COMMUNITY MEETING NOTES
JUNE 1, 2011
GROUP 2 OF 3: BUILT FORM
TOPIC LEADERS: GLYNIS NAKAHARA

Japantown Town Hall – June 1, 2011

Notes from Cultural Character (Group 2)

Recorded by Jenny Niec and Kris Schaeffer
Typed by Jenny Niec

Ideas and Suggestions:

Building height/density

Buildings should be no more than 5 stories high

I don't agree that the heights of the buildings should be high. This will make the community not feel like a town, but rather too corporate and will block important landmarks.

No tall buildings!

Recommend current height limits

Stay with current height limitations

Existing heights are enough to expand the space for new business opoortunities.

Keep heights as is!

Part of what makes the Japantown neighborhood so great is that it's actually a neighborhood. Big bulky towers make sense downtown, but not in a neighborhood. We must do everything we can to protect the immediate neighborhood and our surrounding area as well. We can build new housing and create density without big, bulky high rise building that create shadows, take away from our neighborhood feel, and make Japantown less inviting to residents and visitors.

High rises should be OK in certain areas (such as next to that are already high rises within certain areas)

Keep the density high enough but not affect businesses too much

Can add density without huge towers

Change heights based on flexible zoning controls

Buildings no higher than 40 feet at peak

Make sure amended plan applies height guidelines to entire area. For example: original plan tacitly approves 400 foot high building at 1481 Post. This is completely out of scale and appears to endorse omitting city guidelines requiring 115 feet of space between towers. At earlier meetings, planning staff promised to consider these problems, but they were ignored in printed plan.

<u>Building design/Japanese design</u>

The traditional Japanese building (except Tokyo, Yokohama, etc.) is small residential/commercial space. If we want to emulate the Japanese community, we should do the same.

The design should have a Japanese feel to new buildings, especially along Post, Geary, and Sutter, where most of the commercial businesses are located

Efficient use of space for architectural design

If any building does take place, the design should try to conform to the surrounding area and reflect Japanese concept design.

Buildings should have Japanese architectural aspects unique to Japantown, not to SF in general, not like the ugly building on Post at Webster

Keep traditional

Soft wood finishes

Geary Blvd. should architecturally look Japanese. It is so nondescript now. Japantown is not visible from Geary.

Design has to be more authentic Japanese

Some things that make Japantown and Japanese culture different and unique:

- The use of clever architecture design in small spaces
- Edo style villages
- Wooden kanji signage
- Rooftop beer garden

Note from typist: The yellow highlighted part was from a sticky note that I couldn't read too well, but I think we captured those ideas on the other charts too.

- Infill of additional space maintain allowable height and bulk
- Glass contemporary curtain wall construction for added floors leaving traditional Japanese design style intact
- None to obscure sight lines to pagoda on the East and West end additions
- Cultural museum and performing arts center in glass to reflect pagoda and open up plaza – like NYC's Lincoln Center
- ??? Share some quality condos with affordable units and ??

Concerned about design that has divided us. Not coherent, elements not connected.

Building facades are not welcoming.

Compatibility – to existing grain as well as old Victorians with variety

Need a symbol of the community

More Japanese architecture and influence in the buildings when renovated. The Buchanan Mall (Osaka Way) is the most Japanese style area, while the rest of Japantown lacks this influence and design. Chinatown has a Chinese style, and architecture is a major tourist draw to SF. Japantown could be a great architectural destination.

For new development: urban design should be compatible in scale and have variety in form

Japanese design means:

- efficient use of space
- Buchanan Mall elements: softness, woods, subtle colors
- New Tokyo design elements – (e.g.: egg shape) – blend new Asian with old
- Glass "curtain wall": all glass open at fountain and seen from Geary
- Transparency

Green space/open space/landscaping

Greening the neighborhood
- added trees
- water reuse (gray water)
- plants

Bonsai

Reflecting ponds

Courtyards, rooftop gardens

Need better open areas, nicer landscaping

Maybe cherry blossom trees on Geary Blvd.

Use good architects or designers to change the landscape of Japantown

Enhance present open spaces in Japantown areas such as: Peace Plaza, Webster Street between Sutter and Post

Not only should the Japanese character be maintained in the buildings, but there should be more “green” areas, such as trees, plantings, etc. to make Japantown more attractive.

Cultural character should encompass Chapter 6, and strong, beautiful, and coordinated landscaping to enhance character of our commercial buildings and malls. There are also some beautiful residential gardens in residential complexes nearby – make them more accessible.

Landscaping is critical. We’re not there yet.

Open space with green gardens

Making an iconic monumental landscape, park, or open space, is a good strategy for enhancing community’s identity, and is also a good approach for sustainability.

Bring people to Japantown for the community’s purpose, not only for shopping and consumption.

General

Pedestrian orientation and open space is important for any development to work, together with housing and community-oriented shopping areas, to make the development sustainable.

Activate streetscape to provide activity

Geary Blvd. – build “castle”-type walls with walking trails

Japantown can’t stay as is. Need to attract younger adults.

Density = Money = Festivals

More interaction with street

Nature of the community is interacting with each other

Make Geary Blvd. frontage more inviting

Geary side is very unattractive and not inviting!

Geary should have better access, feel safe and inviting – more cultural feeling and historic information that is easy to read and learn about.

More commercial frontage on Post

Neighborhood/community feel, cultural character

Keep as much Japanese influence with plant species in landscaping, while increasing canopy coverage to mitigate any negative development impacts (even with special permission from DPW for exceptions)

Focus on a symbol of Japantown

Japantown is now a shopping center. So I don’t know where is the center of Japantown.

Gates (something like what Chinatown has) at more of a “front door” to neighborhood in a busy area

Geary Blvd. – a “wall” after Kabuki to Japantown garage – make like a Japanese castle wall.

Easier accessibility via Muni

Extend cable car to Japantown

Link tourist experience to Japantown

Possibly consider rezoning for fewer restaurants and more community spaces, event spaces, or even other commercial spaces.

Peace Plaza

Restore Peace Plaza – make it more welcoming.

Restoration of Peace Plaza (to what it was like before it was demolished)

Signage

Allow vertical flag-style signage in specific areas designated for cultural character

Wayfare signage, e.g. placques

More signage on Geary

Questions:

Is cultural character to be applied to the intrinsic character of the building or for the "USG" (usage??) applied to the building?

Are there plans to expand the pedestrian areas (car-free zones)?

How can standards be developed that are consistent with Japantown's cultural character? (e.g. Victorians, "Japanese" architecture, old or new? or both?)

Who can provide/create design guidelines – someone in the Japantown community?

Would like to learn more about landscaping options/designs. Are rooftop gardens a possibility? Plans for trees?

Are the proposed guidelines to be applied uniformly throughout Japantown, or are there to be specific guidelines for specific areas?

What are the streets that define the entire planning area?

On which side of the streets are the setbacks proposed?

What is a large parcel design? (1/2 acre or larger, about the size of 4 standard lots or larger – per Paul Lord)