

**Japantown Peace Plaza Committee
MINUTES
via Zoom
5 pm, Tuesday, January 25, 2022**

Committee Members: Jon Osaki (Chair), Alice Kawahatsu, Glynis Nakahara, Rosalyn Tonai, Sandy Mori, Benh Nakajo, George Yamasaki.

Staff Present: Melissa Bailey Nihei, Susie Kagami, Dr. Emily Murase, Brandon Quan.

Others Present: Consul General of Japan Hiroshi Kawamura, Marien Coss (Recreation & Parks Department), Michael Degregario, Tomo Hirai, Mas Inoue, Masahiro Kuroda, Doug Nelson, Emily Nichols, Beverly Ng, Shinichi Seino, Melody Takata, Max Nihei, Nancy N., David Ishida, Consulate General of Japan in San Francisco Staff member.

I. Call to Order

Chair Jon Osaki called the meeting to order at 5:04 pm. He introduced the new Executive Director of the Japantown Task Force Dr. Emily Murase. Jon also extended a very warm welcome to Consul General of Japan Hiroshi Kawamura.

II. Updates on Structural Analysis and Design

Jon invited Marien Coss, a veteran architect and project manager of the San Francisco Recreation & Parks Department, to provide an update.

Marien reviewed the 5 Peace Plaza Design Goals:

1. Make Post Street visually open and inviting while mitigating wind and providing seating and shade.
2. Provide a large permanent stage and seating to accommodate 200-300 people.
3. Make Peace Plaza an inviting and playful space for people of all ages to discover and explore.
4. Create an inviting visual expression along the Geary Boulevard edge that draws people into the plaza and mitigates noise levels from Geary Boulevard.
5. Incorporate significant cultural elements included in the original design for Japantown Peace Plaza.

She explained that because the Peace Plaza sits on 2 levels of the garage, it can be considered a rooftop garden. A thorough evaluation of the structure is necessary to ensure that the structure underneath can support the plaza.

In the middle of last year, RPD staff met with the Department of Public Works for a careful evaluation of the current structure. The Public Works Material Testing Lab extracted and analyzed concrete core samples to determine the integrity of the structure and to confirm that the concrete could support the weight of the features as indicated on the “as built” drawings. The structure is performing as designed.

In December, the core design team including advisors Doug Nelson, Mike Degregario, and Mas Inoue met with Department of Public Works landscape architects and engineers to review the structural findings and to identify and recommend modifications to the Peace Plaza Vision Plan. These two 3-hour meetings were collaborative and informative.

The core design team determined that the 5 Design Goals can be met, including the monument and pagoda as features. What emerged as a major problem was the water feature. Marien explained that the weight of the water feature jeopardized other features, and concluded that the water feature should be swapped out by alternatives such as special lighting to create new textures. Another problem was the proposed ginkgo trees. The size, weight, irrigation needs, and projected growth of ginkgo trees make it incompatible with the design constraints of the Peace Plaza. She explained that alternatives such as bamboo will be explored. The planting of cherry trees, on the other hand, is not problematic and will be included in the design. Marien also stated that in order to meet load-bearing requirements, the location of certain features/planters will need to be placed above the strongest part of the structure below, directly over beams/columns.

Engineers and historic preservation consultants submitted a completed report to the San Francisco Planning Department that included all options considered and the recommended solutions. The Planning Department has asked Marien to submit an environmental evaluation application to be included in the Pagoda Technical Design review update.

Discussion by the committee focused on the water feature. Rosalyn Tonai and Glynis Nakahara expressed disappointment with the conclusion about the impracticality of the water feature. In contrast, Sandy Mori, George Yamasaki, and David Ishida expressed agreement with abandoning the feature, per Richard Hashimoto’s perspective as the director of the Japan Center Garage which has experienced persistent leaks and water damage since the last Peace Plaza renovation.

Marien added that the design team will need a few more months to finalize the design plans. Further research is being done on the features, assembly, look and feel. She emphasized that structural calculations are critical work, necessary to evaluate, confirm, reconfirm weight, shape assemblies and alignment. This takes time because it is important to be thorough and to get this part right. She will be reconfirming plans with the Historic Preservation Commission and the Building Inspection Department.

As for specific next steps, Marien stated that the team will finalize the structural findings and present this to the Peace Plaza Committee in February or March. Next, a report will need to go to the Arts Commission Civic Design Review Committee on April 18. Then the team will submit a revised environmental application adding the pagoda to plaza improvements. Although there was previous discussion about a community town hall in the spring, Merian explained that, given all these steps, summer is a better time frame since plans will be firmed out by then. After that, the team will focus on design development and finalizing construction documents.

Committee members thanked Marien for her presentation and candid assessment of the designs. Alice Kawahatsu also thanked Marien for her presentation and recounted the burst pipe that flooded the Japan Center Garage on December 30. The flooding created an electrical outage of the garage and forced the shutdown of the Nijiya supermarket on one of the busiest shopping days of the year due to the New Year's holiday. Alice asked if anything has been done to check the aging pipes. Mas Inouye urged that analysis of plumbing and other structural elements be included in the final cost estimate.

II. Latest Peace Plaza video and outreach

Jon Osaki reported that the Task Force has been putting together videos about Japantown merchants. He introduced a short video of Asakichi, a Japantown shop specializing in traditional Japanese tea ceremony and ceramics. The video series is available here:
<https://youtu.be/efgWqxPiqQs>

III. Buchanan Mall Update

Jon reported that the State of California has made funding available to upgrade the Buchanan Mall area. He has been meeting with JTF Board Member Glynis Nakahara and JCBD Executive Director Grace Horikiri and JCBD Board Member Robert Sakai about this issue.

Glynis reported that there was a meeting this morning with Maria De Alva of the Planning Department and Trent Tieger of DPW. The Planning Department will be securing the \$5 million grant that Assemblymember Phil Ting secured from the State of California budget. Glynis briefly explained the main goals of the renovation.

1. To enhance accessibility
2. To rehabilitate the Ruth Asawa fountains
3. Support the Business Community

Glynis shared that the Asawa origami fountain sculptures belong to the Arts Commission. The Nihonmachi Parking Corporation is responsible for maintaining the surface of the Buchanan Mall. The Department of Public Works is responsible for the underground infrastructure.

To gather public feedback, the City is planning to host three public workshops in the summer and fall. The target date for commencing construction is in spring 2024.

Glynis explained that the JTF subcommittee is exploring whether a private landscape architect can be engaged for this work. They will also be engaging the Asawa Family who is happy to be working closely with the Japantown community.

Rosalyn Tonai asked about the ultimate goal of the renovation: is it to restore the water feature of the fountains or is it to repair the origami sculptures? Jon responded that the project is still in its infancy and that there will be ample opportunity for the community to weigh in.

Benh Nakajo spoke about the Peace Plaza and the importance of incorporating Light, Wind, Fire, and Water, key elements in Japanese culture and design.

IV. Adjournment

Jon adjourned the meeting at 5:56pm.