



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Memo to the Planning Commission

HEARING DATE: DECEMBER 5, 2019

Date: November 27, 2019
Case No.: 2019-022159CWP
Project: Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines
Staff Contact: Maia Small – (415) 575-9160
maia.small@sfgov.org
Recommendation: **None - Informational**

1650 Mission St.
Suite 400
San Francisco,
CA 94103-2479

Reception:
415.558.6378

Fax:
415.558.6409

Planning
Information:
415.558.6377

PURPOSE OF THIS HEARING

The Planning Commission will be presented with the proposed Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines (Japantown SADGs) for informational purposes (see Exhibit A/Attachment A).

BACKGROUND

The Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines began as a recommendation from the Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHESS) adopted in 2013. JCHESS recommended a proposed strategy to "Create Japantown Design Guidelines." The first draft of design guidelines began in 2013 and into 2014 but, after consultation with community members, were set aside during the adoption process of the San Francisco Urban Design Guidelines (UDGs). The Urban Design Guidelines, which apply in the Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District, were adopted by the Planning Commission in 2018. With the creation of the Special Area and Topic Design Guidelines that add detailed guidelines to complement the Urban Design Guidelines, the Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines process restarted in late 2019. Given the recent passage of SB 330 which prevents the application of non-objective design standards adopted on or after January 1, 2019 to housing projects approvals, the Planning Department seeks completion and adoption of these design guidelines by the end of the year. The guideline draft as included for this first informational is in progress and will be more complete after the community meeting on December 3rd (note omitted "means" under many of the guidelines).

FRAMEWORK

The Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines were developed in order to encourage culturally relevant architecture in new building and site designs and in renovations and additions to older buildings and sites to support a physically beautiful and socially vibrant neighborhood. The use of these guidelines is to promote, maintain, and accentuate the authentically expressive qualities of Japanese-inspired designs that contribute to the uniqueness of Japantown. They are intended to help convey the concepts that support and help express the contextual and unique aesthetic and spatial qualities of Japantown. Fundamental goals include:

- Protect and strengthen the unique qualities and character that make Japantown special.
- Preserve historically-significant structures and places in Japantown.
- Support a fine-grained scale of the neighborhood.

- Enhance pedestrian activity and walkability of Japantown.
- Promote environmental health and sustainability.

Outreach and Guideline Development

The Planning Department restarted these design guidelines after discussion with interested community members. The Department is working closely with the Japantown Task Force and in alignment with and as a continuation of many recent community outreach efforts including for the Cultural Heritage District, the redesign of Peace Plaza lead by San Francisco Public Works and Recreation and Parks, and participants in the JCHESS to establish community consensus on guidelines that fulfill the intent of the JCHESS recommendation. These outreach meetings are on-going and the draft document is expected to evolve quickly. The Department continues to welcome public participation, comment, and feedback.

Applicability

The Japantown SADGs apply to parcels in the Japantown Neighborhood Commercial District zoning as well as on parcels under the R District zoning within the bounds of the Japantown Cultural Heritage District if the proposed project includes non-residential uses or for residential projects that include a frontage of 150 feet or longer or 25 or more housing units. This is the same existing applicability as the UDGs within the cultural district.

They are intended to work in concert with the Urban Design Guidelines, which currently apply to this area. While the UDGs provide a broad level of design guidance that is generally applicable to neighborhood commercial districts throughout San Francisco, the Japantown SADGs provide additional guidance that is specifically tailored to local context. Consistency with both sets of guidelines is mandatory in the design review process. Should application of the respective guidelines conflict, the Japantown SADGs supersede the UDGs. Depending on location, other design guidelines may also be applicable and project applicants should consult with Planning Department staff to confirm.

Design Review

These guidelines are to be applied during the design review process. Projects demonstrate conformance with design guidelines during design review. Procedurally this occurs during project entitlements per design finding requirements in Code Sections 309, 311, 312, and 329, along with a variety of other designations (Conditional Use authorizations, for example). This work is done prior to Planning Commission approval but can also follow through the application of conditions of approval, Discretionary Review process, post-entitlement revisions, or addendum approvals. The Planning Department is also asked to confirm that projects involving public uses or public land conform to policies and design principles of the General Plan via General Plan Referrals.

REQUIRED COMMISSION ACTION

RECOMMENDATION: None - Informational
--

Attachments: Attachment A - Initial Draft Japantown Special Area Design Guidelines