



# JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE

日本町の経済発展・計画・保存

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING & PRESERVATION OF JAPANTOWN

## NOTES FROM THE LAND USE/TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE JAPANTOWN TASK FORCE UNION BANK COMMUNITY ROOM THURSDAY, JULY 11, 2019

### BOARD MEMBER PRESENT:

Glynis Nakahara, Kenta Takamori, Rosalyn Tonai, Judy Hamaguchi, Rich Hashimoto, Alice Kawahatsu, Benh Nakajo

### STAFF PRESENT:

Steve Nakajo

### OTHERS PRESENT:

Jeremy Chan, Steve Nakajima, Karen Kai, Michael Jacobson, Dan Mackowski, Mary Ishisaki, Linda Walsh, Bob Rusky, Cynthia Boedihardjo, Jessica Sharp

The meeting began at 6:05 p.m.

### UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

#### PEDESTRIAN SAFETY (MICHAEL JACOBSON, SFMTA / VISION ZERO, AND DAN MACKOWSKI, GEARY RAPID PROJECT SMTA)

Michael Jacobson, SFMTA / Vision Zero, and Dan Mackowski, Geary Rapid Project (SMFTA) came to speak)

Their presentation came with a slide deck (see attached). This presentation was prompted by the recent traffic fatality on Laguna and Geary.

Vision Zero is a traffic safety program with the goal of eliminating traffic fatalities and reducing severe injuries. Philosophically, vision zero sees traffic deaths as preventable (not inevitable), integrates human failing and mistakes into its approaches and policies. It was adopted in 2015, and issued a new action strategy in 2019 born from community input.

The three categories are: strategic actions, transformative policies, and complementary goals, all grounded in an equity focus. For equity, Vision Zero is looking at demographic equity (seniors and other vulnerable populations), as well as geographic equity (vulnerable neighborhoods).

Their four transformative policy goals are automated enforcement, urban speed limiting setting (i.e. lower speed limits that cater to an urban environment), pricing and reducing vehicle miles travelled (ex. congestion pricing), and local regulation of transportation network companies. These require state action (ex. the state sets speed limits, teaching regulation for transportation network companies). In response to Kenta's question, Dan acknowledged that these goals are simultaneously pursued along with local action.

Four complementary goals that support Vision Zero are land use/housing choices, mode shift (ex. bikes), transit first, and climate action.

Vision Zero has 50 strategic actions, distributed among the categories of safe streets, safe people, safe vehicles, and data systems.

Safe streets strategic actions include initiatives like widening sidewalks, high visibility crosswalks, retiming crosswalkings, curb management. Safe people strategic actions are enforcement and education efforts, including non-encroachment campaigns ("It Stops Here"), senior engagement, and driver training programs for TNCs. Safe vehicle initiatives include autonomous vehicle technology (influencing state policy), City Fleet vehicles (ex. collision avoidance technology), and safety with respect to new forms of mobility like e-scooters. Data systems includes updating the High Injury Network (a limited number of streets – 30? Accounts for majority of crashes) linking hospital and police data. Dan acknowledged that many communities may not feel comfortable reporting to police, and that the police are less equipped than hospitals and trauma centers to process this information.

Mary Ishizaki asked a question about the implementation of traffic circles, commenting that people do not signal while exiting a traffic circle. Dan and Michael said it would a good driver education campaign.

Karen asked what the process with respect to hyperlocal control (ex. how do people on a block or in a neighborhood indicate that they want a speed bump or other traffic calming structure). They were told that there aren't enough people on that block who said they support it.

Michael said that in response to the fatality, Geary BRT is working to implement the planned traffic calming changes as quickly as possible.

Glynis asked and Dan confirmed that Japantown is one of the vulnerable neighborhoods in the High Injury Network. There is a map on the Vision Zero website as well as the SFMTA website.

Ros asked about what the traffic calming efforts will be on Geary. Michael said there will be 2 general lanes and one bus line. The sidewalks will also be widened. The traffic lanes will be marked narrower so that drivers drive slower. There will also be a crosswalk at Buchanan to provide more crosswalk areas, and the traffic light will calm the traffic as well.

Kenta commented that this fatality and the previous Geary fatality from 3 years ago were both caused by paratransit vehicles.

#### NEWERA @1700 POST

The landlord of the space that Newera seeks to occupy has requested an initial indication of community support from Newera in order to proceed with lease negotiations. As a result, Newera has requested from JTF a note indicating JTF's willingness to continue working with Newera to identify and address community concerns, as they proceed with a full community engagement process as part of the conditional use permit requirement.

The goal for the meeting is to discuss and decide whether the JTF Land Use Committee will recommend to the board writing a letter indicating that they support Newera's good faith efforts to continue to work with the community. (Note: This language was later tweaked, see motion below.)

Jessica put together an economic impact report, at Rich's recommendation. They are expecting about 1000 customers a day, spending about \$50-\$150 on services in Japantown, creating an estimated impact of \$4 million in potential earnings for the neighborhood. They have done

community outreach with key stakeholders. They have started a petition and have 56 letters and petitions of support including local artists, supervisor Vallie Brown, and the architecture firm.

Jessica briefly talked about the history of cannabis in Japan, prior to American colonization after World War II which stopped its use and development. She also discussed the health benefits of cannabis to treat veterans with PTSD and children with cancer.

Jessica said the building owner is now looking for personal letters of recommendation.

Jessica addressed some community concerns. First, cannabis places are more strict than bars with respect to underage persons. They will be adding more cameras, physical bodyguards, and will close by 10pm due to city requirements, as well as to keep the frontage of the building clean.

To reduce public smoke, they will have zero tolerance policy for people who smoke outside the building. They are also structuring the space such that people will be incentivized to enjoy their products inside. They will partner with Lyft to offer discounted rides such that people do not drive while under the influence. With respect to venue odor, they will be implementing an HVAC system. She said it's bad business to have a place that is "stinky" and makes no sense to flood people with carcinogens / cancer, especially since they are focused on wellness.

Because cannabis market has high taxes, cannabis is relatively expensive, so most practitioners are working professionals. Most of their clientele so far are women, ages 55-65, with a median income of over \$100,000.

Jessica reemphasized that they will be opening as a tea house / sound lounge first, since the cannabis purpose will take 1.5-2 years to be approved. They want to use that time to continue to demonstrate their support of the community.

Newera is also interested in setting milestones with the community with respect to community involvement and projects.

Mary affirmed Jessica's statement that it would be helpful for Newera to provide city regulations to the people they speak to. Kenta commented that he wanted committee members to comment before general public comments.

Karen asked if we are bringing the CBD into this discussion. She talked about a general concern with respect to land use overlapping economic components. She also commented that in her opinion, it wasn't necessary to do committee comments before public comments.

Ros asked about scope. Glynis noted that Newera has talked to the CBD and clarified that conditional use has always been a part of the Land Use committee. The Economic Development portion in this case is incidental. Karen said that Land Use lacks merchant representation, and is glad that Newera talked to the CBD.

Newera said that she received positive and negative feedback from the CBD. They have spoken with many merchants and are in talks to develop collaborative opportunities.

Ros asked for clarification about the underage regulation. Jessica said that the high price of cannabis discourages buying and reselling and there are also limits on how much each person can buy. They have to keep a registry of all customers, including date of birth, tied to a state registry (so fake IDs would not work). Also, based on seed to sale, each cannabis dispensary knows about who grew and where it came from. Jessica emphasized that the primary purpose of

Newera is tea and the sound lounge.

Cynthia clarified the registry. For adults, you can show a passport or government issued ID. That will be electronically scanned and connected to a state registry to determine if it's a valid ID. Some night clubs also use this technology.

Glynis said that the high school kids probably don't have money and are vaping in the bathroom during lunch. Ros said she spoke about Newera as an external sharing space.

Rich commented that he met with the dispensary going into 2222 Bush Street (Fillmore), whose application may be approved in the fall. He's doing outreach (Rich said the business owner didn't have to go out to Japantown, but he did). Rich commented that dispensaries are on the higher scale, attracting more responsible adults (whereas kids will just get it on the black market). In his capacity as Merchant Association president, he said that bringing in a business like Newera is positive for the community.

Judy said that Sandy Mori sent an email, and said that her comments should be shared with the board.

Kenta said that he is opposed to having Newera in Japantown. He doesn't believe that having a cannabis dispensary is beneficial and is concerned about how it will change the texture of Japantown. He would prefer the committee not make a recommendation to JTF.

Linda asked if cannabis would be offered via salves. She spoke about how it provided health benefits to senior women friends of hers (who otherwise would not be drawn to cannabis). Jessica said that there are multiple methods of consumption, including via skin contact, as well as a method that results in a "head high."

She emphasized that the place serves to educate others about different cannabis uses, but also provide sound therapy and tea.

Repeating her request from last month Jessica also offered to host a sound healing and tea session for the community. She also brought a sound therapy instrument and did a short demonstration of how it works.

Cynthia clarified the scope of the ask. They are not necessarily looking for endorsements of the cannabis element (since the permitting process can take 3 years or longer), but to support the start of the Newera as a wellness center/soundroom/tea house. She clarified that their queue will start once they get an address (and since they do not have a lease agreement yet, they have no address). It's a vocal / telephone call to David (the broker) or Michael (the owner) signifying initial support and a willingness to continue to work with Newera as they gather community input. Jessica emphasized that the community (including JTF) still has the option to oppose and say/decide "No" during the subsequent permitting process.

Rich asked if Newera would be open to having a community advisory board or board of directors. Cynthia said that they would be. Also, 25% of their profits will be set aside for the community for grants, etc. and they will also have a community advisory board to distribute those grants.

Judy relayed Sandy's email, saying that she is concerned that we don't know what the community thinks about this business. Sandy also said she is concerned that JTF is not in a position to make a commitment to the building owner. Sandy also said many neighborhoods are being inundated

with big money cannabis businesses. She was concerned if it would be open after 10pm (it will not).

Judy commented her concern regarding backlash from community members who say “you never asked me about this.” Glynis clarified that the purpose of the letter is to say “we’ve heard from them and we are willing to work with them on community engagement” which is different from “we support them.” Judy said that the economic impact is based off the sale of cannabis, which will not be eligible for 3 years. Judy said that JTF has halted projects because community outreach is poor and said that “we will help guide you” is close to “we support you.”

Paul said that he agrees that community outreach is key. We can help facilitate a community meeting and get publicity out. He said he is concerned that the policy is “grandiose marketing speak” that glosses over problems, that admittedly can be dealt with but should be addressed.

Karen clarified that his comment about role was intended to be inclusive. She also said that facilitating community input is within our expertise, and does not have a problem with saying we will be involved.

Alice applauded Newera for coming twice to the committee. She commented on the content in their deck about the Shinto religious history of cannabis, and said she was concerned about such comments being associated with the Konkō Church. She said to be mindful about associations with religion. She said she was supportive of the sound therapy lounge, meditation, and creams, but is more concerned about cannabis. She also commented on the impact of cannabis on dog walking (i.e. dogs inadvertently consuming cannabis).

Jeremy spoke in support of Newera. He spoke about the significance of Newera as an art space, given that the lack of art spaces has been a major concern for Japantown and the JTF Cultural Heritage Committee. He also said that the current ask of the Land Use committee is a low bar, because JTF still can say “no” in the subsequent conditional use community vetting/permitting process. He emphasized that Newera will be initially starting as a tea lounge and sound therapy lounge, which will be beneficial to the community.

Ros said she supports the tea lounge and sound therapy elements. She said it would be important to implement a good neighbor policy with neighboring organizations / communities like CPMC, Kaiser, churches, etc.

Bob said it’s counterproductive to overthink the issue, since businesses can develop into a thousands of permutations. Bob said a business like Newera is infinitely preferable to a bar, referencing the broken glass that results after a night of partying as a bigger concern for dogs like his. He sees more social problems associated with alcohol than cannabis use, and emphasized that Newera is looking to a high end market. He would be in favor of continuing the discussion and facilitating community outreach, which needs to be done anyway. He cautioned against censoring too deeply what comes into the community given the cultural push to legalize cannabis.

Rich emphasized that there will be more cannabis applicants coming in. He reiterated Beau’s comment from the last JTF Board meeting, saying that other cannabis applicants may not be as intentional with community outreach, nor have the same level of culturally specific program and community commitment.

Karen made a motion to recommend to the board to send a letter to the landlord indicating a willingness to work with Newera and identify concerns, and that JTF Land Use will continue to

work with Newera throughout the permitting process.

Paul seconded.

Mary commented that she supports Newera's efforts to present more facts about how cannabis affects different populations. Mary spoke about her concern about the impact of people after they consume cannabis. She recommended to Newera that they explore further how Newera will impact the neighborhood. She also recommended representing a more concise package about the non-cannabis aspects of the business and the impact of the cannabis elements on the neighborhood. She spoke personally about the negative side effects of marijuana when used for health purposes, as well as the impact with respect to broader narcotics efforts.

In response to the motion, Mary said if they put together a good presentation we should all look at it and make an educated decision.

Benh asked about the business hours (10am-10pm). He also asked where their past events are held. Jessica and Cynthia replied that the events were held all around the Bay Area. The consumption was hosted at a private home – a 3000 square foot space in SoMA. They did a talk at Equinox Gym on Market. They also did an event at the Laundry and Hotel Kabuki, and at the Harmonia Wellness Center (in Sausalito).

Benh asked about medical use vs. recreational use. Jessica said that Newera would be considered a recreational place, in that they would not be required to provide medical advice, but will provide information about the products. The analogy is like a pharmacy – they can provide information for over the counter medications, but not specific medical advice. Cynthia clarified that all of the staff will be trained (from an accredited cannabis college) to learn about the science behind cannabis.

Cynthia emphasized that patrons do not need to have a medical condition to visit Newera, and that they want to create a space for people to de-stress (whether it's through tea, sound, or cannabis). Jessica said "you don't need to be sick to seek wellness."

Benh asked how Newera is going to encourage folks to patronize Japantown businesses. Jessica said her experience at Salesforce gave her the skills/experiences to create systems for this. Jessica will have a "choose your own adventure"-ish application to incentivize people to attend different businesses (similar to Amazon). For example, a customer who is been at the lounge for 30 minutes may get a notification saying "Are you hungry? Go to Doobu and get a free appetizer."

Benh asked about the difference between Newera and the proposed Liberty dispensary on Bush. Cynthia compared it to liquor stores vs. bars/restaurants. A dispensary is like a liquor store – you purchase your cannabis, and then you leave to take it home, or smoke it in the smokeroom. Newera is looking to create a wellness space. Just like you go to a restaurant for an experience, Newera wants to create a "spa" or gym like environment where you can interact with art, connect with people, and use different modalities/forms of healing.

Benh asked what image would we be sending out in connection to the cannabis. Benh said he would prefer the motion not go through.

Steve Nakajima noted that he is speaking in his capacity as a resident and community member and read a statement. He commented that he is strongly opposed to the cannabis business. He is not opposed to medical or recreational cannabis. His nephew benefited from medical marijuana.

before passing away. He is opposed to a location like this in Japantown. Cannabis carries cultural stereotypes that are opposite to the Japantown cultural aesthetic. He is opposed to a business that uses Japanese aesthetic to sell cannabis. He made an analogy: “we are going to allow kissing, but not sex.” He is also opposed to using religious references (such as Zen or Shinto) to sell cannabis. In response to the Merchants Association support, he said that we don’t need “that kind of foot traffic.” The city process only requires community outreach, not approval. The proximity to Nihonmachi Little Friends, Peace Plaza (a public park), and kids who eat lunch by the Ruth Asawa fountain are also a concern. He said that cannabis is available nearby at Van Ness and Bush for people who want to use it.

Glynis asked clarifying questions about Steve’s reference to cultural stereotypes and more clarity around how it did not fit into Japantown. Steve talked about stereotypes like “opium dens” and “massage parlors” and clarified that stereotypes are not necessarily based on fact, but that he was concerned about the public perception.

Jeremy commented that Newera’s purpose as an arts space, tea lounge, and sound therapy lounge all support the cultural integrity of the neighborhood, and that cannabis was one part but not the focus. He also commented that because the cannabis permit will not come through for at least 1.5-2 years, Newera will have 1.5-2 years to demonstrate to the community their value as a wellness center featuring a tea lounge, sound therapy, and arts space, independent of cannabis.

Steve responded that this was like saying “you can have sex, but you’re not going to get pregnant.” He commented that cannabis is the focus because that is how Newera makes a profit.

Glynis commented that although the selling of the cannabis is used to make a profit, this is analogous to restaurants selling alcohol to make a profit. For restaurants, even if alcohol is used to make a profit, it is not the focus of the restaurant.

Bob commented that Japantown is full of faux Japanese and faux Asian things throughout Japantown. He asked if the committee is prepared to object to all of those organizations. He said by definition, the JA community has evolved to be unique from Japanese culture.

Judy said she sympathized with Steve’s comment and that it is hard to explain the “core, memory, feel” of Japantown.

Kenta said that any support to keep the process moving forward is a show of support. Kenta said he does not think cannabis is a small part of Newera. For the economics of this to work, Newera will have to sell a lot of cannabis.

Kenta commented that this committee has not discussed THC potency. Karen commented that the Jessica and Cynthia addressed the THC potency at the first committee meeting with Newera. With respect to the \$4 million economic projection, Kenta commented that it was scary that many people/dollars will be going to Japantown to visit a “pot shop.”

Kenta said he was offended by the reference to cannabis in Japanese culture, and said it was the definition of cultural appropriation to have someone from outside the community define what Japanese culture is. Jeremy commented that the slide about historical uses of cannabis in Japan came from a peer reviewed journal article, indicating its factual integrity.

Paul said there were methods in the conditional use process to create clear guidelines to limit how the business evolves.

Glynis commented that she is supportive of continuing to work with Newera and supports a robust community outreach process. She is confused about the stereotype of cannabis, but would love to hear more from the committee / public about it. Glynis's stereotype is that younger professionals will use cannabis, because it's expensive. She supports and has personally spent a lot of money on cbd cannabis products for shoulder pain and cosmetic applications.

Judy said that it is important to be explicit that the motion not take a position on the issue. She talked about the history of keeping Peet's Coffee out of Webster.

Glynis proposed to **amend the motion to recommend to the board to send a letter to the landlord indicating JTF's willingness to continue to work with Newera to ensure a robust community outreach process to identify and address community concerns.**

Karen approved the amendment and Paul seconded.

Steve Nakajo clarified that the work is done by the committee, and is not necessarily a mandate on the staff. Bob commented that it's up to the board to decide what tasks will be implemented by the staff. Kenta agreed that that comment should be brought up with the board. Steve Nakajo reemphasized that Newera also has a responsibility with respect to community outreach.

Paul clarified that in the past, the committee has been conscious of staff time. The project sponsor has done the majority of the work. Although notices have been mailed out by staff on the JTF mailing list, the committee has drafted the language for those emails. Steve Nakajo reiterated his concern about staff time.

Bob called the question, and so the committee members voted.

#### **Votes for the Motion**

Linda, Glynis, Paul, Karen, Bob, Jeremy

#### **Votes Against the Motion**

Judy, Kenta, Ros

#### **Abstain**

Alice

The motion passed.

#### **BIKESHARE**

Kenta had no update.

#### **COMMITTEE PLANNING INITIATIVES**

Glynis moved to defer this to the next meeting.

Karen commented that the Cultural Heritage proposal was approved by the city. The Cultural Heritage co chairs should discuss with the Land Use co chairs and be on our agenda next week.



**NEW BUSINESS:**

None

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

None

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

The meeting adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

The next meeting will be at 6:00 p.m., August 8, 2019 at the Union Bank Community Room