



**JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE BOARD MEETING**  
**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17 2014 @ 6:00 P.M.**  
Union Bank Community Room

**Draft Minutes**

**ATTENDEES:** Seiko Fujimoto, Miki Heitzman, Alice Kawahatsu, Richard Matsuno, Mark Moriguchi, Steve Nakajima, Benh Nakajo, Ros Tonai, Paul Wermer

**ABSENT:** None

**STAFF:** Bob Hamaguchi, Greg Marutani, and Greg Vioria

**GUESTS:** Aya Ino, Don Tamaki, Barry Lewin, Clement Kong, Jason Tran, Mabe Ng, Mark Zeff, Lisa Achi, Caryl Ito, Rich Hashimoto, Kathie Cheatham, Michiko Yamada, Glynis Nakahara, Bernie Choden, Karen Kai, Tim Colen, Karl Matsushita, Lois Ohwa, Craig Waterman, Sandy Mori, Beau Simon, Karl Matsushita

**I. Call to Order**

The meeting called to order: 6:02 p.m. by Alice Kawahatsu, President. There was a quorum.

**II. Approval of Minutes of the Board Meeting on August 20, 2014.**

It was moved by Paul Wermer and seconded by Steve Nakajima to approve the August 20, 2014 minutes as submitted. The motion passed unanimously.

**III. Guest Speaker: Barry Lewin, Prospect Hotel Advisors – New owners of Hotel Kabuki**

- Property was purchased around three months ago
- Lewin introduced team members – Clement Kong (Lawyer) , Jason Tran (Kwan-Henmi), Mabe Ng (project Architect – Kwan-Henmi Architects), Lisa Achi (Project Manager - Prospect Advisors), Mark Zeff (MarkZeff Design), Craig Waterman (General Manager – Hotel Kabuki)
- Prospect Hotel Advisors oversee Hilton Hotels and other chains for Blackstone group.
- Lewin sees an opportunity to transform the hotel into a great hotel.
- Lewin committed to working with the community on having the hotel support the community events.
- Mark Zeff presented the design concepts of the project. Garden will be the highlight of the hotel. Lobby will be moved to an entrance from Post Street.
- Timeline for the project: Project start target April 2015. Project completion target beginning of 2016.

Public comments included that the project is consistent with the community design guidelines – not stereotype Japanese.

Lewin commented that it would target an active business customer that comes to San Francisco. He hoped that they will be a catalyst for the surrounding area.

When. asked if there were any plans for a concierge at the hotel, Lewin said there would be a concierge but the industry is moving to a digital future of information communications.

Regarding their business strategy Lewin said they are positioning the hotel for a profit and in five to seven years probably will not be the owners.

Lewin said that the renovation costs would be around \$20M. It was suggested that they communicate these plans more publicly.

Another commenter applauded that the Hotel was to comply with the existing Japantown covenants.

Donald Tamaki commented his appreciation that the Hotel was not afraid of the covenants and that the management met with community.

#### **IV. JTF Staff Reports**

##### **A. Marketing Committee**

Greg Vilorio reported there are two tours coming to Japantown. One is "Retail Across America" which is a campaign of the National Retail Federation. The National Retail Federation is a lobbying / association of local retail businesses. The tour will be on Thursday, September 25, 2014.

The second tour is SF Travel on September 26, 2014 from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Greg also noted that Yasukochi's Sweet Stop was mentioned in a popular food blog called 7x7. They were voted #1 Cake in SF on September 4.

Caryl Ito mentioned that Soko Hardware was highlighted on PBS this last weekend highlighting independent hardware stores.

##### **B. Crime Report**

- 1) Greg Marutani reported that crimes in the Japantown area are less than the city as a whole. Japantown burglaries are up, auto boosts are down - Auto Boosts have declined after stickers were placed on the meters. Noise complaints have increased. Alice K. congratulated Greg M. on his good work representing Japantown.
- 2) He reported that foot patrols have begun in the Hayes Valley/Haight/Duboce triangle and Lower/Middle Polk neighborhoods; Japantown will be next.
- 3) Greg M. reported that we have met with homeless unit. They recommended that "No Trespassing signs" be posted on private property so they can cite the homeless. Unfortunately the station ran out of signs; but 42 signs have been posted in Japantown. Bob Hamaguchi. commended Greg M. on his diligence on getting the signs up.
- 4) Greg M. reported that two people who spray-painted the brick wall on Hemlock Street (near Laguna) were arrested last weekend.

#### **V. Committee Reports**

A. Land Use/Built Form (Paul Wermer)

1) **Nihonmachi Little Friends (NLF) Letter of Support**

Paul Wermer announced that the JTF draft letter of support (**Attachment A**) was signed and sent on Tuesday, September 16, 2014. The public hearing at Planning Commission will be held on September 18, 2014. Rosalyn Tonai asked if NLF got a letter of support from JCCCNC. Wermer said he has not heard that a letter was issued but there were some concerns but nothing actionable or objectionable at this time.

2) **Design Guidelines** – Wermer said we had a lunch with Chikara, Glynis, Maya. We talked with Planner, Maya, and we hope to have an improved draft at the October 8 Land Use Committee meeting and have a board review on October 15.

3) **Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District** – Wermer. reported that we had made good progress on this but has recently stalled. We are now revisiting it.

Tonai asked if we have business owners on the Land Use Committee. Wermer said property owners have participated.

4) **1481 Post Street**

Paul W. reported that the Planning Commission held a hearing on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) on September 4, 2014. The DEIR showed impacts on the community by the project. The **draft** letter outlined concerns of the Draft EIR, including concerns about seniors (sunlight, traffic, etc.) and shadows.

Bob Hamaguchi reported that the Land Use Committee had been previously been given the approval to send a letter and the Executive Committee did not meet to approve the letter. Since the deadline has been extended to September 29, 2014 it is now being brought back to the main board meeting for approval.

It was moved by Paul Wermer and seconded by Ros Tonai to approve sending the letter (Attachment B) with the comments from the JTF regarding the DEIR prepared for the 1481 Post Project.

Public comments included:

- Has a copy of the concerns on the draft EIR outlined by Neighborhood group – San Francisco Tomorrow?
- Did the report give specifics on wind condition changes. Wermer. said that the developer chose mostly measurement points on Gough side only. Japantown side showed a reduction of wind but Wermer pointed out that it is an average over a period of time.
- Not only seniors can be affected by wind but children as well.

Alice K. called for a vote on the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

**VI. Unfinished Business – No Unfinished Business**

**VII. New Business**

Asian Pacific Islander American Heritage Preservation (APIAHP) Conference – Washington DC – Karen Kai presented a summary of a conference she attended. Asian Pacific Islanders Americans in Historic Preservation is a group of individuals who formed in 2007 to deal with preservation issues amongst the Asian Pacific Islander community. Washington DC Chinatown was presented to make cultural preservation more visible. Kai was on a panel called Intangible Culture and Place Making. There were several preservationists from Philadelphia. Kai talked about a planning process on how to preserve cultural heritage. She encouraged the JTF to participate in future APIAHP conferences.

**VIII. Announcements**

Next JTF Board meeting: Wednesday, October 15, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. Union Bank Community Room

**IX.** The meeting adjourned at 7:55p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Tonai', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rosalyn Tonai  
Secretary

## Attachments A





## JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE

日本町の経済発展・計画・保存

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING & PRESERVATION OF JAPANTOWN

Executive Director

Robert Hamaguchi

Community Aides

Greg Marutani

Greg Viloria

Board Members

Alice Kawahats, President

Paul Wermer, Vice-President

Mark Moriguchi, Treasurer

Rosalyn Tonai, Secretary

Seiko Fujimoto

Miki Heitzman

Richard Matsuno

Steve Nakajima

Benh Nakajo

September 16, 2014

San Francisco Planning Commission  
1650 Mission Street, Suite 400  
San Francisco, CA 94103

SUBJECT: 2013.0419CV, 1834 Sutter Street – Nihonmachi Little Friends

Dear Planning Commissioners:

The Japantown Task Force (JTF) strongly endorses the proposed expansion of Nihonmachi Little Friends (NLF) school located at 1830-1834 Sutter Street onto the playground space of their property. The JTF Board urges approval of the project, including the requested variance for rear yard open space.

Established in 1975, NLF is a non-profit, community based organization providing high quality and affordable childcare programs that integrate Japanese language and culture. An anchor neighborhood institution, they connect diverse families throughout San Francisco to Japantown, thus playing a critical role in the cultural and economic sustainability of the neighborhood.

In order to secure, consolidate and expand their preschool program, which is currently housed in two sites, NLF plans to build a 9,978 sf, two-story addition with basement to their existing Sutter Street preschool – a historically-significant Julia Morgan building – in the location currently occupied by three off-street parking spaces and the play area that serves the preschool. The proposed project maintains the current Sutter Street setback established by the existing preschool building. It also matches the rear setback of the existing building, thus requiring a zoning variance from the rear yard requirement. A rooftop playground will offset the loss of the current play area. The building size and program is driven by California code requirements for indoor and outdoor activity space (sf per child) and licensing mandates.



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Miki Heitzman  
Richard Matsuno  
Steve Nakajima  
Benji Nakajo

The Japantown Task Force supports the proposed project on the following basis:

- 1) **The project supports key goals of the JCNESS** – The expanded facility supports the long-term sustainability of the organization and its Japanese-enriched curriculum, which plays an important role in preserving cultural heritage. It contributes to a thriving commercial and retail district by attracting new families throughout the city to Japantown. And, it enhances the attractiveness and vitality of the neighborhood through its design and community-serving program.
- 2) **The project's design is sensitive to, and compatible with, the neighborhood and streetscape** – The contemporary design of the addition respects the prevailing scale of the street and complements its immediate neighbors – the JCCCNC and Julia Morgan structure -- without replicating their architecture. Subtle design strategies, including the alignment of major horizontal elements, window and doorway configuration and details, integration of “shoji” pattern language, and exterior building materials and color palette create a unique, but cohesive infill project with cultural meaning. An exterior Japanese garden adds a much-needed natural element to the streetscape. The generous setback of the project also provides visual relief and a welcoming street presence and respects the entry to the JCCCNC building.
- 3) **The project's design reflects best practices for additions to historic buildings** – Significant care and effort went into crafting a compatible building addition distinct from the Julia Morgan structure, without dominating or distracting from it. This is in keeping with the principles of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.



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- 4) **The project was designed in good faith** – NLF engaged in an extensive design review process with the Planning Department and neighborhood, meeting and surpassing all requirements for community outreach. They consulted with neighbors to understand their concerns and revised the building design to reach mutually-beneficial outcomes. NLF also sought the involvement of the LUBF committee through review and input to incorporate JCHESS principles into their design.
- 5) **NLF has committed to good communication during construction** – NLF has clearly demonstrated that they understand the possible construction impacts on their neighbors, and especially the programs for seniors and youth at the adjacent JCCCNC building. They have committed to clearly communicate with the neighbors so as to avoid surprises and minimize disruption.

Crafting a childcare facility addition on a tight, urban-infill property, adjoining a historically-significant structure, in a heritage neighborhood is an exceedingly tall order in San Francisco. The LUBF committee acknowledges NLF for their effort to create a sensitive, culturally-meaningful, and attractive facility that is a good neighbor and advances the goals of the JCHESS.

Sincerely,

Alice Kawahatsu  
Board President  
Japantown Task Force, Inc.

Cc:

Jonas Ionin, Planning Commission Secretary  
Scott Sanchez, Zoning Administrator, Planning Department  
Sara Vellve, Planner, San Francisco Planning Department  
Cathy Inamasu, Nihonmachi Little Friends





18 September, 2014

Executive Director  
Robert Hamaguchi

Community Aides  
Greg Marutani  
Greg Vora

Board Members  
Alice Kawahara, President  
Paul Werner, Vice President  
Mark Moriguchi, Treasurer  
Roselyn Terai, Secretary  
Seika Fujiwara  
Miki Heitzman  
Richard Messano  
Steven Nakajima  
Bonh Nakajo

**Sarah B Jones**  
Environmental Review Office  
San Francisco Planning Department  
1650 Mission Street, Suite 400  
San Francisco, CA 94103

Via email

**Subject: Case No. 2005.0679E, 1333 Gough Street/1481 Post Street Project DEIR**

**Dear Ms. Jones:**

The Japantown Task Force (JTF) submits the following comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report for Case No.: 2005.0679E, the 1333 Gough Street/1481 Post Street Project.

First, JTF would like to express our concern that the lack of a table of contents, the lack of a list of figures and tables, and lack of an index, have made it impossible to have confidence that the DEIR impacts are fully comprehended by this 574 page pdf DEIR, or that we have in fact identified all deficiencies in the report. On that basis alone the DEIR should be rejected, and resubmitted with useful indexing.

**Secondly we note that the CEQA appendix G guidelines are a minimum standard, and that a CEQA analysis should address any foreseeable adverse impacts on the environment, human health and safety.**

**Thirdly, we note that the Department of Public Health's San Francisco Indicator** Project data shows that the area around this project has a very high percentage of seniors (<http://www.sfindicatorproject.org/img/indicators/pdf/Seniors.pdf>), which is consistent with our awareness of senior housing in the neighborhood. Both the Indicator Project and the concepts of the Healthy Development Measurement Tool are important sources of information for assessing the impacts on a community, yet this resource seems to have been ignored in the CEQA process. And by failing to evaluate the impacts relative to the local demographics, the Draft EIR fails to adequately assess the actual impacts.

**Specific areas of concern we have identified include:**

1) **TRANSIT:** The DIER concludes that impact on transit will be less than significant (TR-2, C-TR2). However, SFMTA data as reported does not accurately represent the rider experience - e.g. the 38/38L so packed that the bus bypasses stops; ditto the 47/49. SFMTA TEP data reports the 2 at capacity as part of their justification to switch service from the 3 Jackson to the 2-Clement. Yet the

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info@japantowntaskforce.org • www.japantowntaskforce.org

DEIR reports ridership not exceeding 85% capacity at peak period. While the TEP program and Geary BRT may be implemented, the DEIR fails to address what the impacts will be if these projects fail to deliver as promised. Given SFMTA performance to date on such critical items as on-time performance, failure to address the gap between SFMTA reports of capacity and the current rider experience, or the impact of the GEARY BRT not being implemented, may well change the assessment. The report also fails to consider the specific impact on seniors, many of whom are mobility impaired and thus even more impacted by overcrowded transit. This is aggravated by the failure to adequately address cumulative impacts (Item 2, below)

Also failing to consider the high population of seniors, Improvement Measure I-TR-D does not discuss adjustments to street crossing times to accommodate the needs of the local population. Countdown timers are an excellent tool if and only if they provide pedestrians adequate time to cross the street, and by failing to specifically consider the needs of the local population the DEIR falls short of a credible mitigation.

**2) CUMULATIVE IMPACT:** It appears that the Cumulative Impact analysis does not consider what happens when more projects are approved on a spot upzoning basis along the Geary and Van Ness corridors. The probability is high that developers will be using the approval of 1481 Post as the basis for approving additional upzoning and it is likely that to meet housing demand, such projects will be approved. Generally speaking, cumulative impacts are based on the existing zoning - yet if there is a series of spot upzoning, the cumulative impact can be much more significant. However, this is not discussed in any significant detail.

The DEIR also fails to consider the cumulative impact of the proposed project on the existing built environment along the Post and Geary Street corridor from the Buchanan/Laguna midblock to Franklin, which is characterized by an existing wall of highrises approved during the Redevelopment era over the objections of the affected communities. The proposed building, which would be almost twice as high as the tallest existing buildings along this corridor, may have significant adverse effects on the felt environment and existing lack of human scale of this neighborhood, particularly for the high concentration of seniors residing around the proposed project.

**3) NOISE:** The construction noise impact is a significant concern. While San Francisco Coode conventionally uses the dBA scale, this is inadequate, given human sensitivity to low frequency noise that is not adequately captured by the dBA scale

(<http://www.noiseandhealth.org/article.asp?issn=1463-1741;year=2004;volume=6;issue=23;spage=59;epage=72;aulast=Leventhall>)

(For example - a reading of 60 dBA, when measured on the dBC scale, which more accurately

measures human response to low frequency, can be 75dB or more. Since dB is a logarithmic scale, this is significantly more than 10 times as loud as the dBA result implies.)

**4) HOUSING IMPACT:** The DEIR fails to adequately consider the demand of additional moderate income housing driven by the number of high-market rate unit. Economic data analysis and models show that demand for services increases significantly with cost of residential units; this increased demand for services drives a demand for lower wage workers - which is good for employment figures, but adds to pressure on housing demand. The DEIR evaluation (based on

discussion on p.5.2) fails to reference or address the findings of the Keyser Marston Associates, Inc. 2007 Residential Nexus Analysis study (summary table on p.7). Failure to address the nexus study findings means the DEIR does not adequately comprehend the increased demand for below market rate housing driven by the proposed project.

5) SHADOW: Notwithstanding Proposition K's requirement to evaluate new shadow on city parks, shadow can have a variety of other adverse impacts. This project – the tallest project west of Van Ness in many years – introduces significant new shadow on a primarily residential neighborhood. This impact arises in at least 2 areas:

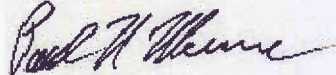
a) GHG impact by the reduction of solar resources on residential properties: Failure to address shadow impact on existing solar energy installations in the area shadowed by the building means the DEIR fails to consider the reduction in actual and potential access to solar energy. There are a large number of Solar PV and possibly some Solar Thermal installations in the shadowed areas. This will impact GHG emissions by reducing the solar energy capture of the affected properties (an EIR consideration), with related adverse financial impacts. This will impact many of the Japantown area residents (shadow fan, figure 4.f.2, 4.f.13, p.306 of 574)

b) Failure to consider shadow impact on open space readily available to mobility-limited seniors and preschool play areas ignores the learnings that lead to Proposition K. While in the downtown area shadowing of open space is expected, moving significant additional shadow into the predominantly low-rise neighborhood west of Gough is a matter of concern. Access to sunlight – especially in a city with as much cloud cover as San Francisco – is important for health, especially for seniors and the very young. Yet the DEIR disregards this.

6) WIND: The standard criteria used in the DEIR involve averaging the wind over a time period. When considering the impact on a healthy, robust individual, the criteria undoubtedly make sense. However, while a fit 45 year old may not be impacted by gusts (even while riding a bicycle), the same cannot be said for a frail 80 year old who is dependent on a Zimmer frame for balance. By failing to consider the at-risk population affected by the project when establishing the significance criteria, the DEIR becomes inadequate.

In summary, the DEIR fails to provide an accurate assessment of a number of impacts that are specific to the area, and so fails to provide policy makers with the necessary data to determine whether the project benefits outweigh the impacts on the community.

Sincerely yours,



Paul H. Wermer  
Land Use Committee Chair, Japantown Task Force