



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Planning Commission Resolution No. 18965

HEARING DATE: SEPTEMBER 19, 2013

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Project Name: **Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHES)**

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Recommendation: Approval

RESOLUTION ENDORSING THE "JAPANTOWN CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY (JCHES)".

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 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 Planning Commission has heard and considered the testimony presented to it at the public hearing and has further considered written materials and oral testimony presented on behalf of Department staff, the Japantown Organizing Committee, and other interested parties; 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.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission endorses as City policy to support Japantown as a culturally and economically vibrant community; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission 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 Planning Commission endorses the Recommendations of the JCHESS; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission directs Planning Department staff to propose possible legislation, and initiate review of any proposed legislation under the CEQA, to create the Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District as recommended in the JCHESS; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission directs Planning Department staff to review and propose for possible adoption Japantown Design Guidelines which meets the goals and objectives of the JCHESS; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission direct Planning Department staff, through its existing implementation activities, to proactively work with the Department of Public Works, the Recreation and Parks Department, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, and any other relevant agency 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 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission 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 Planning Commission 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 Planning Commission 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 Planning Commission 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 HPC review and implement those portions of JCHESS under their purview; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission recommends that other City agencies with jurisdiction and/or programs in Japantown review and implement those aspects of the JCHESS which are in their purview; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission recommends that the community implement those aspects of the JCHESS which are in their purview.

I hereby certify that the Planning Commission **ADOPTED** the foregoing Resolution on September 19, 2013.



Jonas P. Ionin
Acting Commission Secretary

AYES: Fong, Antonini, Borden, Hillis, Moore, Sugaya, Wu

NAYS:

ABSENT:

ADOPTED: September 19, 2013