

Japantown Task Force  
Cultural Heritage & Sustainability Committee Agenda  
Monday, March 7, 2022  
5:30pm – via Zoom

Committee Members Present: Gary Barbaree, Lucy Fisher, Benh Nakajo, Yuki Nishimura, David Takashima, Rosalyn Tonai  
JTF Board Members: Sandy Mori, Richard Hashimoto  
JTF Staff: Melissa Bailey Nihei, Susie Kagami, Emily Murase  
Guests: Karen Kai, Shinichi Seino

- I. Call to order
- II. Approval of Agenda  
Moved by Benh Nakajo, seconded by David Takashima. Passed unanimously.
- III. Approval of Minutes  
Minutes of February 7, 2022 CHSC meeting\*  
Moved by David Takashima, seconded by Yuki Nishimura. Passed unanimously.

IV. Staff reports

Update from Dr. Emily Murase, Executive Director  
Emily attended a second board meeting at Kinmon Gakuen. Board members are looking forward to understanding ways in which this committee can support their work. Susie will announce an International Women's Day event for tomorrow.

Update from Susie Kagami, Cultural District Project Manager  
Susie announced a program tomorrow with the Asian American Women's Artists Association, 12N - 2 pm, details at <https://www.aawaa.net/pass-it-on>. She is very busy exploring additional grants, from the City and the Hewlett Foundation.

Lucy asked if there was a decision on the recent grant application. Susie responded that JTF received the award, but the final amount of the grant has yet to be determined.

David asked Emily about the expectations of the Kinmon Gakuen board. Emily said board members are very open to a discussion on how JTF can support the board.

Lucy followed-up on an item from the February meeting, the branding of the Cultural District. David wanted to explore committee approval of the branding. Emily asked Susie to show examples of branding from other cultural districts and

the multiple logos that led to the final design. Susie presented these at the end of the meeting.

## V. Unfinished Business

- A. Confirmation to support three identified cultural assets in Japantown: Kinmon Gakuen, the Japanese Benevolent Society (Jikkei Kai, Japanese Cemetery in Colma), and Hokka Nichi Bei Kai.

Lucy introduced the topic and opened it up for discussion.

Emily provided an update on the Japanese Benevolent Society which has offices in the same building as JTF. Dean Hedani is the Board Chair and Seiko Fujimoto the Executive Director. The financial model of the Japanese cemetery relies heavily on one initial payment by families. The board then solicits annual donations to maintain the cemetery. Dean and Seiko have asked for support from JTF staff, Brandon Quan, with helping to organize records.

Sandy stated that we need to be very sensitive in offering support to organizations. For example, she urged that outreach to Hokka Nichi Bei Kai should be done by bilingual individuals as most board members are primarily Japanese speaking.

Richard thanked everyone for their support of Kinmon Gakuen. The board is exploring city and state support. The first step is to identify the cost of the renovation.

Shinichi Seino (an advisor to the Kinmon board) explained that for many years, student enrollment for Japanese language classes was at about 60 students. Pre-pandemic, there were 30-40 students. Currently, there are 25 or so students. He suggested that an afterschool program could be offered so when parents pick up their children, they also shop in Japantown, leading to economic activity.

Richard summarized primary goals: 1) renovation of the facility, 2) increase students, 3) explore community uses.

Roz asked if the Kinmon Gakuen board would like to partner with JTF on the renovation. Richard stated that it is still too early in the process to say.

Sandy suggested that if committee members are interested in one or more of the organizations, they can notify Lucy. These smaller groups could meet with organizations.

Gary and Lucy asked committee members to indicate their interest with one or more of the organizations. Gary emphasized that we wanted to communicate recognition and support to these organizations.

Yuki Nishimura noted that she is bilingual and has worked with the Hokka Nichi Bei Kai in the past. She helped them write a grant proposal and offered to act as a liaison between CHSC/JTF and this organization.

## VI. New Business

### Japanese Tea Garden: parking lot conversion and gift of koi

Lucy and Benh are part of the Friends of the Japanese Tea Garden, composed of seven people dedicated to renovating the pagoda, drum bridge and landscape around the pagoda.

Benh shared that, in 2009, Carol Murata assumed the concession in the Japanese Tea Garden, composed of the tea house, gift shop, and parking lot in back of the band shell. A kiosk, built by Jack Hirose, the original concessionaire of the Japanese Tea Garden, was located in the parking lot. Benh explained that due to many roadways closed to cars during the pandemic, there was tremendous pressure on the Recreations & Parks Department to ensure sufficient handicap parking. The Department removed the parking lot from the concession contract, and demolished the kiosk.

Richard commented that Rec & Park should have reached out to the Japanese American community before proceeding with the demolition and the takeover of the parking lot, a change in the concession contract.

Benh suggested that Carol could be a resource for additional information. David asked if Carol Murata had an attorney because the Department's action could be in violation of the contract. Emily will contact Carol Murata and Tak Matsuba for further information.

In addition, Benh reported that a wealthy donor, Mr. Gantz, had an affinity with Japanese design and had engaged Carol Murata's father to design the grounds of his Marin County home. Upon Mr. Gantz' passing, he bequeathed specimen koi to the Japanese Tea Garden. The Friends of the Japanese Tea Garden is exploring opportunities to publicize this very generous gift. The gift of specimen koi arrived a week ago, transported by the Garden's head gardener. Discussion focused on measures to protect the valuable koi from predators such as herons, raccoons, and people.

## Staff Reports - continued

Susie has been working with the Plinth Agency to create a logo for the Japantown Cultural District. She presented a detailed background of the logo (a

part of “branding”), including examples of other Japantown organizations and reasons for the final design. She also explained that OEWD required each cultural district to select a logo and showed examples from other districts.

Rosalyn expressed dissatisfaction with the leading logo. She felt that the committee and the board should have been consulted. David questioned the selection of the colors. He expressed that they did not reflect Japanese traditional colors.

Lucy suggested that, moving forward, decisions that affect the larger community could be presented as changes occur.

VII. Public comments: none offered

VIII. Announcements: none offered

IX. Adjournment  
Next CHSC meeting Monday, April 4, 2022