

**Japantown Task Force
Board of Directors Meeting**
Wednesday, September 7, 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: Cathy Inamasu, Amanda Jones, Greg Vilorio, John Ota, Joyce Nakamura, Judy Hamaguchi, Karen Kai, Melissa Bailey Nihei, Michiko Yamada, Kenji Taguma, Peter Hirshberg, Masahiro Inoue, Tomo Hirai, Wes Nihei, Bob Falk, Nicholas Large and Emily Nichols

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:01p.m. by President Sandy Mori. A quorum was acknowledged.

II. Special Meeting Agenda Item Overview of the decision-making process and the proposal to acquire the Hotel Buchanan from the Board President

It was moved by Richard Hashimoto and Lucy Fisher to discuss and consider the JTF Board taking a position on the proposed acquisition by the City of the 1800 Sutter Hotel Buchanan, which would be converted from a tourist hotel to permanent supportive housing for 131 homeless seniors. This hotel is currently being used as a Shelter in Place hotel for the homeless. The motion passed unanimously.

Sandy Mori encourages everyone to attend the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH)'s 2nd Community Meeting on the Proposed Supportive Housing Acquisition of the Hotel Buchanan on Wednesday, September 8th at 5:30pm. 340 people have registered for the meeting.

Sandy reported that the Buchanan Hotel is currently being used as an emergency homeless shelter during the pandemic. She and other Executive Directors from Japantown organizations have been meeting with Providence, the homeless service provider. The purpose of the meetings is to increase communication between the service provider and Japantown. The city is seeking to purchase the hotel for supportive housing from the owner, KHP. Kimpton is the operator of the hotel. There are 3 other supportive housing shelters being proposed in Mission, Excelsior and SOMA. These 3 neighborhoods are in support of supportive permanent housing. KHP submitted a proposal to the city to sell the Buchanan Hotel. Japantown organizations directly met with Eric Moulton, Vice President of KHP, to take the Buchanan Hotel off of the table but he could not commit a yes or no.

The Board had the following comments or questions:

- I will speak as a representative of Kinmon Gakuen at the 2nd community meeting.
- From what I've observed so far, if the city were to acquire the property as supportive housing, would the city revert it back to Japantown after a period of time such as 10 years?
- It is doable to request a Supervisor to report on the economic impact a supportive housing shelter would have on the community given my experience working with the city. Japantown is not recognized as visitor destination. Ask the Board of Supervisors to put the Buchanan Hotel on hold until economic analysis is done and move on with the other 3 neighborhoods.

- Before World War II, Japantown was 40 blocks. After the internment, Japantown shrunk to 14 blocks. After redevelopment, Japantown was significantly reduced to 4 blocks. I've looked into Project Homekey. Any project with Homekey is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and any conditional use authorization or any approval that the city would require. This project is not subject to any Planning Commission approvals.
- HSH published an updated FAQ and confirmed everything that was mentioned above.
- According to the state's legislation, the exemption under CEQA shall not apply for a long-term covenant restriction for fewer than 55 years. This project will need to be put in place under covenant restrictions recorded with the city and county for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, or low-income households for no less than 55 years. This is a very long-term housing project.
- There is an issue of transparency. We have been working tirelessly with the JCHES for the last 10-15 years to help Japantown survive. And now working on the CHHES. The homeless project was not included in the CHHES plan and was not discussed with us. There must have been a list of other neighborhoods who applied for this proposal.
- What are the implications with OEWD if we oppose this project?
- I don't think we should be concerned about any retribution at all.
- There's an article that came out today from the Mayor. The city is putting the brakes on the hotel plans on hold to turn it into supportive homeless housing. Supervisor Dean Preston is supportive of having permanent supportive housing but is not convinced that the Buchanan Hotel is the best location. There are 6,500 signatures for an online petition to stop the sale of the hotel. The 1st community meeting was successful as city leaders are paying attention to Japantown.
- I think it's important that this board opposes the plan. I feel that it's not on us to ask the city to provide data. That's why Supervisor Preston is looking at this project differently despite being a big supporter of permanent supportive housing. Japantown has suffered for the common good. This organization should make a statement and be very clear about that statement. This is not about lowering property values. This is about a community struggling to survive. We have survived despite all the oppressive policies we had to endure. A good point was made. Redevelopment made Japantown a visitor and tourist economy. That was not a recreation of the Japanese American community. The redevelopment agency made it that way. Any piece taken away from this community is helping to dismantle it. I've been working with the families of these communities for over 30 years. If the hotel becomes permanent supportive housing, that will affect Nihonmachi Little Friends. I would love for the families to look past the supportive housing but that will not be the case. Those families will not do that. We are not only putting the small businesses in jeopardy, but also one of our community institutions in jeopardy. With all of our history and information, we need to make a stand to the Mayor. This was not handled well. We are not anti-homeless. We are pro-Japantown. Our community is in critical need. It is a very fragile ecosystem. Taking a major piece away from it can have horrific effects on this community. JTF should speak very clearly in this situation.
- Echo what was said about taking this opportunity to believe what we believe is right for our community. Too often we are taken advantage of by our community. No clear direction on what's going to happen. The city will not back down. It feels like a done deal from the beginning. We should have a rally at the Peace Plaza and get a strong letter out to the Board of Supervisors.
- After redevelopment happened, one of the first sites to be built was Nihonmachi Terrace, which is low income housing. It was built by the Japanese American Religious Federation (JARF) with 245 units 40 years ago. JARF also built 54 housing units for frail elderly with specialized supportive services, culture specific activities, and medical services. 299 units that the community has built on its own. We are still developing the housing tactics in the CHHES document.
- HSH did say that one of the reasons why they want to purchase the hotel is because refurbishment cost would be low compared to other hotels. They have economic incentives. Good to know that JARF has built low income housing as it shows we are not a NIMBY neighborhood. Kokoro has low income beds as well as Kimochi Home. It needs to be looked into if the homeless provider should be dispensing cannabis and alcohol near a school. The community needs to rally together.
- We have to stand our ground and this hotel should not be sold to the city. Find another owner who will work with the city. There will be severe economic impact to this community.
- We should oppose this project. From what I've seen from HSH, they have not done enough research to gain our trust. How can we work with the city when they are not being transparent with us?

- Should we include in the motion that the JTF opposes the purchase of the hotel because it will further erode the footprint of Japantown that has been significantly harmed by city policy and action? It should be mentioned somewhere.
- After the vote is taken, can the language of the motion be changed to more strongly worded?
- A friendly amendment can be added.
- Is it possible to have a template? There should be a unity of a statement.
- Nihonmachi Community Coalition will be writing up some talking points that can be used in a letter. We just took a position. Anyone here tonight can make comments at the 2nd community meeting. We don't have to spend a ton of time amending the position.

It was moved by Kenta Takamori and seconded by David Takashima for the JTF to oppose the City purchase of the Buchanan Hotel that will result in the loss of one of only two private hotels in Japantown that serves visitors and tourists. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comments:

- We are not opposed to homeless housing but Japantown is just not the right place. Due to the temporary homeless housing situation at the Buchanan Hotel, Nihonmachi Little Friends staff has many safety concerns. Staff has been cleaning up the trash and needles near by the school so that everything is clean for the students who come to school. Some homeless have been sleeping in front of the school's doorways. Our top priorities are the safety of our families and children, the economic vitality of our community and the support for the union workers at the Buchanan Hotel.
- I have never heard of real estate deal where someone was opposed to a better offer. I am a member of GlobalSF, an International Economic Development Agency. We've seen interest from Taiwan and Hong Kong to invest in SF. Find an alternative owner who can strengthen Japantown. This is someone GlobalSF can do. This economic analysis seems crucial. After COVID, Japantown is struggling.
- I encourage everyone to go the Japantown 4 Justice's facebook page and view the discussion they held with a representative from HSH. There was very little planning, they admit that they didn't communicate with the community, and planned to speak with Nihonmachi Little Friends about the issues at some point.
- I am drafting a letter to oppose the sale of the hotel. I will make a statement focusing on losing the hotel would affect the businesses.
- Be assertive about the statement. Japantown is a very important entity. We can't minimize the effects the hotel sale will have on the community.

III. 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.

IV. Announcements.

None.

V. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:58pm.