

**Japantown Task Force
Board of Directors Meeting**
Wednesday, August 18, 2021
6:00 pm – VIA zoom Meeting

Attendees: Sandy Mori, David Takashima, Alice Kawahatsu, Beau Simon, Benh Nakajo, Daryl Higashi, Gary Barbaree, Glynis Nakahara, Jeremy Chan, Jon Osaki, Kenta Takamori, Lori Yamauchi, Lucy Fisher, Mark Moriguchi, Richard Hashimoto, Richard Jue, Rosalyn Tonai, Scott Hamaguchi, and Steven Santa Maria

Absent (excused): none.

Staff: Steve Nakajo, Lauren Nosaka, Brandon Quan, Susie Kagami, Max Nihei

Guests: Grace Horikiri, Karen Kai, David Darling, Donna Ong-Kimura, Elena Nielsen, Emily Nichols, Hillary Nakano, Judy Hamaguchi, Kim Kolbe, Mary Ishisaki, Michiko Yamada, Satoe Haile, Tomo Hirai, Yuki Nishimura, Ryan Kimura

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:02p.m. by President Sandy Mori. A quorum was acknowledged.

Approval of Agenda

It was moved by Lucy Fisher and seconded by David Takashima to accept the agenda.

The motion passed unanimously.

II. Approval of Minutes

Minutes of the JTF Board meeting of July 21, 2021. (Attachment A)

The minutes were amended to include:

- Under the Update from the Executive Director, the minutes were corrected to include that Benkyodo will close by March of 2022.
- Under the Land Use/Transportation Committee's update on Yi Fang, it was clarified that the question mark was included to indicate that the board member SSM asked a question.

It was moved by Benh Nakajo and seconded by Lori Yamauchi to approve the June 16, 2021 minutes.

The motion passed with unanimously. No public comments.

III. Update from the Executive Director, Steve Nakajo (Attachment B)

Steve Nakajo provided more information from his Executive Director's Report. He and Sandy Mori attended a meeting with Diana Ponce de Leon of Mayor's Office of Economic and Workforce Development (MOEWD) for an exploratory conversation on the possibility and feasibility of the city funding to support Benkyodo. She looking into how the city can be helpful to support Benkyodo but made no commitments at this time. For the Community Arts Stabilization Trust, JTF staff and Chinatown Community Development Center had exploratory discussion on Benkyodo, Nakamoto building and Kinmon Gakuen auditorium. The Japantown Merchants Association's President Richard Hashimoto is looking for a successor to take over as president as he has many responsibilities with the Japan Center Garage and has lost many staff at the parking garage. Jon Osaki, point person between the city and JTF, informed the board that the funds for the Buchanan Street Mall Project has been allocated, but we still need to discuss scope of the project and what the improvements are. He hopes to have a very inclusive community process.

Public Comments:

- I would appreciate being involved in the Buchanan Street Mall Project.

Update from the Japantown Cultural District, Susie Kagami (Attachment C&D)

Susie Kagami elaborated that the Japantown Walking Tour was a specific request from the branding agency for the co-creative hub. The tour focus around Japantown's history and background.

Update from Executive Director of Japantown Community Benefit District (Property Owners in Japantown), Grace Horikiri (Attachment E)

No public comments.

IV. Committee Reports

A. Land Use/Transportation Committee (Co-chairs Glynis Nakahara/Kenta Takamori)

1. Recommendation to approve Steven Santa Maria as a new member of the Land Use/Transportation Committee

It was moved by Glynis Nakahara and seconded by Mark Moriguchi to approve Steven Santa Maria as a new member of the Land Use/Transportation Committee.

The motion passed unanimously. No public comments.

2. Committee Updates

Formula Retail Proposal

Aaron Starr from the Planning Department attended the August 12 LUT meeting and gave an overview of the proposal for Japantown. Currently, businesses with 11 or more store fronts worldwide are considered formula use. The proposal is recommending that it would exempt businesses located in Japan for that 11 count. The city attorney is giving a tentative yes and it would be up to Japantown to decide on this proposal. The LUT committee will be discussing this issue at the next committee meeting.

Osaka Way Improvements

The Committee is assessing the strategy and is looking to the Peace Plaza Project as a model. Nothing has been decided and they are currently looking at how the funds are being allocated through the city. Jon Osaki is working with Phil Ting's office on this issue. Jon Osaki added that there will be a Phil Ting press conference on Tuesday, August 24, 2021 at 10am in the Buchanan Mall. Jon encouraged the board to attend. If you are attending, let JTF staff Brandon Quan, bquan@japantowntaskforce.org know.

Pedestrian Improvements

Committee members, Linda Walsh and Alice Kawahatsu organized interns from National Japanese American Historical Society (NJAHS) to conduct traffic surveys in the neighborhood. Key areas of concern are Webster St., Buchanan crossing, and Geary St. crossing where there is a new light and crosswalk. While Linda and Alice surveyed the new Geary and Buchanan crossing, they noted that the Geary St. crossing's lights are always green unless someone pushes the button to cross. In a previous Land Use Committee meeting, SFMTA informed the Committee that the lights would be timed with crossing for pedestrians. Linda and Alice will be working with WalkSF on the new improvements.

Preservation and Development Master Plan

Committee Member Lori Yamauchi is working on the committee charter and meeting with Japanese American Religious Federation (JARF) for outreach.

Redistricting

Redistricting is happening. Co-Chair Glynis encourages everyone to pay attention to redistricting.

No public comments.

B. Cultural Heritage Sustainability Committee (Co-chairs David Takashima/Lucy Fisher)

1. Presentation by Hiroshi Sengoku of Nichi Bei Kai

Lucy Fisher reported at the August 2 committee meeting, Hiroshi Sengoku gave a presentation on the Nichi Bei Kai, a 128-year-old organization which was founded by the Issei first generation. He spoke about the tea house inside the building. Lucy will be introducing Hiroshi Sengoku to Karl Matsushita from the Japanese American National Library on August 19. Karl Matsushita mentioned that he has more information about Nichi Bei Kai.

2. Update on Japantenna Project

Lucy Fisher reported that Kenta Takamori asked for JTF to send a letter to potential prefectural governors in Japan and invite them to participate in the Japantenna Project. The Consul General of Japan will be including a cover letter to the JTF letter. Kagoshima Prefecture has been identified as the initial group for this project. The pilot project might occur as early as November, but may happen later depending on the venue and date. The JTF letter will be finalized by August 19. Kenta T. will continue to attend the Cultural Heritage Committee meetings to update them. The new Consul General of Japan will arrive in September 2021.

No public comments.

C. Peace Plaza Committee (Co-Chairs Jon Osaki/ Rich Hashimoto)

1. Committee Updates

Jon Osaki reported that the Committee received updates from Marien Coss of the Rec&Park Department. The updates include primarily testing the site to determine the feasibility of all the items in the concept plan. There has been a seismic stability analysis done to the pagoda. There is some additional work being done to determine what type of repairs might need to be done. Potential repairs to the pagoda was factored into the funds for the project. Former Rec & Park staff, Michael DeGregorio has been added to the design team. The committee hopes to schedule a community town hall by the end of the year. \$25 million has been allocated for the Peace Plaza Project. If the project costs more than \$25 million, it will be the city's responsibility to pay for the remaining costs.

Public Comments:

- Has any of the copper flashing and roof of the pagoda been looked at? It should be replaced if needs to be.

D. Ad Hoc Japan Center Malls Technical Committee (Chair Lori Yamauchi)

1. Committee Updates

Lori Yamauchi reported that at the August 9 committee meeting, Santino DeRose of Maven Properties attended and discussed the Yi Fang situation, and potential businesses that could lease a business in the malls such as Mensho Ramen, a Japan based business. He added how difficult it is for them to attract companies from Japan to Japantown due to formula retail. When a company from Japan is invited from Maven or 3-D Investments, they face 9 months of conditional use, 6 months for permitting and another 6 months for construction and they are paying rent the whole time. That is over a year and a half before they can actually open their shop in the Japan Center Malls.

No public comments.

E. Cultural, History, Housing, and Economic Sustainability Strategy (CHHESS) Draft Overview and Update by Project Manager, Susie Kagami

Susie Kagami gave a presentation on the CHHESS draft overview (Attachment D). The Japantown Cultural District (JCD) is second in line after the Soma Filipinas Cultural District who are slated to go before the Board of Supervisors in September. Japantown Cultural District is projected to go before the Board of Supervisors in October. The CHHESS was presented to all of the JTF committees prior to this board meeting. There will be a town hall meeting tentatively set for August 30 to receive feedback from the community. Susie is conducting an internal review and editing the CHHESS draft with the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD). The JCD team is contacting 30 community organizations, meeting and reviewing the CHHESS with them, and requesting them to submit a letter of support.

Public Comments:

- JCBD added that Max Nihei hired as the Small Business Coordinator, a joint collaboration between JTF/JCD and JCBD, has been a huge help to the JCBD and the small businesses.
- I am concerned that we are not getting a final completed draft to review. The community needs one complete document.

F. Submission & discussion of the Bylaws Working Group (Kenta Takamori, David Takashima, Mark Moriguchi, & Sandy Mori) of the proposed revised JTF bylaws. The intent is to approve these revised bylaws at the September Board meeting.

The Bylaws Working Group presented the proposed revised JTF bylaws to the board members (Attachment F). Board members raised their questions and concerns on the proposed revised JTF bylaws.

The following questions and concerns were:

- Did the committee consult with a nonprofit lawyer on the bylaws?
- There should be a clearer process, timeline and selection criteria for selecting board of directors and officers. Also include a conflict of interest policy.
- A personnel committee should be established to look at HR and personnel issues added.

Public Comments:

- 48 hours in advance notice by email and 72 hours in advance notice on the JTF website is not enough time for the public to know going on and be involved at the board meetings.
- Opportunities to speak at the meetings are not clear.

VI. Debrief on Personnel Policies and Procedures of our Fiscal Agent, JCYC (Jon Osaki, ED of JCYC)

Jon Osaki gave a debrief on personnel policies and procedures as the Executive Director of JTF's fiscal agent, JCYC. As JCYC is the fiscal agent, all of the JTF staff are actually JCYC employees and are required to follow JCYC's policies. JTF can have a personnel committee, however; all JTF personnel matters fall under the policies and procedures of JCYC. JCYC provides a full-time Human Resources Manager and Employment Law Attorney, and follows processes for personnel changes and personnel issues. JCYC prioritizes a high level of confidentiality to protect the privacy of every employee in the organization. Personnel matters almost never go to the Board of Directors. It would only go to the Board of Directors in an extreme crisis, which has never happened as an employee has never taken JCYC to court nor has there been a personnel situation that has gotten out of hand. All JTF decisions are made by the JCYC Human Resources department including hiring and firing JTF employees. From a legal standpoint, JTF is like a department within JCYC. JCYC provides clinical support to all employees, and specific services such as support with benefits, hiring, taxes, social security, and payroll. Primarily, the HR department is to support all of the managers through training on supervision and how to support employees. Exit interviews are conducted with every employee who leaves the organization.

VII. Update from the President/Executive Committee

Sandy Mori reported that the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) is seeking to buy the Buchanan Hotel at 1800 Sutter Street and convert it into permanent supportive housing up to 131 units. KHP is the owner of the Buchanan Hotel. Kimpton operates the hotel. KHP has been negotiating with the city to sell the hotel for the purpose of turning the hotel into permanent supportive housing. The Board of Supervisors will vote on this program. The city is looking to purchase buildings for supportive housing for the homeless in 4 neighborhoods: SOMA, Mission, Excelsior and Japantown. There will be a community meeting on August 26 at 5:30pm for community to learn about the program, and give public comments.

Below are comments from JTF board members:

- Not enough time to plan/present (we only have 8 days)
- This project will not help economic recovery to businesses and will take away from tourism.
- I want to hear more. I think that this will be a huge impact on Japantown
- This project will bring loss tourism, vitality and our mission of preservation and history. We need to work on gathering more data, facts, and information.
- The City should have notified JTF and others in the community sooner.
- What is the criteria they used to decide on this property?
- The Mayor's plan is to put housing for the unhoused all over the city. There is funding for this (over 1 billion).
- We only have 3 Japantowns, I don't want to see the loss, especially since the City passed the Cultural Districts.
- We need to stay very focused. We need to be at the table during these City decisions.
- This will affect change of use and economic impact. Who will gather data? How will we collaborate with stake holders?
- Revenue loss. What is the community benefits?
- Residents need to express how they feel to D5 Supervisor.
- We have to look at the end goal.
- We have to look at the neighborhood and how it will be impacted.

No public comments.

VIII. General Public Comment

Members of the public may address the Board for up to two minutes with respect to each item on the agenda, and may speak for up to two minutes regarding matters not on the agenda during general public comment.

No public comments.

IX. Announcements.

None.

X. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:54pm.

NEXT BOARD MEETING: Wednesday, September 15, 2021 via zoom meeting.