

## **Hawaii News from the Honolulu Star-Advertiser - Districts near train aim to buoy community - Hawaii News - Honolulu Star-Advertiser**

StarAdvertiser.com

### **Districts near train aim to buoy community**

Input from area residents will help shape developments around future rail stations

By Jayna Omaye / jomaye@staradvertiser.com

POSTED: 1:30 a.m. HST, Jul 19, 2015

Envisioned as a game changer for Oahu residents, plans to create mixed-use developments around the city's rail stations would generate more housing, jobs and other amenities, city officials say.

Transit-oriented developments, also known as TODs, build on the convenience of the 20-mile rail line from East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center by incorporating affordable housing with retail, restaurants, parks, recreation and other services to enhance existing neighborhoods.

"It's kind of a once-in-a-generation opportunity to take advantage of a major investment," said Harrison Rue, who was hired in July 2013 as administrator of the city's TOD program. "I think that folks in general here in Hawaii have known that you need to plan around the transit station."

The Waipahu TOD plan, the first one adopted by the Honolulu City Council, includes the West Loch and Waipahu Transit Center stations. "Celebrate Waipahu" suggests, among other things, revitalizing the "Old Town" area, restoring the Kapakahi Stream with a walkway to Pouhala Marsh and the Pearl Harbor Historic Trail, adding mini parks and open space, developing a gateway office at Fort Weaver Road and Farrington Highway, and creating more affordable housing units.

"I think that the residents expressed their feelings about what they would like to see and what they would not like to see," said Richard Oshiro, a member of the Waipahu Neighborhood Board. "We could see that if it (rail) did get built, it was an opportunity to participate in the planning process for our community."

At community meetings, Oshiro said residents wanted to ensure that the "character of Waipahu was preserved," adding that they did not want high-rise buildings in the area.

In the Aiea-Pearl City plan, which includes the Leeward Community College, Pearl Highlands and Pearlridge Center stations, recommendations include Pearl Harbor Historic Trail improvements; new bicycle paths along Waiawa Stream; a neighborhood park and pedestrian trail by the Sumida Farm; a new main street connecting Moanalua Road and Kaonohi Street; and development of medium- to high-density housing units.

Council members approved the Waipahu and Aiea-Pearl City plans in April 2014 and September, respectively.

The first leg of the city's \$6 billion transit system, stretching from East Kapolei to Aloha Stadium, is slated to open in 2018, with the entire line to Ala Moana Center expected for completion in 2019. City officials are holding public meetings to help draft TOD plans along the rail line, with the goal that all of the plans and a majority of the zoning regulations be adopted by mid-2016.

Introduced in February 2008 by then-City Councilwoman Barbara Marshall, the TOD bill paved the way to allow for special districts near rail stations, saying that "a vital part of the mass-transit project is the opportunity to develop and redevelop key areas of Honolulu to provide additional housing and work opportunities in our growing island," according to the ordinance.

The measure, adopted in March 2009 by the Council, requires establishing several zoning regulations as well as the inclusion of a public-input component. Marshall died about a month before the Council voted to adopt the bill.

"I was really for it because that was going to make the rail line successful to bring people to the train station," said former City Councilman Gary Okino, who represented Aiea, Pearl City and Halawa and cast a final vote in favor of the bill. "It's a boon to the landowners. It's a boon to the community."

Within the city Department of Planning and Permitting, the TOD division consists of Rue, three full-time planners, a secretary and an information specialist. Costs associated with the TOD projects include annual salaries ranging from about \$36,400 to \$160,000 per full-time employee and other fees for contracts and studies, such as a \$250,000 contract fee for the Waipahu plan and \$400,000 for the Aiea-Pearl City contract.

City officials have been working with residents to develop TOD plans modeled around the concept of "live, work, play" that group stations in the same area. Along the 21-station rail line, the city is responsible for developing TOD plans for all stations except for two in Kakaako, which fall under the jurisdiction of the Hawaii Community Development Authority.

Officials estimate that about 40 percent of Oahu's jobs will be located within a mile of the rail stations, with the potential to build 52,000 housing units on unused and underused property along the line, Rue said.

"For the neighborhoods around the stations, people will have much better access, not just to work, but kids going to high school," Rue said. "You don't have to have a whole family driving two hours both ways in the SUV, eating dinner in the car."

The developments will typically be located within a quarter-mile to a half-mile of the rail stations.

The planning process spans about 12 to 18 months per plan and includes drawing up recommendations pertaining to land use, parking, pedestrian amenities, and historic and cultural enhancements. City Council members then vote on the final plan drafts. With Waipahu and Aiea-Pearl City approved last year, TOD neighborhood plans will eventually take shape for East Kapolei, Kalihi, Downtown Honolulu, Ala Moana, the state-run HCDA jurisdiction, and Halawa and Honolulu Airport areas.

The adopted plans serve as the basis for developing the special districts. The city is responsible for drafting a land-use ordinance for all of the TODs and individual zoning plans for each group of stations. Most of the developments will be designed and built by companies on private land, with the city overseeing the process.

Rue said zoning regulations should reflect the community's suggestions.

"The plans themselves aren't regulations. They're adopted as a resolution," Rue said. "(But) we're being very careful that the draft zoning really is based on what people have asked for before."

The TOD plans have derailed some residents who raised concerns about the impact on parking, traffic and congestion as development ramps up.

"It's a plan, and it's something that most of the community endorses," said Cruz Vina Jr., chairman of the Pearl City Neighborhood Board. "(But) some of them, they're kind of concerned because they're worried about the traffic."

Vina, a longtime Pearl City resident, said he plans to meet with community members to gather suggestions on bus stop locations to ensure that residents have access to the rail stations.

Okino acknowledged that several residents are worried about an increase in traffic, but maintained that traffic should decrease once the rail line is in place.

"There's a trade-off. For some of the good, you're going to have some negatives," Okino said. "(But) I think it's (rail) going to blow them away."

For more information and to view the TOD plans, visit [honolulu.gov/tod](http://honolulu.gov/tod).



Copyright (c) Honolulu Star-Advertiser