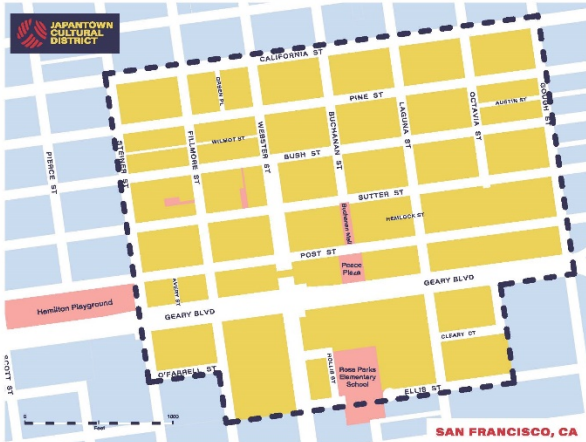


# JAPANTOWN CULTURAL DISTRICT

CULTURAL HISTORY, HOUSING, AND ECONOMIC  
SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY REPORT



Mayor's Office of  
Housing and  
Community Development

## Ramaytush Ohlone Land Acknowledgement

*“We acknowledge that we are on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone who are the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula. As the indigenous stewards of this land and in accordance with their traditions, the Ramaytush Ohlone have never ceded, lost nor forgotten their responsibilities as the caretakers of this place, as well as for all peoples who reside in their traditional territory. As guests, we recognize that we benefit from living and working on their traditional homeland. We wish to pay our respects by acknowledging the ancestors, elders and relatives of the Ramaytush Community and by affirming their sovereign rights as First Peoples.”*

– Gregg Castro/Jonathan Cordero (Ramaytush Ohlone)

## City Acknowledgements

### Office of Economic and Workforce Development

- Community Economic Development Staff
- Business Development Staff
- Nonprofit Stabilization Program Staff
- Office of Small Business

### Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development

- Data Team
- Multi Family Staff
- Homeownership and Below Market Rate Staff
- Small Sites Staff
- Community Development Staff

### Planning Department

- Data Team
- Community Equity Division Staff
- Citywide Division Staff

### Arts Commission Staff

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Japantown Cultural District would like to acknowledge the over 500 community stakeholders who participated in 8 focus groups, 3 town hall meetings, and one-on-one interviews to create this community vision plan. Many of the attendees were merchants, business owners, residents and community members, many of whom belong to, work or receive services from one or more of the following organizations below.

- [Buddhist Church of San Francisco](#)
- [Christ United Presbyterian Church](#) (CUPC)
- [Hokka Nichi Bei Kai](#) (Japanese American Association of Northern California)
- [Japan Center Garage Corporation](#)
- [Japan External Trade Organization](#) (JETRO)
- [Japanese American Citizen League - San Francisco Chapter](#) (JACL SF)
- [Japanese American National Library](#) (JANL)
- Japanese American Religious Federation (JARF)
- [Japanese Benevolent Society of California](#) (Jikeikai)
- [Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Northern California](#) (JCCNC)
- [Japantown Community Benefit District](#) (JCBD)
- [Japantown Merchants Association](#)
- [Japanese Community Youth Council](#) (JCYC)
- [Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California](#) (JCCCNC, or “The Center”)
- [Kimochi](#)
- [Kinmon Gakuen](#)
- [Kokoro Assisted Living, Inc.](#)
- [Konko Church of San Francisco](#)
- [Nakayoshi Young Professionals](#)
- [National Japanese American Historical Society \(NJAHS\)](#)
- [Nichi Bei Foundation](#)
- [Nihonmachi Little Friends](#)
- Nihonmachi Parking Corporation (NPC)
- [Nihonmachi Street Fair](#) (NSF)
- [Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival, Sakura Matsuri, Inc.](#) (NCCBF)
- [Pine United Methodist Church](#)
- [Nichiren Hokka Buddhist Church of San Francisco](#)
- [Soto Mission of San Francisco](#) (Sokoji)

## Acknowledging COVID

The Covid-19 pandemic has rapidly and permanently changed the ecosystems of San Francisco, impacting all aspects of our lives. Due to COVID-19:

- Children of color and low-income community members are more affected by school closures: 85% of the public-school population and only 52% of the total child population
- Public transportation has reduced ridership; BART is at 87% below baseline daily ridership, MUNI is at 63% drop (as of November 2021)
- Overcrowding and multi-generational housing increased COVID-19 risks, especially among Latinx
- Essential workers are more likely to have greater rent burdens and fewer safety nets
- 33,000 renter households are estimated to be at risk of eviction after the moratorium on rent collection
- Tax and revenue losses leave the City with a \$50 million budget shortfall (after accounting for funds expected from the federal stimulus passed in March 2021.)

Given the fact that COVID-19 is having disproportionate impacts on Black, American Indian, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islander, low-income communities, and neighborhood businesses, the Cultural Districts' work is needed more now than ever. Since March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020, each of the Cultural Districts stepped up to serve their respective communities, leaning into their role as a conduit of information and helping to leverage resources in response to emerging needs caused by the pandemic. Some Cultural Districts focused on supporting small businesses, some created open-air spaces for community activation, some distributed food and supported additional mental health support services, and others became citywide leaders in the testing and vaccination effort. Many of the Districts created COVID-19 response collaboratives, partnering with multiple agencies developing innovative culturally responsive strategies by providing mini-grants for housing support, small businesses, and employment opportunities.

All the Cultural Districts partnered with the SF COVID-19 Command Center, the SF Economic Recovery Task Force, and other City Departments to provide culturally competent outreach and services as well as to distribute personal protective equipment across each District. While the pandemic prohibited community members from gathering at annual events and festivals, the Cultural Districts continued their work on each of their Cultural History and Housing Economic Sustainability Strategies Reports (CHHESS).

This CHHESS report was created while facing new adversities and stands as a testament to San Francisco's fortitude and the power of collaboration and partnership.

## Letter from the MOHCD Cultural Districts Manager

San Francisco is home to a variety of diverse and vibrant communities that infuse our City with their distinct flavors. How do we ensure that these inimitable cultural and neighborhood assets are sustained and strengthened?

The Cultural Districts Program provides a platform for communities and the City to collaborate on developing strategic priorities for place-keeping and place-making. Managed by the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development in partnership with the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, Planning Department, and Arts Commission, the program – and this co-written CHHESS report – signal a partnership between the City and historically oppressed groups to achieve a shared and feasible vision for preserving distinct cultural assets.

San Francisco has long been a hub for innovation, social justice movements, and cultural pride. The Cultural Districts Program adds to this legacy of inclusion and social change and builds upon previous and current work underway. It has been an honor to learn about Japantown's rich history, work with its community, and coordinate with City stakeholders on this community-driven framework. I am grateful for Julia Sabory's stewardship of the Cultural Districts program through FY2022, and I am excited to take the reins from hereon to advance the efforts of San Francisco's cultural communities.

I have many fond memories of Japantown, sitting by the Peace Pagoda, window-shopping along Buchanan Mall, and eating some of the best Japanese food the City has to offer. I do these same activities today, and I am heartened to know that these opportunities will exist for me and others for years to come, thanks in part to this program.

*– Grace Jiyun Lee, Cultural Districts Program Manager, MOHCD*

Fiscal year 2022 was my last year at MOHCD and I am very honored to have been the inaugural Cultural Districts Manager providing the leadership role in instituting the structure and developing deep partnerships across San Francisco's Departments and the Cultural District's Communities.

This has been an incredible journey and it is fitting for it to culminate with the Japantown CHHESS report. In many ways, the Cultural Districts program created its path by incorporating lessons from the experiences of the Japantown Cultural District, with the community leading the way (as it should be) with their first-hand experience and vision for healing aimed at achieving a more equitable City.

I am confident that the next chapter of the Cultural District program under the leadership of Grace Lee, the new Cultural Districts Manager, will be fruitful and expand the ever-growing success of the Cultural Districts Program and San Francisco.

Congratulations to Japantown for advancing their framework for righting the wrongs of the past and pushing forward an agenda for self-determination and cultural vibrancy for generations to come.

*– Julia Sabory, Community Engagement Manager, SF Planning  
Former Cultural Districts Program Manager, MOHCD*

## Letter from Japantown Task Force Executive Director

San Francisco Japantown, the first and oldest Japantown in the United States, is an extraordinary cultural asset not only for the City & County of San Francisco, but also the nation. Before the war, there were over 80 Japanese communities throughout the United States. Today, there are just three remaining, all in California: Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, San Jose Japantown, and San Francisco Japantown. With origins in community-wide town hall meetings under the leadership of Mayor Willie L. Brown, Jr. in 1997, the Japantown Task Force (JTF) was established in October 2002 to preserve and promote San Francisco Japantown. It has now been 20 years since and there has been tremendous progress. In 2013, Japantown Cultural District became San Francisco's first designated Cultural District with the Japantown Task Force the responsible agency. Despite the delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we launched the Japantown Cultural District website in 2022 ([japantownculturaldistrict.org](http://japantownculturaldistrict.org)) as well as the website for the new KOHO Co-Creative Arts Hub ([kohosf.org](http://kohosf.org)) in late 2021, thanks to the dedicated efforts of Japantown Cultural District Manager Susie Kagami and Program Coordinator Melissa Bailey Nihei. Please visit the JTF website to learn more about our ongoing work ([japantowntaskforce.org](http://japantowntaskforce.org)).

Since the beginning, JTF has enjoyed a robust partnership with the City and County of San Francisco which has made possible several planning initiatives, including the *2013 Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy*, a precursor to the current report. The bulk of the work for this report was conducted under the leadership of former Executive Director Steve Nakajo, his staff at the time, and the dedicated team of CHHESS authors. None of this would have been possible without the vision of the late Executive Director Robert Hamaguchi and former JTF Board President Sandy Mori whose 20-year tenure on the board concluded in 2022. I am indebted to these extraordinary individuals for their contributions and inspiration. I want to express my appreciation to MOHCD Director of Community Development Brian Cheu, Julia Sabory, Grace Lee, and Imani Pardue-Bishop of MOHCD, as well as long-time partners Diana Ponce DeLeon, Rafael Moreno, and Director Kate Sofis of the Office of Economic and Workforce Development.

This report reflects the views of engaged community members and Japantown leaders who truly care about the future of Japantown. I hope it will inspire you to join us in preserving and promoting San Francisco Japantown, our unique cultural gem in the very heart of San Francisco.

– Dr. Emily Murase, Executive Director, Japantown Task Force

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## Executive Summary

**San Francisco is known around the world as a homeplace for sanctuary and cultural pride, where personal and collective movements for justice and innovation are born.**

Historic preservation practice in Western culture developed over the past two centuries to integrate historic architecture and artifacts from our past into contemporary life, and its focus was primarily on the material representations of dominant historical narratives. Historic preservation protections were applied solely to tangible cultural elements such as buildings and objects. The 2000's saw a marked shift in how cultural heritage should be approached with the United Nations leading this new interpretation. More recently, preservation activities have expanded to include safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage elements, such as traditional practices, cuisine, art forms, or annual events that make up the social fabric of an area. San Francisco's Cultural Districts reflect this global and local evolution in how societies think about and manage their cultural heritage.

The Cultural District Program's approach to community development, as it relates to place-keeping and place-making, can be described as supporting active, local leadership to maintain the community's social fabric by and for the people who live, visit, and work there. This framework allows for participatory planning, community building activation, and the strengthening of the intangible, as well as tangible, infrastructure of a community and neighborhood.

Each Cultural District in San Francisco, including the Japantown Cultural District, is working to address societal issues that exist simultaneously across three time periods. This report also uses the three time periods to guide the flow of this report:

- the **past**, by acknowledging and rectifying history, allowing the community to tell its own narrative, and by supporting their leaders and amplifying cultural traditions,
- the **present**, by having a landscape analysis, maintaining community cohesion, and responding to the needs of the community while also building out mechanisms for distributing information and resources, and
- the **future**, by proposing culturally informed recommendations and collaborating with City governmental stakeholders to help strategize, prepare, and implement innovating strategies.

**Once a Board of Supervisor legislates a Cultural District by ordinance, each Cultural District applies for and receives a grant from MOHCD for operations.** Cultural District staff and the Community Based Advisory Board establish an oversight and governance process and launch their communications tools and community engagement processes.

**The Cultural History, Housing, and Economic Sustainability Strategies Report (CHHESS) is one of the first tasks for the Cultural District and City partners.** The CHHESS is a legislatively

mandated document that provides a shared understanding and strategic vision for the City and Community. The legislation outlines the following elements to be included in each CHHESS Report:

- Profile of the neighborhood – past, present, and future
- Areas of concern/challenges
- A prioritized set of strategies that support the cultural community and cultural district resulting from a community engagement process
- A record of cultural legacy and heritage

**The Cultural District’s initiating legislation specifically outlines key issues and strategy areas that intersect with place-based cultural stabilization.** The departmental partnership and connectivity to community as well as community proposed strategies and recommendations are organized into six primary Strategy Areas:

1. Historic and Cultural Preservation
2. Tenant Protections
3. Arts and Culture
4. Economic and Workforce Development
5. Land Use and Housing
6. Cultural Competency

Japantown proposed adding a seventh Strategy Area - *Regenerative, Sustainable Resilient Futures*, which is reflected in its Organizing Framework. The Strategy Areas are high level in nature, it is up to each cultural community to prioritize and interpret the methodologies that will be most culturally responsive.

The Cultural District leaders facilitate a year of community engagement and research that produces a set of strategies and recommendations that hundreds of community members report will stabilize and promote their culture. The steps for collaborating partnering with City Departments are:

1. **Strategies are shared with a City Interdepartmental Committee**, made up of representatives from Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD), Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD), the Planning Department and Arts Commission, who then share and coordinate feedback with colleagues across their respective Departments to gather as much input as possible.
2. **Cultural District staff and City Interdepartmental Committee members meet**, discuss, edit, and agree upon a final set of strategies.
3. **The final set of strategies are placed into the CHHESS Report** along with the following sections- A City historical snapshot, a City landscape analysis of the district, the Community cultural legacy, and description of the Cultural District as an organization.

## **Japantown's Community Strategies & Recommendations Summary**

The following is a summarized version of the strategies and recommendations created by the Community and collaborated on by MOHCD, OEWD, Planning Department, and Arts Commission. Through a series of meetings, the Japantown Cultural District staff/volunteers and Departmental leads sifted, line by line, through over 20 City staff's comments and questions on each of the strategies. After months of work, the strategies below reflect the outcome:

### *Cultural Heritage Conservation and Sustainability*

1. Support improvements to Peace Plaza.
2. Support improvements to Buchanan Mall/Osaka Way in collaboration with Nihonmachi Parking Corporation (NPC) and Japantown Community Benefits District (JCBD).
3. Utilize tools for preservation of historic buildings and structures.
4. Building more cultural and environmental programming into arts, community organizations and businesses with focus on Japanese traditional eco-culture.
5. Create an accessible digital archive from existing physical and digital archives held by multiple community organizations through collaborative efforts.

### *Tenant Protections*

6. Develop and implement a Strategic Plan to address the Japan Center Malls (JCM) Covenant Agreements, the adjoining properties between Laguna and Fillmore Streets, and the future of the properties, and negotiate Benefits Agreements with JCM and other owners.
7. Explore new strategies to work with existing residential tenants and descendants of those displaced by redevelopment, property owners and the City to protect residential tenants from displacement and to place Certificate of Preference holders, artists, culture bearers, families, younger generations, and employees of community-based organizations in existing housing.
8. Work with existing commercial and nonprofit tenants outside of the Japan Center Malls to negotiate protections and benefits they need to remain in Japantown.

### *Arts and Culture*

9. Create a virtual and physical Artist Assistance and Media Center.
10. Develop a virtual and physical intergenerational Co-creative Hub.
11. Establish a SF Japantown Arts Committee.

### *Economic and Workforce Development*

12. Create a virtual and physical Small Business Assistance Center.
13. Assist existing Japantown businesses with succession planning.
14. Increase promotion and marketing capacity in Japantown.
15. Increase fundraising and partnerships to ensure long-term sustainability and to support CHHESS strategies (co-create collaborative abundance).

16. Explore a Visitor Center (virtual and physical) to be located inside the Japan Center Malls.
17. Develop partnerships and collaborations with the Japan External Trade Organization, the City, Japanese companies, and eco-initiatives, and other Japantowns and networks.

#### *Land Use and Housing*

18. Work with property owners and community organizations to identify, secure and occupy underutilized space to meet community needs.
19. Engage in the implementation of the 2022 Housing Element to ensure Japantown's housing needs are addressed.
20. Explore opportunities for a community oversight infrastructure to establish a community development corporation / community land trust / community investment fund or a similar mechanism and work with the City to acquire property for community control.
21. Develop a Japantown Preservation and Development Vision Master Plan (Community Plan).
22. Work with property owners, developers, and the City to develop opportunities for affordable housing that is culturally affirming in design.

#### *Cultural Competency*

23. Explore an appropriate model for a Japantown Community Council or Consortium with dedicated sources of funding.
24. Initiate inclusive, intergenerational conversations about Japantown's history of displacement and its impacts on the community as part of the broader communities of color in the country.
25. Explore the creation of an intergenerational community permaculture edible garden with programming.

# ACKNOWLEDGING THE PAST

## (I) The City of San Francisco

### ***A Historical Snapshot - How we got here***

San Francisco is known around the world as a homeplace for sanctuary and cultural pride, where personal and collective movements for justice and innovation are born. There are countless examples of how the City by the Bay serves as a lighthouse — a beacon of hope radiating light for those who envision a better life, not just for themselves, but for families, communities, and generations to come.

The Cultural Districts build upon the courage of those who came before, those who raised their minds, bodies, and spirits to protect those in need, holding accountable the systems that neglect the vulnerable and prevent equitable opportunities. This cultural legacy of pride and service to those most in need not only sets a foundation for the Cultural District Program, but also institutes a standard for our collective expectations. Let us continue this work and actualize the dreams of the past to prepare for the future.

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*The 2000's saw a marked shift in how cultural preservation should be approached. San Francisco took this pivot and created Cultural Heritage Districts which evolved into the Cultural District Program we have today.*

---

### ***The United Nations Shifts the Cultural Heritage Preservation Approach***

Previously, the historic preservation field was applied solely to tangible physical elements such as landmarks and architecture. More recently, preservation has expanded to include intangible heritage such as culture and the many elements that make up the social fabric of an area.

In 2003, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage recognizing “...that the processes of globalization and social transformation, alongside the conditions they create for renewed dialogue among communities, also give rise, as does the phenomenon of intolerance, to grave threats of deterioration, disappearance and destruction of the intangible cultural heritage, in particular owing to a lack of resources for safeguarding such heritage”<sup>i</sup>. Indigenous communities were called out as having important roles in cultural diversity and human creativity as well as in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage for future generations.



The purposes of the Convention are to:

1. Safeguard the intangible cultural heritage;
2. ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned;
3. to raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof; and
4. provide for international cooperation and assistance.

## ***Evolution of Preservation & Place Keeping Policy In San Francisco***

### **San Francisco's Cultural Heritage Districts and Japantown's Role**

In the same spirit of the UN's pivot in how preservation is defined and actualized, members of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors requested a hearing in May of 2012 to assess San Francisco's cultural preservation efforts and to also review the progress of the City's implementation of [Senate Bill 307, passed in 2001, entitled The California Japantown Preservation Pilot Project](#) that aimed to support the three remaining Japantown neighborhoods. Prior to World War II there were more than 40 Japantown neighborhoods and while the Bill did not cite Internment directly, the fact was that by 1992, the U.S. government had disbursed more than \$1.6 billion (equivalent to \$3.67 billion in 2021) in reparations to 82,219 Japanese Americans who had been interned. The Bill that built upon this reckoning effort and cited the following needs:

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*"The three remaining Japantowns in California face immediate challenges of integrating development and urban renewal proposals that are not consistent with the cultural character of Japantown neighborhoods. While economic development within Japantown neighborhoods and communities is both welcomed and encouraged, that development should be guided by a comprehensive vision of the future with a commitment to the history and cultural character of the neighborhoods and communities."*<sup>ii</sup>

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The San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) then endorsed [Resolution No. 0698](#), recommending that the City develop an inter-departmental program, entitled 'Cultural Heritage Districts' which would further the efforts of documentation and designation, thereby incentivizing preservation of social and cultural heritage. At the same time, the HPC and Planning Department were actively developing historic context statements that reflect the diverse social and ethnic histories of the city which continue to be under-represented in cultural heritage work. These efforts demonstrated a shift in the approach the City took to strengthen the preservation of culture and history.

The Cultural Heritage Districts effort was then recognized by the City's Board of Supervisors in 2013 with the intent to expand the definition of cultural heritage to include having unique social and historical associations and living traditions. Therefore, the geographic boundaries could now formally expand its work to preserve local activities, including commerce, services, arts, events, and practices. This new take on recognition spurred community efforts to develop strategies for sustaining the living culture of these places, an effort facilitated by the Planning Department and the Office of Economic and Workforce Development. Initially, the Cultural Heritage Districts program was unfunded.

True to form, San Francisco's community and City leaders raised the bar, accelerating implementation of their vision and deepening the coordination between City Departments and communities. There was a collective realization that to ensure progress in cultural stabilization, there needed to be a toolkit of economic, zoning, educational, marketing, and planning approaches appropriate to the safeguarding of living heritage.<sup>iii</sup>

### **SF Creates Cultural District Program & Prop E. Passes**

The current Cultural Districts Program was formalized by [Ordinance 126-18](#) in May of 2018 when the Board of Supervisors' legislation defined a Cultural District as "a geographic area or location within the City and County of San Francisco that embodies a unique cultural heritage because it contains a concentration of cultural and historic assets and culturally significant enterprise, arts, services, or businesses and because a significant portion of its residents or people who spend time in the area or location are members of a specific cultural, community, or ethnic group that historically has been discriminated against, displaced, and oppressed."<sup>iv</sup> The legislation outlined the program's purpose:

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*San Francisco's Cultural Districts program will seek to formalize a collaborative partnership between the City and communities and bring resources and help in order to stabilize vulnerable communities facing or at risk of displacement or gentrification and to preserve, strengthen and promote our cultural assets and diverse communities so that individuals, families, businesses that serve and employ them, nonprofit organizations, community arts, and educational institutions are able to live, work and prosper within the City.<sup>v</sup>*

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The legislation's goals are the following:

- To preserve, strengthen and promote diverse communities' cultural and neighborhood assets, events, and activities.
- To celebrate, amplify and support the community's cultural strengths to ensure immediate and long-term resilience.
- To streamline City and community partnerships to coordinate resources that stabilize communities facing displacement.

Subsequently, in November of 2018, [Proposition E](#) passed by a 75% majority allocating approximately \$3 million annually from the City's Hotel Tax Fund to support the Cultural Districts Program. Proposition E not only provided the necessary resources for the Cultural Districts program, but also a formal recognition of the fact that San Francisco was experiencing a dramatically changing landscape; in response to this emerging transformation, the City's voters overwhelmingly had chosen to allocate ongoing funding to preservation of the City's diversity and cultural identities through a strategic stabilization.

### ***Community Development Using a Racial & Cultural Equity Approach***

The Cultural Districts Program's approach to community development, as it relates to place-keeping and place-making, can be described as supporting active, local leadership to maintain the community's social fabric by and for the people who live, visit, and work there. This framework allows for participatory planning, community building activation, and attempts to strengthen the intangible, as well as tangible, infrastructure of a community and neighborhood. This approach improves connectivity within and across neighborhoods for the provision of direct services and the leveraging of resources to better serve San Francisco's residents. The overarching goals are empowerment and self-determination.

The Cultural Districts Program is founded on the framework that solutions developed by the people most impacted by the social inequities are often the most viable and impactful. This approach supports communities in keeping the cultural memories and legacy of their neighborhood alive by supporting their ability to maintain their traditions and way of life.

Each Cultural District in San Francisco, including the Japantown Cultural District, is working to address societal issues that exist simultaneously across three time periods:

- the **past**, by acknowledging history, repairing past harm, allowing the community to tell its own narrative, and by supporting their leaders and amplifying cultural traditions,
- the **present**, by maintaining community cohesion and responding to the needs of community-based organizations and its community members while also building out mechanisms for distributing information and resources, and
- the **future**, by remaining engaged in City governmental processes to help strategize, prepare, and plan for their families and cultural community members.

This CHHESS report builds upon the City and community's work over the last two decades and provides a roadmap for deeper partnerships and leveraging of resources to attain the community's vision over the coming years. The roadmap will help maintain and support Japantown's growth as the regional center for the Japanese community and it will facilitate increased visibility of the Japanese community.

## RESPONDING TO THE PRESENT

### How the Cultural Districts Program Operates

1. A City Interdepartmental Committee made up of the Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD), Planning Department, Arts Commission, and Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD) meet bi-monthly. Together they align intersectional Departmental efforts, support cultural equity goals, and encourage communication and streamlining across city and community entities
2. Once the Board of Supervisors legislates a Cultural District by Ordinance, each Cultural District applies for and receives a grant from MOHCD for operations. Cultural District staff and the Community Based Advisory Board establish an oversight and governance process and launch their communications tools and community engagement processes.
3. The CHHESS report is one of the first tasks for the Cultural District and City partners. The CHHESS is a legislatively mandated document that provides a strategic vision and shared understanding for the City and community to coordinate. A set of priorities and strategies identified by cultural community members.

The following elements are included in each CHHESS Report:

- Profile of the neighborhood – past, present, and future
- Areas of concern/challenges
- A prioritized set of strategies that support the cultural community and cultural district resulting from a community engagement process
- A record of cultural legacy and heritage

### How does the Legislation define the key issues to be addressed?

The legislation carefully outlines key issues and strategy areas that intersect with place-based cultural stabilization. The Cultural District program encourages neighborhood planning, cultural activation, and a coordinated approach.

The Strategy Areas are high level in nature; it's up to the cultural community to prioritize and interpret the methodologies that will be most culturally responsive. The community engagement process, division of labor across departments, and community strategies are organized into the following categories:

<b>Cultural District Legislative Strategy</b>	<b>Legislation Strategy Area Description</b>	<b>City Department Scope Alignment</b>
Historic/Cultural Preservation	Preserve and develop cultural and historic buildings, businesses, organization, traditions, arts, events, and District aesthetics	Planning Department & Historic Preservation Commission
Tenant Protections	Protect tenants from displacement and promote affordable housing and homeownership	Mayor's Office of Housing & Community Development
Arts and Culture	Attract and support artists and cultural enterprises	Arts Commission
Economic and Workforce Development	Promote jobs, tourism and economic opportunities that stabilize the district's economy.	Office of Economic and Workforce Development
Land Use and Housing	Create city regulations and programs that support businesses and industries that advance the Cultural District	All
Cultural Competency	Promote culturally competent and appropriate City services, policies, and narratives	All

### **How do Community and City collaborate on the prioritized set of culturally informed strategies and recommendations?**

1. Cultural District facilitates a year of community engagement and research that produces a set of strategies that will stabilize and promote their culture.
2. Strategies are shared with the City Interdepartmental Committee who then share and coordinate feedback with colleagues across their respective Departments to gather as much input and as possible.
3. Cultural District staff and City Interdepartmental Committee members meet, discuss, edit, and agree upon a final set of strategies.
4. Set of strategies is shared with Department Directors.
5. Final strategies are a key element of the CHHESS report which also includes a City Narrative and Cultural Legacy Narrative.



## Cultural History, Housing, and Economic Sustainability Strategies Report (CHHESS)

*The CHHESS report proposes a strategic vision for addressing the past by planning for the future.*

The CHHESS report serves as a foundational roadmap for the Japanese community as a Cultural District and as a regional hub. Each strategy serves as a guidepost as to what activities have been deemed as culturally responsive stabilization activities. Many of these strategies are already activated and some are policy tables waiting for the City and the Community to sit together and learn, explore, and engage in crafting a more equitable future together.

On the following pages, you will read about the challenges from the past, some of the current City policies that impact the neighborhood and then, in their own words, about the district's broad community engagement process and how it informed their set of community strategies.

Each of the four City Departments - MOHCD, Planning, OEWD, and the Arts Commission - reviewed the strategies and worked to assure alignment with their department's purview and goals. This is not new work; this is strengthening the work that is already in place.

This report tethers together both culture and policy in a new and unique way. This document will serve as a source for learning, healing, and reconciliation as it addresses the lasting residue of pain and suffering for this cultural community. Both the City and community poured their time and energy into a collective process that produced this vision for a better future.

Japantown residents, business and community leaders identified the project area as a "regional hub" for a dispersed community of Japanese and Japanese American San Franciscans. The CHHESS plan is grounded in past strategies and planning efforts and includes new framing and strategies around business stabilization and recovery and housing, while also reflecting the six objectives and Cultural District Program Policy Areas previously mentioned.

### **Japantown Cultural District's overarching goals include:**

- 1. Strengthen Japantown's cultural heritage to support the recovery and healing from a history of displacement caused by discrimination.**
  - a. Build a strong, multi-generational, and interconnected Japantown including the Shin-Nikkei (recent immigrant) and Mixed Heritage communities.
  - b. Amplify the narrative, spirit, and essential values of J/JA culture.
  - c. Re-envision the development of Japantown's physical environment to be ecologically sustainable and healthy.
- 2. Secure Japantown's future as the historical and cultural heart of Japanese and Japanese American Communities.**
  - a. Ensure that Japantown remains a thriving commercial, retail, and arts district.
  - b. Prevent further displacement of Japantown's culturally-relevant businesses and organizations
  - c. Preserve and expand housing for the Japanese/Japanese American community and protect its community-based institutions.

- d. Work with the City to assess opportunities to officially acknowledge the impacts of Redevelopment in Japantown, and champion equitable development and housing opportunities.

Looking toward the future, while remaining rooted in the cultural history and legacy of Japanese and Japanese American Culture, the Japantown Community has identified various actionable items that advance their vision and are aligned with the City Departments' scope. The community strategies in this report have been reviewed in detail by the City Interdepartmental Committee and have been deemed feasible.

## A Demographic Snapshot of Japantown

Japantown located in the Western Addition neighborhood has a rich immigrant and migrant history. Originally populated by many European Jews that immigrated at the turn of the century, the neighborhood was home to three synagogues, a Yiddish community center, and a thriving commercial corridor along Fillmore Street. Following the disruption of the 1906 Great Earthquake, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Filipinos, and Japanese Americans moved into the still intact and affordable apartments of the Western Addition, which soon became known as "Little United Nations."<sup>vi</sup> The 1906 earthquake and fires displaced Japantown from its original location in Chinatown and South of Market and most Japanese businesses moved to the present location in the Western Addition.

Historically known as *Nihonjinmachi*, the "Japanese people's town before World War II," San Francisco Japantown is now more commonly known as *Nihonmachi*, "Japantown," since the return of Japanese/Japanese Americans after their wartime incarceration. Japantown's geographic boundaries span from Gough Street to the east, Steiner Street to the west, California Street to the north and Ellis Street to the south, with its main commercial district including Post Street and Geary Boulevard, between Laguna and Fillmore streets.<sup>vii</sup>

Figure 1: Japantown Cultural District Map



Source: [www.japantownculturaldistrict.org](http://www.japantownculturaldistrict.org)

San Francisco's Japantown is recognized as the oldest and largest of three remaining Japanese/Japanese American Cultural Districts in the nation, all of which are in California—Little Tokyo in Los Angeles and Nihonmachi in San Jose. San Francisco Japantown survived the 1906 earthquake, California Alien Land Laws, the World War II incarceration, and the impacts of redevelopment and urban renewal and is recognized as a resilient community and cultural hub.<sup>viii</sup>

San Francisco Japantown was adopted by the City as a Special Use District in the Planning Code in 2006 to help preserve the cultural attributes and assets within this community.<sup>ix</sup> Below are some annual events that take place in the Cultural District annually that honor Japanese heritage and/or bring people together in allyship in Japantown:

#### January

- *Osechi Ryori (SF Japantown Foundation)*
- *Oshogatsu New Year's Festival (The Center)*

#### February

- *Day of Remembrance (BADOR Consortium)*

#### April

- *Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival*

#### May

- *API Heritage Month Performances*
- *Kodomo No Hi Children's Day Festival (The Center)*
- *Japanese Cemetery Clean Up, Colma CA (The Center)*

#### July

- *Buddhist Church of San Francisco Ginza Bazaar and Bon Odori*
- *Soy and Tofu Festival (Nichi Bei)*
- *Tule Lake Pilgrimage (Tule Lake Committee)*

#### August

- *Nihonmachi Street Fair*
- *Origami Palooza*

#### September

- *Tabemasho (The Center)*

#### October

- *Osaka Matsuri*
- *Aki Matsuri*
- *Fleet Week Neighborhood Concert (Japanese Community Benefit District)*
- *Angel Island Pilgrimage (Nichi Bei Foundation)*
- *Wakamatsu Pilgrimage (Nichi Bei Foundation)*
- *Halloween Carnival (The Center)*

#### December

- *Silver Bells Craft Fair (Kimochi, Inc)*

## Understanding Displacement in San Francisco

Throughout history, ever-changing economies, demographics, and the cultural evolution of metropolitan areas have nurtured advancement for some and hardship for others. In the United States, gentrification and displacement of long-time residents has been most intense in the biggest cities which are often coastal.<sup>x</sup> San Francisco, along with other major cities throughout the country, have faced a new wave of economic growth, specifically in the technology sector, throughout the 1990's and 2000's.

Research shows that between 1990 and 2015, San Francisco experienced significant demographic changes, particularly in the neighborhoods where communities of color live. Some of the changes observed in these neighborhoods were not “natural” demographic shifts resulting from individual households choosing to move elsewhere, but resulted from eviction, large rent increases, or other reasons otherwise known as displacement.<sup>xi</sup>

San Francisco's increasing income inequality and housing and business costs have been linked to changes in the city's socio-economic composition and displacement of communities of color, the businesses and organizations that serve them, and low-income households. Characteristics of displacement can surface as residential, commercial, or psychological, and can be direct and indirect, physical, or economic, and exclusionary.<sup>xii</sup>

Residential and commercial displacement is the process by which a household or commercial tenant is forced to move from its residence or place of business.<sup>xiii</sup> Psychological displacement is both the fear of loss and the sentiment that what once was home is no longer a welcoming space. A stable community is one that provides existing residents and businesses the choice to stay in the neighborhood rather than be forcibly displaced as change and pressures occur. Thus, there are countless impacts of displacement on a household, community, neighborhood, and city.

Vulnerable populations tend to be most at risk of displacement. Vulnerable groups include people of color (Black, Latinx/Hispanic, Asian, Native American/American Indian, Pacific Islander, and other non-white racial groups), people living with disabilities, low-income households, people experiencing homelessness, seniors, youth, immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, refugees, linguistically isolated households, small businesses, veterans, and nonprofit organizations.

Pressures from displacement cause vulnerable populations either to move out of their neighborhoods within San Francisco or to leave it entirely. These vulnerable households may be driven from their neighborhood into higher poverty, lower-resourced neighborhoods.<sup>xiv</sup> Low-income households have experienced the highest percentage of out-migration (four percent) of any income category between 2006 and 2015.<sup>xv</sup> Additionally, while Black residents made up 11 percent of the city's population in 1990, by 2017 they made up only 5.3 percent of the population. Thus, in the time span of 25 years, the proportion of the Black population in San Francisco was reduced by half, a far more rapid decline than the rest of the Bay Area.<sup>xvi</sup> Displacement of low-income households to other lower-income neighborhoods intensifies poverty conditions, creates new patterns of segregation, and reduces access to opportunities. The movement into other housing also may increase transportation and housing cost burdens on the migrating household, especially if the housing lost is rent controlled or more affordable than any current options.

### *San Francisco's Rising Rent*

Dramatically increased rents and home sales prices have placed a burden on many San Francisco households. The median home sales price more than doubled between 2011 and 2017. The median asking rent grew by 50 percent from 2012 to 2015, where it remained through the end of 2017. From a regional perspective, in 2018, the median rental price for a two-bedroom apartment in San Francisco was 57 percent higher than the median rental price for the entire Bay Area. A San Francisco family of three with a combined household income that is 110 percent of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) median income would fall a little over \$1.1 million short of being able to purchase a median-priced two-bedroom home (\$1,573,000 in 2018).

Housing cost burden has increased for renters and owners of nearly all income groups, except for the highest income households. Most of the cost-burdened households are of extremely low- and very low- income households. Black and Latinx/Hispanic renters face the highest rates of cost burden with nearly half of both groups cost burdened or severely cost burdened. Asian and Pacific Islander renters also experience elevated rates of cost burden.<sup>xvii</sup>

Beyond housing, small businesses and service providers also experience the impacts of affordability during a changing retail and commercial landscape. The average rent for office space increased by 122 percent between mid-2010 and March 2016.<sup>xviii</sup> Business owners also shared that the lengthy, complex permit process, high start-up, and high operating costs make it challenging to open and operate a business in the city.

### Long Range Planning and Redevelopment in Japantown

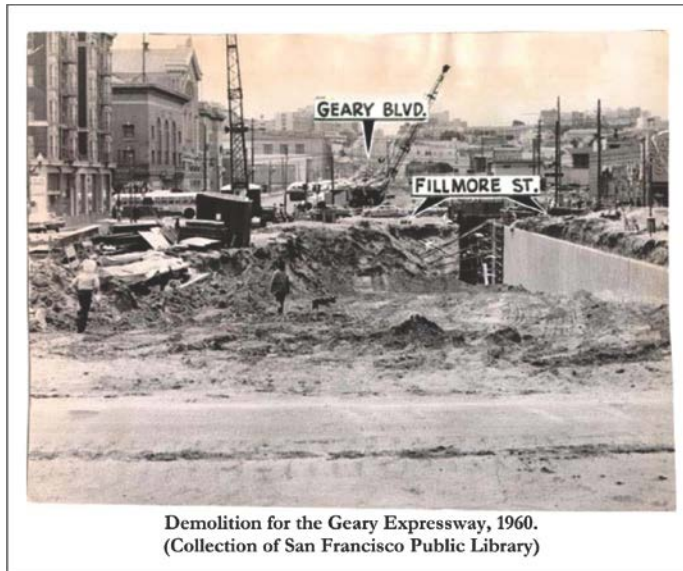
Japantown has been at the center of multiple long-range, strategic planning efforts. The first major, state-sponsored planning efforts implicating Japantown were Western Addition Redevelopment projects. In 1948, the San Francisco Planning Department announced one of San Francisco's first urban renewal projects in the Western Addition. Through much of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) deemed blighted, publicly acquired through eminent domain, razed, and redeveloped over 90 blocks of homes, businesses, and schools in the Western Addition. Despite strong and organized resistance from existing Black, Japanese/Japanese American, and other residents, most of Japantown was razed in this process.

The Western Addition Redevelopment occurred with minimal input from the existing Japanese/Japanese Americans and other communities of color living there. Its effects are still felt to this day. While some original Japantown residents successfully advocated for placements into replacement affordable housing, Redevelopment permanently displaced many more Japanese Americans. It also altered the physical fabric of the Western Addition. Redevelopment leveled many architecturally significant and community-serving buildings and built the Geary Expressway through the heart of the Western Addition. The Geary Expressway also serves as a firm dividing line between the Fillmore and Japantown and occupies buildable land for fast-



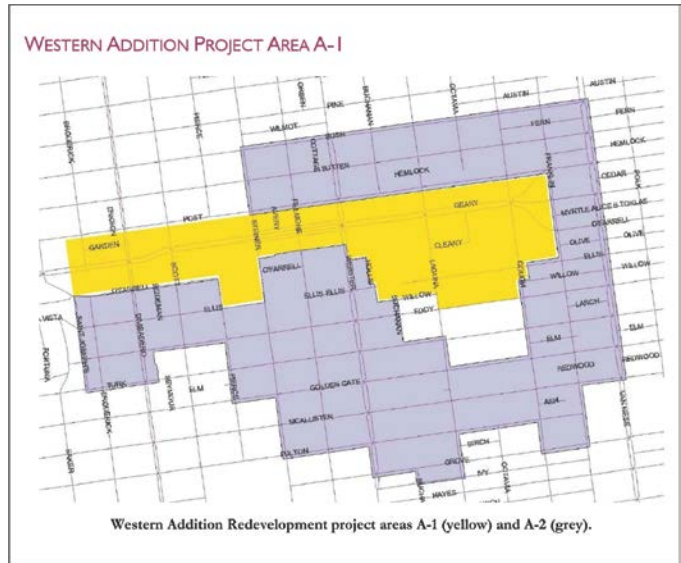
moving traffic. The goal of the Geary Expressway, notably, was to connect the Financial District to single-family developments in the Richmond and Sunset neighborhoods rather than to serve Japantown residents.

*Figure 2: Demolition for the Geary Expressway*



Source: San Francisco Public Library

*Figure 3: Western Addition Redevelopment*



Source: Japantown Historic Context Statement (May 2011), SF Planning

*“Despite these prophetic voices, and years of delay caused by lawsuits and the complications of developing a plan for relocating residents, the SFRA began acquiring properties in the late 1950s and mass clearance of much of the neighborhood using eminent domain was accomplished within ten years. This undertaking was conducted in two project areas: A- 1 and A-2. Eight thousand residents were evicted by the A-1 phase of redevelopment, displacing the neighborhood’s multi-ethnic populace without a comprehensive plan for finding new homes. Nearly all the area’s residents rented or leased their homes and commercial establishments before urban renewal and thus received no relocation assistance or compensation.”*

- *Japantown Historic Context Statement (May 2011), pg. 55-56*

SFRA’s Western Addition A-2 redevelopment area’s sunset in 2008 shifted the area back to general City jurisdiction. At the same time, Japanese American advocates petitioned for greater resources and attention into preserving the three remaining Japantowns in the United States, in Los Angeles, San Jose, and San Francisco. This advocacy led the California State Legislation to adopt SB 307 in 2001, devoting an initial grant to a Japantown Preservation Pilot Project. This bill provided grants to municipal governments in Los Angeles, San Jose, and San Francisco “for the purposes of aiding in the preparation, adoption, or implementation of specific plans that promote the preservation of existing Japantown neighborhoods in those jurisdictions.”<sup>xix</sup>

## City-Supported Place-Keeping Efforts in Japantown

This section touches on existing and ongoing investments and tools implemented by MOHCD, Arts Commission, OEWD, and Planning Department in Japantown that support stabilization and place-keeping efforts. The CHHESS strategies complement and add to these existing efforts.

### *Affordable Housing in Japantown*

MOHCD's Housing Division focuses on creating housing policies and programs that create safe, stable, and affordable housing. Over more than five decades, tenant advocacy, community activism and City leadership have shaped policies that protect tenants from displacement, such as rent control, just cause eviction protections, limitations on owner move-in evictions, and various other expansions of tenant protections under the Rent Ordinance.

Further, various community-based anti-displacement services and programs are a result of the collaboration between the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development and San Francisco's vibrant community-based nonprofit sector.

Citywide anti-displacement strategies that can be leveraged within the Japantown Cultural District include:

- Preservation Programs that place affordability restrictions on existing rental housing units
- Affordable Housing Lottery Preference Programs that give preference to current and displaced San Francisco tenants for the City's deed-restricted affordable housing
- Eviction Prevention and Housing Stabilization Programs and Grantmaking that allocate more than \$45 million annually in community-based tenant assistance through the full range of prevention, early intervention, and intensive service strategies

As of 2021, there are ten sites with 821 existing affordable housing units in Japantown.

*Figure 4: Affordable Housing Sites in Japantown*



Source: SF Planning

### ***Arts Commission and Public Arts Investments within Japantown***

The San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) champions the arts as essential to daily life by investing in a vibrant arts community, enlivening the urban environment, and shaping innovative cultural policy. SFAC programs include Community Investments, Public Art, Galleries and Public Programs, and Civic Design Review. Grants for the Arts (GFTA), a division of the City Administrator's Office, promotes the diverse and unique communities of San Francisco by supporting the arts through equitable grantmaking.

SFAC and GFTA issue annual competitive grant cycles to support arts organizations and individual artists. SFAC and GFTA have a long history of providing grant support to the Japantown community and artists and arts organizations deeply rooted in Japanese and Japanese American culture. Further, SFAC has awarded grants to community arts organizations, who are deeply rooted in the Asian Pacific Islander (API)/Japanese and Japanese American community outside of the Cultural District. Grants for the Arts provides funding support for the Nihonmachi Street Fair and Cherry Blossom Festival, the two primary cultural events in Japantown that attract thousands of people locally, regionally, and internationally.

The City is working on upgrades to the Japantown Peace Plaza which will be reviewed by the SFAC Civic Design Committee (CDR) and approved by the Commission. We anticipate this project to come before the CDR in FY23 and begin construction in FY24. Renovation improvements include waterproofing, lighting, planting, and seating to improve the highly used, central gathering space for cultural events. The City (DPW) is developing a project scope to renovate the Japantown Buchanan Mall. State funding of \$5 million was secured for the Buchanan Mall renovation due to break ground in 2024.

*Figure 5: The Origami Fountains by Ruth Osawa*



*The Origami Fountains is the centerpiece of Buchanan Mall/Osaka Way. By acclaimed artist Ruth Asawa, this public art was commissioned by the San Francisco Arts Commission and installed in 1999.*

*Source: ArtandArchitecture-SF.com*

### ***Economic Impact & Trends in Japantown***

The Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD) strives to create a thriving and resilient economy, where barriers to economic and workforce opportunities are removed, and prosperity is shared equitably by all. The Community Economic Development Division of OEWD focuses on developing opportunities to maintain and build a vibrant local economy that supports small businesses and entrepreneurs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant and lasting impact on the local, regional, and national economies. In the Bay Area, COVID-19 created hardships for small businesses and low-income workers. OEWD is entirely focused on helping our residents and our businesses to recover lost ground and thrive in our new normal. Businesses and workers alike find themselves in a new economic context, which carries significant implications for the programs and supports that can contribute to their success. From this crisis lies a transformational opportunity to address the new economic context ushered in by the pandemic and the pervasive social and economic trends that have excluded diverse communities from meaningful economic participation. To form strategies that protect the economic health of San Francisco and all the communities that rely on it for their economic well-being, it is imperative that we understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the lasting effects that will result from our response to the pandemic, and the implications of those changes.

#### *OEWD's Investments in the Japantown Cultural District and Cultural Community Citywide*

The Japantown Task Force (JTF) was originally started by a group of passionate neighborhood volunteers in the 1990s. In 2000, the JTF became a 501(c)(3) non-profit with help from funding from OEWD. Our office provides a baseline fund of \$155,000 to JTF to provide events, activations, and business support in the district. The Task Force's goals are as follows:

- Develop Japantown as a historical center, cultural capital, and community center for people of Japanese ancestry in America;
- Revitalize Japantown as a thriving commercial and retail district; preserve and expand Japantown as a neighborhood of residents, community-based organizations and institutions, and neighborhood services
- Improve Japantown's physical environment so that it contributes to the diverse cultural, economic, and neighborhood vitality of the community; and
- Lead the community oversight board for the Japantown Cultural District.

In response to a request from the Asian Pacific Islander Council, the Mayor provided an enhancement through OEWD of \$1,055,000 in this year's (FY23) budget to support economic recovery and public safety efforts within Japantown including, but not limited to small business technical assistance, marketing, ambassadors, senior chaperones, security cameras, and safety

workshops. A few more specific examples of what these funds will be for in terms of small business include:

- A program that provides small business income through gift certificates purchased from struggling small businesses for distribution to nonprofit agencies
- Bilingual assistance with loans, grants, and negotiations with landlords over leases and back rent
- 7 weekend "Picnics" in the Peace Plaza events to provide additional retail space for small Japantown businesses
- Funding for victim support services including money to provide legal counsel

Further, funding was allocated to events that promote safety, cross-cultural tolerance, and united communities. Funds will likely be disbursed this year, 2022, to eight organizations through a grant with OEWD with the Japanese Community Youth Council as a fiscal sponsor.

#### *Japantown Community Benefit District*

The Japantown Community Benefit District (JCBD) was approved by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in July 2017. The JCBD comprises six blocks along Geary Boulevard and Buchanan Street. The JCBD was formed to clean, beautify, and provide economic enhancements within the district. The JCBD includes both privately and publicly owned properties. The district is 6 whole and partial blocks and approximately 67 parcels in the commercial core of Japantown. Through the work of the JCBD, Japantown benefits from environmental enhancements like increased sidewalk sweeping, litter and graffiti removal, and pressure washing. The CBD also sponsors cultural events, provides business assistance to local merchants, and executes marketing and promotion for the neighborhood.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the JCBD has been the go-to resource for COVID related questions, guidance, and support for our merchants. Due to the success of the JCBD's Heart of Jtown Resiliency Fund, PPE supplies were purchased, and grants were awarded to 80 small businesses. In partnership with SF Department of Health COVID-19 PCR Testing was made available to the community and continues today with the support of Virus Geeks.

One example of small business support to Japantown during the COVID-19 pandemic is in May of 2020, OEWD provided \$31,000 in funding to the Japantown Task Force to collaborate with the JCBD to support COVID response for small businesses including outreach and \$21,000 in mini grants to Japantown small businesses. The JCBD raised an additional \$500,000 in private funding through its Heart of JTown Resiliency Fund.



*Figure 6: Japantown Community Benefit District Map*



Source: [www.jtowncbd.org/district-map](http://www.jtowncbd.org/district-map)

### *API Arts/Cultural Events and Activations*

Through former Assembly Member David Chiu and the City, OEWD leveraged and funded a city-wide API Neighborhood Commercial Recovery Strategy at \$1,000,000 with a sub area of \$350,000 dedicated to API events and activations. OEWD funded the following organizations in the Japantown Cultural District: Japantown CBD, Cherry Blossom Festival, and the KOHO Launch Event.

Additionally, OEWD funds and supports the Nihonmachi Street Fair with a \$85,000 allocation for FY 21-22.

### *Preserving Places and Planning for Growth*

The San Francisco Planning Department plays a central role in guiding growth and development towards a healthy, vital, and equitable city. The Department works with communities and other City agencies to provide access to resources for current and future generations.

The Cultural Districts program is central to the Planning Department's work. Under the guidance of [Planning Commission Resolution #20738 regarding Centering Planning on Racial and Social Equity](#) and [Historic Preservation Commission Resolution # 1127](#), the Planning Department has prioritized racial and social equity tasks across all divisions.

### *Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan*

Japantown community members, organized as the Japantown Preservation, Planning & Development Taskforce, produced the "Concepts for a Japantown Community Plan" in 2000, reflecting a desire from many community leaders for targeted planning efforts to preserve, sustain, and grow Japantown. Community advocacy and City collaboration initiated the

development of [Japantown's Better Neighborhood Plan \(BNP\)](#) in 2006, a visioning document and plan for the 20-year development of Japantown.

SF Planning partnered with the Japantown Task Force, a grassroots community planning and advocacy organization, to develop the plan. Community engagement was built into each phase of the BNP's development, including multilingual surveys, focus groups, town hall updates, and workshops that encouraged the public to shape and give feedback on the BNP's draft strategies. The final draft of the BNP stated that its goal was to preserve and develop Japantown's cultural, commercial, residential, and public realms. It not only included specific historical context and discussed policies to support economic development, transportation, and the built form, but also an implementation plan. One notable aspect of the BNP was its proposed built form changes and height increases, specifically along Geary Blvd and surrounding blocks.

In 2009, SF Planning and the Japantown Task Force presented the draft plan. However, given ongoing concerns from some community members related to its proposed height increases, cultural preservation, and other elements of the plan, the plan was not adopted. The Planning Commission instead adopted Resolution 17911 "acknowledging" the draft plan process and recommending that the Board and Mayor fund additional studies and that a "Business Retention Plan and Cultural Resource Plan" be undertaken by the Planning Department and the Office & Workforce Development. This latter recommendation began the subsequent JCHESS process of 2009-2013.

#### *Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategies (JCHESS)*

The goals, vision, and much of the data collected during the development of the BNP, however, was not discarded. After the suspension of the BNP, Japantown community leaders and Planning pivoted towards a new community planning effort – the [Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategies \(JCHESS\)](#). From 2009 to 2013, Planning, the Japantown Organizing Committee, the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, and other City and community stakeholders developed a community visioning document centered around the goals of cultural and economic heritage identified in the BNP. This novel and groundbreaking community planning effort built on previous efforts to explore the community's history, current conditions, and vision for a thriving Japantown. The JCHESS took a step back from focusing on land use and built from strategies such as in the BNP to address cross-cutting community concerns and expressions of community visions and needs more fully before tackling land use and development issues.

The JCHESS proposed broad, interagency recommendations to support those goals. These recommendations included the development of a Japantown Community Land Trust, Japantown Community Development Corporation, Neighborhood Commercial District, specific design guidelines, and improvements to major public spaces such as the Peace Plaza and

Buchanan Mall/Osaka Way, among many others. The JCHESS was adopted by the Planning Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, and the Board of Supervisors in 2013.

The JCHESS not only articulated a long-term community vision for Japantown itself, but it also established the foundational model for the Cultural Districts program and their CHHESS reports today.

### *Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District*

Japantown today is known to many as a commercial and cultural hub, attracting visitors from across San Francisco, the Bay Area, and even further. It hosts several dense commercial corridors, large retail developments, and significant cultural and community spaces. The neighborhood, however, is primarily residential. This is reflected in the current zoning, in which most of Japantown is zoned for either low-density residential (RH-2 and RH-3) or medium- to high-density mixed residential, commercial, and other residential-supporting uses (RM-1, RM-2, RM-3, and RM-4).

The commercial spaces in Japantown are concentrated along Fillmore Street to the west of the Cultural District and the blocks surrounding the intersection of Buchanan and Post Streets in the middle. These commercial areas are covered by three Neighborhood Commercial Districts (NCDs) - Fillmore Street Neighborhood Commercial Transit District (Fillmore Street NCT), Upper Fillmore Neighborhood Commercial District (Upper Fillmore NCD), and Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District (Japantown NCD).<sup>xx</sup>

The Japantown NCD (Planning Code Section 721) regulates the blocks that make up the center of economic and cultural activity in the district, including developments such as the Japan Center Malls, Hotel Kabuki, and the AMC Kabuki Theater. The goal of the Japantown NCD's regulations are to "encourage and promote development that enhances the walkable, commercial character of this area and to support its local and regional role." To that end, the Japantown NCD details permitted and unpermitted uses that align with the community's economic, cultural heritage, and development goals and certain building form rules. Notably, it requires Conditional Use for any new or changed non-residential use larger than 2,500 square feet and does not permit or requires a conditional use authorization for formula retail (retail locations with 9 or more locations), industrial and manufacturing uses, non-retail sales and services (such as travel agencies, insurance agencies, other services without active storefronts) on the ground floor, among other uses. The NCD also requires upper story building step-backs along Buchanan between Post and Sutter streets.

### *Japantown Special Use District*

The Board of Supervisors adopted the Japantown Special Use District (SUD) in 2006. The Japantown SUD (Planning Code Section 249.31) was a product of community and City collaboration, stemming from a community request. The goal of an SUD, generally, is to establish land use controls different from the underlying zoning. It allows Planning and the community to strategically allow certain uses that are supportive and prohibit undesirable uses specific to a sub-area without having to create comprehensive new zoning districts.

The Japantown SUD covers a similar area to the Japantown NCD, including Japantown's main commercial corridor. Ordinance 180-06 establishing the SUD stated that its goals were to "stabilize change in Japantown and preserve its existing character so that the City and stakeholders have an opportunity to work collaboratively on an anticipated community planning process." To that end, the controls outlined in the original version of the Japantown SUD required a Conditional Use authorization for a new use or change in use, the merger of one or more uses into a larger use, and formula retail. While the regulations on new uses or changes to uses and mergers remain in the SUD at the time of this report, the controls on formula retail have been moved from the SUD to the Japantown NCD.

### *Japantown Historic Context Statement*

Planning published the [Japantown Historic Context Statement \(HCS\)](#) as part of its development of the Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan. While no commissions or the Board of Supervisors adopted the Japantown BNP or the HCS, the Japantown HCS serves as an important reference document for the City's historic and cultural preservation frameworks in Japantown.

Important to note is that the goal of the Japantown HCS, as with all historical context statements produced by SF Planning, is not to provide an exhaustive or definitive history of Japanese and Japanese Americans in San Francisco. Rather, Planning staff, the Planning Commission, and Historic Preservation Commission use historical context statements to understand the significance of spaces and places in a community for planning and historic preservation purposes. The Japantown HCD catalogs the establishment and development of the Japanese and Japanese American community in the Western Addition from the 19th Century to modern day, with a particular emphasis on the relationship of historical events and trends with the built environment. It also details types of and specific buildings and uses that are significant to the Japantown community.

### *Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines*

Both the Japantown BNP and JCHESS identified the importance of a set of building design guidelines specific to Japantown. In 2019, the Planning Commission adopted [Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines](#) (SADG) for Japantown as part of its update of the citywide Urban Design Guidelines. The Japantown SADG states that its goals are to project Japantown's unique

qualities and character, preserve historically significant structures and places, enhance pedestrian activity, and promote environmental sustainability. Its guidelines remark on overall site and development design, the architecture of individual projects, and the public realm.

### *Public Realm Projects in Japantown*

Originally built in the 1960's as part of the Redevelopment Plan for the Western Addition, Japantown's Peace Plaza and Buchanan Mall/Osaka Way have served as the heart of the neighborhood and continue to host the community's large cultural activities and events. The Peace Plaza and Buchanan Mall/Osaka Way are essential to the cultural and economic vitality of Japantown.

In the 2013 JCHESS, the Japantown community identified the need for design changes and renovations to the Peace Plaza and Buchanan Mall/Osaka Way and recommended next steps to implement these projects. As of October 2022, funding has been identified for designing and implementing both projects. The Recreation and Parks Department has carried out a community-led process resulting in a finalized design concept for the Peace Plaza and has established a timeline for implementation. Renovation will begin in 2024. In Spring 2022, the Planning Department and Public Works initiated outreach and engagement for the design process for the Buchanan Mall/Osaka Way Improvements, and the community design process is ongoing as of the publication of this report in early 2023.

# PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

## (II) Japantown Cultural District

### *Vision, Goals, and Objectives for the Japantown CHHESS Report*

#### Vision

San Francisco Japantown will thrive as a culturally regenerative, economically vibrant, authentic, safe, and eco-friendly neighborhood which will serve the people of Japanese and Japanese American communities for generations to come. It will actively support the preservation, transmission, and creation of an evolving Japanese/Japanese American culture that reflects and continuously revitalizes a local and global community.

#### Goals and Objectives:

1. Create a new “Regenerative Japantown” where traditional Japanese/Japanese American culture converges with the innovation of new Japanese/Japanese American cultural expressions to empower Japantown to recover, heal and move forward from a history of displacement caused by social discrimination in government programs.
  - a. Build a strong, multi-generational, and interconnected Japantown across the diversity of the Japanese/Japanese American community, including the Shin-Nikkei (recent immigrant) and Mixed Heritage communities.
  - b. Share and embody the narrative, spirit, and essential values of Japanese/Japanese American culture.
  - c. Re-envision the development of Japantown’s physical environment to be ecologically sustainable and healthy.
2. Secure Japantown’s future as the historical and cultural heart of Japanese and Japanese American Communities.
  - a. Ensure that Japantown remains a thriving commercial, retail, and arts district.
  - b. Prevent further displacement of Japantown’s culturally relevant businesses and organizations
  - c. Preserve and expand housing for the Japanese/Japanese American community and protect its community-based institutions.
  - d. Work with the City to officially acknowledge the impacts of Redevelopment in Japantown, and champion equitable development and housing choice to reverse and repair its impacts on the Japanese/Japanese American community.



## Organizing Framework: Regenerative, Sustainable, Resilient Japantown

The organizing framework, or frame of reference for the recommendations of this report, consists of three basic concepts: 1) Building on the Resilience of the Past, 2) Sustaining the Present, and 3) Regenerating into the Future. These concepts inform the paradigm for a regenerative, sustainable, and resilient Japantown.

### Building on the Resilience of the Past

For over a century, Japantown has been an integral part of the cultural fabric of San Francisco, meeting adversity and hardship with fortitude, resilience, and the ability to build back from waves of forced removal and displacement.

Before the 1906 Great Earthquake and Fire, Japantown was in the South of Market and Chinatown areas. Although a Japanese community presence remained in the South of Market until the 1930s, the Earthquake forced Japantown to retreat to the then underdeveloped Western Addition.

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which gave the United States Army the power to establish “exclusion zones” on the West Coast of the United States. The US Army subsequently issued Civilian Exclusion Orders from its headquarters in the Presidio of San Francisco in March through August 1942, forcing the removal of Japanese and Japanese American residents in Washington, Oregon, California, and parts of Arizona to concentration camps operated by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) in the interior of the United States. Several first generation (Issei) Japanese residents, mostly men considered to be community leaders, had already been arrested and placed in Department of Justice (DOJ) camps in the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941. Forced to abandon everything they had built, San Francisco’s Japanese American community returned to San Francisco in 1945, only to find their homes and businesses destroyed or occupied. What had been a thriving neighborhood that spanned 40 blocks, Japantown had been reduced to a core of roughly 15 square blocks. The returnees set to work on rebuilding their Japantown neighborhood into a modern and more diverse community than the one they had been forced to leave behind.

By 1948, the Western Addition, which included Japantown, was selected as one of the first large-scale “urban renewal” projects in the nation. The San Francisco Redevelopment Agency declared the Western Addition a “blighted” area and targeted 28 blocks for Phase A-1 and the 70 blocks of Phase A-2 for mass clearance, eviction, and redevelopment, removing most Japanese American and African American small businesses and residents from the neighborhood. Only a decade after rebuilding Japantown, from 1956 to 1979, properties were seized by eminent domain and entire blocks were razed to the ground. By 1965, the entire area of A-1 was cleared for a shopping center, residential buildings, and the Geary Expressway slicing

through and between the Japanese American and African American communities. As in the past, the Japanese/Japanese American community responded to this crisis with determination and resolve. Redevelopment served to unite Nisei (second generation Japanese Americans) property owners, residents, and merchants with Sansei (the third generation) activists. Inspired by organizing tactics learned from the Civil Rights Movement, they worked with the African American community to mobilize efforts to protect their homes and businesses and resist the displacement of people of color out of the Western Addition. Galvanized by the student-led protests at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University) and the University of California at Berkeley, the resistance gave birth to community-based service organizations designed to meet the needs of the Japanese/Japanese American community from a culturally-specific perspective: access to senior services for the Issei (the first generation of immigrants); political and legal collectives; activities, education and employment support for youth; affordable housing; cultural preservation; an art and media collective creating work by and for Japantown, many of which continue to this day.

With Redevelopment sunsetting in the early 2000's, Japantown sought to take control of its future. In 2001, the California State Legislature passed Senate Bill 307 that initiated the planning process to help preserve San Francisco as one of the last three remaining Japantowns in California. Community-based planning efforts began with the Japantown Preservation, Planning & Development Taskforce, and its concepts for a Japantown Community Plan. In 2008, Japantown was designated a "Preserve America Community" under a White House initiative, which encourages use of historic assets and resources for community revitalization, and protection and appreciation of such resources through education and heritage tourism programs. The City's Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan (BNP), which compiled much needed data on Japantown between 2006-2009, was not uniformly embraced by the community due to a lack of consensus around future development issues and the Plan process was thusly "acknowledged" by the Planning Commission but the Plan not adopted. Building upon the BNP's research, the Japantown Cultural Heritage, and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHESS) that was endorsed in 2013 reflected a robust community engagement process that created a ground-breaking strategy for community cultural preservation, land use, transportation, and economic sustainability. It was upheld as a model for the City's Cultural Heritage District program.

### **Sustaining the Present**

As the regional hub and cultural heart of Japanese/Japanese American communities in Northern California, Japantown is defined by its physical footprint, its diverse community, and its cultural reach. Its physical fabric expresses a layered and complex history. Although its commercial district is concentrated on Geary Boulevard, Post and Sutter Streets between Laguna and Fillmore, its physical footprint roughly spans from Gough Street on the east, Steiner Street on the west, Pine Street to the north and Ellis Street to the south.

Japantown's cultural reach extends throughout Northern California. As one of only three remaining historic Japantowns in the United States, through its community-based organizations, arts and cultural groups, and unique cultural businesses, San Francisco Japantown is a nexus for Japanese/Japanese American activity for the broad and diverse Japanese/Japanese American community dispersed throughout the Bay Area -- the Nisei and Sansei (second and third Japanese-American generations), the Japanese-speaking community (i.e., recent-immigrant Shin-Nikkei, international students), Mixed-Heritage Japanese, and the younger fourth and fifth Japanese/Japanese American generations -- Yonsei and Gosei. Its seasonal celebrations and cultural festivals draw many to return to a cultural home-base, but over the years, those who live, work and play in Japantown have changed. Only a minority of Japanese/Japanese Americans live and work in Japantown. Although the residential base has long been displaced, the merchants and organizations -- including historically significant churches and temples -- continue to serve as cultural anchors. The community does not want to see Japantown's physical and cultural identity further diminished or lost.

In 2020, however, an already endangered Japantown faced yet another threat to its very existence, compounded by the severe consequences and adverse economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Japantown merchants lost much of their pre-pandemic income, and, according to a 2021 report by the Japantown Community Benefits District, at least 24 businesses permanently closed or relocated. Contact with Japan, including commerce and tourism, were decimated due to new quarantine rules. Arts and cultural organizations have done their best to pivot to online programming but have lost revenue and momentum that can never be recouped. Individual artists who have struggled to survive and create in San Francisco's tech-boom economy of the recent past found themselves with even fewer resources and opportunities. The need for social services increased but the ability to meet that need was challenged. In response, Japantown's constituents were and continue to be actively doing as much as they can to rally resources, be creative and support their community and each other.

### **Regenerating into the Future**

In an atmosphere of declining cultural diversity in San Francisco and multiple looming global crises, including pandemics and climate change, San Francisco is responding by empowering existing cultural districts, including Japantown, to participate in the transition toward a vibrant, diverse, and resilient future.

The Japantown neighborhood and its composite economic, social, cultural, and physical systems have been—and continue to be—destabilized, most recently by the pandemic. The diagram on the following page (Figure 7) illustrates how systems, such as Japantown, can respond to disruption and destabilization through adaptation to bounce back to its previous state. For example, Japantown adapted to the disruption of the pandemic by employing multiple strategies, among them securing funds to assist small businesses and organizations and pivoting to online events and marketing.

However, only returning to its previous state will not sustain resilience for Japantown. By reimagining and transforming existing systems and creating new mechanisms to assist and grow nascent segments of the community, Japantown can evolve and regenerate into a more resilient future state. It can also proactively build resilience by increasing engagement with the broader Japanese/Japanese American community and expanding its reach to the regional and global communities, supporting succession planning for businesses and organizations, and expanding its residential base with more affordable housing and more community ownership of land.

In order to transform itself, Japantown should also address points of internal fragility within the community, among them: perceived resistance-to-change by some long-time community stakeholders (a traumatic response to the multiple losses, displacements and disappointments of the past); limited engagement by the broader Japanese/Japanese American community; a lack of leadership opportunities for the next generation; decreased investment and involvement of Japanese companies in Japantown over the last 40 years -- all of which have led to a perception of Japantown as “stagnant” among various Japanese/Japanese Americans and shin-nikkeis (postwar Japanese immigrants).

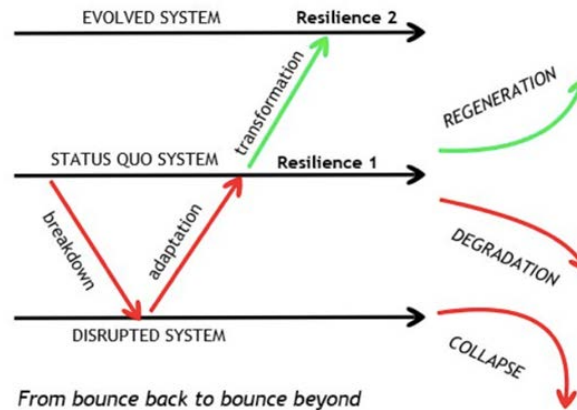
Japantown is embedded in a set of broader physical, socio-economic, and political status-quo systems, which are extractive and exploitative by design, thereby making them more vulnerable and less resilient to future global crises. A byproduct of these systems is a scarcity mindset or reactive survival state which has been reinforced by Japantown’s past adversity and hardships. Japantown can also regenerate into a thriving future by refocusing from a reactive survival mentality, or scarcity mindset, to a growth or abundance mindset that is empowering, collaborative, creative, and proactive. Instead of viewing Japantown as a zero-sum game in which there is a fixed population, footprint, and economy, Japantown should view itself as a “Regenerative Japantown” with the potential to grow and increase its reach, resources, and vitality. Re-Alliance, a coalition dedicated to regenerative development in response to disaster and displacement, defines the term as follows:

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*(T)he term ‘regenerative’ describes processes that restore, renew, or revitalize their own sources of energy and materials, ensuring the capacity to sustain and nurture all life. Regenerative approaches use whole-systems thinking to build equitable resilience that responds to the needs of society while respecting the integrity of nature.*

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Figure 7: Regeneration Resilience Diagram



Source: Anthony Hodgeson

This mindset naturally ties into the values of traditional Japanese eco-culture, emphasizing humanity's symbiotic relationship with nature and with each other, as well as collective abundance. Those values were embodied in ancient Japan, which was ecologically conscious, zero-waste focused, and self-sufficient. Its economy was based on principles of collective wealth and prosperity, interdependency, sufficiency without greed, reciprocity, mutual benefit, and equity. Its architecture was based on sustainability and well-being; its use of natural materials and design is harmonious with nature. Its arts reflected sustainability and resilience through art forms such as *kintsugi*, which sees value in broken ceramics and redeems them to new purpose, and *boro*, up-cycled fashion which recycles textiles and garments into clothing with even more beauty and value.

Japantown can reclaim and internalize these ancient Japanese eco-culture values, applying them to its physical environment, its economy and businesses, its social service providers, its arts and culture community, its demographics and diversity, and its infrastructure. This would entail incorporating more natural green elements and traditional Japanese design principles into its landscape and architecture. It can also support capacity building, skills sharing, and virtual and physical infrastructure to grow its economy and businesses. It can conduct collective advocacy, promotion and marketing of existing and new businesses, artists, and community organizations, so that all could benefit from more visibility and a greater customer base. It can attract more engagement from the broader Japanese/Japanese American community through cultural and environmental programming around traditional Japanese eco-culture.

At the same time, a "Regenerative Japantown" would encourage innovation and transformative education in its cultural expressions. By cultivating innovation that "re-stories" (retells beyond conventional ways), reinterprets and recreates its culture and cultural values -- through the arts, cultural businesses, community events, community co-creative spaces, marketing, and fundraising -- Japantown can sustain and evolve its culture in new and fresh ways, increase

support and engagement, and provide a space where the diversity of the Japanese/Japanese American community can take part and thrive. For example, community co-creative spaces could bring together a diverse array of individuals and organizations to engage in problem-solving around its points of fragility, envision new futures for Japantown and create new cultural expressions.

By honoring traditional Japanese/Japanese American culture and innovating new Japanese/Japanese American cultural expressions, a new “Regenerative Japantown” can emerge, empowered to recover, and heal from its history of displacement socially, physically and spiritually. By healing the trauma of its displacement and its expressions of fragmented behavior, the Japantown community can build broad trust, and true collaboration and communication, so that regenerative shared community leadership can emerge, and the diversity of constituencies and segments of the J/JA community can participate and engage in building a “Regenerative Japantown.”

Importantly, Japantown is in the Western Addition and has a deep shared history with its Black neighbors. Dating back to the westward migration of Black families from the American South, the prewar Black population in San Francisco was small (about 1% of the overall population) but growing. These early families endured considerable racism and lacked social services. In 1919, a group of Black women seeking to fill the services gap started the Booker T. Washington Community Service Center and successfully raised funds to purchase property at 1433 Divisadero Street, despite multiple efforts by White property owners to prevent the community center from opening. During World War II, community center staff moved into the Golden Gate Institute/Kinmon Gakuen building in Japantown and safeguarded the personal property of several incarcerated Japanese American families who relied heavily on this kindness to rebuild their lives which were devastated by the incarceration experience. This is just one example of the deep allyship between the Japanese American and Black residents of the Western Addition. This allyship was recently manifested in the City’s redistricting effort where new proposed district lines would have separated Booker T. Washington Community Center, currently located at 800 Presidio Avenue, from the Western Addition and Japantown. The Japantown community galvanized a strong unified voice in support of the Black community that ultimately prevailed in keeping Booker T. Washington Community Center in the same district as the rest of the Western Addition.

To fully regenerate into the future, Japantown will continue and expand the deep allyship with its neighbors in the Fillmore District/Western Addition. For example, in October 2022, the U.S. Department of Transportation launched a federal grant program called “Reconnecting Communities,” an equity focused funding opportunity targeting marginalized communities negatively impacted by past transportation infrastructure and policies. The San Francisco County Municipal Transportation Authority, SFMTA, and Planning Department applied for a planning grant (up to \$2 million) to bring together the Western Addition communities to



develop a remedy for the Geary Expressway that created a high-speed traffic boundary dividing Japantown from the Western Addition. The grant application included letters of support from key organizations representing the Black, Japanese American, and Jewish communities.

## Japantown Community-Based Methods and Overarching Challenges

The Japantown Cultural District (JCD) is a program of the Japantown Task Force (JTF). The JTF consists of 21 board members, and 4 committees which include the Land Use and Transportation Committee, the Ad-Hoc Committee on the Japan Center Malls, the Cultural Heritage Sustainability Committee, and the Peace Plaza Committee. The board members are a diverse representation of the Japantown community, including community and organization leaders. All Cultural District Initiatives go through the JTF governance board.

This Cultural District ‘Cultural Housing History Economic Sustainability Strategy’ (CHHESS) Report builds on the Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHESS), a vision planning document developed by the community in partnership with City agencies and endorsed by the City in 2013. The JCHESS inspired the creation of the new Citywide Cultural District program. The JCD CHHESS process which began in August 2019, has been led by the JTF, which reached out to multiple constituencies, organizations, and businesses to solicit input and engagement. The JCD/JTF staff led a series of 8 focus groups and 3 town-hall meetings and conducted one-on-one interviews, collectively engaging over 500 participants, along with extensive research into previous documents and models from similar communities.

### *Overarching Challenges*

This section describes the key challenges identified by various community members during focus groups, town halls, and interviews. The challenges relate to key focus areas discussed at those events. These challenges represent real and perceived issues which are impediments to realizing the vision and achieving the goals for Japantown. Although most of the discussions took place before the pandemic struck, some of the challenges have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Those challenges related to the pandemic are listed first. Those that follow are longer-term challenges which are less related to the pandemic.

The challenges themselves are summarized below, with more detail on each given in the pages that follow.

#### **1. Survival of Japantown businesses during and post-Coronavirus shutdown**

In response to the pandemic, the Japan Center Malls were closed to the public. While some of the Mall businesses remained open, many have closed. Restaurants have been making a fraction of their pre-pandemic income; retail shops are generating little to no income. Some businesses secured federal assistance and City loans/grants, and Japantown organizations such

as the Japantown Community Benefit District (JCBD), the Japantown Task Force (JTF), the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCCNC), and the Japantown Foundation also responded by raising funds to assist neighborhood businesses. The JCCCNC and Japan Center Malls Staff responded by organizing outdoor events for restaurants to stage, such as Picnic in the Plaza on weekends, and Restaurants in the Plaza on weekdays. However, retail non-restaurant businesses which are considered non-essential are more severely impacted than restaurants due to lack of physical customer foot traffic. A JCBD survey of merchants indicated that many require more digital marketing assistance and visibility. Even as businesses are allowed to reopen, the volume of customers and visitors declined sharply due to fear of contracting the virus. At least 24 businesses have already closed permanently or relocated, while many others remain at risk. The survival of Japantown businesses hangs in the balance. Vacancies are declining as our malls, ground floor storefronts, and restaurants gain more traffic. There were 13 vacancies during the COVID pandemic, and now there are five.

The pandemic exacerbated broader trends in Japantown businesses. In recent years, some long-time Nisei owners of Japantown businesses have retired, decreasing the number of authentic Japanese/Japanese American-owned businesses that reflect the community. Currently, Japantown lacks relationships with new Japanese companies, which may inhibit those companies' opening stores in Japantown. As with commercial districts everywhere, retail businesses relying on in-store customers have been affected by e-commerce and online shopping. The survival and success of Japantown businesses directly affect the economic and social vitality of the neighborhood, as well as the cultural identity of the Japantown community.

## **2. Business information and infrastructure support for Japantown small businesses, arts and cultural groups, and independent artists**

To earn a living-wage and sustain themselves, Japantown's small businesses, artists, and arts and cultural organizations need to be resourced. Business and organizational succession plans for existing businesses are essential; there is little to no incubation and support for next generation businesses. They require expertise to maneuver bureaucracy, prepare proposals, write grants, and obtain permits, particularly where culturally sensitive and bilingual needs exist. They need access to information and assistance with resources such as legal services, funding opportunities, tenants-rights, loan applications, and permits. The challenge is to develop the knowledge and expertise to provide these essential skills, and to assist them to use available tools, such as developing a stronger online presence.

## **3. Need for space and tools to connect, create and perform/exhibit by the Japantown arts & culture community**

The traditional and contemporary arts are fundamental to the cultural heritage of the Japanese and Japanese American community. The coronavirus pandemic has critically impacted artists and cultural groups' opportunities to produce, showcase and exchange art and culture in the

community. They must now rebuild their audience bases and rethink how they plan and develop performances and exhibitions. Moreover, as evidenced during the coronavirus shelter-in-place protocols, virtual “space” for arts and cultural events for the Cherry Blossom Festival, Children’s Day, and other activities are needed so that the arts can build and sustain community connections online.

As the cultural hub and focal point for Japanese/Japanese American communities in the City and Northern California, San Francisco’s Japantown could be the natural nexus for arts and cultural organizations to confront these critical issues. However, even before the pandemic struck, few spaces were made available/affordable for artists, arts organizations, and cultural groups to gather, organize, restore their livelihoods and create. There are very few professional arts spaces, and no professional performance or public-facing gallery spaces in Japantown.

#### 4. The Japan Center Malls covenant agreements, adjoining properties between Laguna and Fillmore streets, and their impact on Japantown’s future

The commercial blocks between Laguna and Fillmore streets, along the north side of Geary Boulevard and the south side of Post Street, contain multiple properties held by various owners.

*Figure 8: Japantown ‘Superblocks’*

This aerial view locates the 11 properties and their owners of Japantown’s most recognizable commercial corridor sometimes referred to as the Japantown ‘superblocks’.



Source: Japantown Task Force

In 2006, covenant agreements for the Japan Center West and East malls were executed between the Los Angeles-based mall developer 3D Investments (3D) and Kintetsu Corporation (the seller) and the City of San Francisco (City). The covenants in the agreements require, among other provisions, that 3D retain ownership of the Mall for at least 15 years, maintain a Japan theme, and allow nonprofit organizations from the Japantown community to use common areas in the Mall. These covenants have helped to preserve the Japan Center East and West Malls as a culturally relevant, commercially thriving, community supportive part of Japantown. In 2021, the 15-year ownership retention period ended. 3D has indicated its desire to retain the property past 2021. Under the agreements, 3D is obligated to honor the covenants for as long as it owns the property, but the enforcement of the covenant's rests solely with the owner since the community is not a party to the agreements and the City as a third-party beneficiary to the agreements, has limited enforcement power.

A similar covenant agreement was executed for the hotel site (now the Hotel Kabuki), however, no ownership retention period was included. The Blackstone Group invested over \$5 million to renovate the hotel and retained a modern, pan-Asian theme. No agreements with the owners of the other privately-owned properties exist. None of the agreements provide protections or benefits for tenants. During the pandemic, some (not all) property owners provided rent deferrals. If 3D Investments or any of the property owners were to sell, develop and/or change their properties, their actions would affect Japantown businesses inside and outside the Malls, as well as property owners, cultural activities, and the character of the surrounding neighborhood far into the future. It is vitally important that the community ensure that the properties on these blocks remain as business and community hubs for the Japanese/Japanese American community and that their future development support and benefit Japantown.

## **5. The erosion of Japantown's high-quality Japanese-oriented character/flavor or *miriyoku***

Some of the buildings and landscapes in Japantown developed during the 1960's have heavy exterior facades in the Brutalist style, with few openings to the outside, presenting a generally unwelcoming appearance to pedestrians and visitors. Many focus-group respondents and interviewees have also stated that there is too much concrete and not enough attractive green space. Some of the businesses and restaurants are perceived as non-authentic caricatures of Japan, and the declining percentage of Japanese/Japanese American residents and business owners contributes to the perception that Japantown does not cater to the local Japanese population. There is a sense of a lack of ownership and connection to the space for segments of the community as it has become less of a space to live, work, and create culture. These factors contribute to a perception that Japantown's strong and authentic high-quality Japanese-oriented character, consistent with traditional and contemporary Japanese culture, has eroded. Many of the young adults and local Japanese nationals who contributed their feedback indicated that this diminishes *ikioi* (vigor, spirit, liveliness, freshness) and reduces the

neighborhood's appeal. In response, JTF sponsored a new project called *Japantenna* piloted in November 2021 to bring exhibits of artisan crafts and specialty foods from lesser-known regions of Japan to a vacant storefront in the Japan Center Malls. In 2022, Japantenna hosted three successful exhibits, attracting nearly 5,000 visitors, and generating over \$10,000 in new revenue to a formerly empty retail space.

## **6. Need for a central collaborative platform for Japantown**

The Japantown community has multiple constituencies and stakeholders, many of whom have long been engaged but who operated independently, without the true collaboration, communication, cohesion, trust, and resource-sharing akin to villagers in a village. The coronavirus pandemic crisis and other critical issues have prompted community organizations to band together, organize action, and speak out on behalf of Japantown. Co-convened by the Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach and the Japanese Community Youth Council, a new Nihonmachi Community Coalition composed of the leaders from Japantown non-profits, including the Japantown Task Force, the Japantown Community Benefit District, the Japanese Cultural & Community Center of Northern California, the Japantown Merchants Association, and many others formed in 2020 to address the Asian Hate crimes happening in other San Francisco neighborhoods, and to address precautions in our own community. The pandemic exposed the need for a central collaborative platform or entity where all community organizations and members can communicate and coordinate with each other on strategic visioning and planning, critical decision-making, and timely action to advocate for and build a thriving Japantown.

## **7. Minimal engagement of and leadership opportunities for young adults in Japantown**

Young Japanese/Japanese American adults find little to engage them in Japantown. Unlike other San Francisco neighborhoods where young adults can both live and enjoy activities, the lack of affordable housing precludes many from being able to live there. Japantown offers few gathering/event spaces such as performance venues, clubs, or galleries. Programming of interest and outlets for nightlife are minimal. As far as participating as contributors to Japantown, they have identified limited mentorship and skills-building opportunities as well as opportunities for young adults to step into leadership roles. Their engagement and leadership are vital to the future of Japantown. Existing organizations such as the JCYC, Nakayoshi Young Professionals, the Nikkei Community Internship Program, a statewide initiative which selects college students to support the work of community organizations while increasing their understanding of contemporary issues affecting Japanese Americans, and Japantown for Justice with its agenda of social justice advanced by a younger generation should be supported and leveraged to address this issue.

## **8. Lack of a unified marketing plan for Japantown businesses and cultural activities hinder the economic recovery for Japantown**

Japantown must bring people back to the community to support the return of a vibrant economic merchant corridor, amplify cultural events and traditional resources, and attract visitors and Japanese/Japanese American families to the neighborhood. Various organizations share efforts to bring audiences back to the community. Nichibei Foundation promotes businesses and cultural institutions through online and print resources. The Japan Center Malls, JCBD, and JTF all utilize social media and email promotional notifications to promote Japantown attractions and merchants. Non-profit organizations and businesses also do their own promotions. A Japantown Marketing Committee has been formed by the JCBD which include community organizations and businesses creating public relations and focused marketing campaigns to attract visitors to Japantown. JCBD has also provided technical assistance to small businesses helping build marketing skills in the community. Only with a consistent marketing budget to support dedicated staff will a unified marketing committee be successful.

## **9. Limited community-controlled land and space for growth and development in Japantown**

Japantown occupies a small physical footprint that continues to shrink – the result of historic displacement, limited community property ownership and retention, and loss of Japanese/Japanese American-owned businesses. There is limited room and opportunity for new construction and property development. Without land it is difficult to address community needs. Although some of the smaller properties along Post and Sutter streets are owned by Japanese American individuals, families and organizations, the major properties in Japantown – the Japan Center Malls and connected properties – are not owned by Japanese/Japanese American entities.

At the same time, some existing buildings and property in Japantown are historic and/or underutilized. The historic buildings are important symbols of Japantown's past and cultural identity and should be preserved and renovated. If existing buildings and property are owned, managed, and developed by individuals and entities who are not connected to or supportive of the Japanese American and Japanese-speaking community or culture, then the cultural identity of Japantown could be eroded. Securing Japantown's land and physical space will be a long-term, ongoing challenge.

## **10. Need for cohesive preservation and development plan for Japantown**

The 2013 [JCHESS Report](#) presented a comprehensive and groundbreaking vision for the economically vibrant preservation of an ethnic community's authentic cultural character and legacy. To that end, the JCHESS provided an extensive compilation of Japantown's tangible and



intangible cultural assets, as well as an assessment of Japantown's physical character, including its residential and commercial buildings, land uses, zoning, and height limits. It also recommended various strategies around land use and design, such as historic preservation, use of the Japantown Special Use District to attract new businesses, a new Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District to enhance the pedestrian scale and retain the mix of uses in the shopping district, and Japantown Design Guidelines. Many of these strategies have been implemented since 2013.

The JCHESS identifies four individual buildings and one collection of buildings as Historic Landmarks designated by the City. It also shows that 9 buildings are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, as well as 75 buildings and structures as being historically significant to the community. The JCHESS laid a solid foundation for future planning of Japantown, emphasizing that the community desires to retain Japantown's small-scale neighborhood character, and not endorsing major changes to the zoning and building height limits that would be inconsistent with preserving that character and Japantown's cultural legacy. The JCHESS 'explicitly [did] not directly address changes to development or height limits.' This viewpoint was consistently expressed by the preponderance of the community throughout the 4-year JCHESS process, starting community objections to concepts for major development in the draft Better Neighborhoods Plan (2009). Thus, the JCHESS deliberately chose to avoid the topic of major changes to zoning and building height limits except for a targeted 5' height increase along Post Street to allow 15' ground floor ceiling heights for retail. The JCHESS addressed the treatment of commercial uses in considerable detail through the then proposed and subsequently adopted Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District. It also addressed residential development by incorporating a community-requested Planning Department "Development Potential" study, which concluded that Japantown has considerable room for such development within its existing zoning.

However, the JCHESS did not provide an overall assessment of specifically projected needs for residential, commercial, institutional, open space, or community space. While the JCHESS analyzes the potential for new development based on existing zoning, it does not address how such development potential might be realized in order to meet currently projected space needs, as proposed by the community. Building on the foundation of the JCHESS, a more specific preservation and development master plan is needed to further identify Japantown's buildings and structures to be preserved as cultural assets as well as those properties with development potential and/or improvement opportunities. With a neighborhood preservation and development master plan, Japantown can articulate a proactive vision for its future which can guide historic preservation efforts, and development plans by individual property owners and developers.

## Japantown's Community-Designed Strategies for the Future

The strategies below are organized by Cultural District CHHESS focus areas with goals and background specific to Japantown's experience and history.

### ***A. Cultural Heritage Conservation and Sustainability***

(Strategies 1-5)

#### **Goal Statement**

- ❖ **Preserve, Sustain and Develop Japantown's Cultural and Historic Assets in support of the Japanese/Japanese American community.**

#### **Background**

At the time of the incarceration during World War II, more than large properties were lost. Family heirlooms and treasured items were left behind or rendered useless. Many destroyed any possessions deemed "too Japanese" for fear of being associated with "the enemy," and culture, heritage and family histories were lost. When the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency selected Japantown as one of the first "urban renewal" projects in the nation, grocery stores, retail stores, businesses and restaurants in Japantown were relocated to other parts of San Francisco and separated from both its community customer base they served, as well as the support-system of neighboring merchants. The community's natural ecosystem was destroyed; many became isolated and did not survive.

As the regional hub and cultural heart of Japanese/Japanese American communities in Northern California, Japantown is defined by its physical footprint, its diverse community, and its cultural reach. Despite the dispersion of Japanese/Japanese Americans to other parts of San Francisco and the Bay Area, the merchants, and organizations – including historically-significant churches and temples – continue to serve as cultural anchors. The community does not want to see Japantown's physical and cultural identity further diminished or lost. To that end, the Japantown Cultural District is committed to safeguarding the historical, social, and cultural assets of the community to strengthen understanding and appreciation of the significant place the Japanese community holds in the history and culture of San Francisco.

#### **1. Cultural Preservation Strategy: Support improvements to Peace Plaza**

The Peace Plaza is the most valuable and iconic public space in Japantown, serving as a central gathering place and used for both everyday activities and special events. Despite its significance as the heart of Japantown, its condition and design have suffered over time, making a renovation necessary. The Japantown Peace Plaza Vision Plan for renovation was completed with extensive community engagement and approved by the San Francisco Parks & Recreation Commission in 2019 for the 2020 Health Bond, which was approved by the Board of

Supervisors. Proposition A, the SF Health and Recovery Bond, was approved by the voters in the fall of 2020. Moving forward, the community must work with the City to ensure timely and competent implementation of the Peace Plaza improvements.

The Peace Plaza renovation will address many of the challenges that the community has expressed, including the lack of inviting, functional, and flexible gathering spaces, and the lack of healthy green spaces in Japantown. The renovation design team is considering community preferences for more event space, open seating, greenery and kid-and-senior-friendly design elements in the Peace Plaza. The Peace Plaza is slated to undergo renovation construction in 2024. The Peace Pagoda, which is not owned by the City, is also in need of assessment and renovation.

## **2. Cultural Preservation Strategy: Support improvements to Osaka Way/Buchanan Mall in collaboration with Nihonmachi Parking Corporation (NPC) and Japantown Community Benefits District (JCBD)**

The Buchanan Mall, a valuable open space in Japantown, was designed to resemble a Japanese streetscape with shops opening to cobblestone streets and apartments above. In 2008, then-Mayor Gavin Newsom renamed Buchanan Mall “Osaka Way ” on the 50th anniversary of the sister-city relationship with Osaka. Osaka Way/Buchanan Mall is also home to Japantown’s oldest family-owned business -- Benkyodo established in 1906, and Soko Hardware, established in 1925 and was home to Japanese sweets maker Benkyodo, established in 1906 which recently closed in March 2022. In 1976, world-renowned artist Ruth Asawa was commissioned to design the origami sculpture fountains which are connected by a cobblestone “river,” both of which are part of the City’s art collection overseen by the San Francisco Arts Commission. The Mall, completed in 1980, needs revitalization. The origami fountains have not been functioning for many years, street lighting is inadequate for evening hours, and the cobblestone pathways present ADA and safety issues. In 2019, the “Buchanan Mall Vision Plan” was created by the JCBD. It details the issues found in the Mall that hinder desired improvements and includes suggestions for the revitalization of the commercial area. It recommends the installation of a water-recycling system to power the fountains once existing plumbing issues are resolved. New permanent lighting installations would beautify and improve safety and security in the area. Improvements are required to make the cobblestone and concrete pathways fully accessible for disabled and older adults to navigate the Buchanan Mall.

The Mall is owned by the City, regulated by multiple City agencies, and maintained by the Nihonmachi Parking Corporation. The Japantown Cultural District should support the Japantown Community Benefits District in its effort to develop and implement a strategy for the revitalization of the Buchanan Mall. Originally envisioned by Asawa to symbolize the growth and life of the Japanese community, a “facelift” would reinvigorate this open space so it can continue to serve as an organic part of Japantown’s cultural landscape.

### **3. Cultural Preservation Strategy: Utilize tools for preservation of historic buildings and structures**

As proposed in the 2013 Japantown Cultural Historic Economic Sustainability Strategy Report (JCHESS), Japantown should work with the City to encourage and help property owners to use available tools to preserve, maintain, and rehabilitate historic buildings and structures. These include: designation in the San Francisco Planning Code of individual buildings and districts considered historically and architecturally significant or as contributors to historic districts; using the Mills Act for designated historic resources to provide property owners who rehabilitate historic buildings with property tax reductions; using the California Historic Building Code to save cost on rehabilitation; using the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Incentives for properties which are rehabilitated, and using historic preservation facade easements to preserve historic facades. Some of these tools would involve designating certain buildings or entire blocks as National Historic Landmarks or National Register Historic Districts. Los Angeles' Little Tokyo, for example, is designated as a National Historic District.

### **4. Cultural Preservation Strategy: Build more cultural and environmental programming into arts, community organizations and businesses with focus on Japanese traditional eco-culture**

To support a more ecological focus, artists and culture organizations can help to transmit the wisdom of the traditional Japanese culture, while bridging ancient culture with innovation, keeping the arts and culture community rooted yet fresh, strengthening community connections as well as connectivity with surrounding neighborhoods. Existing arts and cultural organizations in Japantown engage in cultural and environmental programming and could be supported to do more. Examples of such programming include the Japanese *boro*/upcycled sustainable fashion; workshops on *bengala* and *aizome* ecological-fabric dying practices, traditional papermaking, and workshops on Japanese fermented and preserved foods such as *miso*, *katsuo-bushi*, *hoshi-gaki*, *shoyu*, and *natto*, healthy and natural products regularly included in current best-practices in nutrition.

### **5. Cultural Preservation Strategy: Create an accessible digital archive from existing physical and digital archives held by multiple community organizations through collaborative efforts**

Japantown has several historical archives, among them: the Japanese American National Library/Center for Japanese American Studies, the Japanese American Archives at the JCCCNC, and the National Japanese American Historical Society Gallery and Archives, and the archive of the Nichi Bei Weekly newspaper (formerly the Nichi Bei Times). The Western Addition branch of the San Francisco Public Library also houses Japanese collections. These archives hold valuable information not only for the Japantown community but for scholars and historians. As independent collections they are difficult to access and maintain. Efforts are underway by some

of the organizations to stabilize and digitize their physical archives. Other organizations need assistance in digitizing their archives. Once all organizations have completed digitizing their archives, a coordinated effort among these organizations to provide searchable, but controlled, access to those archives to the public, possibly linked to each other, would increase their accessibility, and empower the community with their data and stories. This could also be instrumental in creating intergenerational dialogues, with the potential to be exhibited as a virtual museum to share the story of Japantown. Partnerships with the Internet Archives SF, Densho Digital Archives, and tech companies should also be developed. Currently, succession planning, as well as staff support and appropriate funding, would need to be enhanced to realize a joint digital archive to ensure that these resources are not endangered or lost.

## ***B. Tenant Protections***

(Strategies 6-8)

### **Goal Statements**

- ❖ **Protect and support small businesses in Japantown with resources and infrastructure.**
- ❖ **Prevent further displacement of Japantown's culturally relevant businesses and organizations.**
- ❖ **Preserve existing affordable housing. Preserve housing for the Japanese/Japanese American community and protect its community-based institutions from displacement.**

### **Background**

As referenced above, Japantown's commercial district is concentrated on Geary Boulevard, Post and Sutter Streets between Laguna and Fillmore Streets. There are multiple properties held by various owners. In 2006, covenant agreements for the Japan Center West and East Malls were executed between 3D Investment (3D) and Kintetsu Corporation, with the City of San Francisco (City) as a third-party beneficiary. These covenants have helped to preserve the Japan Center East and West Malls as a culturally relevant, commercially-thriving, community supportive part of Japantown. Except for the Hotel Kabuki site, no agreements with the owners of the other privately-owned properties exist. None of the agreements provide protections or benefits for commercial tenants. Existing tenants in the Malls need protection and relief from economic hardship, as evidenced by the impact of the Pandemic on Mall tenants and subsequent closures given the lack of protections and the increased rent burden for those tenants. Other businesses, some of whom are long-time Japanese-oriented businesses, are located outside the Malls, on Post, Sutter, and Buchanan streets. Some of them own their own property, while others are tenants. Those commercial tenants outside the Malls must be protected from displacement, as well.

Japantown's housing stock was decimated by the incarceration during World War II, and the mass clearance, eviction, and demolition of entire blocks by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency from 1956 – 1979. During Redevelopment, over 1,500 residents were affected; 2,600 homes and over 60 businesses, many of them Japanese American family-owned establishments, were displaced and ultimately replaced with the Japan Center Malls (formerly the Japanese Cultural and Trade Center) and the eight-lane Geary Expressway which sliced through the neighborhood. Those displaced received a "Certificates of Preference" which, to a limited extent, granted their return. To date, only 4% of these "Certificates of Preference" have been used.

Today, Japantown contains 2,500 total residential units, with a mix of housing types in and around its commercial blocks between Gough, Ellis, Steiner, and California streets. Two large affordable housing rental buildings in Japantown include the Golden Gate Apartments (with family rental housing), and Nihonmachi Terrace (for low-income families, seniors and physically disabled). Of the total residential population in Japantown, only 3% are Japanese/Japanese American.

Given the limited amount of housing in Japantown, it is imperative that existing residential tenants be protected from displacement.

Many community-based and service organizations operate in Japantown. Some of them own their buildings, while others rent, some from legacy Japanese American families. As property ownership turns over, some community organizations who are tenants are vulnerable to displacement and need protections.

**6. Tenant Protection Strategy: Develop and implement a Strategic Plan to address the Japan Center Malls (JCM) Covenant Agreements, the adjoining properties between Laguna and Fillmore Streets, and the future of the properties, and negotiate Benefits Agreements with JCM and other owners**

A Strategic Plan is needed to guide such tools as the Japan Center Malls (JCM) Covenant Agreements with 3D Investments, the owner of the Japan Center East and West Malls, to honor Japantown themes and traditions. The community could consider additional requirements for new property owners to honor and support long-time community events such as the Cherry Blossom Festival and the Nihonmachi Street Fair that involve temporary measures such as street closures and sound permits. The Strategic Plan and its implementation would provide a framework under different future scenarios (retention, development, demolition/new construction) to:



- Provide relief for existing tenants of not only the JCM, but for other properties in those blocks (e.g., Kinokuniya) who have been impacted by the pandemic and may be impacted by future disasters;
- Guide tenant selection and occupancy plans for the existing JCM buildings and adjoining buildings that would prioritize existing tenants and local businesses, culturally relevant businesses, and space for community use;
- Build in protections and mitigations, e.g., designated space, to prevent displacement of small businesses that serve as cultural anchors for Japantown, especially the Legacy Businesses and other long-term businesses not yet designated as legacy businesses;
- Provide long-term benefits to the community, such as control over ground-level retail, and long-term space to meet community needs, such as arts spaces, business facilities and affordable housing which cannot be met elsewhere;
- Ensure that future development, including vertical development of the properties is consistent with the Japantown Design Guidelines (2019) and its further development, and is sustainable and resilient in its design and configuration.

The creation of the Strategic Plan would involve broad consultation with the community, including a community needs-assessment with dissemination of information about the covenants, which many members of the community do not know about. The Strategic Plan would also include mechanisms for enforcing and implementing the community's requests. The Japantown Task Force has established a Japan Center Malls Technical Committee (JCMTTC) to advise on the development and implementation of the Strategic Plan, along with mechanisms for enforcement. In 2021, a new Covenant Committee, convened by the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California, began meeting to discuss the future of the expired covenant that ensured a Japanese theme in parts of the Japan Center Mall. Parallel discussions with the City should be conducted on agreements that would require the City to take action to enforce the provisions of the agreements with the JCM and other property owners, as well as on vehicles that will enable future development which benefits the community.

**7. Tenant Protection Strategy: Explore new strategies to work with existing residential tenants and descendants of those displaced by redevelopment, property owners and the City to protect residential tenants from displacement and to place including Certificate of Preference holders, artists, culture bearers, families, younger generations, and employees of community-based organizations) in existing housing**

Surveys of existing Japanese/Japanese American tenants in Japantown, as well as the broader community, should be conducted to determine their housing needs and desires to live in Japantown. The survey results will inform strategies for protecting existing tenants.

Existing residential tenants in Japantown including those who are Japanese/Japanese American should be protected from displacement. Collaborations and education of existing residential rental property owners in Japantown could lead to agreements which protect existing tenants, particularly those who are Certificate of Preference holders, artists and culture bearers, families, younger generations, and employees of community-based organizations, in their properties. Working with Japanese/Japanese Americans who are descendants of Certificate of Preference holders and those who wish to live in Japantown to get their names on waiting lists for existing properties can help to increase the Japanese/Japanese American residential population in Japantown.

**8. Tenant Protection Strategy: Work with existing commercial and nonprofit tenants outside of the Japan Center Malls to negotiate protections and benefits they need to remain in Japantown**

Maintaining Japantown as the cultural heart of the Japanese/Japanese American community also requires the retention of commercial businesses and nonprofits, particularly those which are integral to the fabric of the Japantown neighborhood and have long served the Japanese/Japanese American community. Such organizations must be protected from displacement. Collaborations and education of property owners who have commercial and nonprofit tenants should be pursued to negotiate agreements which protect existing tenants, as well as promote placement of Japanese/Japanese American commercial and nonprofit tenants.

***C. Arts and Culture***

(Strategies 9-11)

**Goal Statement**

- ❖ **Equip, protect, and support the arts & culture community and organizations in Japantown with resources and infrastructure.**

**Background**

The traditional, contemporary, and experimental arts are fundamental to the cultural heritage of the Japanese/Japanese American community. The Japanese American arts and culture community involves a rich array of arts and artists that flows across all creative spectra including visual arts, martial arts, performing arts, acting, theater, writing poetry, and all forms of music both traditional and contemporary. San Francisco has been home to Japanese American pioneers in all genres of the arts. At the same time, while traditional Japanese arts have been part of Japantown's history, they lack visibility. The arts and culture community is dispersed and lacks synergy, their connections and ties to Japantown tenuous.

The COVID-19 pandemic has critically impacted artists and cultural groups' opportunities to produce, showcase and exchange art and culture in the community. They must now rebuild their audience bases and rethink execution of performances and exhibitions. Moreover, as evidenced during the COVID-19 shelter-in-place protocols, virtual "space" for arts and cultural events are needed so that the arts can build and sustain community connections online. As the cultural hub and focal point for Japanese/Japanese American communities, Japantown is the natural nexus for Japanese/Japanese American arts and cultural organizations to confront these critical issues. However, few spaces are available/affordable for artists, arts organizations, and cultural groups to gather, organize, restore their livelihoods, and create. Providing the arts and culture community with physical space that is flexible, multi-purpose, affordable, high-quality, and embedded throughout Japantown will enable them to connect and work with each other, as well as share their work and build/strengthen relationships within the community, and with the public at large. Providing them with online media resources will enable them to build/strengthen relationships with other groups outside of Japantown, as well as bring greater visibility and expand their reach to multiple audiences.

#### **9. Arts and Culture Strategy: Create a virtual and physical Artist Assistance and Media Center**

The Artists Assistance and Media Center is needed to assist existing artists by directing them to resources such as financing, legal services, infrastructure support, permitting and marketing. It would also assist in establishing and increasing an online presence and visibility, provide marketing assistance, as well as graphic design, fundraising and grant-writing. It would start out as an online assistance and resource center for these groups and scale up capacity as it develops. It could also feature a media channel to highlight and cross-promote artists. The virtual Center could use available no-code and low-code software development tools that are easy for non-professionals to use, and are customized to Japanese/Japanese American community values. It could also use Virtual Reality tools to engage corporate sponsors and young creative artists to participate in designing Japantown content with businesses and artists. This could be combined with the Co-Creative Hub (see Strategy 10).

#### **10. Arts and Culture Strategy: Develop a virtual and physical intergenerational Co-creative Hub**

A Virtual and Physical Japantown Co-Creative Hub would provide an intergenerational, multi-use, co-working arts space, that is a versatile space serving the arts and culture community, as well as the broader community. Its various uses could include:

- Intergenerational gathering space/ "hangout" space -- an opportunity for synergy between established artists, emerging artists, and artists in multiple media
- A Makerspace; studio/workshop space/ co-creating space
- Collaborative co-working space & entrepreneur coaching space

- Gallery/exhibition space/art installations
- Performance arts/events & rehearsal space
- Artist Media Channel
- Micro-events programming, including a space for pop-up vendors
- A Japantown museum and Japanese arts and crafts museum
- A Japanese “cultural school” for the transmission of the form, practices and seishin (mind, essence, and spirit) of Japanese art and culture through education and activities
- Artist residency program/ artist incubator lab

In June 2022, Japantown Cultural District launched [KOHO SF](#), the concept of Japantown’s first Co-creative hub. [KOHO SF](#) is a dynamic multi-disciplinary cultural co-creative arts hub in development for and by artists & creators, located in the heart of San Francisco’s Japantown. KOHO SF welcomes all visitors near and far and serves as a beacon for Japanese & Japanese-Americans to return to Japantown to reconnect with authentic culture and community, and preserve and revitalize San Francisco Japantown for many future generations to come. KOHO SF will be a non-profit community arts space and Japantown visitor’s center and activate empty storefronts and public spaces to bring the vision of a co-creative hub to life to attract new audiences and assist in economic revitalization for Japantown. KOHO’s vision amplifies our community’s history and voices through Space Activations, Workshops, Pop Ups, Professional Development, Panel Discussions, Art Exhibits, and Events.

KOHO SF will provide opportunities for the Japantown community to experience and celebrate authentic culture, while also empowering artists and culture bearers. This project will begin as an online platform which will serve as a hub for the arts and culture community. It would provide information for artists and organizations; stream arts & culture education, performances, events, and workshops, and cultivate a network for the Japanese/Japanese American arts community in Japantown and the Bay Area.

As shelter-in-place restrictions are lifted, the online platform could manifest into a network of physical spaces until a suitable permanent space is identified and acquired. These physical spaces could include vacant storefronts, as City policy allows, or underutilized community spaces in Japantown. In the wake of the pandemic, vacancies have increased. Integrating authentic cultural experiences in traditional retail spaces is an emergent model, and a viable potential strategy to uplift the community while also strengthening the future of local business. Spaces that have the highest immediate potential are the Japan Center Malls Visitor Center and Kinmon Gakuen.

KOHO SF will partner and provide funding and technical assistance to existing and emerging arts and culture organizations and artists to mentor and nurture young creatives and emerging leaders, and transmit traditional art forms, building on and expanding existing programs in Japantown. It will be a space where skills and resources are shared between generations,

unique capacities are uplifted, and creative problem solving for Japantown and beyond emerges. This space could also house a visitor's center and the origin of an Arts Committee, as described below.

### **11. Arts and Culture Strategy: Establish a SF Japantown Arts Committee**

The SF Japantown Arts Committee would be a collective/think tank of community-based artists in partnership and close communication with Japantown organizations on common issues and evolving challenges to which art can respond. Art, broadly defined, can serve as a powerful communication tool to engage, unite, and activate the diverse members of the broader community around a united vision and messaging. It can also be used to explore new perspectives and engage in transformative conversations for creative problem solving. The Arts Committee can serve as a vehicle for the use of arts to articulate the community's story, reach other audiences, gain visibility, and develop partnerships to accomplish the creative solutions which the community devises.

The Arts Committee also creates a voice for artists, creatives, and culture-bearers. It could work with the Japantown Community Council (see below) and other organizations in Japantown to remain connected with and in dialogue with the broader Japantown community. Sustainable Little Tokyo's Arts Action Committee, and +LAB, a project of Little Tokyo Service Center in Los Angeles, could serve as a model for an Arts Committee, through its community planning, organizing and development that centers on the arts and creative processes to empower their community.

## ***D. Economic and Workforce Development***

(Strategies 12-17)

### **Goal Statements**

- ❖ **Equip and support small businesses in Japantown with resources and infrastructure.**
- ❖ **Ensure that Japantown remains a thriving commercial, retail and arts district.**
- ❖ **Promote Japantown with donors/investors, the City, Japanese and Japanese American entities and the public.**

### **Background**

As referenced in Tenant Protections, Japantown's commercial district is concentrated on Geary Boulevard, Post and Sutter Streets between Laguna and Fillmore streets. Other businesses are located along the Buchanan Mall and street between Sutter and Bush streets, as well as on Sutter Street between Webster and Buchanan streets. During the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, many Japantown businesses have closed or are facing threats to their existence. Even as

businesses are allowed to reopen, the volume of customers and visitors has declined sharply due to fear of contracting the virus. The survival of the businesses hangs in the balance.

The pandemic has exacerbated broader trends in Japantown businesses. In recent years, some long-time Nisei owners of Japantown businesses have retired, decreasing the number of authentic Japanese/Japanese American-owned businesses that reflect the community. Currently, Japantown lacks relationships with new Japanese companies, which may inhibit those companies from opening stores in Japantown. As with commercial districts everywhere, retail businesses relying on in-store customers have been affected by e-commerce and online shopping. The survival and success of Japantown businesses directly affect the economic and social vitality of the neighborhood, as well as the cultural identity of the Japantown community.

Beyond the current forces of the pandemic, a long-term economic development strategy for Japantown should consider taking steps toward evolving to a Regenerative economy, rather than an extractive economy. This would involve intentional actions to promote collective wealth and prosperity, interdependency, sufficiency without greed, reciprocity, mutual benefit, and equity. In practical terms, this may involve developing properties which provide internal subsidies to residents, businesses, artists, and organizations so they can afford the spaces they occupy, and the local neighborhood economy can be sustained into the future.

#### **12. Economic and Workforce Development Strategy: Create a virtual and physical Small Business Assistance Center**

The Small Business Assistance Center is needed to assist existing small businesses by directing them to resources such as financing, legal services, infrastructure support, permitting and marketing. It would also assist in establishing and increasing an online presence and visibility, provide marketing assistance, as well as graphic design, fundraising and grant-writing. It should build on the strengths of the JCBD and the JTF. It would start out as an online assistance and resource center for small businesses and scale up capacity as it develops. This center can also include a unified Japantown online-shopping platform to increase an online presence and gain more visibility. The virtual Center could use available no-code and low-code software development tools that are easy for non-professionals to use and are customized to Japanese/Japanese American community values. It could also use Virtual Reality tools to engage corporate sponsors to participate in designing Japantown content with businesses.

#### **13. Economic and Workforce Development Strategy: Assist existing Japantown businesses with succession planning**

Assistance with succession planning (e.g., strategies, resources, outreach to interested/aspiring participants) for small businesses and artists could be provided through the assistance and media center as well as supporting older generations of merchants and community leaders to mentor and prepare younger generations to take on leadership. Engagement in the OEWD's

Shared Equity in Economic Development (SEED) initiative could also be helpful in succession planning. Additionally, an incubator and capacity building program for culturally relevant startups and local entrepreneurs should be developed, providing mentorship, skill development, seed grants and fundraising training for new community enterprises.

#### **14. Economic and Workforce Development Strategy: Increase promotion and marketing capacity in Japantown**

Proactive and sophisticated promotion of Japantown and its unique cultural heritage is essential to achieving the vision of Japantown as a culturally regenerative, authentic and economically-vibrant neighborhood. The very act of devising a coordinated promotion program requires collective thinking and action. Promotion can take myriad forms. It can involve outreach for groups and businesses, as well as marketing Japantown businesses, artists, and events in a coordinated and focused way. Such promotion requires dedicated resources and support that incorporate community-generated content and messaging tailored to multiple audiences. Coordinated collective promotion activities are more effective than isolated individual actions in effecting broader community goals.

A unified marketing plan should be developed in conjunction with existing and new community organizations and businesses. With the formation of the Greater Japantown Marketing Committee, which is led by the JCBD, there is an effort underway to create such a plan. Anchored in a web presence linked to multiple organizations within Japantown, it would create a virtual Japantown connected to historic Japantowns in Los Angeles and San Jose. Inclusion of social media marketing, with contemporary Japanese content, such as anime, manga, or J-Pop, would promote Japantown to younger audiences. At the same time, the marketing plan could have content that is tailored to the multiple sectors in the community (i.e., artists, businesses, cultural organizations, community nonprofits), with common messaging around the culture and history of Japantown.

Similarly, expanding active participation, representation, and ownership by Japantown organizations and community stakeholders in the planning processes for existing community events such as the annual Cherry Blossom Festival would strengthen and empower the community to better embrace mutually beneficial opportunities for resource-sharing, and increased visibility and marketing. Such festivals could also leverage its reach through online marketing and streaming.

#### **15. Economic and Workforce Development Strategy: Increase fundraising and partnerships to ensure long-term sustainability and to support CHHESS strategies (co-create collaborative abundance)**

Companion to advocacy and promotion is fundraising, which is necessary for the survival of Japantown. Robust fundraising capacity-building is needed for the Cultural District and for



Japantown organizations. As content for coordinated promotion or marketing is developed, the Cultural District and other organizations in Japantown would expand their networks and revenue streams, share the collective values and stories of Japantown, develop partnerships on innovative projects, cultivate social entrepreneurship, explore community impact investments and shift to a mode of developing collaborative abundance.

To address the impacts of the pandemic, it is imperative that efforts to raise funds, solicit contributions and obtain grants and loans for businesses, organizations and artists be expanded and strengthened.

For the Japantown Cultural District to be sustainable, it needs to develop a business plan and increase its revenue streams beyond its City government grants, through an expanded web presence, and more targeted grant writing and partnerships with both for-profit and nonprofit funding sources. In the past, Japantown organizations have relied on government agencies and existing Japanese and Japanese American donors and supporters. Such organizations, including the JCD should be provided with information and links to companies, foundations and sponsors/investors who may not currently be linked to Japantown, that would be interested in supporting community entities and initiatives. There could be a central online fundraising resource where businesses and organizations could share funder information with each other. The online platforms and websites referenced above should include fundraising components which link the Japantown community to entities or individuals who access those platforms and websites.

The Japantown Cultural District and other Japantown organizations should look past conventional forms of fundraising for ways to network with other Asian American, racial equity, arts, housing, and cultural preservation entities on building creative solutions to common problems. In addition to solution building, this networking could lead to greater access to philanthropy.

The Cultural District, artists, creatives, community-based organizations, and individual experts can also collaborate to build greater community abundance and sustainability by fostering social entrepreneurship and creating new funding vehicles, such as revolving funds for artists and innovative pilot projects or community impact funds that leverage returns from property and business investments to benefit the community at large.

Beyond monetary funding, the Cultural District and other Japantown organizations should undertake joint outreach to organizations, companies, and individuals outside of Japantown, share their collective stories, and gain access to skills, resources and assistance needed to implement Japantown initiatives.

**16. Economic and Workforce Development Strategy: Explore A Visitor Center (Virtual & Physical) to be located inside the Japan Center Malls**

A Japantown Visitor Center has been under consideration for many years. The purpose of the Visitor Center is to provide a central location to orient and inform community members and visitors about Japantown and its history, shops, programs, events, community spaces according to their interests and needs, as well as Japan and travel in Japan. By also providing information about other Japanese/Japanese American cultural sites in San Francisco, such as the Japanese Tea Garden and the Theatre of Yugen, it would truly serve as a hub for broader access to the Japanese/Japanese American community of San Francisco by local, national, and international visitors.

The Visitor Center would offer virtual wayfinding and serve as a physical location for the Artist/Small Business Assistance Center that would house the programming of the Intergenerational Co-Creative Gathering Space. Paid staff and/or volunteers would staff the visitor center and assist visitors. The JCCCNC is developing a mobile app that directs users to a virtual History Walk of Japantown with images from its physical panels. This mobile app could also be augmented with information about businesses, restaurants, and organizations in Japantown to help visitors navigate the community. This website should be closely linked to the Artist Assistance Center and Small Business Assistance Center, and the Intergenerational Co-Creative Hub, and could be accessed on the self-navigation monitor at the Visitor Center as well as through the mobile phone. It could also serve as a satellite site and information portal for the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Northern California (JCCNC) and Japan Information and Culture Center (JICC), an organization of the Japanese Consulate, which could enhance relationships and increase collaboration with these organizations.

**17. Economic and Workforce Development Strategy: Develop partnerships and collaborations with the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), the City, Japanese companies, and eco-initiatives, and other Japantowns and networks**

Partnerships between Japantown and Japanese organizations such as the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Northern California (JCCNC), and Japan Society should be enhanced to realize Japantown's potential as an international cultural and next-generation eco-technological hub, a beacon of innovation and exchange, especially given its location in San Francisco and the Bay Area's global technology center. Such a partnership should involve JETRO, JCCNC, and the Japanese Consulate acting as a conduit between Japantown and Japanese businesses by facilitating relationships, and marketing Japantown as a viable option for both a physical location and virtual hub for investment and involvement. As Japanese businesses have dramatically increased in the Bay Area in the past decade, the potential for collaboration and mutual advancement is vast. Relationships could be

built with Japanese Eco/Technological initiatives and companies, potentially hosting international trade shows to feature their products. For example, Fujisawa Sustainable Smart Town and Kashiwa-no-ha Smart City can provide Japantown with new tools and ways of thinking about its regenerative future.

Partnerships on grassroots levels between Japantown and Japan, neighboring communities, and Cultural Districts, and other Japantowns across the state should also be enhanced. The Osaka-San Francisco Sister City relationship should be revived on a grassroots level if not on a political level. The Japanese English Teaching (JET) program is also a potential partner. Statewide Japantown collaborations could entail virtual festivals and events of all Japantowns, arts collaborations, State-level policy advocacy, and virtual knowledge and best-practice sharing, which will mutually strengthen visibility and resilience for all. Like statewide Japantown collaborations, enhanced partnerships and collaboration with the Fillmore community as well as the other S.F. Cultural Districts -- sharing best-practices and resources and coordinating joint City-level policy advocacy would be mutually beneficial.

Partnerships with multiple City agencies should also be enhanced to realize a Resilient City and a Regenerative Japantown. The Planning Department's Sustainable City & Neighborhoods Initiative and Eco-Districts program, Office of Resilience and Recovery, Regenerative City Assessment & Grid Design for San Francisco, as well as Office of Economic and Workforce Development's Shop & Dine 49 "Driving Shared Prosperity Through Shopping Local" initiative and "SF Biz Connect" can support resilience-planning, as well as stronger business-to-business relationships and visibility of Japantown businesses.

### ***E. Land Use and Housing***

(Strategies 18-22)

#### **Goal Statements**

- ❖ **Preserve, Sustain and Develop Japantown's Physical Assets in support of the Japanese/Japanese American community.**
- ❖ **Re-envision the development of Japantown's physical environment to be ecologically sustainable and healthy.**
- ❖ **Expand housing for the Japanese/Japanese American community and space for its community-based institutions.**
- ❖ **Work with the City to officially acknowledge the impacts of Redevelopment in Japantown, and champion equitable development and housing choice to reverse and repair its impacts on the Japanese/Japanese American community.**

## Background

Land Use in Japantown involves preserving, redesigning, and expanding Japantown's unique physical and social infrastructure. The 2013 Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHESS) presented a comprehensive and groundbreaking vision for the economically vibrant preservation of an ethnic community's authentic cultural character and legacy. The JCHESS provided an extensive compilation of Japantown's tangible and intangible cultural assets, as well as an assessment of Japantown's physical character. It also recommended various strategies around land use and design, such as historic preservation, use of the Japantown Special Use District to attract new businesses, a new Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District to enhance the pedestrian scale and retain the mix of uses in the shopping district, and Japantown Design Guidelines. Many of these strategies have been implemented since 2013.

However, the JCHESS did not provide an overall assessment of specifically projected needs for residential, commercial, institutional, open space or community space. While the JCHESS analyzes the potential for new development based on existing zones, it does not address how such development potential might be realized in order to meet currently projected space needs, as proposed by the community.

For Japantown to remain a vital and dynamic neighborhood, its physical and cultural assets should be developed in accordance with a community-directed vision and master plan for Japantown. Individual property development must be sensitive to the character and fabric of the existing neighborhood, while optimizing the capacity to provide the physical space needed by the community. Within Japantown's limited footprint, densifying development of existing properties, and increasing a pedestrian-orientation should be considered creatively and prudently. Given Japantown's redevelopment history, however, property development should engage and be responsive to community input, as well as invest in community infrastructure and benefits for neighborhood businesses and community organizations. Ideally, property development should be undertaken or managed by culturally competent community-based entities, who act as trustees on behalf of the Japanese/Japanese American community. Also, Japantown's location, with proximity and connections to public transit, provides opportunities for transit-oriented development, which will further enable its sustainable future.

### **18. Land Use Strategy: Work with property owners and community organizations to identify, secure and occupy underutilized space to meet community needs**

In addition to the JCM, multiple properties, including historic buildings which are important cultural assets, are underutilized and need renovation or reconfiguration. The properties should be assessed for their utilization and condition. Once community needs in a space are identified and prioritized, the properties should be evaluated for their ability to meet those needs. If they can be readily occupied, then an occupancy and leasing strategy should be developed to secure

the space for those community uses. If any adaptation or renovation of the space is needed for the community uses, then such adaptation or renovation should be designed, and plans developed and funded, companion to occupancy and leasing. Vacant spaces could also be activated by artists.

**19. Land Use Strategy: Engage in the implementation of the 2022 Housing Element development process during 2020-2022 led by the Planning Department to ensure Japantown's housing needs are addressed in this City policy document**

The City's Housing Element of the General Plan is a state-mandated policy and implementation document that shapes the future of housing in San Francisco, particularly the actions the City will take regarding housing between 2023-2031. The Planning Department led a community engagement process to shape the drafting of the Housing Element 2022 Update from 2020-2022 and the updated Element was adopted by the Planning Commission in December 2022 and the Board of Supervisors in January 2023. These policies address the City's housing needs in terms of adequacy, affordability, racial and social equity, environmental justice, design, resiliency, and livability. The Housing Element is a significant component of San Francisco's General Plan, an integrated statement of objectives and policies. Among other policies, the Housing Element includes policies to provide equal housing opportunities for San Francisco residents, assist in the development of housing, improve, and conserve existing housing stock, and preserve units at-risk of conversion from affordable to market rate. Japantown has engaged in this process by advocating for city agencies and funding to advance the programs and activities recommended in the Element that focus on preservation of existing affordable housing and promotion of additional housing development in Japantown. One of the key idea categories included in the Housing Element is to "Recognize the historic racial, ethnic, and social discrimination in government programs and champion equitable housing choice to reverse their consequences." This key idea is particularly relevant to Japantown because the impacts of the displacement by the Redevelopment have not yet been remedied or reversed, especially in housing.

**20. Land Use Strategy: Develop a Japantown Preservation and Development Vision Master Plan (Community Plan)**

Japantown needs a comprehensive "preservation and development vision master plan" to guide future physical growth and development. It would contain guidelines for the neighborhood's economy, land use, housing, transportation, community facilities, public realm, wayfinding, and streetscape, and should draw from community input, and surveys of existing development, physical characteristics, and social and economic conditions. It should also draw from the extensive precedent documents and legislation which address land use, physical design, and historic preservation, such as: the JCHESS (2013), Japantown Special Use District

(2006), Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District (2017), and the Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines (2019).

A Japantown Vision Master Plan would include an inventory and assessment of existing facilities/resources, building on the work of the 2013 JCHESS, and include the following elements.

- Identify specific historic properties for preservation and protection.
- Identify cultural assets (tangible, intangible) required for a sustainable Japantown.
- Determine the mix of uses and their physical relationship.
- Identify specific properties for development and or improvement.
- Identify transportation / circulation goals and priorities, and address pedestrian safety concerns.
- Explore the use of air rights for development to benefit Japantown, as a remedy to compensate Japantown for the loss of property and diminution of its physical footprint, due to past historic governmental actions.
- Act as a framework for regeneration, including guidelines for resilient and sustainable design and more green natural spaces, including Japanese seasonal trees such as maple, and ginkgo, vertical gardens, and attract private sector investment.
- Further develop design guidelines to reinforce key CHHESS concepts and establish benchmarks for development over time.
- Include a public realm plan, including public, semi-private, and private spaces and public amenities.
- Propose a public investment strategy.
- Identify pedestrian and streetscape improvements, including wayfinding signage.
- Include a phasing and implementation schedule and identify priorities for action.
- Integrate strategies to strengthen resilience in future development, including addressing the impact of earthquake, public health crises, and impacts of climate change including extreme weather (drought, heat wave, storm, fire, etc.) and their impacts such as blackouts, smoke, etc.

The Japantown Vision Master Plan should provide a blueprint for future stewardship of Japantown's physical footprint, based on a community-driven vision for a sustainable, just, equitable and regenerative Japantown.

During the Housing Element process, Japantown Task Force requested, and Planning agreed to work together on a community plan that would accommodate more housing, especially affordable housing, by rezoning property, including increasing height limits and lifting density limits. The Japantown community will continue to work closely with the Planning Department and the Housing Element Implementation process."

**21. Land Use Strategy: Explore opportunities to establish a community development corporation / community land trust / community investment fund or a similar mechanism and work with the City to acquire property for community control**

As proposed in the JCHESS, a Community Development Corporation (CDC) or Community Land Trust for Japantown would acquire and retain control of existing property for the benefit of Japantown, as well as assist in community development. Companion with a Japantown Master Plan, the CDC or Land Trust would identify and assess vulnerable spaces, and opportunities for development for the benefit of Japantown. It may also create social housing, and space for businesses, organizations, institutions, and cultural activities. It could also support economic development activities, working in partnership with JTF, JCBD and other entities, as well as provide technical support, in conjunction with the Small Business Assistance Center. It could also support a community council or consortium in advocacy activities for Japantown, as well as work with JTF on a strategy for Japan Center Malls (as proposed below). It should also explore mechanisms to hold property in trust for the community in ways that are not discriminatory and would allow for “angel” investors to develop property for the benefit of Japantown.

Technical assistance is needed to determine the most effective mechanism for community land acquisition and/or development. In considering different options, the level of resources needed to create and sustain a CDC, Land Trust or Investment Fund should be carefully evaluated. Moreover, depending on which entity is formed, adaptation and evolution of an existing community organization into a CDC/CLT or CIF should be considered. For example, developing a CDC requires considerable expertise, dedicated staffing, and sustainable funding. At the very least, such an entity requires the support of existing community-based organizations in order to succeed. Also, Community Land Trusts (CLT) are difficult to sustain since they require permanent governance, and the complicated management of multiple properties. Per a 2011 study commissioned by the Japantown Task Force and funded by The Ford Foundation, it was feasible to create a CLT focusing on commercial properties. Alternatively, a Community Investment Fund (CIF) would create a network of investors to invest on a project-by-project basis, akin to the Little Tokyo Community Impact Fund. To explore how this may apply to Japantown, JTF/JCD was selected to participate in the second state-wide cohort of the Community Vision Capital Consulting and Genesis LA’s California Community-Owned Real Estate Program (CalCORE), a year-long initiative bringing together 14 BIPOC-led real estate organizations deeply rooted in communities of color and historically disinvested communities.

With adoption of Planning Commission Resolution No. 20738, “Centering Planning on Racial and Social Equity”, the City has an obligation to work with Japantown to identify proactive strategies to reverse the impacts of Redevelopment, including support for land acquisition.



**22. Land Use Strategy: Work with property owners, developers, and the City to develop opportunities for affordable housing that is culturally affirming in design.**

To sustain the vitality of the Japantown neighborhood, more affordable housing is needed. A survey of housing needs of Japanese/Japanese Americans within and outside Japantown should be conducted, to identify the priority groups who would benefit from more affordable rental housing. The survey should include, but not be limited to, groups such as:

- Descendants of those displaced during the Redevelopment era and received the “Certificate of Preferences (COP);”
- Families, seniors, younger generations, and employees of community-based non-profits;
- Community-based Artists and Culture-Bearers.

Development of affordable housing can take place on underutilized sites or in mixed-use projects (new construction or renovation). Property owners and developers should work with Japantown organizations and the City to incorporate affordable housing in their projects. A Japantown new housing development strategy should explore the possibility of setting a percentage of new housing for targeted affordable rental units that is higher than levels required by City policy. Depending on the survey results and the income levels of those needing housing in Japantown, the affordability levels of new housing in Japantown should be set accordingly.

Tenant selection processes for new affordable housing in Japantown will provide preference to Certificate of Preference holders and provide neighborhood preference in accordance with Chapter 47 of the San Francisco Administrative Code. This will ensure that such affordable housing will be available to community members who would like to live in Japantown, cannot afford market-rate rents there but do not qualify for low-income subsidized housing.

Whether affordable or market-rate, new housing in Japantown should be culturally competent, which at the minimum should be Japanese/Japanese American affirming in design aesthetic and include single and multi-unit options that accommodate varying community needs and lifestyles.

## ***F. Cultural Competency***

(Strategies 23-25)

### **Goal Statements**

- ❖ **Empower, advocate for and proactively promote Japantown.**
- ❖ **Build a strong, multi-generational, and interconnected Japantown across the diversity of the Japanese/Japanese American community, including the Shin-Nikkei (recent immigrant) and Mixed Heritage communities.**
- ❖ **Share and embody the narrative, spirit and essential values of Japanese/Japanese American culture.**

### **Background**

Given that the Japantown neighborhood has shrunk, and the Japanese/Japanese American population has dispersed, it is imperative that a reinvigorated Japantown community be proactive in ensuring that its cultural identity is preserved as it evolves. Japanese cultural values -- Gaman or Perseverance; Jihi or Compassion, Wagou or Harmony, Seishin or Spirit/Mind/Essence, Isshoni or Together -- have guided the Japanese/Japanese American community throughout its history in San Francisco, contributing to its resilience despite displacement, incarceration, and urban renewal. While the public has grown in its appreciation of Japanese cuisine and products, it has not come to fully appreciate the richness and complexity of Japanese/Japanese American culture and its contribution to San Francisco's diverse cosmology. As a cultural compass, a reinvigorated Japantown would steward Cultural Competency as living evidence of that contribution.

To achieve common goals such as retaining and cultivating Cultural Competency, it is critical that the community is empowered to advocate and work around common mutual goals. This involves collaboration and partnership between organizations and institutions within Japantown. A central collaborative entity can provide a forum and platform to identify common goals, and devise and implement strategic plans and actions to advocate for and realize those goals. It can also strengthen relationships and alliances between groups and individuals by effective mobilization around unified action, providing a mechanism for long-time community leaders to transmit their experience and knowledge of the work to others, potentially identifying emerging young leaders willing to assume responsibility for the community and its future.

### **23. Cultural Competency Strategy: Explore an appropriate model for a Japantown Community Council or Consortium**

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the community proposed exploring a Japantown community council or consortium as an entity to serve as a central collaborative representative coalition and forum where religious, cultural, and community service organizations; businesses, residents, property owners, the Japanese Consulate, and other vested stakeholders could share information, strategize, and mobilize around common mutual goals. The objectives of this entity would be to enable a broad array of stakeholders and constituencies in Japantown to advocate, advise, and participate in issues affecting them, as well as to create cohesion and coordination in building consensus, resource-sharing, and planning for Japantown. It is important that the entity be as inclusive as possible, to accommodate multiple voices and viewpoints.

A Japantown community council could:

- Respond to crises such as the coronavirus pandemic with action plans developed in advance;
- Work closely with an Art's Committee to strengthen relationships, build solidarity, and create networks of reciprocity beyond neighborhood borders;
- Support discussions and negotiations with the property owners of the Japan Center Malls on new or stronger agreements, and consultations with other property owners and organizations on occupancy/renovation strategies for existing underutilized spaces and buildings;
- Develop a pipeline for leadership development and mentorships for young adults, as well as promotion of young adult leadership in existing and new organizations;
- Conduct surveys to gain a better understanding of how Japantown is perceived from inside and outside the community; and
- Develop "Cultural Competency" material that articulates the unique narrative of Japantown to help developers, the City, and collaborative partners work with Japantown and its multiple constituencies.

A community council or consortium would differ from the Japantown Task Force (JTF) as it is currently constituted, in that it would be more representative of different stakeholders in the community and allow for direct and timely input from those stakeholders. Different models for such a council or consortium, including those with and without decision-making authority, should be studied before a particular model is selected. These include the Little Tokyo Community Council, and the Japantown Community Congress of San Jose. The community council could be created as an advisory group to JTF, or it could be initially an arm of JTF, and spin off as an independent entity. Alternatively, it could be established as a separate entity from the start, in which JTF is a participant.

**24. Cultural Competency Strategy: Initiate inclusive, intergenerational conversations about Japantown's history of displacement and its impacts on the community as part of the broader communities of color in America**

It is critical for the Japantown community to continue efforts to come to terms with its history to shift its energy from survival to growth. The trauma of repeated displacement creates an additional, internalized emotional burden that can impede a community's self-determination. Generational trauma, if confronted, can be healed. Events like Day of Remembrance of Executive Order 9066, which led to the wartime incarceration, and community-sponsored access to the work of experts in this field (e.g., psychologists Satsuki Ina and Donna Nagata) are vital to the healing process from the trauma of incarceration during World War II. The trauma of displacement by Redevelopment should also be addressed. In the tradition of oral history, inclusive and intentional intergenerational conversations about Japantown's history of displacement will allow Japanese American elders to share their personal and family histories with younger Japanese Americans and Japantown community members. This would include the history of community-building and Japanese/Japanese American contributions made in coalition with other communities, from commerce (e.g., developing the San Francisco Flower Mart) to non-profit (e.g., saving the Buchanan Street YMCA for the Western Addition). Such sharing is also necessary to create a bond with newer community members, Shin-Nikkei, and others who are not informed about the community's history and experiences – both painful and triumphant – in a society where race prejudice has touched the lives of all people of color, and shaped Japanese American culture and perspectives as distinct from Japanese culture. These conversations can lead to collectively exploring remedies to the impacts of racial prejudice and displacement, as well as help to build regenerative shared community leadership and cohesion.

As referenced above, Japantown and the Black communities of the Fillmore District/Western Addition share a long history of racial discrimination and exclusion from public services prior to the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 as well as forced removal due to Redevelopment in the late 1960s, early 1970s. Marginalized communities that learn from each other are stronger together. For example, the Black reparations movement that has gained momentum in California and other places across the country can refer to the successful redress and reparations effort of the Japanese American community. And, in fact, without the support of the Congressional Black Caucus, the Civil Liberties Act of 1987 (HR 442), the legislation that authorized redress payments, would never have been enacted.

In 2021, the Japanese American Religious Federation launched We Are One, a faith-based collaboration between Japanese American and Black religious leaders to promote interfaith, interracial communications. Conversations between and among Japantown and the Fillmore District/Western Addition leaders and residents can lead to collectively exploring remedies to the impacts of racial prejudice and displacement, as well as help to build regenerative shared

community leadership and cohesion to stimulate the shared commercial corridor, amplify our connections and shared histories through the arts, and acquire housing allocated for the return of our families to our neighborhood who were displaced by Redevelopment.

**25. Cultural Competency Strategy: Explore the creation of an intergenerational community permaculture edible garden with programming**

Community members seek to connect to authentic and traditional aspects of Japanese culture through Japantown. This is especially true for younger community members attracted to ancestral/indigenous aspects of Japanese culture as evidenced in food, music, and the arts, embracing values and “purpose-based spaces” and Earth-based cultural connections. One example would be a community permaculture edible-garden or farm, where connections to traditional Japanese food and food practices such as fermentation and pickling can occur. Japanese American history is tied to agriculture and young adults could be empowered by connecting to that history. A connection to the “Nihonmachi farm” could also promote deeper levels of investment in the community and the physical space of Japantown as a whole. The garden can serve as an educational center for children, a source of fresh local produce for the community; a place for intergenerational community engagement; open space for disaster management; a resource for recreation, leisure, health, and wellbeing; and a space for transformative education on Japanese culture, as well as exploration and exchange of traditional knowledge. It could also aid in community-sustenance, and a potential CSA (community supported agriculture) program, which could generate an economy based on exchange of produce. Culinary artists could also be involved to create Japanese organic and regenerative food experiences. Potential sites for the garden should be identified and evaluated, and collaboration with organizations with some degree of existing gardens, such as Kokoro, Nihonmachi Little Friends, and Rosa Parks Elementary School, on the opposite side of Geary Boulevard, should be explored.

### (III) Conclusion – Collaboratively Moving Forward Together

San Francisco Japantown Cultural District and the CHHESS report create important opportunities for Japanese/Japanese American communities to shape Japantown's future. Through extensive community input and research, the CHHESS strategies have been developed through a truly grassroot process.

The CHHESS was developed amidst the global coronavirus pandemic, and its completion speaks volumes about the community's ability to turn crisis into an opportunity for transformation. Through this formalized collaborative partnership with the City and County of San Francisco's Cultural Districts Initiative to stabilize its unique cultural assets and prevent them from disappearing, the Japantown community expects not only to survive these crises, but also become truly resilient and thrive into the future.

Realizing the Japantown Cultural District vision and goals through the implementation of its strategies will depend on the engagement and determination of the broader community, in continuous collaboration with the City. This CHHESS, a living document, is a roadmap to guide the implementation of strategies for Japantown sustainability and resilience over the next few years. The direction San Francisco Japantown goes today will determine the fate of the nation's first and oldest Japantown, a unique and enduring cultural asset which makes San Francisco a world class city.

There are two primary recommendations on how the City and Community should move the work forward –

#### Next Steps

##### ❖ COORDINATION OF STAKEHOLDERS

- Representatives of the Cultural District Steering Committee will meet with Cultural District leaders to develop incremental benchmarks to achieve the strategies laid out in this CHHESS report. CHHESS Report check-ins will take place quarterly.
- Per the Cultural District Legislation, MOHCD will report on progress made on the CHHESS.
- The Cultural District will report back to their stakeholders, partners, and community members on the progress of the CHHESS report and specifically the strategies and recommendations

##### ❖ WORKING COLLABORATIVELY

- The Cultural District's strategies and recommendations serve as an opportunity for community and City Departments to align goals and leverage efforts.

- The City implements many initiatives and programs that are in line with the strategies put forth in this report.
- It is important that we bridge gaps, streamline, and coordinate our collective efforts to improve outcomes for San Francisco's communities in need.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Economic Recovery Task Force and Dream Keeper Initiative Alignment

On the following page you will see how two important City Initiatives compliment and align with the Cultural District Program. First, the Economic Recovery Task Force has put forth a set of recommendations that align with both the Cultural District Program Areas and Japantown Cultural District's community generated strategies.

Second, the Dream Keeper Initiative, under the leadership of Mayor Breed and the Human Rights Commission has developed a roadmap for reforming public safety and addressing structural inequities in San Francisco for the Black community. The Cultural District Program looks to this incredible leadership and innovative effort for guidance and an opportunity for building racial and cultural solidarity. We are stronger together. "When one succeeds, we all succeed". - Kendra Spencer

### Cultural Districts Program and Economic Recovery Task Force Alignment

Cultural Districts Program Areas	Economic Recovery Task Force Recommendations	Japantown Cultural District Strategies & Recommendations
<b>1. Historic/Cultural Preservation</b> - Preserve and develop cultural and historic buildings, businesses, organization, traditions, arts, events, and District aesthetics.  <b>3. Arts and Culture</b> - Attract and support artist and cultural enterprises	<b>8. Imagine and Build Stronger Neighborhoods:</b> activate and draw upon San Francisco's unique neighborhood and cultural assets	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Support improvements to Peace Plaza.</li><li>2. Support improvements to Buchanan Mall/Osaka Way in collaboration with Nihonmachi Parking Corporation (NPC) and Japantown Community Benefits District (JCBD).</li><li>3. Utilize tools for preservation of historic buildings and structures.</li><li>4. Building more cultural and environmental programming into arts, community organizations and businesses with focus on Japanese traditional eco-culture.</li><li>5. Create an accessible digital archive from existing physical and digital archives held by multiple community organizations through collaborative efforts.</li><li>9. Create a virtual and physical Artist Assistance and Media Center.</li><li>10. Develop a virtual and physical intergenerational Co-creative Hub.</li><li>11. Establish a SF Japantown Arts Committee.</li></ol>

<p><b>4. Economic and Workforce Development</b> - Promote jobs, tourism and economic opportunities that stabilize the district's economy</p>	<p><b>1. Local Economic Stimulus:</b> explore policies &amp; investments that encourage economic development and activity</p> <p><b>2. Job Connections:</b> facilitate and improve connections to jobs and explore programs that hire local workers</p> <p><b>5. Pursue Economic Justice:</b> narrow the wealth gap and bridge the digital divide for low-income residents and communities of color</p>	<p>12. Create a virtual and physical Small Business Assistance Center.</p> <p>13. Assist existing Japantown businesses with succession planning.</p> <p>14. Increase promotion and marketing capacity in Japantown.</p> <p>15. Increase fundraising and partnerships to ensure long-term sustainability and to support CHHESS strategies (co-create collaborative abundance).</p> <p>16. Explore a Visitor Center (virtual and physical) to be located inside the Japan Center Malls.</p> <p>17. Develop partnerships and collaborations with the Japan External Trade Organization, the City, Japanese companies, and eco-initiatives, and other Japantown's and networks.</p>
<p><b>2. Tenant Protections</b> - Protect tenants from displacement and promote affordable housing and homeownership</p>	<p><b>6. Invest in Housing:</b> incentivize the construction of affordable housing, an immediate and long-term need</p>	<p>6. Develop and implement a Strategic Plan to address the Japan Center Malls (JCM) Covenant Agreements, the adjoining properties between Laguna and Fillmore Streets, and the future of the properties, and negotiate Benefits Agreements with JCM and other owners.</p> <p>7. Explore new strategies to work with existing residential tenants and descendants of those displaced by redevelopment, property owners and the City to protect residential tenants from displacement and to place Japanese/Japanese American Certificate of Preference holders, artists, culture bearers, families, younger generations, and employees of community-based organizations in existing housing.</p> <p>8. Work with existing commercial and nonprofit tenants outside of the Japan Center Malls to negotiate protections and benefits they need to remain in Japantown.</p> <p>18. Work with property owners and community organizations to identify, secure and occupy underutilized space to meet community needs.</p> <p>19. Engage in the Housing Element development process during 2020-2022 led by the Planning Department to ensure Japantown's housing needs are addressed in this City policy document.</p> <p>22. Work with property owners, developers, and the City to develop opportunities for culturally competent affordable housing.</p>

<b>5.Place Keeping &amp; Place Making</b> - Create and support programs that support businesses/industries that advance Cultural District	<i>(See 1. Economic, 2. Job Connections, and 8. Imagine and Build Stronger Neighborhoods)</i>	20. Explore opportunities for a community oversight infrastructure to establish a community development corporation / community land trust / community investment fund or a similar mechanism and work with the City to acquire property for community control. 21. Develop a Japantown Preservation and Development Vision Master Plan (Community Plan).
<b>6.Cultural Competency</b> - Promote culturally competent and appropriate City services, policies, and narratives	<b>7.Meet the Basic Needs of the Vulnerable:</b> ensure San Franciscans have access to food, shelter, mental health, and other services	22. Work with property owners, developers, and the City to develop opportunities for culturally competent affordable housing. 23. Explore an appropriate model for a Japantown Community Council or Consortium with dedicated sources of funding. 24. Initiate inclusive, intergenerational conversations about Japantown’s history of displacement and its impacts on the community as part of the broader communities of color in the country. 25. Explore the creation of an intergenerational community permaculture edible garden with programming.

### Cultural Districts Program and Dream Keeper Initiative Alignment

In 2020, Mayor London Breed launched the [Dream Keeper Initiative \(DKI\)](#), a citywide effort reinvested \$120 million over Fiscal Years 2020-21 and 2021-22 from law enforcement into San Francisco’s Black and African American community. This Initiative is part of Mayor London N. Breed’s roadmap for reforming public safety and addressing structural inequities in San Francisco. The Dream Keeper Initiative recognizes the diversity of San Francisco’s Black and African American community and includes investments in a wide range of programs that will support youth, families, seniors, and members of the Black LGBTQ+ community. These investments are designed to improve outcomes for San Francisco’s Black and African American youth and their families and ensure the needs of all family members are addressed cohesively and comprehensively. The Dream Keeper Initiative aims to break the cycle of poverty and involvement in the criminal justice system for the families in City programs and ensure that new investments are accessible to San Francisco’s families who are most in need.

MOHCD is leading efforts to: increase African American homeownership, build the capacity of African American housing developers, and support Cultural District Planning through the lens of intersectionality with and within the African American community targeting engagement to African American residents.

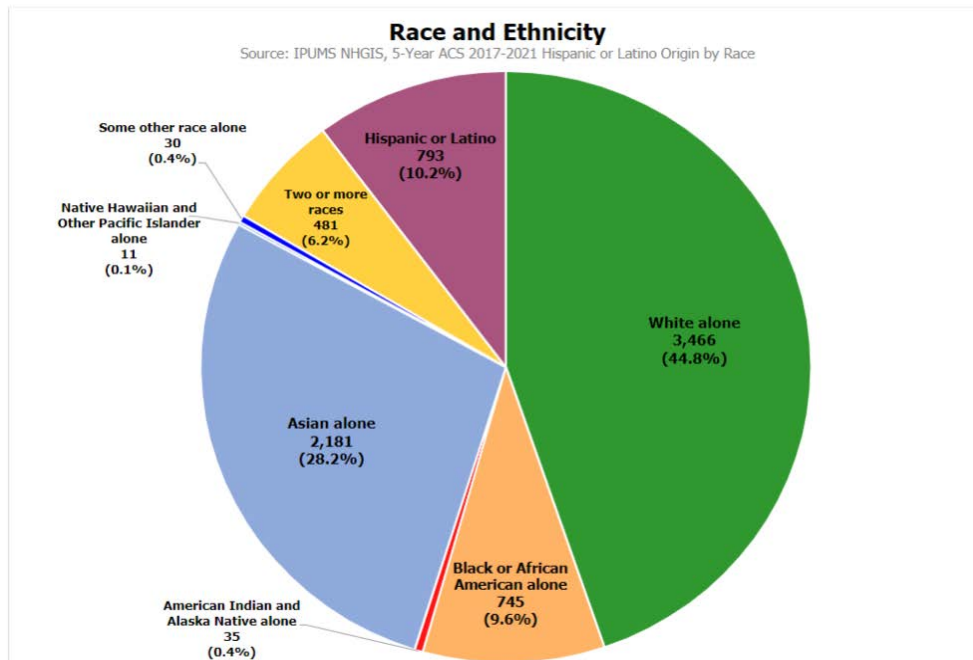
MOHCD is committed to racial equity. Further, as MOHCD facilitates the alignment of the Dream Keeper Initiative and the Cultural District program, SF cultural communities will have the tools not only to look inward, but also consider how their strategies impact and should include Black residents. Moreover, leaders in the Cultural District Program, among both the City and Community, recognize that the upliftment of Black residents, one of SF’s most disenfranchised communities, is integral to the full success of the program.

As intersectionality and equity are key frameworks of DKI as well as the Cultural District Program, it is imperative to consider the alignment of these initiatives in the CHHESS process. The previously mentioned DKI investments and Cultural District priorities—anti-displacement, preservation of unique cultural identities or experiences, and collaborative partnership with the City—are in direct alignment (see figure below).

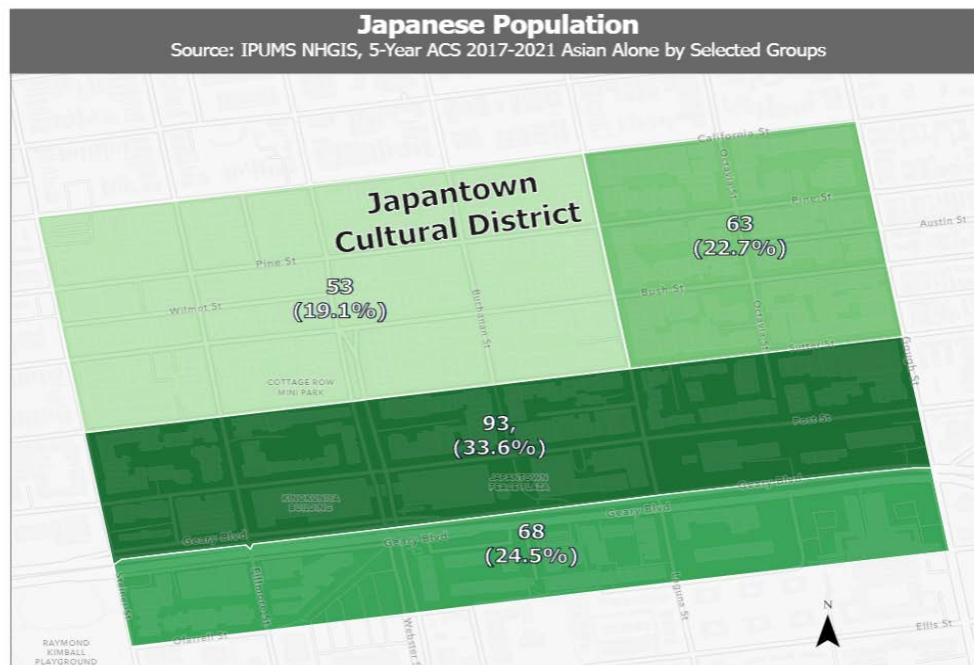
Cultural Districts Priority Areas	Dream Keeper Initiative Framework
<b>1. Historic &amp; Cultural Preservation</b> <b>3. Arts and Culture</b> <b>5. Place-Keeping &amp; Place Making</b>	Culturally affirming spaces that celebrate Black people: Physical spaces that highlight the culture and beauty of San Francisco’s diverse Black communities. These gathering spaces celebrate joy and being in community together and give visitors an opportunity to engage in the expansive experiences of the Black diaspora.
<b>2. Tenant Protections</b> <b>4. Economic and Workforce Development</b>	Growing financial health and economic well-being: City Employment Pipelines; Workforce Training & Development; Guaranteed Income; Business & Entrepreneurship Support; Youth Development- San Francisco’s diverse Black communities’ foundational needs are met, and they have an opportunity at equitable economic growth through homeownership, entrepreneurship, employment pathways in high growth industries, guaranteed income and other income generating opportunities.
<b>6. Cultural Competency</b>	Transformative and intergenerational social-emotional wellness - i.e., physical, mental, behavioral health): San Francisco’s diverse Black communities have access to mental and physical healing and wellness that is created and provided by people with shared lived experience and who practice cultural humility. Families receive support where they are loved and cared for.
	Black-led and Black-centered narrative shift- Using performance, arts, storytelling, and media, Black-led and Black-centered narratives showcase the expansive experiences, stories, and talents of San Francisco’s diverse Black communities. These narratives are created to highlight the rich beauty and brilliance within the Black community.
	Building organizational knowledge and infrastructure- (i.e., capacity building): Black-led and -serving organizations are adept in centering San Francisco’s diverse Black communities. These organizations are financially solvent and growing. Their policies and practices are reflective of wanting to create change so that San Francisco’s diverse Black communities may prosper.

## Appendix B: Japantown Cultural District Data

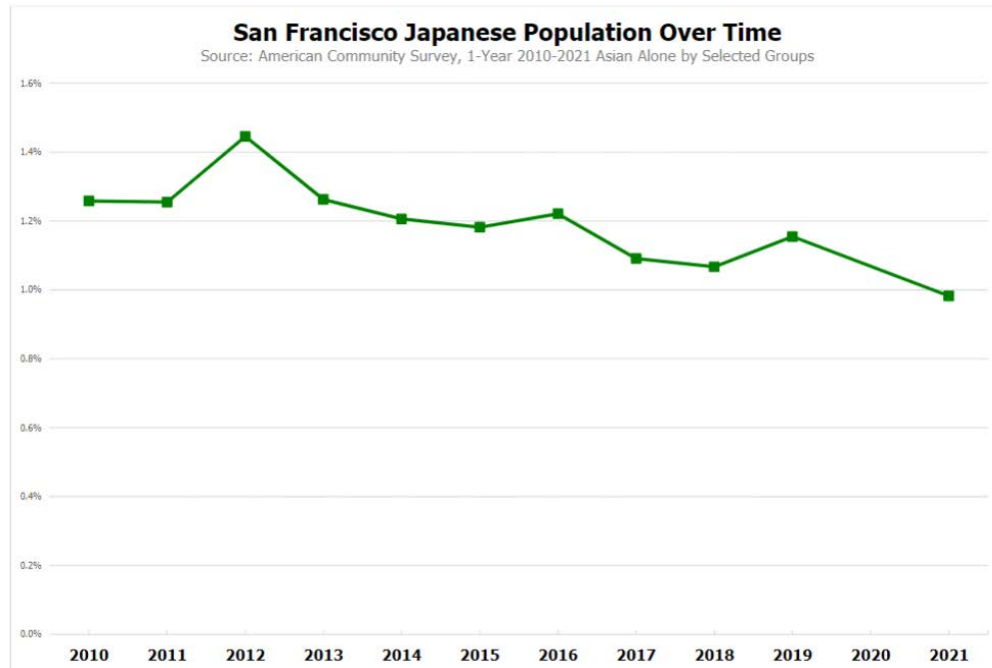
### Race Distribution in Japantown Cultural District



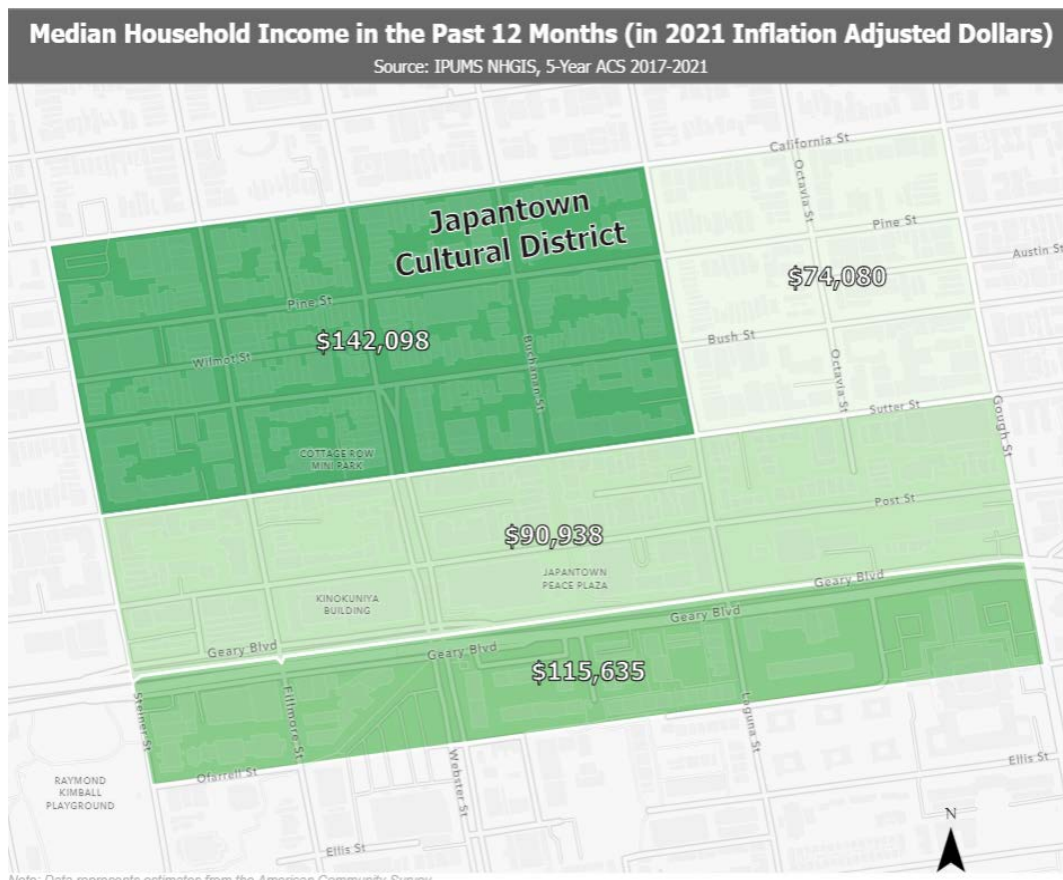
### Japanese Resident population in Japantown Cultural District



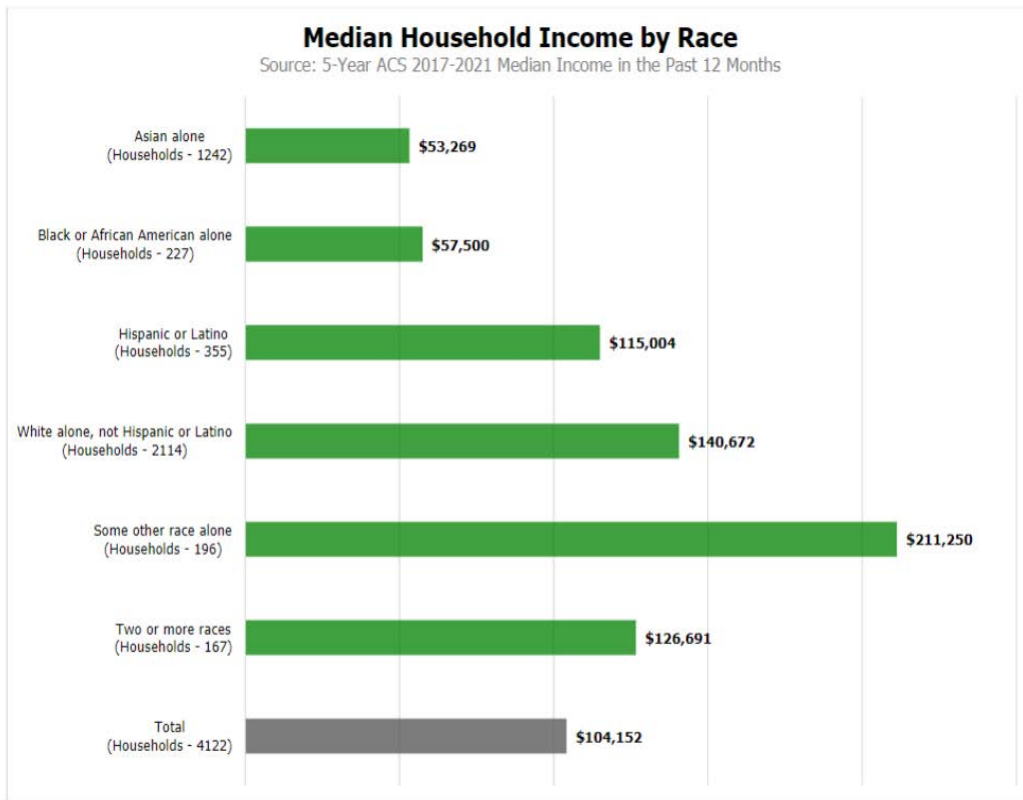
### Japanese Resident Population in SF by Year



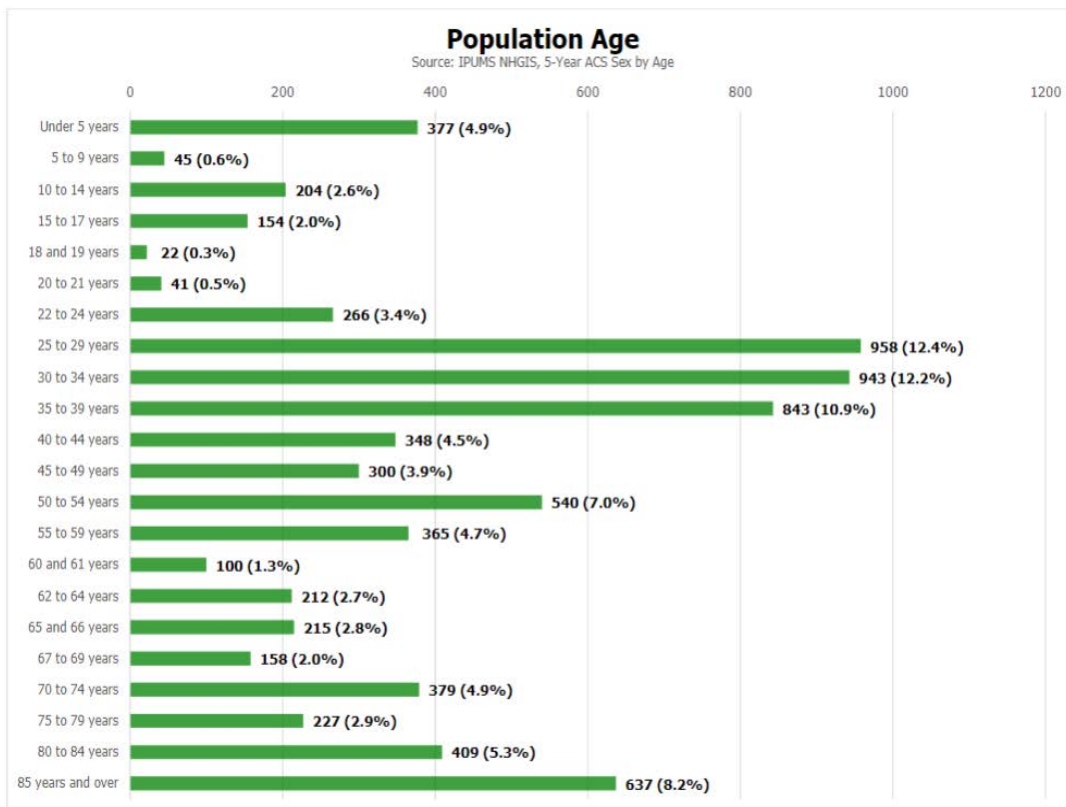
### Median Income of Japantown Cultural District Residents





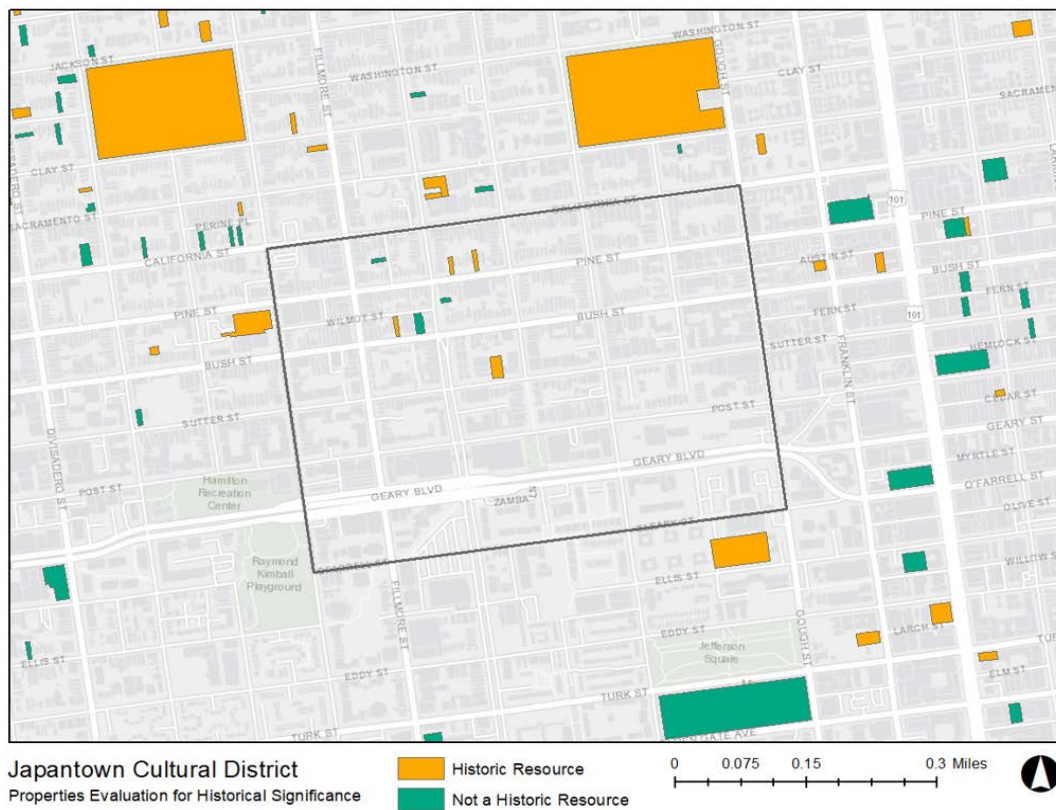


### Japanese Resident by Age in Japantown Cultural District



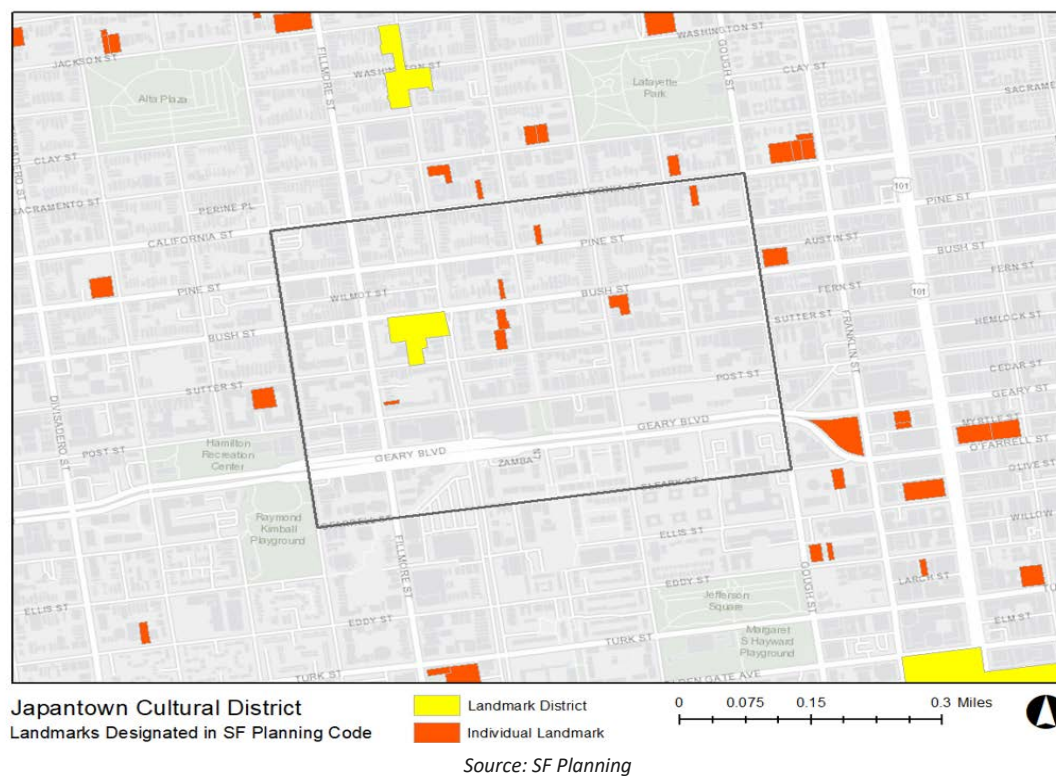
### Historically Significant Properties in Japantown Cultural District





Source: SF Planning

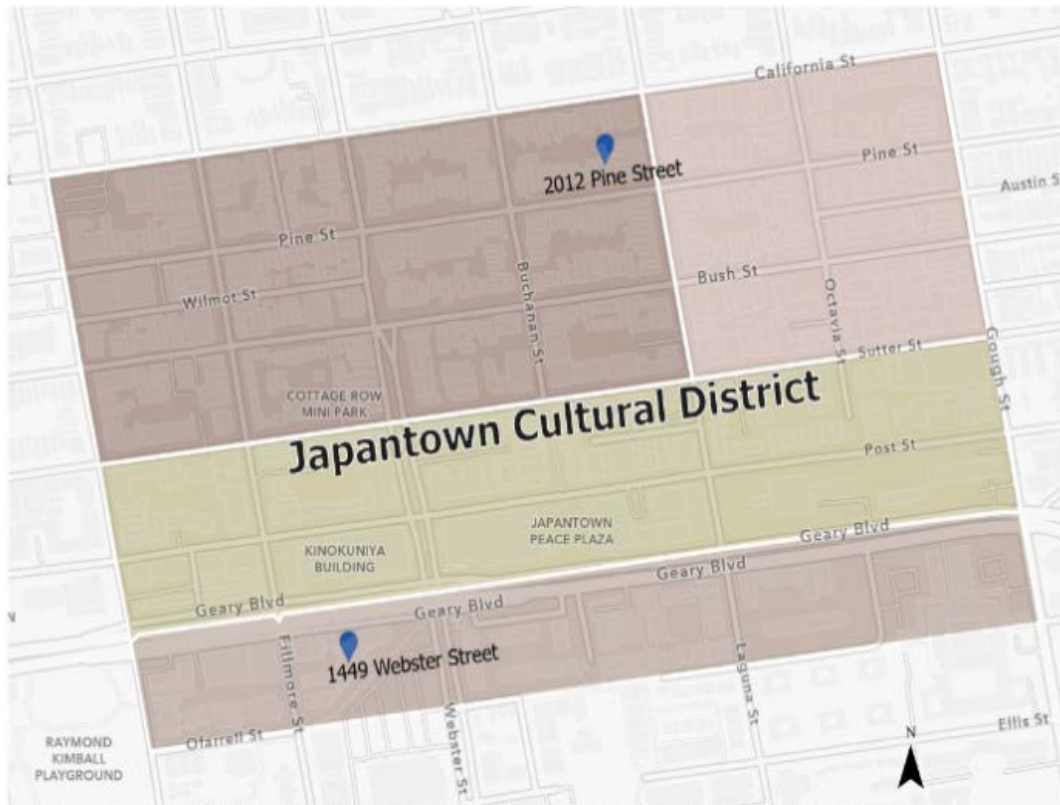
### Landmarks in SF Planning Code in Japantown Cultural District



Source: SF Planning

## Community Development Grant Projects in the Japantown Cultural District

San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development



Source: SF Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development primary dataset of grantee recipients in Fiscal Year 2021-22.

### Recipients of Community Development Grant Funding

#### Grant Project Descriptions

- (1). Job readiness services, primarily for residents of the Western Addition
- (2). Administration of a community action grants program in District 5
- (3). Workforce development services at Plaza East and scattered sites
- (4). Academy case management and other services provided through a black-led coalition of organizations for adults and transitional aged youth
- (5). Cultural District launch funding

#### Agency Names

Projects 1-3: Centers for Equity and Success, Inc.

Project 4: San Francisco Black Leadership Academy (Fiscal sponsor: Centers for Equity and Success, Inc.)

Project 5: Japantown Cultural District (Fiscal sponsor: Japanese Community Youth Council)

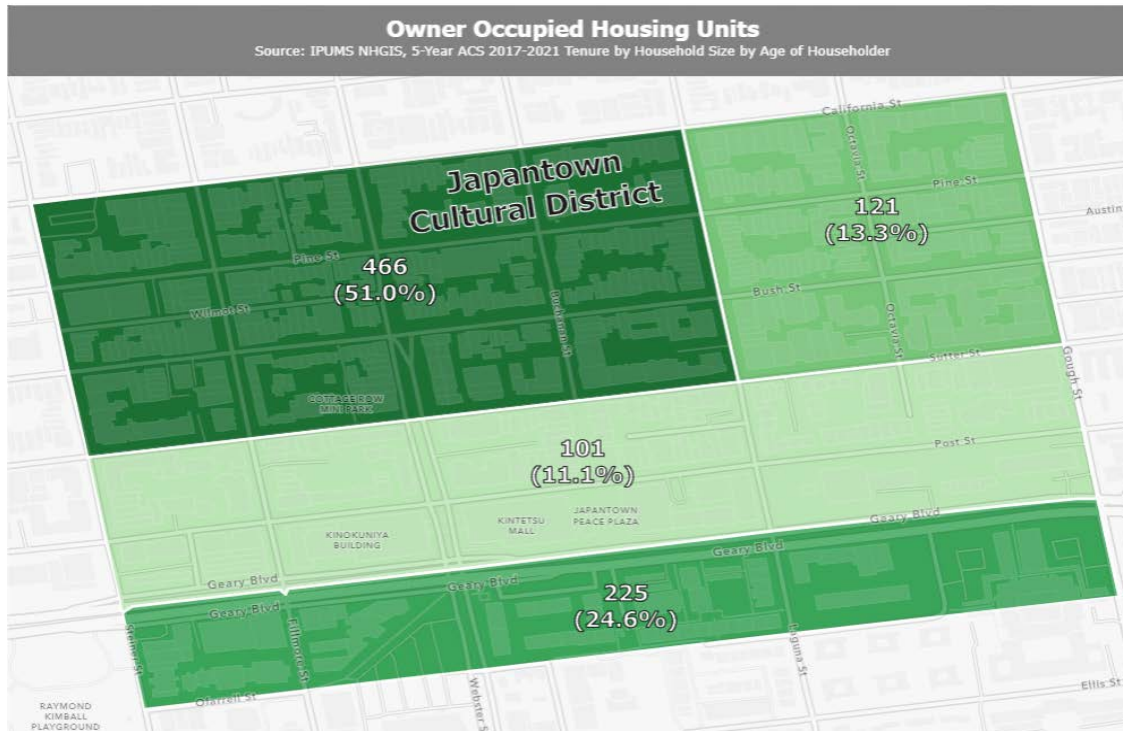
#### Project Addresses

Projects 1-4: 1449 Webster Street, San Francisco, CA 94115 -- Centers for Equity and Success, Inc. & San Francisco Black Leadership Academy

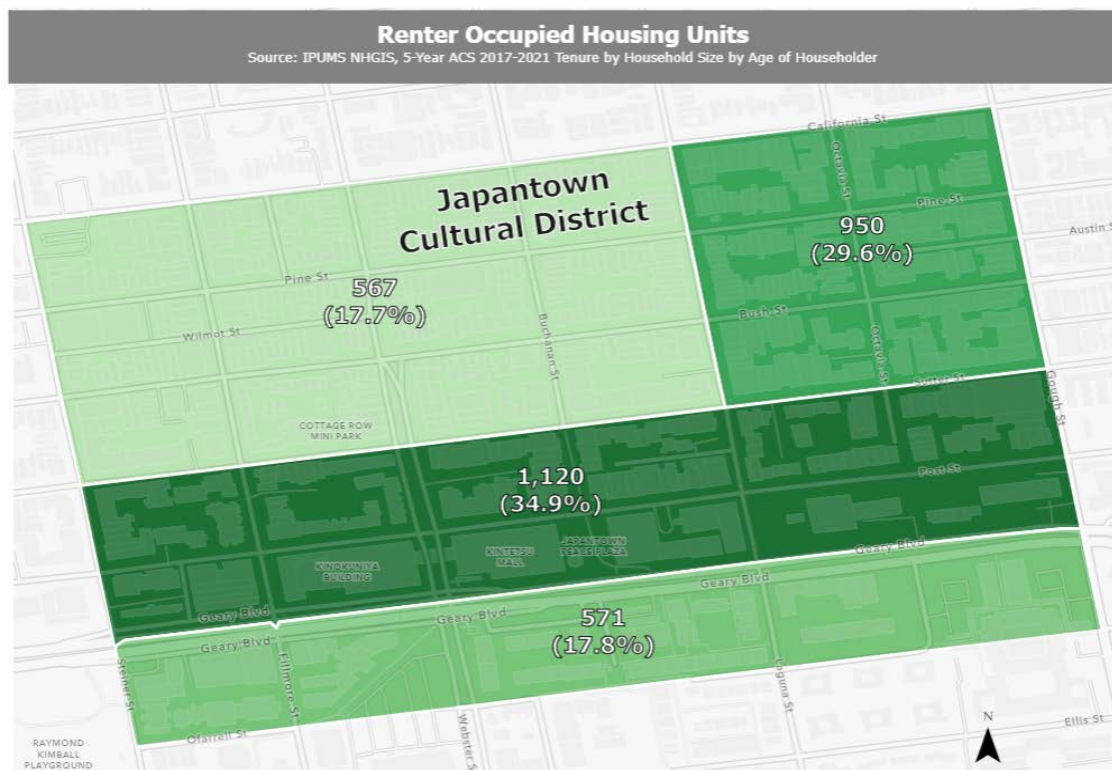
Project 5: 2012 Pine Street, San Francisco, CA 94115 -- Japantown Cultural District



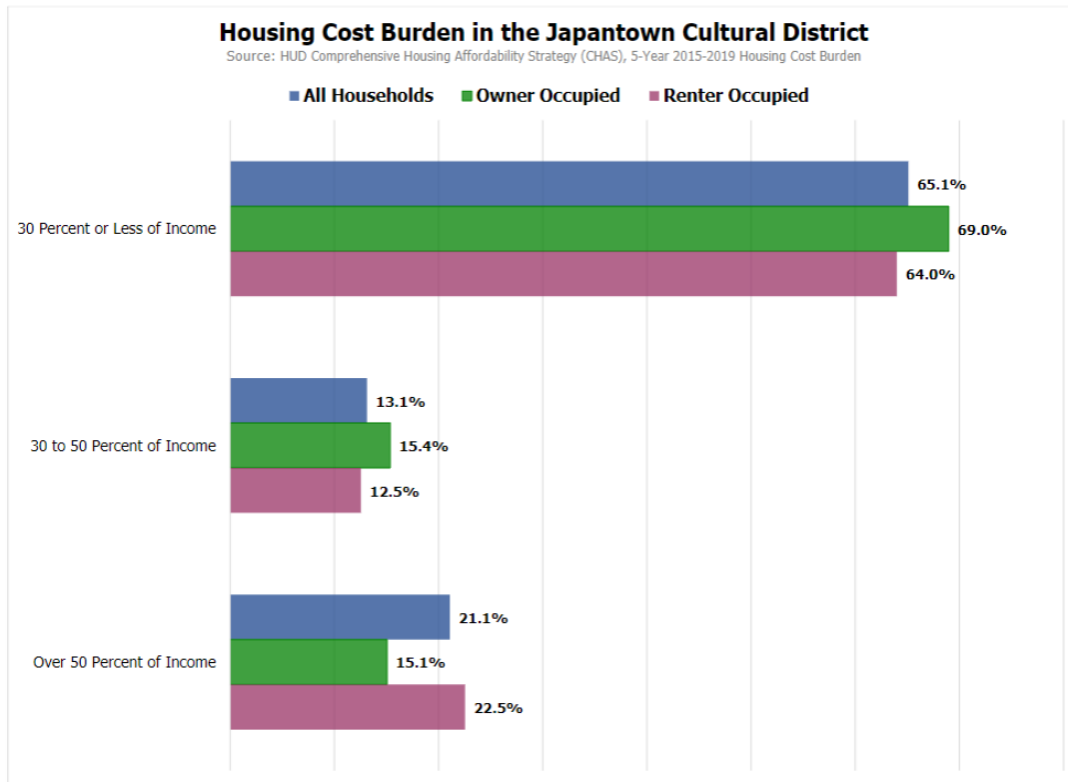
## Owner Occupied Housing Units in Japantown Cultural District



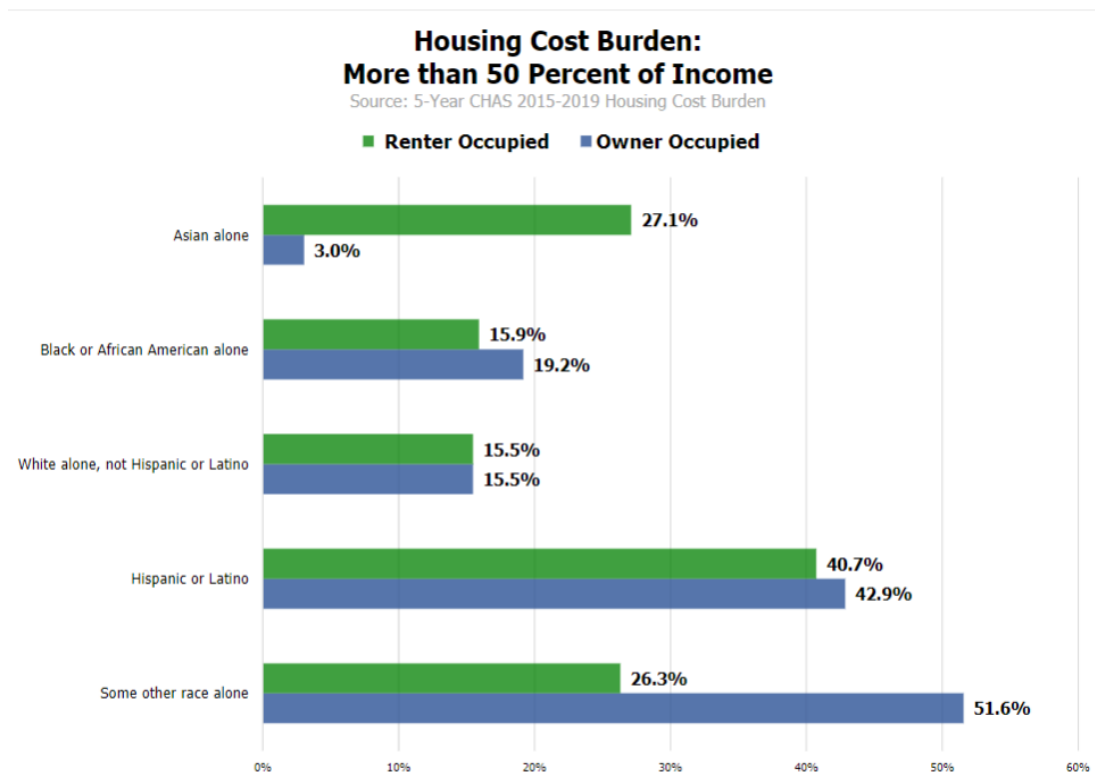
## Renter Occupied Housing Units in Japantown Cultural District



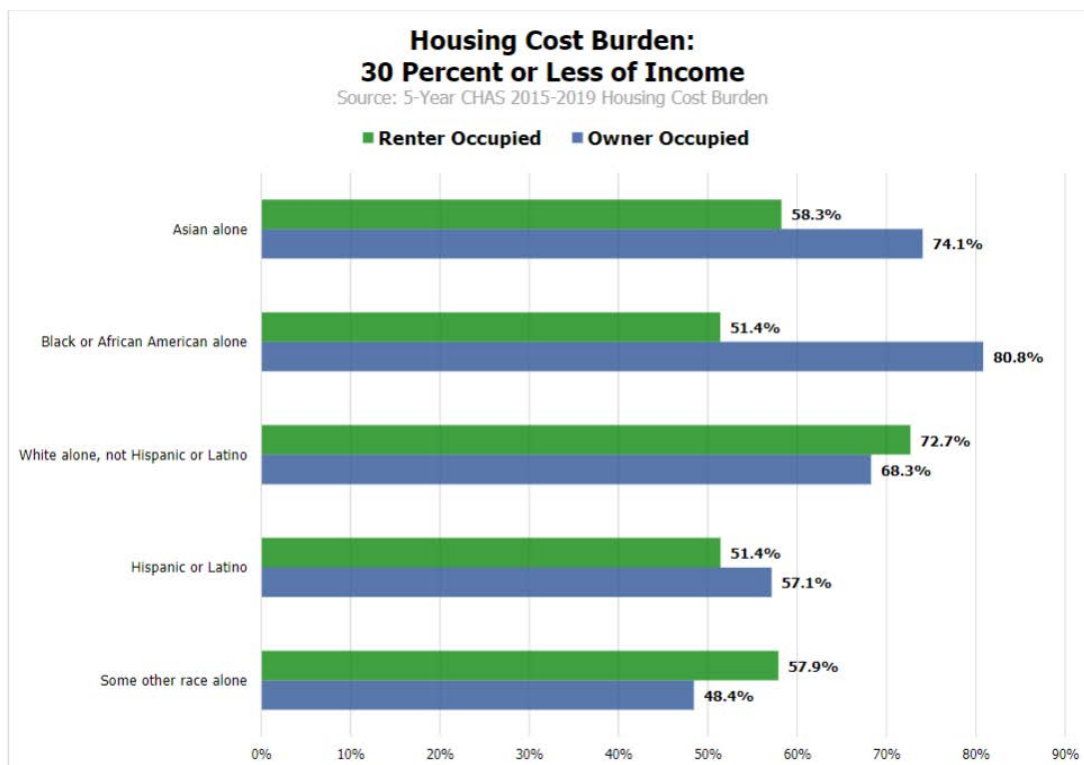
## Housing Cost Burden in Japantown Cultural District



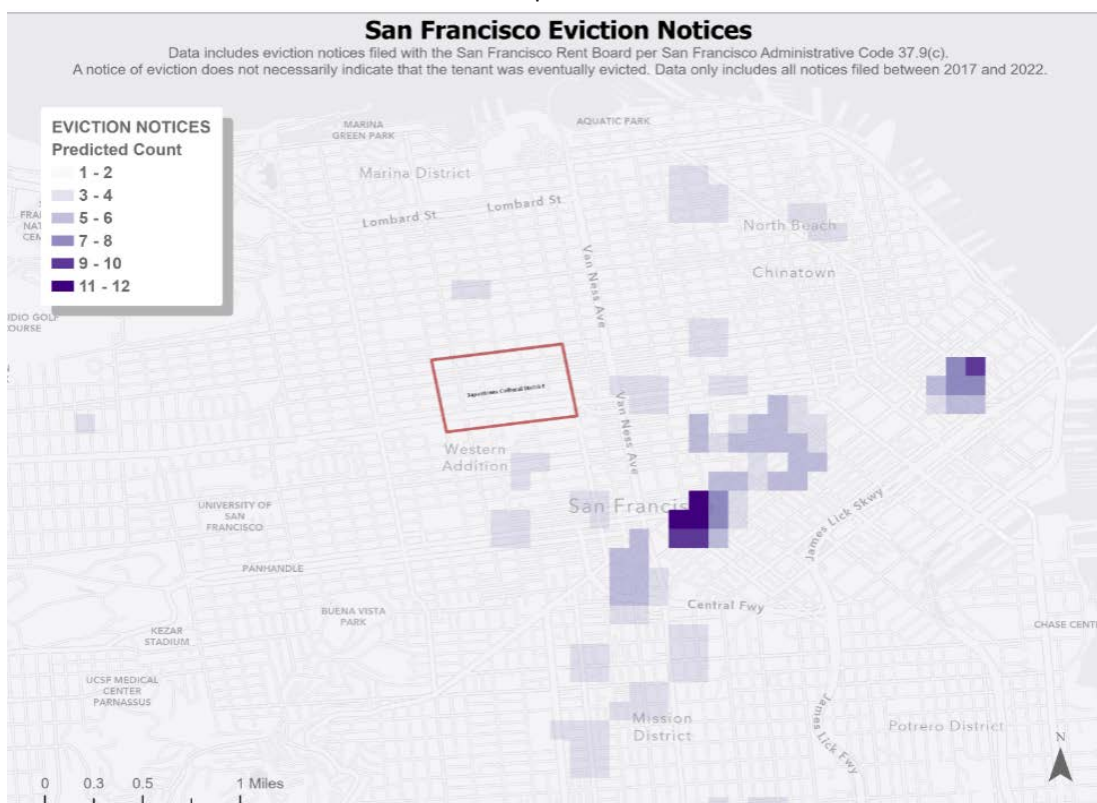
## Housing Cost Burden by Race/Ethnicity in Japantown Cultural District



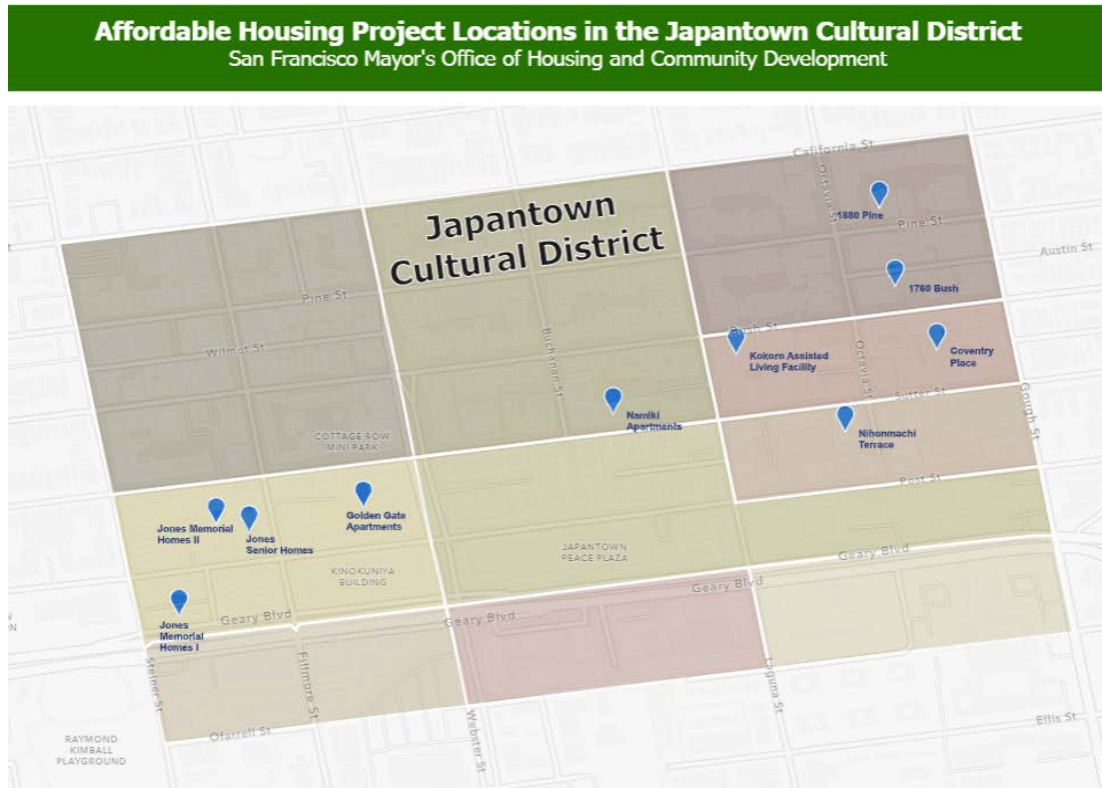
## Housing Cost Burden by Race/Ethnicity in Japantown Cultural District



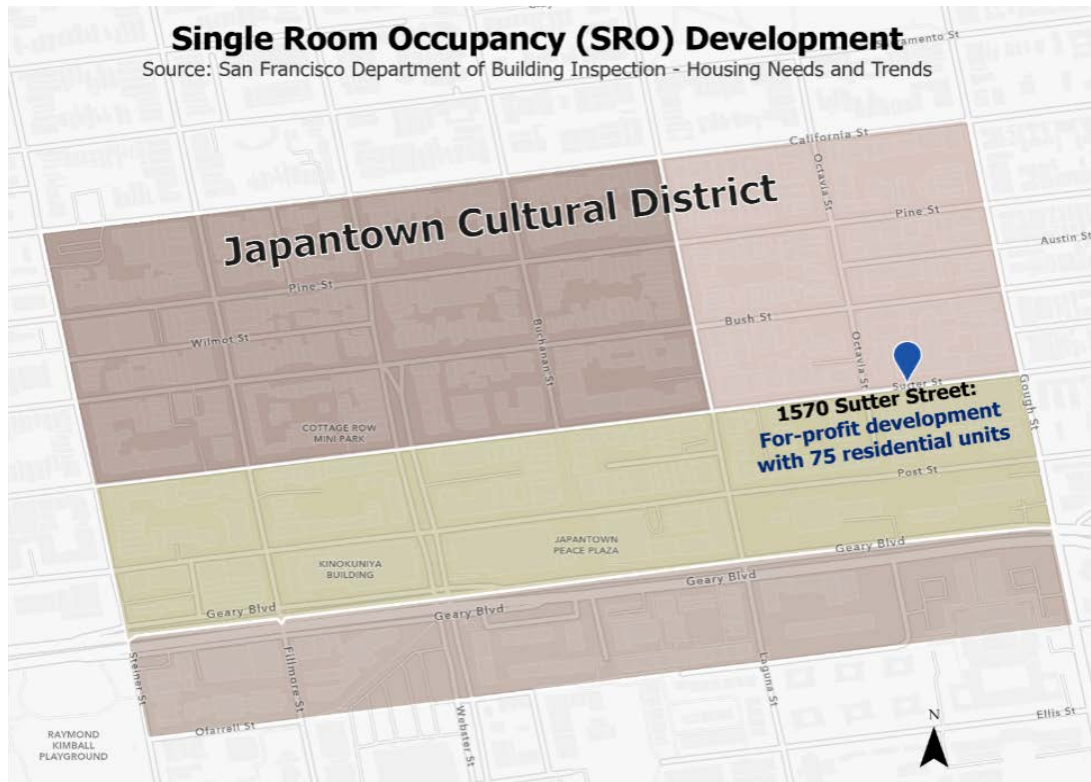
## Eviction Notices in Japantown Cultural District



## Affordable Housing Sites in Japantown Cultural District



## SRO's in Japantown Cultural District

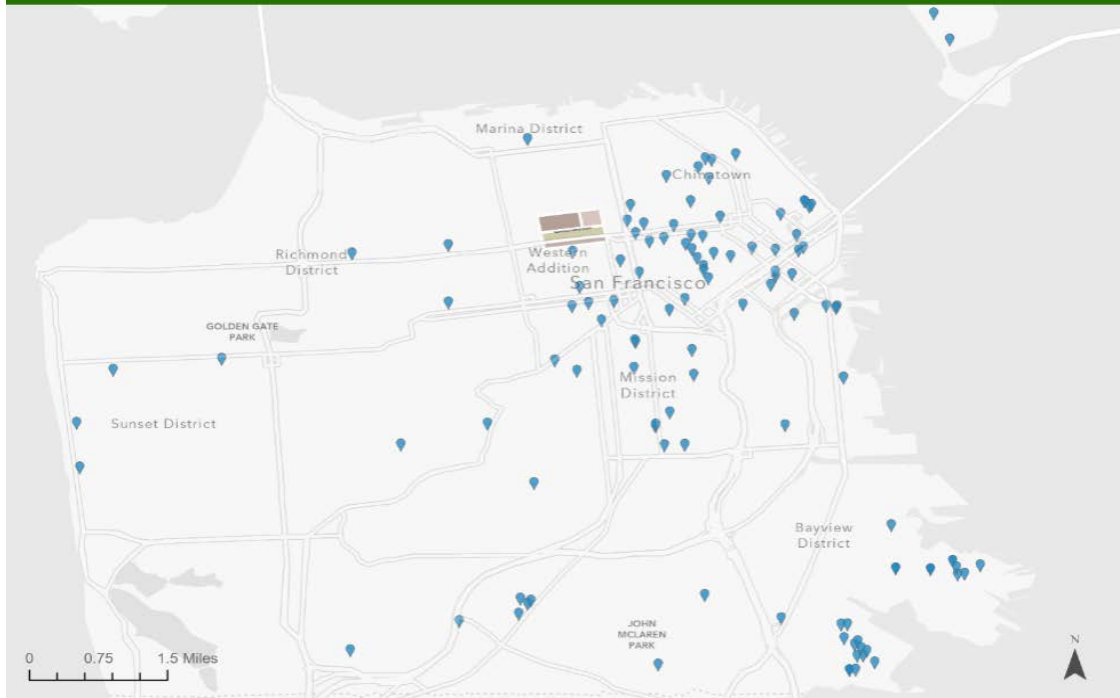




## Residential Pipeline Developments in Japantown Cultural District

### Residential Pipeline Developments in the Japantown Cultural District

Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development





### Civic Art Collection in Japantown Cultural District



Source: San Francisco Arts Commission – [Civic Art Collection Map](#)

*The publicly-sited works in the Civic Art Collection are Ruth Asawa's Origami Fountains.*

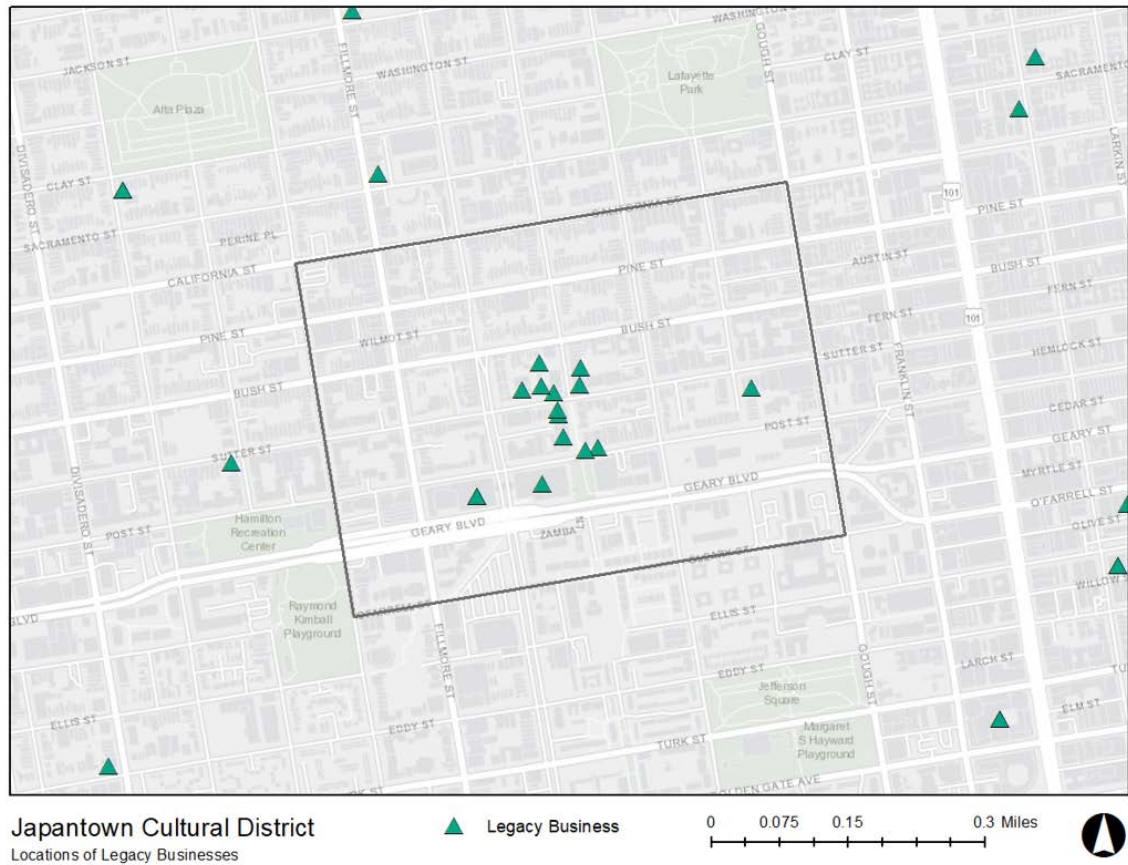
### StreetSmARTS in Japantown Cultural District



Source: San Francisco Arts Commission – [StreetSmARTS Murals Map](#)

*The StreetSmARTS Murals in Japantown Cultural District are by Sean Bullen (1601 Fillmore) and Bryana Fleming (633 Geary).*

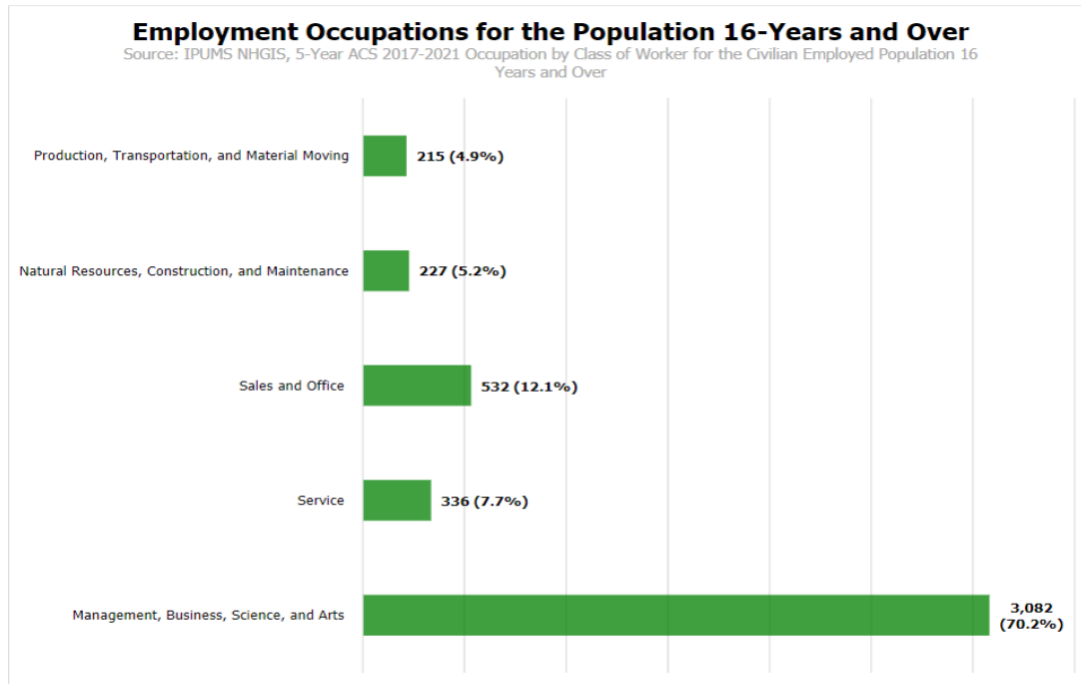
## Legacy Businesses in Japantown Cultural District



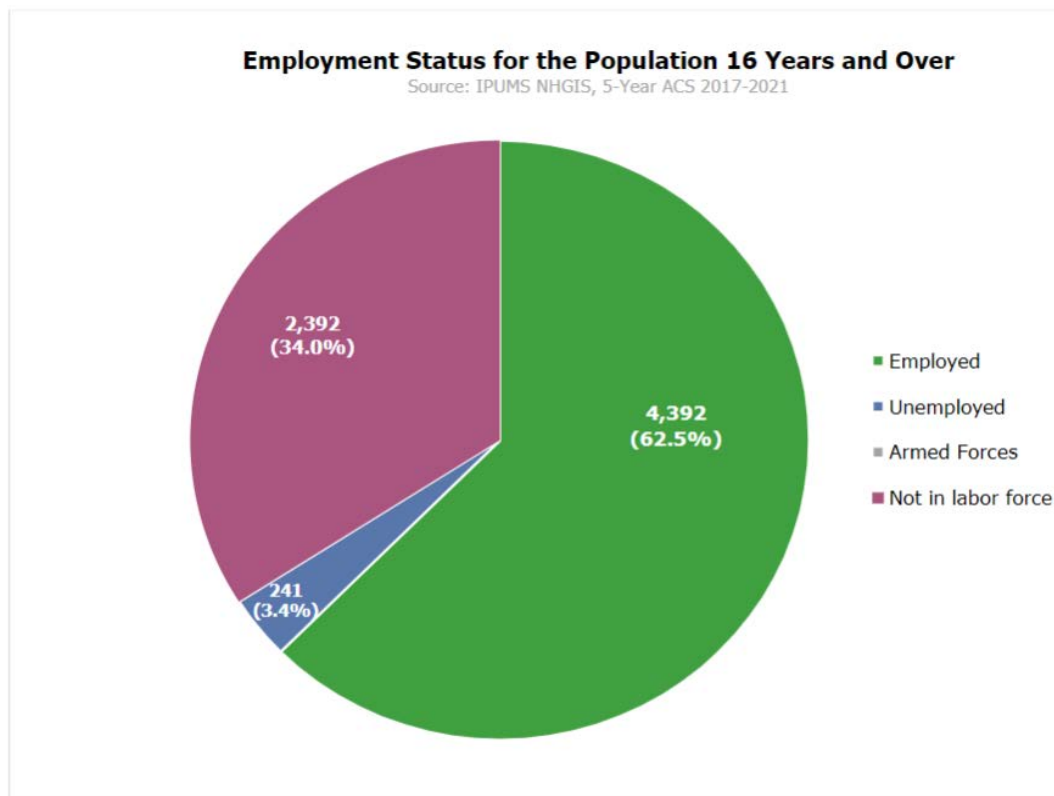
Source: SF Planning

*Legacy Businesses located within Japantown Cultural District are Japan Video & Medi, Paper Tree, Yasukochi's Sweet Stop, Nihonmachi Little Friends, Soko Hardware, Kabuki Springs & Spa, National Japanese American Historical Society, Inc., Nichi Bei Foundation, Mums - Home of Shabu Shabu, Kinmon Gakuen (Golden Gate Institute), and Kimochi, Inc.*

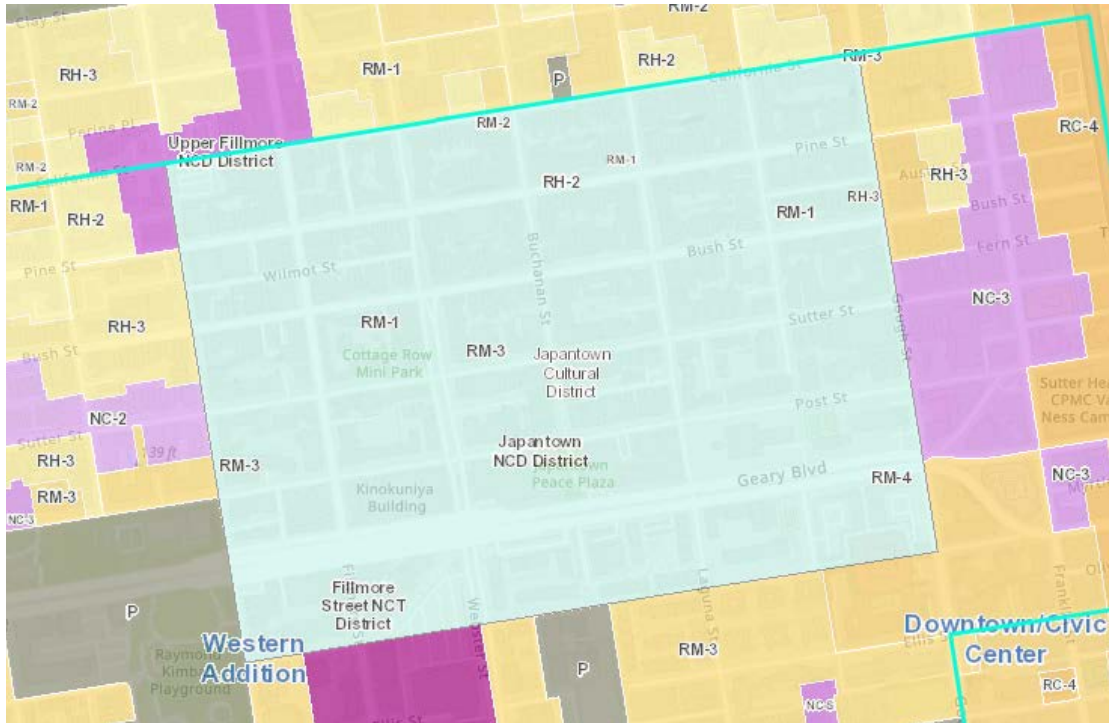
### Employment by Industry in Japantown Cultural District



### Resident Employment Status in Japantown Cultural District



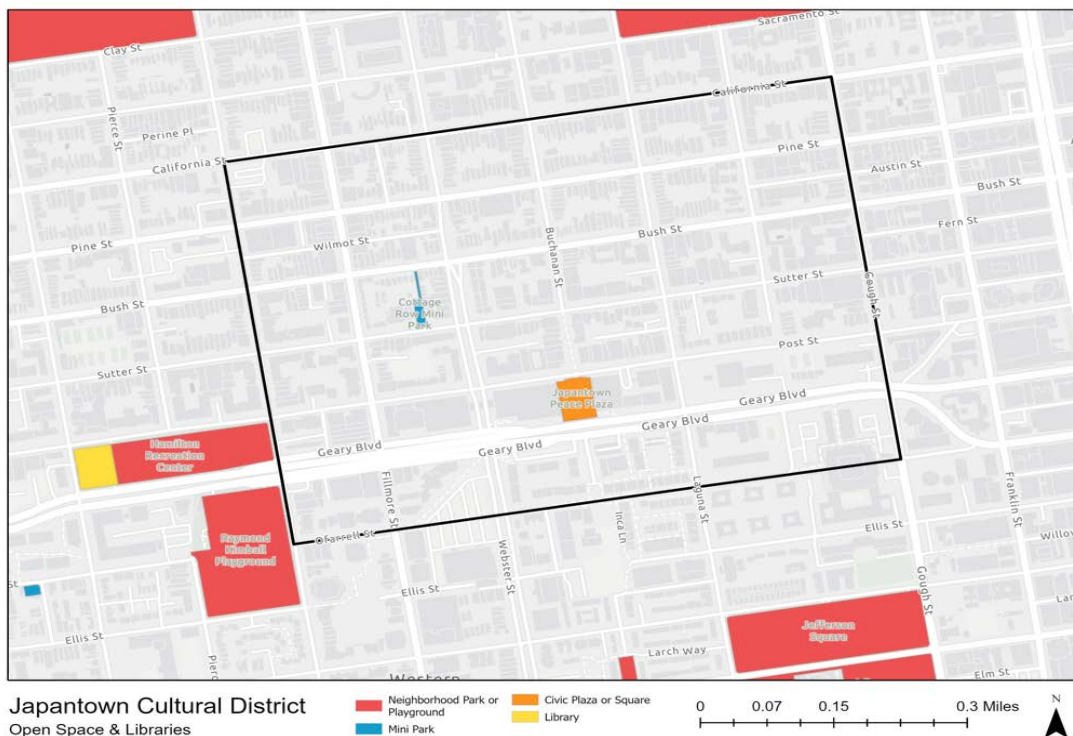
## Zoning Districts in Japantown Cultural District



Source: SF Planning – [Property Information Map](#)

- *RM-1: Residential-Mixed, Low Density*
- *RM-2: Residential-Mixed, Moderate Density*
- *RM-3: Residential Mixed, High Density*
- *RH-2: Residential-House, Two Family*
- *RH-3: Residential-House, Three Family*

## Japantown Parks and Open Space



Source: SF Planning

## Planning Department's Contact List for Western Addition

*The Japantown Cultural District boundary falls within the Western Addition Neighborhood Group List Boundary*

The Planning Department's 'Neighborhood Contact Lists' are created per Neighborhood Boundary as described in the SF Planning Code. For more information you can explore it in this link:

<https://sfplanninggis.org/PIM/map.html?search=3704011&layers=Neighborhoods,Cultural%20Heritage%20Districts>

- ❖ **How is this list created?** Each organization on the list has requested to be notified of projects undergoing Planning review in their neighborhood. It is a fully opt-in system. They can request notifications for as many neighborhoods as they like. It is a free service. Organizations can sign up on our website or call or write.
- ❖ **What are the qualifiers for who is currently on this list?** There are no qualifiers except that you are an organization. This is the link to the application.
- ❖ **How is this list managed and/or updated?** Planning's administrative staff update and manage it as requests come in. Since it's free, there is no need to re-submit requests annually.
- ❖ **What goes out to those on this list?** An email or letter is sent prior to Planning Commission hearings, Zoning Administration hearings, or staff approval of a project application. Notification length is 20-30 days depending on the project type. We also require larger projects to notify the organizations and hold an engagement meeting prior to project submittal (pre-application meeting). Notes from those meetings have to be submitted with the application.

<b>Organizations on Planning Department's Western Addition Neighborhood Contact List</b>
Anza Vista Civic Improvement Club
Marina/Cow Hollow Neighbors & Merchants
Market/Octavia Community Advisory Comm.
Oak Grove Group
Alliance for a Better District 6
Tenderloin/SOMA/WSOMA-Community Planners
San Franciscans for Reasonable Growth (SFRG)
Temescal Terrace Association
Western Addition Neighborhood Association
Board of Supervisors - District 5
Board of Supervisors - District 2
Japantown Task Force
Hayes Valley Safe
Hayes Valley Small Business Association
Lower Haight Merchants & Neighbors Association
Alamo Square Neighborhood Association
Cathedral Hill Neighbors Association
Duboce Triangle Neighborhood Association
Fillmore Merchants Association
Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association
Japantown Community Benefit District
Japantown Merchants Association
c/o Japan Center Garages
Lower Haight Merchants & Neighbors Association
Nihonmachi Little Friends
North of Panhandle Neighborhood Association
San Francisco Land Use Coalition (SFLUC)
San Francisco
Mid-Market Neighbors
Liberation Alliance for Economic and Social Change



## MOHCD Community Development Grantees Located within Japantown Cultural District

Agency Name	Program Name	Program Area
Centers for Equity and Success, Inc.	City Build - IPO Support	Workforce Development
Centers for Equity and Success, Inc.	Access to Opportunity Career Center	Access to Opportunity
Centers for Equity and Success, Inc.	Community Action Grantmaking	Community Building
Japanese Community Youth Council, <i>fiscal sponsor of Japantown Cultural District</i>	Japantown Cultural District	Community Building

## Appendix C: Japantown Community Organizations

The following community organizations and its members were either associated with the creation of or may benefit from one or more of the strategies in this CHHESS report. For a full list of community organizations, visit the Community Assets page on [www.JapantownCulturalDistrict.org](http://www.JapantownCulturalDistrict.org).

### [Buddhist Church of San Francisco](#)

BCSF was founded in 1898, and while remaining true to its Japanese heritage, over the years it has become a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-generational temple community.

### [Christ United Presbyterian Church](#) (CUPC)

CUPC's mission is to ACT justly, LOVE compassionately, WALK humbly with God. CUPC's vision seeks to be a spiritually thriving Christ-centered community that is a living witness to God's love and justice in the world. CUPC is a diverse, intergenerational Christian faith community that seeks to offer opportunities for spiritual growth in our faith journeys. While affirming the importance of our Japanese/Japanese American heritage, we are a congregation that also seeks to embrace imagination and creativity to spiritually empower all who come.

### [Hokka Nichi Bei Kai](#) (Japanese American Association of Northern California)

Hokka Nichi Bei Kai is the oldest Japanese American Community organization. Established in 1895 to better relations between America and Japan, Americans and Japanese, its mission is to continuously work to better relations between Japanese Americans and the public and to resolve problems for the native Japanese speaking Japanese and the American community.

### [Japan Center Garage Corporation](#)

The City of San Francisco Japan Center Garage Corporation is a nonprofit public benefit corporation organized for the express purpose of assisting the City and County of San Francisco to provide oversight of the Japan Center Garages.

### [Japan External Trade Organization](#) (JETRO)

JETRO is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO's core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.

#### [Japantown Merchants Association](#) (JMA)

The Japantown Merchants Association was established in 1968 and is a not-for-profit business organization organized under the laws of the State of California in the promotion and commerce in San Francisco's historic Japantown. Through its members, the JMA goal is to provide a rewarding shopping and dining experience for our visitors. The JMA further promotes cultural and traditional experiences of the Japanese and Japanese American by hosting events and festivals held throughout the year.

#### [Japanese American Citizen League](#) - San Francisco Chapter (JACLSF)

Founded in 1929, the Japanese American Citizens League is the oldest and largest Asian American civil rights organization in the United States. The JACL champions issues affecting the Japanese American and Asian Pacific American communities and advocates for the civil and human rights of all Americans. The San Francisco Chapter has a storied history as one of the earliest to be formed and has been the home chapter to many national JACL leaders.

#### [Japanese American National Library](#) (JANL)

Since 1969, the JANL has served the public as the only national Japanese American resource center that devotes its attention to collecting and preserving primary and secondary source material related to Japanese Americans. The library makes their materials available to the public, and it provides information and referral services.

#### Japanese American Religious Federation (JARF)

JARF is a charitable non-profit organization which provides 245 housing units for low-income elderly or handicapped families and other low-income families on a non-discriminatory basis. The organization is the general partner of Nihonmachi Terrace LP and serves as a general partner for various limited partnerships that are developing low-income housing projects. JARF comprises of the following member churches: Buddhist Church of San Francisco, Christ Episcopal Church, Christ United Presbyterian church, Hokkeshu Buddhist Church, Konoko Church of San Francisco, Nichiren Buddhist Church, Pine United Methodist Church, Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Center, St. Benedict Parish at St. Francis Xavier Church, SF Japanese Seventh-day Adventist Church, Sokoji, Soto Mission of San Francisco, Tenrikyo America West Church.

#### [Japanese Benevolent Society of California](#) (Jikeikai)

As the first entry point into mainland America, San Francisco saw an increase of Japanese immigrants from 1868-1912. In 1901, Jikeikai was the first Japanese organization to obtain California State authorization as a nonprofit benevolent society to provide emergency care to the Japanese and Japanese American people who were sick or suffered a mishap and can't get any help from others, and to create and administer a suitable burial ground for deceased Japanese.



#### [Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Northern California](#) (JCCNC)

JCCNC was founded in 1950 to promote business, mutual understanding, and goodwill between Japan and the United States. In 1951, JCCNC was incorporated as a California nonprofit.

#### [Japantown Community Benefit District](#) (JCBD)

JCBD supports economic business development for property owners and merchants, beautification of public spaces for all to enjoy and a safe livable environment, allowing Japantown to continue to thrive as a culturally rich, authentic, and economically vibrant neighborhood which will continue to serve as the cultural heart of the Japanese and Japanese American communities for generations to come. The JCBD is supported by the City's Community Benefit District partnership with the City to improve commercial and mixed-use corridors in San Francisco.

#### [Japanese Community Youth Council](#) (JCYC)

JCYC's mission is to cultivate and enrich the lives of children and youth from diverse, multi-cultural communities throughout San Francisco and beyond.

[Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California](#) (JCCCNC, or "The Center") The Center strives to meet the evolving needs of the community through offering programs, affordable services and facility usage and celebrates our diverse community and its people, sharing our rich Japanese heritage and customs as a means of recreational, social, and educational enrichment. Founded by the community, The Center is committed to maintaining a Center where people feel welcome, supported, and heard, and providing them the opportunity for growth, wellness, and connection.

#### [Kimochi](#)

Since 1971, Kimochi has provided culturally sensitive, Japanese language-based programs and services to 3,000 Bay Area seniors and their families each year. Services include transportation; referral and outreach services; health and consumer education seminars; healthy aging and senior center activities; social services; congregate and home delivered meals; in-home support services; adult social day care; 24-hour residential and respite care.

#### [Kinmon Gakuen](#)

Established in 1911, Kinmon Gakuen/ Golden Gate Institute served as an educational institution for the children of Japanese immigrants who were not allowed to go to the local schools in the US. In 1924, the State of California granted its recognition as a legal corporation. Over the years, Kinmon Gakuen has grown. With time it has become a venue for Japanese Americans to gather and participate in cultural activities to enrich their lives and those of future generations. Today, Kinmon Gakuen is a language school that teaches not only the language but also the Japanese culture and tradition to anyone interested. Kimon Gakuen is a nonprofit Japanese Language and Culture School organization in San Francisco's Japantown.

#### [Kokoro Assisted Living, Inc.](#)

Kokoro is a 30-year-old non-profit assisted and independent senior living community that provides 54 residential units and blends Japanese and American heritage, culture and cuisine through activities,

celebrations and dining. A vision of the Nisei (second generation Japanese American) community, Kororo wanted to augment the culturally sensitive services available to older Japanese Americans.

#### [Konko Church of San Francisco](#)

Practicing Konkokyo (The Konko Faith), Konko Church is in San Francisco Japantown.

[Nakayoshi Young Professionals](#) is a community development organization sponsored by the JACL for young professionals in their twenties and thirties to address social justice issues through volunteerism and grassroots mobilization, and provide opportunities to network, socialize, and give back within the Japanese American and Asian Pacific American community in the Bay Area.

#### [National Japanese American Historical Society \(NJAHS\)](#)

NJAHS is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to the collection, preservation, authentic interpretation, and sharing of historical information of the Japanese American experience. NJAHS plays a significant role in the health and vibrancy of San Francisco's Japantown and its programs. Our work includes ground-breaking exhibitions and educational events for the public, historical research, and development of educational resources for teachers and students.

#### [Nichi Bei Foundation](#)

Nichibei.org is a community news hub with a Japanese American and pan-Asian American focus. We proudly take the rich tradition of quality journalism produced by the Nichi Bei Weekly's predecessor, the historic Nichi Bei Times, and mix it in with the mission of the non-profit, [Nichi Bei Foundation](#), our parent organization. Nichibei.org is here to provide a portal for sharing pan-Asian American opinions and ideas and for preserving history and culture through our online archives and resources.

#### [Nihonmachi Little Friends](#)

We are a community-based, Japanese bilingual and multicultural childcare organization committed to providing quality and affordable childcare services and committed to providing affordable services for all income levels. Incorporating Japanese language and curriculum, NLF's programs foster children's self-esteem, cooperation, and confidence. NLF was founded in 1975 by a group of parents and community activists who were committed to the idea of offering culturally sensitive childcare for young children in San Francisco's Japanese community. NLF also recognized the importance of the early years in a child's growth and development the critical period for brain development during the first five years of life.

#### [Nihonmachi Parking Corporation \(NPC\)](#)

The NPC operates two outdoor parking lots adjacent to Buchanan Mall/Osaka way. Proceeds from the adjacent parking lots pay for street cleaning and surface maintenance of the Buchanan Mall/Osaka way.

#### [Nihonmachi Street Fair](#) (NSF)

Founded in 1973, the NSF has provided leadership and mentorship opportunities for the youth of [J-Town](#) and to honor the cultural heritage that was, at the time, at risk of being displaced. The two day-event is produced, staffed, and organized by youth volunteers, thus providing practical, hands-on

experience in collaboration, entrepreneurship, and problem solving and engages a broader cultural context participants can experience in addition to traditional Asian-Pacific influences

#### [Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival, Sakura Matsuri, Inc.](#) (NCCBF)

The NCCBF is one of the largest cherry blossom festivals outside of Japan and takes place in San Francisco Japantown in the month of April. It is a two-weekend festival which showcases the vibrant colors and grace of Japanese culture, and the rich heritage and diversity of the Japanese American community.

#### [Pine United Methodist Church](#)

Pine United Methodist Church is a historically Japanese American, predominantly Asian American, LGBTQIA+ affirming church (a Reconciling Congregation) focusing on deepening in faith, social justice & community. Pine UMC is a place of worship whose mission is to facilitate spiritual growth, support spiritual needs, and provide avenues of service so that Christ's love, compassion, and genuine, just peace becomes a concrete, lived reality in our world.

## Appendix E: Resources and References

1. Burlington Associates, Preliminary Business Planning Assumptions - Japantown Community Land Trust (2013).
2. Hodgson, Anthony & H3Uni, <https://www.h3uni.org/online-core-course/>
3. Japantown Community Benefits District, Vision Plan: Revitalization of the Buchanan Mall (2019).
4. Re-Alliance, <https://www.re-alliance.org/regenerative>.
5. San Francisco Planning Code, Japantown Special Use District (Section 249.31) (2015).
6. San Francisco Planning Code, Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District (Section 721) (2017).
7. San Francisco Planning Department, Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines (2019).
8. San Francisco Planning Department, San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development, Japantown Organizing Committee, Japantown Cultural Heritage, and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHESS) (2013)
9. San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, RDA Fact Book (1986), RDA Tentative Plan for A-2 (1964), and RDA Report - Nikkei Heritage, Redevelopment & Urban Japantowns. Vol. XII, No. 4/ Vol. XIII, No. 1 Fall 2000/Winter 2001. Shizue Seigel. Ed (1964).
10. Second Amended and Fully Restated Post Closing Agreement - Miyako Mall (Kintetsu Enterprises Company of America, Miyako Mall, Inc., Japan Center East Associates, 2006).
11. Second Amended and Fully Restated Post Closing Agreement - Kintetsu Mall (Kintetsu Enterprises Company of America, Japan Center West Associates, 2006).
12. The coronavirus pandemic has critically impacted artists and cultural groups' opportunities to produce, showcase and exchange art and culture in the community. - Mark Izu, First Voice et al. <https://www.sgvtribune.com/2017/01/13/victims-of-incarceration-the-life-altering-impact-of-wwii-japanese-american-camps/>

## Appendix F: Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> [Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage - intangible heritage - Culture Sector - UNESCO](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/01-02/bill/sen/sb\\_0301-0350/sb\\_307\\_bill\\_20011014\\_chaptered.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/01-02/bill/sen/sb_0301-0350/sb_307_bill_20011014_chaptered.html)

<sup>iii</sup> Filipino Cultural Heritage District Community Planning Process, SF Planning Department and SoMa Pilipinas Working Group, Progress Report. October 2016.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://sfbos.org/sites/default/files/o0126-18.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> <https://sfbos.org/sites/default/files/o0126-18.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> [https://default.sfplanning.org/plans-and-programs/in-your-neighborhood/japantown/JCHESS\\_FINAL\\_WEB2.pdf](https://default.sfplanning.org/plans-and-programs/in-your-neighborhood/japantown/JCHESS_FINAL_WEB2.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.sfbos.org/about-japantown/>

<sup>viii</sup> [https://sfplanning.s3.amazonaws.com/archives/documents/1862-](https://sfplanning.s3.amazonaws.com/archives/documents/1862-San%20Francisco%20Japantown%20Better%20Neighborhood%20Plan%20Historic%20Context%204.11.08.pdf)

[San%20Francisco%20Japantown%20Better%20Neighborhood%20Plan%20Historic%20Context%204.11.08.pdf](https://sfplanning.s3.amazonaws.com/archives/documents/1862-San%20Francisco%20Japantown%20Better%20Neighborhood%20Plan%20Historic%20Context%204.11.08.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> [https://default.sfplanning.org/plans-and-programs/in-your-neighborhood/japantown/JCHESS\\_FinalDraft\\_07-10-13.pdf](https://default.sfplanning.org/plans-and-programs/in-your-neighborhood/japantown/JCHESS_FinalDraft_07-10-13.pdf)

<sup>x</sup> <https://ncrc.org/gentrification/>

<sup>xi</sup> UC Berkeley Urban Displacement Project, Rising Housing Costs and Re-Segregation of San Francisco, 2018.

Online: [https://www.urbandisplacement.org/sites/default/files/images/sf\\_final.pdf](https://www.urbandisplacement.org/sites/default/files/images/sf_final.pdf)

<sup>xii</sup> UC Berkeley and UCLA, Gentrification, Displacement, and the Role of Public Investment: A Literature Review. March 3, 2015

<sup>xiii</sup> UC Berkeley Urban Displacement Project, <https://ced.berkeley.edu/research/faculty-projects/urbandisplacement-project-considers-transits-role-on-gentrification>

<sup>xiv</sup> UC Berkeley, Urban Displacement Project. Rising Housing Costs and Re-Segregation in San Francisco. 2018.

<sup>xv</sup> San Francisco Planning Department. 2017 Housing Needs and Trends Report. Migration rate is defined as the number of individuals who moved in or out of San Francisco in a given year, as a percentage of the number of people in that income group in that year. The rate is calculated as an annual average over the 10-year period 2006 to 2015.

<sup>xvi</sup> In comparison, the Bay Area's overall Black population had been 8 percent in 1990 and had decreased to 6 percent over the next 15 years. (San Francisco Housing Needs and Trends Report, 2017).

<sup>xvii</sup> San Francisco Planning Housing Needs and Trends Report 2018

<sup>xviii</sup> Status of Bay Area Nonprofit Space and Facilities, March 2016:

[https://ncg.org/sites/default/files/files/news/NCG\\_NPO\\_survey%20report.pdf](https://ncg.org/sites/default/files/files/news/NCG_NPO_survey%20report.pdf)

<sup>xix</sup> <https://sfgov.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=469027&GUID=6CC64454-EE02-4974-948C-421F0A8B57B9&Options=&Search=>

<sup>xx</sup> [https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/san\\_francisco/latest/sf\\_planning/0-0-0-25360](https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/san_francisco/latest/sf_planning/0-0-0-25360)