



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

THURSDAY, XXXXX, 2020

BOARD MEMBER PRESENT:

Glynis Nakahara, Alice Kawahatsu, Jeremy Chan, Kenta Takamori, Sandy Mori, Lori Yamauchi, Ros Tonai,

STAFF PRESENT:

Nina Bazan-Sakamoto

OTHERS PRESENT:

Linda Walsh, Tomo Hirai, AnnieScott Rogers, Marlayne Morgan, Karen Kai, Paul Wermer

The meeting began at 6:00 p.m.

STAFF UPDATE:

CHHESS UPDATES

Nina reported that they will be meetign wth teh City on 12/14. They will be going line by line with them, and the City will discuss how they can support each tactic.

They have identified four priorities. Two are short term strategies relating to small businesses, and two are long term strategies.

- Virtual and PHysical Japantown Co-Creative Hub
- Virtual an Physical Small Busienss & ARTists Assitance and MEdia Center
- Japatown Community Development Corporation (CDC) / Community Land Trust (CLT) / Community Impact Fund (CIF) or similar mechanism
- JApantown Preservation and Development Master Plan

They have also been meeting with Executive Directors of various J-Town orgs to see what their priorities are and to see where they can collaborate together. They have met organizaitons including the Japanese Chamber of Commerce, JCCCNC, Nakayoshi, JCBD, and NJAHS, and will meet with more to come.

Alice asked how these meetings went. Nina said they are open to collaboration, but so far they have not yet committed to helping with specific tactics. Alice noted that some orgs may not be able to commit to things unless they run it by their board, so having a clear concise plan will be helpful to make a decision. Lori (having sat in on these meetings) said she noticed an alignment between the CHHESS tactics and the missions of these orgs. Lori said she hopes the JCD staff will create touchpoints to help us better identify these synergies. The more we come to a consensus about our goals, the more we can identify what resources we can bring to the table.

Jeremy asked about Lori's role (since joining the board). Lori clarified that she agreed to help with the CHHESS until it was adopted by the board of supervisors, so she is continuing to act as a "volunteer" for the Cultural District while also being a board member. She noted that it would be helpful to develop a summary of the feedback for the board to review. Glynis and Jeremy agreed it would be helpful.

Through Seeding Reciprocity, Nina has been counseling four Japantown artists who will be submitting for a grant next week.

They are working on developing a mission statement for the cultural district.

Nina asked the LUT committee to fill out the form detailing what strategies align with the committee, as well as what they would prioritize.

NEW BUSINESS:

NEW COMMITTEE MEMBER NOMINATION - LORI YAMAUCHI

Lori said she has met with Kenta and Glynis and is excited to join the committee. Glynis noted Lori's experience with the planning department.

See Linked In: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/yamauchi-lori-3a7b178/>

Alice moved and Paul second to recommend to the board that Lori join the LUT committee. The motion passed unanimously

SFMTA SLOW STREETS PROPOSAL

The new Slow Streets map intersects with Japantown. For more info, see <https://www.sfmta.com/projects/slow-streets-western-addition>

There is a survey <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6032227/WesternAdd-English>

It's a strategy of narrowing car paths as a way of influencing speed of drivers. It is theoretically closed to traffic unless you live there. Paul noted that it is "marvelous" for pedestrians.

Karen noted that sometimes people cross streets without regard to oncoming traffic, and suggested more safety awareness in these measures.

Kenta asked about how this might influence traffic on other streets, if at all.

Paul noted that Google right now directs people up Scott, which runs near Alta Plaza Park which has lots of pedestrians / dog walkers, as well as schools. He suggested the slow street should be

on Steiner, but switch to Scott on the north end.

Karen noted that the Steiner slow street runs by the driving entrance to the Western Addition library, as well as a high school. There are also medical buildings.

She noted that she is less worried about Alta Plaza because it's raised up, but Paul said not when you're crossing over.

Kenta noted that the hill on Scott won't necessarily be good for bikes.

Karen said that she was hesitant to make recommendations for outside the Japantown neighborhood since it may be outside our area of expertise / connection with neighbors.

Jeremy asked if the committee would be interested in exploring slow streets in Japantown to revitalize commercial corridors. Kenta said it was a good question, but thought that the community may be reticent to it based on previous conversations about bikeshare and bike lanes. Jeremy noted that slow streets primarily target pedestrians more than bicyclists. Glynis agreed, but also noted that it tends to support residences more than commercial corridors.

Glynis and Jeremy discussed that a temporary closure, such as the Sunday Streets program, might be helpful.

Karen noted that Japantown isn't inherently anti-bicycle, but rather that Japantown serves a wider geographic background of people who have to drive to enter Japantown, as well as seniors, and other folks who use car transportation to access Japantown.

PESKIN LEGISLATION: FIRE/LIFE SAFETY IN VINTAGE HIGH RISE BUILDINGS

Marlayne Morgan presented on this issue. A few weeks ago, the Golden Gate Apartments had a fire. Peskin has introduced legislation for all buildings to become fully sprinklered. This legislation has been proposed before, but it has failed twice. The problem is that this is a multi million investment for high rise buildings, including ones in Japantown, and apartment associations, landlords, etc. have previously blocked it for this reason. This dates back to the redevelopment era - concrete buildings were developed with no gas above the ground floor, but gas is in basement.

Marlayne asserted that this will increase cost of rent, units to be taken off the market, home owners association to go bankrupt, etc. Many legacy buildings are at risk.

She would like Japantown, Cathedral Hill, etc. to work with Supervisor Peskin to shape this legislation before it's proposed in January. Ex. support from the City like low interest loans.

Affected buildings include the Sequoias, Nihonmachi Terrace, Cathedral Hill, etc. Marlayne sympathies with the need, but noted that there has been no major fire in these buildings. Any fire has been contained to one unit.

Marlayne would like JTF to work with their local supervisor (Preston). She also noted that she does not want to sandbag Peskin, who is a land use advocate. Paul agreed it would be good to reach out to Preston earlier rather than later.

In the past, historic buildings have advocated and said “please exempt us, we will create our own fire safety plans.”

Kenta noted that he is not convinced by the points Marlayne brought up. He is uncomfortable with putting a price on people’s lives. San Francisco has made many policy decisions where the problem of payment is figured out afterwards. Implementation will still take a long time after it’s passed. There will be opportunities to advocate for the City to help offset the cost following the legislation. He does not feel comfortable opposing the legislation.

Karen said that we do not have to outright oppose the legislation, but rather provide input in the process. Ex. individual fire protocols set up by buildings. She noted that the Covid economic impact that parties are facing right now means that we should especially discuss this burden.

Lori noted that there are other models where requirements were implemented after the fact. Ex. Soft Story Retrofit program in which the City provided funding. A more nuanced approach as opposed to a one size fits all solution may be more effective - for example, other ways to mitigate a fire risk without implementing full sprinklers.

Paul agreed with Karen and Lori. He also said it’s important to look at the process in how these are created and how they are ultimately phased in. The Soft Story Retrofit program was a wide conversation with neighborhood associations, construction groups, etc. about how best to implement solutions. He suggested to have that discussion before anything is put on paper. Once the fire commission, etc. weighs in, then later public comment will not be effective. You may be able to kill the legislation, but you won’t be able to influence it at that stage.

Jeremy expressed his sympathy with Kenta’s point. He asked what legacy building have done in the past to create their own fire safety programs, and also what places like Nihonmachi Terrace, Cathedral Hill, etc. have done to contain fires to one unit. He also asked if Golden Gate Apartments is similarly a legacy building, and noted that if they had similar protections that ultimately proved ineffective, then a more nuanced approach may be ineffective and a “sledge hammer” solution needed.

Marlayne said the next step would be to discuss with Supervisor Preston and Peskin to open a dialogue.

Alice noted that in Nihonmachi Terrace, they have a fire captain on each floor to communicate if there’s a fire. Each of the rooms has an emergency fire pull. Alice said that she is concerned about the wellbeing of the seniors in these buildings. When the buildings were renovated, the seniors felt like they were being kicked out and wouldn’t be able to return. She suggested discussing further with Preston and Peskin, and noted that they both serve on the Board of Supervisors Land Use and Transportation committee.

Glynis said this isn’t asterisked to be a voting item. Karen noted that we can make a decision when time is of the essence. Jeremy noted this is just asking for dialogue and therefore doesn’t need a recommendation to the board. Paul said that this is the time to mitigate.

Marlayne noted were not even at the mitigation stage - Cathedral Hill hasn’t taken a position, and just wants to meet with the supervisors and engage in a dialogue. Jeremy agreed that this is an information gathering phase. Sandy said that there is no problem with requesting a meeting with the supervisors. This is part of the research / homework, and later on a recommendation will be brought to the board.

Annie wanted to know the timeframe.

NY PLANNING - 2021 GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Deferred until January. Please fill out Nina's chart.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

CCA URBAN DESIGN STUDIO COLLABORATION

CCA is interested in J-Town having closer engagement with the project compared to last year.

Glynis sees the studio as augmenting our resources. They have the high level design background, can do 3D modeling and run with it, etc. She would also like to get the CBD and Santino involved.

Nina noted that it is very much aligned with what the CHHESS discusses - ex. space meeting community needs, and that there is potential to collaborate on the tactics.

Glynis reminded the committee that these are student projects, and therefore should be critiqued accordingly without "killing their dreams."

Glynis would like there to be some formality to our collaboration with CCA, and thus would like to make a formal recommendation.

Ros noted that they underwent a similar design process with students for Building 640. She noted that these projects are particularly impressive for an undergrad program. Ros asked what the ethnic composition of the class is (white vs. students of color). She noted that it's nice to bring in outside perspectives to view Japantown in a new way, and that it serves as a useful creative exercise. Ros noted that they ultimately did not take the student's designs since they were too far out, but did apply their environmental concerns and other features. Ros also put their designs into an art exhibit and allowed the public to comment / vote on them. (Glynis liked the exhibition idea).

Glynis noted that if Steve is concerned with staff time, it's something that the committee can specifically focus on (Steve said he's okay with that). She would like to involve Cultural Heritage as well. If there are one or two specific pieces of CHHESS that benefit from the students, that would be especially helpful.

Glynis noted the benefits of cross pollination and learning from what other neighborhoods are doing (ex. a restorative justice center in the Outer Mission).

Nina indicated her personal interest in the project, and thought it might be a good way to engage younger generations in what they want the future of Japantown. She asked about time commitment.

Glynis went over the initial framework suggested by Chris, which includes a tour, 2-3 workshops

/ design crits, interviews, etc. They are currently looking into sponsors to compensate CBOs for their time. Glynis also noted that in some ways, CCA is providing “free” labor for the Cultural District project.

Lori noted that it’s important to manage student’s expectations and ground them in reality. She suggested it be publicized widely throughout Japantown so it doesn’t look like JTF scheming behind the scenes. The outcomes should be set from the start. What common assumptions and values should we set from the start. She noted that out of the box thinking can sometimes scare people. Glynis noted it will be challenging to identify specific outcomes since we don’t know if / what the targets might be. Ros noted that it should be defined who is in the driver’s seat.

Ros noted that we particularly need ideas about how to reinvent retail, and Glynis said there were several great findings from the previous year.

Nina asked if this could be a warm up exercise that prepares us for a Japantown Master Plan. Glynis said it potentially could, but we’d have to think about how to plug it in effectively.

Karen noted that much of the expertise that would go into this project is represented on our committee. Karen emphasized that it needs to be mutual respectful and that these are their projects.

Tomo moved and Ros seconded to recommend to the board that the LUT committee will enter into a collaboration with the CCA urban studio *Common Ground: Re-making the Ground Floor* project.

SF HOUSING ELEMENT UPDATE

Jeremy, Lori, and Nina attended one of the three workshops that the Housing Element project is organizing this month.

They have also agreed to do a Listening Session with us, even though they technically completed that phase.

Brandon will be helping to facilitate, organize this, and advertise this.

We will suggest 1/13, 1/19, 1/21.

SFMTA / NEIGHBORHOOD PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Alice reported that different (brighter) lights have been installed on the Post / Octavia crossing. Alice met with Bob Scott and Bob Krugler, who are working to get a petition together to get a stop light there.

The speed limit on Geary has also been reduced to 25 mph.

1619 LAGUNA STREET VARIANCE

No update - the change has not been made yet.

PEACE PLAZA RENOVATION BOND MEASURE UPDATE

Sandy noted that Ginsburg is valuing the importance of having a cultural competent designer on board, and so will likely be contracting with RHAA and allowing them to continue on with the project.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Tomo commented that Pika Pika announced they were closing.

Jeremy reported on APILO's panel on small businesses, featuring Ryan Kimura from Pika Pika as well as the attorneys representing tenants. You can watch the recording on Facebook and on their website.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

The next meeting will be at 6:00 p.m., January, 9, 2021 online via Ring Central.