



# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR  
AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Jon Cicirelli

**SUBJECT:** NAMING OF A  
NEW PUBLIC PARK:  
AT JAPANTOWN

**DATE:** August 27, 2020

Approved

Date

8/27/20

**COUNCIL DISTRICT: 3**

## RECOMMENDATION

Accept one of the following recommendations regarding the future public park within the Japantown Square Development along North 6<sup>th</sup> Street:

1. Approve the Parks and Recreation Commission recommended name of “Sakura Park”;  
OR
2. Approve the staff recommendation of “Heinlerville Park,” OR
3. Approve Item 1 or 2 and direct staff to work with the community to name an amenity within the park after the name not approved for the new park; OR
4. Select and approve an alternative name from the list of conforming names generated through the outreach process.

Each of these is discussed in the Policy Alternatives Section of this Memorandum.

## OUTCOME

Approval of one of the recommendations will result in the naming of this new city park in alignment with the Council’s decision and in conformance of Council Policy 7-5.

## BACKGROUND

This park site is located within the Japantown Square Development project (formerly known as the Japantown Corporation Yard). The park is located mid-block along the east side of North 6<sup>th</sup> Street between East Taylor Street and Jackson Street in the Japantown neighborhood (Attachment 1).

This 0.75-acre public park site is neighborhood-serving and configured as an urban plaza. The site includes an historic memory walk, public art, shaded landscaped seating areas, spaces for public events (activation), a children’s playground, and at least two cherry blossom trees as described by the Master Plan (Attachment 2). Design documents for the park are 35% complete and construction is expected to begin in 2022 with a target opening in 2023.

On March 4, 2020, staff recommended the name “Heinlenville Park” at the scheduled Parks and Recreation Commission (the Commission) meeting. After some consideration, the Commission voted to not accept the staff recommendation and instead recommended “Sakura Park” to honor Japantown’s culture, in alignment with public input received to have a name of Japanese origin for the park.

## **ANALYSIS**

City Council Policy Number 7-5, Naming of City-Owned Land and Facilities (Policy) establishes guidelines and procedures regarding the naming of City-owned land and facilities that are not public streets, such as a public park. Per the Policy, official names must be reflective of one of the following criteria:

- A. Geographic location;
- B. Prominent geographic feature or local reference point;
- C. Adjoining subdivision/community;
- D. Historical event;
- E. An individual who has been deceased for at least five years;
- F. An individual via a donation or sponsorship agreement; or
- G. A group via a donation or sponsorship agreement.

As a result of online public surveys, staff received 42 name nominations. Of the nominations received, 25 were found to meet the required Policy criteria. Attachment 3 provides the list of all qualifying and non-qualifying name nominations. Among the names presented, “Yujo Park” received the most individual votes (69). However, staff research concluded that the Japanese word “yujo,” which means friendship, also carries connotations that are potentially inappropriate for the naming of a City facility.

Staff recommended “Heinlenville” to the Parks and Recreation Commission as the name for the park. Multiple nominations that referenced the name John Heinlen in some format (e.g. John Heinlen Park, Heinlenville-Chinatown Gardens Park, Heinlenville Park) were submitted through the community process. When combined, these names were found to have received a majority of community support with 79 votes total.

In 1887, John Heinlen, a German immigrant farmer and businessman, set aside a portion of his land to permanently house Chinese immigrants who were seeking refuge after the City’s original Chinatown was burned down. Mr. Heinlen’s land created a refuge and established resources that

resulted in the creation of a safe community. This eventually led Japanese immigrants to settle in the area resulting in the formation of what is now San José's Japantown.

During its March public meeting, the Parks and Recreation Commission acknowledged the importance of John Heinlen's actions, the community he helped to establish, and the historic context of the origins of today's Japantown. The Commission members also expressed concern about of historical lack of park names that are representative of black persons, indigenous persons, and people of color. Commission members expressed that a family name of European origin was not reflective of a desire to have a culturally-representative name for the park. Per Policy 7-5, all name nominations for the facility are required to be presented at a Commission hearing, where the Commission is tasked with hearing public comment, reviewing nominations, and recommending the most appropriate name for the facility. Should the Commission deem the staff recommendation undesirable, they may choose from any qualifying nominations received.

After some discussion, the Commission agreed that the vast majority of survey responses referencing names that reflect Japanese culture validated identifying a new recommendation consistent with public desire for a Japanese name. The Commissioners identified "Sakura Park" as the preferred name because it respects community input by honoring a much beloved symbol of Japanese culture and because second to "Yujo Park," "Sakura Park" received the most public votes for a single nomination. A motion to nominate "Sakura Park" as the official name was put forth and passed 7-0-3 (District Seats 5, 6 and 8 vacant).

Staff finds that the Commission's recommendation of "Sakura Park" conforms with the Policy in that it reflects Japanese culture and references aspects of the Japantown community. "Sakura" (or "cherry blossom") is a much beloved flower of Japan and has been celebrated in many ways for centuries. This springtime flower is included in many national symbols, coins, annual events and festivals, poems, songs, textiles, and is widely referenced in Japanese history.

Since the Commission's hearing, staff has received correspondence from the community asking the Council to reconsider "Heinlenville" as the official park name (Attachment 4).

## **CONCLUSION**

The proposed action would result in naming of the future neighborhood park in alignment with the Council Policy 7-5

## **EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP**

Once a name is adopted, staff will coordinate with the City Clerk's Office to ensure the name is recorded and the Public Works Department to include park signage during construction.

## **CLIMATE SMART SAN JOSÉ**

This recommendation has no effect on Climate Smart San José energy, water, or mobility goals.

## **POLICY ALTERNATIVES**

This memorandum proposes four potential recommendations of the requested City Council action. Each of these is discussed below.

**Potential Recommended Action #1:** Approve the Parks and Recreation Commission recommended name of “Sakura Park”.

**Pros:** “Sakura Park” aligns with City Council Policy Number 7-5, Naming of City-Owned Land and Facilities as it is reflective of a geographic location and adjoining community. The name is consistent with the Parks and Recreation Commission’s desire to have a name of Japanese origin for the park.

**Cons:** Subsequent public correspondences (Attachment 4: Community Correspondence) shows strong support for “Heinlenville Park.”

**Reason for Not Recommending:** Not Applicable.

**Potential Recommended Action #2:** Approve the staff recommended name “Heinlenville Park”.

**Pros:** “Heinlenville Park” aligns with City Council Policy Number 7-5, Naming of City-Owned Land and Facilities. Staff found the name is consistent with public input, reflects the history and diverse culture of the neighborhood, honors the family who provided a haven that eventually led to the establishment of Japantown, and was considered by the Parks and Recreation Commission during a notice public hearing. This name has strong community support.

**Cons:** Adoption of this name would not be consistent with the Parks and Recreation Commission recommendation.

**Reason for Not Recommending:** Not applicable.

**Potential Recommended Action #3:** Approve Potential Recommended Action 1 or 2 and direct staff to work with the community to name an amenity within the park after the name not approved for the new park.

**Pros:** Names for amenity areas within the park (i.e. sitting areas, memory walks, etc.) are within staff’s discretion subject to the City Manager’s approval. Regardless of which name is adopted by City Council, an area, or an amenity within the park within the park could be named after the

name that is not selected. Options for amenities to name include the History Walk, the picnic area, the plaza, and the children's play area.

**Cons:** There is potential for the community to feel that the name not selected is relegated to a lesser status.

**Reason for not recommending:** Not applicable

**Potential Recommended Action #4:** Select and approve an alternative name from the list of conforming names generated through the outreach process (Attachment 3.)

**Pros:** The Council can select another name that is consistent with public input that is included with this staff report.

**Cons:** The City Council would be selecting a name other than the two considered at the Parks and Recreation Commission. This action omits the public forum from the decision, where the commissioners' considerations of the matter are discussed.

**Reason for not recommending:** Not applicable.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

Staff completed several rounds of online public surveys to engage the public in the solicitation of name nominations and to allow the public opportunities to vote on qualifying names. These surveys were circulated between September 10, 2019 and September 24, 2019 and again between January 8, 2020 and January 17, 2020. The surveys were distributed through Council District 3 newsletters and email announcements, the Park Advocates social media accounts, and the department's electronic communication networks and social media accounts.

## **COORDINATION**

This memorandum was coordinated with the City Manager's Budget Office and the City Attorney's Office.

## **COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION/INPUT**

See the Background and Analysis sections of this memorandum for more information regarding the Parks and Recreation Commission's discussion and recommendation.

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**CEQA**

Not a Project, File No. PP17-008, General Procedure & Policy Making results in no changes to the physical environment.

/s/  
Jon Cicirelli  
Director of Parks,  
Recreation and Neighborhood Services

For questions, please contact Nicolle Burnham, Deputy Director, at (408) 793-5514.

**Attachments:**

- 1) Location Map
- 2) Approved Park Master Plan
- 3) List of Nominated Names
- 4) Community Correspondence