

JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE
AD HOC JAPAN CENTER MALLS TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
AGENDA
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2022
5:30 PM – VIA ZOOM MEETING

Committee Members Present: Chair Lori Yamauchi, Roy Ikeda, Sandy Mori, Glynis Nakahara, Joyce Oishi, Beau Simon.

Staff Present: Dr. Emily Murase, Lauren Nosaka, Susie Kagami,

Guest Present: Tomo Hirai, Nichi Bei Weekly, Edward Thet Tun, Kinokuniya; Greg Vilorio, Japan Center East & West Malls.

I. Call to Order

Chair Lori Yamauchi called the meeting to order at 5:32 pm

II. Approval of July 11, 2022 minutes*

Sandy Mori moved, Roy Ikeda seconded the motion to approve the July 11, 2022 minutes. The minutes were approved unanimously.

III. Update on SF Housing Element and comment letter from State, implications for Japantown

Lori presented a few slides to provide an update on the SF Housing Element. The Housing Element will cover 2023-2031 and is due by January 31, 2023. The state requires the City to produce 82,000 new housing units. If the City does not meet this deadline, then it will be obligated to complete rezoning by calendar year 2023.

[A copy of the slides are available here.](#)

DISCUSSION

Discussion focused on the need for extensive public outreach and education on the proposals to increase height limits from 40 feet to 240 feet, and relax density requirements altogether. Sandy stated that there is tremendous pressure on the City to reach these housing goals and, since Japantown is located along a major transit corridor, Geary Boulevard. Glynis Nakahara emphasized that this is a critical issue for Japantown and must be prioritized. There may be a working group convened by the Land Use/Transportation Committee. Joyce stated the new height limits could be a boon to property owners. She recommended a PowerPoint presentation that could be shared with various organizations. Glynis reported that the Planning Department's public engagement will be conducted in two phases, with the first phase starting in the fall (soon!). Committee members agreed that it is critically important to educate the community and bring them along.

IV. Report from Dr. Emily Murase on meeting with Kinokuniya in May

Emily reported on her visit to the Kinokuniya Headquarters on May 23. She met with Hirotatsu Kano, General Manager of Sales, Kinokuniya Books of America; and Eiji Matsuoka, Vice President of Kinokuniya Books of America. At the meeting, Emily praised the work of newly hired Property Manager Edward Thet Tun who had already repaired many relationships and was becoming a very visible member of the Japantown community. Discussion focused on whether Kinokuniya was planning to make any changes in Japantown, such as selling its

building. According to Emily, at her meeting, Matsuoka-san expressed Kinokuniya's commitment to remain in San Francisco.

Additional discussion focused on the impact of Proposition K that requires shadow analysis. Due to shadow impacts on the Peace Plaza, tall buildings could only be erected on property south of Geary. Otherwise, rezoning would be required.

Committee members pointed out that Kinokuniya is going to face a large burden of time and money. These are issues that executives in Japan are going to have to weigh-in on. It would be very important to inform Kinokuniya executives about the extent of the changes that are likely to happen in the Japan Center Mall and implications for future design and construction plans.

V. Update on new tenancies and vacancies in Japan Center East and West Malls, and Kinokuniya buildings (Greg Viloría, Edward Thet Tun)

Greg of the Japan Center East and West Malls reported that the Malls lost 5 businesses during the pandemic. In 2022, new businesses are coming in including Flying Raijin which sells anime action figures. Playland Japan closed during the pandemic and the space is now occupied by a plush products specialty store. In the East Mall, Screen Saver Art & Coffee and OK Marketplace Vintage Clothing. Last week, Yi Fang fruit teas opened with considerable Japanese signage as a result of community feedback. Pending is a lease with a mechanical games shop that features the very popular Japanese claw machines in the former Murata-ya space. The Pink Pink Tea Shop will go in across from Andersen Bakery and is slated to open by the end of the year. Greg noted that staffing challenges are affecting all of the stores in Japantown. He recommended a job board for Japantown. Suite 310 in the West Mall and Suite 533 in the East Mall remain vacant. The former space of Takara Restaurant is being used for taiko, odori, and shamisen classes organized by Gen Taiko. The Dandelion space remains vacant. The number of inquiries post-pandemic has increased tremendously.

Lori invited Edward Thet Tun of Kinokuniya to report on the current state of leases in the Kinokuniya Building. He shared that Chato is scheduled to move to the Negishi Jewelry space because Marufuku Ramen will be expanding. There are negotiations in process for Suite 270. The former space of Tan Tan Cafe is also under negotiations. There have been lots of inquiries regarding the former Mifune Restaurant space on the ground floor. Edward asked for any resources to address problems with concrete infrastructure.

Edward shared that lease negotiations are being conducted with Japanese lessees. One challenge has been supply chain delays arising from the global computer chip shortage.

VI. General Public Comments

Members of the public may address the committee for up to 2 minutes with respect to each item on the agenda, and may speak for up to 2 minutes regarding matters not on the agenda during general public comment.

Emily reported on two items. First, JTF is planning to apply for the US Department of Transportation "Reconnecting Communities" planning grant. The grant is designed for communities that have been negatively impacted by government policies. For example, Geary Boulevard cut Japantown off from the rest of the Western Addition and the Fillmore District. This is an opportunity to bring together representatives from Japantown, the Western Addition/Fillmore District, and the Jewish community which owned many stores on Fillmore. The Western Addition is home to the Jewish Community High School, Jewish Children and Family Services, and the Rhoda Goldman Assisted Living Facility.

Second, she has been facilitating a working group to address the lack of reliable high speed Internet access. The working group consists of major Internet service providers who have been tasked with coming up with solutions to this vexing problem.

VII. Announcements

A. Peace Plaza renovation - community briefing on 9/20

Emily explained that the community contributed to the 2019 Peace Plaza Vision Plan and, for the last 18 months, the Recreation and Parks Department, together with the Public Works Department, has been conducting a structural analysis of the Plan. She invited everyone to attend the Peace Plaza Community Briefing scheduled for Tuesday, 9/20, 6:30-7:30 pm, where the results of the structural analysis and conceptual designs will be discussed. The [event flier can be found here.](#)

B. Japantown mural project

Emily disclosed that she a board member of the Japanese American Citizens League San Francisco Chapter. The SF JACL is planning a large format mural on Geary Boulevard, between the entrance to the Japan Center Garage and the stairway to the Peace Plaza, to document the history of Japanese Americans in San Francisco. There will be an in-person community meeting on Thursday, September 29, 6-8 pm, at the JACL Headquarters Building, 1765 Sutter Street, to discuss the goals of the project and partnering muralists.

C. October 10 meeting - reschedule, given holiday?

Emily stated that JTF follows JCYC's paid holiday schedule which is based on the school district's calendar. The next scheduled committee meeting, October 10, falls on Indigenous People's Day, a school/JCYC/JTF holiday. Lori proposed meeting on Tuesday, October 11 instead, same time, 5:30-6:30 pm. She will see if the proposed date works for Hirotsu Kano of Kinokuniya who was unable to speak to the committee earlier in the year. Lori will work with Lauren Nosaka to confirm the October meeting date.

The meeting adjourned at 6:31pm.

*indicates an action item