

VISION PLAN

The Revitalization of the Buchanan Mall

Photo Credit: Hokubei Mainichi Newspaper

About the Japantown Community Benefit District

The Japantown Community Benefit District (JCBD) is an assessment district designed to improve and convey special benefits to properties within the central business district of Japantown. The JCBD was established in 2017 pursuant to the state law; the “Property and Business Improvement District Law of 1994”, as amended and augmented by Article 15 of the San Francisco Business and Tax Regulations Code. To guide the JCBD for the next 10 years, a JCBD steering committee and the Japantown Task Force (JTF) developed a Management Plan that responds to today’s market opportunities and district challenges.

The JCBD provides new improvements and activities, including environmental and economic enhancements. Each activity is designed to meet the goals of the JCBD: to improve the appearance and safety, to increase building occupancy and lease rates, to encourage new business development and attract ancillary businesses and services. The JCBD provides funding for enhanced maintenance, safety, beautification and marketing programs.

The development of the Buchanan Mall Vision Plan was funded by the San Francisco Japantown Foundation.

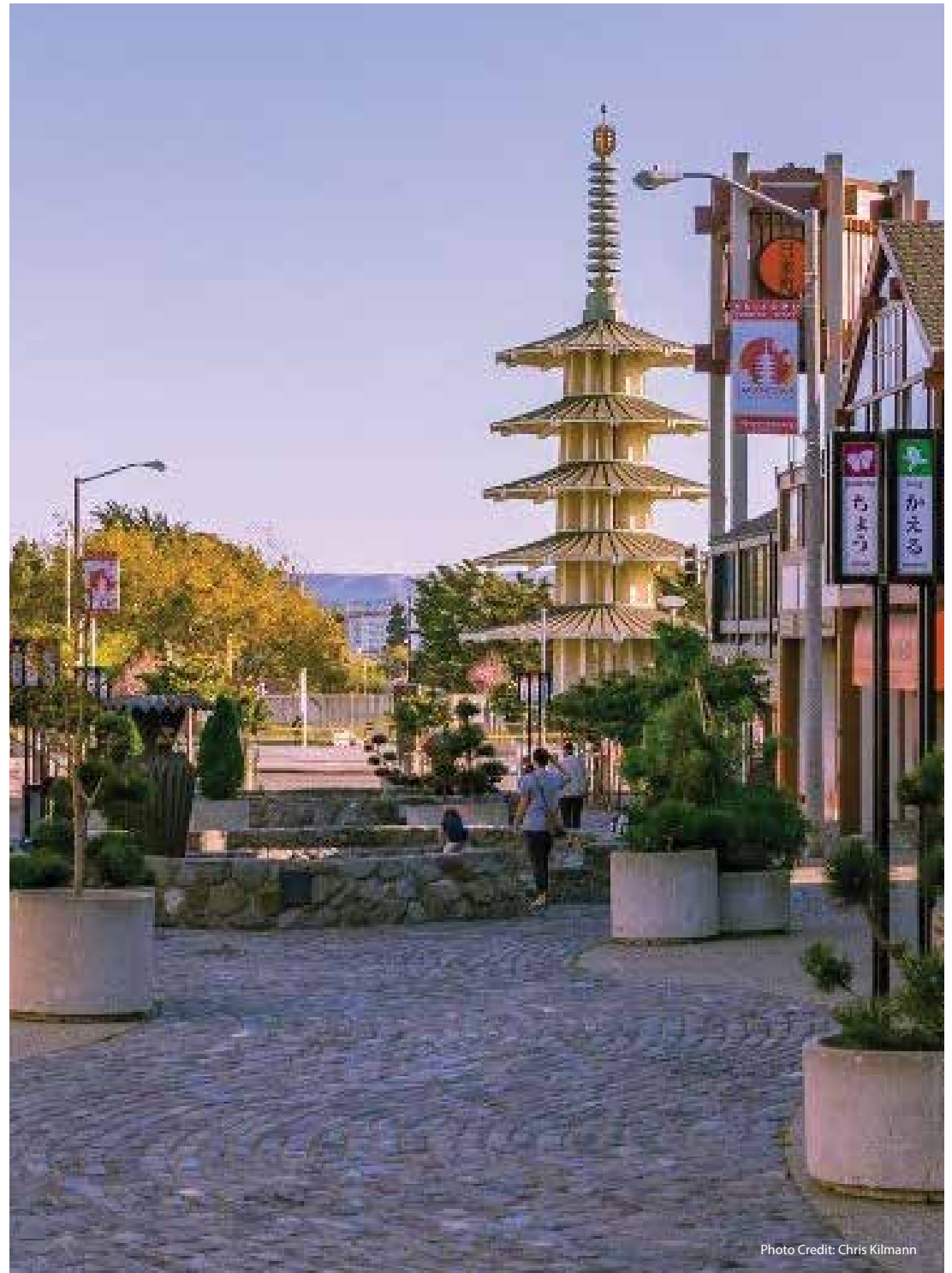


Photo Credit: Chris Kilmann

To Our Community

Developed by a coalition of property and business owners, the Japantown Community Benefit District strives to ensure that San Francisco Japantown thrives as a culturally rich, authentic, and economically vibrant neighborhood, which will continue to serve as the cultural heart of the Japanese and Japanese American communities for generations to come through economic business development for property owners and merchants, beautification of public spaces for all to enjoy, and the maintenance of a safe and liveable environment.

San Francisco Japantown once spanned 36 blocks. Today its core consists of only four blocks, covering Fillmore, Geary, Laguna, and Sutter Streets. Japantown was cut down by the WWII forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans, as well as through Redevelopment in the 1960s and 1970s. Through this process, many Japanese Americans lost their homes and businesses and much of what was historic Japantown was irrevocably changed. As one the last 3 remaining Japantowns in the United States, the JCBD is working with key community organizations and groups to ensure the future viability of the greater Japantown neighborhood.

The Buchanan Mall Vision Plan was developed in cooperation with key Japantown community representatives and city consultants. This Vision Plan details the issues found in Buchanan Mall that hinder desired improvements, and includes comments and suggestions for improvements from merchants that currently operate on Buchanan Mall.

We greatly hope this Vision Plan will lead to the successful implementation of rehabilitation efforts in the Buchanan Mall, for the benefit of the community and continuing prioritization to preserve the significant cultural elements of San Francisco Japantown for years to come.

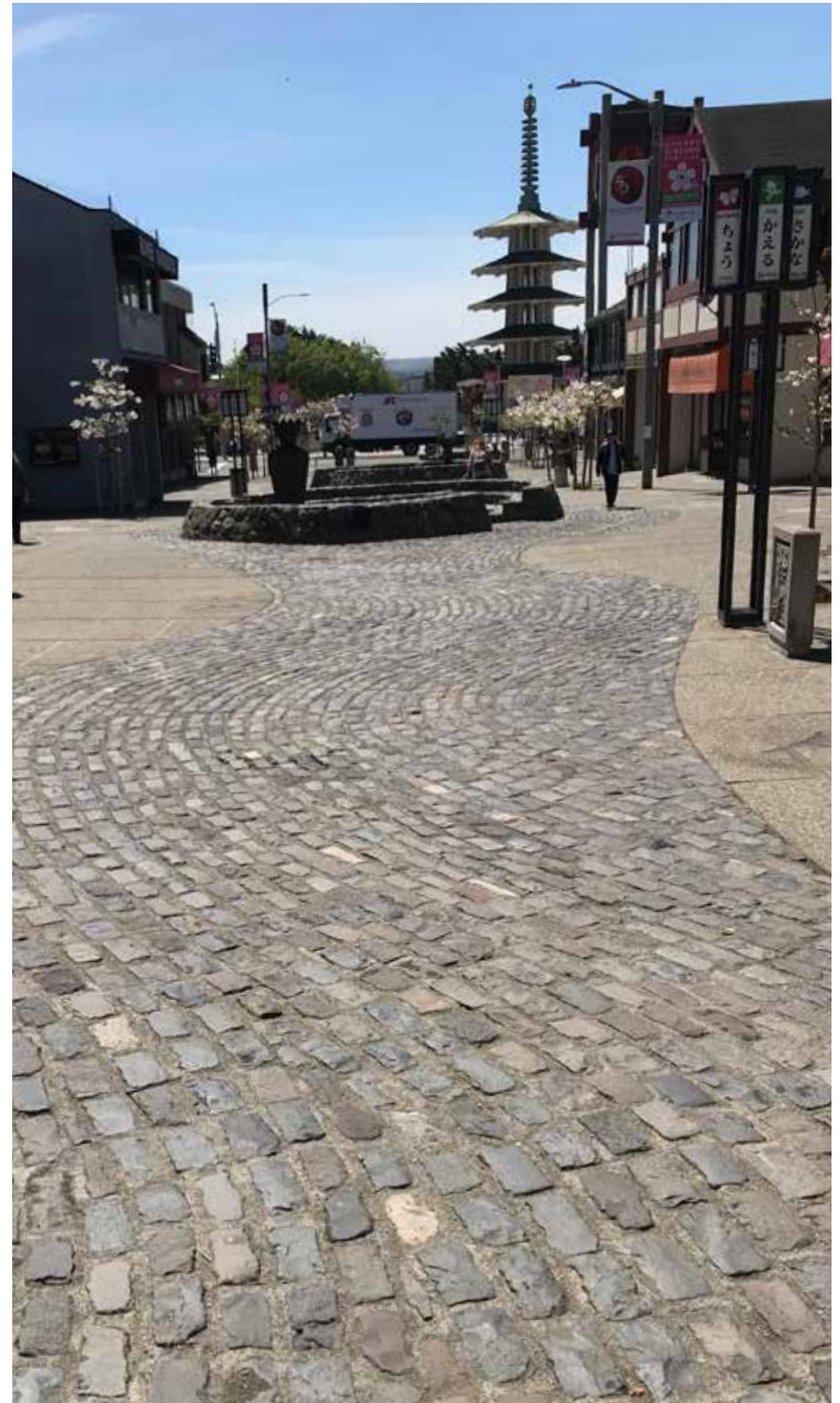




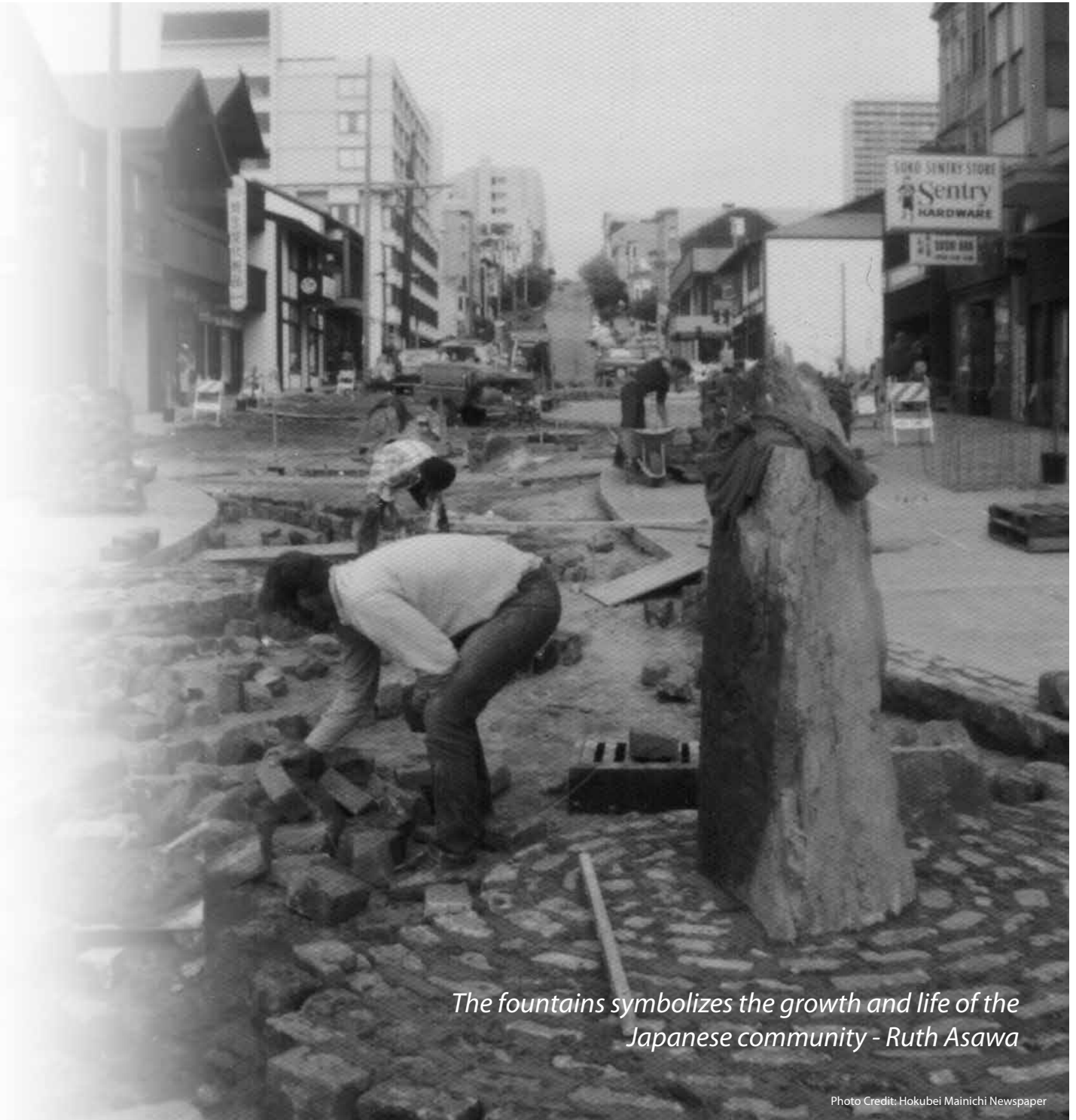
Photo Credit: Hokubei Mainichi Newspaper

Context/History of Buchanan Mall

Buchanan Mall was constructed in 1980 and designed by Rai Okamoto, an architect and planner of Japanese and African American descent who worked for the Redevelopment Agency. Buchanan Mall appears quaint, old, resembling a Japanese streetscape with shops opening to cobblestone streets and apartments above. The Buchanan Mall was envisioned and created to serve as a place where visitors and locals could enjoy a natural Japanese inspired garden atmosphere.

The Origami Fountains, the most prominent cultural element of Buchanan Mall, were created by world renowned artist Ruth Asawa. Asawa was incarcerated at Rohwer, Arkansas during World War II. Buchanan Mall is also home to two of Japantown's oldest family-owned businesses. Benkyodo was first opened in 1906, and Soko Hardware in 1925. Both businesses were forced to close during World War II, but were able to reopen after the war and remain in Japantown through Redevelopment. Benkyodo was designated a San Francisco Legacy Business Registry in 2019.

Photo Credit: Hokubei Mainichi Newspaper



The fountains symbolizes the growth and life of the Japanese community - Ruth Asawa

Photo Credit: Hokubei Mainichi Newspaper



Vision Plan Overview

The Buchanan Mall Vision Plan details the issues found in Buchanan Mall that hinder desired improvements, and includes suggestions for improvements for the revitalization of the commercial area. This Vision Plan was developed with key Japantown community representatives and organizations, city department consultants, and merchants that currently operate on Buchanan Mall.

The revitalization of Buchanan Mall will allow it to serve as an additional public space for the public to utilize and enjoy. The JCBD under the guidance of the City and County of San Francisco's Department of Public Works has taken the first steps towards this important project. It is not only about repairing what is not working, but to give the area a "face lift" so the cultural pathway that it once was many years ago can come to life once again, and remain a permanent part of Japantown's cultural landscape.

The Origami Fountains have not been functioning for many years. The installation of a water-recycling system to power the fountains once existing plumbing issues are resolved, would be a sustainable and environmentally friendly solution for their operation.

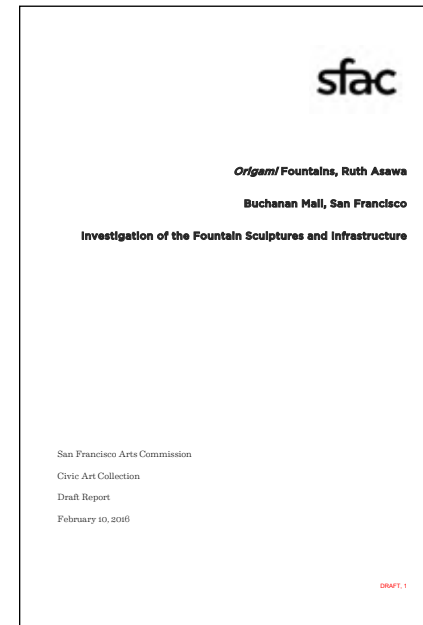
The cobblestone pathway presents ADA and safety issues that need to be addressed. Improvements are required to make the cobblestone and concrete pathways fully accessible for disabled and older adults to navigate the Buchanan Mall.

The lighting in Buchanan Mall is inadequate for evening hours. The Origami Lanterns have not been functioning for many years. New lighting installations would beautify and improve safety and security in the area.



Challenges

Throughout the years attempts were made to fix the plumbing issues under the Origami fountains. Unfortunately without proper oversight, even the best attempts can fail. In 2016 at the behest of the San Francisco Arts Commission and Department of Public Works (DPW), ARG Conservation Services conducted an assessment which developed an itemized list of “fountain rehab” costs totals \$437,177.34. It is definite that costs will have greatly increased in the past 3 years. The cost of repairs for the fountains, necessary ADA compliance alterations to the cobblestone pathway, and the fabrication and installation of lighting will make the Buchanan Mall Revitalization Project a challenging endeavor for Japantown to take on in years to come.





Next Steps

The first steps of the Vision Plan for the Buchanan Mall were to educate ourselves on the various planning and work that was done in prior years and to gather information from various community organizations, individuals, and City departments.

The JCBD has been coordinating with San Francisco Public Works to address immediate fixes such as checking on the health and replacing vandalized cherry blossom trees and flushing out the drainage of the Origami Fountains every 3 months.

Cement trash receptacles that lined the Buchanan Mall were removed in cooperation with the Nihonmachi Parking Corporation. These trash receptacles were constantly rummaged through by the homeless and became an eyesore in the community.

Working with the Mayor's Fix-It Team, we regularly schedule walk throughs to identify any punch list items. Ongoing outreach to the many merchants along Buchanan Mall is done so that they can also play a key role in the maintenance of the Buchanan Mall area.

We will continue to consolidate the informations received so that we can build on a strategic plan with input from City departments and the Japantown community.

Conclusion

Taking care of what was given to us is rooted in our culture, and Buchanan Mall will again awaken and fill with a peaceful and soothing ambiance. Ruth Asawa's hope that the fountains would symbolize the growth and life of the Japanese community was important then as it is today. Revitalizing and taking better care of the open space we still have in Japantown is crucial and part of the bigger picture of keeping Japantown thriving and preserving our community for future generations.

