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Land Use

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4.1 Existing Land Use Patterns

Japantown is comprised of a mix of land uses, including purely residential blocks, blocks combining a mixture of residential, institutional and commercial uses, and blocks entirely made up of commercial uses. Japantown's mix of uses are not unlike other San Francisco neighborhoods, however much of Japantown has had a different set of land use controls established by the Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) for the past 40 years. Typically, the zones or districts that define and control the land uses in San Francisco are determined by the City's Planning Code. However, much of Japantown was designated as Redevelopment Areas A-1 and A-2 in the late 1950s (See Figure 4.1) and made the SFRA responsible for controlling land uses. As of January 2009, the last of the neighborhood's redevelopment areas expired and for the first time since urban renewal, all of the Japantown area falls within the City's jurisdic-

tion and adheres to the City's Planning Code. With this transition, the allowable land uses revert back to the underlying permitted land uses from the 1950s (determined prior to SFRA's jurisdiction). As a result, much of Japantown's land use controls are in need of updates to ensure that the neighborhood's established and desirable businesses, community facilities and housing are allowed and supported in the Planning Code.

In total, the Plan Area includes ten existing land use zones, most of which are residential, mixed residential or neighborhood commercial zones. Bush Street is a noticeable east-west division between residential zones to the north and mixed residential and commercial zones to the south. The following pages describe the neighborhood's existing land uses according to their relationship to Bush Street.



The Victorians (above) are located in an RH-2 zone and exemplify the type of fine-grained single- and two-family homes found in the RH-2 and RH-3 zones.



Small storefronts with housing on upper floors (as shown above) are typical in the Fillmore Neighborhood Commercial District.

North of Bush Street

The area north of Bush Street is primarily residential and is characterized by fine-grained, single- and two-family homes, typically not wider than 25 feet, and less than 40 feet in height. Aside from the blocks along Fillmore Street between Bush and California streets, the area has a residential character. It is zoned Residential (RH-2 and RH-3) and Residential Mixed (RM-1 and RM-2), with the exception of the parcels on both sides of Fillmore Street, which are part of the Upper Fillmore Neighborhood Commercial District (Fillmore NCD). Typically, residential zones are the most restrictive in terms of permitting commercial and other non-residential uses. Some moderately scaled apartment buildings, group housing and institutions are permitted in this area (See Figure 4.1: Existing Land Use and Zoning).

Residential Areas

The most restrictive zone in the Plan Area, RH-2, comprises 18% of the land within the Plan Area, and is only found north of Bush Street; RH-2 permits two dwelling units per parcel. A slightly less restrictive zone, RH-3, is applied to a small number of parcels (1% of the Plan Area); it is similar to RH-2, however it allows up to three residential units and is slightly more accommodating of non-residential uses. In comparison, the Residential Mixed districts (which comprise a total of 5% of the Plan Area) allow a wider mix of dwelling types and higher densities than RH districts (i.e. more apartment buildings), but they still maintain low densities compared many of the City's zoning districts. Nonresidential uses in the RH districts are intended to meet the needs of people outside the immediate area, in addition to residents.

Upper Fillmore Neighborhood Commercial District

On the western edge of the Plan Area along Fillmore Street, the residential character transitions into a Neighborhood Commercial District (NCD). The area north of Bush Street has its own character-defining district called the Upper Fillmore NCD District, which intends to preserve the local shopping character and activity during the day and night. While housing is still allowed and encouraged above the ground floor, the majority of uses are commercial. This district intends to meet both local shoppers' needs, as well as appealing to a wider shopping base. The Planning Code defines the land use controls and physical restrictions which are used to maintain the character as follows:

Building standards regulate large lot and use development and protect rear yards above the ground story and at residential levels. Most commercial uses are permitted at the first two stories of new buildings. Special controls are designed to preserve the existing equilibrium of neighborhood-serving convenience and specialty commercial uses... In order to promote continuous retail frontage, drive-up and most automobile uses are prohibited.

Currently, the Japantown Special Use District (described later in this chapter and depicted in Figure 4.1) serves to maintain the character of Japantown's commercial core. The Upper Fillmore Neighborhood Commercial District could be used as a guide for Japantown's neighborhood commercial district to ensure an "equilibrium of neighborhood-serving" uses, livability, and continuous retail activity is secured in Japantown's commercial core.

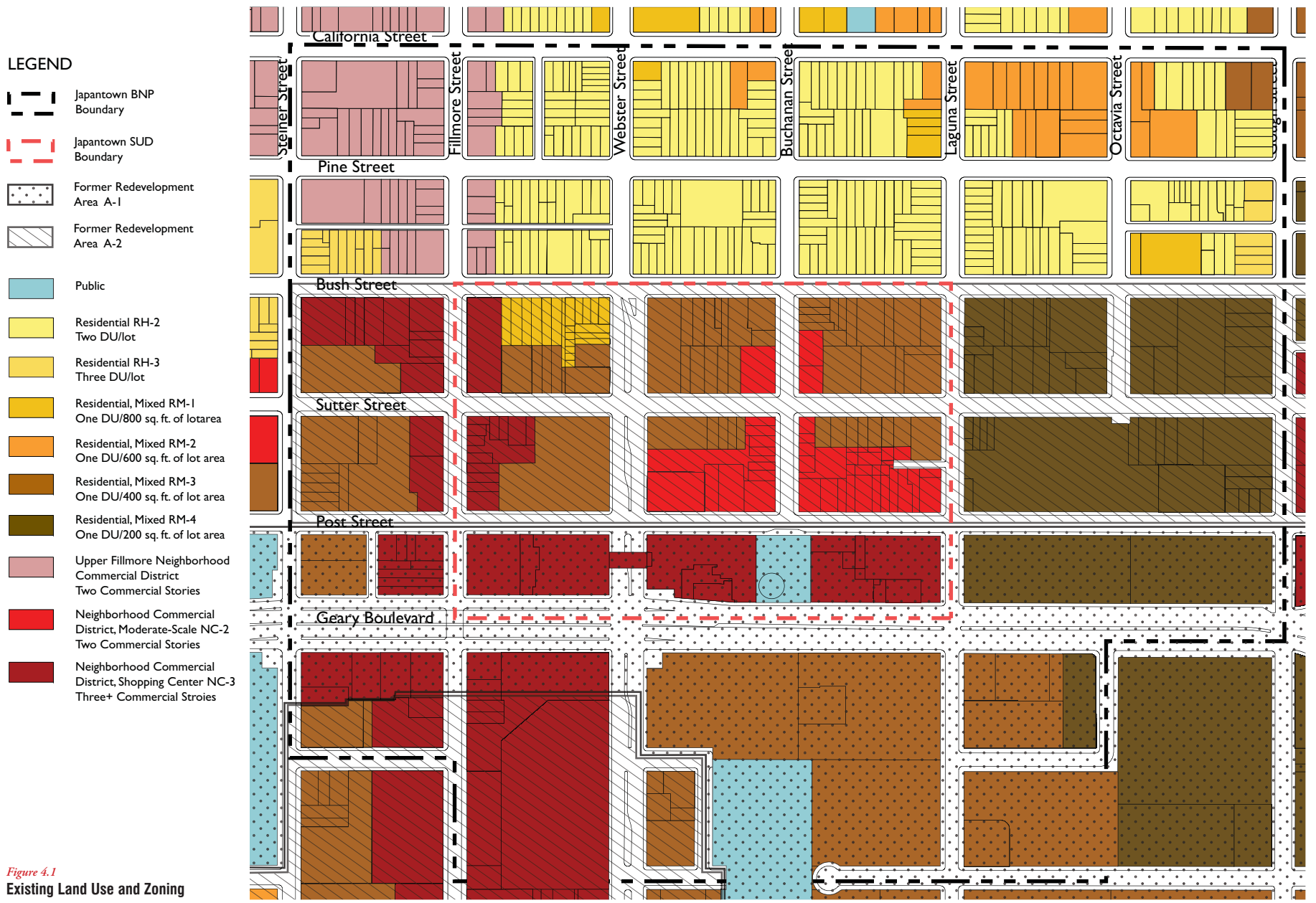


Figure 4.1 Existing Land Use and Zoning



South of Bush Street

In contrast to the area north of Bush Street, the rest of the Plan Area, encompassed in the blocks south of Bush Street to Ellis Street, have a broader mix of land uses and higher building densities. This area was most dramatically affected by Redevelopment Areas A-1 and A-2, which transformed the pattern of small 25-foot lots into large parcels with single owners and often one land use. The blocks between Bush and Sutter streets were not as significantly impacted by redevelopment and have a mix of parcel sizes. These blocks serve as the transition between the residential neighborhood character to the north and the blocks south of Sutter Street, which are made up of larger parcels, higher densities, and a mix of residential, commercial and institutional uses. The blocks between Post and Geary Boulevard serve as Japantown's commercial core.

Mixed Residential Areas

Almost all parcels south of Bush Street are zoned Residential Mixed (RM-3 and RM-4) or Neighborhood Commercial (NC-2 and NC-3). RM-3 and RM-4 are the medium to high density mixed residential zones, respectively; they allow more units per square foot; the buildings are taller and bulkier than in less intense zones. RM-3 is predominately comprised of buildings of six or more units. The area zoned RM-4, located entirely between Laguna and Gough streets, is higher density and is home to more senior housing facilities such as Kokoro Assisted Living Center, Kimochi Home, Nihonmachi Terrace Apartments, and The Sequoias.

However, these institutions and types of housing are not currently permitted within the existing zoning controls. RM districts do not permit commercial uses, and require special authorization¹ for group/senior housing



The mix of existing land uses in RM-4 is illustrated in this block of Sutter Street where two traditional single-family Victorians flank Kimochi Home, an assisted living center that is classified as institutional use. Medium and high density housing in Hinode Tower (back right) and The Sequoias (back center) are also permitted.

(for more than six residents), community facilities (e.g. community centers) and institutions (e.g. medical facilities, social services, and childcare centers). Given the noticeable quantity and importance of community centers, childcare centers and social service providers within Japantown's RM-3 and RM-4 zones, new zoning controls should be applied to this area to ensure that future development continues to meet the community's needs appropriately.

Neighborhood Commercial Districts

The Neighborhood Commercial districts (NC-2 and NC-3) comprise the core of Japantown's shopping areas. A NC-2 district is located along the north side of Post Street and both sides of Buchanan Mall; it encourages small-scale neighborhood-serving convenience goods and services on the ground floor with housing or offices above. Restaurants, bars, liquor stores and general commercial uses, as well as medical, financial, personal and professional services are permitted on the first floor. There are limits on uses that are considered in conflict with livability standards, such as automobile

¹ The authorization process is known as conditional use authorization (pursuant to Section 303 of the San Francisco Planning Code) and requires a property owner to submit an application and gain approval by the Planning Commission.

repair shops and late-night activities. In comparison, NC-3 is similar to NC-2, but allows for commercial uses that serve the region, in addition to neighborhood-serving businesses. The NC-3 areas are located on Geary Boulevard, Fillmore Street and the south side of Post Street, which are three of the area’s major thoroughfares and transit routes; new housing is encouraged above the second story of buildings. Both NC-2 and NC-3 protect existing housing with limitations on changes in use and demolition of units.

Though the scale of lots and development in Japantown’s NC-3 zones currently meet the NC-3 intentions to provide neighborhood- and regional-serving retail, the buildings lack commercial frontages along the heavily trafficked thoroughfares to meet their potential; they fail to create an active retail district.

Japantown Special Use District

Japantown has another overlay of land use controls called the Japantown Special Use District (SUD), established in 2006, which covers the area between Fillmore Street, Bush Street, Laguna Street and Geary Boulevard. Currently, the SUD aims to protect the character of Japantown by a) requiring new land uses to be compatible with the cultural and historic integrity, neighborhood character, development pattern, and design aesthetic of the neighborhood; and b) requiring conditional use authorizations from the Planning Commission for:

- Any change of use in excess of 4,000 square feet.
- Any merger of one or more existing uses in excess of 2,500 square feet.
- The establishment of any formula retail use (which is defined as any retail establishment with eleven or more locations within the United States).

While there is wide support of the intent of the Special Use District, its ability to protect the character of the neighborhood could be strengthened. In addition, the area covered within the SUD should be adjusted to protect Japantown’s commercial and community-serving uses and is discussed in the following section.

4.2 Recommendations and Strategies

The following land use recommendations and strategies for Japantown are intended to protect Japantown’s established mix of uses and unique character, and to emphasize and enhance the pedestrian environment in the commercial core, in order to maintain this as a vibrant and attractive area. These strategies address the physical aspects of the desired land uses conditions in Japantown, and work in conjunction with the strategies outlined in the other chapters of this Plan.

The blocks south of Bush Street require changes to the existing land use controls in order to address the desired land uses and character; existing controls are outdated. A combination of new zoning controls and/or a revised Special Use District are recommended to secure Japantown’s future and achieve the Plan’s four overarching goals; this approach is described in the following pages.

Additionally, this section also contains recommendations intended to protect and activate Japantown’s commercial core.



The scale and transparency of the storefronts on the northside of Post Street (above) are consistent with much of the city’s Neighborhood Commercial districts. The southside of Post (below) and northside of Geary (far below), however, is not.



Update Zoning Controls South of Bush Street

The area north of Bush Street has a strong residential character and does not require any changes to its zoning. Similarly, the existing land uses within the Upper Fillmore Neighborhood Commercial district are in keeping with the existing land use controls and should remain the same. Nor has the community expressed any desire to modify the character or allowed uses in these areas.

The blocks south of Bush Street require zoning modifications to safeguard the mix of uses that exist in Japantown today and encourage more complementary uses in the future. Three new Japantown districts should be created.

Create Zone 1 (Mixed Residential Zone)

The residential mixed areas currently zoned RM-3 and RM-4 located roughly between Bush and Geary and east of Webster street (see Figure 4.2: Proposed Land Use and Zoning for exact location) should be rezoned with a new district that permits housing, office, religious facilities, schools, child care facilities, senior and assisted living centers, community centers, and retail. This area is not the commercial core of the neighborhood so commercial uses should be limited to 2,999 square feet on the first floor and no more than 10,000 square feet per parcel. This limitation intends to concentrate the majority of the district's commercial uses in the area around Buchanan Mall, Post Street and Japan Center. Liquor licenses are only allowed for restaurants with bars.

Japantown's new zones will complement existing land uses and promote neighborhood commercial activity day and night.

Create Zone 2 (Neighborhood Commercial Zone)

The residential mixed area currently zoned (RM-3) and the neighborhood commercial area (NC-2) should be replaced with a new district to encourage Japantown's existing neighborhood-serving retail core to flourish along Post, Buchanan and Fillmore streets (see Figure 4.2 for exact location). It would permit residential (above the first floor), retail (up to 2,999 square feet on the first two floors with a limit of 10,000 per parcel), restaurants (including those with bars), theaters, business and professional services, general office (above the first floor) and arts activities. New religious facilities, schools, child care facilities, tourist hotels, fast food, bars, and formula retail uses would require conditional use authorization. Within this zone, liquor sales should be permitted but limited according to type: Stores selling liquor (most limited), bars selling liquor for on-site consumption (limited); and restaurants selling liquor for on-site consumption (least limited).

Create Zone 3 (Regional Commercial Zone)

The neighborhood commercial area (NC-3) along the north side of Geary Boulevard between Avery and Laguna streets would be replaced with a new zone to encourage the Japan Center malls and the other parcels along Geary to maximize their potential as a regional-serving commercial destination (see Figure 2.2 for exact location). This zone would permit residential (above the first floor), retail (up to 2,999 square feet on the first three floors with no limit per parcel), bars, nighttime entertainment, theaters, business and professional services (above the first floor), and arts activities. New religious facilities, schools, child care facilities, tourist hotels, fast food and formula retail uses, as well as retail above 3,000 square feet, will require conditional use authorization. Within this zone, liquor sales should be permitted but limited according to type: Stores selling liquor (most limited), bars selling liquor for on-site consumption (limited); and restaurants selling liquor for on-site consumption (least limited).



LEGEND

Japantown BNP Boundary

CONTROLS TO REMAIN

- Public
- Residential RH-2
Two DU/lot
- Residential RH-3
Three DU/lot
- Residential, Mixed RM-1
One DU/800 sq. ft. of lot area
- Residential, Mixed RM-2
One DU/600 sq. ft. of lot area
- Residential, Mixed RM-3
One DU/400 sq. ft. of lot area
- Upper Fillmore Neighborhood
Commercial District, NCD
- Neighborhood Commercial
District, Shopping Center NC-3
Three+ Commercial Stories

PROPOSED CONTROLS

- Proposed Zone 1
- Proposed Zone 2
- Proposed Zone 3
- Revised Japantown Special Use
District Boundary
(exact boundary to be deter-
mined when zoning is updated)
- Active Ground-Floor

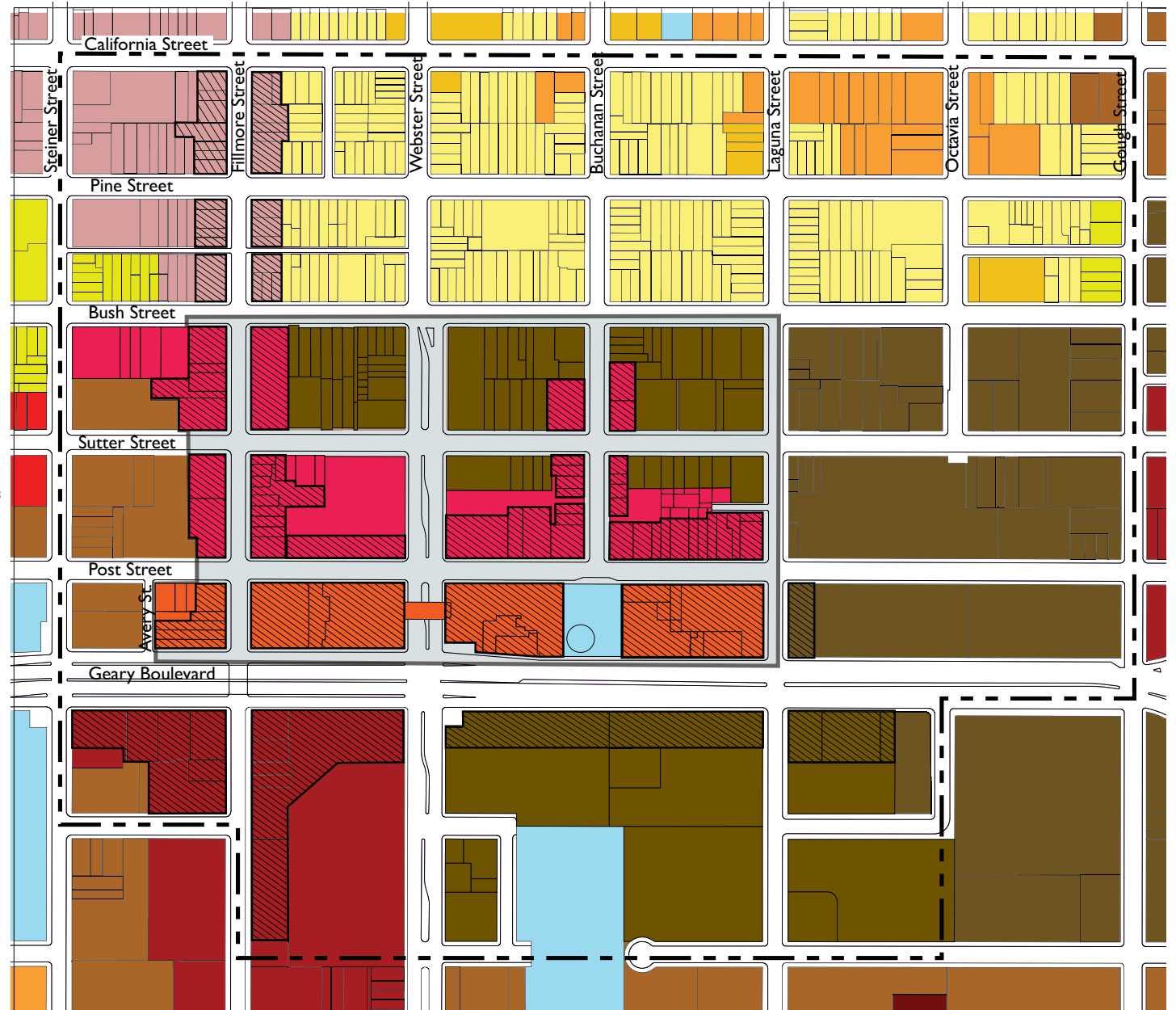
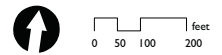


Figure 4.2
Proposed Land Use and Zoning



All three zones should include the following zoning control updates:

- Revised residential and parking standards for new development. No residential off-street parking should be required for new housing units. A maximum of one parking space per new housing unit should be permitted for Zones 1 and 2; a maximum of 0.75 parking space per unit should be permitted in Zone 1. No new parking lots should be permitted. New parking garages should require conditional use authorization.
- Revised housing requirements for new development. Housing for families should be prioritized. In other areas of the city, family housing has been encouraged by requiring 40% of units to contain at least two bedrooms, 30% of units to contain at least three bedrooms or all affordable units to contain at least two bedrooms. There should be no density limit on dwelling units; the unit mix and building height would determine the number of units allowed on each parcel.
- Property owners should be encouraged to retain existing community-serving uses (facilities and institutions) with incentives, such as height bonuses for properties that retain existing community space.
- Enhanced neighborhood notification for conditional use authorization to ensure land use and character compatibility.
- Reduction of open space and affordable housing requirements and increased flexibility for permitted land uses on important historic properties to make retaining historic structures more feasible.

The zoning controls identified above could be added to the existing Japantown SUD and would require the boundary to expand, or they could be included in each new zone, or a combination of both.



Activate Ground-Floor Spaces

Japantown's commercial areas should be protected from physical intrusions, such as driveways and blank walls, that interfere with an active and walkable shopping district. The Planning Code has several existing requirements for commercial streets that should be active, pedestrian-oriented and walkable. The intent of these requirements is summarized below and should be applied to Japantown's commercial corridors as depicted in Figure 4.2. Active ground-floor use and protected street frontage requirements should be applied to the following streets in Japantown:

- Post Street between Fillmore and Laguna streets
- Geary Boulevard between Steiner and Laguna streets
- Fillmore Street for the extent of the Plan Area
- Buchanan Street between Post and Bush streets
- Webster Street between Geary Boulevard and Post Street
- Laguna Street between Geary Boulevard and Hemlock Street



Japantown's commercial areas can be enlivened by requiring transparent and accessible ground floor spaces that are complemented with pedestrian-oriented amenities, as depicted in the rendering (above top) and in the Lower Haight (above).

Improve streets frontages and streets with required ground floor commercial uses

In order to preserve, enhance and promote street frontages that are pedestrian-oriented, lively, fine-grained, and provide opportunity for multiple shops and services to serve both local and citywide populations, a number of requirements have been identified and are summarized below (see Planning Code Sections 145.1 and 145.4 for more detailed explanation):

- **Above-Grade Parking Setback** which requires any parking built above street grade to be set back at least 25 feet on the ground floor, (with the exception of space allowed for parking and loading access, building egress, and access to mechanical systems), and 15 feet at all other levels from any facade facing a street.
- **Ground Floor Commercial Uses** shall occupy no less than 75 percent of the building frontage and shall be open at the pedestrian eye level, allowing visibility to the inside of the building. Such openings shall use clear, untinted, glass except for decorative or architectural accent. Any decorative railings or decorative grille work, other than wire mesh, which is placed in front of or behind such windows, shall be at least 75 percent open to perpendicular view.
- **Active uses at the ground floor** shall include those that are oriented to public access and walk-up pedestrian activity. These uses shall not include any use whose primary function is the storage of goods or vehicles, utility installations, any office use, any use oriented toward motorized vehicles, or any use or portion of a use which by its nature requires non-transparent walls facing a public street.

Protect pedestrian- and transit-oriented street frontages

In order to preserve the pedestrian character of commercial districts and to minimize delays to transit service, garage entries, driveways or other vehicular access to off-street parking or loading shall be regulated on development lots within Japantown’s commercial corridors (see Planning Code Section 155r for more detailed explanation).

Promote street life with outdoor activity areas

Outdoor activities which promote street life and do not detract from livability should be encouraged and permitted in the proposed Japantown Zone 2 and Zone 3 (see Planning Code Section 145.2 for more detailed explanation).



All commercial areas denoted to have active ground floors in Figure 4.2 will be encouraged to promote outdoor activities. There are many ways to promote street life as shown in these examples, where sidewalks have been extended into the parking lane to accommodate outdoor seating (above) or property owners simply providing seating in front of their buildings along wide sidewalks or adjacent plazas (above top).

RECOMMENDATIONS
IN THIS CHAPTER:

Built Form

→ Update Building Heights

- Increase Heights Along Geary Boulevard
- Increase Height at Gateways
- Increase Ground-Floor Heights for Commercial Uses
- Require Step Backs in Japantown's Commercial Core

→ Improve Large Parcel Design

- Improve Tower Design
- Require Mid-block Pedestrian Connections

→ Apply Japantown-Specific Design Guidelines

- Form and Structure
- Roofs
- Materials and Ornamentation
- Landscaping, Open Spaces, and Public Art

→ Apply San Francisco's Citywide Design Guidelines

- Site Design
- Massing and Articulation
- Façade Treatment
- Ground-floor Design
- Parking and Access
- Private Open Space