

Japantown Task Force
Cultural Heritage & Sustainability Committee
Minutes

Monday, October 4, 2021
5:30am – via Zoom

Board members present:

Lucy Fisher, David Takashima, Jeremy Chan, Benh Nakajo, Rosalyn Tonai, Kenta Takamori, Sandy Mori (Gary Barbaree excused)

Staff:

Steve Nakajo, Susie Kagami

Guests:

Misato Nakayama, Judy Yokohama, Sheridan Tatsuno, Derek Tahara, Kim Kolby, Natasha Maki Jessen-Peterson

- I. Meeting called to order at 5:32pm by David Takashima. Quorum was present
- II. Agenda:
Moved to approve by Lucy and seconded by Benh – approved unanimously
- III. Minutes of August 2 meeting:
Moved to approve by Lucy and seconded by Benh – approved unanimously
- IV. Staff report:

Steve Nakajo noted four areas for his report:

1. CHHESS document – on-going meetings with Julia Saboy of the Mayor’s office OEWD. JTF’s report is ready for approval by BOS, scheduled after SOMA’s review. However, since SOMA is not ready, ours will be delayed, possibly until November. David asked about a public meeting: there will be a community review before BOS approval but the date is dependent on the Mayor’s department.
2. Japantenna project – Steve deferred to Kenta on this topic
3. Co-creative Hub – Susie will present details in her report
4. Job announcement for program coordinator was posted, anticipated hiring for mid-October. Position was approved for hiring after a 19-month budget freeze.

Susie Kagami

1. Co-creative hub: a JTF group has been working with a SOMA district team for 9 weeks; created a name and logo and anticipating a soft launch first quarter next year.
2. Program coordinator position: several viable applicants for the program coordinator.
3. Battery Powered grant submitted and should hear results in next two weeks. David hadn’t heard of this; Susie suggested he read her last month’s Board report. She and Kenta described this philanthropic organization as a private club of young entrepreneurs in the financial district. David asked about the new staff person “they are rushing through to hire before the next executive director.” Steve responded that the ED hire

will be handled by the exec committee and current staff have been working on programs started in March (co-creative hub, small business coordinator with the Community Benefit District, long term projects re land-use) without new staff. Since funds for staff was released last month, this position was posted. Mayor supports cultural district concept and will “back-fill” hires for next two fiscal years.

V. Unfinished Business

1. Kenta updated committee on Japantenna pilot project. The site will be open three days/week starting 11/12 -14 and closing December 5. Planning opening event 11/9 with community. Currently finalizing logo, store layout, store front work. Funding: major grant submitted to Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and these funds must be spent by end of calendar year. Staffing: working with volunteers from Kagoshima Kenjinkai and a younger group from JT community. Looking for paid manager for this project. Location in Mall suite 320, provided pro-bono.

Roz asked about project’s budget. The Ministry grant application is “in 6 digits” to be used to hire manager, publicity/promotion for signage, branding, virtual reality, etc.

David asked for a description of Kagoshima. Steve and Roz described southern Kyushu including some history, such as Shin-Issei and Shin-Nisei connections with agriculture in California. Kim Kolby added to description of that prefecture.

2. Lucy gave update of Japanese Tea Garden renovations: Temple Gate repainted, Pagoda continues renovation process, and Kurisu’s plan for landscaping around the Pagoda. Questions included whether the Garden is open (yes); if portion of admissions go to Garden (no, all go to General Fund).

VI. Public comments: none offered

VII. Announcements:

Roz reported that she will be giving tours of JTown to attendees from a real estate convention.

Sandy provided Hotel Buchanan update: Peter Hirshberg offered to gather data and analyze information regarding the impact of selling a tourist hotel on the local economy. Hirshberg is an urban economist with a focus on small business issues. He is working with Grace Horikiri, Daniel Byron, and Greg Veloria. Sandy said no hotels will be introduced to BOS this week but 2 have been approved at budget committee. Two others (Panorama and Buchanan) were not introduced because of push back from neighborhoods. Other hotel owners are interested in buying the Buchanan.

Questions for Sandy:

Lucy: what we can do to continue opposition? Sandy: petitions and letters to HSH.

David: was budget committee unanimous to buy hotels? What was price of Buchanan? \$57M price learned via Freedom in Information Act

Jeremy: Supervisor Preston asked for economic impact report but so far, not acted on?
Sandy: Mayor asked Dan Adams for this info, as he was hired to find hotels for supported housing. Peter feels strongly that a tourist hotel sale (with 90% occupancy) is the tipping point towards negative economic impact. Breed is interested in this information.

Ros: Press coverage? Sandy: coverage can be negative and impactful so must be managed. Tourist/travel industry leaders won't make a public statement about losing a tourist hotel.

Natasha Maki and Jesse Peterson, journalism students who work for Peninsula Press introduced themselves; they would welcome an opportunity to write about this situation.

Discussion about how the budget committee will vote, the requirement to spend housing funds by the end of the year, and value of an economic impact study.

Meeting adjourned at 7pm.