



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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## Informational Presentation

HEARING DATE: JUNE 3, 2009

*Date:* May 28, 2009  
*Project:* **Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan Historic Resource Survey**  
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*Recommendation:* Informational – no action required

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### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan (BNP) is a community-based, long-range planning effort that addresses cultural preservation of San Francisco's Japantown, one of three remaining historic *nihonmachi* (Japantown) communities in the U.S., as a goal. As part of the Japantown BNP, the Planning Department contracted with the consultant firm, Page & Turnbull to gather information regarding buildings, structures, sites, objects, and areas in Japantown for the purposes of informing cultural and community preservation strategies. Page & Turnbull conducted area-wide historic research, gathered information for approximately 500 individual properties, and produced historic evaluations of selected individual properties and sites located within the Japantown BNP area. The Japantown BNP boundaries are California Street to the north, O'Farrell and Ellis Streets to the south, Gough Street to the east, and Steiner Street to the west. (See Attachment A, Map of Japantown BNP historic resource survey area and properties documented.)

The Japantown BNP historic resource survey produced research documents, evaluative reports, and summary memos that informed development of the cultural and community preservation strategies found in Chapter 2, Community Heritage, of the *Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan, Draft for Public Review* (Attachment I) as well as policies and strategies found in other chapters of the *Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan, Draft for Public Review* (Attachment K). The Japantown BNP historic resource survey materials produced by Page & Turnbull for the Planning Department include:

- *Historic Context Statement: Japantown, San Francisco, California* (author Donna Graves). Organizes Japantown's historical, cultural, and architectural development according to important themes, time periods, and patterns of events. (Attachment B)
- *Physical Heritage Report*. Identification of known extant buildings, structures, objects, sites and areas with historic connections to the cultural and community development of Japantown. (Attachment C)
- *Traditional Cultural Property Evaluation Report*. Identification of active historically rooted cultural sites associated with the continuing cultural identity of Japantown that may be recognized by the National Park Service. (Attachment D)
- *Primary Records (DPR 523A forms)*. Information on 504 individual properties constructed before or during 1975. (Attachment E)

- *Building, Structure, & Object Records (DPR 523B forms)*. Assessments of 16 individual properties associated with the historic cultural development of Japantown. (Attachment F)
- *District Record (DPR 523D form)*. Assessment of an area associated with the historic cultural development of Japantown. (Attachment G)
- *Survey Findings Report*. Summary of findings, analysis, and recommendations. (Attachment H)

The Japantown BNP historic resource survey materials are currently in the form of final drafts produced for public review by Page & Turnbull. Preliminary drafts of Japantown BNP historic resource survey materials were reviewed by the Preservation Working Group of the Japantown BNP Steering Committee and by Planning Department staff, whose comments were incorporated by Page & Turnbull into final drafts for public review.

The Planning Department conducts historic resource surveys to inform long-range community planning efforts such as the Japantown BNP. In addition, the gathering of historic resource survey information by the Planning Department can benefit individual property owners who might otherwise be required to provide the information at their own expense during the building permit review process. Historic resource survey information can also benefit individual property owners who choose to apply for preservation incentives through local, state, and federal programs.

## SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

The Japantown BNP historic resource survey focused on gathering basic information for the majority of properties in the Japantown neighborhood, on identifying properties that have specific associations to the historic development of the *Nikkei* (Japanese) ethnic and cultural community in Japantown, and on assessing those properties that appear eligible for listing in historic registers, in order to inform community heritage preservation strategies of the Japantown BNP. The objectives of the Japantown BNP historic resource survey did not include comprehensive evaluation of all properties within Japantown. Therefore, properties within Japantown may have historic or cultural associations, connections to important historic individuals, or architectural or design merits that were not fully evaluated in the Japantown BNP historic resource survey.

### Historic Contexts

A unifying theme in Japantown's history since 1906 is the enduring *Nikkei* community. The Japantown neighborhood, which began as an ethnic enclave of Japanese in San Francisco, has grown into a regional, national, and international hub of *Nikkei* cultural and community identity. The cultural and physical landscapes of Japantown, while historically influenced and shaped by external factors and forces, primarily reflect the influence and character of generations of *Nikkei* – *Issei*, *Nisei*, *Sansei*, and *Yonsei* (first, second, third and fourth generations, respectively) – who have occupied the area for more than a century.

The time periods examined by the *Historic Context Statement: Japantown, San Francisco, California* (Attachment B) include the period from approximately 1880 through 1906, encompassing the early history of Japanese in San Francisco, and early development of the Western Addition area, prior to the founding of Japantown in the Western Addition. Following that, the historic context statement documents the development of Japantown as the home of the Japanese cultural community during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including: the earliest period of Japanese occupancy in the Western Addition area beginning around 1906; growth of the Japanese cultural community within the neighborhood that became known to residents as *Nihonjinmachi* (“Japanese person’s town”) through the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the events of World War II internment and the post-war return of *Nikkei* to Japantown; the mid-century period of federally funded urban renewal in Japantown and the Western Addition; and the recent period

of cultural and community revitalization in Japantown during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thematic time periods described in the historic context statement that relate to the historic and cultural development of the Japantown neighborhood and the *Nikkei* community include:

- Early Japanese History in San Francisco, 1880s–1906.
- Japanese Settlement in the Western Addition, 1906–1920s.
- *Nihonjinmachi* of San Francisco, 1920s–1942.
- World War II Internment, 1942–1945.
- *Nikkei* Return to Japantown, 1945–1960s.
- Redevelopment of Japantown, 1960s–1980s.
- Rediscovering *Nihonmachi*, 1980s–Present.

The historic relationship of Japantown to other communities of the Western Addition is vital to understanding the cultural character of the neighborhood. In addition to social and cultural themes specific to Japantown, the broader Western Addition of San Francisco has important historic associations to other ethnic and cultural communities, including German Jews, African Americans, Filipinos, and Koreans. Thematic time periods described in the historic context statement that relate to the broader cultural history of the Western Addition include:

- Early History of the Western Addition, 1880s–1906.
- Citywide Reconstruction, Resettlement & Recovery, 1906–1910s.
- San Francisco’s “Little United Nations”, 1910s–1950s.
- Redevelopment & Preservation in the Western Addition, 1950s–Present

Additional research may further establish and clarify the historic time periods and cultural themes associated with the development of the Japantown neighborhood and the Western Addition area of San Francisco.

### **Physical Heritage**

Japantown’s physical heritage includes the wide range of extant buildings, objects, sites, and areas in the neighborhood that provide connections to *Nikkei* culture and history through use, association, design, memory and interpretation. Physical heritage properties are historically and culturally rooted and many are also associated with architectural values. The most prominent of these physical heritage properties historically played (and many still play) active, central roles in the lives of community members. These include schools, churches, and institutional properties that maintained social cohesion, retained ethnic heritage and promoted cultural identity. Other physical heritage properties of Japantown are less prominent, yet nonetheless important, in the history of the cultural neighborhood. These include properties associated with organizations, businesses, personal services, residences, and social gathering places that provided the background for the community’s historical development. Further research may identify additional physical heritage properties in Japantown. (See Attachment C, Physical Heritage Report.)

The physical heritage of Japantown also includes properties associated with ethnic and cultural communities other than *Nikkei*, with the historical and physical development of the Western Addition of San Francisco, and with exemplary architecture and design. The objectives of the Japantown BNP historic resource survey did not include comprehensive identification of all physical heritage properties within

Japantown. Therefore, physical heritage properties within Japantown may exist with historic or cultural associations, with connections to important historic individuals, or with architectural or design merits that were not fully identified in the Japantown BNP historic resource survey. Additional research may further document the physical heritage of the Japantown neighborhood and the Western Addition area of San Francisco. As described in the following section entitled “Preservation in the Japantown BNP”, the Japantown BNP recognizes the wide range of physical heritage properties in the neighborhood (documented and undocumented) as an important part of the overall community heritage of the neighborhood, which also includes people, tradition, language, arts, events and commerce.

The following findings regarding the physical heritage of San Francisco’s Japantown were incorporated into the cultural and community preservation strategies of the Japantown BNP:

- Japantown’s physical heritage properties are associated with the entirety of the social and cultural history of the neighborhood, including the development of Japantown as one of the first and best-established *nihonmachi* communities in the nation, and Japantown’s development as one of several distinctive communities within the broader area of the Western Addition.
- Properties that are actively and currently associated with the continuance of *Nikkei* cultural and community identity are generally (but not exclusively) located together within the historic, current, and future core of San Francisco’s Japantown (approximately bounded by Bush, Webster, Octavia Streets, and Geary Boulevard), an area that is comprised mostly of purpose-built properties constructed during the recent past (the last fifty years).
- A high degree of synergy exists between uses that are associated with the continuance of *Nikkei* cultural and community identity – such as churches, organizations, businesses, and public spaces – and properties that display Japanese-influenced architecture / design, which contributes to the character of the neighborhood and reinforces cultural and social cohesion of the historically based community.
- A number of outstanding historic cultural landmarks in Japantown, several of which are also active and functioning elements of the cultural community, merit recognition, preservation, and rehabilitation so that they may continue to serve as important anchors of cultural identity in Japantown.
- Further research and analysis is warranted in order to better understand the relationship of broad patterns of social and cultural history to the wide range of extant properties and areas found in Japantown, including those associated with the historic cultural community during the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (generally located north of Bush Street), and those associated with the recent past of Japantown (generally located south of Bush Street).

Physical heritage properties may be evaluated according to criteria and standards of eligibility for listing, designation, or other official recognition (which does not result in actual listing, designation, or other official recognition). The Japantown BNP historic resource survey produced evaluations of selected physical heritage properties and sites according to criteria and standards adopted at local, state, and national levels in order to inform the community preservation strategies of the Japantown BNP, including eligibility of property owners to apply for preservation incentives such as federal tax credits, the California Historic Building Code, and the Mills Act. These evaluations assessed specific properties as “traditional cultural properties” and/or as “historic properties” eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, in the California Register of Historical Resources, and for local listing.

### Traditional Cultural Properties

The National Park Service provides guidelines and evaluative criteria for identifying “traditional cultural properties” that are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a type of cultural resource. A traditional cultural property is a building, object, site or area that is currently occupied, functional, or active, and associated with cultural practices or beliefs of a living community that are rooted in that community’s history, that are still practiced and valued in the present day, and that are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community. Determination of a traditional cultural property requires verification by the cultural community, as well as concurrence by the National Park Service, and does not result in actual listing of a property in a historic register, which is a separate process that may be initiated by a property owner.

The Japantown BNP historic resource survey identified several properties in Japantown that appear to qualify as potential traditional cultural properties pursuant to the National Park Service’s guidelines and evaluative criteria, including a number of properties built within the last fifty years. These potential traditional cultural properties include churches, schools, community institutions, assembly spaces, commercial buildings, open spaces and public art, that are important to continuing the historically rooted cultural identity of one of the nation’s oldest, best established, and most vital *Nikkei* communities. Together and in combination, these potential traditional cultural properties may also merit recognition as a type of cultural district or heritage area. (See Attachment D, Traditional Cultural Property Evaluation Report.)

### Historic Properties

The National Park Service also provide guidelines and evaluative criteria for identifying “historic properties” (or “historic resources”) that are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places by demonstrating a quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, or culture. Properties that have achieved significance within the past fifty years may demonstrate exceptional value to qualify. By Resolution, the San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board adopted the National Register of Historic Places guidelines and evaluative criteria for use in evaluating eligibility of properties for local listing. Determination of eligibility of a property for listing in a historic register does not result in actual listing of a property in a historic register, which is a separate process that may be initiated by a property owner.

The Japantown BNP historic resource survey identified a total of ten properties associated with the historic development of the *Nikkei* cultural community that are eligible for individual listing in a historic register, including nine properties that are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and one property that is eligible for local listing. One of the properties identified as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places is currently listed as a San Francisco Landmark. The ten historic cultural landmarks identified by the Japantown BNP include:

- Kinmon Gakuen / Golden Gate Institute, 2031 Bush Street, built 1924
- Raphael Weill School (Rosa Parks Middle School), 1501 O’Farrell Street, built 1927 (eligible for local listing)
- Morning Star Institute, 1715 Octavia Street, built 1929
- Japanese YWCA, 1830 Sutter Street, built 1932
- Sokoji Soto Zen Temple (established at site 1934), 1881 Bush Street, built 1895 as Ohabai Shalome / Bush Street Temple (San Francisco Landmark)

- Buddhist Church of San Francisco, 1881 Pine Street, built 1935
- Japanese / Buchanan YMCA, 1530 Buchanan Street, built 1935
- San Francisco Japanese Salvation Army, 1450 Laguna Street, built 1936
- St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, 1801 Octavia Street, built 1939
- Nichiren Buddhist Church (established at site circa 1950), 2016 Pine Street, built circa 1893

The Japantown BNP historic resource survey documented historic properties using a combination of Primary Records (DPR 523A forms – Attachment E), Building, Structure, & Object Records (DPR 523B forms – Attachment F), and a District Record (DPR 523D form – Attachment G). In addition to historic properties identified as eligible for individual listing (including those documented on a District Record), an area of Japantown was assessed in terms of a potential historic district associated with the social and cultural history of the Japanese ethnic community in Japantown. However, no determination was made regarding a potential historic district in Japantown because it was determined that further research and analysis is required in order to better understand the social and cultural history of the Japanese ethnic community in relation to the wide range of extant properties in the Japantown area, such as commercial and residential buildings, and their collective ability to convey cultural significance as a historic district.

The Japantown BNP historic resource survey also documented several properties with connections to the recent past of the cultural and community development of Japantown (properties constructed within the last fifty years). In addition to the recent past of Japantown, these properties are also important to the present and future of the neighborhood, and therefore warranted documentation by the Japantown BNP historic resource survey. However, no determinations were made regarding potential historic properties built during or after 1959 in Japantown because it was determined that further research and analysis is required in order to better understand the complexity of the history of the recent past in Japantown in relation to extant properties built during the period. In addition, properties that have achieved significance within the last fifty years (including properties constructed within the last fifty years) must be documented as demonstrating exceptional value to qualify as historic.

## **PRESERVATION IN THE JAPANTOWN BNP**

The Japantown BNP is a community-based, long-range planning effort involving the residents, merchants, property owners, and organizations of the neighborhood, the community-empowered Japantown BNP Steering Committee, members of City Boards and Commissions, and Planning Department staff and consultants. The cultural and community preservation components of the Japantown BNP were also informed by the Preservation Working Group of the Japantown BNP Steering Committee, which was comprised of community historians, property owners, Planning Department staff and consultants.

The Japantown BNP is guided by four fundamental and overarching goals, each with underlying objectives. These goals and objectives include:

### **GOAL 1: SECURE JAPANTOWN’S FUTURE AS THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HEART OF JAPANESE AND JAPANESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY.**

- **Promote Japantown’s value and history.**
- **Promote a sense of Japan, in addition to the Japanese American culture.**
- **Enhance historic and cultural landmarks.**

- **Safeguard community-based institutions.**
- **Promote events that attract youth and families (to live, visit, and shop).**
- **Serve as the hub for the Japanese community in the region.**

Chapter 2, Community Heritage of the *Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan, Draft for Public Review* (Attachment I) was developed primarily to address Goal 1 and its objectives, although all of the Japantown BNP interlocking goals and objectives are addressed throughout the *Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan, Draft for Public Review* (Attachment K). The development of Chapter 2, Community Heritage was informed by the Preservation Working Group of the Japantown BNP Steering Committee, by the Japantown Task Force's *Senate Bill 307 Neighborhood Cultural Preservation Report for San Francisco's Japantown* (2005), and by the Japantown BNP historic resources survey.

The Japantown BNP includes policies and strategies to preserve San Francisco's Japantown as one of three remaining historic *nihonmachi* communities in the U.S., with the others located in San Jose and Los Angeles. San Francisco's Japantown is akin to a living ecosystem – it is a vital, resource-rich environment comprised of people, organizations, activities, sites and structures that are all intimately connected and involved in maintaining cultural identity. The community heritage of Japantown includes: people of *Nikkei* ethnic identity as well as people of other ethnic and cultural groups that are historically rooted in the Japantown area; customs, traditions, events, language, literature, and arts that are important to cultural identity; community-serving organizations that support social cohesion and that promote cultural identity; businesses and trade that contribute to day-to-day cultural life-ways such as cuisine, apparel, and personal services; and physical heritage such as buildings, objects, sites and groups of properties that transmit an essence of cultural identity and history.

The Japantown BNP addresses heritage preservation from a community-wide perspective with strategies for sustaining the wide range of community heritage features that are found in the neighborhood: people, organizations, businesses, arts, literature, language, religion, traditions, customs, events, recreation, personal services, and the built environment. The Japantown BNP does not separate the physical heritage of the neighborhood from other aspects of Japantown that are a part of its cultural character. However, the Japantown BNP does present strategies that apply specifically to retaining physical heritage as a part of the overall community and cultural preservation of Japantown.

## OWNER AND PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

Beginning on May 28, 2009, the Planning Department sent notice to owners of properties that were included in the Japantown BNP historic resource survey. The notice explained the purpose of the Japantown BNP historic resource survey, included copies of final drafts for public review of survey materials produced for subject properties, and invited comments by property owners during the period of public review. Also beginning on May 28, 2009, the Planning Department made widely available the final drafts for public review of survey materials produced by the consultant, including through web-page publication, mailings to community organizations and media services, and copies for review at the Planning Department and at the information center on-site in Japantown. Comments on the final drafts for public review of the Japantown BNP historic resource survey may be submitted to the Planning Department.

## ENDORSEMENT AND ADOPTION

The Planning Department is not requesting endorsement or adoption of the Japantown BNP historic resource survey at this time. The Japantown BNP Steering Committee, which supports the cultural and

community preservation strategies found in Chapter 2, Community Heritage of the *Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan, Draft for Public Review*, has indicated the community's preference that endorsement and adoption of the Japantown BNP historic resource survey itself not be considered until resolution is achieved of currently proposed amendments to Articles 10 and 11 of the San Francisco Planning Code, which in part pertain to treatment of properties included in historic resource surveys such as the Japantown BNP historic resource survey. Upon resolution of the currently proposed amendments to Articles 10 and 11, the Planning Department and the Japantown BNP Steering Committee propose to reconvene the Preservation Working Group to make recommendations on endorsement and adoption of the Japantown BNP historic resources survey. The Planning Department anticipates that endorsement and adoption can occur at that time.

Endorsement of the Japantown BNP historic resource survey is not required at this time. Endorsement and adoption of the Japantown BNP historic resources survey, which is anticipated to occur at a future time, is a separate process from that of the public hearing process for the *Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan, Draft for Public Review*, of which this informational presentation is a part.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

In 2005, the Planning Department determined the Survey Program, which includes the Japantown BNP historic resource survey, exempt under Class 6 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Section 15306, *Information Collection* of the CEQA Guidelines states the following: "Class 6 consists of basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environment resource. These may be strictly for information gathering purposes, or as part of a study leading to an action which a public agency has not yet approved, adopted or funded."

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION ACTION**

This report is informational only. No action is required of the Historic Preservation Commission.

### **Attachments:**

- Attachment A Map of Japantown BNP historic resource survey area and properties documented
- Attachment B *Historic Context Statement: Japantown, San Francisco, California*, Page & Turnbull (author Donna Graves)
- Attachment C Physical Heritage Report, Page & Turnbull
- Attachment D Traditional Cultural Property Evaluation Report, Page & Turnbull
- Attachment E 504 Primary Records (DPR 523A forms), Page & Turnbull – included on CD ROM only
- Attachment F 16 Building, Structure, & Object Records (DPR 523B and related DPR 523A forms), Page & Turnbull
- Attachment G District Record (DPR 523D and related DPR 523A forms), Page & Turnbull
- Attachment H Japantown BNP Historic Resource Survey Findings Report, Page & Turnbull (Appendices are attached separately)
- Attachment I Chapter 2, Community Heritage of the *Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan, Draft for Public Review*, Planning Department
- Attachment J CD ROM with Attachments A-H and entire *Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan, Draft for Public Review*

**Informational Presentation**  
**Hearing Date: June 3, 2009**

**Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan**  
**Historic Resource Survey**