

**A New Framework for Looking at San Francisco Japantown:
Gathering Places for Young Adults**

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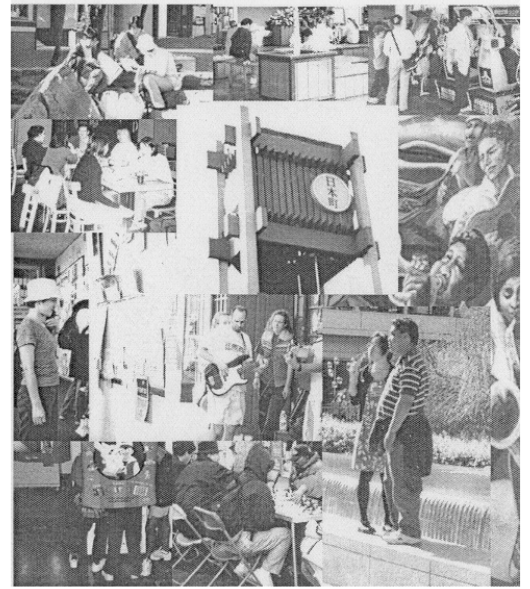


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Abstract

The Japantown Planning, Preservation, and Development Task Force was formed in December 1998 to develop a community plan to guide the future development of Japantown. During Phase One of the planning process, the Japantown community expressed concerns over engaging young adults in both the planning process as well as including them in broader community oriented activities. Working from the concerns expressed by the community and the findings and consultant recommendations from Phase One of the planning process, this report addresses the obstacle identified of attracting multi-generational groups to Japantown, specifically young adults.

Through the use of literature research, community meetings, focus groups, interviews, and site observations, this report seeks to answer three questions: who are young adults? what are the characteristics of places that young adults in their twenties find inviting as gathering places? what are the implications for Japantown?

Destination places that young adults in their twenties go with their friends offer them opportunities to participate in activities and interact with people. Of the many characteristics that make these places enjoyable and inviting, there are eight main characteristics that contribute to this socializing experience.

- Cohesive theme
- Intellectual engagement
- Active day life and night life
- Diverse retail mix and pricing
- Informal interaction with others
- Street life
- Food
- Accessibility

Using the eight characteristics as a new framework for looking at Japantown, the last part of the report explores each of the characteristics in greater detail in the Japantown context.

Chapter 1: Project Overview

Japantown is located in the Western Addition A-1 and A-2 Project Area under the authority of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. The redevelopment plan for the area was adopted in the late 1950s and 1960s. After more than 40 years, the Redevelopment Agency will withdraw from A-1 in 2000 and A-2 in 2009 (San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, 1992, 2). With funding from the Redevelopment Agency and the Mayor's office, the Japantown Planning, Preservation, and Development Task Force was formed in December 1998 to develop a community plan to guide the future development of Japantown.

During phase one of the planning process, the Japantown community expressed concerns over engaging young adults in both the planning process as well as including them in broader community oriented activities. In their recommendation report, the phase one consultant team concludes that one of the challenges for the community is attracting multi-generational groups to Japantown. "How are young adults/students/volunteers brought into the community? How can we make them relevant? Is there a place for them?" (AND/CCDC, 19).

Working from the concerns expressed by the community and the findings and recommendations from phase one of the planning process, this report addresses the issue of attracting multi-generational groups to Japantown, specifically young adults. At one of the task force committee meetings, it was mentioned that "there is not enough here [Japantown] to draw young adults and youth" (AND/CCDC, appendix 5, 4). Often times, attention is given to children, youth, parents, and the elderly. Young adults in the age group of 18 to 30, not belonging strictly to any of the traditional age groups, are often overlooked. This report will address this age group as its own special interest group with its own perspective.

The main goal of the report will be to inform the task force, consultants,



The Japantown planning boundary is bounded by Pine and O'Farrell to the North and South, and Fillmore and Octavia to the West and East.

businesses, and the broader Japantown community about who are young adults, where do they go for their social gatherings with friends, and what are the implications for Japantown.

The term “young adults” has different meaning for different people. The report begins by defining young adults -- their demographics, attitudes, and preferences.

The second part of the report examines Japantown currently as a gathering place for young adults – what is there for them and why do they go? This section summarizes the concerns raised in focus group discussions, and community and task force meetings. In addition, interviews were conducted with Japanese and Asian American young adults to get their perspectives; and behavioral observations were done in Japantown to gain a better understanding of what young adults currently do there.

The third part of the report explores the characteristics of places that young adults in their twenties find inviting as gathering places. In asking those interviewed about Japantown, I also asked them about places they often go when spending time with friends. The Yerba Buena Gardens and the Sony Metreon, North Beach, Haight-Ashbury, Fourth Street in Berkeley, and the Mission District were five places frequently mentioned. Observations were made in these places to determine the qualities that make these places inviting. What types of activities are young adults engaged in, and how do the design and programming of these places support those activities?

I have identified eight characteristics that these five places

share which contribute to the experience of being there and “hanging out” there with friends.

Drawing from all parts of the research, and using the eight characteristics as a new framework for looking at Japantown, the last part of the report focuses on applications for Japantown. The applications are concerned with strengthening places that attract young adults and enhancing places that could contribute to their experience in Japantown.