

JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE
Ad Hoc Japan Center Malls Technical Committee
Minutes
Monday, June 14, 2021
5:00 PM – VIA ZOOM MEETING

Committee Members Present: Joyce Oishi, Glynis Nakahara, Sandy Mori, Roy Ikeda, Lori Yamauchi, Beau Simon, Kenta Takamori, Richard Jue

Others Present: Derek Tahara, Jeremy Chan, Alice Kawahatsu, Benh Nakajo

Staff Present: Steve Nakajo, Lauren Nosaka, Brandon Quan, Susie Kagami, Nina Bazan-Sakamoto

- I. **Call to Order**
- II. **Approval of May 10, 2021 Minutes**
 - A. It was moved by Lori Yamauchi and seconded by Joyce Oishi to approve the minutes.
- III. **Consideration of Lori Yamauchi as Chairperson for the Japan Center Malls Technical Committee**
 - A. It was moved by Beau Simon and seconded by Glynis Nakahara to appoint Lori chair of the committee by Beau Simon
- IV. **Informational Presentation by Lori Yamauchi, retired Associate Vice Chancellor, Campus Planning, UCSF**
 - A. **Key Land Use and Development Regulations for Japantown**
 1. The types of land use in Japantown are residential, commercial, institutional and service uses.
 2. Japantown land use and development was regulated by the Redevelopment Agency from 1964 to 2009.
 - a) Urban Renewal was a federal legislation that allowed states to establish redevelopment agencies which would designate certain neighborhoods as blighted.
 - b) The SFRA designed two areas, Western Addition A-1 and Western Addition A-2, and Japantown happened to be in both.
 - (1) This agency dissolved in 2012 and the government set up a successor agency called the Office of Community Investment & Infrastructure.
 - c) Planning worked with Japantown on developing a Better Neighborhoods Plan(2009), which was rejected after opposition faced in the community.
 - d) The Japantown organizing community worked with planning and the mayor's office to create the Japanese Cultural Heritage & Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHESS) in 2013.
 3. Other regulations that govern land use and development in Japantown include
 - a) San Francisco General Plan and its elements
 - (1) The general plan is a vision and guide to inform public and private actions/decisions on the City's physical quality, character, growth and development
 - (2) Also contains area plans to guide growth and circulation, amenities and other factors of specific areas.
 - b) San Francisco Planning code or zoning policies and Zoning Maps
 - (1) Controls land use and physical development through zoning.
 - (2) Regulates building standards and standards for residential use.
 - (3) Zoning Maps apply the building standards and zoning controls to specific property.
 - (4) There are Japantown-Specific Zoning and Design policies
 - (a) Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District

- (b) Japantown Special Use District
- (c) Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines
- c) San Francisco Building Code
 - (1) Sets of rules and regulations that govern the design, construction and safety of structures and their occupancy.
 - (2) Usually enforced through permits and inspections.

B. Key Planning and Development Policy and Decision-making bodies

1. Planning Department
 - a) Director: Rich Hillis
2. Planning Commission
 - a) President: Joel Koppel
3. Historic Preservation Commission
4. Zoning Administrator - Corey Teague
5. Department of Building Inspection/Building Inspection Commission
6. Mayor's Office of Economic & Workforce Development (OEWD)
 - a) Director: Kate Sofis
7. Other City agencies
 - a) Mayor's Office of Housing & Community Development (MOHCD)
 - b) Board of Appeals
 - c) Department of Public Works
 - d) Department of Recreation & Parks,
 - e) SFMTA
 - f) Arts Commission

C. Redevelopment Agency vs City Planning Department

1. Redevelopment (now Office of Community Investment and Infrastructure or OCII)
 - a) Takes property and sells to private owners
 - b) Building design, size and uses regulated by Redevelopment Plan
 - c) Makes decisions based on staff recommendations
 - d) Citizens Advisory Committee or Project Area Committee reviews projects
2. Planning
 - a) Private property owners
 - b) Building design, size and uses regulated by Planning Code and General Plan
 - c) Decisions made by Planning Commission/Zoning Administrator, certain cases can be appealed to Board of Supervisors or Board of Appeals
 - d) Planning requires developers/property owners to notify adjacent owners and neighborhood groups on proposed projects.
3. Planning Process & Neighborhood Interface
 - a) Project Review Meeting -> Pre-application meeting with community -> Preliminary Project Assessment application -> Development Application -> Building Permit Application
4. Japantown Center Malls community interfaces with the city through a number of agencies
 - a) OEWD Liaisons: Anne Taupier and Ted Conrad
 - b) Planning Staff/Commission
 - (1) Current Planning (project review)
 - (2) Community Planning
 - c) Board of Supervisors (District 5)
 - d) Peace Plaza/Japantown garage - City agency property owners: Rec & Parks, SFMTA, Renovation to be designed by Department of Public Works

D. Discussion

1. Questions included:
 - a) What about the environmental study of the JCHESS prevented from being adopted as an area plan for Japantown? The JCHESS needed to be evaluated in an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) in order for it to be adopted as an area plan. The EIR would have required at least a year to produce and approve.

- b) Is an EIR done in parallel with the project review processes?
Yes, but mitigation measures to reduce any significant impacts identified in the EIR could result in changes to a project.
 - c) What is the line between a public project and a private project?
A public project is built on property owned by a public agency (e.g. Peace Plaza which is sponsored by the SF Rec Park department) and a private project is built on privately-owned property.
 - d) If the City is open to selling the Japantown garage, what kind of opportunity does the community have to purchasing it?
The City typically does not sell public property until it declares it surplus. The garage would have to be declared surplus and put out for bid. If the community were to submit a bid for the garage, the bid could be accepted or rejected by the City.
2. Lori inquired about a business which is proposing to locate in a vacant storefront in the Japan Center Malls. It is a formula retail establishment, Yi Fang Fruit Tea, and has applied for a Conditional Use Authorization from the Planning Commission. The public hearing for the CU authorization is scheduled for June 24. This was raised and discussed at the JTF Land Use and Transportation Committee meeting. The LU/T committee requested that the Executive Committee send a request to the Planning Commission for a continuance of the hearing, so that JTF can meet with the business owner.
- After further discussion, it was noted that there is no official protocol for new businesses seeking to locate in Japantown to follow, in order to contact the community and seek support. Unfortunately, the pre-application notice which was mailed to JTF in January was missed, and the Yi Fang owner did not know how to connect with JTF.
- Although the Japantown Community Benefits District and Japantown Merchants Association were notified by Planning of the application, JTF did not find out about it until recently.

V. Announcements

VI. General Public Comments

NEXT MEETING

Next Ad Hoc committee meeting will be held on **July 12, 2021** via zoom.

It will include updates from Grace Horikiri (Japantown Community Benefits District), Santino DeRose (Maven Properties) and Kirsten Fletcher (Kinokuniya property manager) regarding the status of the businesses in the Malls.

ADJOURNED: 5:53 PM

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