

**TOM SCHNELL DIRECT TESTIMONY**

**MODIFICATION HEARING**

**Land Block 5, Project 3 (The Launiu) (KAK 23-001)**

**Q Please state your name, place of employment, and position.**

A Tom Schnell, PBR HAWAII & Associates, Inc., Principal / Planner

**Q How long have you been in this position?**

A I have been a principal of PBR HAWAII for 10 years. Before becoming a principal, I was a Senior Associate for 7 years, an Associate for 5 years, and a Planner for 2 years. In total, I have over 24 years of experience as a professional planner with PBR HAWAII.

**Q Please describe your educational background and experience.**

A Please see my resume, which is marked as an exhibit in this proceeding. Among other professional affiliations, I am accredited by the American Institute of Certified Planners, and I am a member of the American Planning Association, Hawai'i Chapter, Lambda Alpha International, Aloha Chapter, and the Urban Land Institute.

**Q Please describe your firm's experience.**

A PBR HAWAII & Associates, Inc., based in Hawai'i for over 50 years, is active in all aspects of land planning, environmental studies, landscape architecture, and graphic design. PBR engages in a variety of projects ranging from specific site designs to regional and community plans, urban design studies, environmental assessments and impact statements, and large-scale resource inventory and land management projects. Our multi-disciplined expertise and overall experience allows us to provide clients and end users with successful plans that are functional, sustainable, cost effective, and at the same time, culturally and aesthetically relevant.

**Q Please describe the modifications requested for this Project.**

A Consistent with the Ward Neighborhood Master Plan ("Ward MP") and previously approved developments in Ward Village and in the Mauka Area, Victoria Ward, Limited ("VWL") is requesting two modifications to the applicable provisions of the HCDA's 2005 Mauka Area Rules (the "Vested Rules") for The Launiu.

The first request is to increase The Launiu's mixed-use platform height from forty-five (45) feet to sixty-five (65) feet in height (with additional permitted height for accessory use structures), which will, among other benefits, facilitate the provision of additional commercial, public, and open space in and around The Launiu.

The second request is to permit a continuous building façade on the platform above twenty (20) feet (instead of the 1:1 setback) on the Ala Moana Boulevard and Ward Avenue view corridors to facilitate additional ground level space and pedestrian activation, better define the edge of the street, and allow a more interesting articulation of the building façade, including at the corners and mid-block along the streets.

**Q Why are the proposed modifications consistent with the Ward MP?**

The Ward MP identified modifications that VWL would be seeking to implement the vision of the Mauka Area Plan and the master plan. As stated in finding of fact (“FOF”) No. 62 of the Decision and Order approving the Ward MP, the master plan proposed:

“Increas[ing] the maximum podium or street front element height from 45 feet to 65 feet for parcels fronting Ala Moana Boulevard and to 75 feet for all other parcels not directly fronting Ala Moana Boulevard, which will allow retail, restaurants and residential units to be built within the podium and parking structures to be moved up and away from the street, creating a more aesthetically pleasing and pedestrian friendly façade.”

In addition, in FOF No. 62, HCDA also noted that the Ward MP proposed:

“Eliminat[ing] the 1:1 setback slope from 20 feet to 45 feet in the building height along Ala Moana Boulevard, Ward Avenue, Kamake’e Street and Queen Street, which will allow for development of a continuous building façade that better defines the edge of the street.”

Accordingly, both of the modifications proposed for the Launiu were originally described and proposed as an integral part of the Ward MP.

**Q Did the Authority review the proposed platform height and view corridor setback modifications at the time of the Ward MP approval?**

A Yes. HCDA reviewed the requested modifications, including those for platform heights and the view corridor setback. With respect to the platform height modification, HCDA determined that: “increasing the podium height allows for retail, restaurants, office, and residential units to be built within the podium” and the “additional podium height offers the opportunity to move a parking structure up and away from the street, occupying a smaller floor plate and making room for alternative uses,” which uses “can then surround the garages.” See FOF No. 103.

Similarly, in FOF No. 104, HCDA determined that eliminating the 1:1 setback above twenty (20) feet along Ward Avenue and the other view corridor streets “would allow a more continuous urban street front with greater usable building density brought closer to ground level and a façade that would better define the edge of the street.” See FOF No. 104.

Importantly, HCDA further determined that the modifications to the platform height and view corridor setback would satisfy the standard for granting modifications under HAR § 15-22-22. This is set forth in FOF No. 106 of the Decision and Order approving the Ward MP, which provides that both modifications:

“(a) will result in a development that is consistent with the intent of the Mauka Area Plan and Rules; (b) will provide flexibility for different uses and various design strategies noted in the Master Plan, including concealed parking structures and pedestrian-friendly facades, which will result in a development that is practically and aesthetically superior to one which could be accomplished without such modifications; (c) will not adversely affect adjacent developments or uses; and (d) are necessary to implement the mixed-use, live-work-play neighborhood vision of the Master Plan and Mauka Area Plan.”

Accordingly, HCDA made a determination in connection with its approval of the Ward MP that modifications to the platform height and the platform 1:1 setback above twenty (20) feet along view corridor streets would be consistent with the intent of both the Mauka Area Plan and the Vested Rules.

**Q Why would these modifications for The Launiu be consistent with previously-approved developments in Ward Village?**

A Consistent with the Ward MP and the flexibility for large-scale developments provided for in the Mauka Area Plan and the Vested Rules, HCDA to date has granted the platform height modification for Anaha, A’eo, Ke Kilohana, ‘A’ali’i, Kō’ula, Ulana, and The Park Ward Village. Granting the platform height modification for The Launiu will ensure that this development is consistent with the design and character of other developments throughout Ward Village as intended in the Ward MP. Similarly, granting the view corridor setback modification (which was also granted for The Park Ward Village along Ward Avenue) is consistent with the platforms for other developments within Ward Village, which have a continuous façade. HCDA has also granted similar modifications for other developments in the Mauka Area.

**Q What are the criteria for granting the platform height modification?**

In addition to HAR § 15-22-22, HAR § 15-22-120 expressly contemplates requests to increase platform heights, and the rule provides that platform heights may be commensurately modified to exceed forty-five feet where:

1. Subsurface construction is infeasible;
2. Design requirements for ceiling height clearances require height adjustment;
3. Industrial, commercial, residential or community service uses are substantially located within the platform, especially along streets or public spaces; or

4. Significant public facilities or pedestrian features are provided at the street level, especially arcades or publicly accessible open space in excess of the minimum grade level open space.

The requested modification to increase the platform height for The Launiu meets all four of the criteria:

**HAR § 15-22-120(7)(A) - Subsurface construction is infeasible.**

The proposed modification for The Launiu, consistent with the Mauka Area Plan, avoids subsurface excavation activities associated with an underground parking structure. Keeping The Launiu parking structure above ground, where there are potential cultural subsurface sensitivities and the proximity to the water table, is an important consideration and benefit.

**HAR § 15-22-120(7)(B) – Design requirements for ceiling height clearances require height adjustment.**

To facilitate ceiling heights for commercial uses within the podium, an increase in the ground floor level ceiling height is necessary, and therefore requires an increase in the platform height.

**HAR § 15-22-120(7)(C) - Industrial, commercial, residential or community service uses are substantially located within the platform, especially along streets or public spaces.**

The Launiu will include over 22,000 square feet of ground floor commercial space along Ward Avenue, which will also wrap around the corners facing Ala Moana Boulevard and the landscaped open space resulting from the realignment of Auahi Street. Floors 2-6 of the platform will also have residential units (including studio and one bedroom units) facing these areas. These uses, which provide a more aesthetically pleasing and pedestrian-friendly façade and increase the variety and diversity of housing options, will be easily accessible from the planned Auahi Street pedestrian promenade, Ward Avenue, and Ala Moana Boulevard.

**HAR § 15-22-120(7)(D) - Significant public facilities or pedestrian features are provided at the street level, especially arcades or publicly accessible open space in excess of the minimum grade level open space.**

The proposed modification also facilitates the provision of substantial ground level landscaped areas, interesting streetscape elements, and publicly accessible walkways around three sides of the The Launiu, as well as significant publicly accessible open space in the area adjacent to the Launiu resulting from the realignment of Auahi Street. As illustrated in Exhibit 22 of the Application, increasing the platform height, thereby pulling the parking up and away from the street, not only results in space for the ground floor commercial uses, but also dramatically increases landscaped and publicly

accessible areas at ground level. Depictions of the street-level pedestrian activation and aesthetic benefits arising from the modification are illustrated in Exhibits 24 through 27 of the Application.

As a result, The Launiu and the adjacent redevelopment of the area created from the realignment of Auahi Street will provide nearly 16,000 square feet of open space. This open space will complement the nearby Ka La'i o Kukuluāe'o Park adjacent to Ulana Ward Village, and improvements planned in connection with Kalae across Ward Avenue.

**Q Do the Vested Rules also contemplate modifications to view corridors?**

A Yes. HAR § 15-22-120(1) expressly provides that modifications may also be granted for “[v]iew corridor setbacks.”

**Q HAR §15-22-22 states that modifications are permitted if the applicant can demonstrate that: (1) the modification would provide flexibility and result in a development that is practically and aesthetically superior to that which could be accomplished with the rigid enforcement of this chapter; (2) the modification would not adversely affect adjacent developments or uses; and (3) the resulting development will be consistent with the intent of the mauka area plan.**

**In your professional opinion, do the requested modifications provide flexibility and result in a development that is practically and aesthetically superior to that which could be accomplished with the rigid enforcement of the rules?**

A Yes. First, as noted, HCDA has already determined through the Ward MP D&O that, as a general matter, an increase in the platform height and an adjustment to the view corridor setback for developments within Ward Village would be consistent with the criteria of HAR § 15-22-22.

The design of The Launiu confirms this. An increased platform height up to 65 feet and permitting the use of space within the view corridor setback provides greater volume within the platform to move the parking up and away from the street, and results in substantial flexibility for inclusion of street level commercial space, homes within the platform, and facilitates more open area in and around The Launiu. These benefits substantially enhance the aesthetics of the walkable, active neighborhood contemplated by both the Mauka Area Plan and the Ward MP.

In addition, the view corridor setback modification will also create a continuous platform façade that better defines the edge of the platform along Ala Moana Boulevard and Ward Avenue, and will provide substantially more flexibility in providing an interesting and aesthetically superior platform design as depicted in the application.

**Q In your professional opinion, do these modifications adversely affect adjacent developments or uses?**

A No. As proposed, the modifications are fully consistent with the Ward MP, as well as the D&O approving the Ward MP. Importantly, they are also fully consistent with other developments in Ward Village. Accordingly, the modifications will not adversely affect adjacent developments or uses, but instead will enhance and provide uniformity with neighboring developments within the community.

Notably, the requested modifications do not involve the required 75-foot tower setback along view corridor streets or the required yard setbacks of The Launiu. The orientation of The Launiu's tower, in combination with the tower and yard setbacks will help to maintain established view corridors along Ward Avenue and Ala Moana Boulevard as contemplated by both the Mauka Area Plan and the Ward MP, and will not adversely affect adjacent developments and uses.

**Q In your professional opinion, do these modifications result in a development that is consistent with the intent of the Mauka Area Plan?**

A Yes. The mixed-use at ground level, enhanced and defined streetscape, aesthetically pleasing platforms, and significant landscaped area are all consistent with the intent of the Mauka Area Plan, in that they contribute to achieving the vision of the approved Ward MP, embracing a walkable neighborhood of mixed-use living, recreation, pedestrian street-level activation, and open space.

As outlined in the approved Ward MP, both modifications allow for commercial and other uses to be built within the parking platform and improve pedestrian experiences. As discussed, the additional height also provides an opportunity to move parking uses up and away from the street, thereby dramatically improving the street environment.

**Q In your professional opinion, are these modifications necessary to implement the live, work, play vision of the Mauka Area Rules and the Ward MP?**

A Yes. The modifications are consistent and necessary to create a walkable streetscape to enhance the live, work, play urban environment expressed in the vision of the Mauka Area Rules and the Ward MP. In particular, the modifications permit:

- Development of a community with an appropriate mix of uses;
- Location of uses and activities which support public transportation and pedestrian facilities for internal circulation;
- Preservation of major view planes and corridors, and other environmental elements, including natural light and prevailing winds;
- Development of land use activities that are mixed horizontally and vertically; and

- Residential development which gives all residents access to community facilities such as open space, parks, community meeting places, and other services.

**Q Please summarize the public benefits that will accrue from granting the modifications.**

A The modifications will result in significant public benefits at this Ewa gateway to Ward Village. Moving the platform up and away from the street and modifying the platform view corridor setbacks will result in dramatically more open, landscaped areas in and around The Launiu; a variety of housing options; a far superior and more aesthetically pleasing pedestrian and visual experience; and convenient neighborhood ground floor commercial uses within the platform steps away from the planned Auahi Street pedestrian promenade, Ka La'i o Kukulua'e'o Park, and areas in and around Ward Village. All of these benefits result in a greatly enhanced walkable, enjoyable and active urban community.

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