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Built Form

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5.1 Existing Conditions

Japantown has a varied built environment—everything from its street widths, block sizes, architectural styles and building heights range noticeably within the 30 blocks inside the Plan Area. In much of this area, the traditional San Francisco street grid was altered during the urban renewal era to form large “super blocks.”¹ Building heights range from one-story, single-family residences to a 27-story apartment building. Building styles reflect the city’s historical shifts in architectural trends; San Francisco’s trademark Victorians contrast with urban renewal’s block-long, modernist structures

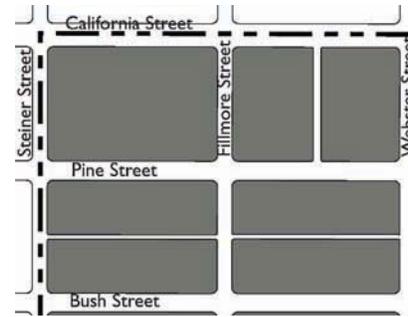
(e.g. Japan Center, Namiki Apartments). Though the Plan Area encompasses many blocks comprised primarily of Victorians, the heart of Japantown today is marked by Japanese-inspired structures, resulting from urban renewal. While these structures are widely considered to be representative of Japantown, they also have been noted as some of the least favorite buildings in the neighborhood.² The following section describes the specific characteristics that shape Japantown’s urban design, including the neighborhood scale, building types and heights.

¹ A super block is a block that results when a street intersecting two blocks is removed to create one large block.

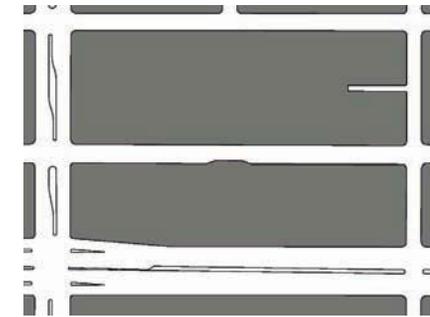
² Japantown Opinion Survey Summary, see Appendix A.



Small storefronts along the ground floor of three-story Victorians was typical of the pedestrian-oriented character throughout the neighborhood prior to the 50s. Pockets of this still exist today, as pictured on Sutter Street at the corner of Fillmore Street.



Typical San Francisco Street Grid



Japantown Block after Urban Renewal

Figure 5.1
Block Comparison

Existing Neighborhood Character

Neighborhood Scale

The Redevelopment Agency’s urban renewal program changed the physical fabric of Japantown and Western Addition in areas that were deemed “blighted” at the time. Some streets were widened, while others were severed to form super blocks. These changes altered the size and configuration of the traditional city grid, changing the circulation pattern and development potential for the southern portion of the Japantown Plan area (See Figure 5.1: Block Comparison). The city blocks bounded by Fillmore Street, Bush Street, Gough Street and Ellis Street were effected most notably; however, traffic patterns and development in the adjacent blocks were also influenced. Severing the city grid, eliminating alleyways, and consolidating parcels impacted view corridors, reduced pedestrian connectivity and increased the size and mass of development.

Massing and Street Wall Definition

A neighborhood’s scale is also affected by how well the buildings relate to the human scale, frame the street and open onto the sidewalk. This is described as the “street wall.” Typically, San Francisco’s neighborhoods with the strongest street walls are those constructed prior to the 1950s and 60s because they tended to be constructed on smaller parcels and built to the property line with entrances typically spaced less than 20 feet apart. In Japantown as elsewhere, this type of development (see image, above left) provides a consistent street wall and creates a pedestrian-scaled environment, with varied and interesting building facades, including transparent storefronts, bay windows, and regularly spaced entrance markers (i.e. awnings, signs, recessed entries, etc.). The best examples of this are along Fillmore Street, between Post and California streets, the north side of Post Street between Webster and Laguna streets, and Sutter Street between Fillmore and Laguna streets.

On the blocks constructed during and after urban renewal, parcels were consolidated, allowing for larger developments and greater massing. Here the architectural style shifted away from the pedestrian scale and focused on vehicular access and circulation with buildings pulled away from the sidewalk (see image on opposite page, top left). These blocks have an internal, self-enclosed orientation, rather than a street, sidewalk and public orientation. The blocks between Geary Boulevard and Post Street are the most obvious examples of this, where buildings are designed for car entrances, rather than pedestrians, and the street wall fails to define the street or provide interest to pedestrians. The large buildings on these blocks are comprised of blank walls, with few or no openings, and are often described as “fortress-like” by the community. They lack interest at the ground-floor, active ground floor uses, and human-scaled building facades, and are often described as “fortress-like” by the community. This chapter contains detailed recommendations for improving these conditions.



The entire street wall on the southside of Post Street between Laguna and Gough is comprised of concrete walls.



Victorian duplexes (like these pictured above left) are prevalent in the Plan Area (especially in the northern portion). The building at the corner of Laguna and Pine (right) exemplifies the mid-scale apartments of the 10s and 20s.



Existing Building Types

Residential Buildings

A variety of housing types are present in the Plan area, ranging from single-family dwellings to large apartment buildings and complexes. Many single-family homes have been converted for multiple-family occupancy. This is a trend that dates as far back as the late 19th century, but was particularly prevalent after 1906, when the Earthquake and Fire caused a housing shortage that pushed the population into intact areas of the city, such as the Western Addition. In an effort to accommodate the displaced population, many single-family residences were subdivided into flats and apartments.

The single-family dwellings within the Plan boundary take on many architectural forms and styles, though most date back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries and most adhere to Victorian-era architectural styles (see image, above). The most typical form of single-

family residence in the Japantown neighborhood is the Italianate or Stick style row house; flats are more prevalent than duplexes within the neighborhood.

Apartment buildings are common throughout the Japantown neighborhood and primarily consist of small to mid-sized buildings containing anywhere from four to fifty residential units. A few large-scale, modern apartment buildings containing upward of one hundred residential units also exist. Apartment buildings tend to be located on larger lots and situated on street corners. They typically date to the 1920s and onward, with the large-scale apartment blocks and towers dating to the mid-twentieth century and later and reflect a variety of architectural styles. Many of the small and mid-scale apartment buildings exhibit the Edwardian-era and Revival styles of the late 1910s and 1920s (see image, above right).

Those with later construction dates exhibit the International and Modernist styles. The large apartment buildings that date to the 1960s and 1970s, are typically designed in the Modernist (and in some cases Brutalist) style. They are found primarily along the Geary Boulevard corridor and within the Redevelopment Agency's Area A-1 or A-2, where urban renewal was targeted (see image on next page, far left). There are a number of garden apartment complexes grouped together in a series of smaller buildings unified by a landscaped site. These complexes are relatively modern adaptations of the multiple-family dwelling type and typically feature Modernist architecture.



The Nihonmachi Apartments, above, exemplify the mid-scale, Japanese-influenced, modernist apartments constructed after the 1960s.



Marcus Books on Fillmore Street is on the first floor of mixed-use Victorian that was saved and relocated from Post Street during urban renewal.



Japan Center's Kinokuniya Mall and the Sundance Kabuki Theater in the background comprise the block of Post between Webster and Fillmore streets.

Commercial and Mixed-Use Buildings

Mixed-use buildings combining both commercial and residential uses can be found throughout the Japantown neighborhood, particularly along commercial strips, such as Fillmore and Post streets (see image, above center). Mixed-use buildings typically consist of two- to three-story structures with commercial space on the first story – often dominated by a storefront – with residential units above that are accessed by a first-story entrance. The upper-story residential units consist of either flats, typically associated with smaller scale mixed-use buildings, or apartments, which are usually found in larger mixed-use buildings. The architectural styles from the Victorian era, especially the Italianate style, are most common in Japantown and typically

feature bay windows on the residential upper stories. Those that were constructed during redevelopment, especially those along Post Street, were designed in a Japanese-influenced modern style. Many first story storefronts on mixed-use buildings have been noticeably altered by many commercial tenants over the years.

Small-scale, single-use commercial buildings (with commercial space on both stories) are less prevalent in the Japantown neighborhood than large-scale commercial buildings. The construction dates and architectural styles of small-scale commercial buildings vary; those from the 1910s to 1950s are the most common in Japantown, this building type exhibits architectural influences from the Twentieth Century Commercial style,

Mediterranean Revival style, and Art Deco and Art Moderne styles. Conversely, the commercial buildings within redeveloped areas were constructed in the 1960s and 70s and most often exhibit a Japanese-inspired modern style.

The relatively few large-scale, commercial buildings were constructed during urban renewal between Post Street and Geary Boulevard to form the Japan Trade Center (now referred to as Japan Center). The three malls that make up Japan Center are only two stories in height, yet the buildings have large footprints and together with the Kabuki (now Sundance Kabuki Theater) and Hotel Kabuki take up three city blocks.



St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church (left) was constructed in the mid 1930s. It integrates Japanese temple ornamentation and Euro-American Christian church elements, which express the mix of cultural influences.



The historic Kinmon Gakuen Japanese Language School was built in 1926 in a Mediterranean Revival style.

Institutional Buildings

The neighborhood is sprinkled with many institutional buildings, including community centers, schools, and churches. Community centers and social halls in Japantown are utilized by a variety of organizations, including those that have cultural and religious affiliations. Some buildings date to the early 20th century, while others date to the late 20th century and are the products of redevelopment-related activism that secured new buildings for existing organizations. The buildings represent a variety of architectural styles, but commonly have some Japanese stylistic influence. Community buildings in Japantown are primarily located in largely residential areas of the neighborhood.

Schools located in the Japantown neighborhood are generally small, private institutions with a cultural and community focus, such as Japanese language schools, and schools with religious affiliations. The buildings that house school activities date to the early 20th-century and represent a variety of architectural styles, such as Japanese-influenced and Mediterranean Revival styles. Schools in Japantown are located in largely residential areas of the neighborhood, surrounded by apartment buildings and single-family residences. The school buildings in Japantown are typically as three-story buildings containing multiple classrooms, auditorium spaces, etc.

There are a large number of churches located in the Japantown neighborhood. Many have strong ties to the Japanese American community. The buildings date from the early 20th-century to the 1970s and represent a variety of architectural styles, many of which have high style elements. Churches in Japantown are located in largely residential areas of the neighborhood, and are primarily situated on prominent corner lots. A variety of other property types are also present, such as industrial buildings, hotels, theaters and auditoriums, and public utilities buildings though they are fewer in number and less concentrated.

Existing Building Heights

The building height zones in the Plan Area fall into a simple pattern with blocks north of Bush Street zoned for 40 feet in height, the blocks south of Bush Street and north of Post Street primary zoned for 40 or 50 feet in height, and the blocks south of Post Street zoned with a mix ranging from 50- to 240-foot height zones (see Figure 5.2: Allowable Building Heights and images, right). A handful of parcels break this pattern and have higher height limits than surrounding parcels (noted with thick black outlines in Figure 5.2).

Despite these existing height limits, the majority of existing buildings have not been built to the maximum height allowable. The majority of properties north of Post Street are less than 40 feet although they are zoned for 50 feet. The buildings on the blocks immediately north and south of Geary Boulevard vary the most in terms of reaching allowable heights—most properties are built below their allowable height.

Heights Along Geary Boulevard

When Redevelopment Areas A-1 and A-2 were established, the permitted building heights in those areas were changed to allow for taller buildings on some of the consolidated parcels and for low-to mid-rise buildings on others. The heights assigned to each parcel do not correspond to the width of adjacent streets, which is one of the key factors used today in determining appropriate building height and warrants reconsidering appropriate heights on these blocks. For example, some blocks flanking Geary Boulevard, a street with as much as 150-170 feet in right-of-way (ROW), are zoned with 50-foot height limits on either side of the street, whereas others are zoned for 240-foot buildings.



The Nihonmachi Terrace apartment complex (three-story townhouses in foreground) abuts the northside of Post Street and has a range of heights. The Sequoias residential tower is pictured in the background.

This inconsistent pattern reflects the popular modernist urban design movement of the 1950s and 60s, which is one of the reasons urban renewal projects are considered out of character with surrounding architecture and detrimental to active, livable neighborhoods.



The existing building heights along Geary Boulevard range from 50 feet to 290 feet within the Plan Area.

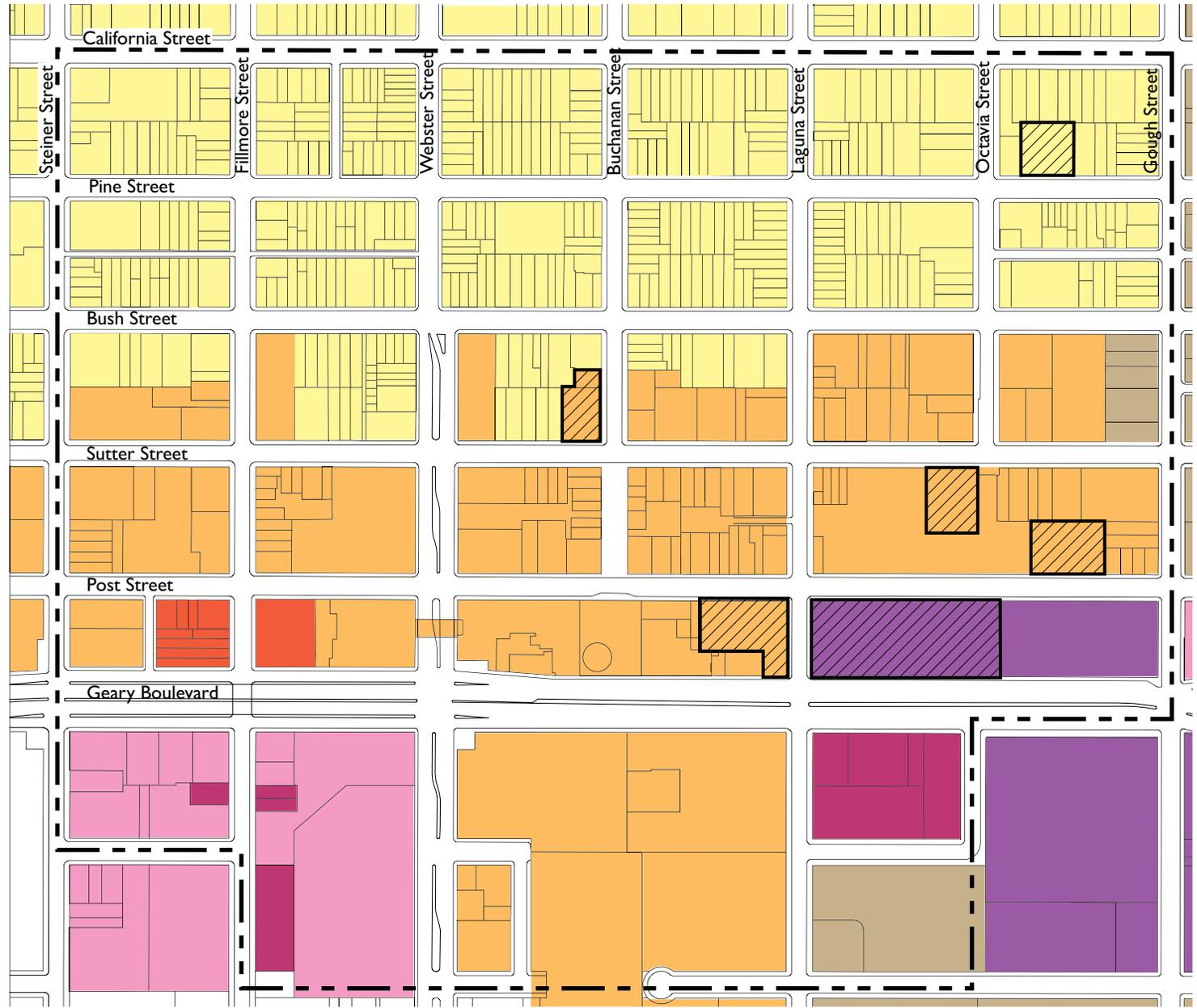
Ground Floor Heights

Many of San Francisco's commercial height districts tend to be based on increments of 10 feet (such as 40, 50, etc.) which assumes each floor-to-ceiling height is 10 feet. A ten-foot floor-to-ceiling height is sufficient for upper floors, but is too low for ground-level, commercial spaces. An additional five feet of height of ceiling height is desirable for active, ground floor retail spaces. This is consistent with other recent changes to commercial districts around the city.

Figure 5.2
Allowable Building Heights

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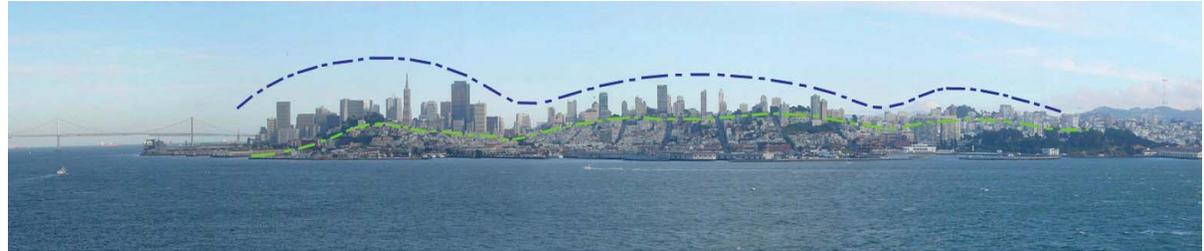
-  Japantown BNP Boundary
-  40 feet
3 Stories, typ.
-  50 feet
4 - 5 Stories, typ.
-  65 feet
6 Stories, typ.
-  80 feet
7 - 8 Stories, typ.
-  130 feet
10 - 13 Stories, typ.
-  160 feet
14 - 16 Stories, typ.
-  240 feet
20 - 24 Stories, typ.
-  Buildings that Exceed the Planning Code's Height Limit



4.2 Recommendations and Strategies

Through this Plan, Japantown has an opportunity to set parameters for future development in order to enhance the neighborhood's character and public realm, as well as uphold San Francisco's reputation as a collection of livable, attractive, and culturally distinct neighborhoods. To this end, this section makes the following recommendations to help guide new development and projects undergoing major renovations:

1. Update Japantown's building heights and large parcel development controls to improve the neighborhood's livability and walkability, while harmoniously complementing the city's larger urban pattern and skyline.
2. Apply the City's recently established design guidelines to improve the quality of site and building design and the impact it has on the public realm. These guidelines will be applied throughout the city's neighborhoods which have undergone recent planning. This chapter describes their intent and how they should be applied in Japantown.
3. Apply Japantown-Specific Design Guidelines to ensure the neighborhood's special character is enhanced over time. There are specific aspects of Japantown's unique character that are not addressed by the citywide guidelines. To respond to Japantown's eclectic mix of urban design conditions and the neighborhood's Japanese character, a set of additional guidelines has been developed to be applicable to Japantown only.



Update Building Heights

When looking at building heights, the impact on the ground level, the neighborhood scale, and the skyline must be considered. The following policies have been established to protect San Francisco's unique skyline and livable neighborhoods. They should be adhered to in Japantown, as well:

- Develop a distinctive skyline form that compliments the city's skyline, including downtown, the natural landform, the waterfront, and the bay, and responds to existing policies in the Urban Design Element of the General Plan.
- Respect the natural topography and follow the policies already established in the General Plan's Urban Design Element that allow increased height on the top of hills.

- Maintain view corridors through the area by means of height and bulk and tower spacing controls that ensure carefully spaced slender towers rather than bulky, massive buildings.
- Ensure adequate light and air to the district and minimize wind and shadow impacts on public streets and open spaces.

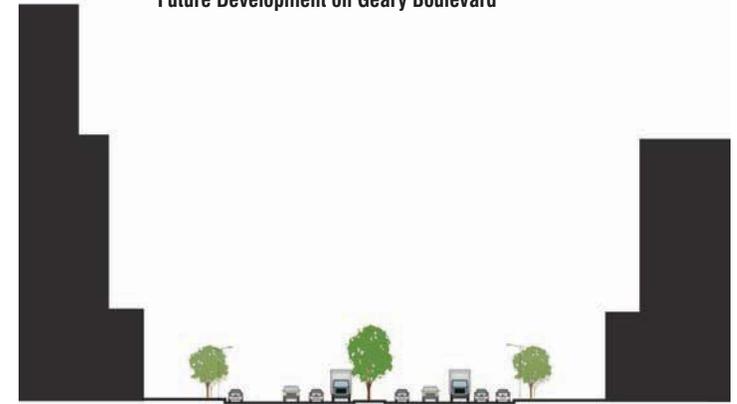
The majority of the height districts within the Japantown Plan Boundary are not in need of changes. The area north of Bush Street (outside of the former A-1 and A-2 areas) and all districts in 40-foot height zones should remain as they are. South of Bush Street some changes to height districts would help encourage appropriate new development for the neighborhood, as defined in the following paragraphs (See Figure 5.5: Proposed Building Heights).

Figure 5.3
Geary Boulevard Today



Building Heights vs. Street Width with a ratio of more than 1:4

Figure 5.4
Future Development on Geary Boulevard



Potential Building Heights vs. Street Width with a ratio of 1:1 (left side of street) to 0.5:1 (right side)

Increase Heights Along Geary Boulevard

The more significant changes to height limits are recommended on the large parcels between Post Street and Geary Boulevard. These parcels that front on the very wide Geary Boulevard (approximately 170 feet wide on the stretch through Japantown), are appropriate for taller buildings, and are the primary place where the neighborhood can successfully accommodate new and denser development in order to meet the city and region’s housing needs, increase community/commercial activity and improve connections between the neighborhoods. The blocks that meet these criteria fall between Fillmore and Gough Streets.

Current urban design understanding is that appropriate building heights should be set in relation to the width of adjacent streets, among other factors. The wider a street is, the taller the adjacent building’s base height

(referred to as the street wall) can be without overwhelming the street level environment. The streetwall helps create a comfortable “urban room” for street-level activity. Conversely, a wide street flanked by one- or two-story buildings and devoid of significant street trees often results in a barren, car-oriented environment. In San Francisco, the appropriate ratio for building height to street width is typically within the range of 0.5:1 to 1.25:1 (meaning that the height of the streetwall should be at least half the width of the street or as much as a quarter taller than the width of the street. See Figures 5.3 and 5.4). This ratio is not the only factor in determining a building’s base height; it must be used in combination with shadow and wind studies for individual projects and design guidelines that describe design details that protect against window and shadow impacts.

Based on street width, topography, parcel size, adjacent building heights and scale, and preliminary shadow analysis, height limits should be modified on Geary Boulevard. Appropriate base heights along Geary Boulevard are 85 feet; appropriate base heights along Post Street remain at 45 feet (east of Laguna) and 55 feet (west of Laguna in the commercial area). This stretch of Geary currently has a few towers which mark the corridor and Japantown as an important center of activity and transportation corridor. New tower heights should be tailored to enhance the topography on the skyline, and should be staggered in height and location. Appropriate tower heights within these blocks range have been determined to be between 135 feet to 375 feet; specific ranges for each location are noted on Figure 5.5: Proposed Building Heights. Further shadow and wind studies will be necessary for each new development prior to approval.



The parcel opposite Hotel Tomo could be redeveloped with housing above ground level retail to define Japantown's northern gateway.

Increase Height at Gateways

The height limits on the parcels at the northern gateway to Japantown (on the Northeast corner of Sutter and Buchanan streets across from the torii gate pictured above) should be increased from 50 feet to 85 feet. This additional height is desirable to balance the heights of the property on the east side of Buchanan Street and to strengthen and mark the intersection as Japantown's northern gateway. Japantown's other gateways (noted in Chapter 6: Public Realm) are already zoned for taller buildings or have parcels that are too small to accommodate more height.



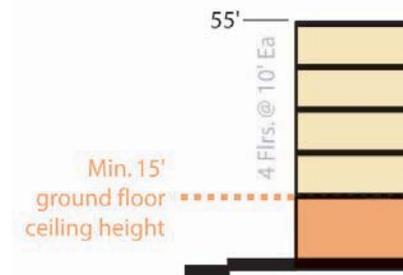
Looking north from the Buchanan Mall, the parcel beyond the Torii gate can accommodate more height.

Increase Ground-Floor Heights for Commercial Uses

The City has established policies that encourage more active and attractive ground floor space. One of them gives a five-foot height bonus to buildings which meet the definition of "active ground floor" use per the Planning Code.³ To encourage generous ground floor heights all parcels in Japantown currently zoned at a 50-foot height limit should be increased to 55-feet if they meet the definition of "active ground floor" use and a minimum ground floor to second floor dimension of 12 to 15 feet is maintained – higher ground floors result in more attractive, bright, and useable retail spaces. These spaces are more attractive to pedestrians and feel more welcoming. Parcels fronting on Buchanan Mall would not receive the additional five-foot height bonus because the existing scale of the buildings and village character should be retained as is.



Ground floor-to-ceiling height should be increased on parcels with ground-floor commercial uses to make the interior space more inviting and the streetscape more active.



³ Section 145.1 defines an "active use" as such: "any principal, conditional, or accessory use which by its nature does not require non-transparent walls facing a public street or involves the storage of goods or vehicles."

Figure 5.5
Proposed Building Heights

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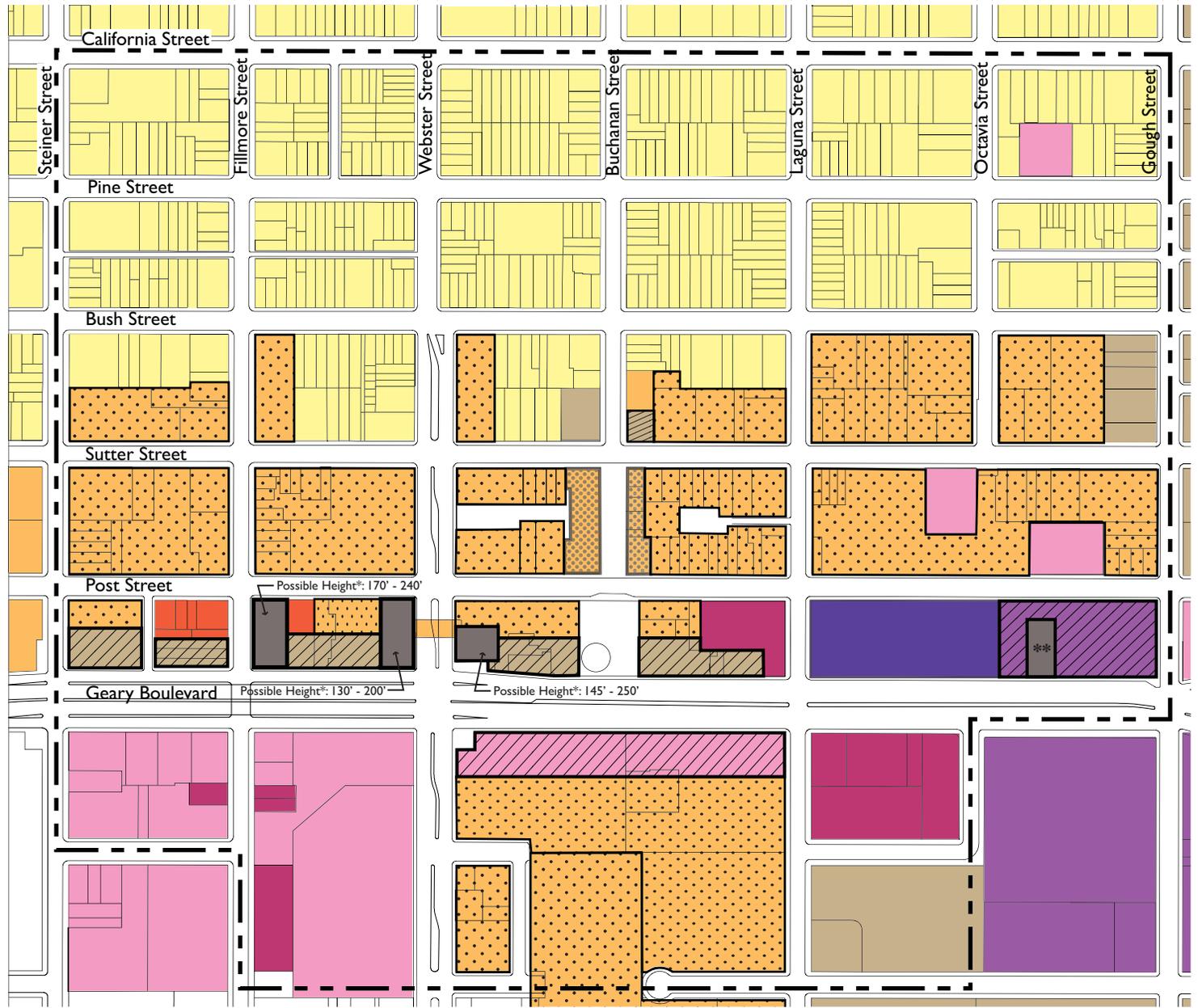
-  Japantown BNP Boundary
-  40 feet
3 Stories, typ.
-  55 feet
4 - 5 Stories, typ.
-  65 feet
6 Stories, typ.
-  85 feet
7 - 8 Stories, typ.
-  130 feet
10 - 13 Stories, typ.
-  160 feet
14 - 16 Stories, typ.
-  240 feet
20 - 24 Stories, typ.
-  300 feet
25 - 30 Stories, typ.

Proposed Changes

-  Parcels with Proposed Height Increases (color denotes exact height change)
-  Proposed 5-foot Height Increase for a total of 55 feet (5 stories)
-  Proposed 15-foot setback above 35-feet (3rd story)
-  Approximate Tower Locations

* Exact tower height subject to further analysis, including environmental review.

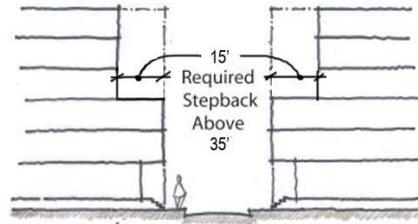
** Plan may consider a tower up to a height of 375 feet. A separate environmental review process is underway.





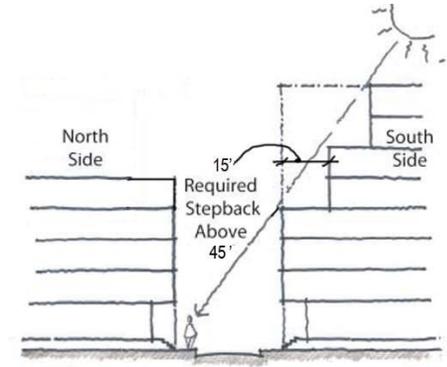
The example above, shows a step back above the fourth floor (approximately 45 feet in height). This results in lessened impacts on the street, more sunlight on the opposite sidewalk, and private open space at the fifth floor.

Figure 5.6
Step Backs on Buchanan Mall



Buildings above 35 feet in height should step back 15 feet to ensure sun access along Buchanan Mall.

Figure 5.7
Step Backs on Post Street



Buildings above 45 feet in height on the southside of Post Street should step back 15 feet to ensure sun access along the north side of Post Street.

Require Step Backs in Japantown's Commercial Core

A parcel's height limit is the maximum height allowed on the parcel, however, to ensure sun access, buildings should step back from the property line or building edge above 35-45 feet in order to avoid the "canyon affect" and ensure sunlight access to the sidewalks on the north side of the streets. The specific step backs in Japantown are as follows:

- The parcels fronting on Buchanan Mall between Post and Sutter streets should step back by 15 feet at 35 feet in height to allow for sun access on the pedestrian mall (See Figure 5.5: Proposed Building Heights and Image 5.6: Step Backs on Buchanan Mall).
- New development along Post Street should step back by 15 feet at 45 feet in height to allow for sun access on the north side of the street (See Image 5.7: Step Backs on Post Street).

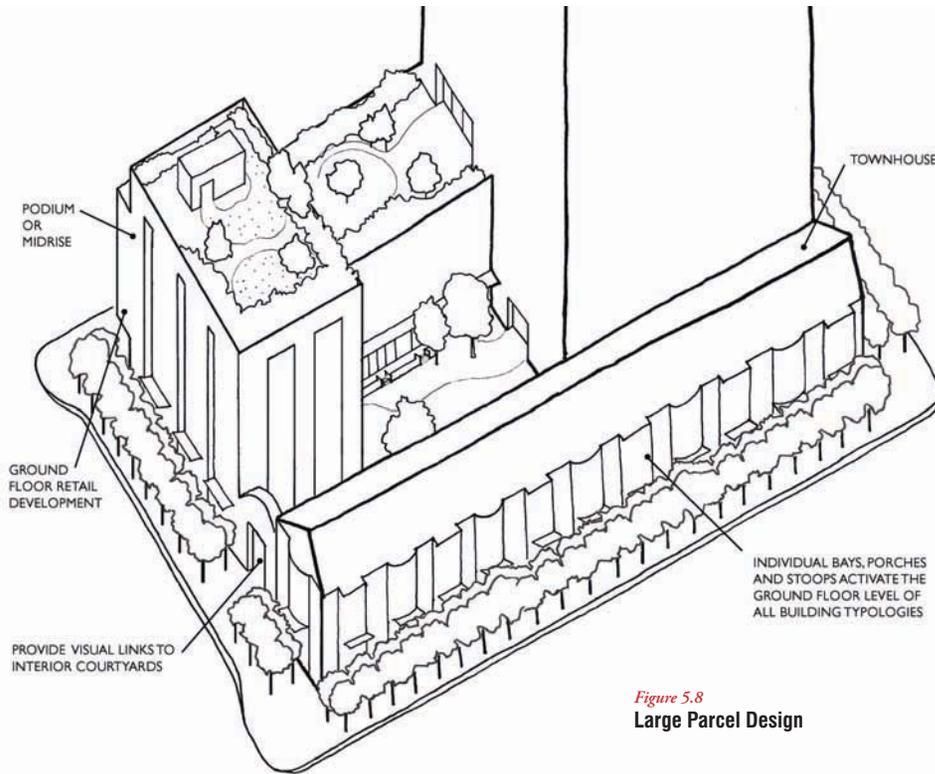
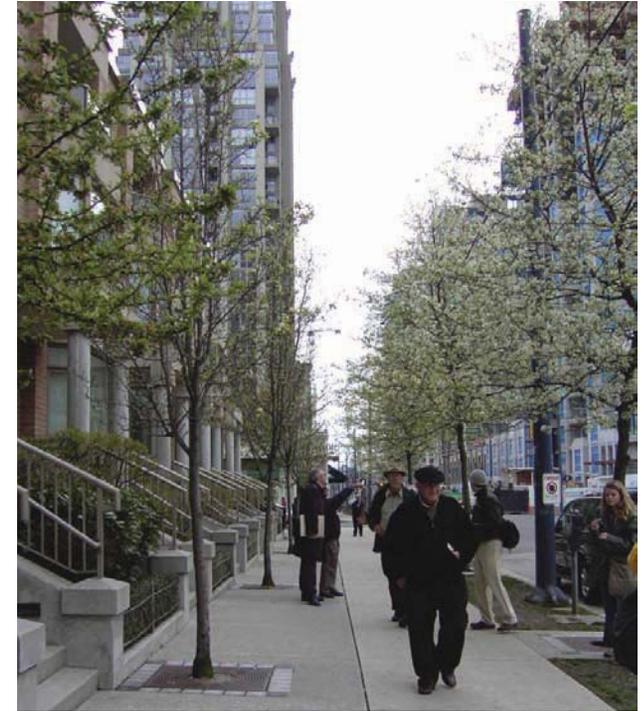


Figure 5.8
Large Parcel Design

Improve Large Parcel Design

In effort to provide more housing opportunities, create an aesthetically pleasing ground-floor environment and better connect Japantown to the south of Geary Boulevard, it is necessary to reconsider how the large parcels adjacent to Geary Boulevard can be redesigned to reinvigorate the neighborhood. The following policies have been established to create livable, mixed-use neighborhoods in other areas of the city. They should be adhered to in Japantown, as well:

- Relate the height and bulk of base buildings to the width of the street, to define a consistent street wall and ensure adequate sun and sky access to streets and alleys.
- Provide quality housing in a pleasant environment that has adequate access to light, air, open space and neighborhood amenities, and that is buffered from excessive noise.
- Preserve and enhance the character and scale of finely-grained residential areas within the Japantown Area.



Townhouses with individual stoops and regularly-spaced tree planting frame the sidewalk creating a pleasant, human-scaled street environment and diminishing the presence of the residential tower located at the corner.

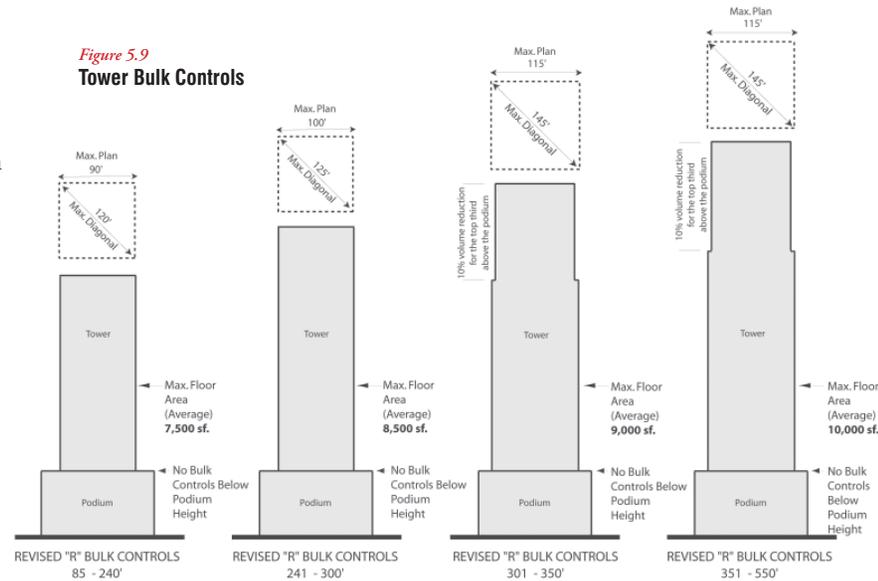
Improve Tower Design

Height, bulk, and tower spacing controls are essential means of meeting the design objectives relating to towers. The number, arrangement and form of towers in an area determine the amount of light and air that reach residential units, streets, and open spaces, and the sense of crowding at street level. Japantown is a residential mixed-use neighborhood, not an office district, and the presence of towers must be tailored to support a living environment.

The height and bulk of large development projects should conform to the following tower design policies:

- Minimize shadows on streets, open spaces and residential units, and the creation of surface winds near the base of buildings (see Figure 5.10 Wind Mitigation below).
- Vary tower heights to avoid the visual “benching” created by a number of buildings whose tops are at the same elevation and to enhance the natural topography on the skyline.
- Sculpt tower tops to allow for architectural elements and to screen mechanical equipment.
- Minimize tower bulk to the dimensions shown in Figure 5.9: Tower Bulk Controls (right), to ensure a feasible tower floor plate, to create elegant, slender towers and to preserve views and exposure to light and air.
- In general, require towers to be spaced approximately 100 feet apart and adhere to the maximum plan dimensions (per Figure 5.9) to minimize shadowing of streets and open space, and to preserve at least as much sky plane as tower bulk.
- Allow no more than two towers per block (or three towers per super block), to optimize exposure to light and air from residential units, streets and open spaces.

Figure 5.9
Tower Bulk Controls



To maintain appropriate proportions and an attractive skyline, towers' floorplates are limited according to their heights and adequate spacing is required between them.

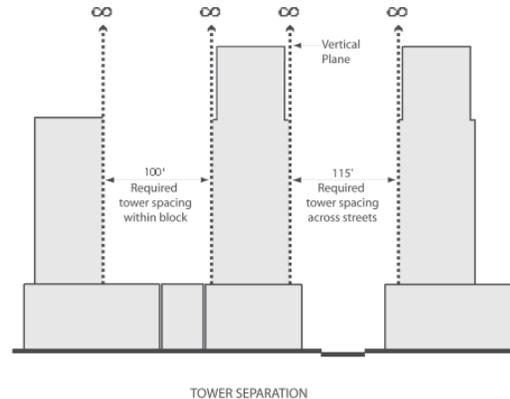
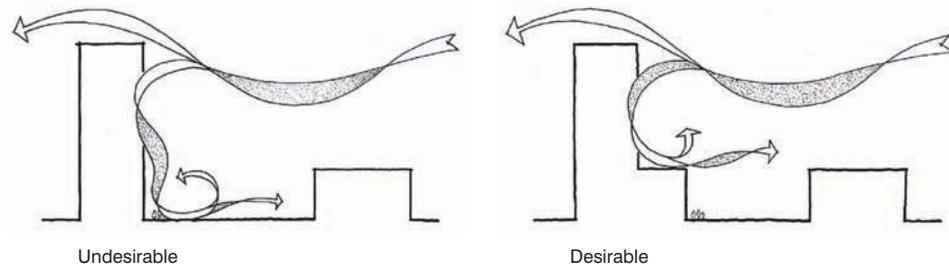


Figure 5.10
Wind Mitigation

Careful attention must be made to design towers that divert windstreams and reduce wind impacts on the ground level.



Require Mid-block Pedestrian Connections

Reduce the existing auto-oriented scale of the streets by creating a circulation network through the interior blocks, creating a street scale comparable to those in existing residential areas elsewhere in the city. This should be achieved in Japantown by creating safe, inviting and publicly accessible north-south pedestrian pathways through super blocks (examples of other pedestrian connections are pictured right and below). The connections should be made in close alignment with the original street right of way.



Apply Japantown-Specific Design Guidelines

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. The following Japantown-Specific Design Guidelines were developed in order to encourage culturally relevant architecture in new building/site designs and in renovations and additions to older buildings/sites. The Japantown-Specific Design Guidelines are intended to promote, maintain, and accentuate the authentically expressive qualities of Japanese-inspired designs that contribute to the uniqueness of Japantown. Nothing in these Japanese-Specific Design Guidelines should be interpreted as limiting new development to specific architectural styles, periods of construction, or cultural expressions. These additional Japantown-Specific Design Guidelines are intended to embellish building and site development in the neighborhood by integrating Japanese-inspired design aesthetics into suitable building features, including form and massing, ornamentation, materials, and landscaping.

The Japantown-Specific Design Guidelines apply to properties within the blocks bounded by Sutter Street, Geary Boulevard, Fillmore Street and Laguna Street. The Japantown-Specific Design Guidelines may also be applied to major development projects located anywhere within the Plan Area based upon recommendations based upon community input. The application of the Japantown-Specific Design Guidelines should consider property-specific characteristics such as setting (including adjacent and nearby properties), pre-existing conditions (in the case of renovation, addition, or new construction following demolition), and project objectives (including use and function).

Form and Structure

A design feature commonly seen in Japanese-inspired architecture, in both traditional and modernist design styles, is exposed structure (including expressed “structural” elements that do not actually provide structural support). This design feature is found throughout Japantown in many commercial, institutional, mixed-use and larger residential buildings that showcase Japanese-influenced designs. Rather than concealing the structural elements of buildings, Japanese-inspired architecture often includes exposed columns, posts, beams, and rafters as defining characteristics of buildings (pictured right and below left). Decorative half-timbering is also characteristic of traditionally-influenced Japanese designs, usually in combination with stucco wall surfaces (pictured below right).

- Use exposed structural (or structural-like) elements (including wood, concrete, and/or steel materials) in new construction, renovations, and additions to existing buildings as appropriate to specific building designs and their settings.



Roofs

A commonly found roof type in Japanese traditional architecture is a gable (often side-facing) with broad, overhanging eaves and exposed structural members such as beams and rafters. Traditional roofing materials can include U-shaped glazed clay tile, wood shingles, or thatching. In Japantown, several small and medium-size commercial and institutional buildings display traditionally-influenced gable roofs with related features and materials. In modernist designs and in taller buildings, sections of gabled or pent roofs utilizing contemporary materials such as concrete or metal structural elements, polymer tile, and composite shingle are sometimes incorporated into overall designs to provide traditional accents.

- Use gabled or pent⁴ roofs (or sections thereof), and related features such as overhanging eaves, exposed structural members, tiles, shingles, thatching, or elements that resemble such in new construction, renovations, and additions to existing buildings as appropriate to specific building designs and their settings. The integration of such roofs should relate to the scale of the building and should be used cautiously to avoid appearing superficial.



Traditional clay roofs (above) are appropriate in some areas of Japantown. The YWCA designed by Julia Morgan in 1932 (right) is a good example of the integration of Japanese materials and ornamentation.



Materials and Ornamentation

Wood, untreated or stained (but not painted), is a commonly used building material in Japanese traditional architecture. A significant number of Japantown's buildings are clad or adorned with wood. In particular, wood siding, shingles, slatted screens, projecting beams and posts, half-timbering, and framing are found.

- Use wood as a primary cladding or ornamental material in new construction, renovations, and additions to existing building, especially where it will complement adjacent and nearby properties. Another common building material is white plaster or stucco, often used as wall cladding in conjunction with half-timbering to evoke a Japanese traditional style.
- Reference Japanese architectural styles by placement, shape, and relationship of design elements in building that utilize modern materials such as concrete, metal, and plate glass.
- Use building materials such as wood, stucco, concrete, metal, and plate glass to suit specific building designs and their settings, as well as to complement and enhance an expression of Japantown's cultural character.

⁴ A pent roof is a slanted or pitched roof that has only one slope.



Cherry Blossom (top), Ginkgo (middle) and Japanese Maple (bottom) are a few types of species that could enliven Japantown's streets and open spaces.



Murals celebrating culture and history (above) and Japanese-inspired gardens with interactive public art (above right) in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo are good examples of complementary public art and landscaping.



Landscaping, Open Spaces, and Public Art

Landscaping can display Japanese influence in various ways, including the use of Japanese plant species, such as Japanese Wisteria, Japanese Maple, Japanese Flowering Plum, Crape Myrtle, bamboo, mosses, and Sakura (cherry). Landscaping may also reference Japanese traditional garden types such as: hiraniwa (“flat garden”); tsukiyama (“hill garden”); karesansui (“waterless stream garden”); or chaniwa (garden path attached to tea-ceremony house). Japantown contains a significant

number of Japanese-influenced landscapes, open spaces (both public and private), and public art objects, designed in both traditional and modernist styles.

- Integrate plant species, objects, materials, and/or techniques in new or renovated landscaping, open spaces, and public art to complement and enhance an expression of Japantown’s cultural character; improvements should not be limited specifically to use of Japanese-influenced design.

Apply San Francisco's Citywide Design Guidelines

The purpose of the citywide design guidelines is to improve the city's aesthetic quality and to ensure all development supports an active, diverse and vibrant public realm. A fundamental principle guiding San Francisco's urban design is the priority the City places on buildings to meet human needs, primarily defined from the pedestrian perspective. The guidelines are intended to:

1. Result in a more coherent architectural landscape.
2. Improve upon the current neighborhood image.
3. Encourage new development to be more consistent with the neighborhood's and San Francisco's roots.

These guidelines will guide new construction and significant alterations to buildings within the Japantown Plan Area to ensure that plans meet the neighborhood's design criteria. Individual project proposals should attempt to conform to all relevant Design Guidelines. Adherence to the Design Guidelines will be an important criterion used to guide City and community review and approval of individual projects within the Plan area.

Site Design

Intent

Site design is meant to provide architectural solutions to the issues posed by matching the constraints of the development site with property owners' needs and good design principles. One of the primary challenges in Japantown is to provide the highest quality pedestrian experience possible. Site design elements such as building orientation, entrance locations, overall design theme, and easements to aid pedestrian circulation all must be considered. There are thousands of visitors to Japantown every year, and almost every one of them is

a pedestrian for some part of his or her visit. Creating a pedestrian realm that is engaging, attractive, diverse, comfortable and safe requires building design that contributes to such an environment.

A second key consideration is to take full advantage of Japantown's rich and varied cultural history. Many existing buildings in the area, however, fail to do so. Orientation of building elements (including lobbies, windows, balconies and common outdoor spaces) towards the public realm creates visual and physical connection opportunities that enhance the overall quality of the area and reinforce Japantown's character as a culturally rich neighborhood and destination.

Guidelines

- Orient building elements, such as main entries, lobbies, windows and balconies to face streets, public parks, plazas and open spaces to help ensure a consistently high volume of pedestrians, strengthen the visual and physical connection to the street, and reinforce the community character of Japantown. Enhanced visual connections between the building and the open space will help maintain an active, safe and vibrant public open space.
- Design hotel, office and residential lobbies to be accessed directly from the street and not from porte cocheres.⁵ Porte cocheres are inappropriate for an urban and pedestrian-oriented district; they detract from the visual quality of the sidewalk and diminish pedestrian safety by increasing the number of conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles accessing the building. Therefore, the City and property owners need to find drop-off and delivery options that rely on better managing curb space.

⁵ Porte Cochere is an off-street driveway located between, and generally parallel to, the sidewalk and the ground floor facade of a building.



Buildings' commercial and residential entrances should be oriented to the street.

- Integrate universal access for all people within the building's overall design concept.
- Place utility vaults and access panels in driveway curb cuts so as to prevent blank building frontages and to ensure that sidewalk planting opportunities for street trees and landscaping are not limited. Where necessary, frontages used for utilities, storage, refuse collection and other activities should be integrated into the overall articulation and fenestration of the facade, or be masked by landscaping or other design features where active uses are not possible.
- Prohibit new curb cuts on Post Street between Fillmore and Laguna streets and on Fillmore Street (with the exception of the possible relocation of the Japan Center Garage entrance). All loading and deliveries for businesses along Post Street must be made from existing alleyways and driveways, or at the rear of buildings.



Repeating vertical elements are created with alternating brick and bay windows in this south of Market example.

Massing and Articulation

Intent

The relationship of a building's size and shape (i.e., its massing) to its visibility from the public realm, to important natural features and to existing development determines whether it will have a pleasing or disruptive effect on the image and character of the neighborhood. Similarly, the level of detail, its placement of doorways and windows, and building articulation affects the level of visual interest the building holds for pedestrians, the quality of the ground level experience, and the perceived mass a building projects on the public realm.

A building is articulated when the façade is comprised of smaller components that achieve a human scale, rather than one blank or minimal surface. Horizontal articulation is achieved when a building's façade is defined by horizontal components that distinguish its base, body and top. Vertical articulation is achieved with vertical elements spaced so a long building façade is broken into smaller sections.



Material changes, bay windows, awnings, and individual store-fronts break up the mass of this building.

A building's scale and its level of detailing are some of the most important architectural factors, along with a building's façade treatment, that contribute to a pedestrian-oriented streetscape, and therefore should be given the highest priority in Japantown. The majority of buildings built in the last 40 years within the Plan area provide little or no visual interest to pedestrians, resulting in a barren and intimidating pedestrian environment. Buildings must be massed according to a human scale and have a level of articulation that maximizes the visual interest for pedestrians. In addition to the design guidelines below, residential development in RH and RM districts is required to comply with San Francisco's Residential Design Guidelines, which have been in effect since 2003.

Guidelines

- Provide strong, repeating vertical articulation on new buildings, especially those with large street frontages, to achieve the visual interest necessary to sustain pedestrian interest and activity. Avoid undifferentiated massing (blank surfaces) longer than 25 feet on residential streets or alleys, and 40 feet on all other streets. Vertical articulation cannot be satisfactorily achieved by minor changes, such as a change in color.
- Make the size and bulk of new buildings consistent with their architectural style. Historic styles for example, such as board and batten construction, should only be used on buildings of small scale.
- Develop rooflines, including roof function, shape, surface materials and colors that are integrated with the building's overall design concept.
- Locate and screen rooftop mechanical equipment, penthouses, and other components to enhance the views of Japantown from surrounding hillsides.

Façade Treatment

Intent

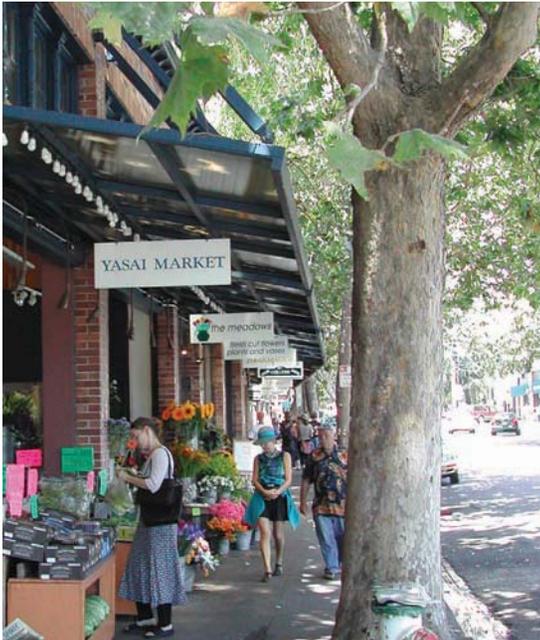
Private development primarily reinforces and enhances the pedestrian experience through the design and articulation of the building’s visible façades. The façade treatment in Japantown, even along Post Street, the pedestrian spine of the area, suffers from an inconsistent and incoherent palette of materials and colors. The use of high-quality materials, detailed openings, and variations in the façade plane maintain a higher level of pedestrian interest and engagement and will help build a stronger pedestrian network that better connects the neighborhood to the rest of the city.

Guidelines

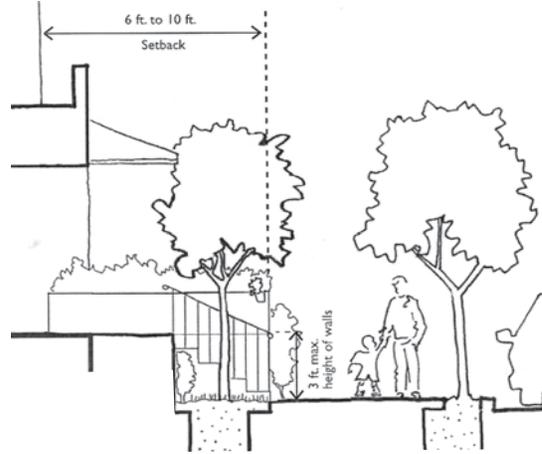
- Use an integrated, consistent range of materials, colors and design elements for each building, including, but not limited to, construction materials, roofs, entrances, and window, door, sign and lighting systems.
- Provide variety along a block through design of building frontages, but remain consistent with the overall urban design concept for the area by not mixing radically different materials, construction methods, bulk, massing and articulation.
- Use high-quality materials that promote permanence and express skilled craftsmanship, including wood, masonry, ceramic tile, pre-cast concrete and integrated, hard-coat stucco on all visible facades. Avoid using inauthentic materials, in particular those that have the appearance of a thin veneer or attachment, such as EIFs or tilt-up panels. On buildings with frontages greater than 25 linear feet, the use of stucco is limited to less than 25% of the facade and is prohibited on any detailing for a building of any dimension.

- Include three-dimensional detailing in building design, such as bay windows, cornices, belt courses, window moldings, and reveals to create shadows and add interest (see image, right). A minimum window reveal of two inches is required above the ground floor and sliding windows or applied mullions on windows visible from the street are not permitted.
- Highlight building corners through the choice of design elements including, but not limited to towers, copulas, changes in façade plane, large windows, awnings, canopies, marquees, signs and pedestrian entrances (see image, below right).
- Integrate new signs and their associated components with the building’s overall design concept; they should not overwhelm the building’s facade with either color or size. New signs must meet the signage requirements outlined in Article 6 of the Planning Code.
- Integrate changes in projections, recesses and elevation, along with materials and color to emphasize pedestrian entries and architectural features, and to de-emphasize garage doors and parking.
- Integrate exterior light fixtures, including custom light fixtures consistent with the overall design concept, into the building’s overall design and should enhance the light levels of the public open space.
- Recognize important historic buildings in the neighborhood that provide continuity with the past and preserve notable landmarks and areas of historic, architectural or aesthetic value.
- Ensure that new development epitomizes the best in contemporary architecture with full awareness of, and respect for, the height, mass, articulation and materials of the best of the older buildings that surrounds them.





Residential buildings in Portland (above top) and neighborhood retail in Oakland, (above) provide visual and permeable connections to the sidewalk.



Ground-floor Design

Intent

The design of a building's ground-floor is the architectural feature that has the single greatest effect on the quality of the pedestrian environment. Consequently, disproportionate resources should be allocated to the quality of design and the materials used at the ground floor. Specifically, special attention needs to be paid to the details of storefront design and residential entries, and the ground-floors of such large-lot uses as hotels need to avoid blank and inactive walls.

The intent of the guidelines for ground-floor design is to produce buildings that contribute to an active, transparent, and engaging pedestrian environment along the building edge. Repeated narrow storefronts, similar to those found in San Francisco's established neighborhoods, produce the highest quality walking environments along retail streets, while houses with front stoops and apartment buildings with open and gracious entries produce the most pleasing and attractive building edge along residential streets.

Guidelines

- Ensure the ground-floor design strengthens the connection between the building and the sidewalk and provide ample visual interest to passing pedestrians.
- Differentiate the sidewalk-level of the building from the middle and top by using elements including, but not limited to, different exterior materials, awnings, signs, cornices, projections, setbacks and large windows. A minimum six-inch projection between the ground and second floor is strongly suggested.
- Where sidewalks are too narrow to accommodate open space opportunities and there is no potential for narrowing the vehicular right-of-way to better accommodate pedestrians, integrate building setbacks with adjacent sidewalks to increase the space for potential public use, including, but not limited to café seating, stopping spaces and other flexible seating.
- Design ground-floor commercial facades to be 75 percent transparent to allow a clear view inwards to an active space from the street; they should not be tinted. Post-construction alterations, such as retail displays, should not prevent a clear view.
- Enhance residential streets' character and level of pedestrian interest by designing ground-floor units that have direct access at grade level, and not through common corridors or lobbies. Upper story units should connect to a lobby entry that opens directly onto the public way. Where possible, units should not be accessed only from an interior courtyard. The individual entrances to ground-floor units should be set back 3-5 feet but no more than 10 feet from the street-fronting property line, and should be at least 18 inches, and ideally 3 feet, above sidewalk level in order to maintain the unit's privacy (see photo and sketch, top left).
- Locate retail entrances at corners. Primary residential entrances should be located away from the corner to prevent congestion.

Parking and Access

Intent

The manner in which we store private vehicles can have a disruptive effect on the quality of the pedestrian environment. Buildings with podium parking, for example, with long stretches of blank walls substantially diminish the streetscape quality and are inappropriate in San Francisco.

The following guidelines will require all at- or above-grade parking to be designed with active frontages along the street in order to maintain a high quality pedestrian environment throughout the Neighborhood area.

Guidelines

- Discourage at- or above-grade parking. Where at- or above-grade parking is necessary, it must be wrapped with a minimum of 25 feet of active use at the ground floor and 15 feet above the ground floor (see drawing, above right). Allowable uses include as residential, retail or office, and must be on both the primary and secondary street frontages, except for the minimum frontage required for fire doors and parking access.
- Minimize the negative effect of parking entrances on pedestrians by limiting the number and width of openings and architecturally integrating them into the building or landscaping. Residential garage door widths should be limited to eight feet; for residential developments with more than 20 units, a separate door for ingress and egress is allowed, but each door must not exceed eight feet and should be separated by at least one foot.
- Minimize the number of entrances and exits in parking structures. For garages with 100 or fewer spaces, a single opening no more than 20 feet wide is allowed. For garages with more than 100 spaces, no more than two openings 20 feet wide are allowed.
- Where a building has two frontages, locate parking entrances, loading docks, bays, and auxiliary entrances on secondary streets (pictured right), and their visual impact on the neighborhood should be minimized.
- Prohibit off-street parking entrances on Post Street, except the public parking garage at Japan Center.



Private Open Space

Intent

Public and private open space provides an indispensable amenity to a community. Open spaces can take a number of forms and meet a great diversity of needs, but general guidelines should be used in their design.

The guidelines in this section focus on improving the attractiveness, comfort and usability of private open spaces in Japantown. Japantown's public open space is addressed in the next chapter: Public Realm.

Guidelines

- Develop rooftop terraces, gardens, and associated landscaped areas to be both attractive common open space and effective stormwater management tools.
- Incorporate seating opportunities in new development. The design of planters and low walls can provide safe, comfortable places where people can stop, view, socialize and rest. Integrating large windows adjacent to plazas and gathering spaces (i.e. stopping and viewing places) improves the site's attractiveness to visitors and provides more opportunity for community interaction (see image, right). Sidewalk and outdoor dining spaces are encouraged; these spaces should not conflict with other sidewalk uses (see images opposite page).
- Develop integrated weather protection systems at the sidewalk-level of buildings, especially at or near building entry points, to mitigate the effects of rain, wind, glare, shadow, reflection, and sunlight on the pedestrian environment.





Source: Ellen Vanderslice

RECOMMENDATIONS
IN THIS CHAPTER:

Public Realm

- Improve Connections between Existing Open Spaces and Facilities through Design and Maintenance
- Encourage Crime Prevention through Design and Maintenance of Open Spaces
- Activate and “Green” Existing Open Space
- Design and Construct Webster Street Linear Park to Complement the Existing Open Space Network and Provide Additional Usable Open Space in The Heart of the Neighborhood
- Prioritize Post Street for Streetscape Improvements
- Improve Lighting, Tree-Planting and Neighborhood Amenities on Residential Streets
- Improve Lighting and Signage on Streets Bordering the Neighborhood’s Open Spaces
- Encourage the Transformation of the Geary Corridor into a Neighborhood-Serving Boulevard
- Connect East-West Streets to the Proposed Webster Street Linear Park
- Connect Japantown to Fillmore Street
- Make Alleys More Livable
- Mark Japantown’s Entrances with Gateways
- Provide Neighborhood Orientation Signs
- Provide Directional Signs
- Integrate Interpretive Signs with Existing Public Art
- Place Signs at Transit Stops