



# 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 (ONLINE VIA ZOOM)  
MONDAY SEPTEMBER 14, 2020**

**BOARD MEMBER PRESENT:**

Glynis Nakahara, Jeremy Chan, Alice Kawahatsu, Rosalyn Tonai, Elena Nielsen, Sandy Mori, Kenta Takamori

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Brandon Quan, Lori Yamauchi, Nina Bazan-Sakamoto

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Linda Walsh, Tomo Hirai, Derek, Karen Kai, Judy Hamaguchi, Paul Wermer, Jana Hopkins

The meeting began at 6:30 p.m.

**SUMMARY OF MOTION TOPICS FOR THE BOARD**

Sutter St. Safety Improvements Update\*

Nihonmachi Little Friends, JCCCNC, and Kimochi met with SFMTA, and SFMTA purportedly agreed to first implement the extended white zones and see how that goes, before reducing the westbound Sutter lanes from 2 lanes to 1 lane.

However, during the SFMTA hearing on Friday 9/18 at 10am, both the extended white zones AND the lane reduction are up for approval. SFMTA has gone against their promise to community organizations.

**Therefore, in alignment with the affected community organizations, JTF should issue a letter supporting the establishment of the white zones, but opposing any vote or approval on the reduction of lanes.**

1619 Laguna Street Variance\*

The property at 1619 Laguna (on Laguna, between Sutter and Post) is applying for a variance to convert from a commercial to a residential unit. The property used to be a Korean video store. The SF Planning hearing will occur on Wednesday 9/23.

Converting a retail space to a residential space is generally a bad idea in a commercial district. However, because the building is not on a commercial strip, this is the rare exception where such a conversion would be acceptable.

That being said, we are concerned about the habitability of residential spaces in Japantown. It is inhabitable for a ground level unit to rely on open windows facing the street for ventilation, and the unit should incorporate mechanical ventilation instead. Furthermore, the new residential unit should also abide by the Japantown Design Guidelines.

**Therefore, the JTF board should issue a letter stating that the conversion of 1619 Laguna from a commercial to a residential unit should not be approved unless it meets the highest habitability standards and aligns with the Japantown Design Guidelines.**

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

### SFMTA / NEIGHBORHOOD PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Linda and Alice reported on the meeting they attended with Supervisor Stefani (District 2) and Supervisor Preston (District 5). They walked around key safety points like the senior crossing on Post between Gough and Laguna. They suggested redlight cameras at Gough and other safety improvements. There is supposed to be another walkthrough scheduled with SFMTA.

One of the co-op members is also part of the Citizens Advisory Committee and will discuss the issue further there.

On Friday 9/11 5pm, there was another pedestrian (senior) who was hit by a car on Post. A car was turning left onto the Webster. The driver stayed and it was reported to the traffic advisor. The

Glynis noted that it was discussed that the Geary BRT would have a traffic calming effect, but Supervisor Preston asked about closing the lanes now. She said it's encouraging that the supervisors are supportive of the safety concerns.

Paul noted that having more pedestrians around is the key thing that reduces traffic speed. Linda said the bulb outs have been helpful, but Paul noted that they are useless for left turns. He noted there are many drivers, including city-owned cars, that are speeding up on yellows and making right turns without paying attention. Paul and Alice discussed that rideshare and delivery cars also drive quickly and recklessly because they are incentivized to do so.

Tomo noted that traffic on Geary speeds up on Geary in the evening, when there are less cars.

Jeremy commented that Berkeley is in the process of removing police from traffic safety /

enforcement and having a new city agency responsible for it. JTF may be interested in advocating for this down the line. Paul noted that much of traffic regulation is maintained by state law and not city law.

### 1619 LAGUNA STREET VARIANCE\*

There is a tenant on the ground floor who is issuing a complaint. The current property owner purchased the property last year. The property owner is seeking a variance of wanting to make the ground floor commercial (it is currently residential). This includes a zoning, rear yard, and common space variance.

Alice and Tomo noted that this place used to be a Korean video store, and a palm reading place.

Paul said that in the past, Greg Marutani investigated this unit for being an illegal AirBnB.

Paul speculated that it is possible that a property abuse is occurring. He doesn't think the open window makes sense as the only ventilation source for a single resident. You need mechanical ventilation; windows only puts the occupant at risk.

Paul said the construction project will take a lot of work, which may result in the tenant being displaced.

Ros asked what are the goals of the committee. Does the committee want to help the property owner follow the law? Or does it want to analyze the feasibility of it with respect to the rest of the commercial district?

Karen asked if there's anything in the Design Guidelines that should be mentioned. She echoed that it doesn't contribute to the streetscape. For example, in other projects, we have suggested sidewalk gardens. She noted that it's not our job to fix their drawing. But we can insist that there are safe and habitable dwelling units in Japantown.

Tomo noted that the building is built right up to the sidewalk, so there is no room for an outlet. It would have to be an inlet.

Ros said to be aware of our purview, and not nitpick the project to death. Kenta noted that this project presents a conflict between two values - providing more housing, and supporting commercial / economic vitality.

Paul said our recommendation here could set a precedent. This location is not part of a commercial strip, and therefore this is where an exception could be made to support the need for more housing. However, we should also support good, habitable standards for residential areas.

Paul made a motion to:

Converting a retail space to a residential space is generally a bad idea in a commercial district. However, because the building is not on a commercial strip, this is the rare exception where such a conversion would be acceptable. However, we are concerned about the habitability of residential spaces in Japantown, and it is inappropriate to rely on open windows facing the street for the ventilation of ground level unit.

If variance is to be granted, a condition of variance should be implementing mechanical ventilation.

For a variance is granted, the property owner should consult with the Japantown Design guidelines.

Karen added the part about the Japantown Design guidelines and seconded the motion

Motion was revised to:  
Jeremy is revising the language:

Lori noted that the Japantown Neighborhood District commercial zoning, ground floor residential use is permitted under the zoning. It is conditional on the second and third floors. Glynis and Paul said this makes no sense. Paul said he would look into it.

Returning to the discussion

Motion for JTF board to issue a letter that makes a rare exception to support the conversion of 1619 Laguna from a commercial to a residential unit, provided that it aligns with habitability standards and the Japantown Design Guidelines.

Tomo noted that the drafted language is different from the final NCD language. Glynis and Tomo said they don't recall anyone discussing this.

Paul said to emphasize at the board meeting that windows as the sole source of ventilation on a ground floor unit is a health / safety issue.

Kenta said he prefers the original version as opposed to the shorter version. The original version says "if a variance is to be granted, the condition should be.

Motion for JTF board to issue a letter stating that if the conversion of 1619 Laguna from a

commercial to a residential unit is to be approved, it should be conditional on meeting habitability standards and aligning with the Japantown Design Guidelines.

Paul motion. Tomo second.

Motion for JTF board to issue a letter stating that the conversion of 1619 Laguna from a commercial to a residential unit should not be approved unless it meets the highest habitability standards and aligns with the Japantown Design Guidelines.

The motion passed.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

### SUTTER ST. SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS UPDATE\*

September 18, 2020 10am will be an SFMTA hearing for the initial phase of the Sutter St Improvements that stakeholders agree with. It would extend the white passenger loading zone on the North side of Sutter between Webster and Laguna. This is to express stakeholder's concern about lack of parking, in anticipation of the reduction of westbound lanes from 2 to 1.

First, they would assess whether the white lanes are working, before deciding how to fully proceed.

Karen said that the notice pasted on the telephone polls is a hearing to reduce the lanes (the road diet). And that is reflected on Page 4 of the document. Karen is concerned that SFMTA did not follow the procedure they said they would. She has been trying to contact Cathy Inamasu (NLF) to see if she is aware of this (Cathy has also been discussing with the other community orgs like JCCCNC and Kimochi).

Judy noted that the JCCCNC has a board meeting tomorrow, and this item is on the agenda.

Jeremy moved that JTF issue a letter supporting the establishment of the white zones but opposing the reduction of the lanes.

Judy noted that JTF shouldn't act without the support of NLF and other community orgs.

Karen suggested that JTF should support whatever NLF and the other orgs support. She noted that those orgs are already in communication.

Karen noted that the reduction of lanes shouldn't even be up for a vote, since that goes against SFMTA's promised timeline.

Jeremy revised his motion to: in alignment with the affected community organizations, JTF should issue a letter supporting the establishment of the white zones, but opposing any vote or approval on the reduction of lanes.

Karen seconded.

The committee voted unanimously to approve the motion.  
Next steps: Karen will continue to follow up with Kathy  
Judy will let the committee know what the JCCCNC discusses.

#### SFMTA CONGESTION PRICING UPDATE

We originally selected September 24 for community meeting to introduce the concept of congestion pricing, but there is a Glynis conflict.

Glynis explained that congestion pricing is a proposal to charge cars for driving downtown. Several committee members noted the current proposed boundary is Laguna. This is an early proposal, so now is the time to comment on / oppose the extension to Laguna.

It was discussed to suggest September 30, October 1, or October 7. It will be the first of many meetings.

#### BUCHANAN HOTEL UPDATE

Jeremy said that at the JCBD meeting, it was announced that the hotel's contract was extended. Paul asked and Alice said there have been no major incidents reported.

#### PEACE PLAZA RENOVATION BOND MEASURE UPDATE

Alice reported on the press conference at the Peace Plaza this morning (Monday September 14) about Prop A. There are now posters for hanging in your home or business window. API Council is also going to do a press conference. There is a fact sheet / how to support guide that will go out to board members. It will be a tough campaign, since a  $\frac{2}{3}$  vote is needed to pass.

Ballots will be mailed the first week in October. There is lots of messaging about getting your votes in early, so messaging about Prop A now is critical.

#### JAPANTOWN CULTURAL DISTRICT / CHHESS DRAFT + BUDGET

Nina discussed that the JCD team has issued a revised draft that will be up for board approval during Wednesday's board meeting.

She emphasized that this is an iterative process. The submission is not a set in stone submission, but is rather an open dialogue with the city. The City will provide more input.

Lori said that on August 31, a list of major changes to the July 24 draft was published. And since August 31, a couple of new tactics were added, one in relation to the city's changing housing process, as well as the creation of a digital archive. The regenerative, resilient futures part was

revised to an overarching framework. An executive summary has also been added. An extensive series of notes was added to substantiate statements in the report.

The history includes an expanded description about the community's resiliency following redevelopment.

Tomo expressed his support for the reorganized document. Glynis said it is much more coherent and easy to get through. Both Tomo and Glynis said they are still reading and going through the document

Alice expressed her support for the document, and said she would be making some comments via email.

Glynis asked if comments made prior or during the board meeting will be included or not. Nina said these comments will be included before giving it to the City.

Nina clarified that the document will go to their MOHCD contact. They will then have dialogue with various city departments about feasibility and how to implement these strategies. After that, there will be another approval by the JTF Board, and then it will go to the board of supervisors.

Jeremy asked if there will be a final town hall, which has been suggested at previous meetings. Jeremy asked if there will be a final town hall after discussing with city departments but before it is presented to the board of supervisors.

Karen said that she appreciates the amount of work that has gone into each iteration. She sees that the document has substantial changes, and is concerned with the issues she has noticed while reading so far. Karen said she is concerned that the current JCHESS budget still incorporates money for the kiosk, when it's one of the lower priorities. There is a disconnect between the report saying "explore X idea" when JTF is continuing to move forward on implementing certain strategies.

Lori clarified that community support will be needed to lobby at the board of supervisors for them to approve JCHESS. That underscores the need for a broader community discussion

Paul expressed his concern that once city departments weigh in, there is little opportunity for the community to question the proposals.

Nina noted that the report does not prioritize any particular strategy. It only discusses short term, midterm, and longterm strategies.

Paul asked how the dialogue between JCD staff and the City will be then extended to public engagement with the community.

Judy warned that without engaging community organizations, the document will fail. She, as a board member of the Center, has noted that the Center has not been adequately asked to engage with this document.

Lori noted that the document is not a master plan.

Karen said that there is a history of picking and choosing pieces of documents  
She noted that the CHHESS report may have to train community members to think in a new way.

Nina noted that she has seen the SOMA Pilipnas draft. They are going through a different process, where they internally drafted the CHHESS and then are meeting with MOHCD, but have not yet discussed it with the broader community. Nina noted that each cultural district has been taking different approaches to the document. Some of the other districts are not even close to starting a report. Calle 24 has a map 2020 which was intended to be their CHHESS, but they were told to work on a new document.

Jeremy asked for clarification about the role of consulting with MOHCD / city departments. Nina said they are providing feedback on the strategies, or perhaps suggesting alternative best practices. It's not necessarily about working with the agencies to implement these programs.

The housing element was added after consulting with the planning department. This includes policies about addressing societal discrimination in housing.

Kenta asked about funding. Nina noted the funding for this year was approved. Glynis noted that the board retroactively approved a budget for MOHCD, with the understanding that the actual line items could be changed.

Karen asked how does that change of use happen at the JTF level, and how will it be implemented with the City.

Ros noted that she disapproves of paying money to 3D Investments when Japan Center Mall tenants are struggling.

She said she appreciated the inclusion of the endnotes, timeline, and focus group notes.

Jeremy asked if we would know by Wednesday about approval for the board and the larger town hall. Nina said she agrees it should be brought for approval of the board. She agrees that a final town hall would be good, and will consult with the JCD team.

Jeremy said whether there is a final town hall or not will affect his vote. Glynis said it should be up to the board to decide if there will be a final town hall. Ros said it's important to go back to the committee and also consult with major executive directors / board of directors (echoing Judy's earlier comment re: The Center).

Glynis noted that for future meetings, she will put the JCD stuff at the top of the agenda so that they don't have to stay for the whole meeting. She thanked Lori and Nina for the hours they put into revising the document.

## TOPIC 6

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Judy Hamaguchi noted that Eddy Moriguchi (Mark Moriguchi's dad) passed away recently.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Linda discussed the focus group she went to as part of the Economic Task Force from the mayor's office. They are looking at businesses, economic justice, etc. The one she attended was on imagining spaces and the rules that govern them. Flexible ground floor space, incentivize conversion of hotel, repurpose outdoor space, etc. Tomorrow is the deadline for input. You can send it directly to the comment person

The meeting adjourned a 9: p.m.

The next meeting will be at 6:00 p.m., XX, YY, 2019 at the JAACL HQ.