

**TOM SCHNELL DIRECT TESTIMONY**

**MODIFICATION HEARING**

**Land Block 1, Project 6 (Mahana Ward Village) (KAK 25-045)**

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

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

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

A I have been a Vice President of PBR HAWAII for 2 years. Before becoming a Vice President, I was 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 26 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 55 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 modification requested for this Project.**

A The Lot P-3 PSA expressly contemplated that the amended Mahana Ward Village PDP application would be "inclusive of design adjustments to accommodate the Supplemental Floor Area and/or reasonable podium tolerances[.]"

As intended by the Lot P-3 PSA, and consistent with the Mauka Area Plan, the 2005 Mauka Area Rules, and the Ward Neighborhood Master Plan ("Ward MP"), the requested modification is to increase Mahana Ward Village's mixed-use platform height an additional two feet, six inches (2' 6") from the previously-approved seventy-five foot

(75') modification approved by HCDA in 2023 in connection with the original Mahana Ward Village planned development permit.

The present modification request to seventy-seven feet, six inches (77' 6") (with additional permitted height for accessory use structures), will, among other key benefits, facilitate the continued provision of commercial, residential, public, and open space in and around Mahana Ward Village with the incorporation of the 163,000 in supplemental floor area provided through the Lot P-3 PSA.

**Q Why is the proposed modification 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."

Accordingly, the present modification request for Mahana Ward Village is within a reasonable tolerance from the seventy-five foot (75') platform height originally described and proposed in the Ward MP (and originally approved by HCDA for Mahana in 2023), and is consistent with the intent, purpose, and public benefits of the increased platform height contemplated in the Ward MP.

**Q Did the Authority review the proposed platform height modification at the time of the Ward MP approval?**

A Yes. At the time of the Ward MP approval, HCDA considered various modifications, including the modification for an increased platform height. 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.

Importantly, HCDA also determined that the modification to the platform height 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 the platform height modification:

“(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 the modification to the platform height would be consistent with the intent of both the Mauka Area Plan and the Vested Rules.

**Q Why would the platform height modification for Mahana Ward Village 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, Waiea, Ke Kilohana, ‘A’ali’i, Kō’ula, Ulana, The Park Ward Village, The Launiu, Melia, and ‘Ilima. Granting the platform height modification for Mahana Ward Village will ensure that this development is consistent, within a reasonable tolerance, with the design and character of other developments throughout Ward Village as intended in the Ward MP. As noted, both ‘A’ali’i and A’eo (which are also along the planned HART rail line) also have platform height modifications, and HCDA has also granted similar platform height modifications for other developments in the Mauka Area. Accordingly, the proposed platform height for Mahana is materially consistent with the aesthetic qualities of Ward Village, including all the developments along Halekauwila.

Finally, as with the design of the originally-approved project, the current modification request does not include any modifications to the setback requirements under the Vested Rules, including the yard setbacks, tower setback, and the platform setback requirements along the Ward Avenue view corridor as provided in HAR § 15-22-66.

The proposed Mahana platform setback is in fact significantly greater than the required 15 feet at street level up to 20 feet in height, then a 1:1 slope up to 45 feet in height, then a 75 foot setback above 45 feet in height.

Exceeding these platform setback requirements (as well as orienting the slender side of the tower mauka to makai and significantly exceeding the 75-foot tower setback) will enhance the views along Ward Avenue and through Victoria Ward Park, thus helping to preserve views of the natural environment, and positively contributing to the aesthetic quality of Ward Village.

Thus, the modest increase in the requested platform height minimizes horizontal building coverage, avoids encroachments into the yard and view setbacks, and will enhance views of the natural environment.

**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 Mahana Ward Village meets all four of the criteria:

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

The proposed modification for Mahana Ward Village, consistent with the Mauka Area Plan, avoids subsurface excavation activities associated with an underground parking structure. Keeping Mahana Ward Village 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.**

Mahana Ward Village will include approximately 13,600 square feet of ground floor commercial space both facing Ward Avenue and along Halekauwila, a colonnade that will provide covered seating for food and beverage options and convenient pedestrian access, and open space, including the plaza facing Ward Avenue and near the planned

HART station. Floors 2 through 7 of the platform will also have residential units overlooking Halekauwila and facing Victoria Ward Park, providing diversity in housing options.

**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 facilitates the provision of ground level landscaped areas, interesting streetscape elements, covered walkways and seating areas, and commercial space. As illustrated in Exhibit 27 of the Amended 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 increases landscaped and publicly accessible areas at ground level, including the plaza and covered colonnade. Depictions of the street-level pedestrian activation and aesthetic benefits arising from the modification are illustrated in Exhibits 26 through 29 of the Amended Application.

The modification in the Amended Application, including the modest increase in the platform height from the original design, is necessary to ensure that Mahana Ward Village will materially maintain the same amount of open space area for the plaza and other publicly-accessible areas at ground level as the originally-approved project.

**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, does the requested modification 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 for developments within Ward Village would be consistent with the criteria of HAR § 15-22-22.

The design of Mahana Ward Village confirms this. The modest increase in the platform height from seventy-five feet (75') that HCDA approved in 2023 to the requested seventy-seven feet six inches (77' 6") provides greater volume within the platform to move the parking up and away from the street, and results in substantial flexibility for inclusion of the public and community benefits noted above, including street level retail, publicly-accessible open space, and interesting streetscapes, all while incorporating the benefits of the additional floor area authorized by the Lot P-3 PSA. These benefits substantially enhance the aesthetics of the walkable, active neighborhood

contemplated by both the Mauka Area Plan and the Ward MP. In short, facilitated by the increased platform height, all these elements will create a desirable urban development along both Ward Avenue and Halekauwila, and will increase pedestrian activation at this key intersection.

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

A No. As proposed, the modification is fully consistent with the Ward MP, as well as the D&O approving the Ward MP. Importantly, the modification is also materially consistent with other developments in Ward Village. Accordingly, the modification will not adversely affect adjacent developments or uses, but instead will enhance and provide uniformity with neighboring developments within the community. The planned ground floor open spaces, improved pedestrian realm, and inclusion of retail and dining options facilitated by the platform modification for Mahana will significantly enhance and complement nearby developments, including The Park Ward Village, Kō'ula, 'A'ali'i, and Ke Kilohana.

As noted, the requested modification does not involve the required setbacks along Ward Avenue, and the tower and platform have greater setbacks than required under the Vested Rules. This, along with the orientation of Mahana Ward Village's tower, will maintain and enhance the view corridors through Victoria Ward Park, Halekauwila, and Ward Avenue.

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

A Yes. The mixed-use ground-level, enhanced and defined streetscape, podium-level homes, seating and gathering areas, aesthetically pleasing platform, and significant ground floor pedestrian activation within Mahana Ward Village 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. Mahana Ward Village will dramatically improve the street environment in this area.

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

A Yes. The modification is 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 modification permits:

- 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.

In short, in my professional opinion, the currently-requested modification of the platform to seventy-seven feet, six inches (77' 6") (which, as contemplated by the Lot P-3 PSA, is within a reasonable tolerance of the previously-approved modification of seventy-five feet (75')) ensures that Mahana Ward Village will continue to provide the public realm, variety of housing options, and land use benefits as originally approved by HCDA in the original application.

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