

**TOM SCHNELL DIRECT TESTIMONY**

**MODIFICATION HEARING**

**Land Block 4, Project 2 (Block E) (KAK 23-038)**

**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 Master Plan") 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 Block E.

The first request is to increase Block E'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 Block E, which enhances the streetscape environment and contributions to a vibrant, walkable neighborhood.

A taller podium for Block E also provides the height and vertical surface to better connect the architectural elements of the tower to the podium's façade. Block E's podium uses articulation in the form of an arched retail colonnade, recessed fenestration, decorative screening, and planter boxes to provide visual character and connect the street level to residences above.

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 view corridor to facilitate additional ground level space and pedestrian activation, better define the edge of the street, and as with the podium height, allow a more interesting articulation of the building façade, including along Auahi Street and Ala Moana Boulevard.

**Q Are there any aspects of Land Block 4 that are relevant to VWL's request for these modifications for Block E?**

**A** Yes. There are several significant public benefits unique to Land Block 4 that are relevant to VWL's request for the modifications for Block E.

The planned 35,745 square foot Diamond Head Plaza Park is to the west of Block D and adjacent to Kamake'e Street. This park is one of the three major public, open spaces within Ward Village contemplated in the Ward Master Plan, with the other two being Ka La'i o Kukuluae'o Park near Ulana Ward Village, and the centrally-located Victoria Ward Park (comprised of areas both mauka and makai of Auahi Street).

The Diamond Head Plaza Park features landscaping with a wide variety of trees, flowering plants, ground covering, and shrubs from a palette that includes more than 14 species of native Hawaiian plants. Other features of the park include a dining terrace, lawn seating, a keiki play area, benches, and seating alcoves.

The placement of the Diamond Head Plaza Park at the far 'Ewa end of Land Block 4 (instead of mid-block) enhances the Kamake'e Street view corridor, as it ensures that the views through this corridor, which include the views from the entrance to Ala Moana Beach Park across Ala Moana Boulevard, will include this expansive, green park space near Honolulu's waterfront.

The IBM Building is on the opposite side of Land Block 4 from the Diamond Head Plaza Park and adjacent to Block E. VWL's decision to preserve and renovate this iconic example of modern, mid-century Honolulu architecture ensures that the IBM Building will remain a cherished part of the Honolulu skyline for future generations. The IBM Building's Ala Moana Boulevard frontage includes an existing native botanical garden, which will be extended to create a harmonious linear botanical garden pathway with interpretive signage extending the entire length of Land Block 4 along Ala Moana Boulevard to unify the IBM Building, Block E, Block D, and the Diamond Head Plaza Park. In addition to serving as a cornerstone of Ward Village, the IBM building (which also includes over 62,000 square feet of office space and ground floor spaces for community

and special events) helps to thematically connect the past, present, and future of Kaka'ako.

VWL's preservation of the IBM Building, combined with the Diamond Head Plaza Park, reduces the developable land area on Land Block 4 by more than 49,000 square feet, or by over 30 percent of the entire land block. To accommodate these community benefits, VWL reduced each of the development lots for both Block E and Block D to approximately 1.8 acres, which are the smallest lots in Ward Village along Ala Moana Boulevard. The Block E and Block D lots are also the smallest lots permitted under the 2005 Mauka Area Rules for the proposed height and tower footprint for each development.

Given these factors on Land Block 4, the proposed modifications for Block E (and for Block D), which pull the parking up and away from the street level, create additional volume within the podium, and allow much more flexibility in design, are particularly important to creating the active and diverse mixed-use pedestrian experiences on the ground floor of Block E, which in turn, contribute to the cohesive, well-planned community contemplated by the Ward Master Plan.

**Q You mentioned the Ward Master Plan; why are the proposed modifications consistent with the Ward Master Plan?**

The Ward Master Plan 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 Master Plan, 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 Master Plan 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 Block E were originally described and proposed as an integral part of the Ward Master Plan.

**Q Did the Authority review the proposed platform height and view corridor setback modifications at the time of the Ward Master Plan 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 Master Plan, 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 Master Plan 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 Block E be consistent with previously-approved developments in Ward Village and Kaka’ako?**

A Consistent with the Ward Master Plan 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, The Park Ward Village, and The Launiu. Granting the platform height modification for Block E will ensure that this development is consistent with the design and character of other developments throughout Ward Village as intended in the Ward Master Plan.

Similarly, granting the view corridor setback modification (which was also granted for The Launiu on Ala Moana Boulevard) 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 outside of Ward Village.

**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 Block E meets all four of the criteria:

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

The proposed modification for Block E, consistent with the Mauka Area Plan, avoids subsurface excavation activities associated with an underground parking structure. Keeping the Block E 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 the colonnade and the 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.**

Block E will include nearly 7,500 square feet of ground floor commercial space within the retail colonnade on Auahi Street, which connects to the colonnade in Block D. The

modifications facilitate the provision of this commercial space within the platform along a key street (Auahi Street) in Ward Village, which leads to Block D, and further, to the Diamond Head Plaza Park. These uses, in addition to drawing pedestrians in and through Block E and related areas, increase the variety and diversity of options for visitors and residents within Ward Village.

**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 modifications facilitate an active street-level pedestrian environment in Block E. At the ground level, Block E welcomes pedestrians, establishing a harmonious relationship between the Diamond Head Plaza Park, Block D, the IBM Building, and the streetscapes of Auahi Street and Ala Moana Boulevard.

Along Auahi Street, the ground floor is designed to attract and engage pedestrians with easily accessible commercial spaces, wide sidewalks, berms, and planters combined with seating areas, stairs, and accessible ramps. An arched retail colonnade, reminiscent of historic architectural elements, provides shade and invites activity along the storefronts. This retail colonnade leads to the Block D retail colonnade, and extends to Diamond Head Plaza Park, creating a continuous and engaging pedestrian experience.

The increased height is incorporated into the podium design to integrate the parking levels without affecting the street view. By employing a varied architectural character, creating a sense of pedestrian scale, and integrating planted berms, seating, pocket parks, and generous landscaping along Ala Moana Boulevard, Block E creates a streetscape that encourages walking, socializing, and gathering.

A significant feature is the continuous botanical garden pathway along Ala Moana Boulevard, which unites the IBM Building, Block E, Block D, and the Diamond Head Plaza Park. This pathway includes over 14 species of native Hawaiian plants, paying homage to the cultural heritage of the area.

Block E epitomizes a pedestrian-centric urban design that weaves together public and commercial spaces, cultural landscaping, and public amenities with architectural ingenuity. This design will significantly contribute to the Ward Village's vision of a connected, walkable, and vibrant community.

**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 Master Plan D&O that 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 Block E 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 and other features that draw pedestrians into the public realm within and around Block E. These benefits substantially enhance the aesthetics of the walkable, active neighborhood contemplated by both the Mauka Area Plan and the Ward Master Plan.

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 provides 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 Master Plan, as well as the D&O approving the Ward Master Plan. 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 Ala Moana Boulevard or the required yard setbacks of Block E. The orientation of Block E's tower, in combination with the tower and yard setbacks will help to maintain established view corridors along Kamake'e Street as contemplated by both the Mauka Area Plan and the Ward Master Plan, 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 areas are all consistent with the intent of the Mauka Area Plan, in that they contribute to achieving the vision of the approved Ward Master Plan, embracing a walkable neighborhood of mixed-use living, recreation, pedestrian street-level activation, and open space.

As outlined in the approved Ward Master Plan, 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 Master Plan?**

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 Master Plan. 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 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 Block E; 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, the Diamond Head Plaza 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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