

JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE
Japantown Peace Plaza Ad Hoc Committee
MINUTES
via Zoom
5 pm, Tuesday, February 22, 2022

Committee Members: Richard Hashimoto (Co-Chair), Alice Kawahatsu, Glynis Nakahara, Sandy Mori, Rosalyn Tonai.

JTF Board Members: N/A

Staff Present: Dr. Emily Murase, Brandon Quan.

Members of the Public: Judy Hamaguchi, Nancy Nagano, David Ishida, Nan Park, Mas Inoue, Doug Nelson, Marien Coss, Michael DeGregorio, Beverly Ng, Keiichi Higuchi, 1-267-254-8017.

Co-Chair Richard Hashimoto called the meeting to order at 5:05 pm. He stated that Co-Chair Jon Osaki was unable to attend due to a canceled return flight from out of town.

I. Updates from the Recreation and Parks Department

Marien Coss of the Recreation & Parks Department reported that she is in the process of getting cost estimates based on the two design team meetings in December, so she does not have a progress update. Instead, she wanted to use the time to review what's been accomplished this past year. She will have more details and visuals at the next meeting in march.

Marien stated that she met the JTF team for the first time a year ago to the day. She recalls that Richard communicated his priorities at that time, including (1) waterproofing, (2) PG&E metering (Marien is working on this), and (3) finishes (i.e., the currently installed slate tiles are breaking). She recounted that the first few months of project planning were dedicated to assembling the team of historic preservationists, planners, designers, and engineers.

Richard asked why there is concern about the structural integrity now when the original Peace Plaza had 3 reflection pools, huge trees, and very heavy materials. Michael DeGregorio explained that building and planning codes have changed significantly since the Peace Plaza was first built.

Marien stated that this process has taken much time due to the need to meet with staff members of the Historic Preservation Commission, the Planning Department, and the Department of Public Works.

Mas Inoue of RHAA, the community consultant for the project, asked about the status of the structural analysis and cost estimates. Marien responded that these are in the works currently. Mas expressed concern about rising costs and cost management. Richard also expressed concern that the delays may be reducing the budget and as time goes on, the cost escalation

may be a factor. Michael, in a previous meeting reassured that there is a large contingency built into the project so there should not be any concerns for cost overruns.

Marien recounted that a major concern that arose from the design team meetings in December was the challenge of weight load constraints. These constraints have forced a rethinking about the water feature that the community developed in the original conceptual design.

Marien said she will have the cost estimates next month. Portions of the estimates are trickling in piecemeal. She recognized that there hasn't been much work on design but that has been intentional. She explained that the Department of Public Works is doing research right now and that the right time for design work is once the research is completed.

Alice Kawahatsu asked about anticipated cost increases. Marien stated that she has learned that plywood costs have increased 800%. For example, Marien worked on a public park in December where the supplier couldn't get steel products. In this instance, there needs to be a decision on whether to open partially or wait until the park can be fully opened. She cited other instances where supply chain issues have created extreme challenges to project completion.

Glynis Nakahara asked about the cost estimator. Marien stated that the cost estimator is 3rd party and Marien is picky about the cost estimators, and that Public Works has been reaching out to different individuals who install these materials. Marien will reach out to Glynis as well, since she works in the industry.

Rosalyn Tonai asked if there is an expectation that RHAA will have an opportunity to come back with design ideas after the cost estimates come in. Marien stated that her goal is to have, by the summer town hall meetings, a revised conceptual design that will be "ground truthed" and have the support of RHAA, and have undergone Civic Design Review as well as review by the Historic Preservation Commission. Once she has the cost estimate, she will be able to revise and share an updated project timeline.

Richard asked for a new timeline of the project so we know where we are and what to expect in the months to come. Marien replied that it is doable.

Nan Park asked to confirm that the discussion is focused on the Peace Plaza. She expressed support for the conceptual design with lots of greenery. Marien reviewed the 5 Goals for the Peace Plaza project and shared the conceptual design that includes the pagoda, trees and greenery, boulders, flagpole, and the monument.

Richard expressed his appreciation to Marien for her candor and dedication to the project. He asked to confirm that she will have substantive details, including costs, at next month's meeting. She agreed and suggested that the town hall timeframe could be determined at the March meeting.

Glynis asked to confirm that Marien will have an updated design, with a recommendation for conceptual alternatives to the water element. It is all schematic right now, may not see a resolved piece, since there are elements brought up by RHAA and Michael that need to be resolved.

II. Initial Plans for Town Halls

Richard stated that the initial timeframe for the town hall was March, but this has been pushed back to the summer. Marien reported that Jon Osaki let her know that there are many community events in April and May. She recommended a summer time frame for the town halls because by that time, the Civic Design Review and the Historic Preservation Commission update

would be completed. Richard expressed that he would like to see the town halls in June since there are not many events scheduled at that time and people leave town for vacation in July and August.

Sandy Mori emphasized the importance of reporting back to the community about the Peace Plaza Project. She explained that there are plans for at least three town hall meetings to maximize public participation: one on a weekday night, another on a weekend day, and a third meeting dedicated to Japanese speakers. She added that there may be outreach to Korean and Chinese speaking communities as well. Sandy wanted to be sure that the updated plans reflected cultural authenticity. She urged that the updated conceptual designs to be shared at the town hall meetings clearly indicate the contributions of the RHAA community consultants toward cultural authenticity.

Richard expressed that many community members have asked him about an update to the Peace Plaza project. He is anxious to report back to community members on the status of the project and share updated designs.

Nan Park shared that there is a regular newsletter of the St. Francis Cooperative housing complex and that Peace Plaza updates could be shared in the newsletter since many residents spend time in Japantown, just across the street.

III. Remembering George Yamasaki

Richard Hashimoto announced the untimely passing of community leader George Yamasaki, known as “the voice of the Cherry Blossom Festival.” Allen Okamoto is organizing a community celebration of life. Details forthcoming.

Next Meeting: Tuesday March 22, 2022, 5:00 PM