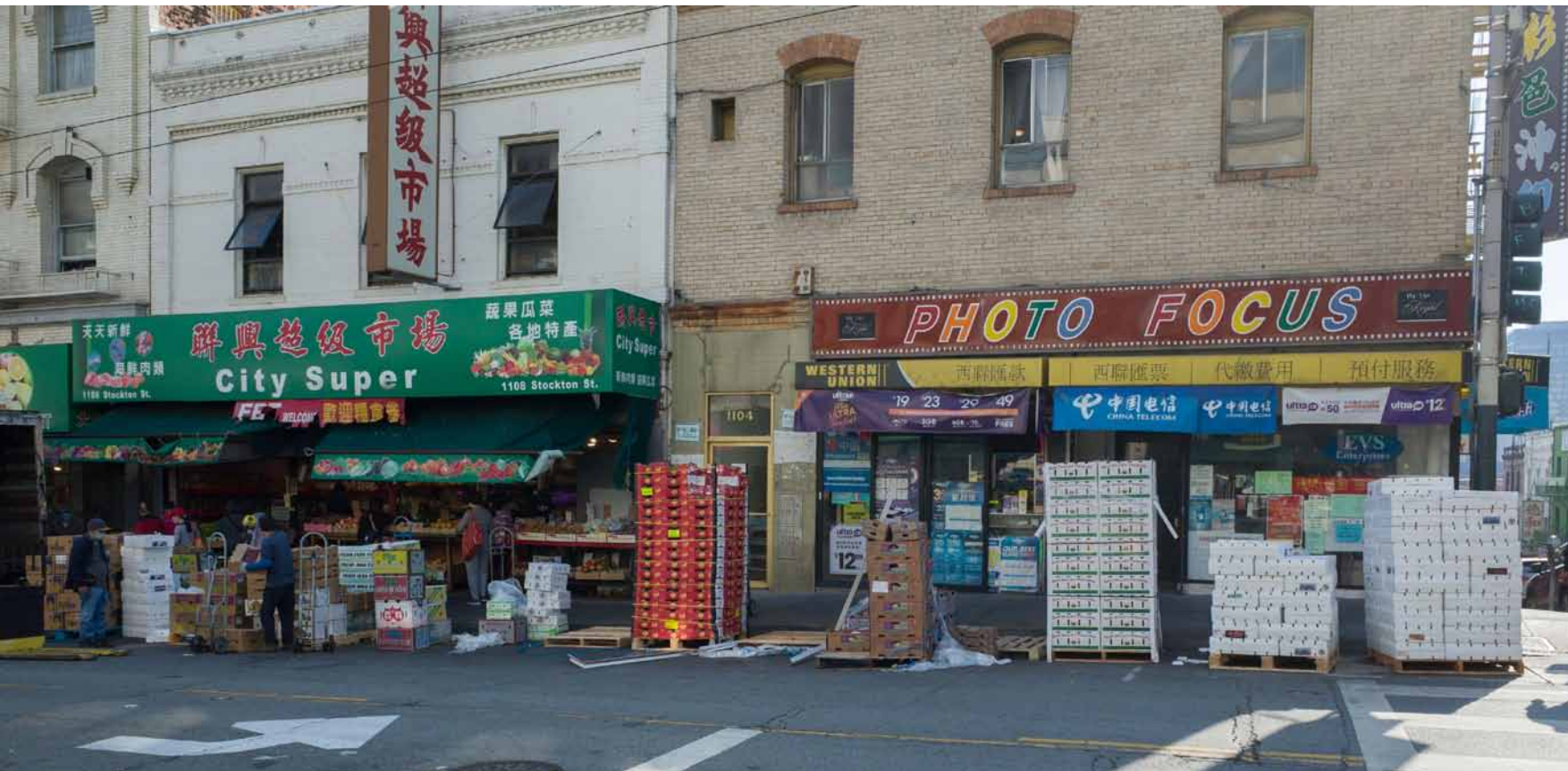




# Pandemic Chinatown Street Level January to August 2020

Photographs, analysis, and text  
by Malcolm Collier

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**Pandemic Chinatown to August 2020**

This report summarizes an investigation of vacancy/ closures of street level activity and commercial spaces in Chinatown from February before pandemic closures through to August 2020.

The summary is based on analysis of photographic mapping of Stockton Street and Grant Avenue on Feb. 21, May 5, and July 31, 2020, and on photographic surveys of the east/west cross streets on August 11, 2020. Additional photographs were made on other dates during 2020 as well. The photographic data was supplemented by study of other records, including Google Street views from 2019 and early 2020.

In my analysis I have defined “vacant” as meaning the space is closed and empty. I counted as “closed” any business that appeared to be occupied but was closed with no indication that it was open at other hours than the time I made the survey. I counted as open any restaurant, even if closed, that had signs indicating they were doing take out. I counted all banks as open, since most were and it is not always possible to determine from the photos whether or not a bank is open or closed. I counted as open several businesses that, from personal knowledge, I knew to be open at other times than when the images were made.

There is a margin of error, so these findings should be seen as well informed estimates. It is possible that the figures generated may slightly over-estimate closures but the trends should be reasonably accurate. Closure rates will drop a bit if hair salons and related businesses re-open after September 14, 2020.

This summary does not include coverage of Powell Street, Kearny Street, Waverly, or any of the smaller alleys nor can it really tell how well open businesses are actually doing.



May 5, 2020



May 5, 2020

August 20, 2020



July 31, 2020







People social distancing, Stockton Street, 12:36 PM May 5.



More casual about it, 11:56 AM July 31.



In any case, hard to social distance with narrow sidewalks on Stockton, July 31, 2020.

# Social distance in Chinatown

Chinatown residents have been very good about wearing masks in public, almost 100%, but circumstances can make social distancing more of a challenge.

May 5, 2020: Social distancing is easy on Grant Avenue.



Generally, people are good about social distancing when it is possible - here a line on Powell for a give away. The line stretched from Trenton, up Pacific, along Powell, and down Clay. August 19, 2020.



**Vacancies and business closures  
on Stockton Street and Grant Avenue  
Feb. 21, May 5, and July 31, 2020**

By fortunate accident, I made photo mappings of Stockton Street and Grant Avenue on February 21, 2020, with plans to make additional records in other parts of Chinatown in March. The original intent was to make a comparison to the business situation on those and other streets in Chinatown in 2020 with that which was found previously in 2016. Events have over taken those plans. Instead I made photo mappings of the two streets on May 5th and a photo survey on July 31st. All photographs were made on weekdays between 11:30 am and 4:30 p.m., with a focus on storefronts rather than people. These records were used to examine vacancies and closures on those dates. An statistical overview of the two streets is presented here, with more detailed information and additional images on following screens/pages.

**Stockton Street - Overview**

Here are the summary figures for commercial vacancies and closures on February 21, May 5, and July 31 for Stockton Street between Sacramento and Columbus. The first figures are the raw number of commercial vacancies or closures identified and the second figures are those numbers as a percentages of the total number of commercial spaces identified, both open and closed.

	Feb. 21	May 5	July 31
Vacant or closed	10 7%	65 48%	43 32%

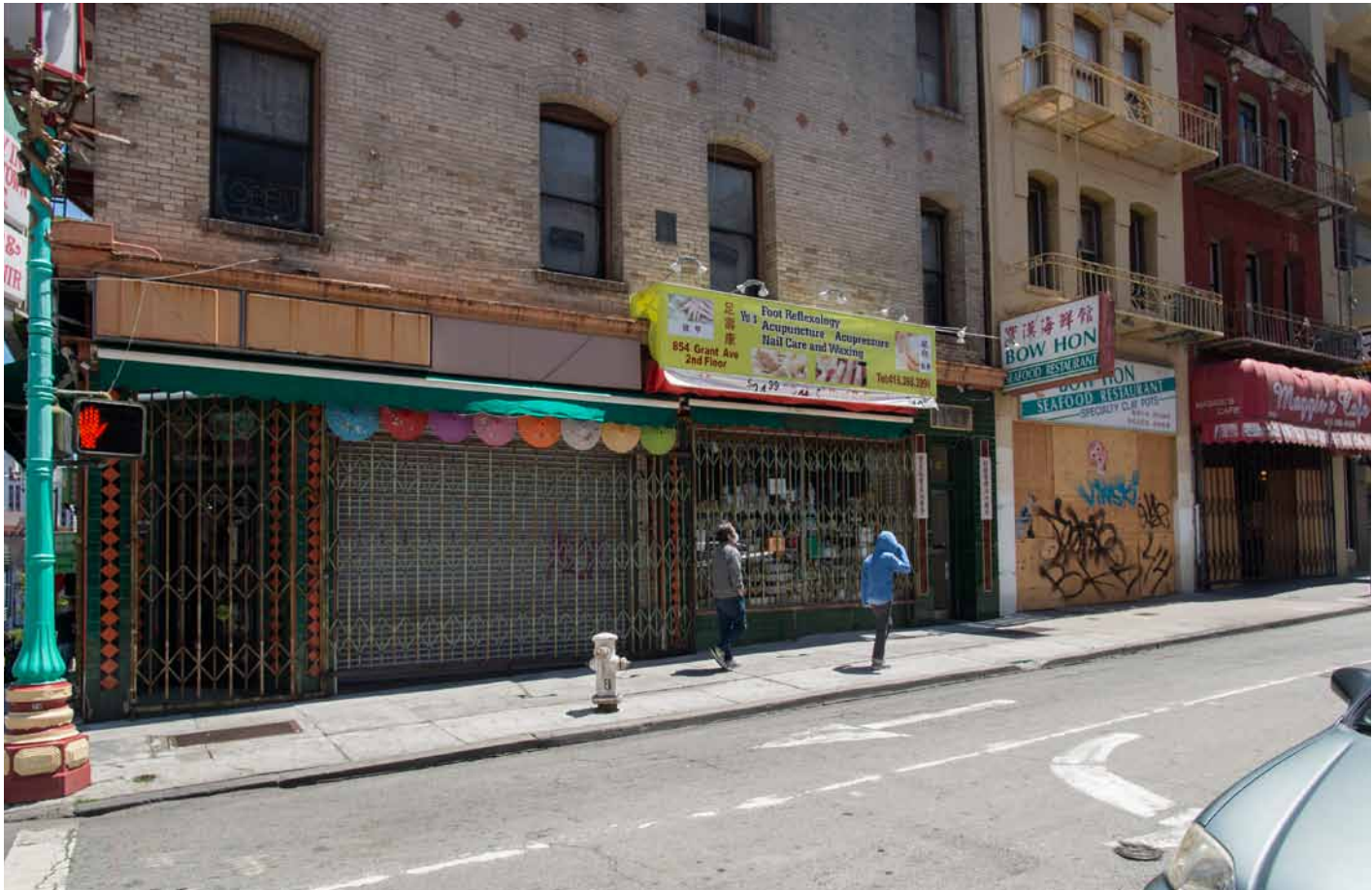
**Grant Avenue - Overview**

Below are figures for commercial vacancies and closures along Grant Avenue on the three dates in 2020. I did not make records of the blocks between Bush and California on May 5, so no data is available for that section for May 5. However, given the nature of the business activity in that section of Grant, it is likely that almost all the businesses were closed on May 5th.

	Feb. 21	May 5	July 31
Vacant or closed between California and Broadway	25 20%	108 86%	98 52%
Vacant or closed between Bush and California	3 7%	no data no data	33 75%



Peak of closures, May 5, 2020. Above: Stockton Street, with many food stores, still had at least some foot traffic in May. Below: Tourist dependent Grant, with 86% of businesses closed, had almost none.





Stockton Street - details and photos

Stockton Street serves a primarily local and regional clientele, with an emphasis on retail food sales. In 2016, the commercial vacancy rate was just under 3%, in February 2020 it had increased to 7%, still significantly lower than other parts of Chinatown. This pre-pandemic increase derives from closures for soft story retrofitting on the west side of Stockton north of Broadway and a gradual business contraction due to the displacement of the Chinese American population north and west of the Chinatown.

Because many of the businesses on Stockton Street are categorized as “essential”, the impact of pandemic closures was and is less dramatic than along Grant Avenue. Food related business, which are concentrated on the west side from Washington to Broadway and on the east side from Jackson to Vallejo, have largely remained open. Other businesses have suffered, as can be seen in the higher figures for blocks south of Washington and north of Vallejo. Some of these figures are likely to improve with re-opening of hair salons and other such businesses in mid September, 2020.

Vacancies/closures on Stockton Street  
Feb. 21 and July 21, 2020

Street/ block	Total store fronts	Feb 2020 vacant/closed	Feb 2020 vacant/closed as percent	July 2020 vacant/closed	July 2020 vacant/closed as percent
<b>Sacramento</b>					
800 EAST	16	0	0.0%	11	68.8%
800 WEST	5	0	0.0%	1	20.0%
<b>Clay</b>					
900 EAST	10	0	0.0%	5	50.0%
900 WEST	4	0	0.0%	3	75.0%
<b>Washington</b>					
1000 EAST	14	0	0.0%	5	35.7%
1000WEST	13	0	0.0%	1	7.7%
<b>Jackson</b>					
1100 EAST	3	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
1100 WEST	11	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Pacific</b>					
1200 EAST	10	1	10.0%	1	10.0%
1200 WEST	14	1	7.1%	3	21.4%
<b>Broadway</b>					
1300 EAST	8	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
1300WEST	12	7	58.3%	7	58.3%
<b>Vallejo</b>					
1400 EAST	6	1	16.7%	2	33.3%
1400 WEST	10	0	0.0%	4	40.0%
<b>Columbus</b>					
<b>Total</b>	136	10	7.4%	43	31.6%



May 5 on east side between Washington and Jackson, no closures Feb. 21, in July 36% remained closed.

Almost everything open on west side between Washington and Jackson, July 31, 2020







Food store draw crowds at Stockton and Pacific on Aug. 1, but other businesses remain closed as between Clay and Sacramento, July 31, 2020.



All stores open and many people between Jackson and Pacific, July 31, 2020.



### Stockton Street contrasts

Small retail, was closed in May, open again July 31.





Grant Avenue

Businesses on Grant Avenue have been suffering for quite some time. In 2016, the commercial vacancy rate on Grant was approximately 8~9%, considerably higher than in the past, although still lower than many other parts of the city. By Feb. 21, 2020 it had increased to 20% in the core Chinatown area from California to Broadway and 17% overall. Prior to the pandemic, the Chinatown core had been doing worse than the downtown blocks between California and Bush but the situation is now reversed following pandemic closures and partial re-openings in June. In the core area, 52% of businesses remain vacant or closed while in the downtown section the figure is 75%. The core Chinatown blocks have a little more local clientele than the downtown blocks but both areas are heavily tourist dependent, had very little foot traffic in July and August, and are unlikely to have major recovery until there are more visitors to San Francisco.

Vacancies/closures on Grant  
Feb. 21 and July 21, 2020

Street/ block	Total store fronts	Feb 2020 vacant/closed	Feb 2020 vacant/closed as percent	July 2020 vacant/closed	July 2020 vacant/closed as percent
<b>Bush</b>					
400 EAST	8	0	0.0%	5	62.5%
400 WEST	11	0	0.0%	8	72.7%
<b>Pine</b>					
500 EAST	12	2	16.7%	10	83.3%
500 WEST	13	1	7.7%	10	76.9%
<b>California</b>					
<b>Subtotal</b>	44	3	6.8%	33	75.0%
<b>California</b>					
600 EAST	5	0	0.0%	1	20.0%
600 WEST	10	6	60.0%	6	60.0%
<b>Sacramento</b>					
700 EAST	13	0	0.0%	7	53.8%
700 WEST	10	0	0.0%	4	40.0%
<b>Clay</b>					
800 EAST	9	4	44.4%	7	77.8%
800 WEST	13	2	15.4%	5	38.5%
<b>Washington</b>					
900 EAST	14	2	14.3%	11	78.6%
900 WEST	15	3	20.0%	6	40.0%
<b>Jackson</b>					
1000 EAST	7	0	0.0%	1	14.3%
1000 WEST	9	2	22.2%	6	66.7%
<b>Pacific</b>					
1100 EAST	11	3	27.3%	5	45.5%
1100 WEST	10	3	30.0%	6	60.0%
<b>Broadway</b>					
<b>Subtotal</b>	126	25	19.8%	65	51.59%
<b>Total</b>	170	28	16.5%	98	57.6%



Above: Lunar New Year street fair January 19, 2020 between Washington and Jackson.

Below: Same block on August 11, 2020.



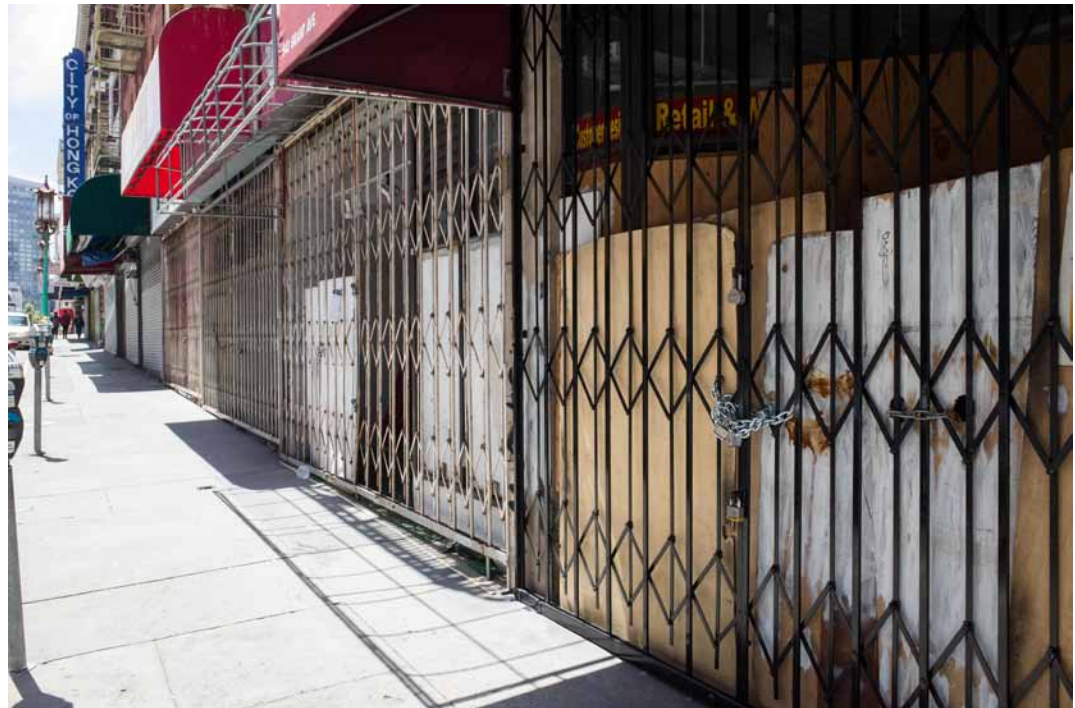




Vacancies were already at 20% before the pandemic, as reflected here between California and Sacramento on Feb. 21, 2020



These businesses between Jackson and Pacific were open in February, closed here in May. The larger building is for sale.



There was only one vacancy on this block between California and Pine in February but 10 out 13 were closed or vacant on July 31, 2020.

July 31, 2020. Some long time import/curio stores like Canton Bazaar re-opened after the initial closures but there appeared to be few customers.



### Grant Avenue open and closed

Bow Hon trying out sidewalk dining. July 31, 2020.



This produce market at the corner of Pacific has been the last one on Grant for several years. It remained open throughout the pandemic, as have a number of other nearby businesses that serve a primarily local clientele. July 31, 2020.





Chinatown East/West streets - Vacancies and Closures

This is a summary of August 2020 vacancy/closures on the East/West streets in Chinatown and comparing that information to the most recent pre-pandemic information I could obtain. The information for August 2020 is from a photographic survey made at mid day on August 11th, supplemented by additional images made shortly before and after that date. I tried to record every vacant or closed ground level storefront. The information for pre-pandemic vacancies/closures are from notes and photographs I made in 2019 and early 2020 and from study of Google street views from several dates in 2019 and early 2020.

The statistical information obtained is summarized in the tables seen here and then each street is examined in turn, with photographs. Unless otherwise noted all photographs were made on August 11, 2020.



Multiple adjacent vacancies/closures on Jackson Street.

Broadway Grant to Powell	Total store fronts	January 2020 vacant/closed	Jan 2020 as percent	August 2020 vacant/closed	Aug 2020 as percent
600 north	12	5	41.7%	5	41.7%
600 south	10	0	0.0%	1	10.0%
700 north	13	4	30.8%	9	69.2%
700 south	6	2	33.3%	4	66.7%
total	41	11	26.8%	19	46.3%
percent		26.8%		46.3%	

Pacific Columbus to Powell	Total store fronts	January 2020 vacant/closed	Jan 2020 as percent	August 2020 vacant/closed	Aug 2020 as percent
600 north	9	2	22.2%	1	11.1%
600 south	1	1	100.0%	0	0.0%
700 north	8	2	25.0%	3	37.5%
700 south	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
800 north	3	0	0.0%	2	66.7%
800 south	4	1	25.0%	1	25.0%
total	25	6	24.0%	7	28.0%
percent		24.0%		28.0%	

Jackson Kearny to Powell	Total store fronts	April 2019 vacant/closed	April 2019 as percent	August 2020 vacant/closed	Aug 2020 as percent
600 north	13	1	7.7%	8	61.5%
600 south	18	2	11.1%	6	33.3%
700 north	12	1	8.3%	8	66.7%
700 south	18	3	16.7%	6	33.3%
800 north	11	4	36.4%	7	63.6%
800 south	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
total	72	11	15.3%	35	48.6%
percent		15.3%		48.6%	

Washington Kearny to Stockton	Total store fronts	May 2019 vacant/closed	May 2019 as percent	August 2020 vacant/closed	Aug 2020 as percent
700 north	6	0	0.0%	2	33.3%
700 south	4	1	25.0%	1	25.0%
800 north	18	6	33.3%	8	44.4%
800 south	13	1	7.7%	6	46.2%
total	41	8	19.5%	17	41.5%
percent		19.5%		41.5%	

Clay Kearny to Stockton	Total store fronts	May 2019 vacant/closed	May 2019 as percent	August 2020 vacant/closed	Aug 2020 as percent
700 north	5	2	40.0%	3	60.0%
700 south	17	1	5.9%	10	58.8%
800 north	12	1	8.3%	8	66.7%
800 south	10	1	10.0%	8	80.0%
total	44	5	11.4%	29	65.9%
percent		11.4%		65.9%	

Sacramento Kearny to Stockton	Total store fronts	January 2020 vacant/closed	Jan 2020 as percent	August 2020 vacant/closed	Aug 2020 as percent
700 north	17	2	11.8%	9	52.9%
700 south	5	0	0.0%	4	80.0%
800 north	4	2	50.0%	4	100.0%
800 south	6	3	50.0%	4	66.7%
total	32	7	21.9%	21	65.6%
percent		22%		65.6%	



Broadway between Grant and Powell



On the south side immediately below Stockton, the mainly food related businesses have fared better. Further toward Grant business are not doing as well, although only one was closed on August 11.



Here customers are socially distancing while waiting to enter “Dim Sum Bistro”. Sidewalks on Broadway are distinctly less crowded than on Stockton.

Overall, the pandemic has increased vacancies and closures on Broadway from 27% to 46% between January and August 2020.

The south side of Broadway has been more stable, with no vacancies below Stockton in January 2020 and only one (out of ten businesses) closed on August 11, although several of the non-food related businesses were not doing well. Above Stockton, the North Ping Yuen and CCDC’s Bayside Senior Housing dominate the south side so there are fewer commercial spaces. Two were vacant in January 2020 and four vacant or closed on August 11, 2020, giving a vacancy rate of 67%. The business locations closer to Powell have been struggling for several years and the pandemic has only made the situation worse.

Chinatown businesses on the north side of Broadway have been suffering for many years. This started above Stockton, with a vacancy rate of over 55% in some years between 2013 and 2016, as Chinatown serving businesses closed. The opening of a few new businesses, with a different focus, brought the vacancies down to 31% in January of 2020 but now the combined vacancies and closures total 69% on August 11, 2020. The north side of Broadway below Stockton, had been more stable but by January 2020 there had been major closures of Chinatown serving businesses there as well, including both a major market and a hardware store, with a vacancy rate of 42% before the pandemic. On the bright side, there have been no new closures following the pandemic.

Vacancies/closures on Broadway, January 2020 and August 11, 2020

Broadway Grant to Powell	Total store fronts	January 2020 vacant/closed	Jan 2020 as percent	August 2020 vacant/closed	Aug 2020 as percent
600 north	12	5	41.7%	5	41.7%
600 south	10	0	0.0%	1	10.0%
700 north	13	4	30.8%	9	69.2%
700 south	6	2	33.3%	4	66.7%
total	41	11	26.8%	19	46.3%
percent		26.8%		46.3%	



Broadway between Grant and Powell



Ironically, surviving Chinatown related businesses, like the trading company and poultry store above, have fared better during the pandemic than the newer, more upscale ones that had begun to replace other Chinatown businesses prior to the pandemic.



The status of this more upscale clothing store is unclear.

These businesses on the north side above Stockton have been vacant for a long time.



On the north side below China Live, only one out of six businesses remain open. However, all these vacancies predate the pandemic.





Pacific between Columbus and Powell

To some extent, Pacific appears to have been the least impacted by the pandemic of all the East/West streets in Chinatown, with an increase in vacancies/closures from 24% in January to 28% in August. Pacific at Stockton is one of the areas of greatest density of foot traffic in Chinatown, which may also help businesses in hard times. However, in making my analysis I had no before and after information on what has happened to businesses within the Miriwa Center, so the data is somewhat incomplete.

Vacancies/closures on Pacific, January 2020 and August 11, 2020

Pacific Columbus to Powell	Total store fronts	January 2020 vacant/closed	Jan 2020 as percent	August 2020 vacant/closed	Aug 2020 as percent
600 north	9	2	22.2%	1	11.1%
600 south	1	1	100.0%	0	0.0%
700 north	8	2	25.0%	3	37.5%
700 south	0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
800 north	3	0	0.0%	2	66.7%
800 south	4	1	25.0%	1	25.0%
total	25	6	24.0%	7	28.0%
percent		24.0%		28.0%	



Left - Mid day scramble crossing at Pacific and Stockton. Ordinarily the most congested pedestrian area in Chinatown, density is distinctly less now than before pandemic. Photo June 26, 2020.

Conversely - below - even before the pandemic, foot traffic had declined further up Pacific at Powell, leaving this store the last one selling fresh produce on Powell or upper Pacific. The two business locations below it on Pacific were open in January but now remain closed.



Right - Food drives most commerce on Pacific and mitigates the impact of pandemic on vacancies and closures.





Pacific between Columbus and Powell



New Wing Lung is the only market open above Stockton on the south side. The two buildings to its right house medical related offices and although closed to entry by the public are not counted as closed here because the agencies are still in operation. August 19, 2020.



Small retail food stores, cafes, restaurants, and community retail remain open below Grant but foot traffic is very light.

New Asia restaurant has converted into a retail food market for the time being.



This location was vacant in January, now is an electric bike rental, a example of general audience business moving into the Chinatown.





Jackson between Kearny and Powell

The pandemic has hit commercial activity on Jackson Street hard. The vacancy/closed rate was about 15% in April 2019, more than on Stockton Street but less than Grant, Broadway, Pacific, Washington, and Sacramento. But in August 2020 almost half - 49% - of commercial spaces were vacant or closed. The north side of Jackson is particularly affected; with 62% vacant/closed between Kearny and Grant, 67% between Grant and Stockton, and 64% between Stockton and Powell. Many businesses that remain open are clearly struggling.

Jackson has many restaurants, those still open are take out only. The steep street, narrow side walks, and west winds are not conducive to setting up for out door service, although at least one restaurant appears to have tried it, briefly. I was not always able to tell whether restaurants were still in business but just closed at the time the survey photos were made, so I may be counting as closures a few restaurants actually open for take out only in evenings.

Vacancies/closures on Jackson, April 2019 and August 11, 2020

Jackson Kearny to Powell	Total store fronts	April 2019 vacant/closed	April 2019 as percent	August 2020 vacant/closed	Aug 2020 as percent
600 north	13	1	7.7%	8	61.5%
600 south	18	2	11.1%	6	33.3%
700 north	12	1	8.3%	8	66.7%
700 south	18	3	16.7%	6	33.3%
800 north	11	4	36.4%	7	63.6%
800 south	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
total	72	11	15.3%	35	48.6%
percent					

**Below, left:** In August, hair salons remain closed by health orders and many small retail and service related stores had not re-opened.

**Below:** This bookstore was semi open but five adjacent businesses were closed or vacant.

**Right:** at noon on July 31, 2020. Woey Loy Goey had tables out for side walk service, but no takers. When I returned at the same time on August 11, the tables were gone.



Above: Sadly typical view.







Many restaurants , cafes, bakery remain open for take out, which helps explain the lower closure rated for the south side of Jackson.



One of several buildings in Chinatown with “for sale” signs - a sign of the times?

Jackson at Beckett below Grant - bar closed, restaurant “open for take-out” although closed at time of photograph, next business closed, little foot traffic. Two adjacent buildings on corner of Beckett listed for sale!



In the midst of closures, someone was remodeling to open a new business in the right hand store front.





Washington Street between Kearny and Stockton

Vacancies/closures on Washington,  
May 2019 and August 11, 2020

Washington Kearny to Stockton	Total store fronts	May 2019 vacant/closed	May 2019 as percent	August 2020 vacant/closed	Aug 2020 as percent
700 north	6	0	0.0%	2	33.3%
700 south	4	1	25.0%	1	25.0%
800 north	18	6	33.3%	8	44.4%
800 south	13	1	7.7%	6	46.2%
total	41	8	19.5%	17	41.5%
percent		19.5%		41.5%	

Washington Street vacancies/closures have doubled to 42% in August, 2020. There are relatively fewer businesses below Grant and many are restaurants that have stayed open with take out and/or sidewalk dining service, contributing to fewer vacancies and closures. Above Grant are more small retail and service businesses that have been hard hit and remain closed or vacant. Pedestrian traffic is light.

Washington Bakery and Grant Place Restaurant next door were reasonably crowded with outside diners for lunch on August 11.



As is true on other cross streets, hair salons remain closed by health orders while retail food businesses remain. As of September 11, 2020, they will be allowed to re-open on September 14.



Another sign of the times at entrance to residential floors at 858 Washington - “outsiders please do not enter.”





Clay Street - Kearny to Stockton

Clay Street commercial activity has been decimated by the pandemic, going from a vacancy/closure rate of 11% in May 2019 to one of 66% in early August 2020. Even allowing for possible errors on my part in identifying closures, this is a bad situation. Some of the high closure rate is driven by closed personal services businesses like hair and nail salons that will be permitted to re-open on September 14, 2020.

Vacancies/closures on Clay, May 2019 and August 11, 2020

Clay Kearny to Stockton	Total store fronts	May 2019 vacant/closed	May 2019 as percent	August 2020 vacant/closed	Aug 2020 as percent
700 north	5	2	40.0%	3	60.0%
700 south	17	1	5.9%	10	58.8%
800 north	12	1	8.3%	8	66.7%
800 south	10	1	10.0%	8	80.0%
total	44	5	11.4%	29	65.9%
percent		11.4%		65.9%	

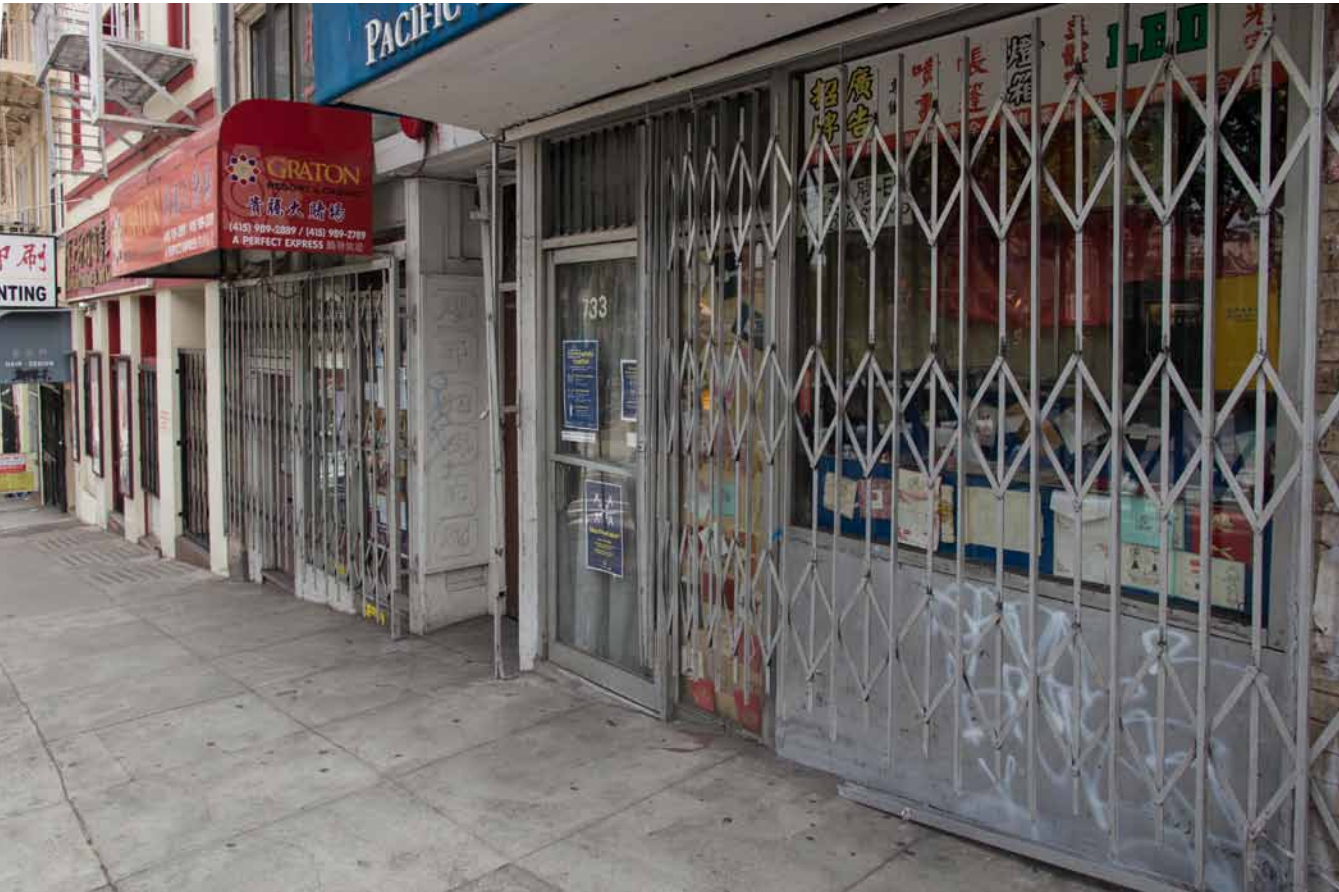


As elsewhere in Chinatown, food businesses have held on the best.



Travel agencies are closed throughout Chinatown.

Multiple adjacent closures below Grant.



Sign on windows of Dragon Seed bridal shop, which appears closed.





Sacramento Street, Kearny to Stockton

Sacramento Street does not have as much retail as other cross streets in Chinatown and has more personal and professional services and related businesses. It has had vacancy issues for many years above Grant but less so toward Kearny, although there have been reports of many vacancies in second floor office spaces, which are not addressed in these street surveys.

The pandemic has hit hard, with an August 11, 2020, vacancy/closure rate of 66%, up dramatically from 22% in January of 2020. In part this is driven by hair salon and massage parlour closures but many other businesses have been affected as well. Many of the “open” businesses were barely open.

Vacancies/closures on Sacramento, January 2020 and August 11, 2020

Sacramento Kearny to Stockton	Total store fronts	January 2020 vacant/closed	Jan 2020 as percent	August 2020 vacant/closed	Aug 2020 as percent
700 north	17	2	11.8%	9	52.9%
700 south	5	0	0.0%	4	80.0%
800 north	4	2	50.0%	4	100.0%
800 south	6	3	50.0%	4	66.7%
total	32	7	21.9%	21	65.6%
percent		22%		65.6%	

Businesses on the north side between Grant and Stockton have struggled for years and all were closed or vacant on August 11.



Work continues on Chinese Playground



Friends Indeed Art Gallery is open by appointment above Kearny. The larger building was listed for \$9~10 million in July.

Travel agency closed, office supplies closed, insurance agent appears open, gate open but lights are out - by appointment only?



Counted as open - a) optometrist's gate open but lights off; b) CPA office gate and door locked but sign says "open" and to ring bell for upper floor - maybe both only by appointment? The trading company store was one of only two businesses on the block that really "looked" open.







A new day begins, 9:10 AM  
August 20, 2020

**AN END, NOT THE END**