



Public Realm

6



6.1 Existing Conditions

The term “public realm” is used to refer to the spaces in a community which are common to everyone – the streets, sidewalks, parks, plazas and other open spaces. Japantown’s public realm has some notable features which distinguish it from other San Francisco neighborhoods, including community-oriented plazas, expansive recreational space, and regional thoroughfares. The neighborhood’s public realm can be categorized as follows:

- Open Space (including public parks and plazas and semi-public greenways)
- Streetscape (including sidewalks, streets and alleys)
- Signage and Wayfinding (including signs that provide directional/locational information and signs/banners/art that tells the story of place)

Japantown’s public realm is notably influenced by mid-century urban renewal-related ideas, which placed more emphasis on auto access and less on streets as places for pedestrians. The acquisition of properties by the Redevelopment Agency within a 27-block area and reconfiguration of this area’s urban grid during the late 1950s and 60s created new opportunities for open space, severed Buchanan and Octavia streets to through-traffic south of Sutter Street, and changed the way people experience the neighborhood. The most noticeable results affecting the public realm are several “superblocks,” formed from a series of smaller blocks, with intervening streets removed. These superblocks were designed to accommodate vehicular travel and have resulted in inward-facing, very large scale developments with little or no attention to comfort and access for pedestrians around the perimeters bordered by two wide thoroughfares—Geary Boulevard and Webster Street.. On the other hand, it also resulted in two large recreational fields on either side of Geary Boulevard - Hamilton Recreation Center and Raymond Kimball Playground. The excessive right-of-way on Webster Street is an opportunity for future open space improvements, integrated into the street design (discussed in detail later in this chapter).

This chapter first addresses the existing conditions of the Plan area’s public realm elements and then provides recommendations to improve the functionality of and access to Japantown’s public realm.

Open Space

The open spaces in Japantown can be grouped into three general categories according to their physical attributes: 1) public plazas (Peace Plaza and Buchanan Mall) that are characterized primarily by hardscape,¹ cultur-

¹ Hardscape is characterized by primarily having paved or hard surface, with minimal plantings (can be permeable or impermeable materials).



Raymond Kimball Playground (left) and Cottage Row (right) exhibit the range of types and sizes of the neighborhood’s open spaces.

ally-focused public art installations, and street furniture; 2) large public parks with dedicated recreation space; and 3) mini park-like spaces that incorporate lawns, plantings, trees and other vegetation-based landscaping that are privately-owned, yet publicly accessible.

Throughout the planning process, the most common community requests concerning open space were the need for:

1. More green spaces, including tree planting, grass, and landscaping.
2. A children’s play area in the heart of the neighborhood for the community’s young children.
3. Lighting improvements for increased safety.
4. Ongoing maintenance of open spaces over time.

City Standards and Guidelines

The Recreation and Open Space Element of the San Francisco General Plan is currently being revised. It identifies the City’s neighborhoods in need of open space improvements. Japantown fits into one of the areas considered high need because of the high numbers of seniors, who would benefit from walkability and livability improvements.

Japantown neighborhood is generally well-served with major neighborhood park facilities within 1/4- to 1/3-mile radius from the edge of the neighborhood, which is considered an acceptable walking distance for the able-bodied. The current supply of approximately 44 acres of existing neighborhood-serving open space includes Alta Plaza Park, Lafayette Park, Hamilton Park & Recreation Center, Raymond Kimball Playground, Jefferson Square, Hayward Playground, Cottage Row, Buchanan Mall and Peace Plaza. However, the heart of Japantown would be well-served with green space, more seating opportunities at regular intervals and a childrens’ play areas.

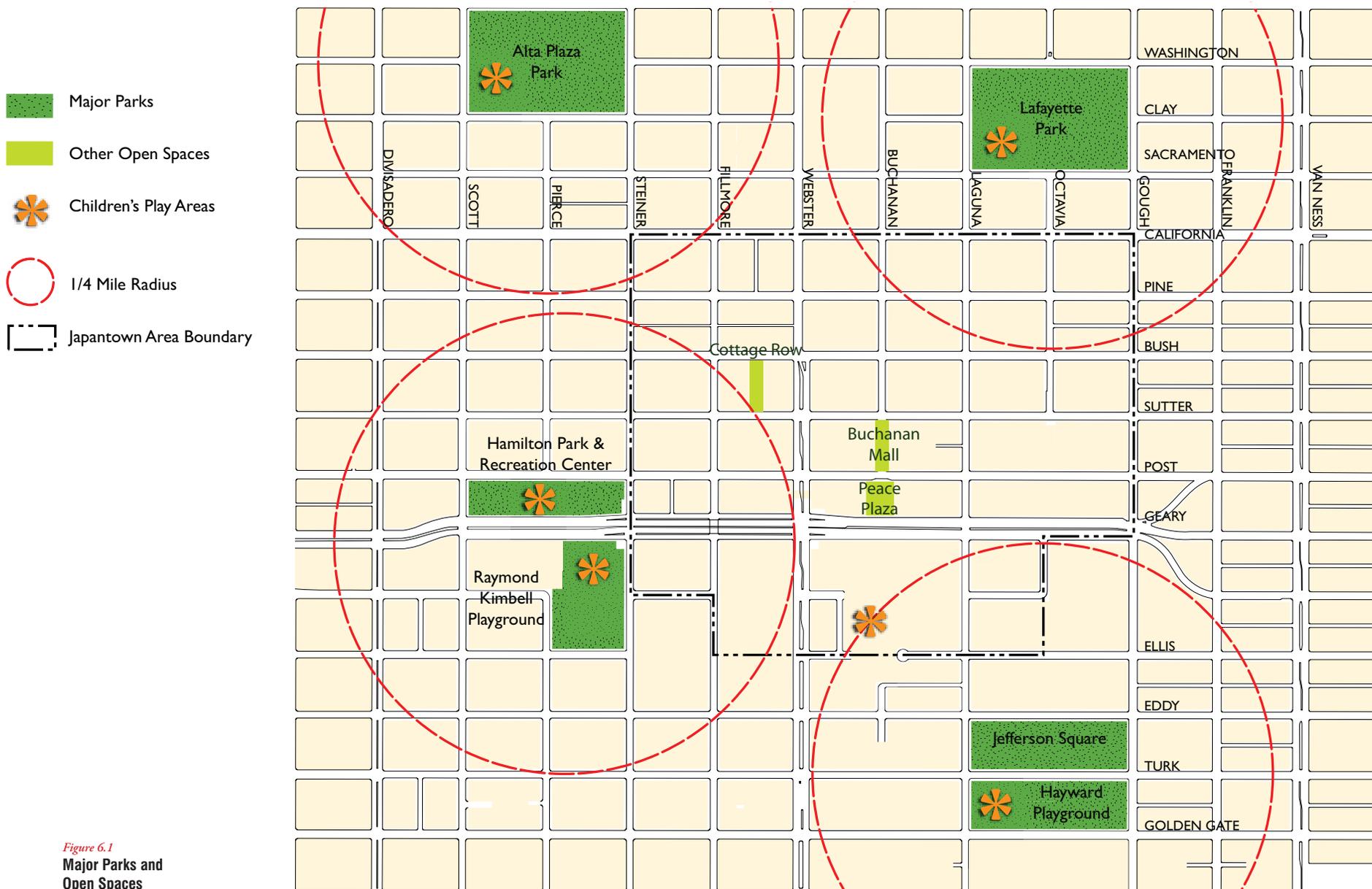


Figure 6.1
Major Parks and
Open Spaces





Public Plazas

Peace Plaza

Peace Plaza is at the heart of Japantown and is home to the Peace Pagoda, Japantown's most recognizable public icon. A number of plaques and public sculptures in this area provide visitors with a brief summary of Japanese American history. In addition to drawing tourists daily, the plaza is home to all of the community's large events, including the Obon (celebration of ancestors) Festival, Nihonmachi (Japantown) Street Fair, Aki Matsuri (Fall Festival), and the Cherry Blossom Festival (Sakura Matsuri). The Plaza was originally constructed as part of the Japan Trade Center in the early 1970s. Its original design included a granite keyhole-shaped reflecting



pool at the base of the Peace Pagoda (a gift from San Francisco's sister city, Osaka, Japan), but was redesigned in 1999/2000 due to water leakage problems. The redesign resulted in a hardscaped plaza with a small stage, geometric arrangement of tree planters, wood benches, boulders and a reflective pool organized around the pagoda. The Pagoda was originally constructed to hold an eternal flame that is 17 centuries old. The flame has been relocated to a small glass enclosure behind the water feature on the west side of the plaza, which is difficult to notice unless visitors know its significance and look for it.



Circular seating areas made of rock are oriented around the origami fountains, providing space to gather. The cobblestone river flows around them, connecting Post and Sutter streets.

Peace Plaza is packed during festivals, (far left), but most days, the Plaza has a more subdued atmosphere (right).

The design has a Japanese aesthetic, however the majority of feedback regarding the plaza suggests that the community considers the new design too cold and in need of more landscaping and seating options.

Buchanan Mall

Buchanan Mall, officially renamed Osaka Way, is the pedestrian mall that runs the block between Post and Sutter streets, directly north of the Peace Plaza. The mall was designed in the 1960s as part of the second phase of urban renewal in partnership with the Redevelopment Agency and the Japantown community. Intended to characterize the area's historic, cultural,

social and visual character; the design reflects a modern version of the Japanese village aesthetic, with intimate scale of buildings and varied facades. It features two fountains designed by the renowned artist Ruth Asawa, located within a winding cobblestone river, designed by Rai Okamoto, that stretches the length of the pedestrian walkway. The river is flanked by concrete walkways. The northern edge of the plaza is marked with a Japanese-influenced tiered wood trellis that resembles a Torii gate, which is traditionally located in front of Shinto shrines.

The majority of feedback about the pedestrian mall suggests that the current, uneven paving materials of both the river and the side walkways are difficult to walk on, and considered unsafe for seniors. Sunlight exposure to the plaza should be protected. Other comments include the need for more landscaping and more activation of the plaza because the much-loved fountains are often turned off and the businesses that line both sides of the walkway do not do enough to activate the mall with outdoor seating and displays.

Large Public Parks

In addition to these two open spaces in the heart of the community, two large parks are located in the vicinity of Japantown (on opposite sides of Geary Boulevard): Hamilton Recreation Center and Raymond Kimball Playground. They are home to sports fields, a public library (housing the largest collection of Japanese books in Northern California), a swimming pool, tennis courts and playgrounds. Significant improvements are currently underway to Hamilton's swimming pool and playground, which should make them more neighborhood-friendly. Rosa Parks Elementary School, south of Geary Boulevard along the Buchanan Street alignment, is another public resource with playgrounds and playing fields, but are not entirely open to the public.



The neighborhood has ample sports fields on either side of Geary Boulevard in both Raymond Kimball and Hamilton playgrounds.

Because these large spaces are not activated by land uses around them, are large expanses with single-use for proscribed activities (rather than having pockets for passive neighborhood use), and are not within the heart of the neighborhood, they are not currently fully utilized as community resources. Some residents feel unsafe in them and accessing them.

Mini Park-like Spaces

A number of smaller open spaces are scattered throughout the neighborhood. These include semi-accessible landscaped walkways incorporated within a few of the large residential complexes, including the privately



An example of semi-accessible pathway through Nihonmachi Terrace (above) is privately owned, but provides pedestrian connections between Sutter and Post streets, where Octavia Street used to be.

owned Nihonmachi Terraces and St. Francis Square; the privately owned diagonal walkway connecting Webster Street to Fillmore along the northern edge of Safeway's parking lot; and the publicly owned, brick pathway and lawn creating the distinctly historic Cottage Row.

Residents have voiced the desire to make walking around the neighborhood easier and more enjoyable by improving access through these spaces so they are fully accessible, linking them with new pathways on large parcels, and providing more seating opportunities.

Streetscape

This section focuses on the pedestrian experience and usability of Japantown's streets and sidewalks (pedestrian safety, crosswalk and intersection improvements, are addressed in detail in Chapter 7: Transportation and Circulation). Often the importance of the streetscape is overlooked in public realm discussions, but in any urban neighborhood, streets and sidewalks are just as critical a part of the public realm as more formal open spaces. More people use our streets on a daily basis than public parks. The design of streets and sidewalks—how they are furnished, landscaped, lit and paved—affects how people experience a neighborhood.

Function of the Streetscape

Though Japantown has distinctive, Japanese-influenced signage and lighting along key corridors and open spaces, it lacks prominent gateways and design elements that signify the neighborhood to passersby traveling along major thoroughways, including Geary Boulevard and Bush/Pine streets. Neighborhood banners and lighting design, in addition to business signs and building design, in the heart of Japantown along Post Street, make the special character of Japantown more evident.

A widely-voiced concern from the community is the maintenance quality of the neighborhood's sidewalk paving, landscaping, and lighting. Though there is support for improvements to the streetscape, the need to maintain existing and new streetscape elements is viewed as a top priority. Merchants are concerned if visitors view the neighborhood as an unpleasant place to walk, shop, or gather, they will not return.

Areas for Improvement

The following list identifies Japantown's streetscape elements in need of improvement:

- **Planting:** The neighborhood has inconsistent tree planting. Tree canopies are too dense along Sutter Street making visibility at night difficult and could be fixed with appropriate tree-trimming that allows the street lights to light the sidewalks. Post Street and the neighborhood's north-south streets could benefit from regularly-spaced, culturally relevant, and environmentally compatible tree planting. Planters are sparse and in need of regular maintenance by individual business owners along the commercial and mixed-use streets.
- **Lighting:** Street and sidewalk lighting is inconsistent. Special Japanese-themed light posts were erected along all streets bordering the Japan Trade Center and in Buchanan Mall. They add to the neighborhood's special character.
- **Paving:** Compared to other areas of the city, Japantown's sidewalk pavement is in relatively good condition,² however there are areas where tree roots have created unwalkable/unsafe conditions, especially for seniors. Trash pick-up and sweeping is inconsistent.
- **Furnishings:** Japantown's sidewalks have minimal furnishings (i.e. benches, newspaper stands and trash receptacles). Given the high numbers of tourists and seniors in the area, more seating and amenities could make a significant difference in their time spent in the neighborhood.
- **Streetwall (Buildings and Uses):** The adjacent building design and uses influences the streetscape greatly, however with the exception of issues concerning graffiti removal and maintenance of storefronts, the streetwall improvements are addressed in Chapter 5: Built Form.



Dense tree growth and lack of lighting along Sutter Street (above) make community members feel unsafe walking at night. Special lighting in Buchanan Mall (below) signal to visitors that they have arrived in Japantown.



² Sidewalk repair is typically the responsibility of the fronting property owner, except on streets maintained by DPW.

Signage and Wayfinding

Wayfinding signage is often a visitor's first introduction to a community and place. A neighborhood's signage and wayfinding network should provide orientation, directional information and identification of significant places and activities. The current signage and directional orientation for Japantown is scattered and does not adequately promote the neighborhood as a unified, culturally-rich neighborhood. Although numerous improvement attempts have been made by both the private and public sectors, the resulting signage's visual imagery is disconnected and fragmented.

Since the community planning efforts in 2000, the community has recognized that a new approach is needed to improve and revitalize the community's identity and support its economic and cultural survival. The deficiency of signage policies and design concepts initiated between the 1950s and 1970s, lack of cohesive identity, and a pattern of neglect were identified as deterrents to Japantown's promotion as a cultural and ethnic destination.

Functions of Signage and Wayfinding

Signs are wayfinding tools that further assist pedestrians, vehicular, bicycle traffic and the other modes of transportation to navigate within both familiar and unfamiliar environments. The function of a signage and wayfinding system is to:

- Assist visitors and residents to find destinations from all modes of travel, including public transit, driving, walking, and biking.
- Create clear pathways utilizing signs, maps and other landmarks from one place to another.
- Establish messages that are user-friendly and clear that feature safety and welcoming messages and locate services and other publicly significant destinations.



Buchanan Mall and Peace Plaza have so much foot traffic, yet the information available to visitors is limited.



The new sensu fan serves as the gateway on Webster between Geary and Post Street, signaling the entrance into the neighborhood.

Source: NDD Creative and Arrow Sign Company

Currently, entry identification on Japantown's primary access streets is lacking. Wayfinding and signage is needed at key regional and neighborhood gateway locations, as well as at a centralized public information site to highlight possible destinations for all visitors. Some recent additions, such as the Japantown History Walk interpretive signs, and the "sensu" sculpture (i.e. Japanese folding fan) marking one of the neighborhood's southern gateways on Webster Street at Geary Boulevard, are useful prototypes to foster Japantown's wayfinding and history. But without the implementation of an integrated and more organized signage and wayfinding network, the effectiveness of these signs and information is limited to a small, targeted audience.

6.2 Recommendations and Strategies

This section provides recommendations for improvements to the three components of the public realm in Japantown: Open Space, Streetscape and Signage and Wayfinding.

Open Space

Making the most of the expansive existing open spaces in the area and creating new spaces that connect to them can help transform Japantown's public realm into a neighborhood more livable and desirable for families and ensure Japantown's future as a physically attractive and vibrant environment. Improvements to Rec and Park property should be coordinated with the Rec and Park Department and Commission. The following open space recommendations should guide improvements in Japantown (see Figure 6.2: Proposed Open Space Framework).

Improve Connections between Existing Open Spaces and Facilities through Design and Maintenance

- Improve and expand the existing network of open spaces to create a connected neighborhood-wide open space system which meet the community's needs and complements city and regional parks
- Improve connections from Peace Plaza to Buchanan Mall across Post Street, including a raised crosswalk or other significant crosswalk treatment, and pedestrian signage. This improvement aims to make the shopping environment safer and better connected on both sides of Post Street. See Appendix G: Transportation and Circulation Analysis for more information on raised crosswalks.



The pedestrian pathways through St. Francis Square serve as a neighborhood amenity and should be encouraged elsewhere. By providing mid-block pedestrian access between Webster and Laguna streets, as well providing north-south connections where Buchanan used to be, they make the neighborhood more walkable.

- Encourage landowners to make private open space open to the public to serve as pedestrian pathways and pocket parks for passive recreation. Property owners can choose to establish a public easement in exchange for a reduction of total square feet of required private open space (per Section 827(e) of the Planning Code). These spaces should be designed as safe, pleasant and visible.
- Ensure that new development proposals conduct wind studies and make efforts to mitigate wind impacts.
- All open space and streetscape improvements will be greatly enhanced by consistent maintenance and care. The anticipated Community Benefit District (discussed in Chapter 3) will aid the City and community by helping to fund improved maintenance.

Encourage Crime Prevention through Design and Maintenance of Open Spaces

- In response to real and perceived safety concerns that prevent people from using the area's open spaces, the (re)design of spaces should promote more activity and visibility from adjacent properties. The buildings fronting open spaces should provide more "eyes on the street"—direct visual and physical access to the space and should be allowed to make use of some of the space during business hours or for special events. Improvements to create smaller, useable pockets of open space that people can use for as a refuge for passive recreation, rather than expansive featureless lawns and plazas.
- To address concerns about graffiti and vandalism, ensure that open spaces are activated and

LEGEND

-  Japantown BNP Boundary
-  Existing Public Open Space
-  Existing Private and Publicly Accessible Open Space
-  Proposed Public Open Space
-  Proposed Publicly Accessible Pedestrian Pathways
-  Opportunity Sites for Children's Play Areas



Figure 6.2
Proposed Open Space Framework



well-maintained. Build on existing community efforts, formalize partnerships with community and responsible public agencies, and ensure funding for regular maintenance programs so graffiti is cleaned up regularly.

- Use innovative lighting technology to brighten dark areas that feel unsafe, especially along commercial corridors and Sutter Street, to facilitate safe nighttime activity, and open spaces (i.e. Buchanan Mall, Peace Plaza, Cottage Row, Hamilton Recreation Center, and Raymond Kimball Playground).

Activate and “Green” Existing Open Space

- Make Peace Plaza more people-friendly by opening the malls’ storefronts onto the plaza (with transparent windows and entryways), planting more trees, grass areas, and plants, installing an information and wayfinding kiosk, providing outdoor dining/seating opportunities and scheduling programmed activities and events. Redesign the connection between Peace Plaza and Geary Boulevard to include a prominent, terraced stairway that allows visual connections to Geary Boulevard and serves as the grand gateway into the neighborhood. This redesign should be coordinated with the Japan Center, Japan Center Garage and the Geary Boulevard redesign, and should be aligned with the proposed crosswalk across Geary (at the Buchanan alignment).
- Make Buchanan Mall more user-friendly by repaving the side walkways, planting more trees, enhancing the existing historic public art (historic fountains, cobblestone river and Torii gate) with new, complementary public art, and encouraging businesses to provide outdoor seating and displays along the storefronts. New energy and water-efficient technologies to light the plaza and maintain the fountains should be explored. Prior to improve-



Opening up ground floor uses onto Peace Plaza, Buchanan Mall and the neighborhood’s commercial streets, and providing seating opportunities can help activate the public realm. The example in Berkeley (above) not only increases the neighborhood’s vitality day and night, but it also addresses safety concerns, because more eyes are on the street. Special weekly or monthly events, like a farmer’s market (below) could be effective at enlivening Japantown’s public realm and building community.

ments, a list of culturally appropriate plants should be developed.

- Encourage property and business owners to plant in spaces between buildings and in planters along sidewalks.
- Encourage business owners to provide outdoor dining where space permits; dedicated space should be made available in Peace Plaza and Buchanan Mall.
- Make efforts to program and activate these open spaces with more users and events.



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

Use the excess, underutilized travel lanes along Webster Street to create neighborhood-serving open spaces between Geary Boulevard and Bush Street. Each of the three blocks would include a collection of differently designed spaces to serve multiple needs, such as plazas with seating, lawns and landscaped areas for passive recreation, a traditional Japanese garden, and a children’s play structure.

One option for the block between Geary and Post Street is an enclosed performance space for community organizations to meet, practice and perform in the heart of Japantown. If this proposal is pursued, the property would remain publicly owned and could be operated by a private organization. It should include a stage, transparent materials to be visible, and provide food/beverage concessions.



Figure 6.3a
Webster Street Linear Park Plan View
(between Geary Boulevard and Post Street)

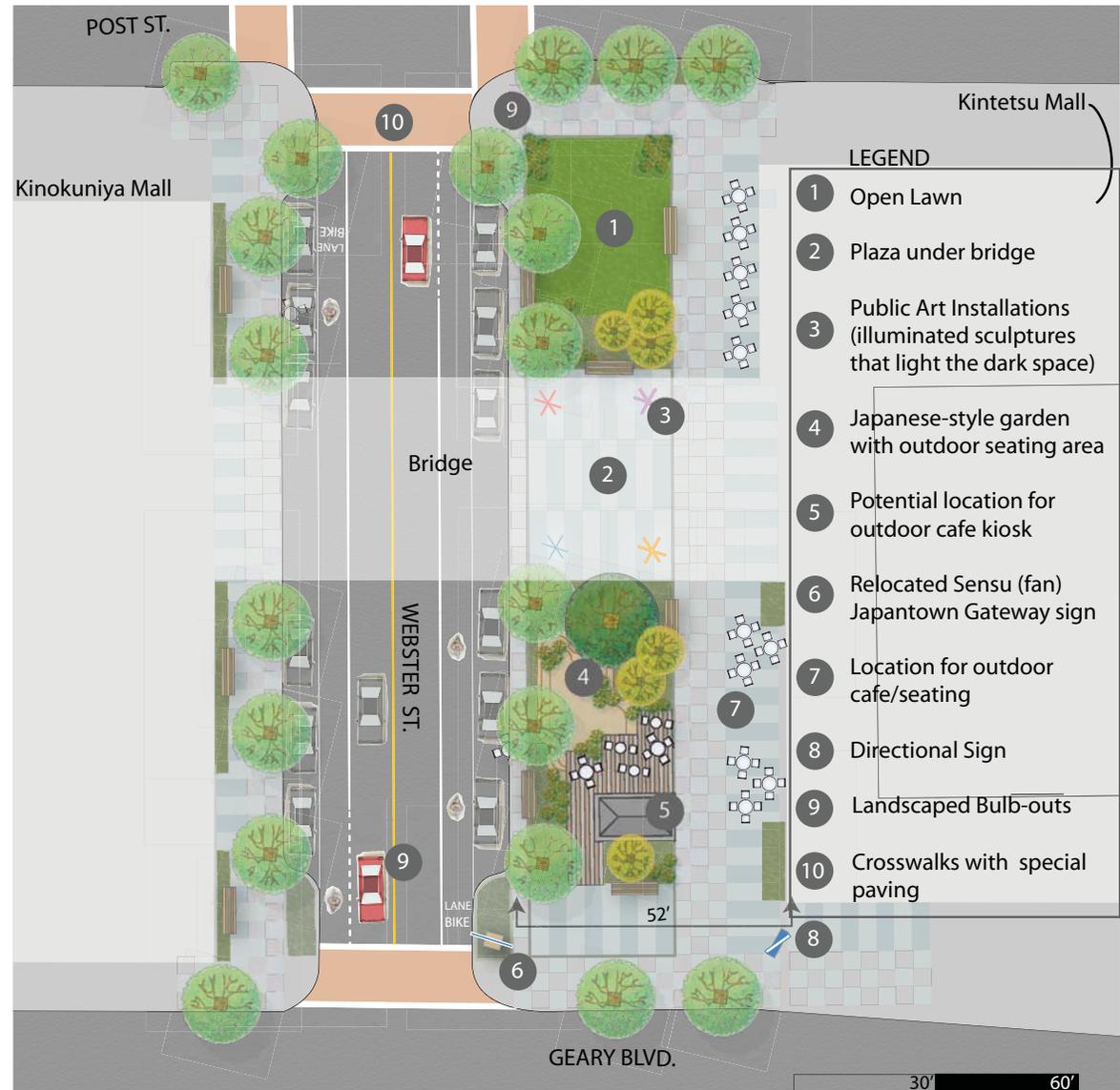


Figure 6.3b
Webster Street Linear Park Perspective
 (between Geary Boulevard and Post Street)

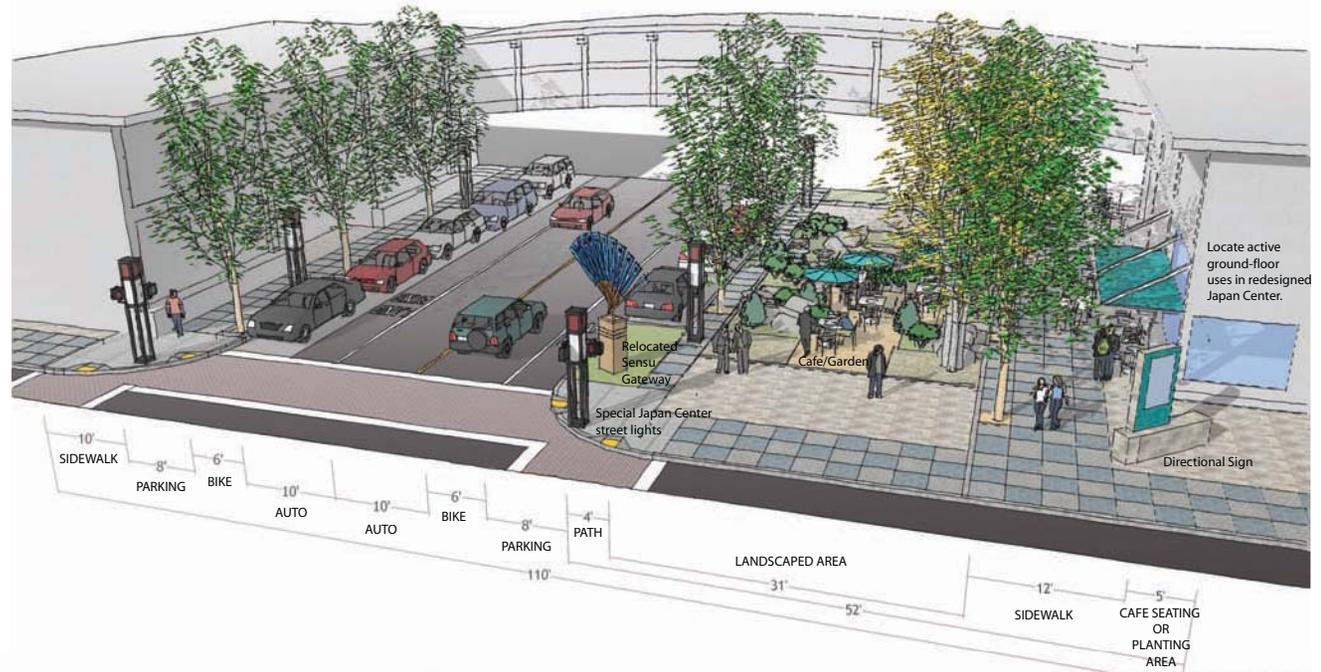
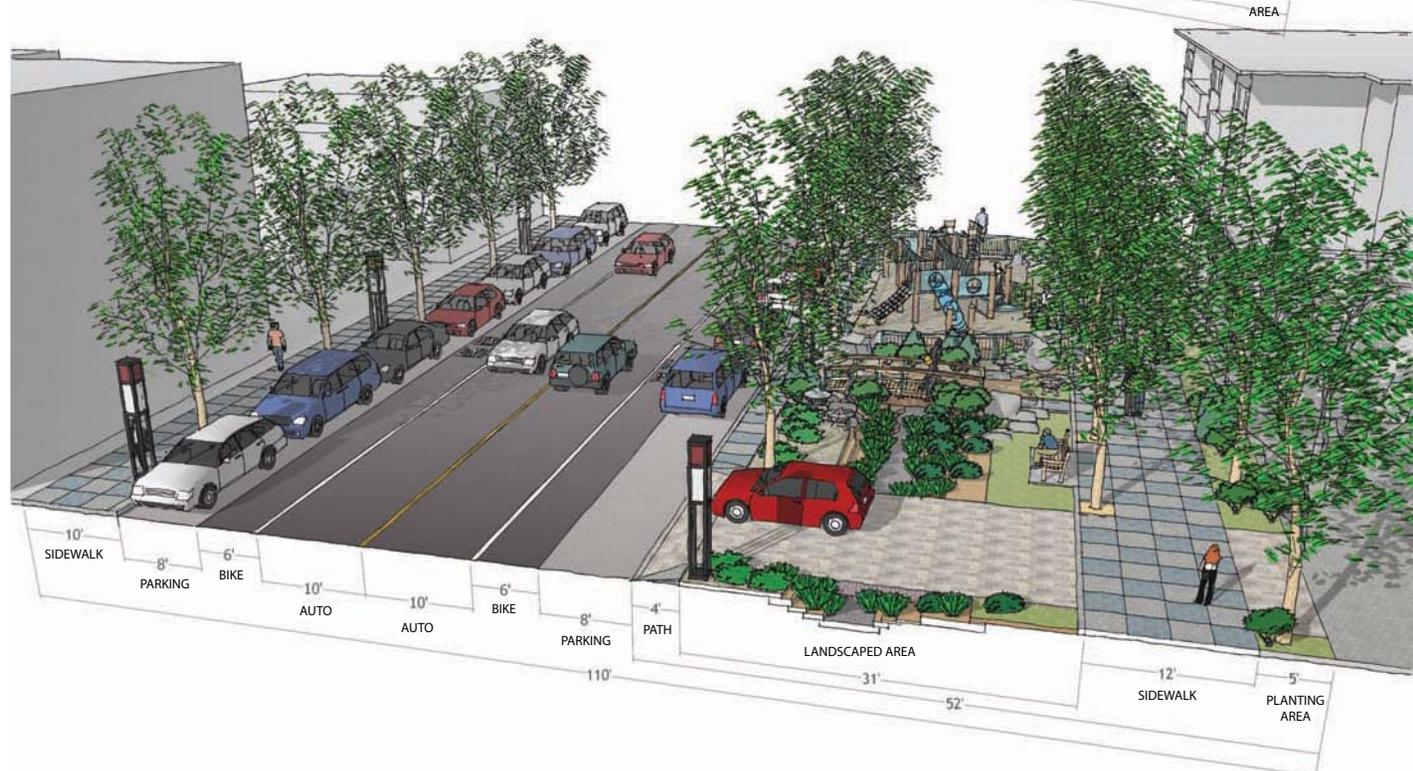


Figure 6.4a
Webster Street Linear Park Perspective
 (between Post and Sutter Streets)



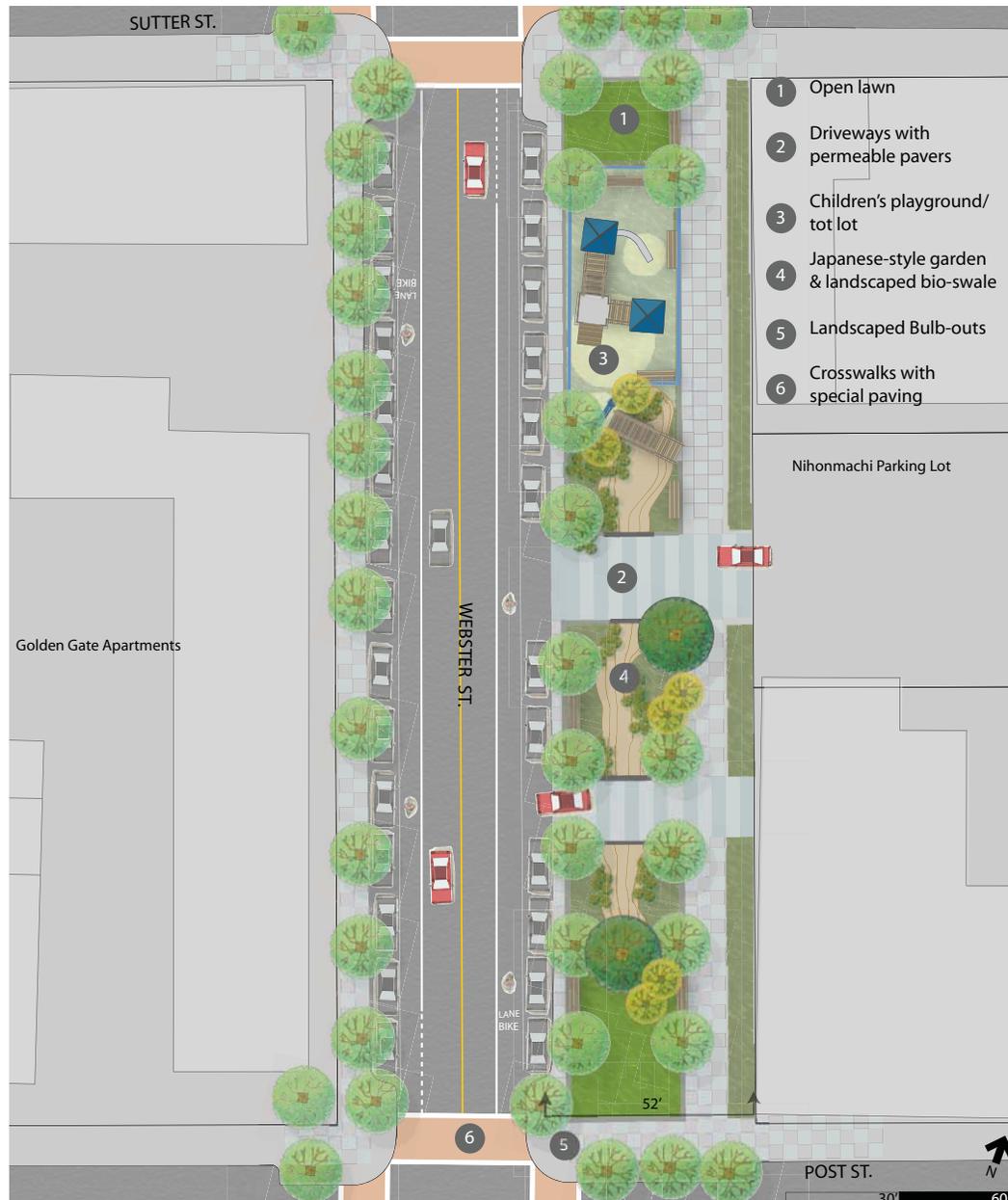


Figure 6.4b
Webster Street Linear Park Plan View
 (between Post and Sutter Streets)

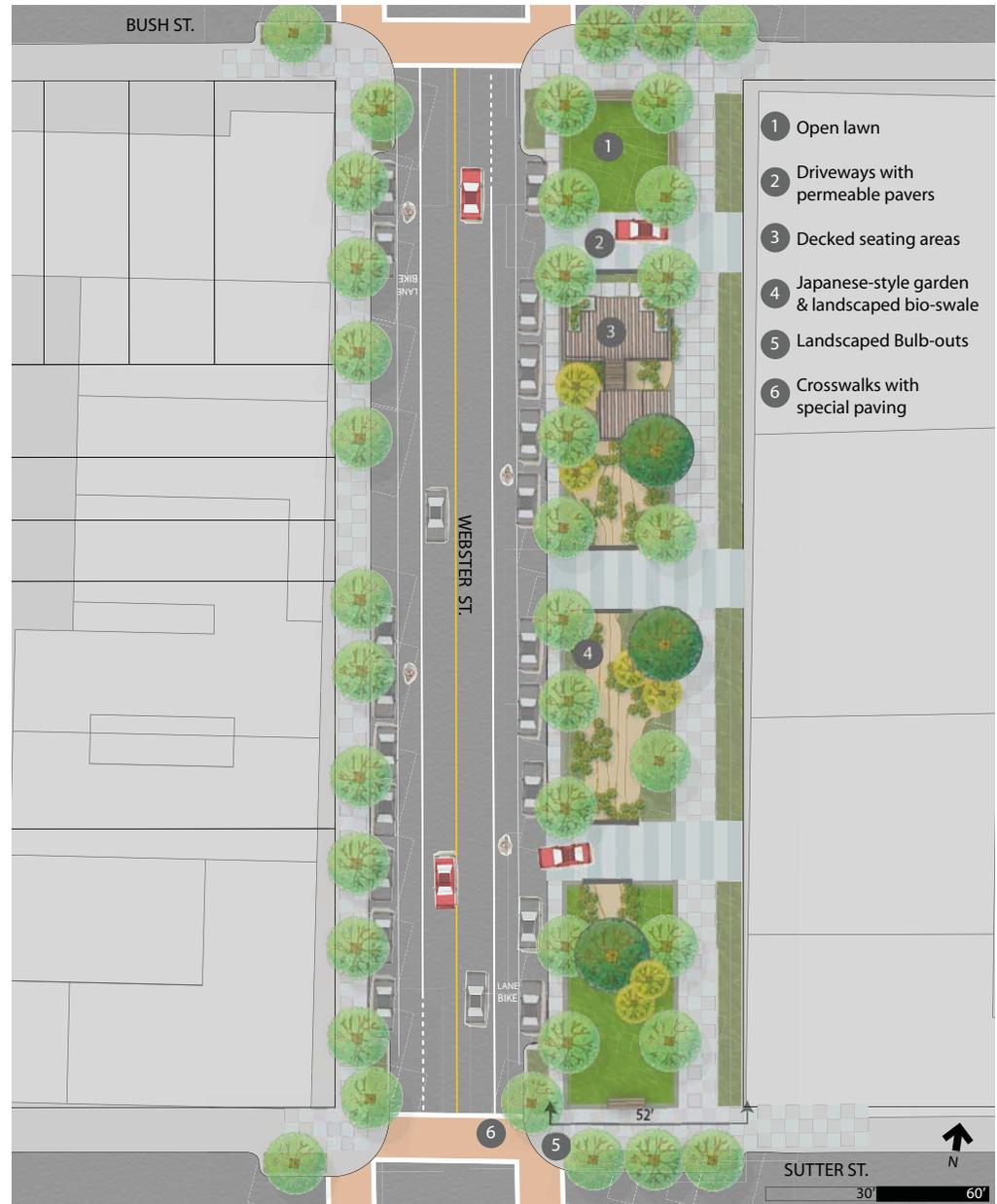


The open spaces should accommodate existing vehicular and pedestrian access to adjacent properties and be coordinated with the redesign of Japan Center. Three alignments were assessed, using the western, center and eastern portions of the roadway, to determine which alternative allowed for access, sunlight, and the most open space opportunities. Each alignment involves challenges with accommodating existing driveways. The east alignment was determined to be the most desirable because it will receive the most sunlight and aligns with the narrower width of Webster Street north of Bush Street (the traffic considerations for this realignment are discussed in Chapter 7: Transportation and Circulation).



- Coordinate with adjacent property owners to ensure their access is maintained appropriately and the design of properties can help to activate the new park.
- Ensure that the redesign accommodates community events and street fair functions.
- Conduct shadow and wind analysis to ensure desirable and appropriate design.

Figure 6.5a
Webster Street Linear Park Plan View
 (between Sutter and Bush Streets)



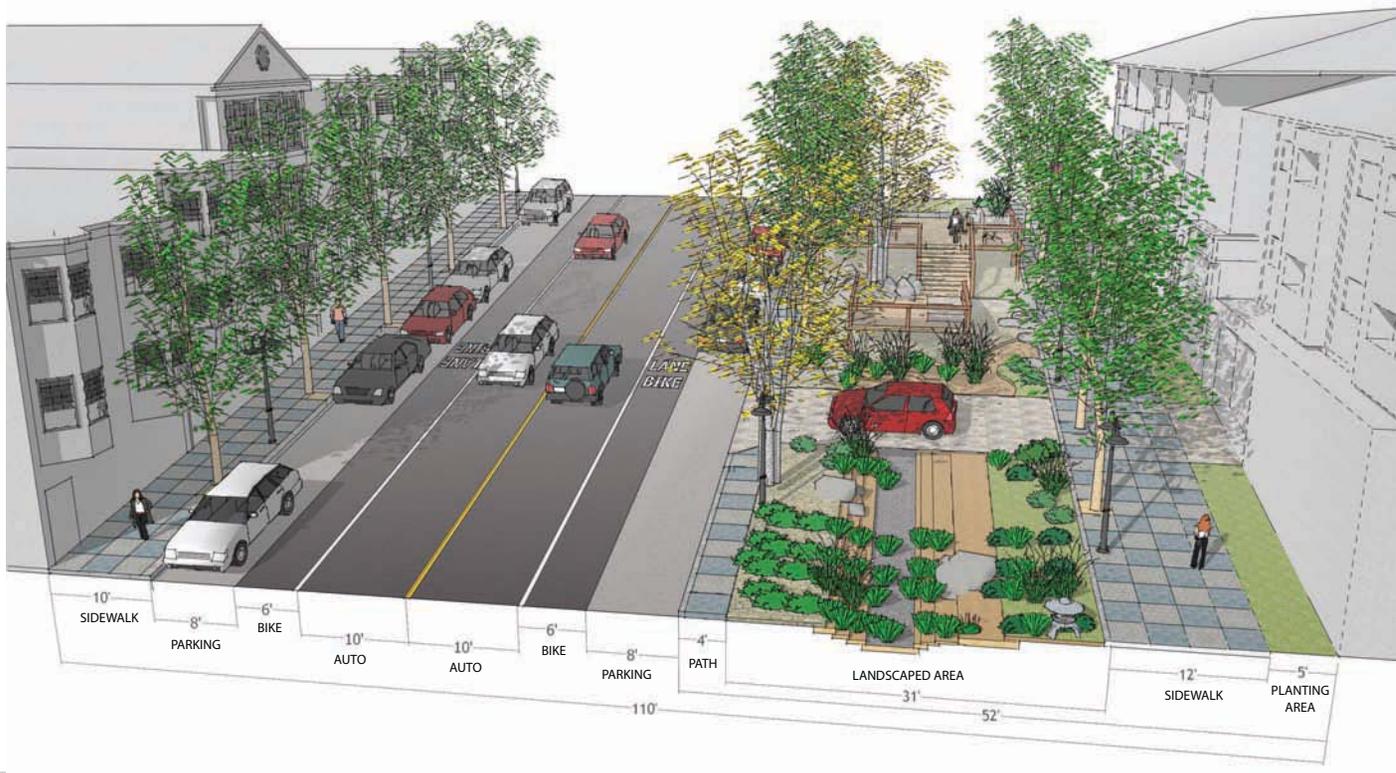


Figure 6.5b
Webster Street Linear Park Perspective
 (between Sutter and Bush Streets)

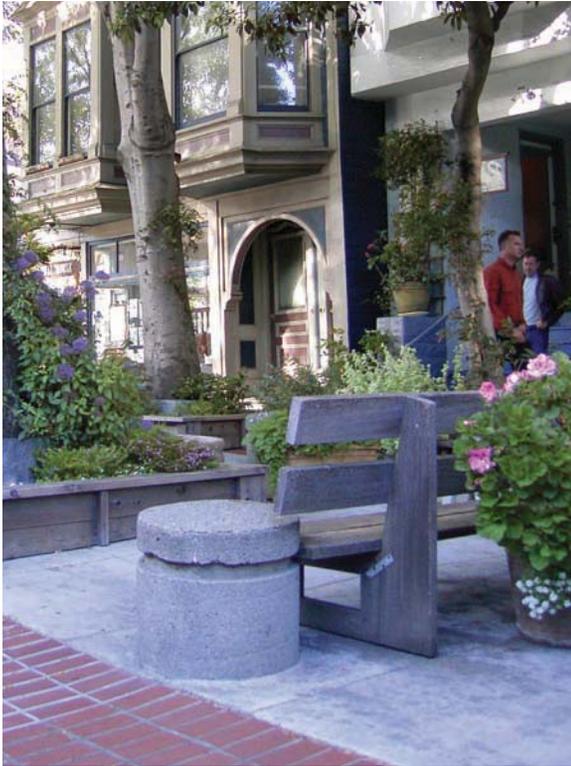
Streetscape Recommendations

As referenced earlier in the chapter, Japantown's streetscape conditions should be improved to create a more comfortable environment for visitors and residents. The City has just published the Draft Better Streets Plan, an important step in a citywide effort to improve the conditions of San Francisco's streets, and expects to adopt the plan by the end of 2009. Following the Draft Better Streets Plan guidelines, Japantown streetscape improvements should be focused within the core of Japantown bounded by Bush Street, Geary Boulevard, Fillmore Street, and Laguna Street. They are prioritized as follows (see Figure 6.6: Streetscape Improvement Plan).

Prioritize Post Street for Streetscape Improvements

Post Street is the neighborhood's main street and should be prioritized for special planting, lighting, paving, street furnishings, public art and directional and interpretive signage to celebrate its function. Special trees (as noted in Japantown-Specific Design Guidelines (Chapter 5) and determined appropriate by the community and landscaping experts), sidewalk and crosswalk paving designs, benches, banners, and public art celebrating the Japanese American history and culture should be located along Post, from Fillmore Street to Gough Street.

Individual property owners should be encouraged to set up and maintain planters in the space adjacent to their storefronts to help beautify the streets. Street furnishings and amenities should be located where there is high-foot traffic and enough space to be out of the path of travel. In particular, given the high number of locally-produced newspapers, special attention should be paid to making these local resources more visible and accessible to passers-by.



Neighborhood residential streets could make space for landscaping, seating and public art where bulb-outs are proposed.



Post Street can benefit from more street furnishings, culturally expressive public art and places for gatherings.

Improve Lighting, Tree-Planting and Neighborhood Amenities on Residential Streets

The neighborhood's residential streets include Steiner, Buchanan, Laguna, Octavia, Gough, California and Sutter; their improvements should be focused on tree-planting, small neighborhood amenities and enhanced lighting, coordinated with intersection bulb-outs described in Chapter 7. Sutter Street should receive

priority because of the uprooting issues prevalent. Replace trees with existing culturally and environmentally appropriate species, such as cherry blossoms. To tell the history of the neighborhood, residential streets should also be prioritized for interpretive signage or art that is characteristic of Japantown (as specified later in this chapter and in the Japantown-Specific Guidelines).

Improve Lighting and Signage on Streets Bordering the Neighborhood's Open Spaces

Improvements to signage, lighting and other pedestrian conditions along routes leading to the major parks on the periphery of Japantown, including Raymond Kimball Park, Hamilton Recreation Center, and Rosa Parks Elementary School, etc.) should be provided to encourage better use of existing resources.

LEGEND

-  Japantown BNP Boundary
-  Japantown Core
-  Fillmore Jazz District Improvement Area
-  1st Priority: Post Street
-  2nd Priority: Sutter Street
-  3rd Priority: Connections to Open Space
-  4th Priority (to be coordinated with Geary BRT): Geary Boulevard
-  5th Priority (to be coordinated with Japan Center redesign): Webster Street
-  6th Priority (to be coordinated with Fillmore Jazz District): Fillmore Street
-  7th Priority: Other Neighborhood Residential Streets
-  8th Priority: Living Alleys
-  9th Priority: Throughways

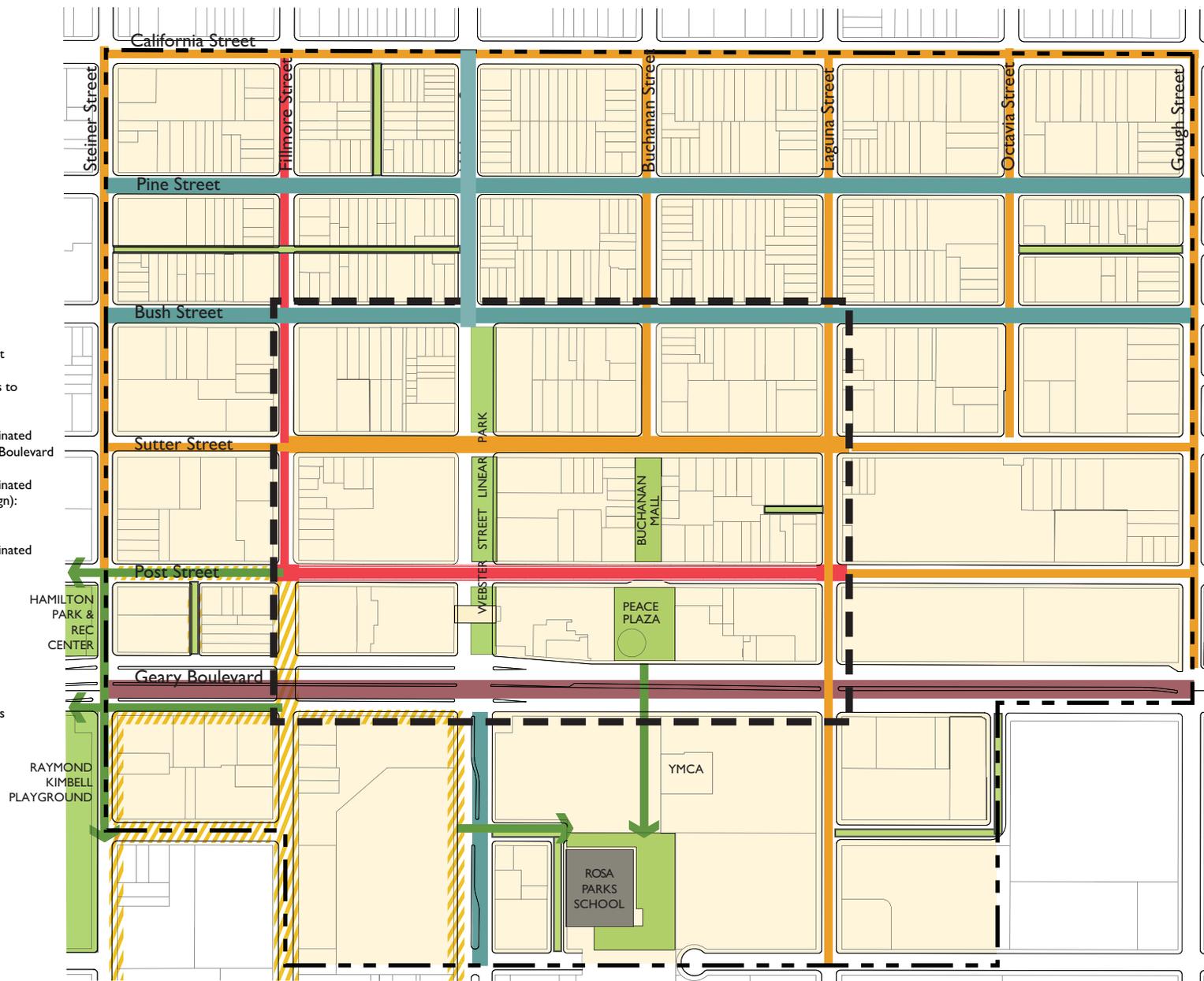
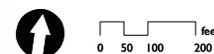


Figure 6.6
Streetscape Improvement Plan



Encourage the Transformation of the Geary Corridor into a Neighborhood-Serving Boulevard

Geary Boulevard should be treated with standard streetscape improvements for boulevards (as noted in the Draft Better Streets Plan to include marked crosswalks, pedestrian signal countdowns, corner curb extensions, streets trees, sidewalk planters, stormwater control measures, pedestrian-scale lighting, special paving in furnishings zone, and site furnishings). In addition, it should include high visibility/special crossing treatments, a mid-block bulb-out and crossing at Buchanan Street, a pedestrian refuge island and public art and signage that showcases Japantown's history and culture. Coordinate with the Geary BRT streetscape improvements to ensure they complement Japantown's streetscape. Connections across Geary Boulevard should be prioritized. Leverage recent improvements connecting Geary Boulevard to Fillmore Street (the diagonal walkway and plazas adjacent to Safeway) and improvements at the Geary/Webster intersection.

A wide, barren streetscape like Geary Boulevard can be greatly improved with widened sidewalks, pedestrian refuges and lighting, tree planting and enhanced crosswalks (as shown in this example of Folsom Street before and after).



Connect East-West Streets to the Proposed Webster Street Linear Park

Special efforts should be made to connect Post, Sutter and Bush Streets to the proposed Webster Street Linear Park, by means of the placement of seating, wayfinding signage and lighting at their intersections.

Connect Japantown to Fillmore Street

Improvements to Fillmore Street between Geary and Bush Street should be prioritized for directional and interpretive signage that is characteristic of Japantown and enhanced lighting to encourage nightlife. The Fillmore Jazz District overlaps with the Plan boundary and the recent improvements there should be enhanced with new improvements along Fillmore Street. Extend Post and Sutter streets' improvements to Fillmore Street to leverage recent improvements in the Fillmore Jazz District (brickwork, Jazz District banners, etc.).



Make Alleys More Livable

Improvements to alleys, including Hemlock, Wilmot, Orben, and Avery, should serve the dual purpose of additional open space and an alternative means of circulation for residents. Improvements should include comfortable spaces for pedestrians with seating, landscaping, pedestrian lighting, and reminders to drivers that they should drive cautiously.

Signage and Wayfinding Recommendations

The development and implementation of an effective Japantown Signage and Wayfinding system are essential components in upholding the neighborhood's role as the cultural heart for the Japanese and Japanese American community and a thriving commercial and retail district. Such a system will strengthen and promote a cohesive image and identity of Japantown. The identification of landmarks, entrances, and pathways is also a key component in orienting and directing movement through public spaces (see Figure 6.7: Signage and Wayfinding Plan).

The new signage and wayfinding system should reflect the community's unique and diverse experience in the United States and San Francisco. Signs, designed with simplicity, functionality and a consistent theme, will encourage both residents and visitors to visit a variety of destinations within Japantown. The signage and wayfinding system should avoid false and superficial interpretations and stereotypical thematic imagery that is often inappropriately used in ethnic neighborhoods. Signs should be strategically located such that they are visible but do not clutter or obstruct the sidewalk – they should be located in plazas, in places where the sidewalk widens, or in the sidewalk furnishings zone so as not to obstruct the path of travel.

LEGEND

-  Japantown BNP Boundary
-  Open Space
-  Gateways
-  Neighborhood Orientation Signs
-  Neighborhood Orientation Kiosks
-  Directional Signs
-  Interpretive Signs
-  Japantown History Walk
-  Signs at Transit Stops (exact locations to be coordinated with Geary BRT and MUNI)

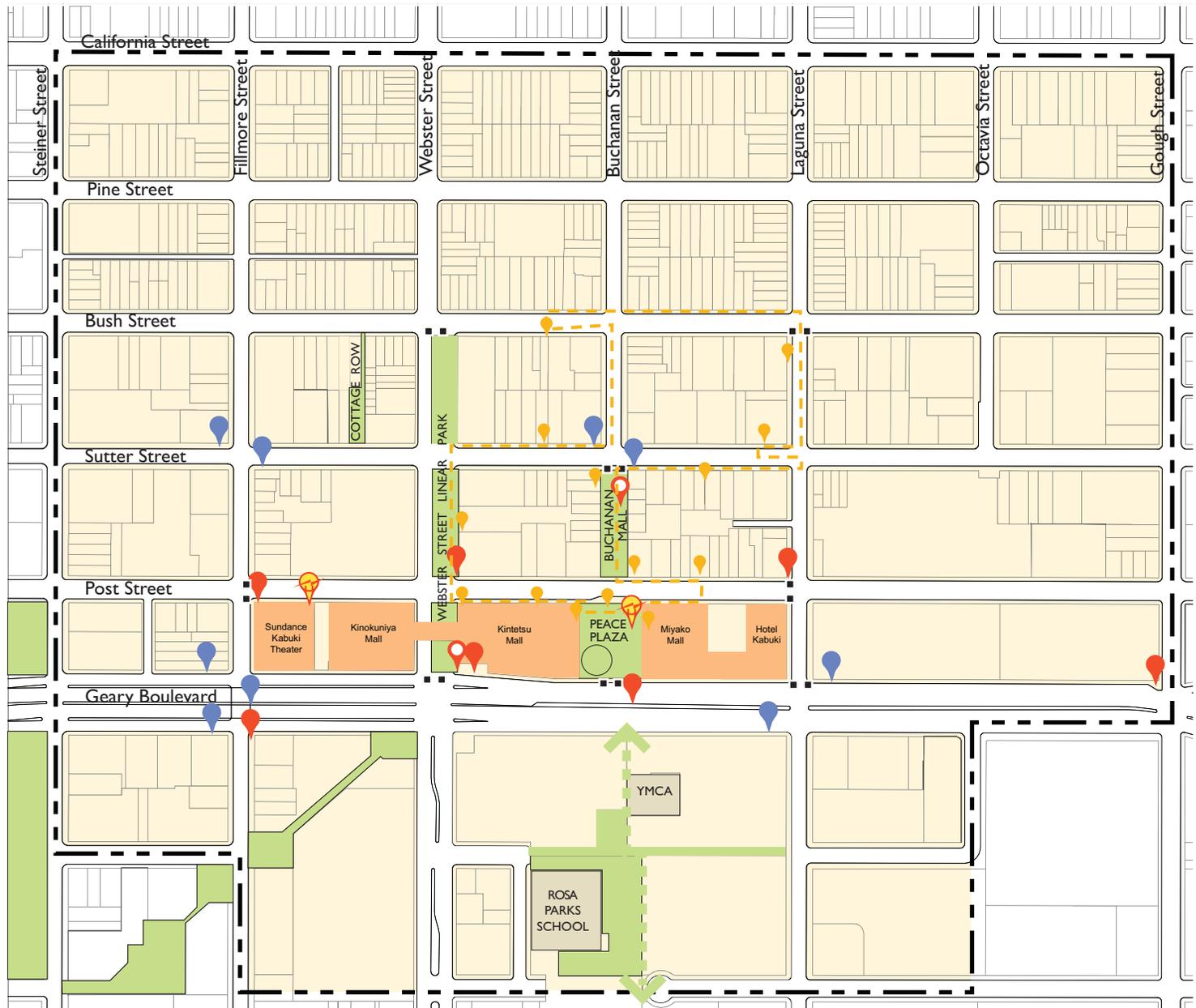


Figure 6.7
Signage and Wayfinding Plan



The Japantown signage and wayfinding improvements should fit into a clearly organized sign hierarchy that is compliant with the Planning Code and accessibility requirements and integrated with privately-owned signs. Recommendations for each component of the wayfinding hierarchy follow.

Mark Japantown's Entrances with Gateways

Markers at entrance nodes signal visitors that they have entered Japantown. Culturally expressive elements, such as the sensu (fan) at Geary and Webster Street and the Torii gate at Buchanan and Sutter Street, should call attention to the neighborhood's entry points. At a minimum, the intersection of Fillmore and Post streets and Laguna and Post streets should be receive gateway improvements (See Figure 6.7: Signage and Wayfinding Plan for locations).



Provide Neighborhood Orientation Signs

These signs identify and distinguish places by name, use and activity, such as primary cultural institutions, historical buildings and sites of significance, through an orderly and coordinated design. These signs should:

- Be free-standing and hold directories/maps to guide people to various neighborhood resources.
- Highlight both public and private destination points in neighborhood, including shopping, cultural and recreational facilities, public parking and facilities (e.g. restrooms) destinations.
- Be bilingual (English and Japanese).
- Adhere to specifications for a standardized template for each type of sign, including a standardized icon, bold, large and visible letters and font and appropriate graphics and text. Signs should include a uniform icon such as the sensu (Japanese folding fan), appropriate materials, dimensions and colors.
- Incorporate design specifications, fabrication, and approval procedures to retain quality control.
- Utilize state of arts technology for innovative, sustainable and visually appropriate signs and graphics, such as solar-powered, LED lighting.

At least two locations (noted on the Proposed Wayfinding and Signage Plan) should be information kiosks that feature interactive and virtual displays providing retail and event updates (for example, events hosted by Japantown merchants, Sundance Kabuki Theater, or Yoshi's).

The Torii gate at the northend of Buchanan Mall (left) serves as the northern gateway into Japantown, and is just one example of the shape a gateway can take. This orientation sign (right) provides visitors with information about LA's Little Tokyo's resources and history.





Directional signs are needed in various sizes and locations to assist pedestrians or slower moving traffic (above top) and for vehicular traffic (above) as demonstrated in LA's Little Tokyo.



Japantown's existing interpretive signs and art share pieces of the community's important history. There are many more sites within the neighborhood that have stories to be told.

Provide Directional Signs

Directional signs should be located at strategic corners within the neighborhood to direct people to Japantown's resources via vehicle, bicycle, or foot. These signs should be integrated with the City's signage program for other neighborhoods in terms of location, placement, design, materials, dimensions and maintenance.

Integrate Interpretive Signs with Existing Public Art

Interpretive signs tell a story, including historical, cultural, natural or architectural themes. Building on the new interpretive Japantown History Walk signs, additional signs and graphics should be designed and sited to encourage visitors to understand the historical sites, people and events that have impacted the neighborhood. These types of signs shall be coordinated with a centralized directory and map.



This example of enhanced transit signage and map (above) makes taking public transit easier for visitors, who can easily identify stops and orient themselves within the neighborhood

Place Signs at Transit Stops

New and existing transit stops in and on the periphery of Japantown should provide directional signage to primary destinations in Japantown and the Fillmore. These signs should be coordinated with citywide standards for MUNI stops and the Draft Better Streets Plan.

The San Francisco and regional signage programs should be updated to provide directions to Japantown at key intersections and locations associated with high tourist activity and Japanese significance.

RECOMMENDATIONS
IN THIS CHAPTER:

Transportation and Circulation

→ Improve Circulation for All Modes

- Prioritize Pedestrian Safety and Accessibility at Key Intersections
- Remove Two Travel Lanes on Webster Street
- Re-Envision Post and Sutter Streets

→ Increase Education and Enforcement Programs

→ Improve Transit Access and Efficiency

- Coordinate with the Transit Effectiveness Project
- Consider Re-routing the 1BX-California Express
- Coordinate with Geary Corridor Bus Rapid Transit Project

→ Improve Parking Management

- Coordinate with SFpark Programs in Japantown
- Price On-street Parking Meter Rates to Meet Demand
- Determine Feasibility of a Parking Benefit District to Capture Increased Meter Revenue
- Provide Additional Parking Regulation
- Provide Additional Bicycle Parking
- Improve Parking Supply Management
- Encourage and Maximize Mixed-use Development to Incorporate Structured Parking with New Commercial and Housing Development
- Consider the Opportunity to Increase the City's Revenue by Providing New Structured Parking Under Geary Boulevard

- Set New Requirements for New Residential Development
- Provide CarShare and Secure Bicycle Parking in Off-Street Parking Areas

→ Enhance Personal Safety and Wayfinding