COMMUNITY MEETING NOTES
JULY 31, 2011
GROUP 1 OF 2: COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT / COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
TOPIC LEADERS: HIROSHI FUKUDA / BOB HAMAGUCHI

Japantown Community Meeting on July 31
- Community Land Trust –

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Topic Leaders: Hiroshi Fukuda and Robert Hamaguchi

Q1. Vote

Q.2 What businesses should be in Japantown?

Cultural/Entertainment

- As the Special Use District is being planned, a cultural/entertainment focus should be considered. Asian American arts/ cultural organizations such as Kearny Street Workshop, Asian American Theater Company, national Japanese American historical society and others should be considered
- Prioritize focus on culture/ traditional values, commercialism, arts and activities
- All businesses that cater to or depict Japanese culture with approval of community
- Japantown is to be cultural. That is the significance of the name
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Educational Institutes

- Cooking school
- Language school: People who want to study Japanese are also interested in Japanese culture, so they would be spend time in J-town.

Youth and Young Adult Place

- Bowling
- Youth events
- Youth gathering place
- Inform youth of cultural classes and events.
- Newspaper is very important for Japanese American Community

- Hamilton Playground is difficult for families with young kids to use because of lack of parking
- More youth-oriented businesses, i.e. “urban design” clothes boutiques (fat lace & formerly Super 7)
- Little Tokyo in LA has far more of these businesses offering a more youth-oriented neighborhood.
- Japantown needs a dedicated space for youth/young adults to serve their needs and interests outside of sports and other structural programs.
- As a long time community member no business brings me to Japantown. None really bring me in. Current businesses also don’t bring in community members to stay. We need youth/young adult space to bring next generation in to stay in the community. Needs to be unstructured hang out spaces, art spaces that we don’t have. Japanese American small businesses as well.

- **Businesses & Institutions**

Restaurants/Food/Shops

- Bookstore
- Food truck night for Asian food? (food truck business is traditionally difficult in the city)
- Bar
- Food/Groceries
- Food truck restaurants?
- Japanese restaurants and grocery/pastry stores bring me to Japantown
- Manjyu (Benkyodo) brings me to J-town
- Small tofu business
- Japanese products and fish markets
- Japanese tea tasting room businesses
- Grocery stores bring me to J-town
- Attract more residents: Japanese clothing shops, late night bars/izakayas/restaurants, and outdoor café.
- Specialty retail like Kimono shop
- Would like to see more: Yakitori, Okonomiyaki, Bento Specialty, Japanese curry, Japanese spaghetti, beef bowl, vegetarian, tofu.
- Businesses that bring me to Japantown: Nijiya, Pika Pika, Benkyo-do, Kinokuniya, May’s café, Tanpopo.
- I come for PikaPika, Kinokuniya, and Benkyodo
- A lot of local Japanese, frequent visitors who are lovers of Japanese cuisine have said the quality and taste of most of the restaurants are not as interesting as others in outside of Japantown.

Arts

- Gallery or some other art related facility
- Martial arts

- Performing arts center
- Genryu Arts willing to step-up and be a part of addressing the maintenance and improvement to Peace Plaza. Japanese/Japanese American Art non-profits/profit based institutes/businesses. Promoting visual and performing art businesses.
- Japantown needs performing arts space—especially serving smaller groups that can't afford the Kabuki Theater or need more technical elements (sound, lighting) than Kabuki offers.

Japanese-Based Chine Stores/Corporate

- Get large Japanese corporations (e.g. Sony, Toyota, Hitachi, etc.) to share a space or rotate to showcase products (at very minimal cost – share rent) – concept to promote goods – so that these corporation can donate money and advice to this community.
- Business that reflect contemporary Japan like New People: Nintendo, Sony, Toyota, Matsuda, Nissan, and Honda
- Hot stores in Japan: Big Camera (electrics/discount store), Miki House (Kids cloth shop), UNIQLO
- Japanese products introduced in J-town one year out. Sony, Toyota, etc. only available in J-town would create regional draw
- Small businesses and chain-store employers should be considered to establish presence in J-town.
- Japanese department store satellite location (Japan-based)
- Japanese toy store with play area for kids
- It would be nice to see a Japanese "Department" type of department stores in Japantown
- Want to see Japan-based formula-retail; more diverse retail towards i.e. electronics want a sports bar.
- Japanese chain could be draw. The current Japan Center lacks any connection to today's Japanese shoppers saves for Nijiya, Kinokuniya, and number of restaurants. Encourage Japanese retailers could revitalize the overall economy.
- Japanese chain like Mitsukoshi, Hankyu (department stores)
- Japanese electric merchants' store we need as camera, computers, etc. Japanese doll and craft shops will be nice too.
- Businesses I want in Japantown: Uniqlo, Japanese-based restaurants, Muji, Self-edge (it's in the Mission), Family Mart (convenience store).
- I want more stores that are exclusive to Japantown
- Japanese quality goods
- Mixed use – retails and production focused on Japanese-based products

Open Space and Landscape

- Somewhere to hang out as a family
- Experience – more Japanese style landscaping, more stores with old traditional Japanese and antiques
- Better lightning with Japanese theme
- Peace Pagoda brings me to Japantown
- Need a family friendly gathering place/park or play space

Non-Profit Organizations

- There is a need for more non-profits to operate in J-town (e.g. Japantown Arts – aka JAM) with low rent. Maybe an art and cultural location.
- Proposed free shuttle from Union Square to Japantown (For detail: www.project.ning.com)
- Nichibei Foundation needs support from community.

Festival and Activity

- Community programs and festival also bring me here
- I come to volunteer at various organizations

Other

- Explore option for local hire (see SF initiative)
- Explore idea of private companies that move in to contribute number of local community
- Japanese Consul General Office should be in Japantown.
- Do not prohibit formula retail, but maintain community approval process
- Historic businesses, buildings, and homes should be remained
- Need a business retention strategy of culturally significant businesses
- **We already have businesses coming into Japantown undercutting and not considering impact it is divisive the question of small businesses need expanding and defining ownership of 2 or more businesses by one owner and family.**
- Too many businesses are owned by one owner family.
- A good mix of contemporary and traditional businesses
- Decide on consumer audience and needs to develop J-town branding strategy

- **Community Land Trust**
  - How do we identify who would realistically be willing to invest in building the financial base for the CLT?
  - How will CLT be governed and managed? How will diverse representation be guaranteed?

- How will preservation of authentic Japanese America/Japanese activities and businesses be preserved. Even if the CLT lowers cost of those businesses, the real problem is continuity beyond current owners.
- In this climate, I am skeptical about attracting enough money for CLT properties and operation. But idea of community ownership is ideal. No doubt about that.
- I'm concerned about fundraising for CLT undermining fundraisers for other Japantown non-profits. Not enough to go around.
- Commercial CLT needed to keep J-town alive and to survive

- **Special Use District**

<u>Agree</u> to expand SUD

- Keep SUD.
- Prohibit Formula Retail to protect small businesses. Large Japanese department retail might draw large numbers of new customers.
- Agree—family owned stores should have 1st priority. Japantown is not a strip-mall, but rather a neighborhood with businesses where people know one another. Need more space for non-profit—with low rent.
- Some protection/safeguards should be considered for "Big Box" employer such as "Wall Mart" "Target" and the like
- Formula retail presents a serious threat to small businesses, as many landlords prefer the deep-pocket security of a chain to a small locally owned business.—So strong restrictions on Formula retail need to be continued—either by bans or by additional use conditions that address community objections.

<u>Disagree</u> to expand SUD

- No need to expand SUD beyond core commercial area. There are other mechanisms for protecting individual properties.
- No, franchise can overwhelm smaller malls and other stores.—Keep ordinance to restrict formula-retail, but formula-retail that is Japanese authentic formula retail may be allowed.
- No, I don't want the ordinance to be extended to ban all formula-retail. I'm all for supporting small businesses, but not even letting certain stores enter Japantown will prohibit the growth potential of Japantown. I would rather have Japantown as a vibrant, desirable community with Japanese retail, rather than have it be a dying retail location with no economic drivers. Uniqlo and Muji are chains and we wouldn't want to prohibit them from coming to Japantown.
- Rather than an outright prohibition it would be nice to have a review of each formula-retail that wants to be here in Japantown.
- I do not support blanket ban as I would like to see for example, successful Japanese chains launch their North America operations in San Francisco Japantown. MikiHouse

(In Hawaii already), Uniqlo (clothing NY), Tokyo Hands (variety), BIC Camera (electronics discount).

- Should be a balance or taken in a case-by-case basis since many small businesses aren't moving into Japantown—so would it be better to have empty store fronts and prohibit formula retail stores like Daiso? I don't think so.
- Formula retail: - cannot restrict all formula retail. Some businesses may be vital for Japantown. Have to look at all proposals on a case by case basis. You can still protect existing, small businesses.
- SUD should maintain conditional use permit NOT wholesale restriction. Prohibiting formula retail may squash opportunities that we want a chance to consider. Also careful consideration of businesses that could increase foot traffic vs. negative impact to existing businesses.

Questions

- **Special Use District needs to be explained in detail. What is formula retail? I wouldn't say prohibit need community/local business but those businesses need to be supported. Should be taken on a case by case basis can't be a blanket ban. Must look at pros/cons priority for family business**.
- SUD is important. But critical question is where planning and land use controls go.-SUD may not be the sole code location.- Ex. A Japantwon NCD with appropriate zoning controls may be a better home for use conditions, sizes, etc.

Discussion Note

Businesses and Other

- Restaurants
- Japanese Council
- Cultural center (JCCCNC)
- Culturally oriented businesses
  - Promote Japanese American relationship here and at the country
- Dentou
- Affordable multi-generational housing
- Cultural and crafts associations
- Small businesses
- Uniqlo: from Japan, only one in New York, not on East cost
- Why Minamoto Kiccyouan in downtown?
  - They want store near Union Square where tourist come
  - Japanese used to look down at Japanese American and other locals (not as much as before nowadays), so they are in downtown
  - Japanese businesses are trying to upscale their businesses?
  - Practically: traffic
- Major department stores
- Affordable housing for Nisei
- Create incubator spaces to cultivate new businesses we want e.g. tofu

SUD – Is this important?

- Balance small businesses with need for vitarity
- Incoming Korean small business – Is that also a part of the question?
- Life blood of community
- Formula-retail: attract traffic and than small businesses benefit