

Building a tall, slim Aloha Kai tower will benefit YMCA and its neighbors

By John Whalen

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With every redevelopment project in Honolulu, there is a balancing of interests that determines whether a project goes forward or not. Aloha Kai Development LLC is proposing a redevelopment project on Atkinson Drive that will result in a new Central YMCA facility being built, along with a 128-unit condominium.



Aloha Kai Development wants to be a good neighbor and appreciates some of the concerns expressed by area residents, including questions about notification related to a zone change request, traffic along Atkinson Drive, the Aloha Kai tower height and impacts on view planes and property values. We would like to clarify some issues about this project and explain why we believe it will be a great addition to the community:

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John Whalen is founding principal of PlanPacific.

»The city's corporation counsel and the Department of Planning and Permitting (DPP) determined that Aloha Kai satisfied all notification requirements under the Land Use Ordinance, contrary to the assertion of some neighbors.

»Aloha Kai has been reaching out to nearby neighbors and made presentations to the Ala Moana/Kakaako Neighborhood Board to keep them informed of the redevelopment project. We will continue with our community outreach efforts.

»Traffic congestion on Atkinson Drive can actually be better managed through required improvements that the developer will be making. These recommendations are based on Aloha Kai's consultation with the city's Department of Transportation Services and Honolulu Police Department.

»The height of the proposed Aloha Kai tower is not excessive for the area and, in fact, beautifully aligns with the city's Primary Urban Center Development Plan and a 2007 Honolulu City Council resolution urging DPP to be more flexible in allowing new condo towers to go higher.

»The taller, slimmer Aloha Kai tower will be less obtrusive on views for our neighbors in the Sunset and Atkinson towers, and under the proposed zoning, provides more space between the buildings and for street-front landscaping.

»The Aloha Kai project will improve an area near the Hawai'i Convention Center that sorely needs improvement, as recognized in the city's current planning effort for a transit-oriented development plan for the Ala Moana district.

The Central YMCA has served the health and welfare of this community for generations, but was faced with the challenges of maintenance and renovation costs of a 62-year-old facility. After a thorough review of all options, the YMCA agreed to the redevelopment plan proposed by Aloha Kai Development, primarily

because of the plan to build a new, fully furnished, three-story facility on the same property. The partnership allows the Central YMCA to remain in its current location and be in a better position to offer health programs and services to families, teens and seniors for many years to come.

In addition, the zone change request from A-2 to AMX-3 will require Aloha Kai to provide 42 affordable housing units. This is not a requirement under current A-2 zoning. The Aloha Kai development also reflects the current sensibility to "go up, not out" to control urban sprawl. It is our belief that Aloha Kai's request for a zone change is appropriate and results in the best alternative and use for the redeveloped Central YMCA property for not only our Atkinson Drive neighbors and YMCA members, but for our community as a whole.

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