



Hawai'i Community
Development
Authority

February 2026

Community Connection



Board Calendar

March 4

The next HCDA Board meetings will be held. Agendas are posted on the website the Thursday before the scheduled Board Meeting.

March 4 & 5

Public hearings will be held on the Mahana Ward Village amendment. The Presentation Hearing will be on March 4 at 9 a.m. The Modification Hearing will be on March 5 at 9 a.m. The Decision-Making Hearing will be on May 6, 2026.

For more information about HCDA, the public hearings or board meetings visit <https://dbedt.hawaii.gov/hcda/>.

Save the Date

Kaka'ako Makai Community Visioning Workshop

Saturday, March 7, 2026
10:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
The Barn at SALT, Kaka'ako
327 Keawe Street

Join HCDA and SSFM for an interactive community workshop to learn about the Kaka'ako Makai Area Plan update and share your ideas for its future. For more information visit <https://dbedt.hawaii.gov/hcda/>.



Kewalo Marine Lab

Where Ocean, Culture and Community Meet

Just steps from the surf at Point Panic, the Kewalo Marine Laboratory (KML) is quietly shaping the future of marine biology, environmental health and community education. With a state-of-the-art seawater system valued at over \$3 million, KML draws clean ocean water from 1,000 feet offshore to support research year-round.

"People come from all around the world to work in our laboratory because we have good ocean quality seawater for doing experiments," said Dr. Bob Richmond, the director of KML.

Originally built to study marine animals as biological models, KML now supports cutting-edge research in coral biology, ecotoxicology and even cancer studies. One recent project, funded by the military, investigates a native Hawaiian cnidarian known as Limu Make o Hana, once used to tip warriors' spears.

"It's really toxic," said Dr. Richmond. "But now we're looking at its medical value, just like Botox." Ocean and Human Health

One Health is a global movement, that emphasizes collaboration across health and science disciplines to achieve optimal well-being for people, animals and the environment. It's a concept that resonates deeply in Hawai'i, where the land and sea are essential to life, culture and health.

This connection became painfully clear, when homeless encampments in Kaka'ako Makai led to sewage runoff into the ocean. Contaminated water reached popular surf spots and local surfers began showing up with staph infections and skin lesions.

"We basically had a sewage fall coming right out of the channel here," Richmond explained. "And the contaminated water was going right out to the surf spot."

KML worked with the Department of Health to address the issue, highlighting the lab's vital role in protecting both ocean and public health.

KML is more than a research facility. It's a hub for education and cultural integration. Collaborating with Kamehameha Schools, the Department of Education and Native Hawaiian scientists, the lab is developing a K-12 curriculum that blends traditional Hawaiian knowledge with Western science.

"A lot of the native Hawaiian elders said they



would love to see a curriculum on ocean knowledge where we don't separate out traditional Hawaiian knowledge from Western science, but we integrate the two," said Dr. Richmond.

Ideally, they would like to transform the nearby "Look Lab" into a community education center serving university students, K-12 learners and public outreach programs. The possibilities are endless. "If you have a seawater system and a microscope, you don't need a Game Boy," said Dr. Richmond.

KML is a regional leader in marine science, supporting Pacific Island nations through the Pacific Islands Forum. From fisheries to ocean conservation and radioactive water monitoring, the lab provides critical expertise.



"We really are the ocean state," said Dr. Richmond. "We have knowledge at the university that's pretty much unmatched for ocean health and marine biology."

Kewalo Marine Lab is a place where science meets culture, where youth discover the ocean and where the future of Hawai'i's marine stewardship is being shaped.

"We are uniquely situated with our infrastructure to turn this into a world-class facility for the people of Hawai'i, for our communities, for our keiki and also for the Pacific," Dr. Richmond said.

Looking Ahead

Community-Driven Planning for Kaka'ako Makai

The Hawai'i Community Development Authority (HCDA), in partnership with planning consultants at SSFM International, is working with the community to update the Kaka'ako Makai Area Plan and its related administrative rules. Encompassing approximately 170 acres makai of Ala Moana Boulevard, the plan provides a long-term framework to guide how this distinctive waterfront district grows, evolves and serves the public for generations to come.

Rather than planning in isolation, HCDA has placed community engagement at the center of the process. "We want this to be a community conversation, not a monologue," said HCDA Executive Director Craig Nakamoto. "If we're going to shape the future of this special place, we need to hear from the people who live here, work here and care about it."

At a recent informational presentation to the HCDA Board, SSFM Manager April Surprenant shared an update on outreach efforts conducted on HCDA's behalf. "This is a snapshot of all the outreach we're doing," she explained. To date, engagement has included coordination with state and local agencies, focus groups with residents and businesses, dozens of one-on-one interviews with landowners, stakeholder groups and small-group discussions. A broader community survey is planned later in the process.

The goal is to "glean as much information as we can," about how the makai area is used today and how planning decisions for the future may affect the people and organizations connected to it.

Several consistent themes are already emerging. Access has been a top concern, particularly vehicle access and parking. "Making sure the area is accessible by vehicle and addressing parking concerns keeps coming up time and time again," Surprenant noted, reflecting the needs of workers, visitors and community members alike.

Perspectives on residential development have been more mixed. Some residents and business owners in the mauka area have expressed concern about units that are sold, but remain largely unoccupied. As Surprenant summarized, "They bought into something they hoped would be even more vibrant than what exists in some locations." At the same time, many participants voiced a desire for a makai area that feels more active, welcoming and lively. "There's been a fair amount of input wanting it to be more inviting," she added.

Housing continues to be part of the discussion, with SSFM reporting increased interest in affordable housing "that our local residents can actually afford," along with support for a range of housing options. Surprenant emphasized that differing viewpoints are expected, and essential, to developing a balanced and thoughtful plan.

Kaka'ako Makai has a layered history. As part of the Kaka'ako Community Development District, the area has long supported maritime and industrial uses, public parks, cultural activities and shoreline access. While the existing Makai Area Plan provides a strong foundation, the current update reflects evolving conversations around land stewardship, resilience, public access, cultural values and infrastructure needs.

"Kaka'ako Makai is a place with deep meaning for so many people," Nakamoto said. "We want to honor that meaning through a planning process that brings many voices to the table."



The next major milestone will be a community visioning workshop on March 7 at The Barn at SALT, tentatively scheduled from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. While the workshop will include a brief overview of the planning process, the focus will be on listening. "We're keeping the presentation short on purpose," Surprenant explained. "We really want to spend the bulk of the time hearing from people."

Designed as an interactive, open-house-style event, the workshop



will feature informational displays, a short presentation, Q&A stations with subject-matter experts and hands-on visioning activities. "There will be lots of sticky notes, sticky dots and opportunities to talk story," Surprenant said.

Following the workshop, HCDA will synthesize a vision statement from all of the input to day and then outline three alternative development scenarios for the makai area. These concepts will be modeled in 3D to illustrate potential massing, view impacts and overall character, then will be refined through continued stakeholder engagement, including interviews, small-group discussions, a community survey and another community workshop. HCDA anticipates reviewing the scenarios with the HCDA Board in late summer.

HCDA remains committed to a transparent, inclusive planning process and encourages continued community participation as the Kaka'ako Makai Area Plan update moves forward.

