

JAPANTOWN

SPECIAL AREA DESIGN GUIDELINES



PLANNING COMMISSION INFORMATIONAL
6 December 2019

Japantown history & context

Western Addition Development in 1850s: Storefronts and Victorians.

Post-Earthquake established the physical core formation of Japanese-American Community.

Whether out of frugality or the desire to avoid racial hostility, most buildings, including the Japanese YWCA (1932) and the Buddhist Church of San Francisco (1937), **looked more Western than Japanese.**

In 1942, however, San Francisco's 5,280 **Japanese and Japanese Americans** were forced from their homes by the **wartime internment** of the entire West Coast Japanese American population.

The remnants of the pre-war Japanese American community that began to return to San Francisco in 1945 set to work rebuilding their Japantown neighborhood.

In 1956, after wholesale eviction of residents and businesses, **Redevelopment Phase A-1** began flattening entire blocks of buildings south of Post Street...



Japantown history & context



...**community resistance** led to the creation of the ILWU's St. Francis Square Cooperative Apartments, with landscaping by Lewis Halprin, which became **a model of multi-ethnic cooperative development**, and of the Japan Cultural and Trade Center, which reflected the rise of Japan as an economic and manufacturing world power...

Redevelopment buildings of the 1970s–1980s, such as Buchanan Mall, the JCCCNC, Nichi Bei Kai, JACL, Konko Church and Soto Zen Sokoji Temple, all **proudly express traditional Japanese architectural influences**.

Redevelopment's devastation also gave rise to a new movement within the City



Japantown history & context

From 2000–2001, the 49-member **Japantown Preservation, Planning & Development Taskforce** began the community planning discussion with their Concepts for a Japantown Community Plan.



From 2006–2009, the Japantown Better Neighborhood Planning (BNP) initiative compiled a trove of data about Japantown, but was ultimately rejected...

Adopted in 2013, Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy - JCHES initiated a broader-reaching community review process to create a *ground-breaking* strategy covering community cultural preservation, land use, transportation, and economic sustainability...

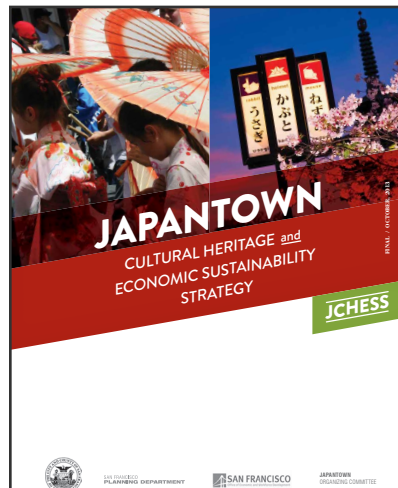
Japantown guideline history

10. Create Japantown Design Guidelines

DESCRIPTION

As described in the existing conditions section, Japantown displays an eclectic mix of building styles, open spaces, landscaping, and public art that contribute to a unique neighborhood character. Japanese inspired design is an element that adds to Japantown's built environment. A draft set of Japantown Design Guidelines were developed by the City and community in order to encourage culturally relevant architecture in new building/site designs and in renovations and additions to older buildings/sites. The draft Japantown Design Guidelines are intended to promote, maintain, and accentuate the authentically expressive qualities of Japanese-inspired designs that contribute to the uniqueness of Japantown.

The draft Japantown Design Guidelines are intended to complement the City's existing design guidelines (described above). Nothing in the draft Japantown Design Guidelines should be interpreted as limiting new development to specific architectural styles, periods of construction, or cultural expressions. These additional Japantown Design Guidelines are intended to embellish building and site development in the neighborhood by integrating Japanese-inspired design aesthetics into suitable building features. The Guidelines specifically speak to building form, massing, ornamentation, materials, and landscaping. It includes sections on "Form and Structure", "Roofs", "Materials and Ornamentation", and "Landscaping, Open Space, and Public Art".



The draft Japantown Design Guidelines are intended to apply to properties within the blocks bounded by Sutter Street, Geary Boulevard, Fillmore Street and Laguna Street, as well as to major development projects located anywhere within the neighborhood based upon recommendations of Planning staff and community input.

BENEFITS

A set of Japantown Design Guidelines can enhance Japanese character and the quality of architectural styles and landscaping in Japantown, thereby creating a more attractive shopping district, improving appearance and cleanliness of the neighborhood and its public space, and enhancing the surrounding cultural and historic landmarks.

CHALLENGES

Design guidelines unto themselves do not guarantee high-quality architecture. Also, given the small quantity of new developments expected in Japantown, there are limited opportunities to implement such guidelines to improve the physical fabric of the neighborhood.

KEY LEADERS

Planning Department, community stakeholders, property developers

NEXT STEPS

The Planning Department should complete development of these Japantown Design Guidelines in conjunction with the community and submit them to the Planning Commission for adoption.

Japantown guideline history

Japantown Special Use District

Planning Code Section 249.31(a)(4)

Encourage the representational expression of Japanese architectural design and aesthetic for commercial, cultural, and institutional uses.

Japantown guideline history

Design guideline concepts as early as 2011.

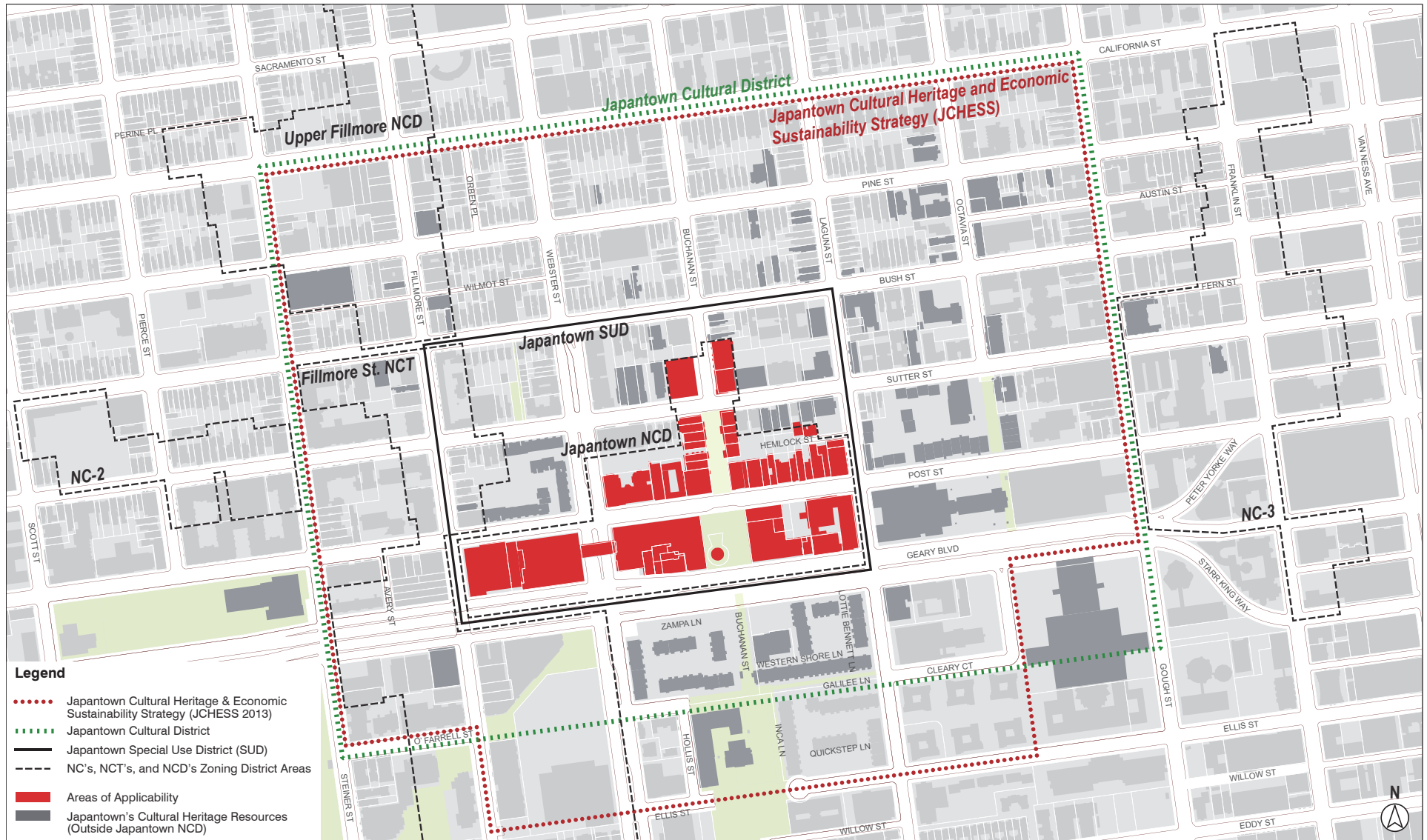
Preparation of the design guidelines continued in 2013-2014 during and after JCHESS's adoption.

Given the overlap with the city's Urban Design Guidelines, this was put on hold until after their adoption in 2018.

In 2019, Japantown's Special Area Design Guidelines was revived, based in or coordinated with many Japantown outreach efforts: JCHESS, Cultural District, Community Benefits District, and Peace Plaza Redesign.



Japantown SADGs Applicability Map



0 250 500 1,000 Feet

1 inch = 300 feet

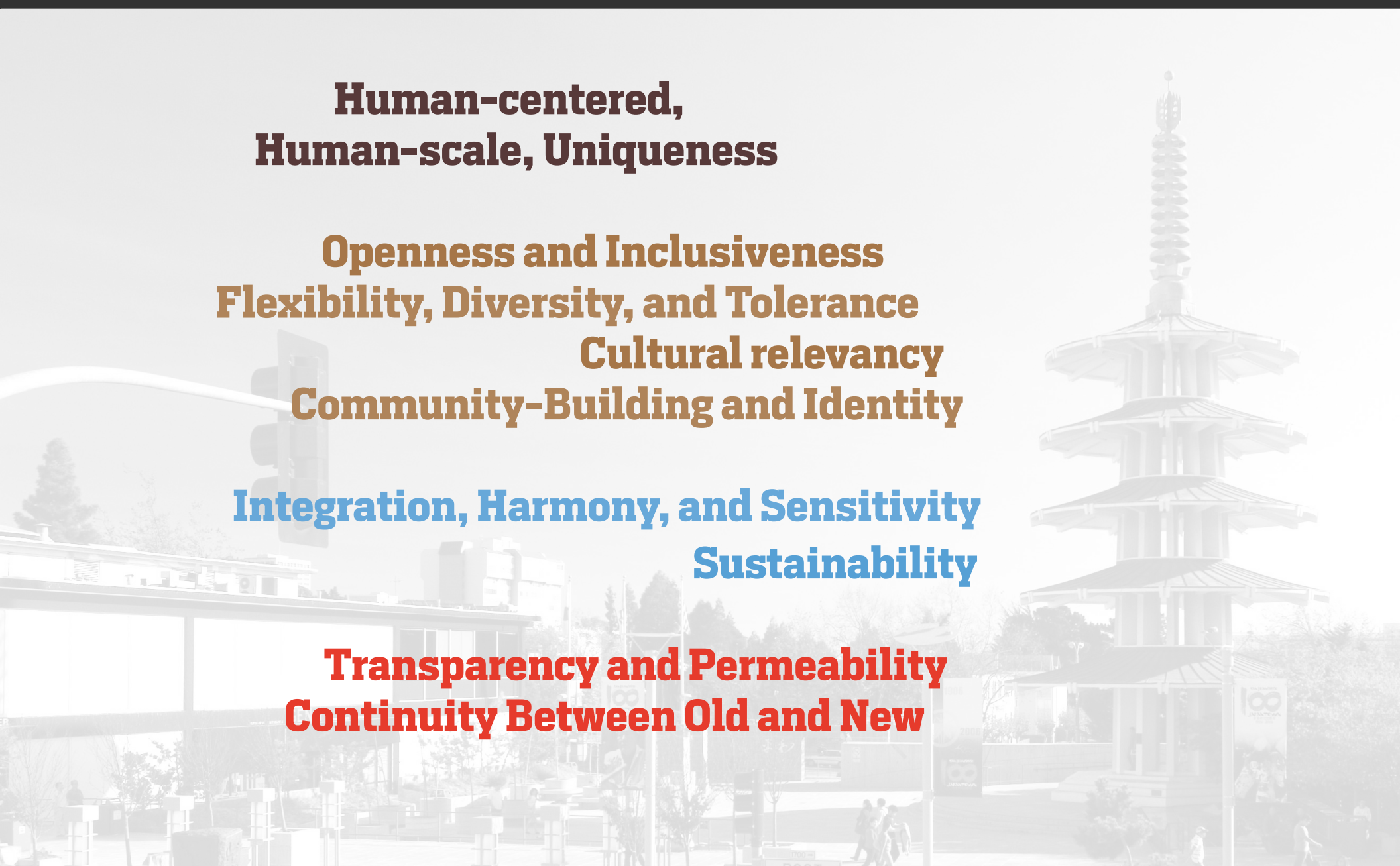
Japantown design values

**Human-centered,
Human-scale, Uniqueness**

**Openness and Inclusiveness
Flexibility, Diversity, and Tolerance
Cultural relevancy
Community-Building and Identity**

**Integration, Harmony, and Sensitivity
Sustainability**

**Transparency and Permeability
Continuity Between Old and New**



Japantown concepts & authenticity

Landscape

Landscape and its related arts have never been “accessories” for the lives of Japanese and Japanese Americans. It is rather a source of identity, an opportunity for spiritual breathing, a place for communication and education, and also inspiration for creative ideas.

The Japanese American experience during WWII also proved that landscape for Japanese American is deeply rooted in their everyday lives. Instead of being crowned in a position of high art, it helped maintain their hope for the future and sense of dignity despite their harsh environmental reality.

Privacy

Japanese houses were often made of thinner external elements with wider windows, which have consequently maintained a certain level of interface transparency. To protect the privacy of each tenant in the neighborhood with narrow streets, Japanese houses were more likely designed to minimize transparency without excluding ventilation routes and natural lights. While maintaining a certain level of privacy, external elements such as **sudare**, **koshi**, or **inuyarai** have allowed vibrant and interactive pedestrian experience through providing them “implications” of interior human activities and structural depth.

Sustainability

Mottainai What a shame to waste
Kodomono no tame ni For the sake of the children

Banbutsu Interconnectedness

*from Envisioning Little Tokyo's Future as a Cultural Ecodistrict Thomas Yee

Design

Kanso Simplicity or elimination of clutter

Fu kinsei Asymmetry or irregularity

Shibumi Beautiful by being understated

Shizen Naturalness absence of pretense

Yugen Suggestion rather than revelation

Datsuzoku Freedom from habit or formula

Shijima Tranquility or an energized calm or stillness

Wa Harmony, peace balance

Ma Empty spatial void, interval of space or time

Yohaku no bi Appreciation of the beauty found in what is implied, unstated or unexpressed

*Ryushi Kojima, Architect

San Francisco's Japantown's physical fabric expresses its layered and complex history of land ownership and control, interior choices and exterior impositions, cultural influences and experiences. When discussing the nature of how it expresses "Japanese" qualities or even "Japantown" characteristics, there are a variety of voices that participate and no singular interpretation or definition prevails.

Culture

Metaphor of Onigiri and Spam Musubi Spam musubi is a Japanese-influenced snack food composed of a slice of grilled Spam on top of a block of rice wrapped in dried seaweed in the tradition of Japanese onigiri. It originated in Hawaii during WWII when Japanese culture met the popular American food. It is evidence of old tradition in a different place resulting in a new practice.

Japantown community process

Recent Community Workshops - November 21 & December 3

Community Feedback - General Comments

- Community Process Outreach
- Area of Applicability
- Principles and Values

Community Feedback - Site Design

- General support
- Clarification regarding the neighborhood "bowl" shape

Japantown community process

Community Feedback - Architecture

- Natural materials
- Harmonize and embrace architecture of different eras and styles
- Respect "layering" and integrate open space
- Building entrances are gateways and should be seen as a journey
- Transitional space between public and private

Community Feedback - Public Realm

- General support
- Landscape and Sustainability are highly valued elements
- Different scales of spaces and design flexibility
- Customized streetscape to highlight neighborhood character
- Integrated public art and accessibility
- Open space designed to create social interaction

Racial & Social Equity Assessment

Potential Benefits, Burdens, and Unintended Consequences and Mitigations

Potential Benefits, Burdens, and Unintended Consequences and Mitigations			
	Description	Stakeholder Impacted	Opportunity to enhance benefit
Benefits <i>The Japantown SADGs should result in...</i>	Clearer expectations from City staff and community during design review, which reduces review time and design costs. This could also address/off-set some of the burdens below.	City staff, project sponsors, community	Consider modifying pre-app meeting application to call attention to these guidelines/how the project addresses them early on in the project.
	Designs that honor the context of Japantown in architecture, landscape, and public space.	City, community	Update guidelines at a future date to demonstrate new examples that continue the guidelines' relevancy.
	Active ground floor character which reinforces pedestrian patronage and business vitality.	City, community	
	Description	Stakeholder Impacted	Mitigation
Burdens <i>The Japantown SADGs could result in...</i>	Potentially somewhat higher construction costs due to higher quality materials and design expectations.	Project sponsors	Look for other ways to reduce costs in the project that do not diminish the public expression or benefits within the project such as through streamlined review.
	Minor limitations on design flexibility.	Project sponsors	Better design and neighborhood cohesiveness should enhance property value.
Unintended Consequences <i>The Japantown SADGs could result in...</i>	Potentially somewhat higher housing or retail rents/costs due to slightly higher construction costs due to higher quality materials and design expectations.	Community	Each site should be reviewed individually to evaluate the scale of those potential burdens and minimize them as is possible.

Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines

SITE DESIGN

- S3.1 **Sculpt Building Massing to Respond to Scale and Use of Peace Plaza and Buchanan**
- S4.1 **Site and Organize New Development to Support Peace Pagoda as a Visual Landmark**
- S5.1 **Build to Front Lot Line or Vary Building Front Setbacks for Public Landscape Elements**
- S8.1 **Sculpt Building Massing to Reinforce Neighborhood "Bowl" Shape**

ARCHITECTURE

- A1.1 **Root Architectural Concepts in Japanese/Japantown Design Principles**
- A3.1 **Use Natural Materials in Facades and Finish Them Honestly**
- A3.2 **Demonstrate Material Rhythm in Facade Expression**
- A5.1 **Shape Rooflines to Support Building Concept and Scale**
- A7.1 **Integrate Signage with Building Architecture**
- A8.1 **Use Transparency, Translucency, Screening and/or Layering at the Ground Floor Facade**

PUBLIC REALM

- P3.1 **Create Public Space that Supports Cultural Activities**
- P6.1 **Balance Areas for Social Activity and Personal Space in Public Space Design**
- P7.1 **Highlight Sustainability Benefits of Open Space**

S4.1 ORGANIZE NEW DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT PEACE PAGODA AS A VISUAL LANDMARK

Both the Peace Plaza Pagoda and the Nihon Machi sign on Buchanan are important visual markers and can be seen from many public vantage points. New massing can frame these elements to further orient pedestrians.

- » Shape the profiles of vertical building edges to frame views where possible.
- » Shift massing of taller buildings to accommodate visual access from important elevated public viewpoints.
- » Provide setbacks in private development or bay windows in publicly-accessible development to direct views towards these two locations.

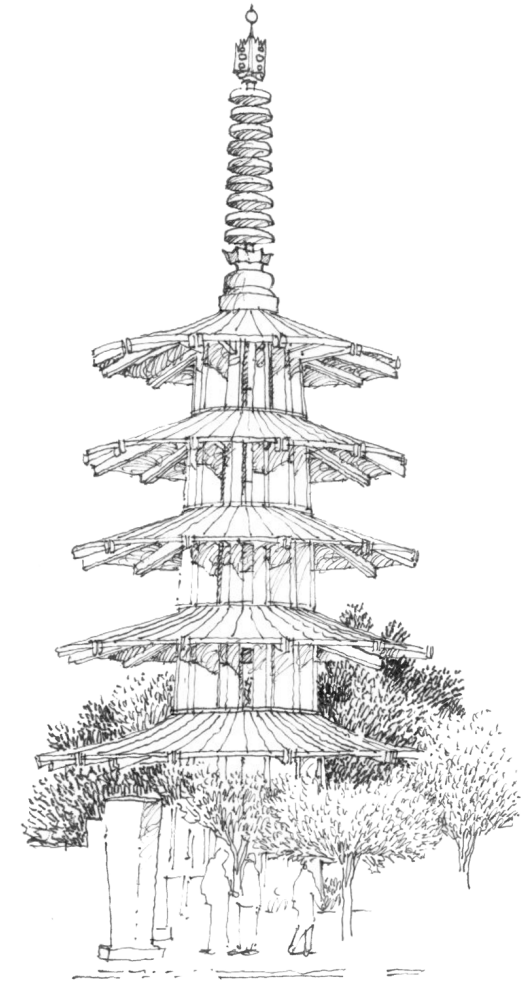
"Views to Peace Pagoda need to be preserved. It is a landmark only if it can be seen from afar."



Building edges can shape views from public space to help the pagoda read even if there is larger development.



Icons in Japantown layer against the backdrop of the city from many vantagepoints and connect them to the city at large.



The Peace Pagoda is a visual and cultural landmark in Japantown.

A8.1 USE TRANSPARENCY, TRANSLUCENCY, SCREENING AND/OR LAYERING AT THE GROUND FLOOR FACADE

Privacy, semi-private, and publicness can layer into a ground floor facade both providing enlivening activity by both provoking interest and curiosity. Storefronts in Japantown are characterized by a fine grain scale that address the pedestrian with elements including varying textures, layering and a pattern of solids and voids.



Landscape elements can help buffer the transition zones between inside and outside.

- » Consider elements that provide transitional spaces between public realm and storefronts such as Engawas (Verandas).
- » Utilize sliding storefront windows where appropriate to the business to encourage openness and transparency.
- » Consider screening elements that provide a sense of layering and depth. Treatments may include wood slats, decorative metals, glass, and interpretations of shoji or paper walls.
- » Expansive, undivided storefront windows are recommended to support window displays.
- » Use deeply recessed alcoves to highlight entries and contribute to façade layering.
- » A minimal amount of wall surfaces may be appropriate to frame and give emphasis to storefront windows and maintain pattern of solids and voids. Blank surfaces should be textured and considered for sign placement.
- » Contain storefront elements to within approximately 8-9' in height to maintain the existing pattern that supports a human scale. Projecting signage may extend above to meet clearance requirements.



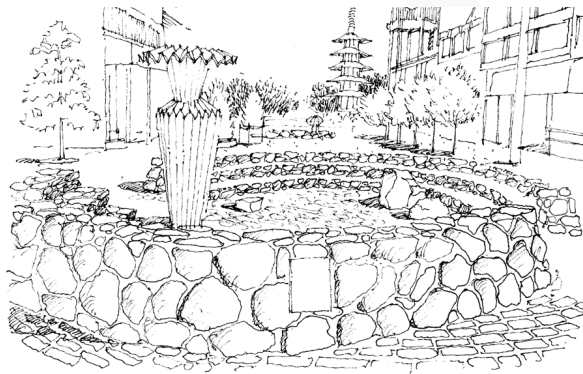
Screens, while they can seem more private, also invite light, some view, and variability.



Furnishing and signage can provide spatial layering between the interior and exterior areas.

P6.1 BALANCE AREAS FOR SOCIAL ACTIVITY AND PERSONAL SPACE IN PUBLIC SPACE DESIGN

Public space has a dual role in Japantown, it is both: a place for people to meet, come together, and hold events and a place for personal reflection, a respite and to reconnect with nature. Spaces include both intimate, walkable spaces such as Buchanan Mall and the auto-dominated Geary Blvd. Recommendations are intended to enhance the primary spaces while mitigating the impact of challenging conditions.



Use of natural materials is highly recommended.

- » Incorporate nature into the public realm by utilizing natural materials such as stone, wood and copper for paving and built features. Painted surfaces should be avoided. Provide both unprogrammed space for large crowds and smaller, intimate spaces for daily gathering.
- » Contemporary, sculptural features that draw upon local Japanese culture and history are encouraged. Built features should promote transparency to maintain clear site lines across spaces. Walls above seating height
- » Preserve and maintain existing features that have cultural value to the community including the Ruth Asawa fountain and benches.
- » Maintain abundant sunlight to public spaces.
- » Asymmetric designs that encourage a fluid pedestrian experience are encouraged. Locate built features off center.
- » Coordinate public space design to highlight and respond to building entries and maintain visibility to storefronts.
- » Utilize special paving at crossings to increase crossing safety, highlight district and link open spaces together.
- » Plant continuous street trees at the back of sidewalk to create a buffer from traffic, encourage traffic calming and enhanced pedestrian experience.
- » Use subtle lighting that accentuates landscape, built features and promotes a safe nighttime environment.



Landscape may be for a visual natural experience alone.



The new Peace Plaza design proposal includes a variety of open and sheltered areas.

Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines

Revised Draft Design Guidelines - Friday
Japantown Taskforce Board Meeting - Tuesday

Planned adoption hearing December 19, 2019

For more information

Contact: maia.small@sfgov.org
sfplanning.org/project/japantown-special-area-design-guidelines

