

**River Street Residences
Community Informational Meeting
Summary of Question and Answer Session**

A Community Information Meeting was held on May 20, 2009 at the Beretania Community Park from 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm. The meeting included an overview of the proposed project, a presentation on the "Housing First" model, a design presentation by the University of Hawaii, School of Architecture, and a question and answer session. Approximately 130 people were in attendance. Debbie Kim Morikawa, Director of the Department of Community Services (DCS), started the meeting with an opening statement. Keith Ishida, planner at DCS, provided an overview of the project and facilitated the meeting.

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

The following provides a summary of comments made during the question and answer portion of the meeting.

Chinatown Resident

Admires the Mayor and his administration for their efforts.

Supports the proposed project 110 percent, but the location is a concern. The River Street Residences would change the ambiance of the neighborhood – there are temples mauka and makai of the site and Foster Botanical Garden is a tourist attraction. Need to respect the cultural aspects of the area – the churches/temples, Chinese Cultural Plaza, and Mun Lun School.

The City should poll residents and businesses on this project.

Consider locating project across River Street by doing a land exchange.

John S., Chinatown Homeowner

There are lots of homeless persons in Chinatown. How can we not support our homeless neighbors who live in the area?

Howard L., Lum Sai Ho Tong

Supports efforts by the Honolulu Police Department (HPD) to clean-up Chinatown and protect its citizens.

Chinatown is an old, established area that is vibrant and active with schools, churches and places of worship, businesses, and residents. The area has historical, cultural, and spiritual significance. If Maunakea Street is the commercial center of Chinatown, the area surrounding the project site is the spiritual and cultural center of Chinatown.

In August 2008, a letter was sent to the City stating that their concerns and those of the community at large were not addressed satisfactorily. Full and complete information on the project is needed, including how citizens will be protected. The community needs assurance regarding the safety of everyone.

The City needs to involve the entire spectrum of the community in the process. An oversight committee is needed.

Pamela M., Safe Haven/Mental Health Kokua (Response to Howard L.)

Safety is our number one concern. We see no reason why there would be an increase in crime as a result of the River Street Residences.

Connie G., Formerly Homeless

Grew up in Kahala and attended Punahou School, currently resides at Winston Hale.

Received support from River of Life Mission and the Institute for Human Services (IHS) which helped to turn my life around.

Important to help people and not turn them away or think they are not worthy.

Victor L., Lum Sai Ho Tong

The Fort Street Mall Special Improvement District chose to pay for extra security. Safety and security are top priority. Relying strictly on HPD is not enough.

The contract for River Street Residences should specify that there be security outside of the facility as well as inside. This would reduce the apprehension of children and elderly persons in the area.

Aala Street Lifetime Resident

Chinatown has a “colorful” personality.

We need to show mercy to other people. My mother has a mental illness (schizophrenia). Mental illness and drug problems affect many people.

Immigrants in Chinatown know how to deal with struggles.

I am hoping we can support others, give them a break. What if that was me?

Community Member

I don't like the plan, we don't need more low-cost housing, e.g., 800+ units at Kukui Gardens, 800 units at Mayor Wright Housing. The IHS should be phased out in the next five years.

The City should set its priorities on restoring College Walk and creating a pedestrian mall along Hotel Street.

We need housing for those earning 30 percent or less of the median income.
The City rammed down our throats all the parking in Chinatown.

Marsha J., Arts District Merchants Association

A community impact assessment is needed. Important to talk with neighbors.
I am not against the project, but against the location. There are lots of City buildings that are empty. Honolulu's Chinatown is 140 years old and is the only one with an Arts District. The culture and history of Chinatown must be maintained.

Harris United Methodist Church, Member

The church is 121 years old and was the first building on River Street. It used to provide services to Japanese immigrants.
I have a question on the intake for the proposed project. Who gets to live there? Will there be a level playing field?

Connie M., Institute for Human Services (Response to HUMC Member)

The "housing first" approach addresses the chronically homeless who often have multiple problems and are the most vulnerable. The River Street Residences would provide permanent supportive housing which is different from a homeless shelter, such as the one that IHS operates. Regarding intake for the proposed project, there are many strategies that could be used that address safety concerns and screens people who are in need of permanent housing and have resided in the Chinatown and downtown area.

Ken Akinaka, Hepatitis Support Network of Hawaii

There is a project in Chicago, similar to the proposed project, that contains studio apartments and a meeting room. There are no people "hanging out," and the neighborhood has improved, it is better than it was before. The River Street Residences may improve the block where it is located.

Former Resident of Samoa

There are two types of homeless person: 1) those that are homeless by choice; and 2) those that are homeless due to uncertain circumstances. The latter group is willing to work, e.g., recycle cans for money.
The City needs to address the need for additional temporary homeless shelters, the existing ones are full.
I help pastors to feed the homeless, we believe that "spiritual feeding" must come first.
We need to upgrade the homeless shelter standards.

Currently working with the Moiliili community on developing a temporary shelter at the former Bowl-a-Drome site.

Many homeless persons have no form of identification, that is a problem.

If you want to help, you need to do something about it, we cannot rely only on the churches, government, and residents.

This is a good project, we need to lift the standards.

Lynne M., Downtown Neighborhood Board Member

Supports the concept, but not the project. First presented to the Downtown Neighborhood Board (NB) in March 2008 and the Board voted to support the concept of the proposed River Street Residences as an affordable housing project. At the October 2008 NB meeting, the number of units in the project increased from 60 to 100 and a caveat was added that reserved a percentage of the units for homeless persons with severe and persistent mental illness. The Board voted to oppose the project with the mentally ill requirement, but would continue to support it if the requirement were dropped.

The project keeps changing, it is a nebulous project. Are there other ideas? Other proposals from the community, e.g., Chinatown as a transit destination? There needs to be upfront dialogue with the City. If the proposed project will be discussed at the NB meeting, it needs to be on the agenda.

Need to address how this project is supportive of the area's Weed and Seed designation.

Does not support the project at this location.

Residents of Honolulu Tower are against the project.

In New York, single room occupancy (SRO) buildings are required to be spread throughout the city and are not allowed to congregate. There is already too much in this small area (Chinatown), e.g., Safe Haven, Kaheihimalie Queen's Medical Center, and River of Life Mission.

This is an area where children walk to school. The needle exchange program does not belong here.

Neighborhood revitalization has taken place along Hotel Street and the Arts District. The proposed project will "kill it" at this location.

Bill H., Institute for Human Services (former Operations Director), Hawaii Pacific University, River of Life Mission

Some people do not support the project because they think it will be a magnet for crime. Homelessness, however, is not the root of all crime in Chinatown. Perception sometimes does not equate to reality. The project will not solve all of the problems in Chinatown.

Shelter or housing availability is not always the solution, e.g., the shelter in Waipahu is not full every night.

Cecelia C., Department of the Prosecuting Attorney (Response to Lynne M.)

Chinatown became a designated Weed and Seed area in 1997. Weed and Seed is a national strategy to “weed out” crime and transform and beautify neighborhoods. The “weed” component includes active involvement, including community policing.

The City’s Prosecutor’s Office spends lots of time in Chinatown. It is a five-year program, and they should have been done in 2002.

There is a zero percent tolerance for crime. One of the strategies is to either hold the defendant or release them elsewhere and impose a geographic ban. Those committing crimes in Chinatown are usually residents from elsewhere.

Tom S., Downtown Neighborhood Board Member

Visited a federal detention center in downtown Los Angeles. It was located near a childcare center and senior center. Due to the high level of security at the detention center, the surrounding area was the safest place in downtown.

The proposed project and the surrounding area will be the safest place in Chinatown, more secure than it is now.

The existing building on the project site is not culturally significant and attracts crime.

SUBMITTED COMMENTS

Chinatown Business & Community Association

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Hawaii

Steve Lohse and Susan Lebo, Chinatown Gateway Plaza

Ken Akinaka, MRA, Executive Director, Hepatitis Support Network of Hawaii