NOTES FROM THE
AD HOC PEACE PLAZA/PAGODA COMMITTEE MEETING
OF THE JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE
COMMUNITY ROOM OF UNION BANK
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2017

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:
Jon Osaki, Richard Hashimoto, Judy Hamaguchi, David Ishida, Glynis Nakahara, Alice Kawahatsu, Rosalyn Tonai

STAFF PRESENT:
Greg Marutani, Coco Tando

OTHERS PRESENT:
Sandy Mori Tim Frye (HPC), Dennis Kern (R&P), Stacy Bradley (R&P), Desirée Smith (HPC), Kayleigh Lloyd, Tomo Hirai, Steve Nakajo, Robert Rusky, Karen Kai, George Yamasaki, Jr.

Jon Osaki called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

I. DEBRIEF OF JTF DECISION TO POSTPONE SEEKING LANDMARKING STATUS FOR THE PEACE PLAZA

Jon reported the Japantown Task Force (JTF) voted to move forward with the Pagoda but to continue the Peace Plaza at this time to avoid any possibility in the remediation of the Peace Plaza.

Tim Frye stated the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) would defer to the community but added there may be other creative ways to landmark the Peace Plaza. He added that if the Pagoda is landmarked and the community would like to move forward in landmarking the Peace Plaza would require an amendment to the Pagoda landmark designation.

Sandy reported that she has documents from the Recreation and Parks Department that in 1985 designated the Peace Plaza as an open space in perpetuity. (Attachment A).

Certificate of Appropriateness (CA)

Kayleigh Lloyd stated that Supervisor London Breed wants community input and community outreach are essential to her in moving forward with the remediation of the leaks from the Peace Plaza into the Japan Center Garage that have persisted for many years without adequate repair.

II. UPDATES FROM SUPERVISOR BREED AND OTHER CITY DEPARTMENTS

Sandy Mori reported that in her meeting with Naomi Kelly, (Chief Financial Officer for the Mayor) is very supportive of the project, however, she said it would require the community to reach out to Phil Ginsberg head of R&P and Ed Reiskin head of San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency (SFMTA) to urge them to include budget support from the two departments.

Rich reported that a staff member from the SFMTA stated that the funds for SFMTA are required to be used only for transportation purposes.

Dennis Kern referenced the study that was completed in 2016 defining the need to remediate the leaks into the Japan Center Garage Corporation (JCGC) that they estimated
$8 million, demolishing the floor down to the garage slab, redesign the grade, install a waterproof membrane and ensure a

A “cheaper temporary fix that would run approximately $600,000. They are awaiting a follow up report from McGinnis Chen, who did the original study.

David Ishida expressed his concern that with the “cheaper fix” assurances would need to be made known in advance to ensure that the remediation takes into account the electrical and plumbing issues are addressed in advance so no further damage results from the “cheaper fix.”

Concern was expressed that the Pagoda has not received an assessment of its condition since its installation in 1968, noting that some spalling has taken place as well as severe deterioration of the copper roofing.

III. REVIEW OF JCHESS PRIORITIES RELATED TO THE PEACE PLAZA
Deferred this item to next meeting (Attachment B).

IV. NEXT STEPS
Determine what is recommended to the Board.

The meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

The next meeting will be at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, October 24, 2017 at the Community Room of Union Bank.
6. JAPANESE PEACE PLAZA
EMINENT DOMAIN

Approval of acquisition of the Japanese Peace Plaza through eminent domain. (The Commission may convene in Executive Session regarding this matter.)

Assistant General Manager for Administration Phil Arnold explained the 1986-87 Open Space Program recommended acquisition of the Japanese Peace Plaza. The Real Estate Department engaged in negotiations with the owner to acquire this property, reached an impasse, and asked if eminent domain proceedings should be initiated. Mr. Arnold said the owner has offered to develop part of the Plaza in return for deeding the remaining portion to the City. The area the owner wants to develop would encroach on the area that is used for public gatherings. He further stated the City Attorney advises the City should proceed to acquire it in order to preserve this area as public open space. It was clarified that the action taken today is advisory to the Board of Supervisors as they are the only body which can initiate eminent domain proceedings.

Harley Hardesty, the attorney representing the owner, Sinclair Louie, explained he had previously presented Mr. Louie's plans to develop the area and donate the balance of the land to the City.

Ronald Iswamasa, representing the Japanese Community, said numerous organizations and institution have attested their concern to keep Japanese Peace Plaza as open space. He encouraged the Commission to continue eminent domain procedures to acquire the Plaza for the Japanese community and the City.

Charlie Morimoto, spoke on behalf of the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California, and explained the Plaza is the only open space in the Japantown area, is used for festivals and is key to the needs of the community.

President Friend informed the Commission he wished to remove himself from this vote because he had a conflict of interest: he is a known friend of Mr. Louie's and a close friend of Mr. Louie's daughter and son-in-law.

On motion of Commissioner Rodriguez, seconded by Commissioner Harris, President Friend was excused from voting on this item.

On recommendation of the Parks and Planning Committee, and on motion of Commissioner Eickman, seconded by Commissioner Mori, the following resolution was adopted:

RES. NO. 14763

RESOLVED, That this Commission approves the acquisition of the Japanese Peace Plaza through eminent domain procedures.

APPROVED BY THE FOLLOWING VOTE:
Ayes: Commissioners Harris, McAteer, Meyer, Eickman, Mori, Rodriguez
Abstain: Commissioner Friend
CULTURAL HERITAGE and ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

ATTACHMENT B
The term “public realm” is used to refer to the spaces in a community which are common to everyone—the streets, sidewalks, parks, plazas and other open spaces. Japantown’s public realm has some notable features, such as community-oriented plazas and regional thoroughfares, which distinguishes it from other San Francisco neighborhoods. Japantown’s public realm is notably influenced by mid-century urban renewal-related ideas, which placed more emphasis on automobile access and less on streets as places for pedestrians.

PUBLIC PLAZAS

Japantown’s public plazas, Peace Plaza and Buchanan Mall, are the geographic and cultural heart of the neighborhood. These plazas serve as gathering spaces, are the location of festivals, and are access points to many of the neighborhood’s businesses.

Peace Plaza

Peace Plaza is situated in the heart of the neighborhood. Peace Plaza is a 0.7 acre space managed by the City’s Recreation and Parks Department. The Plaza was originally constructed as part of the Japan Trade Center in the early 1970s, and redesigned in 1999/2000 due to water leakage problems. The Plaza has a Japanese aesthetic, including the Peace Pagoda, Japantown’s most recognizable public icon, a hard-scape plaza with a small stage, geometric arrangement of tree planters, wood benches, boulders, and a reflective pool. In addition to drawing tourists daily, the plaza is home to all of the community’s large events (as discussed above in Section F. Culture Activities and Events).

Buchanan Mall

Buchanan Mall, recently renamed Osaka Way, is a pedestrian-only portion of Buchanan Street that runs for a full block between Post and Sutter streets. The area, directly north of the Peace Plaza, is also considered the heart of Japantown. The mall is lined by retail uses on both sides. The mall was designed in the 1960s, and was intended to reflect a modern version of the Japanese village aesthetic, with intimate scale of buildings and varied facades.

As a public right-of-way, the maintenance of the infrastructure along Buchanan Mall is managed by the City’s Department of Public Works. In addition, the Nihonmachi Parking Corporation uses proceeds from the adjacent parking lots to pay for street cleaning and surface maintenance of Buchanan Mall.

PUBLIC PLAZAS

The term “streetscape” entails all those things that influence a pedestrian’s experience, including landscaping, lighting, sidewalk, furnishings, and upkeep.

STREETScape

G.2. Buchanan Mall Design. Buchanan Mall’s uneven paving materials are difficult to walk on, and considered unsafe by seniors. There is also need for more activation of the plaza by protecting sunlight exposure, repairing the plumbing serving the two fountains designed by renowned artist Ruth Asawa, pursuing economic strategies to increase business to the shops and restaurants that line the plaza, and increasing outdoor seating.

G.3. Streetscape Maintenance. In Japantown, a widely-voiced concern from the community is the maintenance quality of the existing streetscape, in addition to the desire for improvements. Merchants are concerned that if visitors view the neighborhood as an unpleasant place to walk, shop, or gather, they will not return. Compared to other areas of the city, Japantown’s sidewalk pavement is in relatively good condition, however there are...
PHOTOS ON THIS PAGE

1. The lack of landscaping and seating options makes Peace Plaza uninviting.

2. Buchanan Malls’ Ruth Asawa-designed fountains have not worked in several years.

3. Street furnishings, like the benches on Buchanan Mall, provide a comfortable seating environment for the community.

4. Cultural events bring tradition, fun, and lots of people to Japantown. Pictured here are the J-Pop Summit Festival and the Soy and Tofu Festival. Images courtesy of David Yu, Soy and Tofu Festival.

5. Special lighting on Buchanan Mall serves a functional and cultural purpose

6. The Sensu Fan serves as a gateway on Webster between Geary and Post. Japantown could benefit from more such gateways. Image courtesy of NDD Creative.
8. Utilize Japan Center Garages' Capital Improvement Funds

DESCRIPTION

The Japan Center Garages consist of the Main Garage located at 1610 Geary Boulevard, under the Japan Center East and West malls, and the Fillmore Street Annex Garage located underneath the Sundance Kabuki Cinemas. The City of San Francisco owns the garages under the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA). On July 2, 2002 the City leased the garages to the Japan Center Garage Corporation (JCGC) for an initial term of 15 years, with the option to renew the lease for an additional 15 years. In 2013 a new lease was approved with an initial term of five years with two five-year options.

The JCGC is a non-profit public benefit corporation that augments marketing efforts in Japantown. Additionally, JCGC serves as a steward of the garage providing oversight to the best interest of the City and the community. A professional garage management company operates the garages on a day-to-day basis.

In previous years JCGC had collected a portion of the garage’s revenue in a Capital Improvement Fund for seismic improvements and maintenance of the garage. SFMTA recently utilized the Capital Improvement Fund balance in order to help pay for a structural examination of all of the City’s garages. The ongoing structural examination of the Japan Center’s garages will convey the scope of repairs that may be necessary. As part of JCGC’s new agreement with the City, JCGC surrendered its Capital Improvement Account balance to the City through 2017, as part of the MTA Capital Improvement Series A & B Bond Measures. Once reinstated, the Capital Improvement Account will receive monthly transfers of $37,500 with a cap of $1,350,000.

 BENEFITS

This Capital Improvement Fund could be used to improve the seismic safety of the Japan Center Garages or to help rebuild these garages as necessary. The continued use of the garages is seen by the community as vital for serving local businesses and enabling Japantown to stay as the hub for the Japanese community in the region. Any significant improvement to the garage may affect Peace Plaza, which is sited directly above the garage. As such, changes to the garage could incorporate positive changes to Peace Plaza.

CHALLENGES

New funds will not begin accruing in the Capital Improvement Fund until 2017. Depending on the results of the structural survey, significant and time-consuming reconstruction of the garages may be necessary, which would affect the Japan Center and Japantown as well. Such a scenario would require substantial coordination between City agencies, the JCGC, the Japan Center’s owners, and the community.

KEY LEADERS

SFMTA, JCGC, Japan Center property owners, community stakeholders

NEXT STEPS

If the structural examination of the garages reveals significant concerns, then the community and City could coordinate on a strategy for rehabilitating or rebuilding the garages and managing the impact of such a project on both the Japan Center and the broader neighborhood. If the examination does not reveal significant concerns that would necessitate such a project, then the JCGC and SFMTA could consider assessing the viability of revising the lease agreement. For example, a portion of garage revenues could be used for social heritage events and marketing activities, particularly as they relate to Japan Center, or other neighborhood improvements (such as pedestrian, open space and streetscape improvements).
10. Create Japantown Design Guidelines

DESCRIPTION

As described in the existing conditions section, Japantown displays an eclectic mix of building styles, open spaces, landscaping, and public art that contribute to a unique neighborhood character. Japanese-inspired design is an element that adds to Japantown’s built environment. A draft set of Japantown Design Guidelines were developed by the City and community in order to encourage culturally relevant architecture in new building/site designs and in renovations and additions to older buildings/sites. The draft Japantown Design Guidelines are intended to promote, maintain, and accentuate the authentically expressive qualities of Japanese-inspired designs that contribute to the uniqueness of Japantown.

The draft Japantown Design Guidelines are intended to complement the City’s existing design guidelines (described above). Nothing in the draft Japantown Design Guidelines should be interpreted as limiting new development to specific architectural styles, periods of construction, or cultural expressions. These additional Japantown Design Guidelines are intended to embellish building and site development in the neighborhood by integrating Japanese-inspired design aesthetics into suitable building features. The Guidelines specifically speak to building form, massing, ornamentation, materials, and landscaping. It includes sections on “Form and Structure”, “Roofs”, “Materials and Ornamentation”, and “Landscaping, Open Space, and Public Art”.

The draft Japantown Design Guidelines are intended to apply to properties within the blocks bounded by Sutter Street, Geary Boulevard, Fillmore Street and Laguna Street, as well as to major development projects located anywhere within the neighborhood based upon recommendations of Planning staff and community input.

BENEFITS

A set of Japantown Design Guidelines can enhance Japanese character and the quality of architectural styles and landscaping in Japantown, thereby creating a more attractive shopping district, improving appearance and cleanliness of the neighborhood and its public space, and enhancing the surrounding cultural and historic landmarks.

CHALLENGES

Design guidelines unto themselves do not guarantee high-quality architecture. Also, given the small quantity of new developments expected in Japantown, there are limited opportunities to implement such guidelines to improve the physical fabric of the neighborhood.

KEY LEADERS

Planning Department, community stakeholders, property developers

NEXT STEPS

The Planning Department should complete development of these Japantown Design Guidelines in conjunction with the community and submit them to the Planning Commission for adoption.

11. Implement Improvements to Peace Plaza

DESCRIPTION

As discussed in Chapter 4 - Existing Conditions, Peace Plaza is the public space located at the geographic and cultural heart of Japantown. However, the community perceives that it is not well designed or activated. To address this concern, the Planning Department and Recreation and Parks Department should work with
the community on a strategy to improve Peace Plaza. Potential concepts include:

- Renovating the plaza decks to include a durable waterproofing membrane
- Planting more trees, grass areas, and plants that are culturally relevant to the community
- Installing a visitor’s information and wayfinding kiosk
- Providing outdoor dining/seating opportunities and scheduling programmed activities and events
- Developing areas for different age groups such as a children’s play area
- Redesigning the connection between Peace Plaza and Geary Boulevard to include a prominent, terraced stairway that allows visual connections to Geary Boulevard and serves as the grand gateway into the neighborhood and aligning it with the proposed crosswalk across Geary Boulevard

**BENEFITS**

Being at the heart of the community, improvements to Peace Plaza can significantly enhance Japantown, including:

- Increasing the attractiveness of the shopping district, thereby increasing business viability and helping keep Japantown the hub of the Japanese community in the region
- Creating better public space and recreational opportunities for all aspects of the community, thereby increasing livability
- Drawing more people to the Japanese-inspired Peace Plaza (featuring Peace Pagoda) and thereby conveying a sense of the essence of Japan
- Increasing connectivity across Geary Boulevard
- Improving the neighborhood’s landscaping, lighting, street furnishings, and wayfinding

**CHALLENGES**

Planning any redesign of Peace Plaza would require a substantial effort on the part of multiple City agencies and the community. Implementing these changes would require substantial funding. No source of funding has been identified to date. Any strategy would be affected by the potential need to rebuild the Japan Center garages, and/or the need to seismically retrofit Peace Pagoda.

**KEY LEADERS**

Recreation and Parks Department, Planning Department, Japan Center property owners, Japan Center Garage Corporation, community stakeholders

**NEXT STEPS**

The Planning Department should coordinate with the Recreation and Parks Department to develop a scope for planning improvements to Peace Plaza.

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12. Implement Improvements to Buchanan Mall

**DESCRIPTION**

Like Peace Plaza, Buchanan Mall is a publicly-owned plaza located at the geographic and cultural heart of Japantown. It is lined with shops which help to activate the space. Funding for its maintenance is provided by the Nihonmachi Parking Corporation, based on revenue generated from the two adjacent outdoor parking lots. However, the community perceives that Buchanan Mall is difficult to walk on, and that it could be further activated. To address this concern, the Planning Department and the Department of Public Works should work with the community on a strategy to improve Buchanan Mall. Potential concepts include:

- Repaving the side walkways, planting more trees, landscaping with culturally relevant plants, and enhancing the existing historic public art (historic fountains, cobblestone river and Torii gate) with new, complementary public art