



**JAPANTOWN**  
**BETTER NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN**

**DRAFT FOR PUBLIC REVIEW MAY 2009** SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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# JAPANTOWN

## BETTER NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN



**DRAFT FOR PUBLIC REVIEW MAY 2009**  
SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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# Introduction

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<http://www.flickr.com/photos/tebestar/701329201>

## IN THIS CHAPTER

- 1.1 The Vision for Japantown**
- 1.2 Goals and Supporting Objectives**
- 1.3 The Planning Process**
- 1.4 The Plan Area Boundary**
- 1.5 Neighborhood Context and Key Recommendations**

## 1.1 The Vision for Japantown

The Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan (BNP) sets forth a 20-year vision for the community and neighborhood. As the City continues to change, and development pressures and the cost of living increase, the City's leaders realize that it is critical that the cultural character and resources that make Japantown special be identified, maintained and enhanced.

Japantown has been the cultural heart of the Japanese American community in San Francisco for over a century, serving a role that is unique to the city, region and country. The area known as Japantown today is considerably smaller than the neighborhood's previous

boundaries; future preservation cannot be taken for granted. As one of three Japantowns remaining in the country, the area's cultural and historical resources are widely appreciated and play a significant role in the history of San Francisco and the region at large. Situated in the middle of the city, between downtown and the City's western neighborhoods on the major transit corridor of Geary Boulevard, Japantown attracts people from all over the Bay Area to participate in community events, watch cultural performances, conduct business, shop and receive services. Japanese and Japanese Americans throughout the Bay Area depend on San Francisco's Japantown as the focal point for community gatherings.

Much of what makes Japantown a culturally-rich and recognizable place are the businesses and community-based organizations that are clustered around Post, Buchanan and Sutter streets. A unique mix of businesses offers Japanese, Japanese American, Korean and other culturally specific services, wares and food products that can be found in few other places in the United States, while cultural and community institutions continue to draw people from around the Bay Area on a daily basis. The organizations serve a spectrum of ages from young to old, ranging from nutritional services, childcare and teen programs, Japanese cultural arts performances and instruction (including flower arranging, calligraphy, bonsai, tea ceremonies, dance, and taiko drumming), Japanese language and martial arts schools and community-based long-term care services.

Major transportation improvements, new development and land use changes are already proposed and being considered for Japantown (all described in further detail in this Plan); these investments must be leveraged sensitively to strengthen Japantown’s cultural, commercial and social role and to help the community thrive. There is now a great opportunity to transform the often-negative results of previous changes to the neighborhood’s physical fabric into “people-oriented” streets, plazas and parks.

In keeping with the policies set forth in San Francisco’s General Plan, this Plan establishes goals to secure the future of Japantown, reviews the neighborhood’s existing resources, needs and challenges and outlines recommendations and strategies that will help the Japantown community achieve this vision over the next 20 years.

**THE VISION STATEMENT**

By honoring Japantown’s rich history, retaining and enhancing its resources and securing its future as the heart of the Japanese and Japanese American communities with increased housing opportunities, public realm improvements and economic and community development, Japantown will continue to thrive as a culturally rich, unique and vibrant neighborhood.

**THE BETTER NEIGHBORHOODS PROGRAM**

In 2002, the San Francisco Planning Department initiated the Better Neighborhoods Program to embrace the benefits of change that San Francisco neighborhoods are facing and to build more balanced and livable places in San Francisco. The program is two-tiered. Citywide, it aims to encourage housing where it makes sense and to strengthen neighborhoods. Locally, the program uses intensive community-based planning to refine citywide goals to the needs of the neighborhood. All of the better neighborhood plans address eight elements of a great neighborhood:

**Walk to Shops**

A great neighborhood has everyday stores and services within an easy walk from home.

**Get Around Easily**

A great neighborhood has many ways to get around.

**Housing Choices**

A great neighborhood has a variety of housing types.

**Gathering Places**

A great neighborhood has places for people to meet and talk.

**City Services**

A great neighborhood has a full range of public services for residents.

**Special Character**

A great neighborhood has its own character.

**Part of the Whole**

Great neighborhoods make great cities.



## 1.2 Goals and Supporting Objectives

Four overarching goals were developed with the community to achieve the vision for Japantown and guide this planning effort. Building on the goals that were determined during the community-based planning process which resulted in the Japantown Community Plan in 2000, these goals were reviewed and revised by the Plan’s Steering Committee and the public throughout the planning process.

The goals of the Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan (BNP) are to secure Japantown’s future as:

- The Historical and Cultural Heart of the Japanese and Japanese American Community
- A Thriving Commercial and Retail District
- A Home to Residents and Community-Based Institutions
- A Physically Attractive and Vibrant Environment

Because the four overarching goals are broad, they require a set of objectives to help define and clarify their intent. Each goal and set of objectives sets forth the direction of this Plan. All of the Plan’s strategies and recommendations outlined in the following chapters aim to reach these goals and adhere to these objectives.

<p><b>GOAL 1</b></p> <p><b>SECURE JAPANTOWN’S FUTURE AS THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HEART OF JAPANESE AND JAPANESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promote Japantown’s value and history.</li> <li>▪ Promote a sense of Japan, in addition to the Japanese American culture.</li> <li>▪ Enhance historic and cultural landmarks.</li> <li>▪ Safeguard community-based institutions.</li> <li>▪ Promote events that attract youth and families (to live, visit, and shop).</li> <li>▪ Serve as the hub for the Japanese community in the region.</li> </ul>	<p><b>GOAL 2</b></p> <p><b>SECURE JAPANTOWN’S FUTURE AS A THRIVING COMMERCIAL AND RETAIL DISTRICT.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Preserve Japantown’s livelihood, existing local and historic businesses.</li> <li>▪ Encourage business development for new companies that reflect Japantown.</li> <li>▪ Provide retail/restaurants that cater to youth, families, neighbors and tourists.</li> <li>▪ Provide consistent sidewalk and public space maintenance.</li> <li>▪ Generate demand outside of the immediate area.</li> </ul>	<p><b>GOAL 3</b></p> <p><b>SECURE JAPANTOWN’S FUTURE AS A HOME TO RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITY-BASED INSTITUTIONS.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide more mixed-income housing, especially for families and seniors.</li> <li>▪ Provide economic support for community-based, non-profit organizations.</li> <li>▪ Improve public space and parks.</li> <li>▪ Maintain a livable neighborhood that reflects San Francisco’s diversity.</li> </ul>	<p><b>GOAL 4</b></p> <p><b>SECURE JAPANTOWN’S FUTURE AS A PHYSICALLY ATTRACTIVE AND VIBRANT ENVIRONMENT.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enhance the Japanese character.</li> <li>▪ Increase the sense of safety.</li> <li>▪ Improve the appearance and cleanliness.</li> <li>▪ Reestablish pedestrian connections, social interaction and commerce between the neighborhoods on either side of Geary Boulevard.</li> <li>▪ Provide quality recreational opportunities.</li> <li>▪ Provide spaces that cater to youth and families.</li> <li>▪ Strive to utilize sustainable technology and materials.</li> </ul>
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### 1.3 The Planning Process

#### *The Plan's Initiation*

In March 2007, Mayor Newsom, Supervisor Mirkarimi and the San Francisco Planning Department initiated the Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan (the Plan) at a town hall community meeting. The Plan was initiated to address imminent new development in Japantown; provide support for existing community-based organizations and locally-owned businesses; improve the neighborhood's circulation, streetscape, open spaces, and connections across Geary Boulevard to the Fillmore District; and preserve the special character, culture and history of the neighborhood. The Plan's timing responded to three major changes affecting the neighborhood:

- The sale of five properties in the heart of Japantown, including the two major hotels, two of the malls comprising Japan Center, and the Kabuki Theater (now Kabuki-Sundance).
- The Geary Corridor Bus Rapid Transit project which will dramatically change the character of Geary Boulevard by improving transit service, neighborhood connectivity and the pedestrian experience along the street.
- The sunseting of the Redevelopment Agency's Area A-2 at the end of 2008 shifted a large portion (approximately 11 blocks) of Japantown back into the general jurisdiction of the City.

Throughout the process, the Planning Department has worked closely with a community-based Steering Committee in an effort to include a diverse group of community stakeholders in the process and address the complex issues and opportunities in the neighborhood. The Planning Department also coordinated with

and received feedback from numerous city agencies, including the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, San Francisco County Transportation Authority, Recreation and Park Department, Mayor's Office of Housing, Mayor's Office of Community Investment and the Office of Economic and Workforce Development.

#### *The Steering Committee*

A 25-member Steering Committee was established and met monthly (and in some cases bi-weekly) for the duration of the planning process. Members represent community-based organizations, religious organizations, property owners (large and small), merchants, residents, seniors, parents of school-aged children, young adults, and visitors. The meetings were open to the public and were organized to provide stakeholders the opportunity to determine what should be prioritized in the Plan and give feedback on materials prior to larger community meetings.

#### *The Consultant Team*

To begin the planning process, the Planning Department hired Japantown Task Force to participate as a partner in the Plan. The Japantown Task Force is a community-based organization that was formed after the Concept Plan in 2001 in order to continue the planning and coordination work of the previous Japantown Planning, Preservation, and Development Task Force organization. The Task Force served as the Plan's public relations and outreach consultant, as well as active Steering Committee members.

In June 2007, the Planning Department selected a team of qualified consultants led by Page & Turnbull, Inc.. The team also included: cultural preservationist, Donna Graves; wayfinding specialist, TBA West; urban design-

ers, BMS Design Group; and transportation planners and engineers, Fehr & Peers. The Planning Department hired economists, Strategic Economics, to identify ways to support existing community-based organizations and local businesses and strategies to implement the improvements that emerge through this planning effort. Strategic Economics and Van Meter Williams Pollack studied the redesign of the Japan Center site.

In addition to the planning consultants listed above, the Planning Department, Supervisor Mirkarimi and the Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD) secured funds for a grant to hire a "community consultant" reporting directly to the Steering Committee, who was responsible for educating and informing the community about the repercussions and benefits of the planning analysis and recommendations generated throughout the planning process. The Steering Committee selected Town Consulting to serve this role. See Figure 1.1 to see the relationships between the Planning Department, the community and consultants.

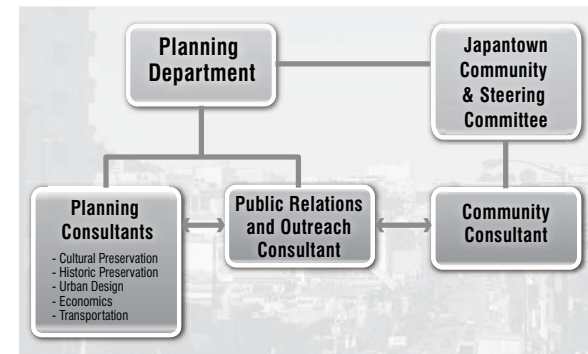


Figure 1.1  
Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan Project Team

Previous Planning Efforts

The Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan builds on numerous previous planning efforts:

- **Fillmore Jazz Preservation District Plan:** The San Francisco Redevelopment Agency established the Fillmore Jazz Preservation Plan (“The Jazz District”) in 1994 to revitalize the Fillmore commercial corridor. The Jazz District Plan has made efforts to bolster the area’s history as the heart of the Jazz community and attract and retain businesses in the area. To date, the Jazz District has included maintenance and improvement efforts, business assistance and loans, city-wide promotions, and the formation of a Citizen’s Advisory Committee.
- **Japantown Community Planning Process Status Report:** The Japantown Planning, Preservation, and Development Task Force worked with Asian Neighborhood Design and Chinatown Community Development Center to draft a status report for the Redevelopment Agency in 1999.
- **Japantown Community Plan:** In 2000, the Japantown Planning, Preservation, and Development Task Force (predecessor to the Japantown Task Force) worked with a team of planning consultants to prepare a community plan for Japantown, focusing on urban design improvements and economic development strategies.
- **Senate Bill 307 Neighborhood Cultural Preservation Report for San Francisco’s Japantown:** In February 2005, the Japantown Task Force engaged in a pilot study funded by California State Senate Bill 307 to define cultural preservation for the neighborhood and identify the area’s cultural resources in efforts to establish a long-term plan for preservation and development of Japantown’s cultural heritage.
- **Japantown Neighborhood Pedestrian Safety & Traffic Community Plan:** In 2006, the Japantown

Task Force followed up on the Japantown Community Plan to look more closely at the area’s safety and traffic issues and to ensure that they are addressed in pipeline projects and future planning efforts.

The Planning Process Timeline

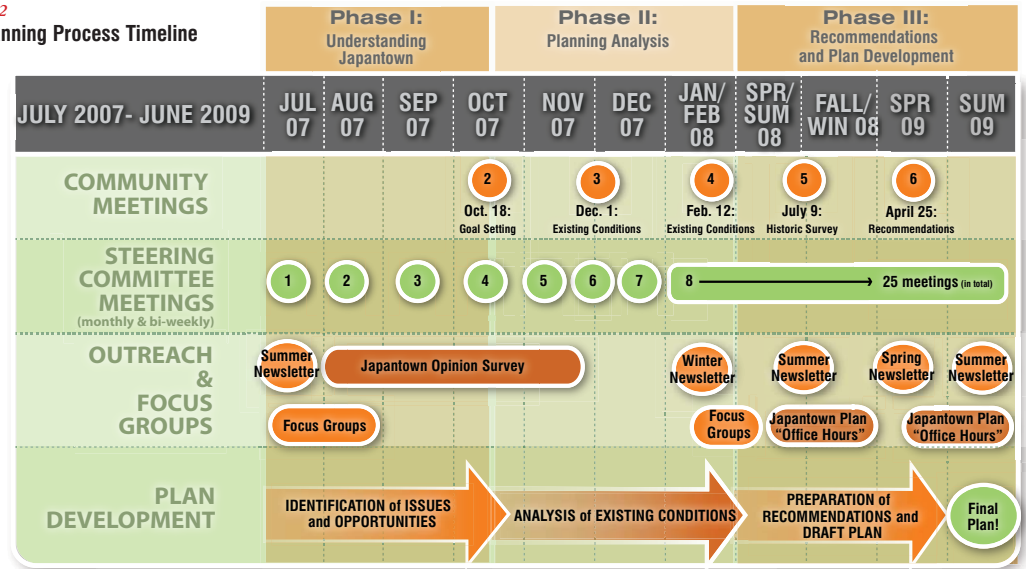
The Plan’s project schedule was organized into three phases (See Figure 1.2 below). Each phase involved community outreach and input in various forms and is described in detail in the following sections.

Phase I

The first phase of the planning process was aimed at understanding Japantown, including the findings of previous planning processes and the community’s opinion of what opportunities and constraints the neighborhood faces. The Planning Department

held fourteen focus groups with various constituent groups in English, Japanese and Korean to hear from stakeholders. Meeting notices were posted throughout the neighborhood, press releases were issued in various Japantown and Fillmore newspapers, and a newsletter was sent out periodically. In addition, the Steering Committee worked with the Planning Department to create an online opinion survey (in English and Japanese) which allowed people to weigh in on what they value about Japantown and what improvements are needed. The surveys were also made available in various community organizations around the neighborhood for four months. Over 600 surveys were returned; 200 of them were in Japanese (*see Appendix A: Japantown Opinion Survey Summary*). At the end of this initial fact-finding phase, the Planning Department held a townhall community meeting to verify the community’s goals and invited the participants to rate their priorities.

Figure 1.2  
The Planning Process Timeline



### Phase II

The second phase of the BNP planning process was geared towards conducting a planning analysis. Taking the feedback from the outreach in phase I, the planning team reviewed the existing economic and physical conditions to provide a sound basis for the Plan's recommendations. Instrumental to this phase were two interactive townhall community meetings (December 1, 2007 and February 12, 2008) where participants were encouraged to provide feedback on all the preliminary findings and development proposals. Participants at the later of the two workshops were organized in small groups to give each person an opportunity to show exactly where they think improvements to Japantown's physical environment should be located. The input from this phase helped staff and the Steering Committee develop Plan concepts and draft strategies.

### Phase III

The final phase of the planning process focused on developing the recommendations and draft Plan. This phase kicked off with another set of focus groups organized around each subject matter. Over 200 participants joined small group discussions about the various aspects of the Plan. Two townhall community meetings were held to provide updates on the Plan's process, preliminary recommendations and revised recommendations to be part of the draft Plan (July 9, 2008 and April 25, 2009). This phase will be completed after several hearings and endorsement at the Planning Commission.

### The Next Steps

Following endorsement, the Planning Department will pursue commitment from the City at the Board of Supervisors to ensure initial steps can begin towards implementation (see Chapter 9).



Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi (above) and Mayor Gavin Newsom (right) encourage community involvement in the Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan at the kick-off townhall meeting in March 2007.



The Plan's endorsement will be followed by four important steps before it can be officially adopted as part of San Francisco's General Plan:

1. The Environmental Impact Review (EIR) will be drafted, reviewed by the public and certified.
2. Coordination meetings will be held with other City agencies for review of EIR and Plan implementation.
3. New zoning controls will be drafted by the Planning Department and reviewed by the Planning Commission and the public.
4. Developer agreements will be made to ensure the community benefits outlined in the Plan are received.

Planning staff will continue to include the Steering Committee, working groups and the public at large as these components of the Plan are drafted and finalized.



A packed house comes together to rate priorities for neighborhood improvements in October 2007.

### 1.4 The Plan Area Boundary

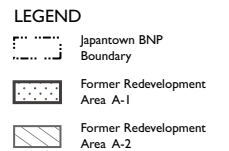
Japantown as we know it today is located just north of Geary Boulevard, with the Fillmore District to the west, Western Addition to the south, and Cathedral Hill to the east. However, prior to World War II, the Japantown neighborhood is said to have stretched east to west from Van Ness Avenue to Presidio Avenue and north to south from California Street to Turk Street. After urban renewal, Japantown’s boundaries got even smaller (described in Chapter 2).

The appropriate boundary for study within the context of this Plan was debated and discussed throughout the planning process. While the majority of the Plan’s recommendations focus on the heart of the neighborhood bounded by Geary, Fillmore, Sutter and Laguna, the BNP boundary comprises over 20 blocks that once made up historical Japantown. To honor the numerous cultural and historic resources of the community, the area is bounded by Steiner, California, Gough, and O’Farrell streets. (See Figure 1.3: Plan Boundary).

A number of significant community resources are adjacent to the Plan’s boundaries, including Rosa Parks Elementary School, Gateway High School, Hamilton Recreation Center and Library, and Raymond Kimball Playground. Improvements to better utilize and connect the core of Japantown to these resources are addressed in this Plan.



Figure 1.3  
Plan Boundary



## 1.5 Neighborhood Context and Key Recommendations

The BNP assesses and provides direction for all aspects of Japantown, including: land use, built form, public realm, circulation, businesses and community organizations and historic and cultural resources. To do this, a comprehensive understanding of how Japantown has become the neighborhood it is today is necessary.

The following sections summarize Japantown's important characteristics and provide a snapshot of the Plan's recommendations; each of these characteristics have influenced the neighborhood over the past generations, are interrelated, and will continue to play a role in the future of Japantown.

### Community Heritage

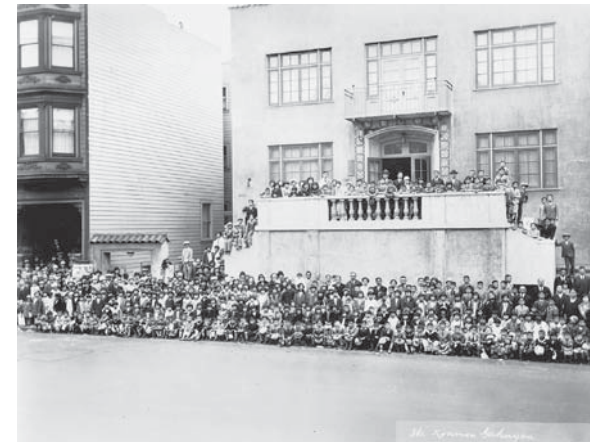
Japantown has a rich and varied history. The historic and cultural development of San Francisco's Japantown, a significant Nikkei<sup>1</sup> community and neighborhood, overlaid on a neighborhood also home to European, Jewish and Filipino immigrants, has resulted in a district full of historical and cultural properties.

Japantown came to be after the earthquake and fires of 1906, when San Francisco's Japanese population relocated to the relatively unscathed area of the city. By the 1920s and 1930s, with the growing influence and resource base of several established Japanese institutions, the area thrived as a home to Nikkei. Unfortunately, at the time of the United States' entry into World War II, the U.S. government ordered the internment of nearly

all persons of Japanese ancestry. During the war, the demographics and density of the area dramatically shifted; the Japanese American community was interned while an influx of immigrants and African Americans from the South arrived to work in the war-related industries. The new demographics brought more commerce and the Jazz scene that made the Fillmore district famous. After the war, those that returned found a different neighborhood with a housing shortage.

By the early 1960s, the Redevelopment Agency identified the area as blighted as part of its urban renewal program (a federal program which intended to improve urban areas, but is widely considered to have made a devastating impact on historic neighborhoods). Many properties within Japantown and the Fillmore were identified for redevelopment in two areas: Western Addition Area A-1 and Area A-2. In Japantown, redevelopment resulted in razing a five-acre, three square-block section of the core neighborhood, which displaced more residents and businesses. A master plan for the four-block area bounded by Bush, Webster, Laguna and Post streets (known as Japan Center) was developed (Chapter 2: Community Heritage and Chapter 6: Public Realm describe the impacts of redevelopment in more detail).

In effort to enhance Japantown's rich cultural, social and architectural history, an important recommendation of this Plan is for the community to seek designation as a National Heritage Area, which can help preserve and promote Japantown's resources. In addition, Japantown-Specific Design Guidelines have been drafted to help new development be compatible.



The Japanese Language School, Kinmon Gakuen (top) and the Uoki Sakai business (above), both of which are still in operation today, are just two examples of the neighborhood's deep roots.

<sup>1</sup> Nikkei refers to people of Japanese ancestry.



Kimochi Senior Services (above) and Kokoro Assisted Living Center (right) are examples of Japantown's long-standing non-profits that provide much needed community services..

### *Community and Economic Development*

Though many of Japantown's community-based organizations and businesses are thriving and attract clientele from around the Bay Area, there is an opportunity to create coordinated support strategies to improve business stability and ensure the longevity of established community-based non-profits so they can continue to serve local and regional patrons. These strategies include consolidating resources of community-based

organizations, building partnerships to attain new resources, increasing regional marketing, and forming a Community Benefit District that will provide an ongoing revenue source for improved maintenance, promotion and marketing for the neighborhood. The Plan addresses new development and existing revenue streams that can be leveraged to provide prioritized important community benefits and provide ongoing

economic development. To ensure that these efforts can move forward, the Plan's main recommendation is to identify a community-based Implementation Organization that is representative of the breadth of Japantown's stakeholders and can implement the Plan's recommendations.

### *Land Use and Built Form*

Japantown has a range of land uses and architectural styles that reflect the neighborhood's history and the community's adaptation to major government-driven initiatives. The heart of Japantown is comprised of the three mall buildings, Osaka Way (informally referred to as Buchanan Mall), and Post Street, all of which were shaped by redevelopment.

#### **Commercial and Office**

Locally-owned, family-run restaurants, retail stores, and service providers in Japan Center, Buchanan Mall, and along Post and Sutter Streets make up Japantown's commercial district. They serve the local community, as well as provide a regional draw for consumers of Japanese and pan-Asian specialties. A number of recent development and renovation projects along Post Street have begun to boost the neighborhood commercial district. The anticipated redesign of two of the Japan Center malls has the potential to further strengthen the physical environment and commercial activity by opening outward onto Post and Webster streets and Geary Boulevard. Changes to land use and height controls can help enhance and maintain the existing unique blend of retailers and community-oriented service providers and integrate more opportunities for housing.

Fillmore Street is another neighborhood commercial street which serves the Fillmore District, south of Geary, and the Upper Fillmore area, to the north. It offers a mix of small retail stores and restaurants, with a more eclectic blend of goods. It is somewhat disconnected from the commercial activity along Post Street because the block of Post between Fillmore and Webster street is almost completely devoid of storefronts on the north and limited to three storefronts on the south. This Plan recommends streetscape and wayfinding improvements to enhance this stretch of Post Street to link these two important commercial districts.

#### **Residential**

The existing residential property takes many forms: single-family homes (mostly north of Bush Street); low- to mid-rise apartment buildings (sprinkled throughout the Plan boundary) and a few residential towers (concentrated along the Geary corridor and south of Sutter Street). Some of the area's Italianate Victorians remain, though much of the residential architecture reflects the modernist style of redevelopment in the 1960s and 1970s. Community feedback throughout the process has repeatedly expressed the desire for more moderate to affordable housing, in particular for families, seniors, and displaced Japanese American families (resulting from the redevelopment effort). New housing should

be accommodated by reverting some of the single-use structures back into mixed-use structures with commercial and/or office at the ground level and residential above. Large parcels flanking Geary Boulevard (a major transit corridor) offer opportunities for new housing development.

#### **Institutional**

Japantown is home to a significant number of non-profit organizations, in the form of churches and youth and elder service providers. These organizations serve local residents, as well as regional residents, and are integral to maintaining the Japanese American character of the neighborhood. For the most part they are housed within pre-redevelopment historic buildings or two-story structures that were constructed post-redevelopment. Updates to land use controls will be necessary to ensure that they are allowed and encouraged in the future





The north side of Post Street (left) is lined with locally owned shops and restaurants.



Looking east on Sutter Street gives a glimpse of the range of housing types in the neighborhood: Victorians (foreground), mid- and high-rise apartment buildings in the background (Hinode Tower (left) and The Sequoias (right)).



Local artist, Ruth Asawa, designed fountains which bring life to Buchanan Mall.



The Peace Pagoda, gifted from San Francisco's sister city of Osaka, Japan in the 1960s is considered an icon of Japantown, but according to the opinion survey many feel its not a good representation of Japanese architecture that Japantown should emulate.

### *Public Realm*

Japantown is in need of an improved public realm that celebrates the neighborhood's rich historic and cultural character and provides better connections to other neighborhoods. Two already well-used open spaces in the heart of Japantown's public realm—Peace Plaza and Buchanan Mall—should be enhanced to meet the community's needs for usable public space and activate the spaces with lighting, landscaping, informational kiosks, vendors, weekend markets, and outdoor dining/seating opportunities. A new linear park along Webster Street could provide the community a much needed play space for children and more opportunities for gathering. In addition, the streetscape of the entire neighborhood should be improved to strengthen the sense of place and make it more people-friendly.

Today, Japantown's abundant resources can be easily overlooked by visitors. The community and city as a whole can benefit from Japantown's identity enhancement. Better signage and wayfinding can improve Japantown's visibility, as well as enhance everyone's understanding of the area's historical and cultural sites and resources.

### *Transportation and Circulation*

The neighborhood as a whole has numerous pedestrian conflicts, including street widths, insufficient cross times, poor signage, and disregard of pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular rules of conduct.

Webster Street and Geary Boulevard, two of the major streets in Japantown, were doubled in width in the 1960s as part of redevelopment. Both streets serve vehicular traffic well, but their streetscape does little to

support pedestrian activity or neighborhood connectivity. Webster Street was intended to be widened as far north as Lombard Street to serve as one of the City's north-south corridors connecting to the Golden Gate Bridge; however the widening did not extend beyond Bush Street. The area that is widened to four lanes has more than enough roadway for the amount of traffic it serves. It is one of the neighborhood's more difficult streets to cross and divides Japantown's more active public areas to the east from Fillmore Street. The Plan proposes to reuse the excess lanes for new neighborhood-serving open space.

Even more noticeable, Geary Boulevard's width and tunnel creates a significant barrier between Japantown and the Fillmore District, making it a hazard to cross; the Boulevard ranges between 6-8 travel lanes and serves as a major transit corridor between the City's western neighborhoods and the city center. Prior to its widening, Geary had a streetcar that served the Fillmore District, Japantown and the Richmond; there was no physical divide between the neighborhoods. This Plan is coordinated with the Geary Corridor Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project underway, which aims to improve the Boulevard's overall character, transit service, lane configuration, intersection design, sidewalk widths, and overall walkability. Together the two plans will address how Geary can be improved to lessen the divide between the two neighborhoods and increase the feeling of comfort and safety along the Boulevard.

All of these topics are interrelated and define Japantown as we know it today. The following chapters address each topic in more detail, drawing on what makes Japantown special and how to maintain and enhance its strengths for generations to come.



The "Geary Divide" is the term many community members call Geary Boulevard (above). Crossing it can be difficult even at designated crosswalks. The extra wide section of Webster Street (right) that passes through Japantown can be reused as neighborhood open space.



RECOMMENDATIONS IN  
THIS CHAPTER:

## Community Heritage

- Establish a Community-Based Body to Guide Preservation Efforts
- Recognize Important Properties of the Japanese and Japanese American Communities
- Seek Recognition as a National Heritage Area
- Encourage the Use of California Historic Building Code
- Develop a Façade Easement Program
- Develop a Japantown Community Land Trust
- Update Land Use Controls to Secure Japantown's Future
- Build on Japantown's Unique Public Realm to Secure Japantown's Character
- Consider Other Preservation Strategies Upon Further Study