
Osaka Renaissance News

No 33. May 2008

Welcome to “Osaka Renaissance News” - the email newsletter of the Osaka City Government’s “Urban Revitalization Task Force”.

The Osaka Urban Revitalization Task Force

We are the first *City Task Force* established in Japan to address urban regeneration and revitalization issues within a common framework. We also collaborate with the central government’s “Urban Renaissance Program”. The role of the task force is to coordinate and promote the set of initiatives that taken together form the Osaka Revitalization Plan.

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“Osaka Renaissance News” is distributed through multiple email channels to spread the word about important initiatives taking place in Osaka.

This Issue: Osaka 2008 – City Budget and Upcoming Events

With the release of the budget for fiscal year 2008, Osaka City has laid out a road map to improving the child-friendliness of Osaka and encouraging the revitalization of both urban and rural Osaka, while putting into place financial reforms. An important emphasis is being placed on the role of the citizens themselves as agents for the improvement of the city for all. This year also has a full calendar of exciting events to get people involved and engaged in the life of the city.

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Osaka 2008 – City Budget and Upcoming Events

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INTRODUCTION

Osaka city has released its budget for fiscal year 2008 and it continues the focus of recent years on revitalizing Osaka, promoting it as both an ideal location for business as well as a lifestyle and tourism city.

Despite the serious financial situation facing the city there is a lot of good to be found in the budget. One of the important facets of this budget is the goal of streamlining government expenditures. The budget puts a strong focus on administrative and financial reforms to help the city secure its financial situation.

The budget contains funds to help promote non-profit organizations that contribute to rural areas. It also expands the support for programs to promote the unique character, creativity and events in each ward as well as highlighting distinctive projects around the city's outlying areas.

Another of the goals for the coming year is the promotion of child-friendliness in Osaka. There are a variety of approaches to this issue outlined in the budget, such as expanding school lunch programs and funds for medical care for early childhood.

Importantly, this budget continues the policy of offering incentives to companies and universities looking to open or expand businesses in the city. There are a variety of incentives planned to help bring new industries and companies here to the center of the Kansai region.

A wide variety of sporting and cultural events are planned for this year, alongside the popular annual events such as Tenjin Matsuri Festival and the Yodogawa Fireworks. The next year will see events ranging from tennis and volleyball to an international robotics fair.

This year looks to be another year of interesting development in the heart of Osaka as urban renewal and business promotion proceed apace, but also for the human side of the city with the focus on programs to improve the quality of life for people throughout the city.

Tod Baudin

OSAKA RENAISSANCE NEWS

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Osaka 2008 – City Budget and Upcoming Events

In this issue we examine some interesting details in the budget for the coming year

(1) Goals for Fiscal 2008

During 2008, the Osaka city government aims to revitalize Osaka through the municipal government where citizens play the leading role, while continuing to work towards the achievement of objectives without easing the pace of municipal reform.

In light of the present serious financial situation, the city has decided to work even harder at promoting administrative and financial reforms. While emphasizing fairness and transparency at all levels of the government, the city will also work to secure new funds, review personnel costs and cut back on some public works.

An important priority for the city this year is to enact policies and measures aimed at making the city a better place to raise a family through a variety of programs aimed at the health and happiness of children.

(2) Priorities and Policies

A major policy goal of this year's budget is the promotion of Osaka as a child-friendly city. The approach to this is to focus on government aid for health- and child-care.

Prenatal and early childhood medical care is vitally important for the health of the population and the city so the city plans

to expand its coverage of general health checkups for pregnant women and medical expenses for infants. Strong health policy for children is an important compliment to educational policy and promoting regular checkups for expectant mothers and young children can also help prevent or identify medical issues as early as possible.

Another challenge facing young families in Osaka is difficulty finding openings in nursery schools. To help ease this burden Osaka City is aggressively pursuing several methods aimed at reducing the waiting lists at nursery schools.

A program to enhance the quality of junior high school lunches has also been included in the budget. The specific course of action hasn't been decided but there are several proposals under consideration.

The second major policy goal of the budget is to promote the revitalization of Osaka. This is to be accomplished by establishing a support system for NPOs that are aimed at tackling rural issues. There are also several projects to directly aid rural areas.

The 2008 budget expands on the success of past projects that promoted the uniqueness of individual wards. By

promoting the unique and distinctive features and projects in individual wards rural areas are able to raise their profile throughout the city and bring increased interest and business to their areas.

Another part of this policy goal is to promote the greening of Osaka. Pilot programs have already begun to promote the greening of buildings and spaces, notably school walls.

The final Policy goal is the continued revitalization of Osaka City. This is a continuation of the past years' successful efforts to attract companies and universities to Osaka, especially in new industries, such as next-generation robotics. One of the major projects in direction is the promotion of the Osaka Aquapolis brands, the reintegration of Osaka's historic waterways into the life of the city.

(3) Revitalization Projects

There are a number of important projects that will either be starting or continuing this year, all aimed at revitalizing Osaka city and bringing new business and jobs to the Osaka area.

Of continuing importance is the redevelopment of Osaka Station North District. With an eye towards co-operation with private sector enterprises, the city will explore various options regarding the second stage of urban center development, especially concerns regarding infrastructure in this vital area.

Overall, transportation infrastructure is an important part of this year's budget. There are projects aimed at improving

travel by road, rail and air into and around Osaka.

One of the infrastructure issues that will receive special attention this year is examination of plans regarding rerouting the JR Tokaido line and its branch lines underground. This study will look at the methods and feasibility of various proposals for the lines and their support facilities.

The development of urban expressways as wide-area strategic infrastructure is also on the agenda for this year. Though this year is less focused on a single area but could have wide reaching impact on the city as a whole.

Kansai International Airport will also receive some attention this year. Osaka City will continue to promote KIX as a hub for international travel, both to and from Japan. With Narita Airport continual congestion of flights and the opening of Kansai International Airport's second runway, KIX is well placed to become a gateway for travel throughout Asia as well as a hub for air cargo.

The city will also be promoting the development of the Hanshin Namba line, which will connect Hanshin Amagasaki Station to the Kintetsu station in Namba. This will provide the citizens of Osaka with another route across the city, easing travel from the busy Amagasaki station through to the Minami area of Osaka's downtown core and beyond to the Nara. It will be opened on March 20th of 2009.

There will also be continued promotion of Keihan Nakanoshima line. Nakanoshima has seen a spate of new building projects

in the last few years and is also home to museums and the City Hall. The new line will add 4 new stations, improving access to all parts of the island. It will be opened on Oct. 19th.

In addition to specific projects to revitalize the urban heart of Osaka, there are also a series of business incentives aimed at attracting new companies to the city and also the expansion of existing companies.

For companies looking to open or expand large scale operations in key industries or in certain designated industrial areas, subsidies will be made available to help defray construction costs.

Rent subsidies will also be available for companies in cutting edge fields establishing or expanding their headquarters in Osaka.

Universities may also benefit from subsidies for rent or capital expenditures if they move into key redevelopment areas and help to develop human resources that can contribute to urban revitalization. Foreign universities can also receive subsidies for rent, travel and accommodation costs.

(4) Osaka City Events

There are a wide variety of sporting, cultural and business events planned this year in Osaka.

On April 26th, Osaka Castle Park will host the Osaka Philharmonic in an outdoor concert under the starry sky. This is your opportunity to enjoy wonderful classical music in a relaxed, outdoor setting.

The first of many exciting sporting events in May is the International Association of Athletics Federations Grand Prix in Osaka. This major event will take place on May 10th in Nagai Stadium. The IAAF brings together world class athletes to compete in track and field events. This is a great opportunity to see some Olympic class competition here in Osaka.

Osaka Olympic day, on May 18th, is an annual event where young and old alike can be like an Olympian, play like an Olympian. This event is free to the public and located on Maishima Sports Island, originally created to host the Olympic Games Osaka bid. Get into the Olympic spirit and meet some Olympians on their way to the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing.

The third major sporting event in May sees the International Federation of Volleyball (FIVB) Women's Beach Volleyball World Tour returning to Osaka after a two year absence. This event will run from May 20th to 25th and will feature some of the most outstanding players in the world. Osaka has hosted more FIVB women's beach volleyball tournaments than any other city in the world since the start of the tour in 1992.

July will see more sporting events, with the International Soccer Festival 2008 being held in Osaka as well as the return of the FIVB for an event in the Junior Men's Volleyball World League.

August and September will feature the Osaka Cultural Festival, held annually at Osaka Castle Park, and a concert of classical music produced by Eiji Ooue,

conductor of the Osaka Philharmonic Orchestra.

October sees the return of the Osaka Mayor's Cup World Super Jr. Tennis Championship. This popular tournament is considered to be among the A list of junior tennis events worldwide and has helped to kick off the careers of some of today's top tennis players, including grand slam winners. More than 20,000 spectators are expected for this year's tournament, which takes place from October 6th to 12th.

If you have an interest in seeing some of the development taking place as part of Osaka City's Water Metropolis revitalization program, October will also offer you the chance to see the sights along the water ways that connect from river to ocean and make Osaka into a true Aquapolis.

The International Next-Generation Robot Fair will be displaying a total of 40 robots, selected from 424 designs sent from 35 countries. The highlight of the event will be pairing exhibitors and potential business partners for commercializing robots. Robots that are currently under development at universities and research institutions will be exhibited at the Fair to promote linkages between academia and industry for further development. The event will be Japan's largest exhibition for next-generation robots and has already attracted considerable interest from around the world.

Also in October, the Eco-art Festival will be taking place. The Osaka International

Puppetry Festival will be happening from October 24th to 26th.

The World Manufacturing Summit new economic growth strategic international conference will also take place in October.

During November and December Osaka City will host the Nakanoshima Music Festival and the Osaka Light Renaissance, also in Nakanoshima. The Light Renaissance event sees not only the lighting of Nakanoshima Park and public buildings but also surrounding private buildings, creating a beautiful space in the centre of the city.

In January, the Osaka City Half Marathon coincides with the Osaka City International Ladies' Marathon. The half marathon is open to anyone and encourages the general population to become active and take part in civic sports activities.

(5) Last Word

This year looks is shaping up to be an exciting year to live and work in Osaka. With the release of the Fiscal 2008 budget Osaka City has reaffirmed its commitment to the revitalization of the city both for business and as a lifestyle city. This revitalization, along with the emphasis on its own unique qualities, will hopefully allow Osaka City to step out from the shadow of Tokyo on the world stage.

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