

## JCHES KICK-OFF COMMUNITY MEETING

### “World Café” Public Comments

February 26, 2013

The comments to the four “World Café” questions below were recorded by our student volunteers and are presented here in note form. These notes capture a snapshot of the conversations that took place at the nine tables during the “World Café” exercise and do not necessarily represent every comment or perspective shared at the Kick-Off meeting. Also, please note that the comments below are copied directly from the students’ notes have not been edited for grammar, spelling, or content, hence there are some spelling and grammar mistakes and many redundancies in the comments. Posting of these comments is not an endorsement of any particular view expressed here, but is an effort to continue the conversation in the community about the future of Japantown and to involve those who were unable to attend the meeting.

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#### **Question 1: What is your favorite aspect of Japantown?**

- There are two groups of people who visit there: people who work or live there and tourists who visit there to shop or get Japanese stuffs.
- Cultural heritage. There are pagoda, (traditional) *Daiso*, *pikapika* and *Sanrio* shop (pop culture).
- Food aspects. There are stores to get Japanese foods and many restaurants.
- Spiritual aspects. People can feel the sense of network or community just like family.
- Atmosphere. The place Japantown locates is quiet and open space.
- centrally located. Like "a bus ride away but a world apart". If it disappear there's no way to restart it.
- crepes
- food authenticity
- lot of positive energy in the neighborhood \*like the diversity of activities.

Restaurants. Gift shops. Dentist office. Of contained neighborhood. Good transportation.

- like the festivals. Open up the whole Japan town area as a whole area. New? Wish there would be no parking in Japan town or through traffic would make it more special. Pedestrian mall.
- likes the availability of parking garages for businesses. .
- authentic alive culture.
- preservation of Japanese community and culture through festivals and the like
- being able to find both things representing new and old Japan
- a place where you can meet people you know
- the family-owned businesses
- as native San Franciscan, Japantown is like my second home
- a place where I can get unique Japanese things like okonomiyaki, but notes that lots of other favorite Japanese things are not located in Japantown
- Residents said the neighborhood has a lot of energy and diversity, with a strong sense of community.
- They also said how they enjoyed how self-contained it was.
- Organizations, businesses, and restaurants are merged in one community.
- There are shared interests and culture.
- Is an active community that has businesses and festivals.
- Place of memory but not strictly about it—also has evolution.
- There's a strong effort to hold onto the past.
- People converse with others to discuss where Japantown will be ten years from now.
- Keeps something alive authentically without it being modernized.
- Holding on to what makes Japantown unique—keeping its history.
- There are different celebrations that go on rather than the cherry blossom festival.
- Maintains the authenticity of the community.
- Different individuals support the community.
- The clear cultural heritage and unique businesses that provide what other areas of

San Francisco do not.

- The community; the sense of comfort from having networks.
- The look and feeling of Japantown. How the open spaces like Peace Plaza and the architectural nuances make one feel.
- The food, Japanese Restaurants. Having all varieties of Japanese food all in one place. It is concentrated here, convenient. Not all the restaurants are good to me personally but that's what's great because many people have different tastes, so many can find what they like.
- The history. Having the historical background of the area. I love the markers with the historical info. The cultural programs also capture historical and current aspects of Japantown.
- The Look, Open sky. It feels like a different place, special. When standing at the square looking past the pagoda, you can see everything, 20 blocks into the city.
- Also the setup, with the business on bottom and residential on top. And the human scale. People live and work here.
- Also like the small type mall, without big business like Walmart
- Restaurants, food, especially the street fairs (primarily cherry blossom festival). The festival is attractive to many who don't even live in SF. It's important to even non-Japanese people. Because of the parade/vendors.
- New People Building. Younger trends
- Atmosphere is nostalgic of Japan
- all variety of Japanese food are gathered and concentrated in Japantown, such as Ramen and Teriyaki.
- Japantown has rich historical and cultural background.
- Great landscape and view.
- Japantown is not too big, not too small. It is a human scale.
- cultural programs - cherry blossom festival, anime festival, street fair

**Question 2: What are your concerns of Japantown?**

- It is not good that businesses in Japantown are taken over by franchise such as McDonald's and Starbucks.
- Recent festivals are getting more into today's pop culture. We should appreciate Japanese traditional music because Japanese rock music sometimes imitate American or British music. In order to continue uniqueness of Japanese traditional music, there should be more events to appreciate their originality.
- Some Japanese shops opened in San Francisco but not in Japantown such as Uniqlo and pink berry.
- Well-known Japanese restaurant should also be in Japantown to attract more people.
- Balance of Japanese tradition and Japanese today's pop culture.
- More space needed to bring more people. Cheaper parking and more various attractive shops.
- keep the kids here. To Keep several generations. What would keep them here. Way to do it is to have opportunity of jobs.
- pressure to develop area.
- same issues in little Tokyo LA. 100 years old and to find a way to conserve history but yet develop.
- making it relevant. Attract young people. Something to come back to and get involved.
- Outside forces imposing on japantown. Other developers trying to come in and take the land. And that it might be taken over and be gone.
- youth are not being involved with the elders.
- concerned about the stores. Closed down and replaced with something new. Korean cosmetic store and cupcake store seem out of place. There were Japanese antique store that's gone.
- KOREAN BUSINESSES TAKING OVER JAPANTOWN BUSINESS. different cultural group inquiring japantown.

- concern of youth taking over businesses they probably might not.
- LA Japantown "everyone's welcome in little Tokyo as long as you take your shoes off". Your welcome but don't try to take over.
- as a youth it's a concentrated effort to understand the significance of the culture.
- business incentives.
- designate property as landmark will cause extra fees and hoops to go through.
- lots of dining places, but the lunch trade is not as strong as it could be
- as lots of businesses are not Japanese, hopes there is a plan for preservation
- worried about gentrification, wants to see more housing in order to promote a more vibrant neighborhood
- lack of implementation organization to create the kinds of activities that would connect people to Japantown and to each other
- There were overwhelming concerns with making J-Town relevant to newer generations.
- There was also worries of small businesses being run out by larger corporations, which someone had suggested as a solution to getting more "attractive" businesses. He said we could look to Japanese corporations (and I believe this was his job) to open new businesses in Japan town.
- This raised concerns of what to do regarding preserving Japanese-American culture, and not simply Japanese culture. A women from L.A said Little Tokyo deals with many of the exact same issues.
- There was also some talk about the various races that are moving into Japan Town, noticing the number of Korean restaurants moving into town. The idea here being that it had something to do with some cultural dignity of Japan-Town having only Japanese, however several people mentioned that the history of J Town was the important part, and that the mixing of races would be necessary in order to survive. Hence, the desire to have monuments and recognition of historical places/events.
- One man saw businesses from Japan opening in Japan-Town, which people worried about it becoming simply Japanese, eschewing what makes it distinctly Japanese-American.

- That important physical infrastructures be maintained into the future.
- Many were hopeful about the cultural elements that make up Japan-town would still be around.
- Not preserving its history.
- Losing the architecture and history of buildings.
- Newcomers have no connection with the Japanese culture and atmosphere.
- May not be able to reach out to newcomers.
- Creating new buildings, which may change the charisma of the community.
- The future of the resident constituency.
- Which people have a voice and who don't.
- The lack of raw Japanese trees (e.g. ebony).
- The environment of Japantown lacks natural objects—plants, small gardens, etc.
- The broken water fountains haven't been fixed.
- Seeing small businesses replaced by franchises.
- The direction that the festivals have been moving toward seems to be less representative of what Japantown really is.
- There is a lack of well known businesses that represent modern Japanese consumer culture (e.g. Uniqlo, Muji).
- There's desire for parking and transportation to be better optimized around the area.
- During any major remodeling of Japantown, there may be compromises that put a strain on the rest of the community.
- The fact that the community is excited with this process seems like it's headed in the right direction, but the community must sustain it, so we need to make sure there's a huge interest.
- Japantown needs to continue to be attractive so businesses will want to be here. For example, a Japanese sweets shop opened on Market St. instead of Japantown. The shop owners seemed to think they would reach more customers in a high traffic area, than in Japantown. Need to attract both commercial and cultural businesses,
- Visual appearances of urban landscape.

- Not a strong enough economic center. Maybe the community wants Japanese American businesses instead of Japanese. A good mix is important, more equal.
  - Japantown is very Japanese American, not so much Japanese
  - People being priced out of apartment and not being able to work here. Type of housing available.
  - ensure to pass cultural things onto the next generation.
  - ensure the continuity of cultural organization.
  - need to make sure what city wants Japantown to be like. their agenda may go to different direction that we dont want to follow.the plan should be community based.
  - Jtown need to be more attractive to bring more money into Jtwon for economic sustainability.
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**Question 3: What do you think should be done to preserve Japantown's cultural heritage and economic sustainability?**

- Price of property has grown up. Some protection needed. For example, some cooperation or organization can be established to control who live or own businesses in Japantown.
- We need policy to preserve cultural heritage.
- Attract more Japanese company to make some programs that support and encourage Japanese company to build business in Japantown. \*especially strong Japanese brand
- Japanese style convenience store such as Seven-Eleven or Family-Mart can be open for quick food, not only Nijiya market.
- People will not come to Japantown to get merchandise American food. They want to find or experience more 'Japanese' stuffs.
- Businesses owned by Japanese American have to find children to keep business here.
- More tight connection needed between association and cooperation to maintain

economy in Japantown.

- Monthly meeting to talk about their business situation to get into with each other.
- Plants and old historic trees should be helpful to convey more historical aspects. in sidewalk to enable people to see from different corners.
- Transportation can be improved so that more people visit there more easily.
- Community connection should be more bound up and bigger. It is not necessarily between Japanese.
- Not only the big festivals but some day to day activities or attraction could be considered to bring more people. Less commercial more community\* LA japantown 1st Street heritage (sacred area) designated area. Things should be landmarked. Designate buildings not a whole block. Tools and grants for financial.
- little Tokyo community castle. Community doesn't agree on everything. There's an area to discuss business. A place to come together and work as a community putting bad feelings aside.
- a plaque of history of what was their previously was there. Past business.
- SJ Japantown has marble Benches telling story. Emotional appeal.
- new businesses that attract the youth. Or monuments to preserve relevanc of building.
- balance of the way to re engage young people.
- agrees with the combined approach in JCHESS of promoting cultural heritage and economic sustainability / three spoke up in support of planning as a good idea
- need some way to create an umbrella organization to implement proposals / someone cited the District 8 example of a clearinghouse that succeeds in promoting communication between the different kinds of organizations
- one newcomer to Jtown thought more Japanese ownership of property would help
- same newcomer noted lack of Japanese architecture and signage in Japanese
- trees – besides cherry trees, there should be less deciduous trees as well that aren't barren so much of the year

- more than one saw need for programs (and microfunding?) for small business start-ups, apprenticeships in Japanese arts and crafts, and for handing on existing small businesses / one cited Cultural Conservancy as a model
- Japanese Consulate has some kind of economic development unit that might help
- Someone mentioned that the real-estate value is very high here, noting the million dollar San Francisco style houses that could be used to attract more people.
- One man mentioned his appreciation of how the streets get blocked off during festivals, and thought it should be an open mall-type area, with no car traffic. Others disagreed, saying most businesses need the car traffic to stay afloat.
- Many were for preserving various physical landmarks around Japan Town, but were also vocal about simple recognition of a piece of land through a plaque or monument. Similar to the benches, sculptures, and monuments around San Jose's Japan Town.
- Recognition of Japanese-American history, both in location and racially was considered very important.
- It was again mentioned that making Japan Town an appealing place for young people to settle down in was of large importance, if it is to have a future as a community. This meant newer shops, and talk of remodeling the mall.
- New buildings that acknowledge the iconicism of Japan-Town.
- Associations should address the needs of the small businesses in Japantown.
- Know what businesses need to maintain themselves.
- Reserve history without making it a bloodline history.
- Share the culture of Japantown, but not by sharing where you came from, whether it may be from a country that had conflict with Japan or a concentration camp.
- Have a mindset change that starts with history.
- The youth should find their own way to connect with each other.
- The opportunities for sharing change with youth and older Japantown.
- Taking action to get an organization to own and be able to control with better judgement what can or can't be done with the real estate.

- Looking to bring strong Japanese brands to strengthen the retail experience of Japantown.
- Continuing to keep companies such as Starbucks from occupying space within Japantown.
- Bringing together the business owners as a way to unify the voices of the community, enhancing communication.
- Maintaining the appearances of visual details (architectural, greenery, etc) that present an image of Japanese culture.
- Have a good, balanced mix of Japanese and Japanese American. Make sure of amounts of each type is coming in.
- There should be a program (perhaps using generated fund through land use), that will sustain these local businesses. And using the money to make the community better.
- Being aware of competition between businesses. The new used bookstore that moved here from Mission may be competition for Kinokuniya. So, be aware of the competition when bringing in new businesses.
- Nihonmachi, the family day care wants to expand. We need to help them. It is a great program. It also exposes the children to other cultures because of the different types of teachers. It brings in many families to Japantown everyday to drop off and pick up their kids, so it's good for Japantown's economy to spend time and shop there. Also, encourage culture for the children.
- Need more evergreen trees than cherry blossoms like in Japan. In colder, winter weather, it just looks lifeless here. More signage, with Kanji, like a Chinatown feeling. More of those flagpoles with the fish and banners and Japanese architecture. More authentic Japanese restaurants as in Little Tokyo/all over LA.
- I hope that the American Japanese kids will learn to speak Japanese. Since, when language is lost, a lot of culture and unspoken etiquette is lost. I'd love to see more than just tourism. I want to bring it back to real language, cultural events. More authenticity. I wish all the sansei can go to Japan and see the real thing, there's such a big difference. Also, there's not enough comradeship between Nissei

- Should maintain local business and support their quality of life in Japantown.
  - Need to make sure what people want from Japantown and ensure those needs; for example, grocery and books.
  - Should think of a balance between other culture and Japanese culture.
  - want more parking lot to bring more family in Japantown. Ex. people come here to pick up kids who's going to a preschool program in Japantown 5 days a week, twice a day.
  - some of cultural things have to be done by Japanese American or Japanese to keep cultural essence. Ex. Taiko( Japanese drums), calligraphy, kendo.
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**Question 4: What is your vision for Japantown in 20 years?**

- There is less community participation in current festivals but more commercial motivation. Younger generation is fading out.
- Japantown would physically look like mixed with modern Japanese architecture (just like "New People") and traditional one.
- Japantown could be the place to hang out with friends for younger generation.
- People who were born and raised up here want Japantown to be place they can feel nostalgic.
- More community participation is desired. More community-based activities. \* like to see the cultural elements of Japanese American and Japanese craft that makes culture alive and relevant. Preserve landmarks like peace pagoda and etc.
- like to see Japan center mall is redesigned. It seems closed off. Mall should be streamlined. It's awkward.
- infrastructure should be redone but preserve the main ones.
- who should own the land. 3 pieces is split and owned by city.
- so many Non Profit Orgs compared to other Japantowns.
- Japanese developers. They have huge funds.
- \$120 million land. Buildings can't be over 8 stories.
- can't build up in zonings.

- bigger museum
- want a place his children can come back to and connect with as their Japantown
- one young person wants more Japanese high-tech things that are not available here
- one mentioned wanting more stores fronting on the street (Geary, Post)
- one mentioned wanting live theater in Japantown
- more street vendors with Japanese foods at reasonable prices
- We should take the history of Japan-Town and Japanese-Americans to build something new, bringing families of a new generation both to and back to J-Town.
- How do we get people to live here?
- Should it be a "home" type of neighborhood or a business one? Can we strike a balance between the two?
- Do we want it to become a multi-cultural place that attracts all races of people, not just Japanese-American/Japanese.
- Non-Japanese people run Japanese businesses.
- Housing in Japantown Is more affordable.
- Japanese culture is maintained.
- Non-Japanese residents live in Japantown.
- Non-Japanese residents are concerned about Japanese culture.
- Keep Japantown open to all ethnicities.
- Have meetings with the youth to determine what needs to be changed; see innovation.
- All generations will understand the personal connections of Japantown, and have their own personal conversations and communicate with social media.
- Japantown may be 50%-60% Japanese people in 20 years.
- A well-kept neighborhood that exudes vibrance without being overly commercialized.
- Presence of a strong community element, regardless of the actual individual makeup.
- A center where people can come for products that can't be found easily elsewhere.
- A place of familiarity that attracts people not only for quick visits but to want to

return and stay.

- Japantown is identified as a specific cultural/economic area. I hope that young people will see Japantown as a viable cultural living place. I don't think we can physically change much though.
- I want it to stay and not disappear. It seems Japanese people no longer live here, not even their kids. I am afraid Japantown may become more of an asian characteristic place than Japanese. Need more families to live here. A mix of Japanese and Japanese American. Kids love to come for festivals. That it will be used as a center to meet and have fun.
- I want it to keep improving. I want more Japanese people to come back.. Many other ethnicities are moving into the area, it's overwhelming. I hope for it to be more authentically Japan.
- Japantown should be identified as specific cultural economic area.
- want it to stay as they are now.
- Sad thing is that some of property in Japantown is owned by other ethnic group.
- want more tree and cherry blossom.
- Bring in more flavor of Japanese culture. theres not enough Japanese character in Japantown.
- want more real cultural things.
- bring more people back in Jtown.
- want more people in SF to understand and learn about Japantown and Japanese American. Language is lost, culture is lost.