

**JAPAN CENTER MALLS TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
MINUTES
MONDAY, July 11, 2022
5:30 PM – VIA ZOOM MEETING**

Committee Members: Daryl Higashi, Roy Ikeda, Richard Jue, Sandy Mori, Joyce Oishi, Beau Simon.

Staff: Lauren Nosaka, Max Nihei.

Guests: Julian Banales, Sheridan Tatsuno.

I. Call to Order

Chair Lori Yamauchi was not able to attend. Acting Chair Daryl Higashi called the meeting to order at 5:31 pm.

II. Approval of June 13, 2022 minutes

Roy Ikeda moved, Sandy Mori seconded approval of the minutes.

The motion passed unanimously.

No public comment.

III. Presentation on the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) basics (Joyce Oishi)

Daryl Higashi informed the committee that the City and County of San Francisco is going through a major process to update its Housing Element plan. The SF Planning Commission is reviewing the Environmental Impact Report, which is a required part of a legal process. Joyce Oishi has experience with the environmental review process at the local and state levels. Joyce gave a presentation on the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) ([Attachment A.](#))

The committee had a robust discussion on the environmental review process and how it impacts the Housing Element. Joyce explained that Housing Element is a city-wide policy that the city is vetting for environmental clearance. Individual projects will still likely have their own Environmental Impact Report (EIR.) Anything that happens in Japantown would likely have its own EIR due to the multiple jurisdictions involved. For example, the ownership of the Japan Center Mall and Peace Plaza is divided among 10 different owners, including the Recreation and Parks Department, and the SF Municipal Transportation Authority.

In response to a question about different stages of EIRs involving more issues, Joyce explained that, for example, even though the Housing Element says that that building heights can go from 50 feet to 240 feet in height along Geary Boulevard, the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors would certainly weigh in on major changes, such as in land use and massing. If the State streamlining process for housing along transit corridors and the Housing Element are as powerful as what some have imagined, it may mean that developers could skip over certain

steps and this would put Japantown at a disadvantage in terms of voicing community concerns. Discussion focused on the likelihood that major redevelopment of the malls would trigger a full EIR. Daryl expressed two concerns. First, the City has an obligation to make sure that impacts be fully mitigated. Second, because the Japan Center Garage is owned by the City, if it will be demolished or renovated, the SFMTA will need to step in and be held accountable

Joyce explained that some of the projects from the collateral work of the Housing Element might have an easier time. For example, the Moscone West Project, the building across the Metreon, was cleared with a mitigated negative declaration as there was already a building with the same height in the vicinity. Projects within the Japan Center Malls would likely not fall within existing envelopes nor be limited to current land uses, so the City would likely be required to conduct a full EIR. She urged that the community must stand up and give comments to show priorities community members care about and are fully engaged in the process.

Sandy Mori pointed out that there are multiple property owners within the malls and asked whether each property owner will be held responsible for understanding the CEQA process if they decide to make a change to their properties or is this something that they only need to understand if a full-scale development plan is proposed. Joyce responded that because all of the mall property owners are interconnected with each other, they will all need to understand CEQA.

Daryl stated that the Task Force has a good working relationship with the Planning Department and has maintained good relations with the owners of the Japantown malls. The Task Force will need to be prepared for any proposals going forward. Sandy urged that some thinking go into when and where the Task Force enters the process, noting that, due to the current challenging economic situation, none of the property owners are likely to be doing any major development. Most say they want to continue to be a part of Japantown, but no one has said they will develop this or that. She urged that the committee communicate with all the owners, especially since many don't know each other. Joyce agreed, stating that these working relationships are very critical to Japantown. Some may be interested in height increases while others are more interested in the re-envisioning of Japantown. Earlier engagement by the community is better than commenting later in the review process.

Sandy emphasized that Japantown as a neighborhood has to be in communication with the appropriate departments, the Board of Supervisors, and the Mayor on a continued basis. The community doesn't have a strong relationship with all members of the Planning Commission, so there is a need to educate them about Japantown. Daryl pointed out that once the Housing Element is adopted by San Francisco and the State of California, it will guide actions for the next 8 years. The EIR will have a major impact and offer additional opportunities for the community to weigh in.

PUBLIC COMMENT

A member of the public and urban planner whose father had a store in Japantown provided public comment. As a survivor of the painful redevelopment process, the speaker urged that the

committee look at Pier 70, a factory that was converted into multi-use housing and workshops. A New York developer was brought in and insisted that the development get community approval. After a whole series of community meetings, over 70 community groups signed on as supporters of the plan. The speaker emphasized that this kind of process will ensure that Japantown will be involved in designing the future of the community.

IV. Announcements

There were no announcements.

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

Daryl Higashi adjourned the meeting at 6:31 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

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