



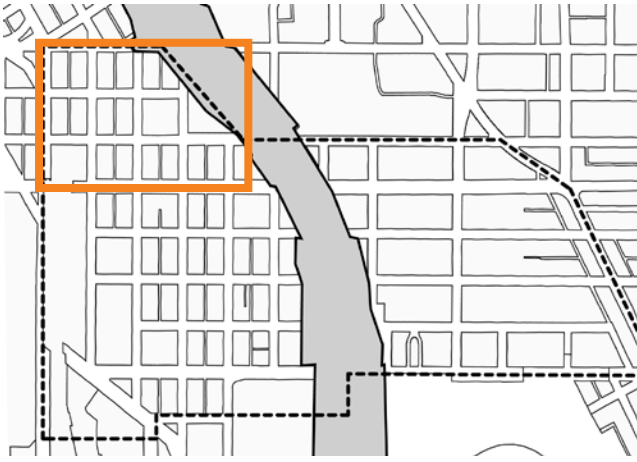
# 「Nihonmachi」

## Community Open Space Initiatives

Community Design Studio Report 2005

Department of Landscape Architecture / University of Washington





## Executive Summary

Nihonmachi is a Japanese neighborhood rich in possibilities and at the cusp of great changes. The neighborhood was once a vibrant community of Japanese immigrants that suffered from cultural abandonment when the population was forced to leave during the Japanese internment. Although Japantowns are disappearing nationally, Seattle's Nihonmachi is ripe for cultural, economic and social development. The following report takes a critical look at the latent assets of the neighborhood as well as the issues with which it is currently plagued. A major consideration of each of the design solutions are to maintain and uphold the gems, the great places of the neighborhood, including Danny Woo Garden, Panama Hotel, NP Hotel, Nippon Kan Theatre, and other places of historic and cultural significance. The design solutions also consider the spaces adjoining these historic landmarks. After careful analysis of the neighborhood through observation and in-depth interviews, the most pressing issues to be dealt with were of residential and commercial vacancy, derelict open spaces, abundance of car-oriented spaces and parking lots, homelessness, drug use, drug dealing and prostitution. The report features four design concepts working together to revitalize the neighborhood:

**Re-lightening Kobe Terrace Park** seeks to ameliorate the deleterious impact of I-5 while providing new programmable community spaces along the northeast edge of the district. It proposes a series of terraced plazas in along the hillside, as well as an illuminated wall that serves as a symbol of friendship to Seattle's sister city: Kobe Japan.

**Monster Stair** proposes a staircase that continues the axis of Maynard Ave S and makes a new entrance into Danny Woo Garden. Public art along the stairs is both pessimistic and optimistic as it uses pop-cultural imagery as a reference to Japanese heritage in the past as well as the present flows of goods and ideas between the city and the Pacific Rim.

**Main Street Improvements** examines how future development could enhance the pedestrian experience and aesthetic quality to create a vibrant, active space along Main Street. Specifically, the project studies the reconfiguration of parking spaces to provide pocket pedestrian spaces, new paving patterns to improve the pedestrian experience and calm traffic; improvement of building facades, and setbacks for upper stories and articulation at the street level.

**Light in the Alley** explores the creation of pedestrian spaces from three alleyways in the neighborhood. While each alley is given a different theme, some common design elements ensure that the three work cohesively as a whole. The alleys would provide both intimately scaled pathways for moving through the neighborhood as well as places for lingering.

These proposed Open Space guidelines, designs, and implementation strategies work to establish connectivity, improve existing spaces, and ultimately revitalize the historic identity of Nihonmachi -- a district serving not only Japanese and Japanese Americans, but also those communities who reside or will reside in Nihonmachi.

## 1. Site Overview

The study area consists of Nihonmachi, a historic area, that has a multitude of land uses within its boundaries. The neighborhood is located within a 15 block area bounded by:

- Yesler Way to the north
- S. Jackson St.. to the south
- 4th Ave. to the west
- 7th Ave. to the east.
- Sixth and South Main served as the cultural epicenter.

## Background

As early as 1891, Nihonmachi served as the heart of Seattle's Japanese American community. This community thrived until the forced removal and internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. While the district has continued to be the home to a Pan-Asian community, Seattle's Japanese American community has never regained the same sense of identity and vitality as enjoyed before the war. Although an active Japanese American community no longer resides in Nihonmachi, the District remains culturally important to those living in the Puget Sound area. As historian Gail Dubrow argues, Seattle's Japantown is the most intact Japanese American district in the U.S. thanks to its exemplary landmarks ("Restoring a Sense of Place in Seattle's Nihonmachi", 2003). Some of the landmarks identified from previous studio and charrette analyses include:



**Location Map**



**Land Use Map**



- **Panama Hotel** - contains both the oldest intact example of a *senjo* (Japanese public bathhouse), and the bustling storefront teahouse that maintains character and street level usage
- **Nippon Kan Theatre** - Japanese community theater and meeting hall (now turned into a courier office)
- **Kobe Terrace Park** – terraced hillside public park adorned with a Stone Lantern gift from Kobe sister city, Mt. Fuji cherry trees, and pathways winding alongside I-5.
- **Danny Woo Community Garden** – approx. 100 garden plots on a terraced hillside; intended users are predominantly low-income Asian seniors.

### Current Conditions

Today, surface parking lots occupy a large percentage of open space in Nihonmachi. These spaces can be seen in light grey on the *Pedestrian and Facade Analysis Map* (p5). Undoubtedly, these parking lots detract from the vitality and the sequential town experience from this neighborhood. The *Pedestrian and Facade Analysis Map* (p5) also analyses the friendliness of the facade, or how aesthetically pleasing, scale appropriate, and well fitting for the neighborhood the building facades are. Most structures are mixed-use and house residential and office spaces above the street level. Small retail spaces occupy the ground level of most of the buildings. As shown on the *Historic Map* (p6), this tendency has continued from the pre-war period and it is one of the significant features of the historic urban fabric of the area.

### Future Development

Nihonmachi is expected to change into a residential area in the next few decades. Future development plans will influence the neighborhood character significantly.

The northern part of Nihonmachi is defined by Yesler Way and extends half a block south from Main Street. It is currently changing into a high density residential area. The parcels in yellow/orange on the *Future Development Map* (p5) are currently under development. Two parcels are slated for middle-high income family type housing. Both are mid-height buildings and cover 100 percent of their lots. The areas that are rich in possibilities for development are in red/orange on the aforementioned map. In this context, the historic part of Japantown is expected to serve as the core of the neighborhood.

**1**  
Maneki  
Restaurant



**2**  
Panama  
Hotel



**3**  
Danny Woo  
Entrance



**4**  
Takohachi  
Restaurant



**5**  
Corner  
Store



### Exemplary Facades

## 2. Neighborhood Assets / Issues

### Assets

There are a number of assets that the neighborhood possesses. The district has a rich history that has left behind a number of great landmarks such as the Panama Hotel, NP Hotel, Danny Woo Garden, Nippon Kan Theatre, and Kobe Terrace Park. The district has a legacy of community involvement, an inspiring amount of pride in their community, a trend of gardening for subsistence that increases the consumption of culturally appropriate food, nutritious vegetables and overall community health. The community is also blessed with dramatic views of the city of Seattle that make climbing the hills in the area worthwhile. The neighborhood also has a great deal of space that can be developed in a way that benefits the community. As seen on the *Land Use Map* (p3) the many parking lots in the area can become valuable open space, mixed use developments, commercial or residential space, etc. Currently, Nihonmachi is host to incredible restaurants such as Takohachi, Maneki, and Tsukushinbo.

### Issues

Nihonmachi is a neighborhood with a number of major issues as well. The area is bisected by a major free-



**Pedestrian + Facade Analysis Map**



**Future Development Map**

way that is impossible to cross in most places. There is an abundance of residential and commercial vacancy, derelict open spaces, car-oriented spaces and parking lots, homelessness, drug use, drug dealing and prostitution. The residents and other members of the neighborhood have expressed a great desire for a higher degree of public safety. There is also a lack of workforce housing and residential population density. Little public transportation exists in the area and open space is limited. One of the few open spaces, Kobe Terrace Park/Danny Woo Garden, is plagued with a population of tenacious drug users.

### 3. Planning and Design Strategies

- Improving Existing Spaces
- Celebrating Culture and History in Spaces
- Connecting Spaces
- Discovering New Spaces
- Multiple Function in Spaces

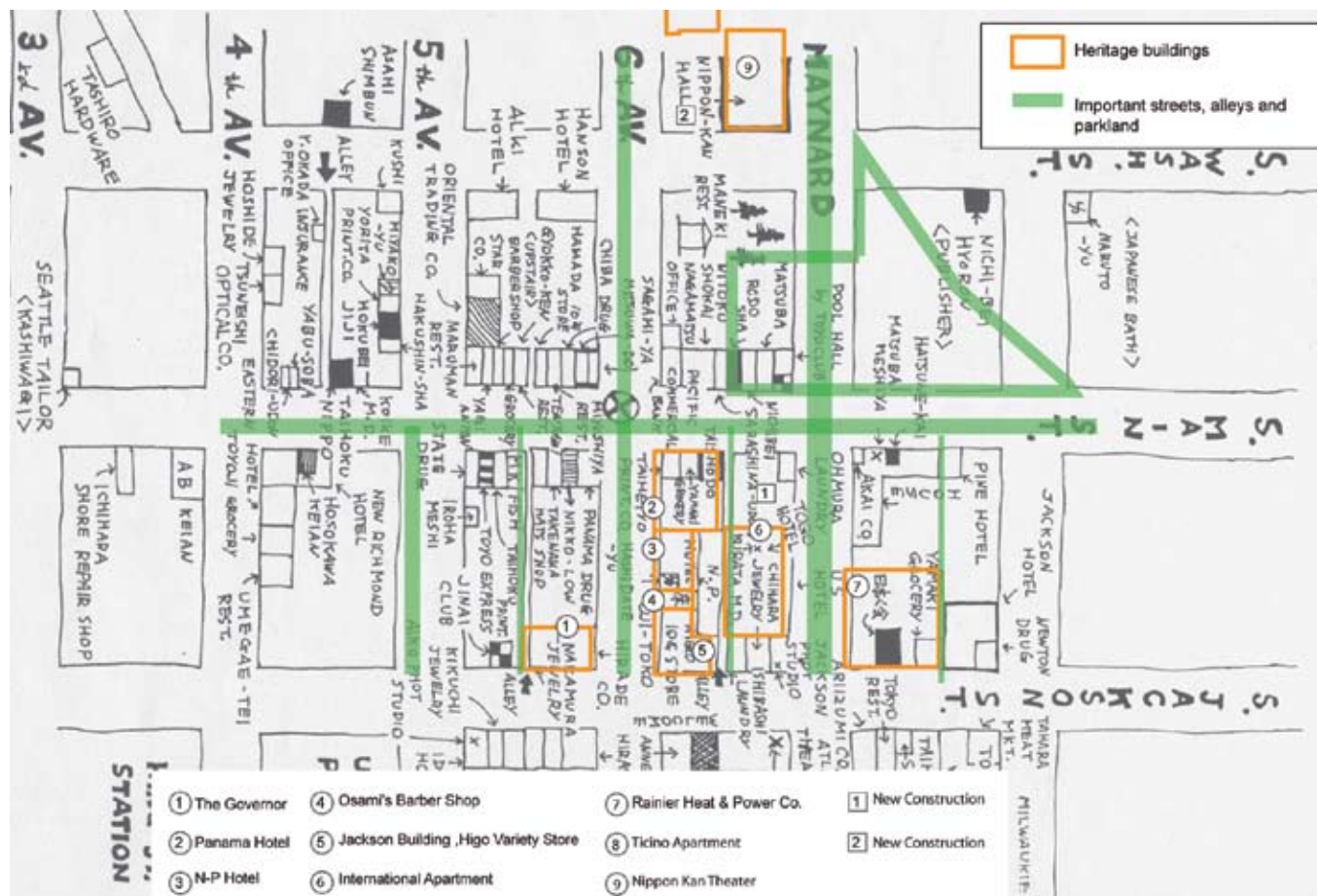
The Nihonmachi group focused on integrating, enhancing and connecting two types of public space in the neighborhood: parks and streets. Some projects emphasized certain themes such as revealing cultural history, discovering underutilized spaces or creating spaces with multiple functions. Sites were generally

chosen based on their ability to enhance neighborhood connectivity and individual design strategies often sought to enhance the aesthetic quality and resident's perceptions of safety in the neighborhood.



### 4. Design Projects

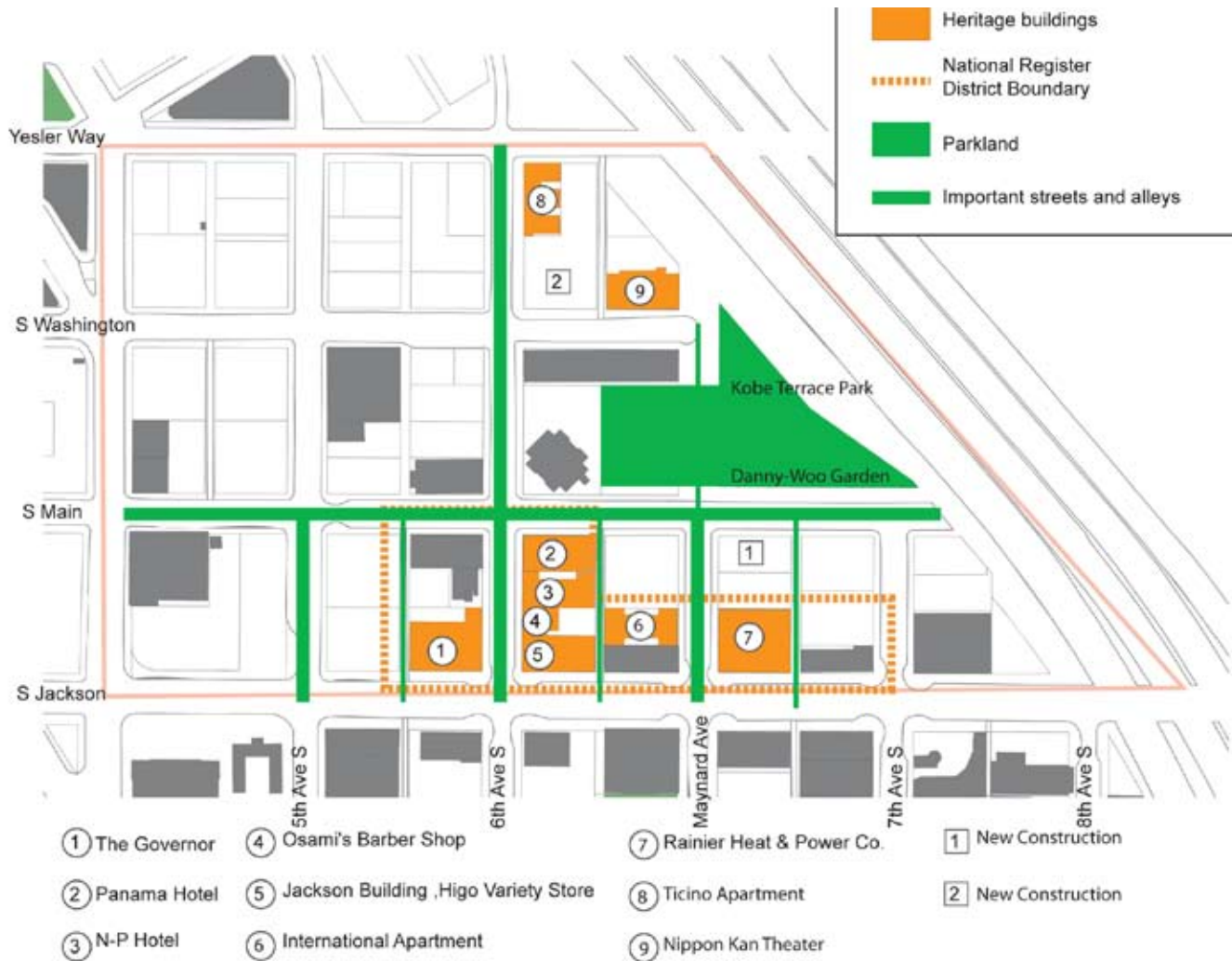
The four design projects focused on creating improvements for a number of locations in the community. Kobe Terrace Park, the street right of way in Danny Woo Garden, the alleys between, 5th and 7th streets and Main and Jackson streets, and Main Street. A map of the project locations is provided on page 7 along with the corresponding designers. In the following pages, a synopsis of each of the four design projects are provided.



(Adapted from Dubrow, 2003)

Historic Map (pre-WWII)





## Open Space and Linkages Map



## Project Site Map

## Re-Lightening Kobe Terrace Park

**Vanessa N. Lee**

*reenvisioning this historic sister-city park into a more inclusive space through plazas, views, and light.*



Kobe Terrace Park was named after the historic **8000 lb. stone lantern** that was given to Seattle by its Japanese sister city in 1976. Along w/ the lantern, Kobe also bestowed Mt. Fuji and Yoshino cherry trees to the park. The exchanges between the two cities range from cultural and educational to business and governmental. Strong economic ties exist between many companies of these two port cities.

Today, the park is visited by tourists, but most residents avoid it because of the transients and hard drug users who may block circulation. The goal of this design project is to provide multiple spaces and paths for various user groups.

### Issues

**Access--**

- Lack of community activity at the surrounding Nippon Kan Theatre Area.
- Obstructed views - overgrown vegetation.

**Safety--**

- Illicit activities (drug dealing and use).
- Too many hiding places and escape routes.
- Isolation (hidden behind Danny Woo, Kobe Terrace “adopts” those transients who have been kicked out of Danny Woo).
- Proximity to I-5 and the “Jungle” transient hotspot.
- Highway noise and air pollution.
- Deemed by Danny Woo garden manager as “Northwest corner of scariness”.

**Inclusiveness--**

- Transient population monopolizing benches and pathway.
- Residents fearing and avoiding transients.

### Opportunities

- Reconnecting Panama Hotel Teahouse with Nippon Kan Theatre (via Danny Woo Garden).
- Revitalizing a community space for festival activity.
- One of the best views in Seattle (included in the Viewpoints Vegetation Management Plan, Seattle Parks+Rec).
- International connections to Kobe Sister City.
- New family housing in construction/ new users/
- Proximity to Danny Woo Garden.
- Rainwater catchment from Metropolitan Apts.

## Design Concept

The design concept uses the notion of **light** and the **Moon** in both its illuminating circular form and the **Japanese folklore** surrounding it. In form, the circle or ‘**enso**’, is a Zen symbol of enlightenment. Seasonal and agricultural **festivals** also play an important role in this multifunctional space.



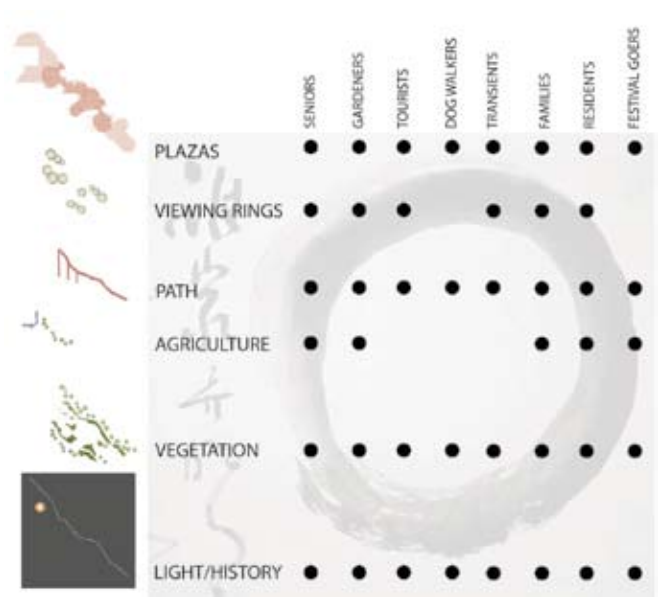
Coupled with these themes of light and cultural tradition is the inspiration derived from an interview with Mrs. Chung, a senior living in the nearby Imperial House Apartments. A photo taken from her apartment shows a shelf with Japanese **floral arrangements** on top, and **jars of fermented beans** on the bottom. As a senior living near the hillside, she was inspired to practice floral arranging after walks through Kobe Terrace Park, but she also gardens at Danny Woo. The two types of objects sitting on her shelf represent the design approach. Kobe Terrace serves as an aesthetic space, Danny Woo serves as a functional one, and the space between is blurred via new methods of **urban agriculture** (**barrel cisterns** and rice paddy wading pools).





As a space for multiple users, the **matrix** on the left delineates how these users may use the park.

**Paved plazas** anchor the entrances of the park as well as the smaller middle plaza. **Gravel middle spaces and paths** link these plazas. **Viewing rings** nestled into the topography (a take on Jens Jensen's "council rings") provide "rooms" of various sizes for multiple groups of users, and would direct you to historical views to the west (Ports- Kobe), southwest (Stadiums- Asian American protest), and south (Duwamish- Issei farmers). A **direct path** would still provide dog walkers a quick way for their routine. The fruit trees would be thinned, but new vegetation would be added in the form of **mosses and larger trees** on the north side. These trees would not create more hiding places, as they would grow behind the **light wall** and serve as some cover from the noise and air pollution of I-5. The light wall would be made of etched or painted lanterns that shared the hopes and dreams of Kobe and Seattle residents.



*Proposed Site Plan showing the sequence of gathering places, terraces, lantern wall and rain catching cisterns.*

Daily Use

MORNING



entrance plaza **BEFORE**

NOON

viewing  
ring  
**BEFORE**



**AFTER**





**AFTER**

### Implementation Strategies + Mechanisms

- Establish a community group to steward the park. (i.e., Friends of Kobe Terrace Park). Opportunities with local organizations such as the Japanese Cultural Center and Community Center of Washington and the Japanese American Citizens League.
- Research funding opportunities with donors such as those listed in the Seattle-Kobe Sister City Association.

- Apply for Open Space Development/Redevelopment Grants as related to recreation and cultural spaces (Land and Water Conservation Fund).
- Celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Seattle-Kobe sister city relationship in 2007. Use that as a kickoff festival.
- Acquire Nippon Kan Theatre and program it to function as a community center (theatre/bookstore/teahouse).

light  
wall  
**BEFORE**

**NIGHT**



**AFTER**



## Monster Stair

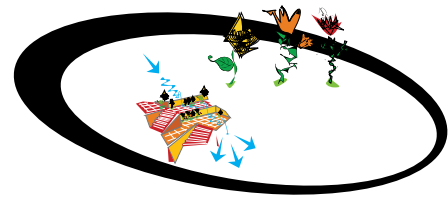
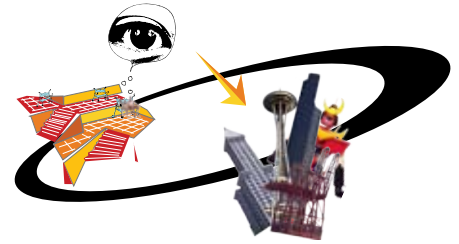
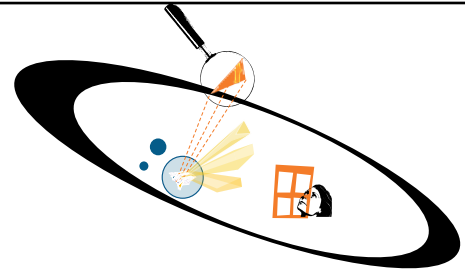
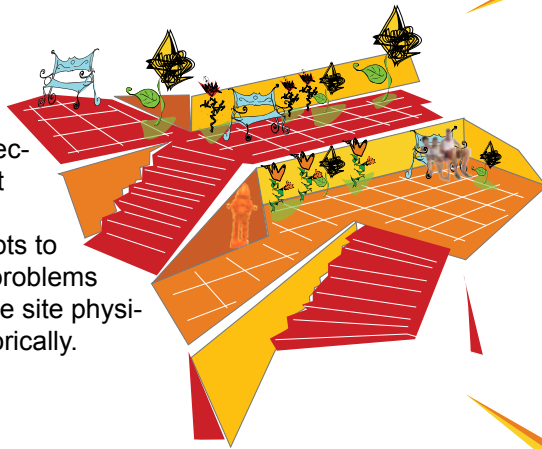
Paul Chasan

This project proposes a staircase that serves as a new entrance and gateway into Danny Woo Gardens at the intersection of Main Street and Maynard Ave South. The attempts to solve the design problems associated with the site physically and metaphorically.

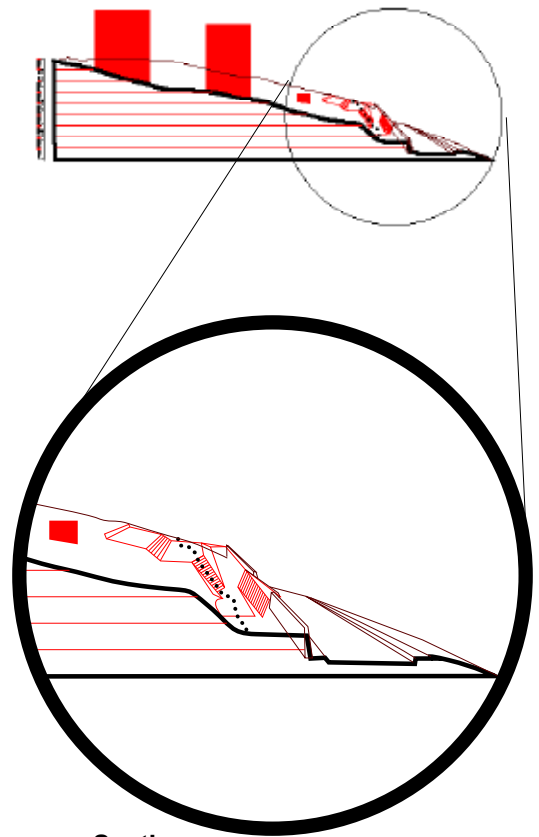
### Context

The site is located on a steep slope with a forty foot grade change in Seattle's historic Nihonmachi (Little Japan) which in turn is a subset of the Chinatown/International District neighborhood. Danny Woo garden is a community gardening space popular with elderly residents in the neighborhood. Recently the garden has been plagued with significant public safety and social issues as it is regularly frequented by hard drug users. Finally Nihonmachi itself was the historic center of Seattle's Japanese immigrant community. The neighborhood was decimated during the internment of the Japanese in World War II and has never recovered its economic vitality nor its residential population since that time. Vacant buildings and parking lots are commonplace. The well-crafted but poorly maintained historic architecture creates spaces that put one into an introspective mood, not necessarily pensive, but a mood of deep thought and reflection. Given the blighted conditions, the city has been trying to spur economic investment in the area. The proposed staircase would

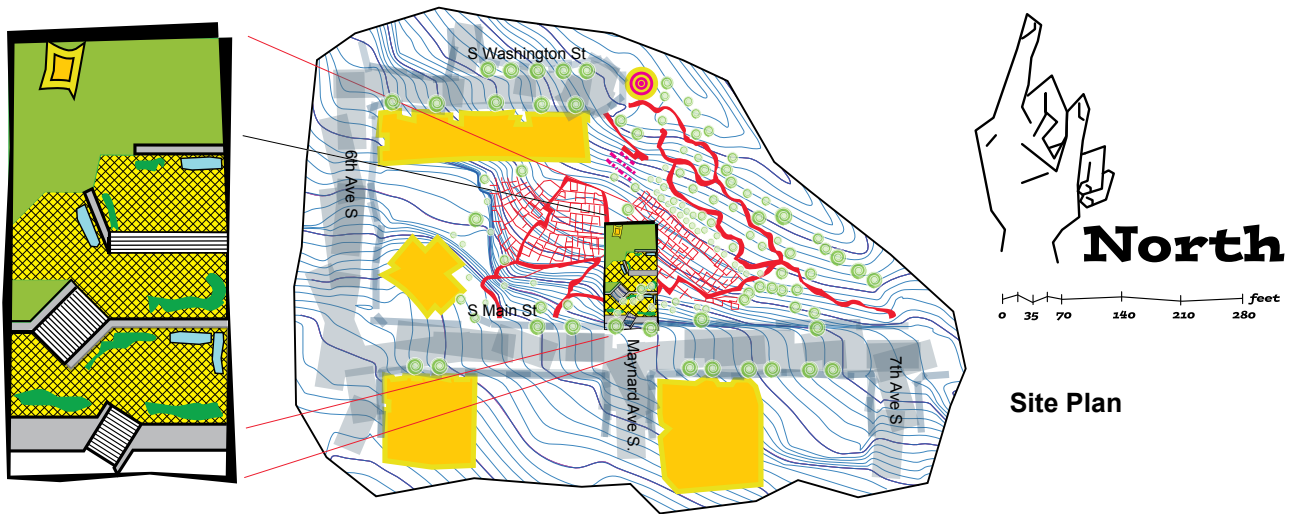
### Concept Sketches



continue the axis of Maynard Ave S. into the park. This would provide views down Maynard Ave and into the district and allow pedestrians on the street to see into the park making it a watched space. Also by providing a sizable entrance at the street terminus, the new stairway would highlight the parks' presence and draw people in from the neighborhood.



Section

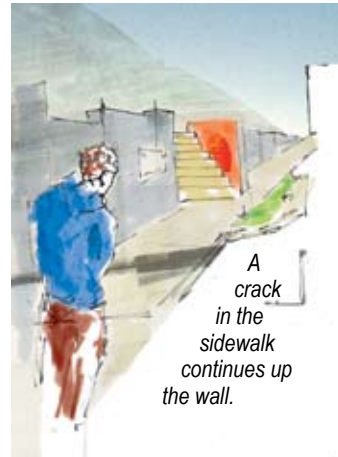


## Metaphor & Art

The vertical walls on the staircase and adjacent plazas will be covered in sheets of colored glass. These in turn are subtly illuminated at night serving as a way finding beacon for the neighborhood and a public art piece. Etched into the glass are pop-cultural images of classic Japanese monsters such as Godzilla. The monsters are reflective of the city's contemporary relationship with Asia and the Pacific Rim. The views from Danny Woo garden and the adjacent Kobe Terrace Park face westward to the Port of Seattle and the Pacific Ocean beyond. Seattle is a city inextricably and increasingly tied to the Pacific Rim. Thus the monsters are reflective of the interchange of goods, ideas and capital that, for good or ill flow between Seattle and the burgeoning economies of Asia.

The comic strip here gives a sense of how one might feel walking through the proposed space.

*On blustery day in early autumn urban walks help clear the mind. Older neighborhoods are best. Stories in the landscape. Layers.*



*He watches her walk down the hill until she fades into the dusk.*



*At the top of the stairs, a girl watches the city. He falls in love. As not to disturb her, he continues up.*

## Main Street Improvements

Chiaki Nakajima



Main Street was once a center of Nihonmachi. The streetscape of Main Street from 4 th Avenue to 7 th Avenue, where historical buildings along the streets still remain must be preserved. Further the pedestrian environment there should be improved. There are four parking lots and one vacant lot along Main Street. All of them are being considered for development in the near future. New buildings will present a strong impact on the townscape in Nihonmachi.

The goal of this project is to revitalize Main Street as a historical pedestrian-oriented street. The overall goal of the project is:

A) To show design alternatives for new development buildings and on-street parking issues.

B) To redesign the building - sidewalk – street relationship along Main Street. This also includes a proposal for ground floor façade design for future developments along Main Street.



Panama Hotel

## Design alternatives

### 1) Basis of the future developments plan

Future developments on current vacant lots along the Main Street which borders the historical area and proposed new developments should be carefully examined mainly considering three points:

**Ground level uses and design**--Ground floor is encouraged to be developed for retail use as much as possible in terms of context and safety. Ground floor building façades must not be monotonous and have to reflect Japan town store front feature.

**Street wall**--In general, historical buildings in this neighborhood cover 100% of their lot creating a strong continuous street wall. This street wall should be retained in future development design.

### 2) Community Alternatives

**Building height and setback**--The height limitation for new development site is 150 feet. This corresponds to a 10-story building, which is relatively tall compared with existing two to six-story historical buildings. Figure A shows how the streetscape of Main Street changes with and without a setback. Buildings in color are future development buildings. The first row is a streetscape without a setback, the second row is a streetscape with a ten foot setback above the third floor and the third row shows a streetscape with a ten-foot setback above the fifth floor. Setbacks make new buildings more compatible with existing historical buildings and also make the pedestrian environment more comfortable.

**Parking-lot study**--The issue of on-street parking is also influence on the streetscape of Main Street. Figure B is a study about on-street parking style.



Nihomachi Terrace



Figure A. Building Height of New Development Sites

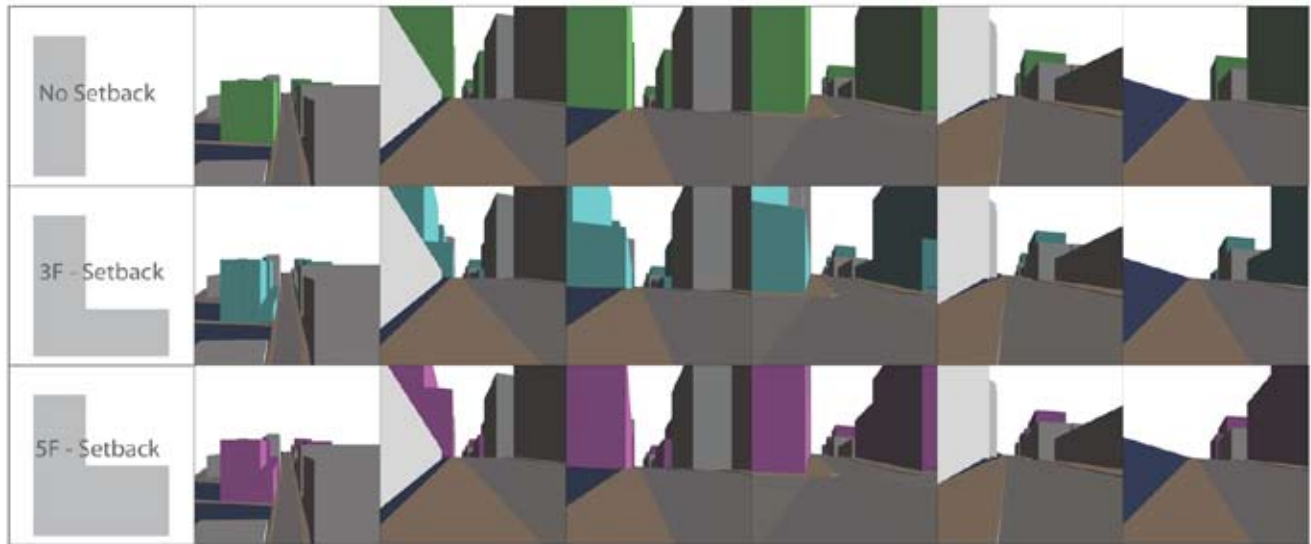
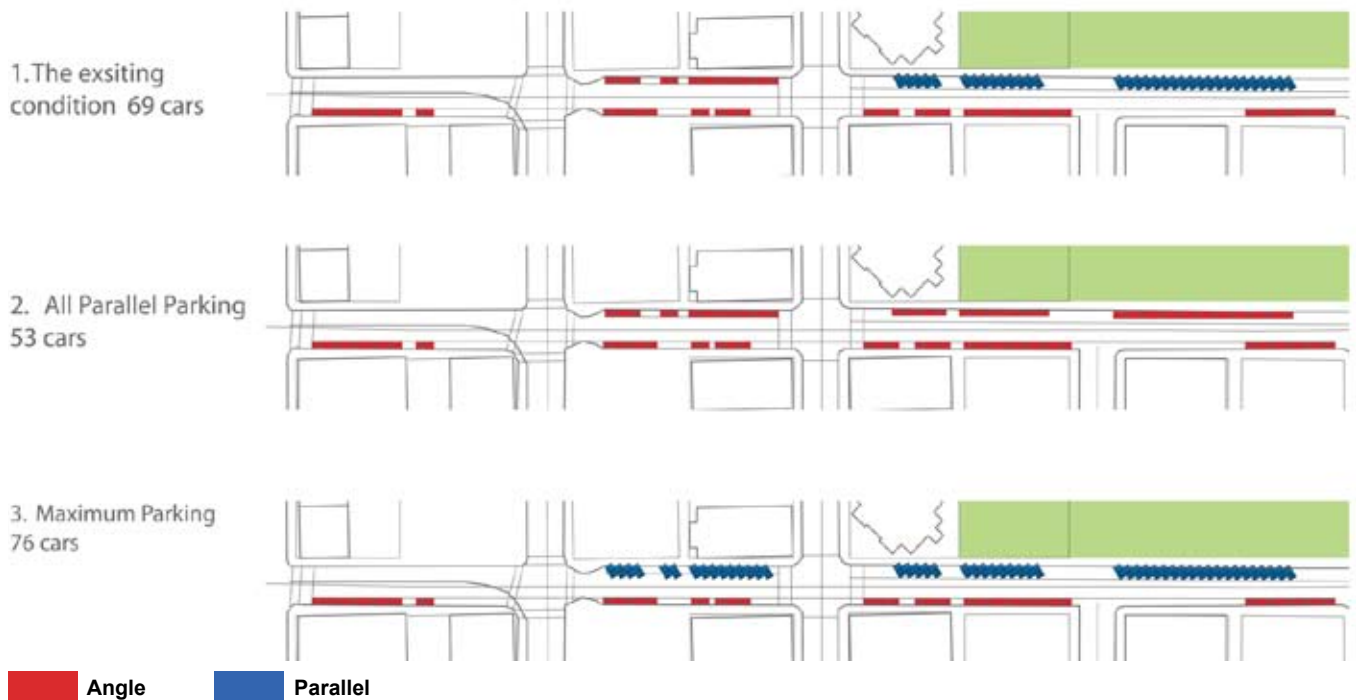


Figure B. On-street Parking



### The building - sidewalk - street relationship

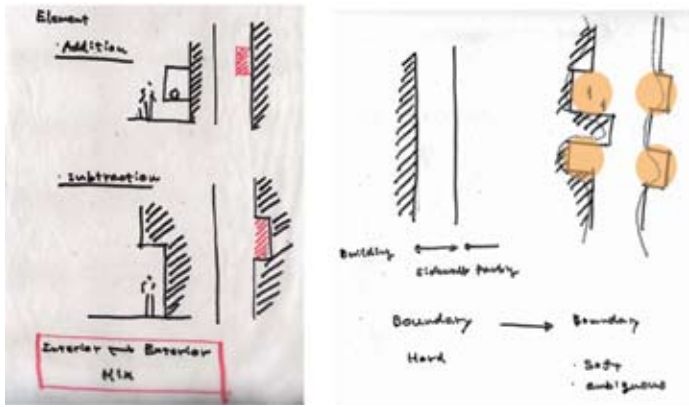
**Activities on the street**--Streets can have multiple functions for play, dining informal and formal communication. The street is designed to accommodate these activities. These functions contribute to making the street livable and improving safety issue for the community as well.

**Concept**--To provide these multiple functions on Main Street, soft boundaries between buildings and sidewalks and sidewalks and streets are suggested. Additional spaces and subtractive spaces are created along the street to create soft boundaries.



An example of additional space

An example of subtractive space

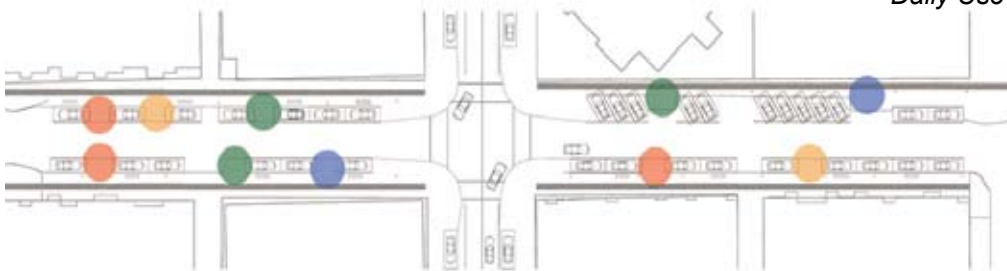


Concept diagram: Additive spaces and subtractive spaces are created along the street to create soft boundaries.

**Program** -- People can use these additive spaces along the street as social space, such as retail spaces, rest spaces and community spaces. The street dramatically changes when events are held. On-street parking lots change into booth and rest spaces and people can walk the driveway as a promenade.



Daily Use Patterns



- Retail use (small booth)
- Retail use (small booth)
- Community use spaces
- Community information spaces

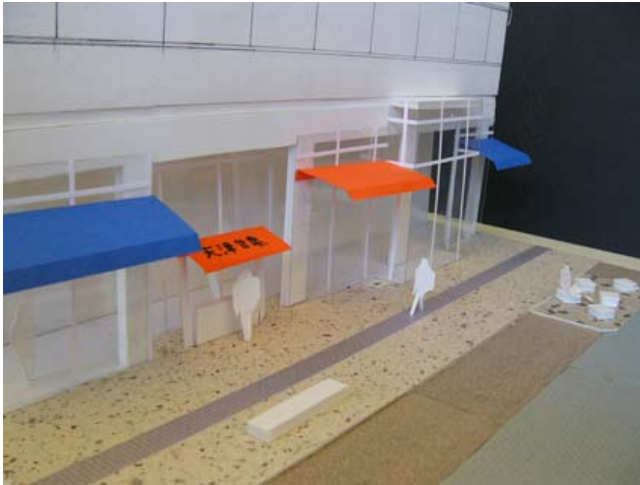


Special Events: On-street parking lots become spaces for open markets and resting.

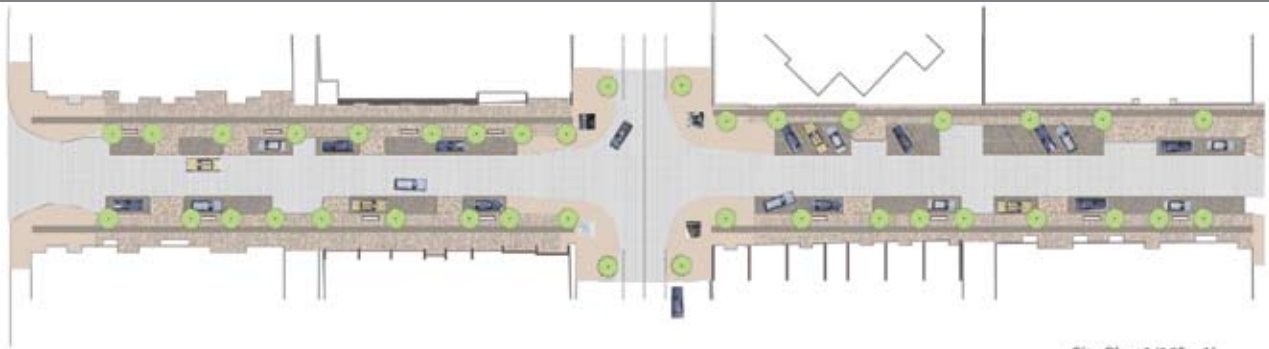
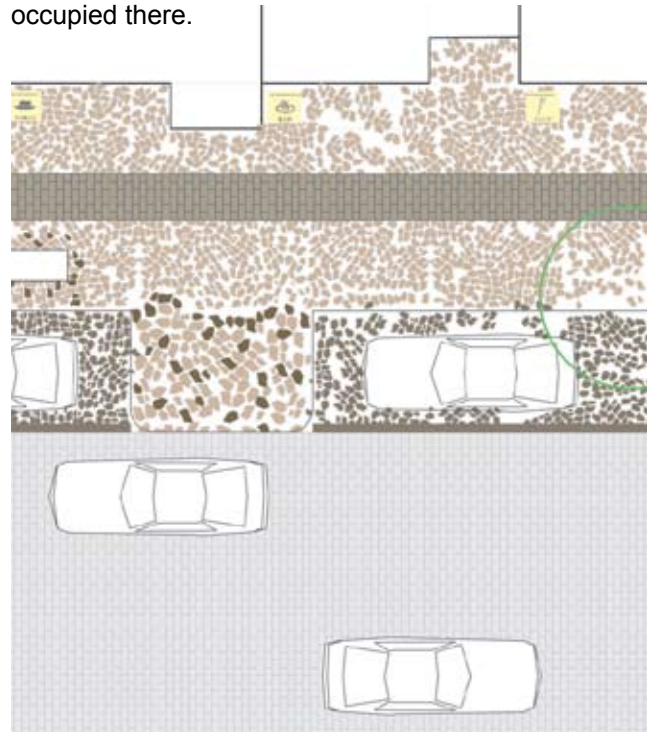


- Booth & Rest spaces
- Booth & Rest spaces
- Booth & Rest spaces
- Booth & Rest spaces

**New development site** -- The concept of additive spaces and subtractive spaces are also applied to a ground floor façade of new developments. A three-foot depth of convex-concave spaces creates public-private space between buildings and the sidewalk. For instance, stores on the ground floor can use these spaces to put their goods or vending carts. This also helps to avoid monotonous façades and contributes to harmonizing the façade with existing historical buildings.



**Detail**--Paving pattern corresponds to functions. Paving and lamps refer to the history of Nihonmachi. The paving in front of buildings shows what stores formerly occupied there.



Site Plan 1/16" = 1'



Existing Section 1/4" = 1'



Proposed Section 1/4" = 1'



## Light in the Alley

Arielle Farina Clark



The alleys of Nihonmachi have immense potential. They could function as important pedestrian oriented spaces that connect various locations and provide

nating and repaving the spaces with simple, elegant cobblestone, and reorienting certain business and residential egresses to face the alleys. Each of these treatments plays a vital role in the recovery of the alleys as great, usable spaces.

Without dumpsters in the alleys there will be fewer places for derelicts to conceal illegal and socially inappropriate actions. In Pioneer Square the dumpster free program was implemented with beneficial results. Residents and business owners have reported that crime in the district has gone down, that alleys are perceived as more safe and are more frequently used by the general public.

Illumination of the alleys would further the perception that they are safe spaces to be in. The lamps would

Existing Conditions



open space for the residents and visitors of Nihonmachi. However, they are currently cluttered with dumpsters, tiled with a menagerie of paving remnants, and often times dead ending. All of these current conditions contribute to the unsafe alleyway environment that plays host to a number of illicit activities such as prostitution, drug dealing and drug use.

This project entitled “A Light in the Alley: A Triptych of Safer Connections” focuses on revitalizing the three north/south running alleys between 5th and 7th Avenues and Main and Jackson streets while maintaining the small scale, off-the-main-path feel that make alleys exciting. The design concept is based on cleansing the alleys of dumpsters, illumi-

also function as an iconic feature that distinguishes the neighborhood from others. Repaving the alleys differentiates the space from the street, simplifies the look,

## Precedents

metropolitan cafe walk



relaxed garden walk

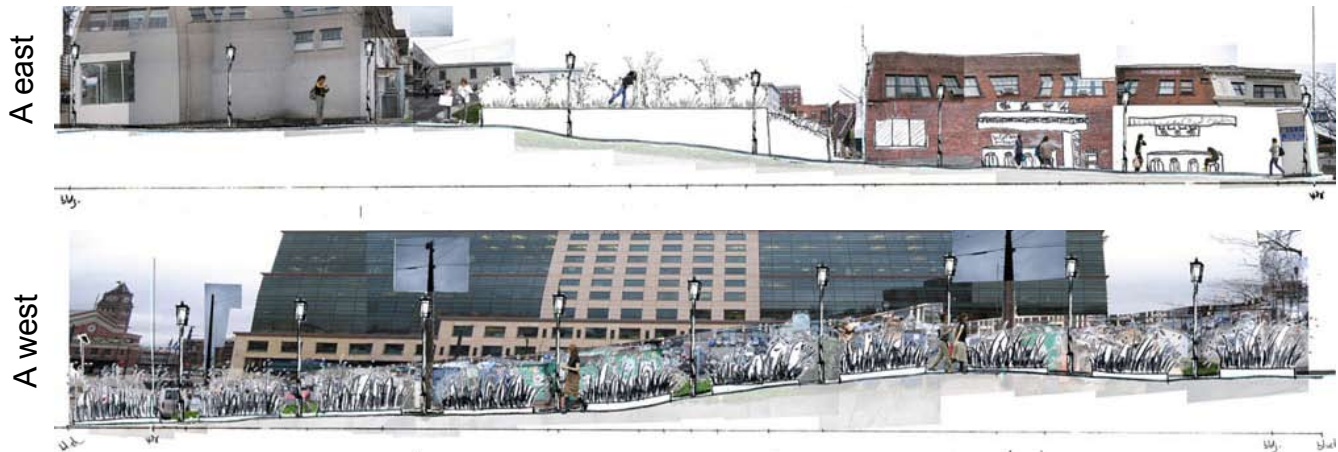


youthful playspace walk



and gives the alleys continuity. With simple improvements and increased safety, residences and businesses would be free to open their doors to the alley. Each of the three alleys has a theme that informs it's over all aesthetic.

**Alley A**, between 5th and 6th streets, plays upon the cosmopolitan feel that is created with restaurant spaces at either end. The project proposes that the north-eastern space, which has a large window facing the alley, be used as a café with a seating area that spills out into the alley. The southeastern space, which contains a restaurant, should also have an alley facing window and an outside seating area. This would provide eyes on the street to discourage illegal activity as well a social space where people can sit and eat. It would also utilize space that is not enclosed on the western side and has good evening light.



**Alley B**, between 6th and Maynard streets, is a space where people could stroll and happen upon a revitalized Japanese garden. The alley would be furnished with tall lamps and short, squat, stone lamps that can be sat upon and repaved with Japanese influenced stone.





**Alley C**, between Maynard and 7th streets, is a space dedicated to family and the youth that will inhabit the new Inter\*Im building. It utilizes the partial blockage, created by the stairway of the building on the southeast corner, to separate the space from the busy Jackson

Street. The alley is still accessible from Jackson but the south entrance is minimized to form a space that is safer for children. The alley has ample play space, is lined with plantings that residents are encouraged to garden, and illuminated at night with lighting.



## 5. Major Recommendations

### Connectivity:

- Connect Jackson St. activity to Panama Hotel (Main St.) and Nippon Kan Theatre (Washington St.) via Maynard Ave. and Danny Woo Garden
- Pedestrian Entry at 5th and Main St; 6th and Jackson
- Continue to thin out vegetation in Danny Woo and Kobe Terrace, and replace with low-lying.

### Streetscape / Alleyscape:

- Retain the same amount of parking spaces (69) on Main Street.
- Create additional spaces along the street as social space, such as retail spaces, rest spaces and community spaces (3 foot depth).
- Hold occasional street closures on Main Street (market/festival).
- Remove dumpsters from alleys
- Add street lighting to alleys
- Encourage residents and businesses to make alley entrances more inviting and utilized
- Make alleys pedestrian priority
- Repave alleys with aesthetically pleasing pavers. Pave streets with historic markers.

### Housing:

- New housing type such as skinny towers (as

found in Vancouver, BC)

- Consider 3F or 5F setbacks to open up the streetscape.

### Cultural Identity:

- Small Scale Neighborhood Identifiers
- Welcome Signs
- Mass planting of Cherry Trees
- Creation / Implementation of Comprehensive Streetscape Plan
- Japanese Internment Memorial
- Mural (on the east side of Imperial House)

### Funding:

- Establish a community stewardship group (i.e., Friends of Kobe Terrace Park). Opportunities with local organizations such as the Japanese Cultural Center and Community Center of Washington, the Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle-Kobe Sister City Association.
- Research funding opportunities
- Apply for Open Space Development/ Redevelopment Grants as related to recreation and cultural spaces (Land and Water Conservation Fund); Seattle Dept. of Neighborhoods Small and Simple Grants; Community Development Block Grant; Safety Grants.



**Community Open Space Initiative:**  
Chinatown, Japantown, Little Saigon—  
International District, Seattle

2005 Community Design Studio Report

**Part 3. Nihonmachi -- Paul Chasan, Arielle Farina Clark, Vanessa Lee, Chiaki Nakajima**

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