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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, JUNE 10, 2021**

COMMITTEE MEMBER PRESENT:

GLYNIS NAKAHARA*, JEREMY CHAN* LORI YAMAUCHI*, ALICE KAWAHATSU*, TOMO HIRAI, KENTA TAKAMORI*, Linda Walsh, Karen Kai

STAFF PRESENT:

Nina Bazan-Sakamoto

OTHERS PRESENT:

Emily Nichols, Steven Santa Maria, Benh Nakajo*, Yasuyo Satoh

* Japantown Task Force Board Member

The meeting began at 6:00 p.m.

STAFF/COMMITTEE UPDATES:

CULTURAL DISTRICT / CHHESS

Nina reported on the Housing Element Focus Group. They have selected 10 participants for a meeting on July 20 or July 22. Glynis and Nina will co-facilitate that focus group.

They are also having a meeting with Plinth Agency (the company of their web contractor Desi) to help design the Co-Creative Hub. They met with Grant Tsuno from Little Tokyo for strategies on organizing the Arts Action Committee.

Nina has also been writing position descriptions to help facilitate the transition between her and Susie Kagami.

Julia from the City has a graduate student intern working with her who will help the Japantown and SOMA Filipinas Cultural Districts finish their CHHESS reports, since Julia's time has been shifted to other things.

Glynis reported from the California Preservation Foundation conference that there may be additional funding for State Cultural Districts, and said she brought the program to the Cultural Heritage Committee's attention to track it and perhaps pursue it for Japantown. Lori said that David Takashima has been following up on the issue. Glynis said there were two panels on cultural districts and many panels on racial equity. She attended an interesting panel on preserving audio and olfactory (sounds and smells) as components of culture.

JAPAN CENTER MALLS

Lori Yamauchi is being considered as the new chair for the Ad Hoc Japan Center Malls committee. They are meeting next Monday. Lori will be giving a presentation on urban and land use planning.

PEACE PLAZA

Rich reported on the Peace Plaza meeting. They are waiting for the structural analysis to finish.

Rec and Park is reviewing the landmarking of the Pagoda and how it might affect the renovation. During the Peace Plaza meeting, George Yamasaki noted that there are several original concept designs that were never included in the current Peace Plaza, such as the eternal flame and the reflecting pool.

They completed filming thank you Peace Plaza videos last week. They have hired former JTF intern Max (a videographer) to put the videos together. A public town hall will be scheduled around August or September.

Ros commented that she recalled Michael DeGregorio saying that the Peace Plaza was included in the budget.

Glynis commented that there were past concerns by some about landmarking the plaza, but that landmarking the pagoda was never questioned. Rich commented that any type of landmarking might delay the process, so they're trying to hold off on landmarking until after the renovation. Ros said that was not what was previously communicated and Rich noted that they have received mixed messages from various city agencies.

Glynis noted that meeting preservation mandates for the plaza should not be an issue. Also she expressed concern that the Pagoda not be damaged during construction.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Alice commented that her husband, Reverend Kawahatsu, saw someone fall into a drop in the pavement on the south side of Sutter St between Octavia and Laguna. She could not get up and so they had to call 911. They spoke with two Nihonmachi Terrace residents, who said that residents have also fallen in this drop. Alice contacted Supervisor Preston and CC'd senior organizations and sent pictures. Preston said that this was unacceptable and said he would work with DPW on Monday June 7. Alice also reported it to 311.

If there is no follow up, Alice may ask JTF to send a letter recommending action. Kenta commented that sidewalk maintenance is inconsistent across neighborhoods.

Glynis noted that Grace Horikiri (JCBD) has also reached out to public works about this.

Karen commented that because the city now has responsibility for street trees, we should ask if this also extends to tree roots uprooting sidewalks.

Lori asked if the location is marked with red/yellow markings, but Alice said there wasn't. Alice has put two orange cones there.

Yasuyo Satoh noted that there is another dangerous sidewalk area on Laguna between Sutter and Post. Alice said she also brought that area to the Supervisor's attention.

Glynis noted that AB550 (the security camera bill sponsored by David Chiu) died in the appropriations committee. See [this article](#) for more info.

With respect to data gathering, they are still looking for interns to join the project. Jeremy asked and it was noted that JTF did not ask for an NCI intern this year. Ros said that JCYC may still be looking for applicants.

Alice and Linda will follow up with Brian Hagesman of WalkSF to determine how to proceed with collecting data about traffic at intersections in Japantown.

AD HOC HOUSING COMMITTEE PROPOSAL

The Executive Committee is evaluating how best to address housing concerns and community engagement. Kenta and Glynis noted that their suggestion is to create a Housing Working Group/ Subcommittee under Land Use, as they felt that this addressed concerns brought up during the May LUT meeting. Anyone, not just LUT members, would be allowed to be part of the group.

Lori said that she believed that the idea of a separate Housing Committee came about as a result of Daryl Higashi's presentation during the Ad Hoc Technical Committee, as well as the Community Land Panel. She suggested checking in with Daryl Higashi to see what his goals are. She also suggested that the Housing Committee should also create a charter, outlining things like - what are the deliverables, who is it accountable to, when will it end, etc.

Ros noted that she has been asking for a board retreat for a while, as that could help determine the goals of such a committee. The committee's goals should be clarified before forming the committee. She noted that the membership should also represent a multitude of diverse community voices.

Kenta said if there is push back, a committee may be created without our input.

Karen commented that the purpose of having a subcommittee is so that the group reports to Land Use. Karen also said that the board, and not just the Executive Committee, should be discussing the governance structure. Karen also noted that Land Use as a committee has been set up to be open, whereas other ad hoc committees have been set up with barriers to entry.

Jeremy said that this could be a both/and situation. We can recommend a structure for the housing group (as a subcommittee meeting of LUT), and also suggest that the Board determine the goals of the Housing committee. Kenta noted that according to the bylaws, committees are formed by approval from the board, but they are silent on subcommittees. Karen commented that subcommittees are probably not mentioned because the bylaws don't necessarily go into the minutiae.

Kenta suggested that perhaps creating a subcommittee is not even necessary, and all we need is just additional engagement. Daryl (or other housing folks) can just work on Housing within the confines of the LUT committee. A subcommittee is essentially just a working group. Housing interested folks can be invited to join the LUT committee.

Karen commented that it's important for all of us to talk to each other and that Housing should not be silo'd away from Land Use.

Kenta Summary

- It would not be constructive to make Housing a separate committee because it is inextricably linked to Land Use and Transportation
- If a separate housing group is going to develop, it needs to have clear goals.

- Housing experts are encouraged to join LUT committee to help address housing issues.
- Housing should be part of the community's long term strategic projects.

Jeremy asked if it's the committee's first choice to just have housing be an informal working group under LUT (just like LUT's other projects), and the second choice be a subcommittee under LUT, and if those priorities should be verbalized. Kenta said that the committee's goal is to have this group be informal, and that it would be best to stick with that from the start.

CD COMMUNITY LAND PLANNING

Lori is creating a working group to create a "community plan" (based off the idea of a master plan, but a master plan requires environmental review), which is one of the key elements of the Cultural District.

Lori outlined her plan for the working group.

- It would be formed under JTF but would invite other community organizations to participate
- Develop a charter describing its purpose, leadership, membership, and responsibilities
- Initial Vision Statement
- Project Plan
- Review precedent documents
- Develop community engagement structure
- Contact city agencies
- Create a communication platform
- Update data
- Develop funding proposal for project

Lori noted that the purpose of this is not to start from scratch, but instead build off of plans like the JCHESS. Preservation, development, and vision are the key areas of the community plan. Karen commented that JCHESS forms the bones of this, and that it might be helpful to ask the Planning Department to help finish this.

Glynis expressed her concern to create a more specific name than a "community plan" or else folks might get confused and think it's redundant. Glynis also commented that even though a master plan triggers environmental review, it should be a long term goal so that it has stronger teeth to it. Lori noted that the JCHESS for example is not an area plan, and so lacks certain teeth.

Jeremy asked and Lori clarified that this will be a working group under Land Use.

CITY OF SF UPDATES

For Geary BRT, they will keep salvageable wood from the tree on the Geary Blvd median at Buchanan. The tree will be removed for the new Buchanan crosswalk. Dan Mackowski (Geary Rapid Project) said the wood will be saved for Japantown and St. Francis. Glynis noted that a "Help Me" sign was posted on the tree saying SFMTA vs. BUF.

CCA COMMON GROUND

Some LUT members attended a recap meeting and gave feedback. Most of the feedback revolved around broader vision / pedagogy, such as increasing community engagement.

There is an [Urban Works exhibit](#) from June 4-June 24 at the Fery Building featuring all of the projects. Ros is also working with them to show the projects in the NJAHS gallery.

PARKING METER PILOT PROJECT

Karen noted that festivals have to pay for the parking meters when they block off streets. Paid Sunday meters might therefore increase the cost for running festivals. Glynis will share that comment with SFMTA.

Kenta read out Hank Wilson / SFMTA's response to our letter. They said they are working on a collection/evaluation plan, and will not move forward with any policy changes until the plan is nailed down.

NEW BUSINESS:

1737 POST STREET, SUITE 367 FORMULA RETAIL CONDITIONAL USE - YI FANG TEA

Yi Fang Tea, a Taiwanese boba shop, is planning to open in the West Japan Center Mall, where MoYo's Yogurt, the frozen yogurt place previously was. Because they are formula retail, there is a conditional use trigger.

Alice commented that she is glad someone is planning on moving in, because it is near the entrance. She noted that it may be popular with young people.

Glynis noted that Rich had an issue with the signage. The covenants state that the signage should fit a Japanese cultural aesthetic.

Tomo asked if there is any Japanese cultural connection for YiFang. Glynis said there were none that she could see.

Jeremy noted that for previous discussion for orgs (like The Face Shop) there was criteria (ex. joining the merchants association, contributing to festivals, etc.)

Alice asked if there has been any communication. Glynis commented that it's a problem that JTF did not receive a notice for this.

Kenta noted that in past cases, organizations have reached out to JTF for support. Because that didn't happen in this case, JTF has no obligation to deliberate on this, unless we want to oppose it. Glynis noted that we have always discussed any conditional use to decide whether to support, oppose, or remain neutral.

Lori noted that there is a Planning Commission advance calendar that is only available by request. She intended to be on the lookout for any intended Japantown developments, but she was also concerned that JTF is not on their list of registered community organizations. Glynis noted that she has not received notices in a while.

Ros noted that 3D Investments also should have notified us.

Alice commented that we have invited incoming merchants to present to JTF so that we get to know our neighbors.

Alice noted that it will be competition with Cafe Hana (Jeremy added on Belly Good), who both also serve boba. Karen commented that as formula retail, they will be able to outcompete other local businesses. Although they may bring clientele, they may also outcompete local Japantown businesses. Cafe Hana has been hit especially hard, since they lost their outside seating (which they also had to pay for).

Jeremy suggested to speak with Cafe Hana and Belly Good to find out more about their opinions. Karen said that she spoke with Cafe Hana, who are concerned but only just learned about this, so they haven't had time to respond. She also spoke with Kissako Tea in the Kinokuniya Mall, who expressed concern but did not know.

Both Karen and Tomo noted that there are several dessert places in Japantown, and there is a potential saturation concern.

Glynis commented that Quickly's tried to open in the location where The Face Shop is now, and were shut down because they tried to disguise themselves as not being formula retail.

Karen commented that when Starbucks wanted to open at 1600 Webster, the community opposed it out of concern that it would take away business from local shops.

Kenta asked if a Japanese formula retail would still be viewed the same way, or would we be more partial to it. Daiso is an example of that, but Ros noted that it wasn't rejected probably because of its Japanese cultural element.

Jeremy commented that YiFang doesn't necessarily overlap with other boba places because it specializes in fruit teas as opposed to milk teas, although Glynis noted that YiFang's milk teas are also popular.

Jeremy also noted that Japantown already has many dessert places, and so it's kind of arbitrary that this business puts the saturation retail over the edge. Karen responded that the saturation concern is based on YiFang being formula retail.

Glynis echoed Jeremy's point that we don't have a lot of information. Glynis asked Rich but he didn't have any input from merchants. The notice was the first he heard of the applicant.

Lori moved that we make a recommendation to the Executive Committee to send a letter by Monday June 14 to the San Francisco Planning commission to delay the conditional use hearing at 1737 Post St so that the community has time to discuss with 3D Investments, Santino, YiFang, other businesses, etc.

Karen seconded.

The letter should go out by Friday June 11, if not Monday June 14.

The motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Ros said that NJAHS is selling the new Go For Broke stamps. Paper Tree may also carry them.

Dr. Meredith Oda gave historical lectures on Japantown. You can watch [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).

Tomo will be [moderating a JANM event with Greg Robinson on queer Nikkei history](#).

The meeting adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

The next meeting will be at 6:00 p.m., July 8, 2021 online at Ring Central.