

**JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE
AD HOC JAPAN CENTER MALLS TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

MONDAY, APRIL 11, 2022

5:30 PM – VIA ZOOM MEETING

(ZOOM INVITATION IN THE EMAIL AND AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS AGENDA)

Committee Members: Chair Lori Yamauchi, Roy Ikeda, Richard Jue, Sandy Mori, Glynis Nakahara, Joyce Oishi (excused: Daryl Higashi, Grace Horikiri)

Board Member: Jeremy Chan

Staff Members: Emily Murase, Max Nihei, Brandon Quan

Others: Oliver Mar, Hirotatsu Kano

1. Call to Order

Chair Lori Yamauchi called the meeting to order at 5:34 pm.

She asked that Agenda Item 4, Preparing for meeting with Mr. Hiro Kano, Kinokuniya Book Stores of America in May, be removed. Mr. Kano is participating in tonight's meeting as an observer.

2. Approval of March 14, 2022 minutes*

Sandy Mori moved, Roy Ikeda seconded approval of the minutes. The minutes were approved unanimously.

3. Conversation with Oliver Mar, Owner of 1825 Post Street (Paina restaurant site)

Before beginning, Lori asked participants to introduce themselves. Lori summarized the committee's last meeting with Oliver Mar in September 2020. He and his sister have managed several family properties, including the Paina site, for the past 25 years. He had met with representatives with 3D Investments and Kinokuniya in 2019. About 9-12 years ago, the Paina restaurant, Oliver's tenant, did a full renovation. Oliver expressed a willingness to work with the community and was interested in a revitalization plan for Japantown.

Oliver reflected that the community appears to be rebounding from the pandemic. He spoke with the property manager a week ago about new promotions to bring increased foot traffic.

Lori introduced the topic of the Housing Element undergoing an update by the Planning Department, which will determine the City's (and Japantown's) housing plan for years to come. The proposed Housing Element includes a rezoning program to increase housing production, particularly along transit corridors, such as Geary Boulevard. When asked about his thoughts about developing housing along Geary Boulevard, including his property, Oliver commented that he is a small part of the building that has two larger property owners on either side. Roy Yamada added that other property owners are considering renovations. He encouraged Oliver to stay engaged with broad issues of renovations. Oliver responded that he met 3D years ago. He is unaware of future plans. He asked committee members about their views on the future of Japantown.

Dr. Emily Murase flagged several items. The first weekend of the Cherry Blossom Festival attracted 25,000 people on Saturday. While this is 50% of pre-pandemic levels, it does signify rebounding of foot traffic. The Peace Plaza renovation is now estimated to cost \$33M compared to the initial estimate of \$25M, leaving a deficit of \$8M. However, planning continues on the design of the renovation. The Buchanan Mall is slated for a \$5M renovation to restore the Ruth Asawa origami fountains to its original operations. Finally, Emily mentioned that the entirety of Japantown is an Internet deadspot, with AT&T the only carrier that provides Internet service, and not even high speed service. She stated that the scheduled renovations are an opportunity to upgrade infrastructure such as Internet access.

Glynis Nakahara asked if there were any "deal-breakers" for Oliver. He was generally supportive of the plans that have been mentioned and future development that are impactful, particularly more housing and projects that revitalize Japantown.

Sandy Mori noted that Paina has functioned as an important venue for social events and fundraisers in the community. She wants to be sure that these kinds of venues continue to be a part of Japantown.

Roy asked if Oliver would be willing to serve on a committee of property owners. Oliver responded that if the committee could come up with an overall plan for the future of Japantown, he would be very open to supporting this. Lori stated there is some discussion about developing an Area Plan for Japantown which would reflect a community-driven vision of the future of Japantown. She amplified Roy's point about the possibility of convening mall owners. She acknowledged that Grace Horikiri, a member of the committee, serves as Executive Director of the Japantown Community Benefits District which is composed of Japantown property owners. Joyce commented that buildings have a lifespan of about 50 years. This committee has facilitated community input and consensus-building.

Lori thanked Oliver for his time and willingness to meet with the committee. She asked if Oliver would like to be added to the committee distribution list for updates. Oliver agreed.

4. Announcements

a. San Francisco Housing Element

Lori announced that the draft Housing Element is under active consideration city-wide. She flagged for the committee a part of the draft plan that recommends relaxing height limits. The current height limit in the Planning Code is 50' for the malls blocks, which are bounded by Geary, Post, Laguna and Fillmore. Draft 3 is contemplating a change to increase the height limit to 55' or up to 85'. The Housing Element draft was introduced to the Planning Commission last Thursday. The Environmental Impact Report will be released April 20. The EIR public hearing will be held in June. The final version of the Housing Element will be considered for adoption in January. The Housing Element will need to be fully approved by May 2023. The Land Use and Transportation Committee will be discussing draft 3 at its meeting this Thursday. San Francisco is required to come up with 82,000 new housing units by 2030.

Glynis Nakahara added that, in addition to changing the height restriction, the draft plan proposes to eliminate restrictions on density which are currently determined by lot area. Lori explained that the current density restriction for the malls blocks is 1 unit per 400 square feet of lot area. Under the proposed rezoning, a property owner or developer can build as much housing that can fit within the allowed building height and footprint.

Emily expressed her hope that by creating space early for community engagement, the kind of opposition and protests that arose around the Webster and Laguna tower years ago can be avoided.

Joyce reflected a proposal in 1982 where the height restrictions downtown were also hugely controversial. She believed that new transit corridors opens up a different conversation about housing and development projects.

Glynis added that the Webster Tower considered in 2009 was 250' or 150' tall, or mid-rise structure. There was a proposal for a much taller structure on the Sequoias property that was also very controversial. The Housing Element's proposed height limit of 85' would accommodate 8 stories, which is lower than a mid-rise structure, and may be more acceptable to the community in the current political climate.

Lori stated that the draft Housing Element explicitly prioritizes communities of color and cultural districts, and takes into consideration Certificates of Preference. San Francisco is very motivated to meet state deadlines due to the millions of dollars in funding that are at stake. The State is looking for a realistic Housing Element that can be implemented and has set a high bar for the City to meet. This morning's paper discussed the state's denial of the Los Angeles Housing Element due to a lack of commitment to equity and fair housing issues.

b. Covenants Committee

Lori stated that she has not had further conversation with the Covenants Committee. Sandy spoke with Paul Osaki of the Covenants Committee. They agreed to have clear and open communication. Emily noted that the next meeting of the Covenants Committee has not yet been scheduled.

c. Redistricting

Lori noted that 80% of new housing in the past 10 years has been concentrated on the east side of San Francisco. This has resulted in an imbalance of population between supervisorial districts. The Redistricting Task Force has been charged to redraw the lines to rebalance voter density. The Housing Element is in response to the lopsided distribution of new housing, by promoting more housing production on the west side of the city and along transit corridors.

5. General Public Comments - None.

*Indicates an action item

6. Adjournment

Lori adjourned the meeting at 6:35 pm.

NEXT MEETING: Monday, May 9, 5:30-6:30 pm

Zoom Invitation:

Japantown Task Force is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Ad Hoc Japan Center Technical Committee Meeting

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