



ISLAND MATTERS *Mufi Hannemann*

Big Blueprints For Mayor Wright

Mayor Wright Housing has been around for so long, it almost qualifies as a historic landmark. Sure, the state government has made renovations over the years, but that Kalihi-Pālama housing project has stayed more or less the same since it was opened in the early 1950s.

But that's about to change over the next decade or so. The state just announced it has inked a public-private partnership deal with Hunt Development, in which Hunt will construct a \$1.3-billion,

sector partner negotiated for several years on the terms of the agreement. Hawai'i taxpayers will pay for 20 percent of the \$1.3 billion cost, with the balance coming from public and private sources, including the federal government.

While the legislature still has to come up with the state's share, public-private partnerships will enable government to fulfill its obligations with mostly private capital instead of public money, which is chronically in short supply. I've long maintained

mixed-use, mixed-income, transit-oriented community."

The inclusion of "transit-oriented" is a clear acknowledgement that Honolulu's rail transit project will be reshaping the city landscape in the same way that Mayor Wright Housing did when it was originally constructed more than 60 years ago.

Ouansa added that the housing authority hopes to increase the number of homes by up to 13,200 units along the rail line by developing 10 properties identified for re-development. These sites in-

are the way to go. During the upcoming legislative session, Gov. David Ige and legislative officials should support at minimum the \$4.5 million needed, according to Ouansa, to finance the entitlement and other pre-development expenses. Later, Ouansa says, there will be additional requests to finance the planning and construction phase.

Step by step, rail transit can be the driving force for much of the current and planned growth in urban Honolulu. We should be encouraging both private and public housing growth all along the rail line in downtown Honolulu, and I expect that trend will continue as folks get excited with the arrival of rail at Aloha Stadium, DKI airport, then at Dillingham, and into the downtown and Kaka'ako areas — and this should be fueled largely, and necessarily, by public-private partnerships. It would behoove Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation, which is responsible for building the transit system, and the city and state to proactively identify opportunities and incentives to maximize the benefits that such a collaboration could do to provide more affordable housing for local residents.

Now is not the time to be tepid about supporting this revitalized Mayor Wright Housing transit-oriented development project. We need our government officials to lead creatively and boldly on this critical housing issue to Hawai'i.

mufi@mufihannemann.com

Hawai'i Public Housing Authority's energetic executive director Hakim Ouansa described the Mayor Wright project as an "exceptional opportunity to transform an existing low-density public housing property into a modern mixed-use, mixed-income, transit-oriented community."

high-rise tower project that will have 2,500 housing units. As conceived, about one-third of the apartments will be rented at fair-market value, while a little over 40 percent will be deemed affordable. The remaining units will be for renters who qualify for public housing or Section 8 housing vouchers. Also included in the project will be commercial spaces for grocery and convenience stores.

What struck me about the announcement were two things: (a) public-private partnership and (b) transit-oriented development, two of my favorite topics that I have advocated for through the years.

that this is the kind of thinking that's necessary for our state and county governments to build and maintain our public infrastructure, while creating private sector investment and employment in the construction phase, and later as commercial-industrial development takes over.

But what was also evident in the announcement was how state housing officials are seeing the future and the role of rail transit in their vision. To his credit, Hawai'i Public Housing Authority's energetic executive director Hakim Ouansa described the Mayor Wright project as an "exceptional opportunity to transform an existing low-density public housing property into a modern

clude School Street, the Terraces at Kūhiō Park, Waipahu and other places, although he did not specify if these developments would be for public housing, affordable housing, market value or a mix.

In early December, the state announced it was selling 1,200 affordable rental units at six sites that serve low-income residents to a private development partnership for \$170 million. In exchange, the developers have agreed to invest \$54 million to improve the properties and limit rent increases for 35 years.

At a time when affordable housing is desperately needed, and the state and city are unable to keep up with demand or funding, public-private partnerships



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