

「Email Newsletter from Mayor of Okayama(51) July 17th Issue」

【Where to set a new cultural and art facilities】

Hello, I'm Omori, Mayor of Okayama.

Okayama City has announced at yesterday's regular interview that a maintenance planned site of the new cultural arts facility to replace the present Okayama Civic Hall and Okayama Civic Culture Hall will be settled at Sennichimae district.

Looking back the progress of the past briefly, the maintenance of new facilities had been an urgent problem because Okayama Civic Hall which is 52 years old and Okayama Civic Culture Hall which is 39 years old, both become deteriorated and there is anxiety in seismicity.

So for that, the city announced that to perform the transfer and rebuilding to Tenjin-cho (ex-Korakukan junior & senior high school site) where is a historical and cultural zone of Okayama in an attempt to integrally maintain these facilities in 2012 fiscal year.

However later on, there was this demand of the invitation issued from Sennichimae shopping district (the most southern area of Omote-cho shopping district that prospered from the Edo period) where pedestrian traffic decreased significantly in comparison with the past. Thus it was discussed in the city council, and at the time of the October 2013 when I took office as the mayor, the situation was in confusion.

So, first of all, I started with arranging the argument that what kind of function new culture art facilities should have toward, then, I began the examination of three places of candidate sites which are Tenjin-cho district, Sennichimae district, and Omote-cho 3 chome district, because an invitation demand has been issued from Omote-cho 3 chome district at the end of last year.

We asked experts to get together in person for the discussions of "the candidate site study meeting which modified new culture art facilities maintenance" which has been held over three times after entering the fiscal year, and various opinions have been issued. We were also able to have direct opinions from many people including the council with regarding to advantages and disadvantages of each candidate sites.

All opinions are appropriate, so it was difficult to converge all in one. You had a hard time to decide, but eventually you've decided to Sennichimae district as maintenance planned site in following three reasons (Tenjincho district and Sennichimae district for 1, 2, and comparison between the Omote-machi 3 chome district).

1. From the viewpoint of town planning in Okayama city centers, creation of new prosperity, improvement of migration in Omote-cho area and ripple effect on the surroundings in addition can be expected.
2. There is space on the site, it can be expected the introduction of the functions required for the new cultural and artistic facilities
3. Sennichimae district and Omote-cho 3chome district will be to advance the business in redevelopment, and the early realization is higher for Sennichimae district because the rate for agreement of right holders is 83% for Sennichimae district while 43% for Omote-cho 3 chome in this moment.

In choosing a candidate, it is the funding issue that made decision to make even more difficult. If you complete the facility development until the 2021 year-end, you get a high possibility to take advantage of the merger propulsion bonds that country (local allocation tax) would take over 45% of construction costs. It works advantageously also for the finance of city. Among the reasons for decision mentioned above, early realization of the project is a particularly important factor.

Needless to say, we believe possibility for the early realization of the project in Sennichimae district; however, more to use a technique called redevelopment, there is always a risk.

For that reason, considering procedures of the city planning with the redevelopment project, the next year in May will be a time limit to confirm whether a condition will have accomplished and so on. There are following two conditions to decide.

1. To seek 100% for attract promotion agreement rate (preparation union participation rate)

2. To arrange a consultation between the city and redevelopment preparation union about the contents which is required for project performance, such as dealing with the impact on the fiscal management of the city which will occur if the 2021 fiscal year of facility development completion cannot meet the deadline.

To proceed with development in Sennichimae district for new cultural and artistic facilities, it is considered to combine the function that “everyone feel free to stop by, get together, and have rest at any time” rather than just the event center like the current Civic Hall. I also expect local people to think and act to make the whole central city area become more active and Okayama City will become a better city as a center of this new cultural and artistic facilities.