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The BNP Made Simple

*A summary of the draft Japantown Better Neighborhood
Plan
prepared by members of nihonmachiROOTS*

To view and download your own copy of the draft Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan online at the San Francisco Planning Department website, go to:

<http://www.sf-planning.org/index.aspx?page=1692>

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<http://www.japantownnow.com>

JAPANTOWN BNP CHAPTER 1: Introduction

I. Vision for Japantown

- The Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan (BNP) is a 20-year plan for the Japantown community and neighborhood.
- San Francisco Japantown one of 3 remaining Japantowns in the US
- Japantown has a culturally-rich mix of businesses and community-based organizations around Post, Buchanan and Sutter streets, offering Japanese, Japanese American, Korean and other services, restaurants and shops.
- Community organizations and cultural activities draw participants of all ages from throughout the Bay Area daily to the neighborhood
- The San Francisco Planning Department initiated the Better Neighborhoods Program in 2002 to build "more balanced and livable places in San Francisco," by encouraging housing and strengthening city-wide and by using community-based planning to implement city-wide goals to specific neighborhoods
 - City-wide goals for each neighborhood include a section of shops and services close to residences, ways to get around easily, variety of housing choices, public places for people to meet, public services for residents, distinct neighborhood character, and incorporation of each neighborhood into the greater city

II. 4 Main Goals of BNP

- Secure Japantown's future as the historical and cultural heart of the Japanese and Japanese American Community
- Secure Japantown's future as a thriving commercial and retail district
- Secure Japantown's future as a home to residents and community-based institutions
- Secure Japantown's future as a physically attractive and vibrant environment

III. Planning Process

- Japantown BNP initiated in March 2007 to address major changes coming to the neighborhood, including sale of Kabuki Hotel, Hotel Tomo, two malls of Japan Center and Kabuki Theater properties, the Geary Corridor Bus Rapid Transit project affecting transit access to Japantown, and the sunseting of the

Redevelopment Agency's Area A-2 at the end of 2008, returning 11 blocks of Japantown into the jurisdiction of the City.

- 25-member Steering Committee representing different stakeholders in the community established, Japantown Task Force hired by Planning Department as partner in the Plan, as well as consultants picked by city Planning Department assembled to work on drafting Japantown BNP
- Planning broken down into 3 phases:
 - **Phase I:** Conduct studies aimed at understanding Japantown, including findings from previous planning processes and gathering community opinion via public discussion groups and surveys
 - **Phase II:** Use feedback and information from Phase I to conduct planning analysis, include additional community feedback on preliminary findings and development proposals
 - **Phase III:** Develop recommendations for the draft plan, including small group discussions and townhall community meetings, to be completed after hearings and endorsement at the Planning Commission
- Before becoming adopted as part of San Francisco's General Plan, the BNP needs to:
 - Gain endorsement of the Planning Department
 - Undergo an Environmental Impact Review, to be reviewed by the public and certified
 - Have coordination meetings held with other city agencies to review EIR and implementation of BNP
 - Have zoning controls drafted by the Planning Department and reviewed by public and Planning Commission
 - Have developer agreements made to ensure community benefits in the Plan are received and implemented
- The boundaries for the area covered by the BNP are Steiner, California, Gough and O'Farrell Streets

JAPANTOWN BNP CHAPTER 2: Community Heritage

I Historic Background

- Chapter 2 of the BNP establishes historical and cultural background information on Japantown
- Japanese settled in Western Addition following 1906 earthquake and fires, originally designated as Nihonjin Machi by residents
- Nihonjin Machi neighborhood had growing base of resources and established Japanese institutions and buildings in the neighborhood, reaching its peak by about 1940
- Wartime incarceration of the Japanese communities of the West Coast removed all Nikkei from Nihonjin Machi between 1942 and 1945

- Nikkei community was scattered following WWII, not all Japanese and Japanese Americans returned to Nihonmachi; the neighborhood was increasingly diverse following the war, with expansion of the African American community and addition of Filipinos and Koreans to the neighborhood.
- By 1950's large parts of Western Addition identified as site for early federally funded urban renewal projects, with many areas in the neighborhood being cleared by the local redevelopment agency for new development, displacing thousands of existing residents and businesses throughout the late 1950's and early 1960's
- Neighborhood redevelopment from the 1960's to 1980's reflected culturally-focused designs and uses of buildings and public spaces
- Fabric of Japantown community has changed with emergence of diversity of generations and ethnicities

II. BNP Recommendations and Strategies to Preserve Community Heritage

- Establish a community-based body to oversee preservation efforts, possibly a subcommittee of the BNP Implementation organization proposed in Chapter 3 of the BNP
- Recognize properties of cultural and historical significance to the Japanese and JA communities
- 5 possible options to seek recognition of Japantown by the National Park Service as a National Heritage Area:
 - Area under boundaries of Japantown BNP designated as National Heritage Area
 - Include Japantown as part of other Bay Area sites to be designated as a larger National Heritage Area, including Angel island, North Beach/ Chinatown/South Park areas initially settled by Japanese in San Francisco, Japanese Tea Garden, Japanese Cemetery in Colma, etc.
 - Include all 3 remaining Japantowns in California (including San Jose Japantown and Little Tokyo in Los Angeles) as a National Heritage Area
 - Include sites of historical and cultural significance to the Japanese American community throughout the state as a National Heritage Area
 - Include sites of historical and cultural significance to the Japanese American community throughout the entire United States as a National Heritage Area
- Change land use controls to be less restrictive and facilitate reuse of historic buildings in neighborhood (explained further in Chapter 4)
- Improve Japantown's public areas to enhance Japantown's cultural character (further explained in Chapter 6).
- Consider other strategies upon further study, including economic incentives for property owners to preserve properties, creation of community land trust to purchase historic properties and lease to non-profit institutions at affordable rates, businesses hosting non-profit groups (listed in Appendix C: Historic Property Benefits Matrix)

JAPANTOWN BNP CHAPTER 3: Community and Economic Development

I. Development Goals

- Maintaining the neighborhood's institutions, as well as a culturally-oriented retail base that sells everyday goods, is critical for preserving Japantown's role as...
 1. A neighborhood center
 2. The cultural home of the Bay Area's dispersed Japanese American community.
 3. A regional tourist destination.

II. Existing Conditions

- Types of visitors include: event visitors, locals, community organization participants, frequent shoppers
- JA population continues to decrease
 - Japantown has evolved through the times
 - "After WWII, JAs returned...to a vastly altered neighborhood, but managed to revitalize their shops and cultural organizations and to coexist with the African American Community...Japanese and Korean American businesses eventually opened in Japan Center, reinventing this product of urban renewal as a central part of the community. With a strong framework for adjusting to future transitions, Japantown's residents and extended community can maintain the everyday retail and the community-based organizations that form the neighborhood's core, a critical goal that serves as the foundation of this Plan."
- **Special Use District** (area between Fillmore, Laguna, Geary, Bush) designated in Planning Code:
 - "Requiring that all major use changes and all new formula retail conform to the neighborhood's character and receive approval from the Planning Commission. In addition, the Japan Center's owners have a signed covenant with the City of SF which requires that, to the extent commercially feasible, the malls' tenants "offer goods and services that reflect that culture, heritage, tradition or arts of Japan or of Japanese American."

III. Challenges facing Small businesses

1. Retail Performance
 - Sales are strong as a whole but business owners report rising costs.
 - Steadily increased following 2001

- Parking demand at the garage has been steady. (cars ≈ people)
 - Average rent for retail spaces in Japantown is \$2.50 – 3.50 per sq feet.
 - Japan Center management has improved lease enforcement.
2. Business climate
- Residents and business owners want improved maintenance and security to attract shoppers and visitors.
 - In 2006, Japantown Task Force established a Japantown *Community Benefits District (CBD)* Steering Committee to possibly form a special assessment district.
 - In 2006, a *Special Use District* was formed (area inside Bush, Geary, Fillmore, and Laguna).
3. Ownership transitions
- 2000 study: 28% of business formed before 1975, 57% before 1985
 - Many are planning to retire but have no one to continue their business.
 - People at the meeting didn't identify this as an immediate concern.
4. Japan Center Reconstruction
- Sales tax revenues indicate that most stores in the mall have performed well in recent years.
 - Japan Center performed better in 2007 than any year since 1993.
 - Center's performance followed trends of Japantown as a whole.

IV. Challenges facing Cultural and Community Institutions

1. Capacity challenges – financial, membership, overlapping missions
 - May benefit from consolidating admin functions, try to attract the younger generation
2. Lack of Permanent Space (i.e Nihonmachi Little Friends)
3. Limited Space for Community Activities – JCCCNC and JCYC aren't enough
 - Need for new performing arts space
 - Space for *intergenerational* gatherings to replace Japantown Bowl
 - Space for youth activities, “hanging out” space, tech
 - Space for art, cultural, historic displays
 - Hotel Kabuki, Sundance Kabuki Theater, J-Pop Center and Rosa Parks Center are too expensive for organizations to use regularly
4. Improved Utilization of Existing Facilities
 - Currently, many facilities owned by non-profits are underutilized: Kabuki Theater, Rosa Parks, Kinmon Gakuen, CUPC, YMCA, Buddhist Church, Nichi Bei Kai bldg.

V. Recommendations and Strategies

- In order to address the concerns listed above, residents, community org's, and business owners worked with the city to identify strategies for maintaining the neighborhood's cultural and economic vitality.

1. Implementation Organization

- Form a community-controlled, non-profit organization to provide leadership.
 - Plan says Implementation Org. will be most effective if it builds on the capabilities of an existing organization, Steering Committee should pick which existing org.
 - Implementation Org. and Steering Committee should work to form a New Strategic Plan.
 - Board of Directors should fully represent the neighborhood's property owners, merchants, residents, and cultural and service orgs.
 - Raise money by fundraising and/or a Community Benefits District (aka Business Improvement District **BID**)
 - Establish sub-committees
2. Promote district as a regional destination through enhanced marketing and support for community events
 3. Provide increased maintenance, beautification, and security services
 4. Increase business retention efforts and address ongoing pressures on existing small businesses.
 5. Recruit new, culturally appropriate businesses to fill vacancies as they arise and achieve desired retail mix.
 6. Improve access to space for community activities
 7. Strengthen community organizations' administrative capacity
 8. Mitigate the impact of future Japan Center construction
 9. Explore strategies for temporarily relocating Japan Center businesses during renovation
 10. Retain the Japan Center's character and its roles as a community gathering place, showcase for Japanese American culture, and home for culturally appropriate businesses.

VI. Community Benefits District

- A CBD refers to the group of parcels or businesses that receive the special services, and ultimately, are the ones who pay for it. Along as a property or business owner is included in the district boundaries, they WILL be paying an assessment to fund those services.
 - Board of Supervisors initiate proceedings to form a CBD when they get request from owners who will pay at least 30% of the proposed assessments
 - Everyone included in CBD boundaries gets to vote if they want to establish the CBD
 - Assessments can be levied up to 15 years

- Residential properties can be included
- Costs of forming the CBD can be included in the assessment amount
- Management plan and Engineer's report is required (Engineer's report shows how the rates are calculated for each property)
- When CBD formed, assessments are paid either through tax bills or direct bill....money goes to the management organization....management organization uses money to fund maintenance services, landscaping, marketing, etc (whatever services were approved to be funded)

JAPANTOWN BNP CHAPTER 4: Land Use

Strategies to address the physical aspects of land use conditions in Japantown.

I. Zones in Japantown

- **Residential Zones** (RH-2, RH-3): Most restrictive zone in permitting commercial and other non-residential uses. Some moderately scaled apartment buildings, group housing and institutions are permitted in this area.
 - RH-2: permits two dwelling units per parcel
 - RH-3: allows up to three residential units and is slightly more accommodating of non-residential uses.
- **Residential Mixed Zones** (RM-1, RM-2, RM-3, RM-4): Allow a wider mix of dwelling types and higher densities than RH districts but maintain low densities compared to other zoning districts.
 - RM-3: medium density mixed residential zones, allow more units per square foot, buildings are taller and bulkier.
 - RM-4: high density mixed residential zones, allow more units per square foot, buildings are taller and bulkier.
- **Neighborhood Commercial Districts** (NC-2 and NC-3): Housing is allowed and encouraged above ground floor but majority of uses are commercial. Intends to appeal to the local and general public.
 - NC-2: Limits on uses that are considered in conflict with livability standards (auto repair shops and late night activities)
 - NC-3: Allows for commercial uses that serve the region in addition to neighborhood serving businesses. New housing is encouraged above second story of buildings.

II. Zoning Recommendations

- **Create Zone 1 (Mixed Residential Zone)**
 1. *Current Situation:* The area of Bush between Laguna and Gough streets is zoned Residential Mixed 4 (RM-4). Home to senior housing facilities(Kokoro Assisted Living Center, Kimochi Home, and the Sequoias). Currently these types of housing are not permitted within the

existing zoning controls, require special authorization by the Planning Commission.

2. *Stated Goals*: safeguard the mix of uses that exist in J-town today and encourage more complementary uses in the future.

3. *Suggestion*: RM-3 and RM-4 areas located between Bush and Geary and east of Webster should be rezoned to permit housing, office religious facilities, schools, child-care facilities, community centers and retail.

· **Create Zone 2 (Neighborhood Commercial Zone)**

1. *Stated Goal*: Current RM-3 area and NC-2 area should be replaced with a new district to encourage Jtown's existing neighborhood serving retail core to flourish along Post, Buchanan and Fillmore Streets

2. *Suggestion*: Permit residential (above first floor), retail, restaurants, theaters, arts activities, business and professional services, general office and theatres. Retail > 3000sf, new religious facilities, schools, child care facilities, tourist hotels, fast food, bars and formula retail uses would require conditional use authorization. Liquor sales permitted w/ restrictions.

· **Create Zone 3 (Regional Commercial Zone)**

1. *Stated Goal*: Encourage malls, others along Geary, to maximize their potential as regional-serving commercial destination.

2. *Suggestion*: Create new zone permitting residential (above first floor), retail, bars, *nighttime entertainment*, theaters, business and professional services, and arts activities. Retail > 3000sf, new religious facilities, schools, child-care facilities, tourist hotels, fast food, bars and formula retail uses would require conditional use authorization. Liquor sales permitted w/restrictions.

· **Zoning Control Updates (to be applied to all 3 zones)**

1. Limit parking (0.75 to 1 per unit MAX), no new parking lots permitted, new garages require conditional use authorization

2. Revise housing requirements – prioritize housing for families

3. Property owners should be encouraged to retain existing community serving uses with incentives – such as height bonuses for properties that retain existing community space.

4. Ease restrictions to make retaining historic building more feasible.

5. Enhance notification of neighborhood for conditional use authorization.

III. Recommendation: Activate Ground Floor Spaces

1. Improve streets frontages and streets with required ground floor commercial uses.

a. Require parking built above street grade to be set back at least 25 ft. from ground floor.

- b. Ground floor commercial use shall be open to pedestrian eye level and occupy no less than 75% of building frontage.
 - c. Active uses at ground floor should NOT include any where primary function is storage of goods/vehicles, any office use, utility installations, any oriented toward vehicles or anything that will require non-transparent walls facing street.
2. Protect pedestrian and transit-oriented street frontages
 3. Promote street life with outdoor activity areas.

IV. Other Considerations : Japantown is a Special Use District (SUD): bordered by Fillmore, Bush, Laguna and Geary.

- Aim is to protect the character of Japantown.
 - Requires new land uses to be compatible with the cultural and historic integrity, character, development pattern and design of the neighborhood.
 - Requires conditional use authorizations from Planning Commission for: Any change of use in excess of 4000 sq. ft. OR Any merger of one or more existing uses in excess of 2500 sq. ft. OR Establishment of any formula retail use “big chains”

JAPANTOWN BNP CHAPTER 5: Built Form

Strategies to guide new development and projects undergoing major renovations

I. Update Building Heights

- *Current:* Building heights range from 1-story, single family residences to a 27-story apt. bldg. Some blocks are zoned with 50-foot height limits, and others are zoned for 240 ft. buildings.
- *Stated Goals:* Develop a distinctive skyline that compliments the city’s skyline. Respect topography and follow policies already established by City. Maintain view corridors by making slender towers rather than bulky, massive buildings. Ensure adequate light and air. Minimize wind and shadow impacts. New and denser development needed to meet the city and region’s housing needs, increase community/commercial activity and improve connections between neighborhoods.
 - **Increase heights of large parcels between Post and Geary**
 - Appropriate tower heights determined to be between 135 feet and 375 feet.
 - Appropriate because it is flanked by wide streets.
 - **Increase height of parcels at northern gateway to Japantown should be increased from 50 to 85 feet.**
 - Northeast corner of Sutter and Buchanan streets.
 - Other gateways already have increased height zones or parcels are too small to accommodate more height.

- Increase ground-floor heights for commercial uses (5 feet)
- Require step backs in Japantown's Commercial Core: *Ensure sun access.*
 - Buildings should step back from property line or building above 35-45 feet.
 - Specific step backs:
 - Parcels fronting Buchanan Mall between Post and Sutter streets should step back by 15' at 35' in height to allow for sun access on the pedestrian mall
 - New dev. along Post should step back by 15' at 45' to allow for sun access on the north side of the street.

II. Improve Large Parcel Design

- Improve tower design
 - Height and bulk: minimize shadows, optimize exposure to light and air, streets and open spaces.
 - Vary tower heights, sculpt tops, minimize tower bulk, space towers ~100 ft. apart, allow max two towers per block: optimizes exposure to light & air from residential units, streets and open spaces.
- Require Mid-block pedestrian connections

III. Apply Japantown-specific design guidelines

- Apply to properties within the blocks bounded by Sutter, Geary, Fillmore and Laguna and major development projects anywhere within the plan area based upon recommendations based upon community input. Intended to embellish building and site development by integrating Japanese inspired design aesthetics into suitable building features.
 - Form and Structure
 - Roofs
 - Materials and Ornamentation
 - Landscaping, open spaces, and public art.

IV. Apply San Francisco's Citywide design guidelines

- Site Design
- Massing and Articulation
- Façade Treatment
 - Exterior light features
 - Recognize important historic buildings.
 - Include 3 dimensional detailing.
- Ground-floor design
 - Design facades to be 75% transparent
 - Design ground-floor units for residents that have direct access at grade level.

- Locate retail entrances at corners. Residential entrances should be away from corner to prevent congestion.
- Awnings, etc.
- Parking and access
 - Discourage at- or above-grade parking. Minimize number of entrances and exits in parking structures.
 - Minimize the negative effect of parking entrances on pedestrians by limiting the number and width of openings
 - and architecturally integrating them into the building or landscaping.
 - Making loading docks bays, etc. out of sight if possible.
 - Prohibit off-street parking entrances on Post street, except the public parking garage at Japan Center.
- Private Open Space
 - Develop rooftop terraces, gardens and associated landscaped areas
 - Incorporate seating opportunities
 - Develop weathered protection systems for pedestrians

JAPANTOWN BNP CHAPTER 6: Public Realm

- "Public Realm" refers to spaces in community common to everyone, ie. streets, sidewalks, parks, plazas, other open spaces
- Japantown's public realm categorized as follows:
 - § Open Space (public parks/plazas, semi-public greenways)
 - § Streetscape (sidewalks, streets, alleys)
 - § Signage and Wayfinding (signs providing directional/locational info, signs/banners/art)
- Current public realm influenced by mid-century urban renewal, designed to accommodate cars, form inward-facing, large scale developments with little attention paid to pedestrian features.

I. Open Spaces

- 3 Categories:
 1. Public Plazas (Peace Plaza, Buchanan Mall), characterized by hardscape, art installations, street furniture
 2. Large public parks with dedicated rec space
 3. Mini park-like spaces incorporating privately-owned but publically accessible landscaping
- Most common request from community during planning was for:
 1. More green spaces, including tree planting, grass, and landscaping

2. A children's play area in heart of neighborhood for young children
3. Lighting improvements for increased safety
4. Ongoing maintenance of open spaces over time

A. Public Plazas

1. Peace Plaza

- Heart of Japantown, home to Peace Pagoda, most recognizable feature
- Many plaques and public sculptures in area show history
- Major daily tourist draw of neighborhood
- Venue for most large community events, including Obon Festival, Nihonmachi Street Fair, Aki Matsuri, Cherry Blossom Festival
- Constructed as part of Japan Trade center in early 1970's
- hardscaped plaza with small stage, geometric arrangement of planters, wood benches, boulders, reflective pool by pagoda
- Pagoda originally to hold eternal flame that is 17 centuries old, flame now relocated to glass enclosure behind water feature, hard to notice
- Design has Japanese Aesthetic, majority of feedback suggests new design is too cold, needs more landscaping and seating

2. Buchanan Mall

- Officially renamed Osaka Way, pedestrian mall for one block between Post and Sutter streets, directly north of Peace Plaza
- Designed in 1960's as part of 2nd phase of urban renewal by Redevelopment Agency, intended to characterize neighborhood's historic, cultural, social and visual character
- Modern version of Japanese village aesthetic, intimate scale of buildings and varied facades
- Two fountains designed by artist Ruth Asawa, winding cobblestone river designed by Rai Okamoto, Torii-style gate at north end
- Feedback from community:
 - § uneven pavement in cobblestone river area is hard to walk on, unsafe for seniors and children
 - § sunlight exposure to plaza should be protected
 - § need for more landscaping and activation of plaza features (fountains often turned off)
 - § businesses on either side of mall do not do enough to activate mall with outdoor seating and displays

B. Large Public Parks

- Hamilton Rec Center and Raymond Kimball Playground
- includes sports fields, public library with largest collection of Japanese books in Northern California, swimming pool, tennis courts and playgrounds
- improvements underway to Hamilton swimming pool and playground

- Rosa Parks Elementary School south of Geary also has playgrounds and playing fields, but not entirely open to public
- These large spaces not activated by land uses around them and are generally single-use for proscribed activities, not within heart of neighborhood, not currently fully utilized as community resources. Some residents feel unsafe in them and accessing them

C. Mini Park-Like Spaces

- Smaller open spaces scattered throughout the neighborhood
- Include semi-accessible landscaped walkways incorporated within some large residential complexes, including Nihonmachi Terraces and St. Francis Square, privately owned walkway connecting Webster Street to Fillmore along northern edge of Safeway parking lot, publically owned brick pathway and lawn creating Cottage Row
- Residents voiced desire to make walking in neighborhood easier and more enjoyable by improving access, linking small pathways to new pathways on large parcels and providing more seating

II. Streetscape

- Focuses on pedestrian experience and usability of Japantown's streets and sidewalks, ie. design of streets and sidewalks, how they are furnished, landscaped, lit and paved
- Japantown has distinctive Japanese-influence signage and lighting along key corridors and open spaces, but lacks prominent gateways and design elements that signify the neighborhood to people traveling along major thoroughways, including on Geary and Bush/Pine streets
- Maintenance of existing and new streetscape elements including sidewalk paving, landscaping and lighting is viewed as top priority
- Merchants concerned that visitors will not return if neighborhood is seen as unpleasant place to walk, shop or gather

III. Areas Needing Improvement

1. Planting - inconsistent tree planting, canopy along Sutter is too dense, Post and other north-south streets could use tree planters, planters are sparse and need regular maintenance
2. Lighting - street and sidewalk lighting inconsistent, Special Japanese-themed light posts put up on street bordering Japan Trade Center and in Buchanan Mall, adding to character of neighborhood
3. Paving - Japantown's sidewalks are in relatively good condition compared to other parts of the city, however tree roots make some places unsafe for seniors, trash pick-up and sweeping is inconsistent
4. Furnishings - sidewalks have minimal furnishings (ie benches, newspaper stands and trash cans), more seating and amenities could improve, given high number of tourists and seniors

5. Streetwall (Buildings and Uses) - addressed in Ch. 5 on built form. Some concerns about graffiti removal and maintenance of storefronts

IV. Signage and Wayfinding

- Signage and wayfinding provide orientation, direction info and identification of significant places and activities
- Current Signage and directional orientation is scattered, does not adequately promote neighborhood as unified
- Community has recognized new approach needed to revitalize identity and support economic and cultural survival
- Function of signage and wayfinding system:
 - Assist visitors and residents find destinations from all modes of travel, including public transit, driving, walking and biking
 - Create clear pathways utilizing signs, maps and other landmarks from one place to another
 - Establish messages that are user-friendly and clear that feature safety and welcoming messages and locate services and other publicly significant destinations
- Currently entry identification on primary access streets is lacking, wayfinding and signage needed at key gateway location, as well as centralized public information site to highlight possible destinations for all visitors
 - Recent addition of Japantown History Walk interpretive signs and Fan sculpture are useful prototypes, but a more organized and integrated system is needed.

V. Recommendations and Strategies

- **Open Space Recommendations**
 - Make most of expansive existing open spaces and create new spaces that connect to them, coordinate with Rec and Park Department and Commission
 - Improve connections between existing open spaces and facilities through design and maintenance
 - Activate and "Green" existing open space
 - Design and construct **Webster Street Linear Park** to complement existing open space network and provide additional usable open space in heart of neighborhood. (BNP page. 97)
 - Creates open spaces between Geary and Bush on Webster street (under bridge), turn into plaza with seating, lawns and landscaped areas, Japanese garden, children's play structure
 - Suggestion for enclosed performance space for community orgs to meet, practice and perform on block between Geary and Post, could

be operated by private org, should include stage, transparent materials to be visible, provide food/beverage concessions

- Open spaces should accommodate existing auto and pedestrian access to properties to be coordinated with redesign of Japan Center
- Coordinate with adjacent property owners to ensure access is maintained appropriately and the design of properties can help activate new park
- Ensure redesign accommodates community events and street fair functions
- Conduct shadow and wind analysis for design

· **Streetscape Recommendations**

- To be in compliance with city's Draft Better Streets Plan
- Prioritize Post Street for Streetscape Improvements (planting, lighting, paving, street furnishings, public art, signage, etc.)
- Improve Lighting, tree-planting and Neighborhood Amenities on Residential Streets
- Improve Lighting and Signage on Streets Bordering Neighborhood's Open Spaces
- Encourage Transformation of Geary Corridor into Neighborhood-serving Boulevard
- Connect East-West Streets to Proposed Webster Street Linear Park
- Connect Japantown to Fillmore Street
- Make Alleys more livable

· **Signage and Wayfinding Recommendations**

- Mark Japantown's Entrances with Gateways
- Provide neighborhood orientation signs (directories, maps, etc., bi-lingual)
- Provide directional signs
- Integrate interpretive signs with existing public art
- Place signs at transit stops

JAPANTOWN BNP CHAPTER 7: Transportation and Circulation

I. Existing Conditions

- Problems identified for the Japantown Neighborhood Pedestrian Safety and Traffic Community Plan prepared by Japantown Task Force, Inc. in 2006
 - Safe pedestrian crossing
 - Double parking
 - Traffic enforcement

- Visitors' understanding of existing laws.

II. Recommendations and Strategies

- Pedestrian friendly changes
- Pedestrian safety the key priority with 3 stages of improvements.
- Remove two travel lanes on Webster street and install pocket park.
- Community opposition to bike lane additions to Post street, a dedicated
 - bus and shared bike lane however is being considered
 - Alternative A: Create 2 left turn lanes on Post for flexibility with double parking, and a pedestrian scramble or X intersection at both Sutter and Post at Buchannan.
- Increase Education and Enforcement Program and target seniors with bilingual pedestrian safety brochures and educational sessions at places like JCCCNC.
- 2004 SFCTA study anticipates BRT service to Geary by 2013-14
- Improving Parking Management
 - Price on street parking meter rates to meet demand
 - Consider Perking Benefit District to capture Meter Revenue
 - Community support if coordinated with CBD, resident priority given for available parking, and community input be used in determining parking rates.
 - Additional parking regulation
 - Bicycle parking to be added

JAPANTOWN BNP CHAPTER 8: Japan Center

I. Mid-20th Century Background and History

- Japan Center occupies blocks between Fillmore, Laguna, Geary and Post
- Mall built in the 1960's, known as the cultural and economic "heart" of Japantown
- 50 businesses and 1500 residents occupied the area before the mall was built
- Kintetsu Corporation of Japan bough property and became owner

II. 2006 Sale of Japan Center Properties

- In 2006 Kintetsu looked for a new buyer to purchase the mall properties
- Discussions regarding the sale of Japan Center Properties took place with community leaders, mayor Gavin Newsome, District Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi and Kintetsu Corporation, resulting in Japantown Special Use District and a series of covenants

- Covenants maintain that new property owners will maintain ownership of the mall building for at least 15 years and will maintain a Japanese and/or Japanese American design theme and leasing strategy
- In 2006 3-D Investments purchased the mall properties from Kintetsu, agreeing to the covenants
- Properties purchased included the Miyako Mall, Kintetsu Mall, Miyako Hotel (now Hotel Kabuki) and the Miyako Inn (now Hotel Tomo)
- The Kabuki Theater (now Sundance Kabuki Cinemas) was purchased months after 3D's purchase of mall properties

III. Community requirements for Japan Center

- Continue to function as the retail "anchor" for Japantown
- Embrace the neighborhood through physical design
 - Open and make transparent the facades facing Peace Plaza, Post and Geary
 - Peace Plaza's hardscape and blank walls limit its function at the heart of the neighborhood
- Improve the design and function of Peace Plaza
 - Need to make it more welcoming, open, add plants and "greenery"
- Retain local businesses
- Retain appropriate off-street parking supply
- Include affordable housing as part of any new residential development
 - Include housing for families and seniors with a variety of income ranges
 - Make possible for JA's living elsewhere in the city to return to Japantown

IV. Development Challenges

- Multiple ownership of Japan Center Properties
 - 3D owns Kintetsu and Miyako Malls,
 - Union Bank owns a portion of Miyako mall in a condo-like interest
 - City of SF through the Recreation and Parks Department and the Municipal Transportation Authority, owns Peace Plaza and the garage underneath
 - Small independent businesses own storefront spaces along Geary
- Any development efforts will require a collaborative effort between property owners
- Peace Plaza
 - By law cannot be removed or diminished in size
 - Underwent significant redesign in 1999-2000, but with widespread dissatisfaction
 - Challenging to design and fund a new Peace Plaza in conjunction with any new development of Japan Center
- Japan Center Garage (beneath Miyako and Kintetsu Malls)

- Capacity of 747 spaces, but 400 are leased to California Pacific Medical Center (CPMC)
- Changes to Miyako or Kintetsu malls would require complete reconstruction of garage, which would cost at least \$45 million
- Any housing developed in Japan Center Malls would likely use the garage
- Retail Space challenges
 - Revenues from rental of retail spaces often do not pay for the costs of building it
 - Too much retail space can take a long time to fill with tenants, can have deadening effect if too many retail spaces are empty
 - Success of retail is very sensitive to location, with spaces along Post and Peace Plaza having greater value

V. Phasing Construction

- A phased construction period *might* allow existing businesses in Japan Center to remain open during construction
- Phasing of construction would significantly increase costs of a development project, leaving fewer funds for other community benefits
- A phased construction plan would increase the total amount of construction time in the heart of Japantown

VII. Development Economics

- No new development is likely to be financially feasible in the next 3-5 years
- Reconstruction of the retail mall buildings without residential components are not financially feasible because costs of rebuilding parking garage cannot be supported by revenues from retail spaces
- Maximizing residential development and limiting the amount of retail spaces tend to be the most financially sound solutions
- Unless city partially funds reconstruction of garage, no development scenario would be feasible

VIII. Summary of Recommendations and Strategies

- The recommendations for future development of Japan Center was one of the primary purposes of creating the BNP
- Primary recommendation:
 - *Short Term*: interior upgrades and minor exterior improvements
 - *Long term*: complete reconstruction of malls, garage, and peace plaza
- Significant renovation unlikely in near future as it will require reconstruction of parking garage
- The city cannot mandate specifics about a new development project

- Can only provide recommendations and attempt to balance the needs and desires of the community and realities of a complex development of the site

1. Ensure Japanese oriented retail is the centerpiece for any new development

- Any new development should keep retail shops on ground floor
 - 30,000 sq ft (out of 80,000) should be reserved for “prime” locations such as high traffic shops or restaurants (Should maintain small spaces to keep competitive)

2. Allow for residential development of Sufficient Height and Density in New Development of Japan Center to Ensure Financially Feasible

- Currently height limit stands at 50 ft
- Proposition is to build substantial residential space above Japan Center (4-5 stories tall along Post St, up to 8 stories on Geary, and 250 ft building on the corner of Webster & Geary).

3. The city should participate actively in the planning and development of any new development project of the Japan Center site

- No project can be successful w/o participation of the city as the city can create new zoning controls governing Japan Center site
 - City collaborate w/Park & Rec Dept to create design for Peace Plaza
 - Collaborate w/Municipal Transportation Agency to create financing plan for reconstruction of garage

4. Ensure that the city participates in the funding of a reconstructed parking garage

- No development of Japan Center possible without plan for garage and should serve retail component for new development

5. Include sufficient parking to serve new residential development – “Transit Oriented” Approach

- Will require dedicated off street parking spaces at .75 spaces per unit, better suit the need of residents. Also, upgrade to transit service (Bus Rapid Transit)

6. Include existing businesses in the retail mix of a new retail center

- Allow below market rent for applicable merchants
- Project sponsor should work w/existing merchant association and create a plan for managing construction impacts, i.e., loss of parking, pollution, and traffic

7. Ensure any new development opens up to the neighborhood

- Should open to surrounding streets and neighborhood with storefronts exposed, merchandise display, outdoor dining in Peace Plaza

8. Integrate and enhance Peace Plaza as a community gathering space

- A new design should be proposed by project sponsor, the community, and the city to integrate buildings on either side
 - Geary side of plaza should be a welcoming entrance from Geary to the heart of Japantown with more amenities for public use.

9. Integrate Japanese influenced design aesthetic in the center's redesign

- Working w/the community and implementation organization, design team should determine appropriate style of Japanese features to incorporate culturally expressive design features, landscaping, and public art

10. Work with the developer to encourage provision of affordable housing in the neighborhood

- SF's inclusionary housing mandates > 15 percent of new units be rented/sold below market rate

11. Work With All Parties to Create a Fair and Balanced Public Benefits Package

- A public benefits package would be associated w/ entitlement of a major new development project on this site which must balance community needs and desires w/financial realities of large and complex development and legal constraints around impact fees and exactions
- Priorities of Japan Center
 - 1) retention of existing businesses in a new retail center, 2) redesign of peace plaza, 3) improvements to Buchanan Mall

JAPANTOWN BNP CHAPTER 9: Implementation

- Chapter 9 outlines the potential costs and funding sources for all of its recommendations and suggests who should work on each recommendation. Recommendations are combined into four groups,

I. Physical Improvements Program (Chapters 6 and 7),

- Lead - Department of Public Works (DPW) and San Francisco Municipal Transportation Authority.
- Summary – Improving Peace Plaza, Buchanan Mall, pedestrian access and safety, transportation and creating a new Webster Street Linear Park.
- Projected Costs-
 - Open Space Improvements (\$14,418,078) - Redesign Peace Plaza, improve Buchanan Mall, and create a new Webster Street Linear Park
 - Streetscape and Pedestrian Safety Improvements (\$22,620,478)
 - Signage and Wayfinding (\$4,304,000)
 - Geary Blvd. Bus Rapid Transit Project (Paid through federal and local sources)
 - Total (not including BRT) - \$41,342,556
- Potential Funding Sources-
 - **Japantown Development Impact Fee** (Up to \$30 million). A Development Impact Fee is a one-time charge to developers to mitigate their impacts on public infrastructure (streets, sidewalks, etc.). For example, if the owners of the Japan Center Mall decided to demolish the mall and build new housing, they could be assessed a Development Impact Fee.
 - **Japantown Community Benefit District (CBD)** (Projected \$13 million over 15 year period). A Community Benefit District (CBD) is a mechanism in which business owners, merchants, residents and community members pay an annual fee which goes to funding neighborhood improvements.
 - **Property Tax Revenue Increase** – As housing is redeveloped, property values will increase which will generate more property tax. However, this property tax goes into a general citywide fund, and it is unlikely that it could be used directly for the Physical Improvement Program (1).

II. Economic Development and Cultural Heritage Programs and Activities

(Chapters 2 and 3)

- Lead – Implementation Organization (new or existing non-profit that would be in charge of implementing the plan)
- Summary – Preserving Japanese culture, increasing awareness of Japantown’s history, cultural heritage, and social values, creating more access for community events and activities, and supporting merchants through retention efforts.
- Projected Costs No specific costs were mentioned in the chapter, but Implementation Matrix outline the cost to create/maintain an implementation organization.

- Potential Funding Sources- Funding from individual donors, foundations, and CBD (which has not been formed)

III. Land Use and Housing (Chapters 4 and 5)

- Lead – SF Planning Commission
- Summary – Updating zone controls (which could also require new developers to adopt public benefits, such as providing private and common open space), creating pedestrian oriented streets, and updating building designs and heights.
- Projected Costs- Related to staff costs and environmental review.
- Potential Funding Sources- Unknown

IV. Japan Center (Chapter 8)

- Lead – Japan Center Owner and Developer
- Summary – Ensuring Japanese oriented retail shops in Japantown, sufficient parking, and affordable housing in any new development.
- Projected Costs- Unknown, based on Japan Center Owner and Developer
- Potential Funding Sources- Unknown, based on Japan Center Owner and Developer

