Resolution endorsing the Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHESS).

WHEREAS, For over 100 years, Japantown has been the cultural heart of San Francisco's and the region's Japanese American and Japanese communities; and

WHEREAS, Japantown has endured multiple challenges to its survival over this last century, including entrenched societal and political racism; the denial of citizenship to the Issei (first generation immigrant) generation, which denied them a political voice; the 1913 and later Alien Land Laws, which prevented the Issei from owning most property; the World War II Internment, which forcibly removed and incarcerated 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry in desolate concentration camps for the duration of the war; and the Redevelopment of the Western Addition in the 1950s-1970s, which devastated the residential and commercial bases of the Japantown and Fillmore communities; and

WHEREAS, There are only three Japantowns left in the United States (Los Angeles, San Jose and San Francisco); and

WHEREAS, California Senate Bill 307 was passed in 2001, which recognized the significance of the state's three remaining Japantowns and created the California Japantown Preservation Pilot Project that provided grants to promote the preservation of Japantown neighborhoods. The San Francisco Japantown community has also been recognized by the federal Preserve America Program as a place that embodies a unique cultural heritage that deserves preservation; and

WHEREAS, San Francisco's Japantown contains hundreds of culturally significant buildings, businesses, and organizations and it hosts many cultural events and activities that
are important to the region's Japanese American and Japanese community. The community has developed memorials to its cultural history, including the Three Japantowns Monument, and created the Japantown History Walk to perpetuate and share its history and culture; and

WHEREAS, Japantown is a central and desirable location in San Francisco that will continue to face substantial economic development pressure to change and grow; and

WHEREAS, The Japantown neighborhood has been the subject of various planning efforts over the past fourteen years. In 1999, the Japantown Planning Preservation and Development Task Force created the “Concepts for the Japantown Community Plan”. This Plan was never adopted by the City. In 2006, the City enacted a Japantown Special Use District to help “maintain the cultural and historic integrity and neighborhood of Japantown”. From 2007-2009 the San Francisco Planning Department drafted a Better Neighborhoods Plan (“BNP”) for Japantown with community input, but the BNP was not adopted by the City due to community concerns related to lack of focus on supporting culturally significant businesses and resources as well as to the potential for adverse effects of new development in the area, including the potential disruption, displacement and elimination of important community-based businesses, organizations and activities; and

WHEREAS, From 2009-2013 the community facilitated a process that focused on ascertaining and articulating the community’s vision of its future and its preferred cultural and economic strategies for achieving that vision; and

WHEREAS, This process involved dozens of community and stakeholder meetings over this four-year period, during which the community identified the need to protect and support Japantown’s cultural heritage as the neighborhood’s top priority; and

WHEREAS, The Japantown community, Planning Department staff, and the City’s historic preservation consultants worked together to develop a new methodology for analyzing and recording both the tangible and intangible elements of cultural heritage, which can serve

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as a precedent for other communities within and outside of San Francisco. This work resulted in an inventory of over 300 important cultural resources, including buildings, businesses, organizations and institutions, and cultural activities and events; and

WHEREAS, The Japantown community, Planning Department staff, staff of the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, and the City's economic consultants created a compendium of economic and other tools to help support cultural resources, which was the first time such a toolkit had been created in San Francisco or anywhere else in the United States; and

WHEREAS, The Japantown Cultural Resource and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHESS) is the result of the process of identifying the community's concerns, the types of cultural resources in the area, and the potential tools to address the concerns and to support these resources; and

WHEREAS, The vision of the JCHESS is that Japantown will thrive as a culturally rich, authentic, and economically vibrant neighborhood, which will serve as the cultural heart of the Japanese and Japanese American communities for generations to come; and

WHEREAS, The goals of the JCHESS are to 1) secure Japantown's future as the historical and cultural heart of Japanese and Japanese American Community of the Bay Area, 2) secure Japantown's future as a thriving commercial and retail district, 3) secure Japantown's future as a home to residents and community-based institutions, and 4) secure Japantown's future as a physically attractive and vibrant environment; and

WHEREAS, To provide context, the JCHESS captures the existing conditions in Japantown, as relates to its land, buildings, organizations and institutions, businesses, culture, and public realm; and
WHEREAS, The JCHESS lists twenty-three “Areas of Concern” identified by the community as issues that have or could prevent the fulfillment of the vision of the JCHESS; and

WHEREAS, To fulfill the goals, and address the Areas of Concern, the JCHESS includes nineteen Recommendations, which are designed to encourage economic development and re-investment in the buildings, businesses, organizations and institutions of Japantown; and

WHEREAS, Some of these Recommendations include the ongoing implementation of existing programs, while others are newly proposed and may require further review, such as environmental review, by the Department prior to implementation; and

WHEREAS, Some of the strategies would be implemented primarily by the City, and others primarily by the community; and

WHEREAS, The Recommendations fulfill the goals of the JCHESS and address the community’s identified Areas of Concern; and

WHEREAS, The JCHESS itself was vetted in over 30 community and stakeholder meetings in the Spring of 2013 and public hearings at the Historic Preservation Commission and Planning Commission in July of 2013; and

WHEREAS, The JCHESS has the written support of 22 community groups, including multiple property owners, businesses and business associations, and community-based organizations; and

WHEREAS, The Planning Department has determined that the JCHESS is not a project as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), per CEQA Guidelines 15060(c), and is thus not subject to environmental review; and
WHEREAS, The JCHESS has received the endorsement of the Historic Preservation Commission and the Planning Commission through Resolutions 711 and 18965, respectively; and

WHEREAS, All pertinent documents may be found in the files of the Department, as the custodian of records, at 1650 Mission Street, Suite 400, San Francisco; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors endorses as City policy to support Japantown as a culturally and economically vibrant community; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors endorses the Visions, Goals, and Objectives of the Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHESS) as City policy; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors endorses the Recommendations of the JCHESS; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors supports initiation of legislation to create the Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District which meets the goals and objectives of the JCHESS; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors supports adoption of Japantown Design Guidelines that meets the goals and objectives of the JCHESS; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors requests that the Planning Department, Department of Public Works, Recreation and Parks Department, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, and any other relevant agencies proactively work together to review for possible implementation those recommendations of the JCHESS which involve capital outlay for infrastructure projects, such as improvements to Peace Plaza and Buchanan Mall; and, be it

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FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors supports the Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD) in using the Invest in Neighborhoods initiative as the framework to deploy services and resources to Japantown; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors recommends that OEWD reach out to the property owners of the Japan Center Malls to discuss potential improvements to the Malls; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors recommends that SFTravel help implement the JCHESS through the creation of a Cultural Heritage Program that would include Japantown; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors recommends that the San Francisco County Transportation Authority and San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency design the Geary Bus Rapid Transit project in a timely manner that provides better access to Japantown, and creates safer and more attractive pedestrian conditions for crossing Geary Boulevard; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors recommends that other City agencies with jurisdiction and/or programs in Japantown implement those aspects of the JCHESS which are in their purview; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors recommends that the community implement those aspects of the JCHESS which are in their purview.
Resolution endorsing the Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHESS).

October 01, 2013 Board of Supervisors - ADOPTED
Ayes: 11 - Avalos, Breed, Campos, Chiu, Cohen, Farrell, Kim, Mar, Tang, Wiener and Yee

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED on 10/1/2013 by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.

Angela Calvillo
Clerk of the Board

I hereby certify that the foregoing resolution, not being signed by the Mayor within the time limit as set forth in Section 3.103 of the Charter, or time waived pursuant to Board Rule 2.14.2, became effective without his approval in accordance with the provision of said Section 3.103 of the Charter or Board Rule 2.14.2.

Angela Calvillo
Clerk of the Board