

**SPECIAL LAND USE/TRANSPORTATION AND CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMITTEES**  
**NOTES**

Tuesday, September 13, 2016  
6:00 p.m.  
JACL Building  
1765 Sutter Street

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Paul Wermer, Ros Tonai Alice Kawahatsu, Richard Hashimoto, Benh Nakajo, David Ishida, Judy Hamaguchi, Glynis Nakahara, Jon Osaki, Seiko Fujimoto

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Greg Marutani

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Patty Wada, Mickey Imura, Robert Sakai, Karen Kai, Thomas Reynolds, Robert Rusky, Paul Osaki, Aya Ino, David Darling, Mary Ann Hori, Tomo Hirai, Edward Ong, Marvin Lambert, Jan Bolaffi, Mary King, Audrey Sherlock, Steve Fillipow

**I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The joint meeting of the Land Use/Transportation and Cultural Heritage Committees was called to order by Alice Kawahatsu, followed by comments by Rosalyn Tonai and Paul Wermer,

Each person in attendance gave a brief introduction about themselves.

**II. SUMMARY OF JTF COMMITTEE PROCEDURES**

Paul Wermer reviewed the Japantown Task Force (JTF) procedures for its committees. Key point published in the meeting agenda.

**III. DISCUSSION OF THE COTTAGE ROW MINI-PARK PROPOSAL**

Ros Tonai started by explaining that the Board and both committees want a process of full disclosure with open and respectful discourse on this issue. Because the proposal has both Land Use and Cultural Heritage aspects, the Board requested that this item to be discussed in a joint meeting of the Land Use and Cultural Heritage Committees.

Paul Osaki made an abbreviated presentation of the proposal regarding the Issei Memorial Garden at Cottage Row Mini-Park.

Mary King read her statement in opposition to the proposed location of the Issei Memorial Garden and proposed the space next to the Peace Pagoda and West Mall. (Attachment A)

Mickey Imura shared his support for the proposal. He asked who how long would this issue be discussed and debated before a decision is reached.

Paul Osaki responded that the final decision rests with the Recreation and Parks. The original proposal was to try and gain approval by the end of the 2016 and completed during the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Japantown.

Marvin Lambert shared his reasons for opposing the proposal because of the diverse history of the park and the neighborhood that included African American and Gay communities.

He added that he is among the local neighbors who have invested and continue to invest time and labor in the park's maintenance.

Jan Bolaffi spoke in favor of the proposal pointing out that it does not take up the entire mini-park and added that it does not exclude other groups that have a history in the neighborhood an opportunity to be acknowledged at the garden.

Karen Kai asked about the educational component of the mini-park and noted that the entire Sutter Street frontage, except the staircase and that the design appears to occupy a major portion of the mini-park.

Patty Wada commented that it is not the role of JTF to resolve the differences between those who support and/or oppose the proposal. No matter which way the joint committee decides to recommend to the JTF Board. There are a number of possibilities

Robert Rusky stated his support of a memorial to the Issei generation, but expressed his concern about the overall process. He added the preservation of the building at 1830 Sutter was saved to memorialize the Issei. He also referenced the Japantown History Walk included recognition of the Issei history.

Thomas Reynolds added that there is currently a memorial plaque in the mini-park recognizing a gay individual.

Glynis Nakahara asked Paul Osaki if some of the concerns raised at the meeting could be considered as the proposal moves through the steps and process required by Recreation and Parks.

Judy Hamaguchi asked why the responses from Paul Osaki to Paul Wermer's questions were not distributed. Paul Wermer noted that Paul Osaki's response stated it was a private e-mail to be sent only to Committee members. Paul Wermer decided that, since the Committee meetings and information supporting recommendations are open to the interested public, and that the questions originated with people who were not committee members, he could not honor the request to forward only to committee members, and so did not forward the message.

There were comments and assertions as to who were members of the two committees and who were the public.

Paul Wermer had copies made of the responses from Paul Osaki to distribute to the individuals present at the meeting (Attachment B).

Paul Osaki clarified that the drawings provided were not the final design, and the design process would include additional public meetings to obtain input.

David Ishida asked if Paul Osaki would be able to put forth a timeline for public notice. The response was affirmative.

Paul Wermer encouraged Paul Osaki to go beyond the 300-foot radius mailed meeting notice requirement to include posting public notices at the Park, providing the timeline to the public using local newspapers such as the Nichi Bei Times and any other social media network, such as NextDoor, that may be available.

It was the consensus of both the LUT and CH Committees to recommend to the JTF Board support the concept of Issei Memorial Garden and look forward to the progress of the design, but not use the boilerplate letters provided with the information packages. Paul Wermer and Ros Tonai will draft a proposed JTF endorsement letter for Board approval,

On a separate item Paul Wermer announced that the Citizens Advisory Committee for the Geary Bus Rapid Transit meeting was canceled and will be re-scheduled for a future date.

#### **IV. DISCUSSION OF NIHONMACHI LITTLE FRIENDS LANDMARKING OPPORTUNITY**

Ros Tonai reported that The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) received a grant from the federal National Park Service (NPS) to identify historic landmarks in under-served communities and that the Julia Morgan building located at 1830 Sutter, which is the current Nihonmachi Little Friends (NLF) main building.

Greg Marutani added that Susan Parks is the staff person from the HPC has been invited to the October 11<sup>th</sup> Cultural Heritage Committee to update them about the procedures for landmarking the building. Cathy Inamasu, Executive Director of NLF will be invited to the CH meeting to let the Committee know whether NLF is in favor of the landmarking or not and what assistance they may need from the JTF.

The meeting concluded at 8:10 p.m.

Hello. My name is Mary King. Thank you for the opportunity to address you this evening. I am a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation German-American. My mother and her brothers were 2<sup>nd</sup> generation. My grandparents and my mother's sister were first generation German-Americans, or the Issei of my world. Although they were not sent away, they were subjected to extreme discrimination because of their German heritage and their extremely German names. My mother's name was Elfrieda Bembenek. Four of my uncles fought in World War II in Europe and in Asia. Because they wore their last name on their uniforms and had first names like Adolph and Ernst they were ridiculed and taunted. When I got older I asked my mother why they never spoke German to us so that we would be bilingual. She replied that they wanted us to be little Americans, not little Germans. My mother died last week and I would like to honor the battles which **she** had to fight in order to live in America. I chose to tell you my story as a reminder that all new immigrants to this country, whether voluntary or involuntary, have experienced some level of difficulty in the assimilation process—and this tradition continues with our new Muslims and Latinos.

I would first like to say that I am not in any way against a memorial garden for the Issei. I am simply opposed to the location. Mr. Osaki has spoken many times about the Issei **and Nissei** returning to Japantown and that the only location which they would recognize would be Cottage Row and the mini-park. That isn't true since there are several other surviving clusters of buildings in the area, but if it were true, they would recognize the park as a Chinese medicinal herb garden which belonged to the Chinese family who occupied 1942 Sutter Street adjacent to the park. The fact that the park is the only green space in the area is highly valued by other people as well and not just by Mr. Osaki. If his claim were valid, then why wouldn't the Parks Dept. have dedicated it to Japantown shortly after it was purchased in 1970 as a vacant lot from Wesley Johnson, an African-American business man. Instead they created a fenced play and picnic area for general neighborhood use which was unquestioned for nearly half a century.

In the Peace Plaza there is a much more suitable location already on its way to being a Zen garden. Between the Pagoda and the the building on the west side there is a beautiful stretch of land 85 feet long, 18 ½ feet in width at its head and narrowing down gradually to 5 ½ feet at its foot. It has many many significant advantages over the Cottage Row site particularly since this area has been known as Japan Town since 1906.

1. It's already there and planted with cherry trees which may have been a gift from Japan according to the gardener who also cares for Cottage Row mini park. The planting is fairly dense and cherry trees do not have a particularly long life span, so some could be replaced with other Japanese trees with more longevity.
2. It is a peaceful, serene location, very accessible, but away from the hustle and bustle of the commercial area and relatively unused. When I was there last week there was one man sleeping and another on his phone. Some benches are already in place, particularly two beautiful curved benches inlaid with small tiles which would seem to be the perfect place for meditation or for teachers to share the legacy with their students. There would also be no problem with ADA access which would certainly be an issue for the Cottage Row site and its viewing stump.
3. Because of its shape, this parcel would lend itself perfectly to the Zen concept of the dry waterfall moving into the dry river and there are already some large rocks in place within the space. There would also be both sun and shade and ample space for small resting benches for guests to sit and reflect and for signage to indicate the significance of the elements.
4. There would be absolutely no neighborhood opposition. Instead of trying to bring people to a memorial, why not bring the memorial to the people. This is where people come when they think of or see Japan Town on a map. This is where the shops and restaurants are. Whether the visitor is Issei, Nissei, Sensei, German-American, African-American, Korean-American, Native American, just plain American or none of the above, **this is Japan Town.**

ATTACHMENT B

The questions were:

1) The current project proposal focuses exclusively on the Japanese/Japanese American presence in Japantown, yet the Japantown area has been home to many ethnic/cultural groups, often coexisting as neighbors in a highly integrated residential community, even if most businesses were Japanese.

1a) Is there a reason why the Park should host a commemoration of one group to the exclusion of others, or a memorial to one group instead of a more integrated memorial to the complex social history of the Japantown area?

To begin with, no other group has contributed more to the history and fabric of the Japantown community, than Japanese American's. Any comparison or contribution from another group just doesn't add up to 110 years of history here. Further, no group has had to suffered and endured more in this neighborhood, if any group has been excluded historically in this neighborhood, its been Japanese Americans. This project is to honor the first generation of Japanese American's who established Japantown 110 years ago. It does not imply that other ethnic and cultural groups have not lived or have contributed to the neighborhood. I'm not sure, what you are actually implying in this statement to be honest?, "that Japanese American's or Japantown can't do projects that focus on our own heritage in our own community?" Every ethnic group should have the right to honor their own history and ancestors without being accused of excluding others. If American history teaches us anything, its that ethnic minority groups are the one's who have had to fight to get their stories told.

Again your question implies that an ethnic group in their own community can't or shouldn't be able to honor their own, because it might exclude others. This City has a rich history made up of many, but Latinos should have the right to honor their own in the Mission, even though historically its had a rich Irish influence and the Chinese American community should be able do the same in Chinatown even though its had Japanese and Italian heritage in it history. Just because one group wants to honor its own heritage, it doesn't mean its at the expense or exclusion of another. If a person wants to do another project to recognize others or plant roses in the park, they should have the right to go through the same process. The Japanese garden project actually compliments the Rec and Park landscaping concept following the removal of the redwood trees (see New Fillmore, 4/2/2014). Ultimately, the plan is a park improvement project for the entire neighborhood and visitors to enjoy, not just Japanese Americans.

1b) How would the proposed commemorative garden integrate with other commemorative or historical interpretations in Cottage Row Mini Park? A concern is that, given the small size of the park, the initial design would result in aesthetic constraints that precludes other historical commemorations. This is a crazy question? It implies that we have foresight into the future? How am I supposed to know the answer to this question? Is there another project? The Japanese garden is at one end of the park and in the only non-accessible space in the park. The entire usable and accessible space in the park is available for any other purpose or future use.(see site-plan)

2) Would the project sponsors be open to expanding the public process with more outreach (especially to the Cottage Row neighbors) to assess the design considerations and goals? The majority of the residents who live on the row already support the garden project and the project sponsors are aware of their thoughts, but to answer your question, yes the project sponsors would be open to input on the design plans, but the goals of the project are the goals and if your question

ATTACHMENT B

really is, would the sponsor be open to a plan like Marvin is proposing the answer is no. We plan to do another mailing to the neighborhood, which will include the drawings, site-plan and a Q and A Fact Sheet.

3) What is the interpretive plan for the Commemorative Garden? We would create signage to explain the concept and purpose of the garden.

3a) How will visitors understand that this is a contemporary Commemorative Garden, and not mistakenly believe it is a historical garden created much earlier in the history of Japantown? (See the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes. and concerns about creating a false historical impression) Whatever interpretive signage that is created must go through the Historic Preservation Commission. (see Article 10 of the Planning Code) Paul, we would never create interpretive or educational signage in an attempt to create false history or mislead people, if that is your concern.

4) What is the status of this project with Rec and Park? The dept. still needs to review the project. (again, we are asking JTF to support the concept not the internal approval process)

4a) Who is the Rec and Park Liaison? Ryan Kimura

4b) What are the Rec and Park Public Notice requirements? Two weeks for mailing, one week for posting, handouts or emailing.

4c) What is the timeline for developing the complete package for Rec and Park Commission Approval? Its up to Rec and Park staff

4d) What will the Approval package consist of? (examples include but are not limited to detailed drawings and installation details (including confirmation that the slope is stable enough to handle large rock installations), CapEx budget and financing plan, maintenance requirements and how maintenance will be managed) I'm not entirely sure at this point, its up to Rec and Park, but I'm pretty sure that soil testing is NOT part of it on our end.

4e) When will this package be available for public review? That is up to Rec and Park

5) What is the maintenance plan for the Commemorative Garden?

5a) Who will do what work to maintain the garden? Rec and Park oversees the park and will be responsible for the overall maintenance. However the JCCCNC will monitor and address needs as they arise.

5b) How will this be funded? I suppose that park staff are paid through the Rec and Park budget. The JCCCNC will establish a fund to help replace or repair physical elements of the garden as needed.

One neighbor (who has not attended meetings) is concerned about any design that might create spaces that might act as shelter/out of sight locations for homeless - an issue that had not been raised before. Several people have brought to our attention the issue of crime and the homeless problems in the park. The issue of public safety was considered as part of the design plan, by eliminating the heavy bushes in the front of the park, it will open up the space, create less hidden areas and provide for a better sight line into the park. Currently the heavy bushes in front of the park have been used as cover or blockage for theft, drugs and drinking.