

JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE
Ad Hoc Japan Center Malls Technical Committee

Minutes

Monday, July 12, 2021

5:00 PM – VIA ZOOM MEETING

Committee Members Present: Daryl Higashi, Grace Horikiri, Roy Ikeda, Glynis Nakahara, Joyce Oishi, Beau Simon, Kenta Takamori, Lori Yamauchi

Others Present: Jeremy Chan, Kirsten Fletcher, Karen Kai, Alice Kawahatsu, Benh Nakajo, Emily Nichols, Derek Tahara, Greg Vloria

Staff Present: Steve Nakajo, Susie Kagami, Lauren Nosaka, Brandon Quan
Nina Bazan-Sakamoto

Call to Order

I. Approval of June 14, 2021 Minutes

A. It was moved by Glynis Nakahara and seconded by Beau Simon.

II. Informational Presentation by Grace Horikiri (Executive Director of Japantown Community Benefit District), Greg Vloria (Japan Center Malls), and Kirsten Fletcher (Davis Properties - Kinokuniya)

A. Japan Center Malls (Community Affairs & Marketing Director, Greg Vloria)

1. Currently there are about 33 tenants up and running. There were about 5 tenants lost due to the pandemic.

a) There are 8 vacant spaces currently in the mall – 20% vacancy.

2. After the holidays, we've seen a gradual increase of foot traffic along with social media traffic.

3. Masks are still being used by employees inside the stores.

a) We are leaving it up to the merchants to decide what they consider is safe.

(1) For example, if a mask is required inside the merchants store.

4. Every facility is now open as of June 15th including the bathrooms that we closed down during shelter in place.

5. There are things that we have learned during COVID that we have kept.

a) Malls are now open at 8:30am, it used to be 7:00am.

b) Bathrooms are not open until 10:00am now.

c) Traffic cones are still lightly enforced.

d) Sanitizer stations are still present.

6. None of the events such as Animefest, Sumo and Origami Palooza are on the radar for 2021. Hopefully they will return in 2022.

7. One thing we learned that helps the merchants is a social media presence to promote themselves and reach more people. The CBD is trying to help by using social media influencers to promote businesses. Using sales \$/sq. ft. as an indicator, Daiso is doing well, but other merchants are not.

8. We have reached a loan agreement with the National Japanese American Historic Society to use about 4 of their displays that are not currently being used right now to decorate the empty spaces we have.

B. Executive Director of Japantown Community Benefit District (Grace Horikiri)

1. Relations between tenants and the CBD have gotten stronger during the pandemic, with face-to-face contact.

2. We have worked with Kirsten Fletcher (see below) to open up some shared spaces in front of the Kinokuniya store.

3. We have revamped the sjftown.org website to help tell the public which merchants are open.

4. We have put our heart and soul into an ENews from the CBD to keep our businesses up to date and to let our merchants know what information is coming in from the city.
 5. There is a 6% vacancy rate outside the Malls, centered around 1700 Post Street
 6. We are creating a page on the CBD website re: what is needed to open a business in Japantown.
 7. In the last fiscal year, the CBD pulled in the services of LGPR to help to promote Japantown with the press. A press trip/tour to Japantown including major publications is being organized by the spring 2022.
- C. Kinokuniya (Davis Partners, Property Manager, Kirsten Fletcher)
1. Over the past year we have actually merged with another company so now we are Birtcher Anderson & Davis Partners
 2. Kinokuniya has gone down the list of tenants to discuss leases.
 - a) All of the tenants that want to stay are allowed to stay.
 - b) Eviction has not even been discussed.
 3. We have currently 6 vacancies, all of them besides Pika Pika happened due to normal attrition and end of leases. We have about a 16% vacancy right now. Roughly 7,667 feet are available.
 4. Pika Pika, one of the tenants, has been negotiating with Kinokuniya on an agreement, but no resolution has been reached.
 5. We should move forward and decorate the vacancies with a mural.
 6. Kinokuniya, the building owners, are very picky about potential tenants of the building. They are very dedicated to authentic Japanese ownership.
 7. The quickest way for potential tenants looking to lease in the Kinokuniya building is to email Kirsten first instead of going to Kinokuniya in Japan or New York. She can assist prospective tenants in putting together rent proposals.
- D. Discussion of the Malls and Kinokuniya buildings included:
1. The KQED article on Japantown focused on the Kinokuniya building and landlord/tenant relations. Since then, the CBD has been trying to promote a more positive message in the media, focusing on the resiliency of Japantown. The CBD conducted a needs survey of small businesses; they need foot traffic.
 2. The merchants need support. The merchants association is inactive and there are no advocates except the CBD. Japantown Task Force, the CBD and the Japantown Merchants Association have been meeting weekly. A lot of merchants are Chinese and don't understand English or Japanese. They are microbusinesses and were left behind in the pandemic.
 3. Each lease is negotiated individually.

IV. Announcements

- A. Nihonmachi Street Fair are holding events on July 17, July 31 and August 7-8.
Japantown Task Force will have an information booth on July 31.

V. General Public Comments

NEXT MEETING

Next Ad Hoc committee meeting will be held on **August 9, 2021** via zoom.

ADJOURN: 5:53PM