

## 2. The Vision for the PUC's Future

---

The vision for the future of the PUC looks forward to the Honolulu of 2025. It expresses the big ideas about what Honolulu will be in 20 years – our aspirations for the City of Honolulu. The vision provides a basis for the policies and guidelines discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

The Primary Urban Center (PUC) stretches from Kahala to Pearl City. It is the capital of the State of Hawaii, the state's commercial and financial center, and the home of its premier educational and cultural institutions. It is the heart of Hawaii's economic, political and cultural life. The value created in the PUC nourishes the entire state.

The **Key Elements** of the vision for the PUC reflect the size and importance of Honolulu and its lead role in the state's business:

- Honolulu's natural, cultural and scenic resources are protected and enhanced.
- Livable neighborhoods have business districts, parks and plazas, and walkable streets.
- The PUC offers in-town housing choices for people of all ages and incomes.
- Honolulu is the Pacific's leading city and travel destination.
- A balanced transportation system provides excellent mobility for residents and visitors.

### 2.1 HONOLULU'S NATURAL, CULTURAL AND SCENIC RESOURCES ARE PROTECTED AND ENHANCED

The mountain lands and shorelines that frame the city are protected and preserved, as are the natural, cultural and scenic areas and resources that lie within the urban area. Beaches and coastal waters, as well as historic sites and mountain lands, are actively managed and improved. Physical access to the mountains, the shoreline, streams and other resources is assured and continually enhanced.

Within the city, the open space network links *mauka* lands and shorelines to parks and open spaces within the urban area. Regional, beach and nature parks, the larger district parks, major campuses and golf courses provide green open space and recreational opportunities. The Civic Center, campuses and cemeteries also provide valuable open space. The public enjoys the Honolulu and Pearl Harbor waterfronts, with their promenades, bikeways and opportunities for entertainment.

Stream greenbelts, numerous bikeways and pedestrian-friendly streets connect major parks and open spaces.

Culturally- and historically-important sites, landforms and structures continue to be preserved and enhanced. Historic and cultural districts are improved and interpreted for visitors.

People enjoy the panoramic views of Honolulu's mountain ridges, craters and coastlines from key vantage points. Within the city, view corridors are preserved through careful planning and design.

## **2.2 LIVABLE NEIGHBORHOODS HAVE BUSINESS DISTRICTS, PARKS AND PLAZAS, AND WALKABLE STREETS**

The PUC is an interconnected network of vibrant, distinct neighborhoods. Each has qualities that make it a livable and enjoyable place to live, work or play. The City and County of Honolulu supports an ongoing program of neighborhood planning and improvement.

Livable neighborhoods include business and community services as well as residences. Key to livability is convenient access to work and to the many services and attractions found in an urban center. Rather than segregate residential from commercial uses, the goal is to integrate them in ways that provide greater convenience and bring activity to neighborhood streets.

Livable neighborhoods have centers where people meet. In some neighborhoods, the center is a business district. In others, it is a popular park that has sports activities. Some neighborhoods have more than one center. In neighborhood business districts, shaded sidewalks and district parking support small shops open to the street.

*Mauka* residential neighborhoods primarily consist of single-family homes and townhouses on the edges of the central city. They retain their historically residential character, with mostly one- and two-story buildings and plenty of yard space and trees. Shops, parks and schools are located within walking or bicycling distance of most residents. Churches, schools, and other uses coexist harmoniously.

In-town residential neighborhoods offer the greatest amenities for urban living. Consisting mostly of apartment dwellings, these neighborhoods are closest to employment centers, universities and cultural institutions. They are also close to grocery stores, shopping districts, and other government, health and commercial services. Proximity to rapid transit lines gives residents mobility and makes it possible to live with fewer automobiles. Newer apartment buildings are typically four to six stories tall, with shops and services on the ground floor. Small parks, plazas and "green streets" provide places for people to meet and for small children to play.

Shopping districts include “Main Street” corridors, shopping centers and neighborhood business districts. Served by transit and district parking, businesses in older commercial districts are freed from individual parking requirements.



**FIGURE 2.1: VISION OF A LIVABLE NEIGHBORHOOD WITH MID-RISE APARTMENTS.** Illustrating the potential for a livable neighborhood in Kakaako, this photo-simulation shows new development on the blocks around Mother Waldron Park. Neighborhood families can walk to the water plaza and to stores from the surrounding apartment buildings. Shops and offices occupy the ground floor of each building, and parking is accessed from side streets.<sup>1</sup>

Livability is cultivated through collaborative planning that involves residents, businesses and government at the neighborhood level. The City has adopted specific area plans for many PUC neighborhoods. The plans recognize and support diversity among the neighborhoods, enhance the special qualities of each neighborhood, and guide programmed improvements. City agencies work with the neighborhoods on an ongoing basis.

---

<sup>1</sup> To illustrate concepts discussed in community workshops, the Department of Planning and Permitting prepared several “before and after” photo-simulations showing new development of various sites. This “after” image is based on a photograph looking makai across Mother Waldron Park, with Cooke Street on the left intersecting Pohukaina Street. This and other illustrations are found in Chapter 3.

## **2.3 THE PUC OFFERS IN-TOWN HOUSING CHOICES FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND INCOMES**

More and more households are attracted to in-town residential neighborhoods because of the convenience and amenities of the urban lifestyle. They include a growing number of elderly moving to smaller quarters but wanting to remain near their home neighborhoods. Young families are drawn to in-town neighborhoods with convenient elementary schools and parks. Living close to work is more popular than ever.

Mid-rise apartments and townhouses are the accommodation of choice because they are attractive, affordable and convenient. With storefronts and pedestrian entries facing the sidewalk, these buildings provide easy access to neighborhood shopping and services. Because they are similar in height and are generally built out to the sidewalk, they relate well to buildings around them and to the street. With street trees and a park or plaza nearby, these buildings form very desirable neighborhood environments.

Builders are enthusiastic about mid-rise apartments because they cost less to build than high-rise towers, and they can be built in smaller increments on smaller lots. Because development is less expensive and involves less risk, apartment units can be sold and rented at affordable prices.

Older walk-up apartments are being repaired and rehabilitated. Preserving the large supply of lower-priced rental units makes living in the PUC affordable for all income groups. The State and City contribute to the supply by preserving or causing to be preserved the existing inventory of affordable rental units and by supporting housing for the elderly, other special needs groups, and low- to moderate-income households with grants, tax credits and land use approvals.

## **2.4 HONOLULU IS THE PACIFIC'S LEADING CITY AND TRAVEL DESTINATION**

The Primary Urban Center continues to be Oahu's primary employment center and the center for many commercial, industrial, transportation and government functions essential to the State of Hawaii.

An expanded Downtown continues to be the hub of government and financial activity. In Kakaako, the University of Hawaii Medical School is an internationally known research center. The adjoining biotechnology park houses the offices and laboratories of key American and overseas companies. A leading center in health research and technology development, the campus draws together researchers and medical innovators from the mainland United States, China and Japan.

With ongoing redevelopment and improvement, Waikiki remains the State's largest and most popular visitor destination. An ever-growing number of visitors are drawn

to Honolulu for business reasons. Many organizations travel here for conferences and meetings at the City’s highly rated Hawaii Convention Center. Newer hotels are located near the Convention Center and in Downtown. In addition, smaller hotels and inns are integrated into the commercial districts of several PUC neighborhoods, where local restaurants and businesses benefit from visitor spending.



**FIGURE 2.2: VISION OF THE HONOLULU WATERFRONT.** In this vision of the future, Honolulu’s waterfront is transformed into a “people place.” By building a Sand Island-Kakaako bypass road, Nimitz Highway has been reduced in size and land has been recaptured for businesses and broad promenades next to the harbor.

Higher-spending vacationers are attracted to Oahu’s unique historic and cultural attractions. Many of these attractions are located in the PUC – particularly the Ala Moana/Kakaako/Downtown corridor, where public agencies and private companies provide visitor services and interpretation. Visitors and residents stroll the harbor-front promenade along Nimitz Boulevard. Since through-traffic destined for Kakaako and Waikiki uses the Sand Island Parkway, Nimitz Highway is transformed into an urban boulevard, with a landscaped median and broad sidewalks.

With the Kalihi Channel restored, Honolulu Harbor is able to accommodate today’s larger ships and increased commercial traffic with greater efficiency and safety. Expanded shore facilities handle growth in container freight as well as port calls by international and interisland cruise ships.

Residents and visitors also enjoy the broad waterfront of Pearl Harbor's East Loch. The historic OR&L bikeway and promenade links extensive parks, including Aiea Bay State Recreation Area, the new park at McGrew Point, and an expanded Neal S. Blaisdell Park. Restored historic sites on Ford Island, together with the U.S.S. Missouri and the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial, make Pearl Harbor the nation's most important site for World War II history.

The PUC continues to be home to the U.S. Pacific Armed Forces and several military bases, including Hickam Air Force Base and the Navy facilities surrounding Pearl Harbor. The more intensive military activities are located on the *makai* side of Nimitz Highway and Kamehameha Highway, with lands on the *mauka* side reserved for housing and community services.

## **2.5 A BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM PROVIDES MOBILITY**

Honolulu's balanced transportation system provides excellent mobility for residents, workers and visitors traveling throughout the Primary Urban Center. Streets are engineered to accommodate automobiles along with transit vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians.

A fully built-out rapid transit system serves thousands of people every day. Its comfortable vehicles ride on priority routes, speeding travel across the central PUC. High-capacity vehicles travel east-west routes connecting Pearl City to Downtown, Waikiki and the University of Hawaii. The system also speeds commuters from Ewa to the PUC without adding to congestion. An efficient hub-and-spoke bus system links neighborhoods to the main rapid transit lines. Community circulator routes (spokes) deliver riders to transit centers (hubs) where they transfer to high-service rapid transit routes. Connected to regional lines that serve outlying communities, rapid transit carries many residents to and from their workplaces in the PUC. During the day, many people hop on rapid transit to make in-town trips, finding it fast, reliable, convenient and less expensive than driving and parking.

Using highly-developed intelligent transportation systems, State and City transportation agencies monitor and manage traffic flow. Efficient management allows optimum utilization of existing roadway capacity. On-board navigation equipment aids both transit vehicles and private automobiles to select the best-flowing routes.

Well-planned bicycle routes make commuting by bicycle safe and convenient. Using Bike-Friendly Route One, cyclists can traverse the PUC from Pearl City to Kahala. Bike routes also contribute to increased recreational bicycling as well.

The PUC is known for being a pedestrian-friendly place, where tree-lined sidewalks attract people to walk for health and pleasure. Regional pedestrian networks along streets and stream corridors connect neighborhoods and mauka areas in both the Honolulu and Pearl Harbor regions. In Waikiki, Kakaako, McCully-Moilili and other

in-town neighborhoods, special pedestrian streets and districts connect residential blocks with parks and shopping areas. Streets with rapid transit system lines have shelters and specially-designed pedestrian crossings. Sidewalks and bus shelters are designed to assure that disabled individuals also have excellent mobility.