



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 / RING CENTRAL MEETING
THURSDAY, MAY 13, 2021

COMMITTEE MEMBER PRESENT:

GLYNIS NAKAHARA*, JEREMY CHAN*, LORI YAMAUCHI*, TOMO HIRAI, KENTA TAKAMORI*, LINDA WALSH, RICH HASHIMOTO*, ROS TONAI*, KAREN KAI

STAFF PRESENT:

Nina Bazan-Sakamoto

OTHERS PRESENT:

Judy Hamaguchi, Kenya Wheeler, Hank Wilson. Steven Santa Maria

* Japantown Task Force Board Member

The meeting began at 6:00 p.m.

STAFF/COMMITTEE UPDATES:

CULTURAL DISTRICT / CHHESS

Nina reported on the Co-Creative Hub. They are identifying what functionalities they want on each part of the virtual web page. They have also been working with the Housing Element project on scheduling the next focus group and seeing how much Japantown will be involved - there are multiple tiers of involvement. Nina also created a [summary of the key trends from the previous focus group](#).

Nina reported that one Japantown artist (Natasha Tamate-Weiss) who participated in the Seeding Reciprocity project received the SF Arts Commission grant. One person from each of the other cultural districts also received the grant. The Seeding Reciprocity cultural district were glad to have at least one person receive a grant, but were surprised that more did not receive grants. They speculate that SFAC may have awarded less grants this year.

Project Associate Brandon Quan has been working on a community land inventory to see who owns land in the 9 block area of the Japantown Special Use District. This should help for the Master Plan project as well as the community land ownership project. He is reformatting it for ease of use.

There is also a staffing transition that is ongoing.

PEACE PLAZA

Rich reported that Michael DeGregorio signed the agreement with JTF to work on the Peace Plaza project. He will be paid at \$100/hour and will serve as JTF's liaison to the city.

Karen asked and Glynis clarified that RHAA serves as the design consultant re: authenticity, quality, community aspirations. Michael's role is like a project manager and will serve as an advocate for public works. For example, he has worked to implement MOUs. Having a strong

project manager will help to avoid fiascos like last time. It was clarified that he is no longer a city employee.

AD HOC JAPAN CENTER MALLS

Glynis reported that the Covenants Committee met Joseph Daneshgar, co-owner of 3D Investments, along with other people from SF Planning. Joseph expressed his understanding of the need for community support with respect to any development on the malls. His preference is to meet regularly with a small group of 3-4 representatives.

It was mentioned during the Ad Hoc meeting that based on the covenants, 3D Investments has an obligation to meet with the community regularly, but that provision has not been enforced, and it was not discussed by the covenants group with Joseph. So far, 3D Investments has continued to state they have no plans to sell the building; they also said they have no plans to develop in the near term.

Karen noted that the community should leverage the covenants to lead and control the direction of the meetings. Tomo noted that the Ad Hoc Committee made clear that 3-4 people cannot possibly represent the community as a whole, and that this should be made clear to 3D Investments.

Tomo asked and Glynis noted that the Covenants Committee does not regularly meet. She noted that Paul's intention was to start with a small group of people and later deploy to the broader community. Most of the meetings have been about clarifying and studying the document.

Judy noted that the members of the Covenants committee will be discussing this with their constituencies. She noted that any discussion about development would not occur for at least another 3-4 months because of Covid-10. She also noted that Joseph Daneshgar expressed his personal attachment to Japantown.

Ros asked if the Covenants Committee discussed the tenant situation with 3D Investments. Glynis reported that 3D Investments acknowledged the problem but it was not discussed in depth. Nina reported that 3D Investments has offered Suite 320 (across from the takoyaki restaurant) for community use.

Karen noted that merchants in the building do not have a voice at the table. She noted specifically that management has prevented restaurants from placing tables in common spaces.

Rich noted that 3D Investments is part of the Merchants Association. Ros discussed that he is surprised that there is no hands-on tenants manager to be with the merchants on site. In contrast Rich said this has been discussed in the past but they were not able to make any headway with Sheron Chu.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

PARKING METER EXTENDED HOURS - PARKING DATA / HANK WILSON

Hank Wilson and Kenya Wheeler from SFMTA presented an update to the parking meter proposal to extend hours.

SFMTA shared data in 2012 about Japantown meter occupancy rates. Anything over 80% means that it is incredibly difficult to find parking. The extended meters match up with the most congested hours in Japantown - 12pm-5pm on Sundays and 6pm-9pm on weeknights.

The occupancy is really low around 12am-3am, which indicates that the spots are not full from residents who are parking and then going home. Rather, it's people going to Japantown for commercial activity

They plan to start with a low rate. Weeknights \$0.50 an hour from 6pm-10pm is what they use in China Basin. For Sundays, it will be 12pm-3pm \$1.25 an hour, and 3pm-6pm \$1.50 per hour.

Hank noted that there will be no time limits on these meters, based on constituent feedback.

They are planning to present this at an SFMTA Board of Directors meeting on June 15 or July 20. They will also be doing a big media push so people are aware and start with warning notices and citation forgiveness during the first few months.

Lori asked why the data couldn't be updated to reflect more recent trends. Hank noted that they will be collecting data prior to implementing this but are concerned about the impact of Covid. Lori asked if the implementation could be delayed until after June 15 to observe how behavior might change with businesses opening up. She expressed concern that the extended metering hours will create a chilling effect on people attending Japantown just as businesses are opening up.

Hank clarified that even once the SFMTA approves something, there is still a long lead time before it's rolled out (because of environmental impact review, etc.).

Linda asked for clarification on the purpose of extended metered hours. Hank reviewed the discussion from April's meeting about how meters create turnover and make it easier for people to patronize businesses.

Karen asked if there are any current studies of the Japan Center Garage occupancy during Covid-19. Due to the loss of the CPMC contract, the occupancy rate is low and is often cheaper than the parking meters. Hank said that this will benefit the garage by removing the financial incentive for people to circle and look for free parking. Extending the on-street meter hours may encourage people to park in the garage. He supported publicity efforts that encouraged people to go straight to the Garage and noted that all of the meters mention the garage.

Karen noted that the perception of meters is to increase city revenue as opposed to supporting businesses, and so asked for specific and recent data about both meters and the garage. She noted that she has asked merchants herself and that they haven't seen metering as a benefit.

Ros asked about what metrics will be used to define the goals - ex. business revenue. Hank noted that they measure occupancy rate, sales tax, as well as credit card data.

Kenta asked and Hank clarified that they are looking at the Laguna - Fillmore and Geary - Sutter meters - there are several hundred meters but he will confirm the exact number, as well as the amount of revenue.

Glynis flagged this item as a potential recommendation item. Rich said that the Merchants Association supports the extended meter hours. He also spoke that the Japan Center Garage has

been struggling and he had to lay off most of his staff and suspend security/janitorial services.

Kenta asked for clarification on if the Japan Center Garage is cheaper than the meters.

Jeremy verified that the Japan Center Garage rates are indeed cheaper than the meters - <https://www.sfmta.com/garages-lots/japan-center-garage>
<https://www.sfmta.com/demand-responsive-parking-pricing>

Rich said the Japan Center Garage was supposed to get a sign that shows the number of open spots, but hasn't gotten it yet. Linda asked which businesses validate parking.

It was brought up and Rich recused himself from the discussion due to his affiliation with the Japan Center Garage. Jeremy asked for clarification on the reason for recusal, and it was discussed that it was because the Japan Center Garage will get a financial incentive from this project.

Glynis made a motion to recommend to the board to issue a letter supporting the extension of the parking meter hours. The motion died for lack of a second. Karen said that it needs further study and discussion in the community. In addition to reiterating her discussing with merchants who did not think this would help, and also expressed concern

Lori also expressed her desire for more data, noting that a more current picture when things open up more would be more illuminating. Lori moved that the committee recommend to the JTF board to issue a letter to the SFMTA advocating that any extension of meter hours should be postponed until after businesses / the City reopen, so that more meter data can be collected after reopening. It was seconded by Karen.

Kenta expressed that businesses / the City reopening should be defined. Lori discussed lifting capacity restrictions; Linda discussed the removal of any color tiers. Lori clarified that the state plans to remove all tiers on June 15, but that each local county can impose their own restrictions.

Rich noted that at China Basin, at first people were reluctant to accept it, but then the merchants were doing very well. Kenta asked if there could be more exploration on merchants' opinions.

Karen asked if for the Merchants Association, there was a full presentation on the metering, and how many merchants attended. Rich said he informed 6-7 core-member merchants - restaurants who said they would welcome the turnover. Retailers close at 6pm so he did not discuss this with them. but Karen noted that they are open on Sundays. Karen noted that not all merchants are part of the Merchants Association,

Lori, Glynis, Linda, Karen, Ros supported the motion. Tomo, Kenta, Jeremy voted against.

The motion passed.

CD COMMUNITY LAND PLANNING

Based on SF Planning's advice, they renamed the Master Plan as a Community Plan, because it's driven by community and not the City. It may ultimately become an Area Plan, which also exists in other parts of the city like Chinatown.

Lori noted that there was a lot of momentum / energy from the community land panel because

both speakers discussed that they had a master plan to guide development. They are trying to figure out how to keep it going. She encouraged others to watch the panel.

Glynis asked Lori if she would be willing to convene whoever is interested in this meet separately to discuss what the next steps would be and perhaps create a roadmap. Lori noted that staff does not have the capacity nor skills to create a master plan / community plan, so ultimately someone will have to be hired at some point.

HOUSING ELEMENT - FOCUS GROUPS

SF Planning is asking for a diverse group to be convened, and they are asking how much we will be able to participate. Staff is looking for input from Land Use on how much we want to collaborate.

Categories include younger generations, older generations, people who live in Japantown, people who were displaced from Japantown.

Jeremy asked to clarify what the goals of the focus groups are. SF Housing Element summarized the key policy areas that resulted from the Japantown listening session, and so they want the focus group to further drill down on specific policies and proposals.

Glynis said it's imperative for this group to be representative of a diverse cross-section of Japantown. It's unclear how much staff time will be allocated to this topic.

Karen said that she is interested but wants JTF to invest resources into it. She also stressed the importance of clarifying what the committee is being asked to do and what the focus groups participants are being asked to do.

Jeremy asked and Nina said that she would likely be the staff person assigned to this given her previous involvement, but she is not sure how much time she will spend because her hours are being cut.

Linda asked if they are looking for people who are knowledgeable about this, or ordinary people?

OTHER CITYWIDE INITIATIVES - SFMTA TREE REMOVAL / CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

The tree removal is moving forward because the person who submitted the appeal withdrew.

There is no update on the Climate Action Plan.

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY - AB 550 AND DATA COLLECTING

JTF Executive Committee signed on to support AB 550 - David Chu's bill about traffic light cameras. It went to Executive Committee because we were asked for a quick turnaround. Tomo noted that AB 550 is in committee, with its hearing postponed.

CCA COMMON GROUND

The students gave their final presentation earlier this month. There will be a post project debrief with professors and community partners but not students. All are invited - please let Glynis know and she will send you the information. Julia and Chris are talking to Ros about exhibiting all of the students' work at NJAHS.

NEW BUSINESS:

AD HOC HOUSING COMMITTEE

Glynis requested committee input on potential separate Ad Hoc Housing Committee due to the Housing Element and it being a component of the CHHESS.

Ros suggested and Karen agreed that it should be a sub-committee of Land Use. Karen noted that the Peace Plaza and Japan Center Malls committee memberships were exclusive. Ros said that the communication structure would be easier for it to be under Land Use. The subcommittee can meet and present to Land Use, which can then make recommendations to the full board.

Lori noted that the focus and purpose of the committee should be clear, and then from there, figure out how to populate it.

Kenta expressed his concern about if the community has bandwidth for creating new committees. Jeremy echoed the concern and noted that if additional committees were to be prioritized, he would suggest reviving the Economic Development committee instead, noting the severe struggling of businesses in Japantown. Glynis also expressed bandwidth concerns about attending multiple meetings.

Jeremy said that the method for joining a committee is currently unclear. Some committees like Land Use and Cultural Heritage have open membership, while others like Peace Plaza and Japan Center Mall committee were slated with an exclusive board with no clear outline for how others can join these committees (up until when Richard Jue was recommended to join the Japan Center Mall committee). Lori noted that this was an issue for the JTF board to resolve, and Jeremy noted that this issue needs to be resolved first before addressing the subcommittee vs. separate committee question.

Tomo noted that Land Use meetings already run long, and that adding in a Housing Committee that reports could be a strain. Tomo echoed the comment that it is unclear how people join committees and who gets a say or not.

1596 POST ST

The family in the building wants to do renovation and build a third floor so that their children can move in. They are doing early community outreach, and Glynis encouraged them to continue their community engagement. Lori discussed the height restrictions in place by virtue of it being a Neighborhood Commercial District.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Glynis said she would reach out to Andy Mo about additional notetaking. Tomo offered to split notes with Jeremy.

Lori asked if we are supposed to adopt the minutes. Glynis said we have not in the past.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m. The next meeting will be at 6:00 p.m., June 10, 2021 online at Ring Central.