

Minutes of a Regular Meeting
of the Members of the
Hawaii Community Development Authority
State of Hawaii

Wednesday, July 8, 2015

KAKAAKO BUSINESS

I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

A general business meeting of the Kakaako Members of the Hawaii Community Development Authority (“Authority” or “HCDA”), a body corporate and a public instrumentality of the State of Hawaii, was called to order by Chair Whalen at 1:17 p.m. July 8, 2015, at Authority’s principal offices at 547 Queen Street in Honolulu, Hawaii, 96813, pursuant to Article IV, Section 1 of the Authority’s Bylaws.

Members Present: Tom McLaughlin
John Whalen
Mary Pat Waterhouse
David Rodriguez
Jason Okuhama
Steven Scott
George Atta

Members Absent: Scott Kami (B&F)
William Oh
Beau Bassett

Others Present: Aedward Los Banos, Acting Executive Director
Lori Tanigawa, Deputy Attorney General
Deepak Neupane,
Lindsey Doi, Compliance Assurance & Community Outreach
Officer
Shelby Hoota, Media Specialist
Tommilyn Soares, Secretary
Laura Savo, Court Reporter

II. KAKAAKO BUSINESS

1. Information and Discussion re: Kakaako Homeless Situation

Member Okuhama made a motion to enter executive session. Member Waterhouse seconded the motion. All members unanimously approved entering into executive session.

Chair Whalen recessed the meeting at 1:19 p.m.

Pursuant to Section 92-5(a)(3) and 92-5(a)(4), Hawaii Revised Statutes, the Authority convened in Executive Session at 1:25 p.m.

The regular meeting was reconvened at 2:17 p.m.

Acting Executive Director, Aedward Los Banos gave a presentation the HCDA-produced on “Homeless in plain sight in Kakaako Makai.” that outlines the homelessness issue, general information on past and current homelessness activity, health and safety concerns and issues for the public as well as those who are encamped in Kakaako and possible solutions.

J. Whalen asked those stakeholders, who live and work, in the area that were invited to speak on the homeless encampment to come up and share their experiences.

Dr. Virginia Hinshaw, Chancellor emeritus of UH Manoa and professor at the John A. Burns School of Medicine – speaking on behalf of Dean Jerris Hedges, commented over the years they have attended many meetings about the homeless issue with HCDA and other entities, state, city, county, private but unfortunately nothing has happened to seriously address the issue and the situation has gotten much worse. Kakaako looks like a Third World country characterized by an unsafe, unsanitary and intimidating environment. Ms. Hinshaw provided 10 examples JABSOM experienced due to the homeless encampment and also mentioned the negative comments Kakaako is receiving online through Yelp and those visiting who convey messages by word of mouth to their friends and colleagues. Ms. Hinshaw also commented how the recent violence made the New York Times. Her hope is that someday a sense of safety and security will return to Kakaako and once again provide a healthy environment for the community.

Chair Whalen called Ms. Loretta Yajima of the Children’s Discovery Center to come forward to speak.

Ms. Yajima thanked Ms. Hinshaw for her comments and expressed the Children’s Discovery center is a place that provides hope to the young citizens in the community. Ms. Yajima agreed (w/Ms. Hinshaw’s comments) that the safety and sanitation problems are huge in the Kakaako area. The center has been exposed to some graffiti and vandalism and cannot combat the acts of violence and disregard and disrespect for the private property that the center has been subjected to over the years. As a nonprofit it’s been a real hardship to allocate human and financial resources. The safety and wellbeing of all children, those who love the center and also those in the encampments that are

impacted are a major concern. To further sanction Kakaako Makai as a safe zone will only led to more problems.

Mr. Tony Castillo, general manager, '53 By the Sea commented his concern with the homeless situation is for the safety of their guests as well as their employees. Mr. Castillo listed a few recent incidents with the homeless trespassing on property disrupting wedding groups and dining guests, also harassing and threatening staff as they are asked to leave the property. Employees that utilize the bus are constantly harassed walking from Ala Moana Blvd to the restaurant. He expressed concern for the homeless children at night as they play in the street because it's difficult to see and becomes dangerous and a safety concern. The water fountains have been used as their bathing area and have seen them get undressed and changed which is visible to all guests. Mr. Castillo commented on having to increase security measures, but it doesn't have seemed to help, as the homeless community grows it's like they are almost taking over and the businesses, employees, guests, etc are visitors. Mr. Castillo stated he came forward to ask HCDA to help find a solution.

Chair Whalen thanked all three businesses, as they are neighbors in the area and have had firsthand experience with the homeless situation. He mentioned hearing the condition changing over time because the encampment is growing and with a longer period of time it gets entrenched and a sense of ownership or territory for those that are encamped there, is that the impression from your organization?

Ms. Yajima commented you can visibly see the increase in the number of homeless tents and noticed a change in activity. With the sit and lie bills, and as new families move into the area, you see a change in behavior. There were art in the park activities for the children and some of the boys from the encampment took down their pants and urinated in front of the center on the street which is a common occurrence. Walking from the parking lot to the center, the yelling and fighting that happen in the tents make the children frightened. The center receives calls asking to guarantee the safety of their children if they come to the center.

Dr. Hinshaw commented they haven't had any sweeps since last year and what's happened during that time is more people are building permanent structures and acquiring more stuff.

Chair Scott asked Ms. Yajima since the mayor came out and said he wasn't going to pursue clearing the homeless out of the Makai area have you seen a dramatic increase in the number of people that have moved in?

Ms. Yajima responded, absolutely. There's no question you can see it on a daily basis. Quotes for a security guard were obtained because of several requests and

the security recommended hiring more than one so they can protect each other. In addition, no one wants to bid on the project.

Vice Chair Scott asked, so if this continued behavior by the mayor and his proclamation that he's not going to pursue clearing it, you just see this as becoming larger and larger in terms of the problem for all three business, plus the area in general?

Ms. Yajima, Dr. Hinshaw and Mr. Castillo all replied yes. Dr. Hinshaw commented clearly it has increased dramatically. We're seeing the changing in behaviors that have been described as more intense but it's dramatically increasing. The homeless are quoted saying "we know nobody will do anything, its okay for us to be here." So that word spreads and it just keeps growing.

Ms. Chihori Miki, Ocean Investment, administrative manager company operates in the '53 By The Sea restaurant and also Terrace By the Sea (wedding company), shared a few incidents employees experienced with the some of the homeless. Due to the negative and violent incidents with the homeless a few guests/clients expressed not wanting to come back because they feel unsafe. Mr. Castillo commented Ms. Chihori's company and '53 By The Sea serve a lot of local clientele and on the wedding side it's over 2,000 weddings a year and those visitors experience the negative side of the homeless encampments and go back and if they spread the word it affects Hawaii tourism.

Vice Chair Scott asked what has been the economic impact to those businesses percentagewise? The Children's Discovery Center have had grandmothers/mothers express they are reluctant to come and bring their children. Do you have a sense of what the impact has been?

Ms. Yajima commented having to rely on earned income through workshops and programs because attendance membership and visitation from the general public is down about 30 percent.

Ms. Miki gave an example of \$6,000 for one couple who cancelled and mentioned the company canceled 25 couples. Company estimates a loss of \$120,000.00.

Vice Chair Scott commented that's a lot and that'll multiply because word of mouth will get back and people won't come. Vice Chair Scott addressed Dr. Hinshaw and said she mentioned the medical school and the accreditation and the like, is this something that is just commonplace with schools in areas like this in cities?

Dr. Hinshaw replied, this situation isn't commonplace anyplace I've visited or been. Accreditation agencies look at the safety and security of the facilities and

the people participating there and they want to know about the surroundings just as much as what's going on inside the buildings a lot of times. It's important to maintain the safety and well-being for medical students. Students run a home program to try to help the homeless with their medical care so it's not people are without compassion, it's just that Kakaako is not a place for this huge encampment.

Vice Chair Scott commented it seems like it's become institutionalized. They've almost taken ownership of the streets and we as the public don't have access anymore unless we have their approval.

Jennifer Appel offered public testimony and made a presentation on alternative housing using old unused Matson type containers.

Greg Jenkins, facilities manager for the '53 By the Sea building and commented that during the sweeps there weren't much problems, the problems and incidents have become increasingly worse as the sweeps stopped.

Vice Chair Scott, asked Mr. Los Banos if he might know when the last time the city went through and cleaned up was.

Mr. Los Banos replied, end of December or middle of December.

Member Waterhouse asked if anyone representing the homeless or work with homeless that might be able to speak.

Mr. Tai Dunson, UH student studying urban planning and as a class project did a study on the effect of sit-lie policies.

Member Waterhouse asked what the results were.

Mr. Dunson commented that one of their findings were how over all sweeps had no effect on houseless individuals wanting to find/seek shelter. About 42 houseless individuals were interviewed in Kakaako, Kapalama Canal and A'ala Park. A lot of those individuals commented getting a citation or displaced weren't motivating factors to reach out to shelters. Some were a part of a shelter system and it didn't work for them or fit their situation or were timed out. What was relayed were folks basically wanting permanent housing and financial support for that. It's a very complex issue and as sweeps are conducted it basically pushes individuals into other neighborhoods and recommends a more comprehensive island-wide solution.

Nani Medeiros, board of directors for Institute for Human Services (IHS), board of directors for the Hawaii Public Housing Authority and the Executive Director for Home Aid Hawaii came forward to address the question member Waterhouse asked.

Member Waterhouse asked if you could provide any kind of information/recommendation on what we could do here.

Ms. Medeiros commented that's a big question. It's a great first step to have a public meeting. Definitely working with City, State and Private Partners is the way to go. Ms. Medeiros recommends changing the discussion from homeless to homelessness and to take a look at what the real issue is, which poverty. She also asked to look at its history and how Kakaako ended up this way.

Mr. & Mrs. Martin, homeless individuals that live in Kakaako offered comments and expressed not wanting to be on the streets but as the cost of living is so high that they find themselves on the streets. Ms. Martin expressed interest in having some enforcement regularly and commented when the city stopped sweeping the cops would only come by to arrest someone.

Chair Whalen asked how they feel about being out there. Do they feel safe or has there been a change in the feeling out there?

Mr. Martin responded and commented they once had hope and built a fence around the Discovery Center to help keep the kids out but it's hard. Some days you feel hopeful other days you feel worthless and we're just trying to survive.

Chair Whalen commented you mentioned the sanitation, there aren't facilities there.

Mr. Martin, replied yes there aren't. It's difficult when you have one person sick the entire area gets sick and if the bathroom is on the other side of the park its difficult to get there in time. Mr. Martin thanked the UH medical school for the medical program because they come around every Thursday to check up.

Chair Whalen commented this was not for decision making just information and discussion.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Chairperson Whalen adjourned the regular meeting at 4:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

John P. Whalen

Note: The transcript of this meeting contains a verbatim record and should be consulted if additional detail is desired.

