

Ties That Bind 3: Strategies for the Preservation of Little Tokyo as an Historic Heritage Community

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Community Design Overlay workshop

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Summary:

The process to develop the Little Tokyo community design overlay began with the California Japantown Preservation Pilot Project funded by Senate Bill 307, which charged the historic Japantowns of San Francisco, San Jose and Los Angeles to develop specific land use plans for the preservation of each community.

The Little Tokyo community, represented by the Little Tokyo Community Council (LTCC) created a working definition of cultural preservation as the initial step toward developing a comprehensive vision of its future while preserving its history and cultural character. Our next step was to develop planning and design guidelines “to ensure that both significant physical (tangible) properties and transmission of intangible aspects of the culture...are given protection and priority in the future development of Little Tokyo.” After consulting with the City’s Planning Department and Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA/LA), LTCC chose to develop planning and design guidelines that would serve as the basis for updated CRA/LA design guidelines and a new Community Design Overlay District. Councilperson Jan Perry, CRA/LA and a number of community groups co-sponsored a community workshop to gather community stakeholders’ ideas and input on culturally appropriate land use and design elements for the Little Tokyo Planning & Design Guidelines. Kumamoto Associates was hired to coordinate and facilitate the workshop, and consultants Doug Suisman, Mark Campbell and Mark Rios were hired to provide technical expertise in planning and design. The workshop took place in December of 2004.

A joint task force of the LTCC and the Mayor’s Little Tokyo Community Development Advisory Committee (LTCDAC) was established to examine workshop data and other planning documents, and to develop the Guidelines to be submitted to the CRA/LA Commission and City of Los Angeles for adoption.

Little Tokyo Planning & Design Guidelines will:

- encourage development and redevelopment in a manner that is aesthetically pleasing, sustainable, attentive to detail, harmonious with the existing structures and maintains the unique historic cultural identity of Little Tokyo.
- establish the policies and concepts for good design and quality development but are flexible enough to allow for individual expression and imaginative solutions to fit the existing Little Tokyo environment.
- encourage individual expression in the development of land and buildings while maintaining continuity in the design of the urban environment.

- protect and enhance those qualities and characteristics, which seem mutually advantageous to the Little Tokyo community and the City in general.

Summary of Little Tokyo Planning & Design Guidelines

- Section 1: LOS ANGELES DEFINITION
 - *Cultural Preservation combines political, economic, and social elements that protect Japanese Americans' rich and dynamic traditions, associations, and heritage within the context of the physical and cultural landscapes of their neighborhoods. The objective of cultural preservation as a planning mechanism is to ensure that both significant physical (tangible) properties and the transmission of intangible aspects of the culture, such as oral traditions, arts, music, and the community's essence, are given protection and priority in the future development of Little Tokyo.*
- Section 1: BOUNDARIES
 - Western Border: Los Angeles St. from 3rd St. to Temple St., including the west side of Los Angeles St. between 2nd and 3rd Sts.
 - Northern Border: Temple St. from Los Angeles St. to Vignes St.
 - Eastern Border: Vignes St. from Temple St. to 1st St., 1st St. from Vignes St. to Garey St., Garey St. from 1st St. to 3rd St., 3rd St. from Garey St. to Traction Ave., Traction Ave. from 3rd St. to Alameda St., Alameda St. from Traction Ave. to 4th St.
 - Southern Border: 4th St. from Alameda St. to San Pedro St., San Pedro St. from 4th St. to 3rd St., 3rd St. from San Pedro St. to Los Angeles St.
- Section 1: GOALS (THEMES)
 - Promoting and sustaining a thriving and active community
 - Preserving cultural identity and character
 - Attracting people of various cultures and generations
 - Fostering social relationships and a sense of community
- Section 2: DESIGN ELEMENTS
 - Little Tokyo Gateways
 - Site Planning/Building Orientation
 - Site Specific Design Guidelines: LT Historic District
 - Public Art and Special Features (Landmarks)
 - Public/People Spaces
 - Sidewalks
 - Street-Level Uses
 - Pedestrian Circulation
 - Streetscape
 - Functional and Decorative Lighting
 - Security and Defensible Design
 - Signage
 - Parking