

**JAPAN CENTER MALLS TECHNICAL COMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
MONDAY, JUNE 13, 2022  
5:30 PM – VIA ZOOM MEETING**

**Committee Members:** Lori Yamauchi, Chair; Roy Ikeda, Glynis Nakahara, Beau Simon.

**Others:** Tomo Hirai, Nichi Bei Weekly; Nancy N.

**Guests:** Edward Thet Tun, Kinokuniya

**I. Call to Order**

Chair Lori Yamauchi called the meeting to order at 5:33 pm.

**II. Approval of April 11, 2022 minutes\***

Roy Ikeda moved, Glynis Nakahara seconded approval of the minutes.

The motion passed unanimously.

No public comment.

**III. Conversation with Mr. Hirotatsu Kano, Kinokuniya Book Stores of America**

Mr. Kano was unavailable to attend the meeting and arranged for Edward Thet Tun, the new building manager, to represent Kinokuniya. Edward introduced himself. He was raised in Myanmar and lived in Japan for over 30 years. He moved with his company to Europe, then to San Francisco. His experience is in office management and previously worked for the US Postal Service, before his current position. Committee members introduced themselves.

Edward handles contracts and rental agreements as well as tenant improvements. The property management team includes Hana, the Property Manager and Christy, the Assistant Property Manager, both of whom work for Cushman Wakefield. They both work primarily remotely while Edward is on-site as the Building Manager. Edward reported that Kinokuniya has 30 storefronts in its building. There are currently 7 vacancies: 3 upstairs and 4 downstairs. He has been on the job for just over a month. He has discovered many issues that require attention. Emily noted that Kinokuniya has made available a 2nd floor storefront for use by the Japantenna Fukuoka Project scheduled for the last two weekends of July. The rent will be covered by a fund made available through the Japanese Consulate, putting the Japantenna storefront on a more equal footing with merchants who have been paying rent throughout the pandemic. Emily added that Internet issues exist throughout Japantown. It appears that Japantown is an Internet deadspot. Emily met with the government affairs director for Comcast earlier in the day and is planning a follow-up meeting with Comcast, AT&T, and Verizon in a couple of weeks to which she has invited Edward, Greg Vioria of 3D Investments, and Grace Horikiri of the Japantown Community Benefits District. Edward mentioned that Comcast estimated it would cost \$20,000 to run a high speed Internet cable to the Kinokuniya Building which is cost prohibitive.

Tomo Hirai with the Nichi Bei Weekly newspaper was curious about whether Kinokuniya was still employing Kristen Fletcher of Davis Partners as the property manager of the Kinokuniya Building. Edward stated that she is no longer working for Kinokuniya.

Security is also a major issue. There are homeless individuals who vandalize property in the Kinokuniya Building. Edward stated that creating a safe environment for merchants and customers is a very high priority.

Roy Ikeda asked for clarification about how Kinokuniya addresses infrastructure issues given that the Japan Center Mall has so many different owners. Edward stated that this is a major challenge. Glynis stated that she will provide Edward with information about a working group that is focused on the maintenance of concrete buildings. Lori asked Edward to keep the Japantown Task Force informed of any planned remediation work.

No public comment.

#### **IV. San Francisco Housing Element Update – Draft Environmental Impact Report Increased Height Limits and Density Decontrol for Japan Center Malls blocks (Information)**

Lori explained that the Housing Element is a housing development plan that is updated every 10 years. The current draft will apply from 2023 - 2033 and is due to the Board of Supervisors for approval by early 2023. The Housing Element must meet the housing goals per the state-wide regional housing needs allocation. Each county is required to build a certain amount of housing units. San Francisco must create 80,000 new housing units. The plan calls for increased housing along transit corridors and in the northern and western parts of the City which have traditionally been low density. The proposed Housing Element is trying to promote more housing and more affordable housing for communities harmed by past government actions.

In prior drafts, there were vague references to lifting height and density in Japantown. The Japantown Task Force provided comments on the January and March drafts. The draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) released in April includes proposals to change height restrictions from 50' to 240', nearly 5-fold increase, and lift housing density limits altogether for the Japan Center Malls blocks. In addition, the DEIR showed proposed increases in height limit for the blocks north of Post Street between Laguna and Webster streets from 50' to 85'. The proposed changes in height and density limits could result in 2700 more housing units by 2050. The 2021 Housing Inventory in Japantown was 2500 units, so this represents a proposed increase of 108% in housing stock in Japantown.

The Planning Department is also considering designating Japantown as a "Housing Sustainability District" which would require that new housing projects include 20% units affordable to very low, low, and middle-income families, per City average median income (AMI) guidelines.

The Land Use Committee is recommending that the JTF submit a comment letter with request for additional analyses. The proposed changes would have a significant impact on historic resources, traffic, shadows and wind.

Lori explained that the Housing Element is not proposing rezoning, but it is setting targets that would require rezoning and proposes “streamlining” of environmental review of enabling legislation. Reviews and approvals of proposed housing development in Housing Sustainability Districts would be “streamlined,” allowing decisions to be made by the Planning Department without Planning Commission review. “Ministerial” approvals of this kind would likely preclude public input.

Glynis thanked Lori for her leadership in organizing a JTF team to review the DEIR. She warned that an example of a “ministerially-approved” housing project is located in front of the Hall of Justice at 850 Bryant. Beau asked that the board letter be very specific in terms of the analysis the JTF seeks.

No public comment.

#### **V. Announcements**

1. KOHO Co-Creative Arts Hub Launch Party, Thursday, 6/23, 5 - 10 pm. [Details and RSVP here](#)
2. Lori announced that she will not be at the July meeting. Daryl Higashi will be chairing the meeting. Joyce Oishi will be doing a primer on the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)
3. Lori also announced that Grace Horikiri has stepped down from this committee.
4. Lori expects that the Covenants Committee will meet soon.

#### **VI. General Public Comment**

Members of the public may address the committee for up to 2 minutes with respect to each item on the agenda, and may speak for up to 2 minutes regarding matters not on the agenda during general public comment.

\*indicates an action item

No public comment.

#### **VII. Adjournment**

Lori adjourned the meeting at 6:32 pm.

---

#### **Next Meetings - 2nd Mondays, 5:30-6:30 pm**

Monday, August 8

Monday, September 12

Monday, October 10

Monday, November 14

Monday, December 12

**ZOOM Link:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88113950249>

Meeting ID: 881 1395 0249

One tap mobile +16699009128,,88113950249# US (San Jose)

+13462487799,,88113950249# US (Houston)