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July 23, 2020

San Francisco Board of Supervisors
City Hall, Room 244
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

To the Members of the Board of Supervisors:

On behalf of the management and ownership of the Kimpton Buchanan Hotel at 1800 Sutter Street in Japantown, I urge you to support the \$25 million allocation for the Japantown Peace Plaza renovation, which is currently included in the proposed Health and Recovery Bond Measure.

You have already received a letter of support from the Japantown Community Benefit District (JCBD) Board, which I now serve as President.

So, please allow me the opportunity to speak with my “other hat on” as it relates to tourism in San Francisco. With 15 years working in hospitality in San Francisco – the last six of which have been right here as the General Manager of the Kimpton Buchanan Hotel -- I’m well versed in what attracts travelers (and the critical financial infusions that come with them!).

The investment in the Peace Plaza renovation has a multitude of benefits to the neighborhood, as well as to San Francisco at large, as we strive to expand our tourism success:

- The “What’s New?” Effect
 - Prospective visitors to San Francisco, or any city really, want to see and do the hot new attraction. We operate in a culture of adventure-seeking on the newest trend, development or place.
 - Curiosity about the Plaza will draw visitors interested in what’s trending, particularly if and when the project can showcase a notable architect or artist installation to generate interest and provide those “Instagram Moments” that are so impactful today.
 - My own JCBD organization’s marketing committee is already working toward lighting sculptures and holiday décor that will enable the run-down current Plaza to “pop” and generate clicks and visits.
- Beating Out Warm with Cool
 - With less beach culture and fewer sunny days than SoCal destinations, San Francisco’s hook in attracting California visitors has always been its culture, walkability and urban adventures. The Plaza builds on our City’s strong performance along these metrics. A photogenic focal point, it will fuel positive buzz and PR about unique tourist experiences available within close proximity of downtown.

- Attractive, diverse outdoor public spaces have become all the more critical and appreciated during this historic pandemic era. Distanced seating configurations in a fresh-air setting will draw praise from locals and visitors alike.
- Small businesses are the engine of our economy and vital to the preservation of the history and character of Japantown:
 - Our Buchanan guests love to discover the “little gems” of retail, dining, spa, etc. throughout Japantown. Unfortunately, aging and interior-facing mall architecture too often mean that our hotel guests miss merchants that are literally across the street! A community center like a revamped Peace Plaza will draw visitors in and improve the chance they’ll duck into a store or grab a picnic or snack to enjoy al fresco, giving vital financial support to local merchants in need.

The Peace Plaza anchors major festivals that attract visitors from near and far. This proposed renovation will increase the ease and movement of traffic through Japantown. Currently, the condition of the tiles generates potential hazards and requires re-grouting on a regular basis to secure loose and otherwise hazardous pieces. With several events typically scheduled in and around Peace Plaza each year, including a 200k-head-count Cherry Blossom Festival that spans two weekends in April, safety and overall attendee experience remain a chief concern for the District.

I will add -- because culture is such a fundamental component of tourism in San Francisco – that the JCBD has already committed significant funds to a PR engagement to increase the profile and overall awareness of Japantown. The Peace Plaza development would further fuel these efforts to put Japantown “on the map” for prospective San Francisco tourists and visitors who would have otherwise passed by this historic and beautiful neighborhood, creating positive coverage of the neighborhood and City at large.

We greatly appreciate your unanimous support of the \$25 million in funds allocated for Peace Plaza in the Health and Recovery bond, and look forward to this important bond being endorsed by San Francisco voters this November!

Sincerely,

Emily Glick

General Manager,
Kimpton Buchanan Hotel

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