

Japantown Task Force  
Cultural Heritage and Sustainability Committee  
Minutes  
Monday, December 6, 2021  
5:30pm – via Zoom

**Committee members present:** Lucy Fisher, Gary Barbaree, Benh Nakajo (ex: David Takashima and Rosalyn Tonai)

**Board members present:** Kenta Takamori

**Staff:** Steve Nakajo, Susie Kagami, Brandon Quan, Melissa Bailey Nihei, Max Nihei

**Guests:** Kenji Taguma, Yuki Nishimura, Emily Nichols, Wes Nihei

A quorum was not present, therefore official business was not conducted.

- I. Kenji Taguma, Editor of Nichi-Bei Weekly presented a 10” video and description of the paper:

In the video, Kenji described the evolution, from 1899 to the current Weekly and Nichibei Foundation. N-B publishes multiple special editions, such as the Cherry Blossom Festival guide, a JTown map and directory, and educational events including book reviews. Distribution is to subscribers but eventually on-line. Kenji reviewed their publications via power-point:

- A JTown map, the “Empowerment Project” is updated each year. The paper map is distributed at airports, visitor centers, and hotels and includes businesses, restaurants, major events; there’s also a free digital edition of Japanese Cultural guide.
  - J-A Resource Guide: comprehensive directory and maps listing schools and churches, Japanese gardens, non-profits, historic tours, senior centers, businesses, assembly and incarceration sites, etc. across the country.
- II. Kenta updated the Japantenna project and referred to the written report he emailed to JTF Board members and staff. The following is a summary of the three parts:
    1. Project review, including ~ 6K visitors over four weekends at 8 hours/day. Visitors, volunteers and businesses involved in planning and execution of project with \*strategies to engage businesses and promote merchants. The project garnered official recognition and attracted over \$130K in funding.
    2. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Grant Reimbursement Process: grant monies are reimbursed *after* expenses are paid and documented. Before JTF and JCYC staff are paid, JTF ED must certify hourly wage rates, number of hours worked, and duties performed.
    3. Nara Prefecture: JETRO representatives have expressed interest in a Japantenna format for Nara in January, 2022. Kenta reiterated that this RFP has not been formally issued and there is no further information at this time (12/6/21).

Questions:

Benh asked about the merchant “sticker” promotion campaign; Kenta explained the goal of this strategy was to increase visitor traffic to businesses in the Mall.

Gary remarked that metrics rather than a narrative was a helpful evaluation component. Kenta said metrics are fundamental to business and economic performance. Kenta: Visitor numbers seemed high, but target numbers were higher. Creative strategies, involving much effort, were expended to get merchants involved.

Important take-aways:

\*A phenomena uncovered was that merchants assumed that Japantenna wanted something from them, rather than Japantenna’s objective to increase traffic/steer people to businesses.

Kenta: it was “difficult to flip this paradigm”.

\*JTF/committee’s early support was critical for success as Japantenna was not a known entity.

\*Believes that JTF could have a role as an incubator for social innovation/social entrepreneurship; there are models for this.

\*If JETRO does issue/approve an RFP, would be helpful to have two ministries to compare process and outcomes. A second project will be “90% easier”, with space built out, etc.

Benh: suggested to obtain licenses to sell items and increase giveaways.

Kenta: agrees that the visitor experience can be enhanced with more time and resources.

### III. Staff reports

Steve: Japantenna was “a great idea from a staff perspective” and Kenta “prepared a comprehensive report.” Is now interested in “closing this out”. Steve listed relationships fostered during the past year, such as NJAHS, Oka and The Library, and Nichi Bei Kai, “brought to life by this committee.”

Susie: Kenta and his group should celebrate their hard work, which brought good to the community. Spoke of orienting Melissa, prioritizing launch for KOHO, building team of volunteers, some from outside JTown. Issues after 2020 census include redistricting to keep population balanced in the 11 districts. Susie is focused on adjoining cultural districts and those with relationships such as Chinatown, to maintain programming, etc.

### IV. No public comments.

### V. Announcements:

Lucy reported visit to Kinmon Gakuen with Mark Chekal of Phil Ting’s office. Mark is connected to Japanese culture and impressed with the school’s large spaces.

January meeting will be cancelled due to proximity to New Year’s holiday.

Gary: Use February meeting to discuss priorities of committee and organize the committee’s workload.