



日本町の経済発展・計画・保存

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING & PRESERVATION OF JAPANTOWN

**NOTES FROM THE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE MEETING
OF THE JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE**

1765 SUTTER STREET (ONLINE VIA ZOOM)

MONDAY, AUGUST 3, 2020

BOARD MEMBER PRESENT:

Rosalyn Tonai, Jeremy Chan, Alice Kawahatsu, David Takashima, Lucy Fisher, Sandy Mori, Elena Nielsen, Benh Nakajo, Glynis Nakahara

STAFF PRESENT:

Steve Nakajo, Lori Yamauchi, Mark Izu

OTHERS PRESENT:

Yuki Nishimura, Karen Kai

The meeting began at 6:00 p.m.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

REPORT FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Steve reported that the Japantown Cultural District, along with SOMA Pilipinas, is ahead compared to some of the other districts. JTF previously was funded by OEWD, and now receives cultural district funding. The supervisors looked at JCHESS favorably as an accomplished document. What distinguishes The Japantown Cultural District from others is that the Japantown Cultural District is managed by JTF, an established 501c3, whereas other cultural districts do not have the same institutions.

The districts will be checking in on August 5 later this week. These meetings have not been held regularly.

Back in July, the department met with the districts and confirmed that the baseline funding of \$200k is still intact. At that time, they were asked to submit an RFP / proposal for that funding.

Steve also discussed the greater marketing committee, which is housed in JCBD but is still developing.

He said the CHHESS report was written from the different focus groups and other information sources, and that both the final and supplemental reports are valuable and should be equally viewed as blueprints. He also stated that everything in the report is flexible and adjustable.

With respect to the impact of Covid, he said that Japantown is facing a similar crisis to other neighborhoods, and that some small businesses and nonprofits may not be able to survive.

Sandy stated that the JCBD staff may need more time to produce the report, and will not be due at the end of August. She also noted that more people seem to be paying attention to the CHHESS report now as it's becoming a final document, when perhaps they didn't attend the focus groups.

DISCUSSION OF FINAL CHHESS DRAFT

David spoke about how he was concerned about the impact of Covid on cultural businesses. Lucy highlighted the JCBD (Steve clarified that this is actually organized by the Japan Center Malls) survey of mall tenants (with 41 respondents), which discussed how 18 businesses were receiving no income, and 21 had laid off / furloughed employees.

Sandy discussed that the CHHESS Report includes phrases that are unfamiliar to her, and wondered if they came from focus groups she was not present at.

David spoke about his discomfort with the white supremacist description, which Lori said would be removed.

Lucy noted the Japantown community exhibits rigidity or resistance to change.

Sandy commented that the tone of the document is very negative, and that the wording should be revised. Ros noted that it paints a very bleak picture of Japantown. Without a positive glimmer of hope, you can't highlight how to create a better future.

Ros noted that there are several inconsistencies and misrepresentations in the history part, and offered to go through it and highlight specific points (ex. mentioning JAN workshop, Nihonmachi Street Fair, etc.)

Ros thought that the community development portion in the supplemental was well written, and language from that should be incorporated into the final report. She viewed the regenerative resilient futures section as an individual viewpoint on sustainable / eco culture. It could be an overarching theme or an introductory statement, but shouldn't stand alone. The report should focus on the 6 categories given by the city. Ros said JTF should focus on the city planning stuff as opposed to programming, cultural development, and marketing

Sandy also notes that the section leaves out the creation of CBOs and the Asian American movement.

Sandy said the current timeline is not realistic, and that a timeline should not be included.

Glynis commented that at the youth focus groups included excitement around an eco-district and sustainability. She thinks that these concepts shouldn't be excluded, but should be discussed in a more balanced way. She also suggested that resiliency should be a separate category, particularly with respect to Covid. Sustainability and environmental stewardship is already embedded into other things, but resiliency is where the City is starting to discuss now, particularly with respect to Covid-19. Sandy noted that historically, the Japanese American community is resilient. Sandy said to incorporate younger viewpoints and present it alongside historical information.

Glynis looked at Sustainable Little Tokyo, and noted that the sustainability / environmental piece is part of a larger master plan with respect to urban planning. Environmental issues can and should definitely be included, but it's currently being presented as "the tail wagging the dog." It doesn't need to be the guiding principle of the document.

Lucy commented that there are statements made without evidence or data to back them up. She

would like to see more of that; otherwise it comes across as an opinion.

Jeremy commented that the “Regenerative Japantown” section presents very real challenges that Japantown and the JA community has faced for a while, including the challenges of how does Japantown and the JA community be more inclusive to Japanese speaking / shin Nikkei folks, multiethnic Japanese Americans, and younger generations, as well as how Japantown can create meaningful leadership opportunities and a leadership pipeline for younger generations. However, he thought that there was a logical leap to present the creation of an eco-district as a solution to those challenges.

Elena commented that at the focus groups, people have presented their real and raw opinions about Japantown and the JA community, which is reflected in this document. Right now the document seems to be focused on containing everyone’s feedback, as opposed to presenting it in a way that’s useful towards implementing future projects.

Glynis commented that doing a simple survey would be helpful to confirm the integrity of the process / document and provide some of that backing data.

Lori asked if it would be helpful for the committees and the board to see the notes from the focus groups. Jeremy discussed that Glynis has suggested for a while that the focus group data be quantified in some way. Jeremy previously suggested to Nina to create a simple word map using the focus group notes to highlight which topics were most frequently discussed. The focus group notes should also be included as an appendix at the end of the supplemental report.

Lucy commented that noting if a topic was discussed across several focus groups would help give the document some heft.

Glynis commented that not all focus groups were well attended; Alice noted that the Economic Development focus group only had about 8 people attend. Lucy said knowing that information is helpful to give the document context.

Glynis noted that the JCD team was struggling to reach the merchants; if we have more time, perhaps we can do more outreach with the merchants. Lucy highlighted that Covid has particularly impacted the merchant community, which makes their opinions particularly valuable.

Lori commented that the Supplemental report had a laundry list of strategies, and the City recommended that the districts focus on fewer strategies. She condensed it to fewer strategies, and discussed the specific action items as “tactics.” If something doesn’t belong, it should be taken out.

Lucy said that developing a Japantown master vision plan is not a tactic it’s a broader longterm strategy. Lori noted that it was in the JCHES before as a strategy.

Lucy noted that at the town hall meeting, none of the respondents discussed the master plan because they didn’t know what it was.

Jeremy discussed that a master plan is an urban planning document to plan a neighborhood with respect to public use, streetscape, zoning, etc., and that the CHHES report should perhaps have more context / a clearer definition to explain this term to lay people.

Ros commented that the visitor kiosk project in the malls should be reevaluated in light of Covid-19. The needs of the community have changed since the kiosk project has started. Glynis commented that for large projects, we should take more time to study the feasibility of the project.

She said that even on Executive Committee, the discussion that it was a \$20k expense was new to her.

Sandy commented that we are a policy making board. It's the role of staff to implement those policies. What came first in this case is the idea, as opposed to the policy. Staff went ahead and created a project without the board policy set.

Steve provided some context about the kiosk project, which started under Bob Hamaguchi when he was Executive Director of JTF. He said that he was looking into moving into a suite or a room (such as the East Mall), but that it wasn't feasible. They were going to cancel the project until the discussions with Daniel Barron occurred. It's possible that the discussions may change again due to Covid.

Steve noted that it was hard to organize the merchants, but that they can try again.

Ros noted that both JTF and NJAHS had received money from the Japantown Foundation, and Ros and Bob had discussed working together to pool that money together to create a wayfinding station. Ros also discussed that the committees are in need of additional staff support as well.

Steve also noted that it's important to have young staff to provide their voice and create a succession plan for the community.

David commented that a visitor center is more limiting, and would rather strengthen online media platforms (websites, social media, etc.) to attract people to come to Japantown.

Karen expressed her concern about "placeholders." If JTF is already at the point of negotiating contracts with 3D Investments and Kinmon Gakuen, then it seems too late to pivot and step back from these projects. Steve clarified that with Kinmon Gakuen, a presentation of utilization was made, and that with 3D Investments, they've had verbal discussions. Both projects can be walked away from, specifically if there is a directive from the board.

Mark noted that arts communities are struggling due to Covid, and that they don't have any long-term solutions.

Lucy asked about the impact of the CHHESS document and what the cultural district will be held to. Steve clarified that the Cultural District will be tasked with implementing the report. That will include assessing the feasibility of the different tactics in the report.

David encouraged everyone to continue reading the CHHESS report and provide comments to Nina and other staff. He noted that the tone and the philosophy of the report are somewhat questionable.

Ros noted how much JTF has accomplished over the year. Sandy noted that it should be commended how much further ahead Japantown (alongside SOMA) are ahead of the other districts.

Glynis asked and Steve clarified that the JCD team is now looking at September or October to submit the report. Steve also noted that JCD is sharing resources with the other cultural districts.

Elena commented that the sustainability discussion has activated a group of young Japanese Americans that hasn't otherwise been involved in Japantown, and cautioned about the impact of

reducing that section. Lucy said that Elena's comment legitimized the whole section, and that it should be included in the report. Lucy noted that the topic should be discussed in a way that people who don't know the background / context understand. Glynis echoed that the youth focus group had a lot of excitement and discussion around this topic.

Alice added that others (non young people) are also concerned about the environment in Japantown and resource conservation, and that this is a particularly important topic because of Covid.

NEW BUSINESS:

TOPIC 1

David announced that next month, the committee will discuss the nomination of Rosalyn Tonai to the committee.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The meeting adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

The next meeting will be at 6:00 p.m., XX, YY, 2020 at the JAACL HQ.