



**NOTES FROM THE  
JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE  
LAND USE COMMITTEE MEETING**

1830 SUTTER STREET  
SATURDAY, AUGUST 9, 2014

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Paul Wermer, Richard Matsuno.

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Karen Kai, Glynis Nakhara.

**SUMMARY:** Recommendation to endorse the proposed preschool structure.

**Background:**

Nihonmachi Little Friends (NLF) plans to expand by building a preschool in the location currently occupied by off-street parking and the current NLF playground area. The proposed building maintains a front setback at Sutter Street aligned with the Julia Morgan designed NLF building<sup>1</sup>(note 1), and fills the lot to the rear lot line (which requires a planning variance because a rear yard is normally required.) The roof of the new building will be used for a new outdoor play area, offsetting the loss of the current play area. Building size is driven by California code requirements for area per child.

Draft Plans and renderings are available at

[https://m.app.box.com/view\\_shared/iga3c6oiu3p9xtfe7yu8](https://m.app.box.com/view_shared/iga3c6oiu3p9xtfe7yu8); these are subject to revision.

**Discussion:**

The design reflects the Secretary of the Interior's guidelines for additions to a historic structure - the preschool is a modern design, and does not attempt to create the impression of an older building.

Building design uses window and door designs reminiscent of shoji screens, and aligns levels with the existing NLF structure. These are intended as unifying concepts for the 2 buildings. At present the finish is not finalized, but most likely will be stucco with a matte tile or stucco inset in a subtle accent tone.

Because the lot for the preschool lies between the Julia Morgan designed NLF building and the JCCCNC<sup>2</sup> (note 2), there was some debate in the early design stages about how to align the design with the neighboring buildings. Because the preschool is attached to the NLF building, the decision was made to align the design more closely with that structure, while respecting the JCCCNC building in terms of height and setback.

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<sup>1</sup> Note 1: The Julia Morgan designed NLF building is a Class A historic resource; see the Historic Resource Evaluation Report (HRER) at: [http://50.17.237.182/docs/Decision\\_Documents/CatEx/CaseNo%5C2013.0419E.pdf](http://50.17.237.182/docs/Decision_Documents/CatEx/CaseNo%5C2013.0419E.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Note 2: The JCCCNC building at 1840 - 1844 Sutter St. was completed in 1986 while Japantown was under Redevelopment controls. It is listed as a Potential Historic Resource (Category B), even though it is not yet 50 years old. The JCCCNC building has not yet been fully evaluated regarding historicity, but given the history of Japantown and redevelopment it is possible that it will be considered of historic merit.

There will be a rooftop garden, as well as a front garden on the east side of the entry, and possibly a planter beside the emergency exit to the west of the entry door.

The NLF planning team met with neighbors to understand and address concerns. Specific issues were:

1. The removal of a large pine from the rear of the lot. NLF explained that construction was likely to damage the tree to the point that it became a safety hazard, or even to kill the tree. From a safety standpoint, removing the tree made the most sense.
2. Neighbors were concerned about noise from the roof-deck play area. NLF agreed to put up a solid wall at the rear of the play area, rather than the proposed chain link fence, as a sound barrier. In addition, the play area was designed with "quiet" play at the rear of the building, and active (aka noisier) moved away from the rear of the building.
3. JCCCNC raised concerns about the height of the emergency exit stair tower, which extended above the JCCCNC roofline in early designs. The tower height was lowered to align with the JCCCNC roofline.
4. JCCCNC expressed concerns about a front setback. The NLF plans had already incorporated a setback aligning with the front of the Julia Morgan building so that the proposed building facade is north of the JCCCNC staircase's SE post.

**LAND USE COMMITTEE CONSENSUS RECOMMENDATION:**

JTF endorse the project in a letter to the Planning Commission.

Specific points include:

1. The design is compatible with the neighborhood, and all Japantown Design Guideline objectives as repeatedly expressed in the Japantown BNP and JCHESS planning meetings.
2. Complies well with best practices for additions to historic buildings.
3. The planned front setback enhances the streetscape.
4. Responsive neighbor outreach programs to address known concerns with design modifications.