

1 [Endorsement of the Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy]

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

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

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

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

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

24 WHEREAS, San Francisco's Japantown contains hundreds of culturally significant  
25 buildings, businesses, and organizations and it hosts many cultural events and activities that

1 are important to the region’s Japanese American and Japanese community. The community  
2 has developed memorials to its cultural history, including the Three Japantowns Monument,  
3 and created the Japantown History Walk to perpetuate and share its history and culture; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

21 WHEREAS, To provide context, the JCHESS captures the existing conditions in  
22 Japantown, as relates to its land, buildings, organizations and institutions, businesses, culture,  
23 and public realm; and

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1           WHEREAS, The JCHESS lists twenty-three “Areas of Concern” identified by the  
2 community as issues that have or could prevent the fulfillment of the vision of the JCHESS;  
3 and

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

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

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

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

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

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

21           WHEREAS, The Planning Department has determined that the JCHESS is not a  
22 project as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), per CEQA Guidelines  
23 15060(c), and is thus not subject to environmental review; and

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1           WHEREAS, The JCHESS has received the endorsement of the Historic Preservation  
2 Commission and the Planning Commission through Resolutions 711 and 18965, respectively;  
3 and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18          FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors recommends that the  
19 community implement those aspects of the JCHESS which are in their purview.  
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