

Transforming a Central Tokyo Park Into a Cutting-Edge Commercial Complex: Miyashita Park, Shibuya

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Abstract

This study examines a case of urban renewal in Shibuya, one of Tokyo’s most prominent downtown areas, featuring Miyashita Park, a dilapidated 10,000-square-meter park that transformed into a modern commercial complex consisting of a multistory commercial building with a roof park and an 18-story hotel. Shibuya Ward, the park’s administrator, selected private companies—initially Nike Japan and subsequently Mitsui Fudosan—as the redevelopment agency to install and operate park facilities—a public–private partnership that went beyond the conventional park concept by building sophisticated commercial facilities. This redevelopment, which began at the end of the 2000s, was met with fierce opposition. To investigate these dynamics, the article draws on qualitative content analysis of Shibuya Ward Assembly minutes (2008–2020), obtained from the official digital archive, alongside media coverage. By systematically reviewing committee and plenary debates where key policy decisions were made, the study traces how the project was planned, debated, and implemented. The findings show that despite legal ambiguities and strong criticism, the ward advanced the project by framing the park as an unprofitable facility requiring private-sector expertise, redefining regulatory boundaries, and limiting resident participation to a formal procedure. This process illuminates how public–private-partnership-led redevelopment, embedded in Japan’s broader neoliberal urbanism, can proceed through strong political conviction at the local level amid opposition and limited transparency. The study contributes to international debates on urban public space, highlighting how local governments act not only as regulators but also as active promoters of privatization and the erosion of urban commons.

Keywords

Miyashita Park; public–private partnership; Shibuya; Tokyo; urban renewal

1. Introduction

Urban public spaces in global cities are increasingly shaped by neoliberal governance, deregulation, and public–private partnerships, often accompanied by the exclusion and appropriation of urban commons. The redevelopment of Miyashita Park in Shibuya—one of Japan’s busiest commercial and cultural hubs—offers a distinctive case study of how local governments have mobilized public–private partnerships to transform public space. The aim of this article is to analyze the institutional dynamics and political rationales underlying this process, and to examine how Shibuya Ward, Miyashita Park’s administrator, promoted redevelopment under conditions of deregulation in Japan. In doing so, the study seeks to address a significant research gap: Although much has been written about the consequences of neoliberal urbanism and privatization in Japan, relatively little is known about how local political institutions—specifically ward offices and assemblies—have debated and decided on such projects in practice.

This article is informed by three interrelated theoretical frameworks. First, public–private partnerships in urban planning refer to arrangements in which governments and municipalities collaborate with private enterprises to implement urban projects. While often framed as innovative and efficient, public–private partnerships raise concerns regarding democratic control, transparency, and accountability, and may lead to the retreat of publicness and policy decisions made without resident participation (Hodge & Greve, 2007). Second, neoliberal urbanism describes an approach to urban governance based on market principles, characterized by deregulation, public–private partnerships, and the privatization of public facilities and spaces. Such approaches, however, tend to marginalize vulnerable groups, including the homeless and low-income populations, in redevelopment processes (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Finally, the concept of the urban commons highlights urban spaces and resources that should be collectively accessed, used, and managed by residents. Redevelopment and privatization often threaten these commons by restricting access and reconfiguring their use (Harvey, 2012). As scholarship from both the Global South and North has emphasized, under neoliberalism and widening inequality, public space has emerged as a critical arena for resistance, mobilization, and “alter-politics” (Hou & Knierbein, 2017). These frameworks provide a lens through which the case of Miyashita Park can be situated within broader debates on urban governance and contested public space.

In recent decades, Shibuya has undertaken massive redevelopment projects that have attracted global attention. While these projects have enhanced infrastructure and stimulated economic growth, they have also raised concerns that once urban spaces are branded and curated, they risk losing their spontaneous, democratic, and inclusive character (Balsas, 2020). Miyashita Park, situated just north of Shibuya Station, exemplifies this dual trajectory. Once a deteriorating 10,000-square-meter public park, it was redeveloped into a fashionable multi-level commercial complex with a rooftop park, accompanied by an 18-story hotel. To implement this transformation, Shibuya Ward introduced mechanisms such as naming rights, the multilevel city park system, and fixed-term land leaseholds (the right to lease land or real estate for a specified period during which, in return for paying rent, the lessee obtains the exclusive right to use and control the land). Initially, Nike Japan spearheaded the project under a naming rights agreement in 2009, reopening the park in 2011 with new sports facilities. In 2015, the ward selected Mitsui Fudosan Co., Ltd., a leading real estate developer, to lead a more ambitious redevelopment, which reopened in 2020 with commercial facilities—including luxury brands and cafés—and a flagship hotel (see Figures 1–3).



Figure 1. Miyashita Park: South part of the commercial facilities.



Figure 2. Miyashita Park: The commercial facilities and the hotel.

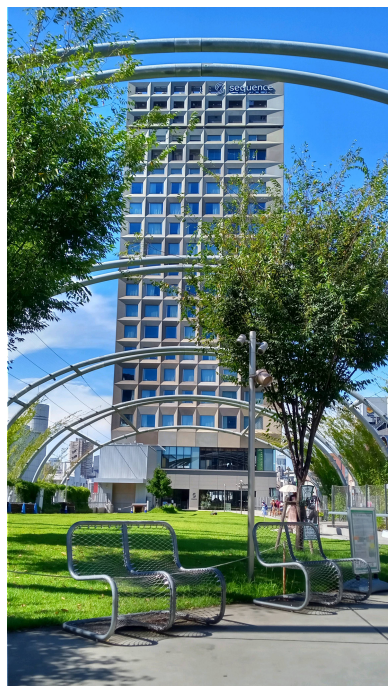


Figure 3. Miyashita Park: North part of the roof park and the hotel.

The project sparked intense debate, particularly over the exclusion of homeless individuals during the redevelopment process who had resided in the park and their supporters, as seen in Figure 4 (Nerukaigi, 2010; Our Planet-TV, 2010). Prior research has interpreted such conflicts as emblematic of the contested role of parks as urban commons (Cassegård, 2011; Cayer & Bender, 2019; Colding et al., 2013; Dimmer, 2017; Kimura, 2019; Kubota, 2021).



Figure 4. Confrontation between Shibuya Ward and protesters at Miyashita Park in September 2010. Source: “Koen no tento tekkyo ni kogisuru hitotachi” (2010). Courtesy of The Asahi Shimbun.

Yet, despite this growing body of literature, little is known about how local political institutions in Japan—specifically Shibuya Ward headed by the elected mayors during this period and Shibuya Ward Assembly (SWA) consisting of elected members—have justified and promoted such redevelopments amid strong public opposition. On what grounds did they proceed, and what institutional dynamics shaped their decisions?

To answer these questions, this study draws on qualitative content analysis of SWA minutes (2008–2020), obtained from the official digital archive (digitized from May 2003 onward), alongside media coverage. Among all mentions of “Miyashita Park,” discussions directly related to this redevelopment—especially those in committees and regular meetings where important policy decisions were made—were systematically reviewed. By tracing how the project was planned, debated, and implemented, the article illuminates the rationales and governance approaches underpinning Shibuya Ward’s promotion of public–private partnerships.

As this study shows, there were multiple occasions of significant debate in the SWA (see Table 1). The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Komeito strongly supported the redevelopment. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was initially critical of the lack of information disclosure and insufficient involvement of the SWA regarding the redevelopment, but subsequently strongly supported the redevelopment. In contrast, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and some independent members of the SWA, such as Yukiko Sasamoto and Nenjin Horikiri, opposed it.

Table 1. Important discussions and decisions regarding the Miyashita Park redevelopment in the SWA.

| Date | Development |
|--------------------|--|
| 2008, September 30 | An SWA member of the DPJ expressed regret at the assembly's regular meeting that the ward had been working toward selling the naming rights of Miyashita Park without informing the assembly. |
| 2009, June 18 | The ward office finally sent an outline of the Miyashita Park redevelopment plan to the SWA's urban environment committee. |
| 2010, June 11 | The mayor expressed his frustration with the opposition movement at the SWA's regular meeting, which was three months before the administrative execution was carried out. |
| 2010, September 30 | In the gallery at the SWA's regular meeting, some audience members made irregular remarks protesting their exclusion from the park. |
| 2014, June 20 | The urban environment committee was informed of a candidate developer. |
| 2015, March 12 | The SWA's regular meeting approved an amendment to the ordinance on voting. |
| 2015, March 13 | The urban environment committee discussed the basic agreement with Mitsui Fudosan and the fixed-term land leasehold. |
| 2015, March 26 | The urban environment committee decided that the consideration of the basic agreement with Mitsui Fudosan and the fixed-term land leasehold would be continued during the closed session, which meant that they were effectively scrapped. |
| 2015, July 9 | The progress report regarding the Miyashita Park project was explained to the ward citizens and environment committee. |
| 2016, March 28 | The JCP proposed an ordinance establishing a new study committee that would review the Miyashita Park plan. |
| 2017, June 8 | The mayor emphasized his stance of confronting homeless support groups opposing the redevelopment during the regular SWA meeting. |
| 2018, June 8 | At the regular meeting, SWA member Yukiko Sasamoto complained about both the hostile treatment of opposing SWA members by the developer during the briefing session and the ward office for failing to acknowledge it. |
| 2018, September 20 | In response to criticism and opposition from some SWA members, the mayor strongly emphasized his commitment to promoting the redevelopment led by Mitsui Fudosan at the SWA's regular meeting. |
| 2019, December 6 | The SWA's regular meeting amended its urban parks ordinance to introduce a designated manager system that would allow parks to be closed at night and permit companies that were designated park managers to use them to make a profit. |

The analysis of this article situates the case within broader structural shifts in Japan's urban planning since the 1980s, characterized by deregulation and increased private-sector involvement (Ishida, 2004). While postwar citizen-led *machizukuri* (town-making) movements that emphasized community participation, local autonomy, and collaborative planning once challenged top-down, technocratic planning as a counter paradigm to conventional urban planning (Hein, 2017; Satoh, 2020; Watanabe, 2007), recent decades have seen participation formalized but often hollowed out—reduced to information provision rather than genuine deliberation (Kadomatsu, 2012; Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, 2003; Utiumi, 2017). Moreover, national-level pro-development initiatives have frequently overridden local environmental and planning controls, creating a dual trajectory of institutional change (Sorensen, 2011).

Miyashita Park illustrates a further shift in this dynamic in which the local government itself actively pursued deregulation and close collaboration with private developers based on public–private partnerships. In Japan, public–private partnerships gained momentum with the private sector involvement policy of the 1980s to expand domestic demand, and have since produced a wide variety of projects, including the development of cultural, sports, and educational facilities, the redevelopment of parks and public housing, the operation of airport facilities and water supply and sewage systems, as well as the reorganization of roads and plazas to prioritize pedestrians. While some of these initiatives are evaluated positively from the perspective of regional revitalization (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, 2024; Nikkei Architecture, 2022), large-scale redevelopment projects in and near Tokyo employing public–private partnerships—such as Yebisu Garden Place in Shibuya Ward and the coastal centers of Tokyo Teleport Town, Makuhari New City, and Minato Mirai 21 along Tokyo Bay—have been criticized for privatizing public spaces, imposing restrictive rules, and eroding historical and geographical connections (Cybriwsky, 1999). Studies on more recent cases of redevelopment in Tokyo’s three wards (Ilunga et al., 2024), Shibuya Station’s ongoing regeneration (Reggiani, 2022), and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics legacy planning and redevelopment (Hasegawa, 2025) emphasize the tendency for limited public engagement and prioritization of economic interests over social and environmental sustainability.

Against this backdrop of broader structural shifts in Japan’s urban planning since the 1980s, the Miyashita Park case illustrates the complementary interrelationship between rapid economic growth, limited public engagement, and the erosion of urban diversity and equity. In doing so, the article contributes to international debates on the politics of urban public space, highlighting how local governments can act not merely as regulators or mediators, but as active promoters of privatization.

2. Redevelopment Based on a Naming Rights Agreement With Nike Japan

Miyashita Park opened in 1953, and a plan to renovate it into Tokyo’s first “aerial park” was reported in 1965. This would involve building a 4.5-meter-high roof over the park, filling it with dirt, and constructing a 260-car semiunderground parking lot below it (“Shibuya ni ‘kuchuteien,’” 1965; “Shibuya ni ‘ukabu ikoino ba,’” 1965). Since the 1990s, both the park and the parking lot, however, have noticeably deteriorated and have become home to many homeless people living in tents. In 2001, *Yomiuri Shimbun* reported that about 90 homeless people living in the park had formed a neighborhood organization (“Jiritsu nimukete. Tokyo no homuresu (3),” 2001).

After the construction of a new futsal court in the park in 2006, the ward received requests for new skateboarding and climbing facilities, and the mayor, Toshitake Kuwabara, worked behind the scenes with a concept for a radical redevelopment of Miyashita Park based on a naming rights agreement. In the SWA’s regular meeting in September 2008, Hiroki Hamada, an assembly member of the DPJ, expressed regret that the ward had been working toward selling the naming rights of Miyashita Park to Nike Japan without informing the assembly. He also urged the ward to establish naming rights criteria and have the SWA vote on the decision to sell. In response, the mayor argued that a sudden offer from a business operator might trigger the introduction of naming rights and that the SWA could not set or approve a uniform standard; rather, a flexible response was necessary, requiring neither a standard setting nor assembly resolution (SWA, 2008a, pp. 70–72, 84–86, 88–89). The following month, at the SWA’s urban environment committee meeting, Kumiko Shinpo of the JCP inquired whether the park renovation plan based on the naming rights

sale should be made a matter for public comment during the formulation stage to obtain the opinions of diverse ward residents and users. In response, Parks Section Chief Akihiko Ozawa and Public Works Director Yasumasa Hioki repeated that they would consult with the SWA and residents after finalizing discussions with the operator regarding the renovation and reaching a consensus (SWA, 2008b, pp. 1–4).

In June 2009, the ward office finally sent an outline of the Miyashita Park redevelopment plan to the SWA. According to Ozawa's explanation and the ensuing question-and-answer session, to address various groups' requests about the installation of climbing and skateboarding facilities, three sports-related companies were consulted in February 2008, with two companies proposing naming rights that included facility development. The ward established a six-member selection committee in the same month consisting of a lawyer, an accountant, a management consultant, and three department heads from the ward office, and this committee selected Nike Japan in March 2008. The sale of naming rights was to be made for approximately 17 million yen per year for 10 years, with Nike spending another 400 million yen to improve park facilities, including the renovation of the futsal court and construction of new sports facilities as requested. After local explanatory meetings, construction was scheduled to begin in September 2009, and opening was scheduled for May of the following year (SWA, 2009b, pp. 4–6).

The question-and-answer session at the June 2009 urban environment committee meeting, however, revealed that some important information was not presented. The ward said it could not reveal the names of the selection committee members and the project costs based on the proposing company's calculations, as the company was private and the ward had to respect confidentiality obligations. Haruki Mori of the JCP criticized the way the plan was made without presenting details to the public, saying the act was too violent and had too much disregard for the SWA and residents. Yoshihiko Kuriya of Komeito, however, said it was an excellent plan triggered by requests from the youth to build new climbing and skateboarding facilities (SWA, 2009b, pp. 8–10, 15–16).

On July 1, 2009, a local explanatory meeting was held with 31 participants, and the SWA was later informed that a basic agreement between the ward and Nike was signed on August 27 (SWA, 2009c, p. 17, 2009d, p. 1). At the SWA, the JCP strongly criticized the ward office for not informing the assembly or residents of any plan outline and demanded that the plan be withdrawn outright. While acknowledging the significance of collaboration between the ward and the private sector, the DPJ questioned the appropriateness of the decision-making process. The party again urged that a guideline be created for the naming rights selection, arguing that the current situation, in which selection criteria and methods were not defined and information was not thoroughly disclosed, made it impossible to gain the ward residents' understanding. The mayor, however, articulated that he did not intend to revise the plan and stated that setting up criteria or guidelines for naming rights in advance would not be effective (SWA, 2009a, pp. 38, 44–47, 79–81, 92).

In March 2010, Shibuya Ward and Tokyu Corporation, the construction operator, held a local explanatory meeting and announced that construction would begin in April, having been postponed because of opposition from a support group for homeless people living in the park, who said that the lack of explanation from Nike's side was incomprehensible (“‘Raigetsukara koji,’ Shibuyakunado hoshin shimesu,” 2010). At the SWA's urban environment committee meeting, Parks Section Chief Ozawa explained that there were 72 participants at the local explanatory meeting, of whom 32 were ward residents, 30 were residents outside the ward, and 10 had no listed address. Eight questions and comments were presented at the explanatory meeting, six of which

were from residents outside the ward. Ozawa also noted that the local shopping district had stated that the park redevelopment had been their dream, and they would very much like to see it proceed. Mori of the JCP, however, argued that only a summary of questions and opinions had been given to committee members and no answers were given by the ward, and that the plan should be reviewed as it had proceeded so aggressively. In response, Yoshihiko Kuriya of Komeito said that the SWA had engaged in full discussions and that he would like to see the project push through. Ozawa stated that several groups were illegally occupying the park but that the project was under consideration to proceed carefully and expeditiously because of strong demand from the district's residents (SWA, 2010c, pp. 1–4).

Groups opposed to the redevelopment continued to set up tents and occupy parts of the park; as a result, construction could not begin. At an SWA meeting in June 2010, Takeshi Ito of the Independent Club—a group of independent members on the SWA—asked the mayor whether the forced removal of these groups might be unavoidable given residents' and facility users' frustration at what they perceived as an inappropriate occupation of the park by nonresidents. The mayor responded that he knew patience had a limit, so he requested that they wait just a little longer (SWA, 2010a, pp. 122–123).

A warning was issued under the Administrative Execution by Proxy Law, with August 21, 2010, as the deadline for removal. Because the notice was not carried out, a public notice was issued on August 21 to conduct administrative execution by proxy on August 24. On August 31, Shibuya Ward recommended that the groups remove their setups in the park and, after determining that their recommendation had been ignored, sealed off the entrance and exit on September 15 (SWA, 2010d, pp. 1–4). Immediately afterward, the minutes of the SWA's regular meeting showed that during the mayor's remarks, audience members said that they would return to the park, prevent its forced removal, and disallow the cozy relation between the ward office and Nike Japan, and were ordered by the chairperson to leave the assembly (SWA, 2010b, pp. 6, 11).

On April 30, 2011, the park reopened with the name “Miyashita Kouen” in Japanese hiragana characters instead of “Miyashita Nike Park” as originally planned. Nike had announced that it would not exercise its naming rights in October 2010, shortly after the start of construction through execution by proxy (“Meimeiken ‘koushisezu,” 2010; “Miyashitakoen. Meimeiken tsukawazu,” 2010). Meanwhile, on April 21, 2011, the homeless people who lived in the park and their support groups filed a lawsuit against Shibuya Ward in the Tokyo District Court, claiming that the previous year's execution by proxy and other actions were illegal, and sought damages of approximately 5.9 million yen (“Shibuya Miyashitakoen no Seikatsusha raga teiso,” 2011; “Tento tekkyo ha iho,” 2011). In March 2015, the court ruled that the ward's forced removal of the tents was legal but ordered a payment of 110,000 yen to a homeless individual because it was illegal for four men to forcibly carry him and drive him away. Although not a problem limited to neoliberal urbanism, the court also deemed it illegal for the ward and Nike to enter into a negotiated contract when competitive bidding was not difficult to conduct (“Koen tento tekkyo,” 2015; “Koenseikatsusha, katsuide taikyosaseto noha iho,” 2015; “Meimeiken. Zuikeiyaku ha iho,” 2015). The Tokyo High Court dismissed the ward's appeal and upheld the ruling of the first trial (“Homuresu kyoseitekkyo,” 2015).

The episode in this section illustrates how the ward strategically framed the project as a flexible response to residents' demands and as an opportunity to harness private-sector vitality, thereby legitimizing the circumvention of broader deliberation. The absence of formal guidelines and disclosure was not incidental; rather, it functioned as a mechanism that institutionalized opacity and weakened the SWA's and citizens' capacity to scrutinize the process.

3. Public–Private Partnership With Mitsui Fudosan: A Little Stumble

Meanwhile, toward the end of Mayor Kuwabara's administration, discussions proceeded to Miyashita Park's further redevelopment. The June 2014 meeting of the SWA's urban environment committee announced the establishment of a four-expert study committee that would select a candidate developer for Miyashita Park and the Shibuya parking lot based on publicly solicited development proposals. During the question-and-answer session, Koji Toma of the JCP and independent member Nenjin Horikiri expressed concern regarding the selection of a candidate operator without residents' knowledge and called for the need for residents' involvement and participation in the study committee, but the ward office dismissed this idea (SWA, 2014c, pp. 9–10, 13).

In August 2014, a park redevelopment proposal was publicly solicited, and in February 2015, Mitsui Fudosan was selected over Tokyu Corporation. In the following month, the SWA's urban environment committee was informed of the decision. Mitsui Fudosan's concept involved building a three-story facility and using the multistory urban park system to create a park on the facility's roof. The basement and part of the first floor would be used for bicycle and car parking, and the remaining three floors would house cafes, bars, restaurants, food courts, brand stores, and inbound facilities. About 10% of the park area would be allocated to the construction of an 18-story hotel. After approval by the SWA, the ward expected to finalize a basic agreement and land leasehold contract with Mitsui Fudosan. Under Mitsui Fudosan's proposal, besides the 2.448-billion-yen up-front land rent for the park and parking lot redevelopment, a 30-year lease at 603 million yen per year would be established. In other words, Mitsui Fudosan would develop the park and parking lot with no financial burden on the ward and would also pay the ward a loan fee (SWA, 2015j, pp. 1–3, 12, 17).

Nevertheless, the urban environment committee's question-and-answer session left many uncertainties and unclear matters. Although constructing a high-rise building in the park was legally impossible, the ward planned to accept Mitsui Fudosan's proposal first and then contact the national government and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government to discuss the matter. The ward argued that the proposal could be adopted even if a hotel could not be built. It was pointed out, however, that the base rent amount should differ depending on whether a hotel was included in the fixed-term leasehold. Moreover, the ward had not conducted a real estate appraisal. When it was pointed out that this would mean entering into a fixed-term land leasehold agreement in the absence of backing, the director of the ward's public works and cleaning department stated that if the operator had not proposed the project, Miyashita Park would have been a completely unprofitable facility moving forward. Because of the operator, the ward would be able to rebuild the aging park and its parking facilities without incurring any financial burden, as well as receive a loan fee, the amount of which would be determined in the future; therefore, the ward expressed its intention to endorse a decision on the candidate (SWA, 2015j, pp. 13–16).

Meanwhile, the SWA approved an amendment to the ordinance on voting in March 2015. The original ordinance on voting was made in March 2014 in relation to the conclusion of a basic agreement and the establishment of a fixed-term land leasehold with Mitsui Fudosan for the redevelopment of the ward office building area, which did not constitute a case that required a resolution of the local government assembly under the Local Autonomy Law. Regarding the redevelopment of the ward office building area, the JCP and members of various factions had been criticizing Mitsui Fudosan's plan to financially benefit by building a

39-story, approximately 420-unit (later 520-unit) high-rise expensive apartment on ward-owned land in exchange for the company's construction of a new ward office building and public hall. They claimed that both the SWA and the residents had received insufficient information (SWA, 2014a, pp. 1–5, 2014b, pp. 160–164). The 2015 ordinance amendment was made so that the ordinance would apply to the Miyashita Park case. The JCP and some other SWA members opposed the ordinance amendment because it was intended to lead to the endorsement of the SWA's proposals regarding Miyashita Park without sufficient disclosure of information. All but them agreed, and the amended ordinance was passed (SWA, 2015f, pp. 1–6, 2015g, pp. 9–12, 2015h, pp. 168–172).

The SWA's urban environment committee then discussed the basic agreement between the ward and Mitsui Fudosan as well as the fixed-term land leasehold. The ward insisted on the former first. During the answer-and-question session, the ward stated that the land lease fee would be the amount proposed by Mitsui Fudosan and that the actual amount would be decided later, before the signing of the fixed-term land leasehold agreement in the next fiscal year. Simply put, the SWA would decide to lease the land without specifying an amount in the leasehold agreement. The ward reiterated that because Mitsui Fudosan was a private company, a win-win relationship with the ward would be impossible unless the company generated a profit, and that if the agreements were to include figures, the ward itself would have to conduct its own real estate appraisal. Thus, the basic agreement and the fixed-term land leasehold agreement would not include figures this time (SWA, 2015k, pp. 7–10).

The ward, after reiterating the project's financial benefits, articulated that the opinions of the SWA and residents would be reflected only to the extent that they would not interfere with the project's execution—an arrangement that effectively reduced participation to a formal procedure rather than genuine involvement in decision-making. The ward was unable to make demands that would force the operator to withdraw from the project from a business feasibility standpoint. During the question-and-answer session, it was clarified that Mitsui Fudosan had yet to conduct a real estate appraisal as well. Critics expressed concern that the project would proceed without data, but the ward asserted that Mitsui Fudosan's proposal was reliable because it is one of Japan's leading real estate companies with vast experience and know-how (SWA, 2015k, pp. 18–20).

The ward, however, had an extremely aggressive approach. The president of the local Miyamasucho neighborhood association and others had submitted a petition to the ward, demanding that the local community's approval be included in the development policy and candidate developer selection, that the park area be maintained, and that the park's trees be preserved (SWA, 2015a, p. 1). Eventually, the SWA's urban environment committee unanimously decided that the consideration of these two proposals be continued during the closed session, even though the SWA election was forthcoming, which meant that they were effectively scrapped (SWA, 2015l, pp. 8–9).

What emerges in this section is a governance strategy that framed Miyashita Park as an “unprofitable facility” in need of private expertise, while sidelining legal uncertainties and the lack of appraisal data. By postponing key regulatory and financial clarifications, the ward effectively created a path-dependent process in which the developer's proposal became a *fait accompli*. This reflects a broader institutional dynamic in Japanese public-private partnerships, where regulatory ambiguities are retroactively adjusted to legitimize pre-determined redevelopment outcomes.

4. Public–Private Partnership With Mitsui Fudosan: Promotion Through Fine-Tuning

In July 2015, the ward's progress report cited criticisms as the reason for the abandonment of the two proposals in March, as they had been insufficiently communicated to the local community; it was unclear whether the hotel could be legally built; and no land appraisal had been conducted. The ward had been explaining Mitsui Fudosan's redevelopment proposal to the local community association and shopping district since May and was having Mitsui Fudosan review the proposal based on the opinions expressed at the meetings (SWA, 2015b, p. 27).

Komeito's Hidetaka Sawashima strongly supported the ward, arguing that reducing the ward's financial burden was key. Meanwhile, Toma of the JCP argued that the land must be appraised first, but during the question-and-answer session, the focus shifted to changes related to the pending hotel construction. The national government and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government asserted that constructing a high-rise hotel in the park would be difficult, leading the ward to consider another approach that would allow for such construction. Miyashita Park was divided into north and south areas, with a bridge crossing in between. Taking advantage of the fact that the park area does not include this bridge section, the ward would widen this section and turn it into a deck as an entrance to the park area, combining the two sections. Although the proposed hotel construction site would be removed from the park area, the overall park area would be maintained by offsetting the deck area. Toma lamented that this change would serve and accommodate a private corporation, but Sawashima countered that it was the government's role to use private-sector vitality to do what was in the best interest of Shibuya Ward's residents and the ward's future (SWA, 2015b, pp. 35–43).

In response, Takashi Kuroyanagi, director of the public works and cleaning department, stated that Sawashima's statements were consistent with the ward office's mindset of a win–win relationship with the private sector and that a company could not properly manage and operate the park if it were unable to make a profit. Sawashima also argued that, after the SWA meeting in March, the ward officials had provided a series of explanations to the residents and listened to their opinions. While their opinions were important, they could not make redevelopment plans, and therefore the ward had to show them the plans and revise them, and the SWA should stop talking as if the ward were not listening to the residents' opinions. Sawashima added that the procedure was not flawed at all to begin with (SWA, 2015b, pp. 44, 51).

At the November meeting of the ward citizens and environment committee, the JCP and some SWA members had utterly incompatible discussions with the ward side. In response to concerns that the commercial facilities would weaken disaster prevention functions, the ward side asserted that they would actually be strengthened as these facilities could be used as countermeasures for people who would find it difficult to return home. With regard to the zelkova trees that the residents wanted to preserve, the ward explained that although the zelkova trees would be cut down, the wood would be reused as benches and other furnishings, which they argued would symbolically preserve the spirit of Miyashita Park. When independent member Yukiko Sasamoto inquired about the land appraisal and the total project cost, Sawashima sided with the ward office, saying that the administration was proceeding carefully and that he respected their efforts (SWA, 2015c, pp. 12–13, 20–22).

In December, the ward citizens and environment committee finally discussed the proposals for a basic agreement and a fixed-term land leasehold. Komeito's Sawashima reasserted that the most important goals were to improve the aging parking lots and Miyashita Park to benefit ward residents and to do so without imposing a tax burden on them. He had the ward chief confirm that a fixed-term land leasehold would bring in 603 million yen annually for 30 years to Shibuya Ward and then pointed out that the ward would need to spend 6 billion yen if it were to redevelop the site on its own. He emphatically stated that those with objections would have to present a counterproposal that would exceed this amount. In response, Toma of the JCP argued that the ward office redefined the park's boundaries by widening the bridge crossing and designating it as a deck that counted as park area. This allowed the planned hotel site to be formally excluded from the park, thereby making the construction of the 18-story hotel legally possible while keeping the overall park area unchanged on paper. Arguing that it made no sense to revisit past discussions, Sawashima urged Manabu Haruta of the DPJ, the committee chairperson, to proceed. Haruta tried to assert that the committee should confirm the history of the case, only to be countered by Sawashima to proceed since he had said so. He even went so far as to say that if only the opponents' opinions were considered, he would file a motion of no confidence in the chairperson (SWA, 2015d, pp. 11–13, 20–23).

The two proposals were approved by the ward citizens and environment committee (SWA, 2015e, pp. 27–31) and the regular meeting, with the LDP, Komeito, and the DPJ voting in favor. At the meeting, the JCP criticized this plan as a scheme to give a park, which was irreplaceable to the ward's residents, to Mitsui Fudosan as a venue to achieve profits with no surveying and through its semi-permanent use of the park under conditions favorable to it. Sasamoto criticized the fact that the ward's responsibilities according to the basic agreement only included managing the overall contract's progress as well as liaising and coordinating with related agencies. She argued that it was Shibuya Ward's responsibility to release relevant materials to its residents and park users, to provide careful explanations, and to implement administrative management with a view toward the ward's future, with a third party reviewing the operators' proposals. She also criticized the basic agreement's stipulation that the SWA and residents would be extensively consulted during the project's design phase but only to the extent that it would not impede the project's execution, indicating that the plan prioritized the construction of facilities, including a hotel. She also told the assembly that such an imposed plan was completely outdated and showed the status quo of the Shibuya Ward administration, in which little attention was paid to ward residents. She urged the assembly to listen to residents' and park users' opinions and redo the plan from scratch, even if it might be time-consuming (SWA, 2015i, pp. 139–141, 144–147).

Meanwhile, the DPJ, demonstrating an exact opposite interpretation of the project, cited several reasons for voting in favor of these proposals. First, since the ward administration's pausing of its consideration of the proposals in March, it has thoroughly explained the project to the neighborhood community organizations, shopping associations, and other interested parties and obtained their opinions. Second, it also clarified that the hotel would be constructed without changing the park area by converting the deck area to park use. Finally, the park's redevelopment and the hotel's construction would enhance the park's disaster prevention function in an integrated manner, serving as a support facility for people experiencing difficulty returning to their homes (SWA, 2015i, pp. 141–142).

As we have seen in this section, regulatory constraints—most notably the prohibition of hotel construction within the park—were overcome by redefining park boundaries through administrative maneuvering. This boundary manipulation allowed the project to comply formally with legal requirements while substantively

prioritizing corporate interests. Such regulatory engineering highlights the discretionary power of local governments in facilitating public-private-partnership-led redevelopment and exemplifies the institutional flexibility through which neoliberal urbanism advances.

5. Toward the Reopening of Miyashita Park

Thereafter, problems surrounding the redevelopment continued until Miyashita Park's reopening in 2020. The JCP proposed an ordinance establishing a new study committee that would review the Miyashita Park plan in 2016. This sought to freeze Mitsui Fudosan's current redevelopment project and devise a new plan through this study group, which would consist of publicly recruited ward residents, park users, members of various groups in the ward, and academic experts. This proposal, however, was rejected on the grounds that returning to a blank slate after the basic agreement was signed would be completely out of focus (SWA, 2016a, pp. 16–18, 2016b, pp. 194–195). The rejection of the JCP's proposal was repeated each year until 2019 (SWA, 2017a, pp. 19–21, 2017c, pp. 196–197, 2018a, pp. 18–20, 2018c, pp. 220–221, 2019a, pp. 23–25, 2019c, pp. 217–218).

Ignoring such criticism from the JCP and some members of various factions and independent SWA members, the ward pushed forward with the project as if to stifle dissent. In March 2017, a hasty decision was made to cancel the naming rights agreement with Nike and suspend the use of Miyashita Park on March 27 instead of the scheduled March 31, with the latter causing a commotion that led to arrests from the opposing side, which resisted. At the SWA's regular meeting in June, the ward's mayor, Ken Hasebe, explained that self-proclaimed homeless support groups have obstructed the closing of the gates, left personal belongings unattended in the park for long periods, and set up illegal structures such as sheds without permission, which was unacceptable to Shibuya Ward, the park's general users, and residents near the park. Considering the persistent obstruction during Miyashita Park's renewal seven years ago from 2017 and similar incidents when Meiji Park closed to give way to the construction of the new National Stadium the previous year, continued hindrances were expected with respect to surveys in preparation for the Miyashita Park redevelopment. Under these circumstances, the ward, as the park manager, determined that the suspension of park services and temporary enclosures were necessary to ensure the safety of park users and pedestrians and to properly manage the park (SWA, 2017d, p. 8).

Incidentally, similar patterns of exclusion and redevelopment were also observed in Tennoji Park in Osaka City, a large-scale park adjacent to areas traditionally known for a high number of day laborers. It saw a sharp increase in homeless tents and unlicensed stalls, especially during the 1990s. In 2003, like Miyashita Park, there was a forced eviction that was seen as a form of exclusion. In 2016, the park began closing at night, which was perceived as an attempt to drive out the homeless to improve the image of the nearby Tennoji Station area, which was undergoing redevelopment ("Gyogiii noni kawai-soya!", 2016).

The post-park-closure overhead at Miyashita Park included 24-hour security and legal counsel fees. A ward office director stated that this legal counsel would deal with "antisocial groups." When the appropriateness of the word "antisocial" was pointed out, he rephrased antisocial groups as groups that claimed to support the homeless people (SWA, 2017b, pp. 17–18). According to Chiyoko Igarashi of the JCP, this attorney had handled cases involving obstructions to the construction of the new National Stadium. Sasamoto argued that this attorney had been a part-time employee of the ward and was paid a large sum of money, which was

problematic. She further noted that another lawyer from this attorney's firm was a member of the naming rights selection committee (SWA, 2017e, pp. 157, 159–160).

Nevertheless, the mayor emphasized his confidence in the Mitsui Fudosan-led projects at the SWA. In response to a request to disclose the total cost of the high-rise apartment building to be built by Mitsui Fudosan on the ward office building area, the mayor stated that the company would construct a new ward office building and public hall using profits from the apartment building, profits which the ward had no way of knowing the value of, as private company profits were hidden from the public. Regarding Miyashita Park, the real estate appraisal for the fixed-term land leasehold agreement between Shibuya Ward and Mitsui Fudosan was conducted two years before the agreement was concluded in June 2017. Because the official roadside land price (used for calculating inheritance and gift taxes) had increased by nearly 25% during that period, some SWA members asserted that the appraisal should have been conducted immediately before the agreement was finalized. They also maintained that the portion of the property where the hotel was to be built only had an appraisal value calculated by the ward itself and that no proper appraisal had been done and urged that the full financial plan, including the total project cost and Mitsui Fudosan's profit, should be disclosed (SWA, 2018e, pp. 50–51, 56–57).

The mayor responded to these comments by first stating that the fixed-term leasehold agreement allowed for discussions on rent revisions in the event of a significant and unexpected impact on land and building prices, such as a major change in social conditions. The rise in roadside land prices in the past two years before the agreement was signed, however, could not be considered a major change in social conditions, as these prices fluctuate. Therefore, a reappraisal was unnecessary. He also stated that the appraisal for the hotel portion was calculated and valued by the ward office because the hotel could be built. Furthermore, he dismissed a request to clarify Mitsui Fudosan's funding plan for the Miyashita Park redevelopment project, arguing that the ward was not in a position to answer it (SWA, 2018e, p. 57). These exchanges took place many times in the SWA, even in the months leading up to the reopening of Miyashita Park (SWA, 2020b, pp. 85–100).

In 2019, the ward amended its Urban Parks Ordinance to introduce a designated manager system that would allow parks to be closed at night and permit companies that were designated park managers to use them to make a profit. For Miyashita Park, the designated manager was Miyashita Park Partners, which consisted of Mitsui Fudosan and Seibu Landscaping Co. (SWA, 2019b, pp. 10–12, 15–17, 2019d, pp. 190–193, 206–209). In 2020, just before the reopening, a draft ordinance was discussed to allow a designated manager to maintain and operate the parking lot in Miyashita Park, which had been conducted by the Urban Development Corporation. The ordinance was enacted with a majority of votes in favor despite opposition from the JCP, which argued that this would allow the designated manager to benefit not only from the park but also from the parking lot (SWA, 2020a, pp. 15–17, 2020c, pp. 193–196).

The ward emphasized procedural correctness while critics contended that objections were systematically minimized. This contrast illustrates the tension between the administration's confidence in the project and persistent concerns about transparency and inclusiveness. In March 2017, Sasamoto presented to the SWA her criticisms regarding the Shibuya Ward Urban Planning Council. This council, established under the City Planning Law to reflect diverse opinions in determining Shibuya Ward's city planning policies, consisted of up to 19 members appointed by the mayor, including scholars, SWA members, residents, and officials from relevant administrative bodies. It made recommendations to the ward on whether it was appropriate to

adopt or amend city planning proposals. The minutes of its meetings were not publicly accessible at the time, and even SWA members who were not part of the council had to be selected by lottery to attend as observers, just like ordinary citizens. The number of observers was also kept extremely small considering venue size (SWA, 2017a, p. 20). Toma of the JCP also criticized the Urban Planning Council for having too few observers and preventing others who wanted to attend its meetings. The mayor, however, stated that observers were selected based on a fair lottery with no unilateral exclusion, denial of residents' sovereignty, or disregard for residents (SWA, 2017d, pp. 36, 40).

At a regular meeting of the SWA in February 2018, Sasamoto, Horikiri, and other SWA members critical of redevelopment projects denounced several problems regarding the operators' briefing in January. First, participants were limited to residents who received flyers from the organizers. Sasamoto stated that the organizers told her to go ahead and change the ordinance to allow SWA members to attend the briefing if they wanted to. Horikiri mentioned that on the day of the briefing, two section chiefs of the ward told him not to attend, and the organizers intimidated him later at the venue. When he went to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government to object, he was told by the person in charge that the metropolitan government would not refuse the attendance of SWA members and that any ward resident should be able to attend (SWA, 2018b, pp. 154–156).

At the SWA's special budget committee meeting in March, Michio Shimojima of the LDP argued that Horikiri's accusations were false, as confirmed by the director of public works and cleaning department, who stated that Horikiri was merely informed by the two section chiefs that he could not enter without a flyer, according to the operators. When the director asked the person in charge of the briefing, he said he did not recall making any intimidating remarks such as those described by Sasamoto and Horikiri. The director further stated that the metropolitan government official whom Horikiri had met confirmed that he had not made any such statements as claimed by Horikiri (SWA, 2018f, pp. 33–36).

At the June regular meeting, Sasamoto complained that the issue was discussed at the March committee meeting as if there had been no sabotage against SWA members and residents, including herself, referring to incidents of outrage involving the operators, which the then-public works and cleaning director denied. The mayor said he had received a report that no such incidents had taken place. Sasamoto expressed concern that this director was now in charge of information disclosure (SWA, 2018d, pp. 121–123).

As seen in this section, in the final phase, dissent was delegitimized through labeling strategies, with opponents framed as “antisocial” or obstructive groups. While participatory mechanisms formally existed, they were reduced to post-hoc consultation and limited information disclosure. This narrowing of participation reveals an institutional dynamic of hollowed-out democracy, in which procedural compliance masks the exclusion of critical voices. The case underscores how political framing and procedural control operated jointly to suppress opposition and consolidate the ward's redevelopment agenda.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Shibuya Ward government functioned not merely as a regulator but as an active promoter of redevelopment based on neoliberal urbanism, particularly through public–private partnerships, employing selective transparency, procedural maneuvering, and developer-friendly

frameworks to advance the Miyashita Park project, while also leading to the exclusion and appropriation of the urban commons.

The redevelopment of Miyashita Park illustrates how public-private-partnership-led urban renewal in Japan can proceed under strong political conviction by local governments, even in the face of public opposition and limited transparency. Shibuya Ward, led by Mayor Kuwabara and then Mayor Hasebe, and supported by a majority of the SWA, framed the project as a financially advantageous partnership that leveraged private-sector expertise while sparing public funds. For these proponents, the redevelopment plan would provide ward residents, who lacked know-how, access to superior ideas based on private companies' expertise. The financial planning of the business was an important component of the company's capabilities as well as its trade secret. Opposition in the SWA—most prominently from the JCP—focused on principles of public stewardship, procedural fairness, and the right to accessible public space, but failed to gain broader political traction.

Miyashita Park's transformation reflects a governance model in which local authorities actively facilitate, rather than merely permit, the privatization of public space. A genuine concern lies in the perception of local governments, which remain convinced that advancing urban renewal projects through deregulation-based public-private partnerships will benefit residents, even in the absence of broad discussion of their merits and drawbacks. This model not only reshapes the physical form and use of parks but also redefines the nature of public participation, narrowing it to post-hoc consultation rather than co-creation. The case raises two urgent concerns for urban policy: first, the need for genuine, early-stage deliberation on public-private partnership projects that alter the accessibility and character of public space; and second, the importance of transparent financial and procedural disclosure to ensure democratic accountability. The politics of urban renewal should consider whose visions, rights, and voices shape the city. Addressing these challenges will require institutional reforms that restore public space as a commons, ensure meaningful citizen participation, and balance economic objectives with social equity, diversity, and environmental sustainability. Ultimately, the case of Miyashita Park reminds us that urban renewal is not only about physical transformation but also about safeguarding the democratic and inclusive nature of the city itself.

Future research should examine how alternative models of urban commons governance could be institutionalized within Japan's legal framework. Moreover, this case illustrates the need for binding guidelines on transparency and citizen participation in urban public-private partnerships to safeguard inclusive urbanism.

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