUR focus group, some issues that were brought up include wayfinding and marketing.

One student suggested sinking Geary and decking it over with a public plaza. The plaza would host festivals and community events and make the gems of Japantown visible to the city. Many of the gems in Japantown are scattered in different hidden corners, so bringing them together in a centralized development would promote these gems. The student also proposed “micro hoods” where smaller scale activities can happen (artist galleries, taiko drumming, yoga, farmers markets, etc.) This evokes the original idea of a shopping mall as a “city in a box” / community center, as opposed to a place where you just buy stuff, incorporating things like cooking classes, workspaces, etc. The micro hoods would be anchored by housing towers that provide a customer base for activities / retail.

The second student was inspired by Japanese cities / regions (like Shinjuku and Akihabara) to create a super dense Japantown. The upzoning was used to deck over Geary. Residential complexes could provide inexpensive housing for young people and seniors, and this density/activity could support retail and cultural programs.

Both students were intentional about preserving Japanese American owned businesses and cultural centers, and enhancing Japantown as a destination point.

Paul Wermer commented that decking over Geary and low cost housing seems mutually incompatible. Height increases building cost, environmental cost, etc. which results in high market rate housing. He also commented that large construction projects displace the existing community for a period of time, and expressed his concern that the displaced community could return following a development.

Both students proposed ideas about phasing these developments over time. For example, a portion would be built, and then organizations would occupy those portions while displaced. The plaza over Geary would have to be built first, and populated with structures that allow for temporary relocation of businesses / cultural centers. The students were intentional about avoiding repeating the dislocation that occurred during redevelopment. Christina showed an example of a temporary shopping area in New Zealand made of colored shipping containers that became so popular that people want it to become permanent; Japantown could incorporate something similar.

Judy asked where and to who will this be presented to, and asked if they or the students were able to attend the meetings about re-envisioning the Plaza. So far, it has just been presented internally at the school, but they are working with SPUR and a working group, but wanted to show it to JTF first to gauge first impressions before proceeding. If there are interesting “kernels,” they would love to move forward in presenting.

Glynis commented that this is a student project, and so a certain level of “suspension of reality” should be used when commenting on the designs. Judy noted that the community has lobbied for height limitations for a long time.

Nina said that a lot of comments in the CHHESS focus group were echoed in these proposals, such as housing anchor, community event spaces, etc. She suggested design charrettes as a potential future activity.

Glynis suggested the students attend a CHHESS focus group, and that JTF would appreciate receiving a copy of the publication.

Karen noted that the students should be prepared to face criticism for their proposals, and highlighted that the assumption that there would be development is a large one. She noted that the experience from a business of moving to a new location, and the uncertain rent amount during transition and afterward. She also noted that the large towers were placed on top of St. Francis Square. Christopher noted that as architecture students, critique and feedback a is common experience for them.

NEW BUSINESS:

PEACE PLAZA BOND

Kenta commented that he attended Supervisor Preston's weekly town hall. He brought up the Peace Plaza bond, and expressed his support for it. There were several Japantown folks attending the call. However, he also noted that the money may be distributed to other projects.

Rich reported that the Rec and Park committee unanimously approved the bond. Commissioner Lowe advocated for Portsmouth Square, which is not included in the bond. Japantown organizers should confirm that the supervisors support the full \$25 million. 5 of the 9 supervisors support the full \$25 million, and JTF board members are continuing to meet with supervisors. Steve Nakajima is keeping an updated list of supervisors that have been contacted. Rich said that it will be difficult for Chinatown to get on the bond, because they have no designs, etc. yet.

Rich brought up the history of how this money was promised to Japantown (there was a lawsuit with the construction agency), but that money disappeared into a hole. Jeremy stressed the importance of sharing that history, because at face value, people may be surprised that money for mental health is being allocated to parks.

Alice noted that Vallie Brown will be running again for District 5.

Glynis reported that the Western Addition Buchanan Mall (south of Geary) has been added to the park bond. Karen suggested that the Peace Plaza committee should send out notices prior to the Rec and Park commission meetings so more J-Town folks can comment. Paul commented that the park commission meetings do not do a good job of encouraging public attendance.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

None