

Japantown Task Force, Inc.
Ad Hoc Japan Center Malls Technical Committee Meeting
Monday, January 11, 2021 5:30PM
via zoom

Committee Members: Sandy Mori, Daryl Higashi, Grace Horikiri, Roy Ikeda, Glynis Nakahara, Joyce Oishi, Beau Simon, Kenta Takamori & Lori Yamauchi

Others Present: Benh Nakajo, Andy Mo, Derek Tahara, Elena Nielsen, Emily Glick, Judy Hamaguchi, Tomo Hirai, Jeremy Chan

Staff Present: Steve Nakajo, Lauren Nosaka, Brandon Quan, Nina Bazan-Sakamoto

I. Call to Order

II. Among the Ad Hoc Committee members, a brainstorming discussion about the Japan Center Malls will take place. Public comments can be made after the discussion

- Today's discussion centered around two parts. For the first part, everyone shared why they care about JapanTown, why they're involved with JapanTown, and the skills they bring to the committee. The second part included everyone sharing what they believe is the future of the Japantown center and malls.

Why do you care about the JapanTown center and malls and what skills do you bring to the committee?

Sandy Mori: The reason I care about JapanTown is because my older sansei who was born in camp. I really feel that the Issei and Nisei who came before us laid the ground for us through five/six generations of struggle for our community. We need to preserve that and make sure everybody understands our history. What I bring to the table is access to policy makers in the city, city hall officials and people who can help us as policy makers to get Japan Town on the radar.

Daryl Higashi: My passion and interests in the JapanTown community are due to a few reasons. Japan Town has a long cultural history but a lot of successes of how different organizations banded together to deal with the struggles. Hopefully through this group we not only embrace the history and culture of the past but use the process to reach out to our neighbors to create a strong partnership with the communities surrounding us. What I bring to the table is expertise in affordable housing. I've worked in the private sector, direct development with nonprofits, and worked with the city as the Chief Housing Finance Officer for 2 administrations.

Roy Ikeda: I have a personal connection with Japan Town because I was raised here and was active with Boy Scout troop 58, Christ United, and Konko Church. We are one of three Japan Towns remaining in the USA. It represents the physical presence of a Japanese community in San Francisco and is critical to sustaining an active, and vibrant community. Construction of the center came at the cost of losing much of the physical Japantown, so the center/malls provided space for local businesses and served as staging and display areas during community events. My

experience after moving out of San Francisco? Japan Town has been more a state of mind than a physical community.

What can I bring to this committee? I was a lawyer before I retired and represented Kintetsu in the sale of the center and hotels. I negotiated the post-closing agreements (covenant agreements) on behalf of Kintetsu and am acquainted with its issues and with Joseph and Faraz Daneshgar of 3D investments (current owners of malls). I can also contribute to discussions about the potential development of the center/malls. For about 35 years, I was a member of the board of the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation ("EBALDC"), a community nonprofit that engages in community development through affordable housing, increasing resident and community engagement and supporting strong neighborhood partnership networks .

Joyce Oishi: There are three main reasons as to why I care about Japantown and feel debts of gratitude. One is that my kids went to Nihonmachi Little Friends School and I continue to volunteer there. I have Buddhist roots and friends who have invited me to funerals and bazaars at Christ United and Konko Church. So I appreciate JapanTown's enduring spiritual community. The third reason is that my studies in tea have benefitted from experiencing the Nichi Bei Kai tea room and from shops inside the mall. I bring to the table my experience working on public projects in San Francisco, including school renovations, convention facilities, transit center and other projects. Although I am an architect, my expertise lies in peripheral areas such as CEQA clearance, property acquisitions and negotiating permits.

Beau Simon: JapanTown was my daughter's favorite neighborhood while growing up. We spent an extraordinary amount of time in JapanTown and it became a cultural centerpiece to us. The significance of JapanTown in the history of San Francisco is relevant to me and the desire to preserve it for future generations is my goal. The malls are the commercial centerpiece of JapanTown because most visitors are brought to JapanTown by the malls. I am a real estate lawyer and I represent owners, developers, tenants, stores, nonprofits, and other types of properties. I know my way around contracts also.

Kenta Takamori: I am profoundly motivated to prevent another mass incarceration due to race. This is what drives me to care about the Japanese community and JapanTown, as an important part of the community. I also care very deeply about US-Japan relations. I care about how Japan, Japanese and Japanese-American people are perceived in America. Japanese people who immigrated here and Japanese-American people have 2 vastly different experiences here but they do share a lot in terms of culture. I have a background in finance, as a chartered financial analyst and a lot of experience working with institutional investors. I have a good understanding of how institutional money works and some experience in development.

Lori Yamauchi: As a 40-year Japanese-American city resident, I want Japanese to survive and thrive for future generations so the Japanese-American community in San Francisco and Bay Area can enjoy and appreciate the importance of Japan town to the cultural fabric of the city. Through the CHES report, I've come to a greater appreciation of how Japan Town's footprint has been drastically reduced by the incarceration during the war and redevelopment. The malls are Japan Town's largest and most visible properties so they should be developed in a way that maximizes the benefits to the Japan Town and Japanese-American community. The skills I bring are 38 years of experience in land use and master planning in San Francisco. I worked on creating the neighborhood commercial district section of the planning code that rezoned all the neighborhood commercial districts. This rezoning provided the framework for the Japan Town neighborhood commercial district. I also worked for 29 years at UCSF doing master planning and development. I

led in the planning of the development of the Mission Bay campus and have planned multi-million-dollar projects.

Grace Horikiri: Being born and raised in San Francisco, the JapanTown area is basically where I grew up. People that make up our JapanTown community, malls, small businesses and nonprofits are my brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles. What happens to the malls is going to affect all the other small businesses around the area. I want to make sure our future generations can experience JapanTown like we have. I am a graphic designer by trade and am the executive director of the Nihonmachi street fair. With my role as the executive director at JCPB is where I got down and dirty working with our community, small businesses, and getting in touch with community leaders that I believe will help the committee.

Glynis Nakahara: Initially through Rosa Parks Elementary School, JBBP, my kids really benefited from the proximity to JapanTown. It really supported our ability to pass on cultural values and even explore our own cultural identities for me and my husband. I just want to make sure JapanTown is around for future generations in that perspective. I also think the environment in JapanTown is an expression of the Japanese-American experience in San Francisco. I've been involved in Japan Town planning for a long time since 2006 or so. I also work a couple blocks away from JapanTown for an architecture firm.

What do you see as the future of the JapanTown center and malls?

Sandy Mori: The future of the Japan Town Malls will largely depend on the future of retail shopping in the United States. I hope that there will be traditional ways of having businesses in the mall. Also, I believe any forms of retail arts and culture need to be included in the Malls

Daryl Higashi: The mall must be vibrant in the future to draw more foot traffic. We have to look for activities and venues that would attract people. Traditional activities such as restaurants, entertainment, coffee places and bars will still be fine. We need to take advantage of the airspace above the mall because JapanTown is in prime real estate. This should become a place where people can come, relax and hang out. The challenge with increasing density on the site is a battle between how much housing can be available for rent, through subsidized housing and workforce housing, versus how much can be available for purchase for home ownership. These are policy questions that the community can bring forth and express our feelings toward as developers move into the area. One out of the box idea that I have is to create a Martial Arts regional center where up to 12-15 different types of martial arts can not only practice but host competitions which would increase the amount of people going to the surrounding businesses.

Roy Ikeda: The Japan center and mall should be viewed as the center of gravity for all things Japanese and Japanese American in the City. Retail businesses should be community oriented, and local business people should be given a preference. Beyond providing retail space, the Japan Town Malls should include a daycare center, senior housing, space for the performing arts, either rehearsal space or office space or both, and a museum of the history of Japanese Americans in San Francisco. The exterior designs of the contiguous properties within the mall/center should be coordinated in some fashion so as to present a common theme focused on Japan. All of the parcel owners in the mall/center should organize themselves in a way that facilitates communications between the Task Force and the parcel owners. We should seek an assignment of the post-closing agreements from Kintetsu to the Task Force (which needs a consent from 3D). This would make the Task Force a party to the agreements and enable the Task Force to negotiate amendments

directly with 3D. To the extent possible, provide office space to community non-profits at rents below market rate, with the difference paid by an existing or new community foundation.

Joyce Oishi: I find myself wondering whether the mall will be able to sustain operations over the next 20 years and accommodate new standards for ventilation, sustainability, retail markets. What excites me at this moment is near term planning future visions. I see a number of educational forums that the AD Hoc committee could organize to help the JTF better understand and strategize options. When a developer comes and asks, we would have some sense of buildable priorities to discuss.

Beau Simon: I envision an outward facing, welcoming, vibrant step of culturally appropriate and engaging buildings. These would house restaurants, shops, arts entertainment venues, nonprofit organizations and other various types of businesses. I believe what's currently at the malls has to be completely revolutionized.

Kenta Takamori: There are 4 areas that are needed: Economic sustainability, Equity, Environmental sustainability, and Cultural sustainability. In terms of economic sustainability, we are going to have to go vertical and expand residential. The community is going to have to accept that. In terms of equity, equity is only going to become increasingly important. We have to expect the housing will draw in people with diverse backgrounds and hopefully the cultural component of what we have will be something that attracts them. In terms of environmental sustainability, public transportation and energy waste/use has to be at the core of what we strive to do. Cultural sustainability is by far the most important one. We could bring components directly from Japan that are authentic but at the same time include more modern components.

Lori Yamauchi: Before any plans of the malls are developed, there needs to be a top to bottom assessment of the existing buildings. There have been studies performed by property owners and other entities that should be collected. There should also be a community wide survey of uses and perception of the features of the mall. Parallel urban design studies of the malls should consider them in the overall context of JapanTown. Also, an assessment of the JapanTown space needs is needed and should be performed. Using these studies and evaluations, different scenarios can be informed. A range of scenarios should be considered including retention and renewal of the current existing buildings with or without additions as well as demolition and new construction. Above all the malls should engage all segments of the JapanTown and Japanese-American community as well as businesses, particularly Japanese businesses, and other investors interested in supporting JapanTown.

Grace Horikiri: JapanTown is a destination but they want to make sure the locals come back. For the locals to come back there has to be things like artist galleries and other things along this line that can draw them to come back. Hopefully the merchants that come in are ones of local people that come in week after week or month after month and not just once a year.

Glynis Nakahara: I would like to see more curation of commercial tenants. The center's original intent was to showcase Japanese innovation. Not having a Japan House for example, is a loss to Japantown. Hopefully in the future we can somehow return to that. Maybe include more Japanese native brands. I've been thinking a lot about commercial and retail as social infrastructure. I would love to see the malls be an integration of not just commercial retail but cultural community also.

III. Announcements

V. Public Comments

Next Meeting

Next Ad Hoc committee meeting will be held on 02/08/2021 via zoom.

Adjourn: 6:29pm