

# The Ala Wai Promenade Must Be Saved

*Honolulu's most beautiful public space is threatened unless new initiatives succeed*



In 1978 Mayor Jeremy Harris first saved the Ala Wai Promenade by rebuilding the approaches and tree-lined paved walkway. It is State Land that has been ceded to the City and County of Honolulu and maintained by its Department of Parks and Recreation.

The promenade is nearly one third of a mile long from its mauka end at Kalakaua Avenue to the makai end at Ala Moana Boulevard. Its entire frontage is along the Ala Wai Canal where every day canoe paddlers of all ages ply their passion with spectacular canoes ranging in various sizes. There is no street traffic noise or traffic lights to distract from the tranquil experience offered by this amazing city jewel.

The spectacular trees that run along the promenade are all stunning, legally-protected, *Ficus benjamina* specimens, some massive and providing noticeable cooling and shade in hot weather. Additionally, the bird life here is a delight to watch. Nowhere else in the city is there a place so beautiful and peaceful to walk along during the day or evening.

**However, the Ala Wai Promenade is Seriously Threatened!**



In the past few years, several ghastly crises have occurred at this location that threaten the very existence of the Promenade.

First, it became a haven for several persistent camps of homeless folks. Most were young and healthy-looking men who enjoyed the location fishing, working out on their gym equipment, fixing bicycles and also defecating and urinating in the adjacent planters. It is not surprising that these guys scared off most people who were afraid to walk along the promenade, especially in the early evening or at night.

Second, the previously installed irrigation system along the promenade fell into disrepair and the trees and grassy areas suffered immensely. Many trees in the middle of the promenade died and were cut down - never to be replaced. The nice grassed areas became dusty and bare. A number of the trees have diseases and are being bravely treated by the Division of Urban Forestry.

Third, as many have found with numerous other urban parks throughout the U.S., the slogan of "Use It Or Lose it" has been proven many times. Without daily activities that bring people to enjoy the parks, issues begin to arise such as graffiti covered walls, vandalism and what was once a beautiful public place becomes a shameful slum

## **But Help is On The Way - If Enough People Become Involved**

Just when slumification of the promenade seemed irreversible, some good news began to appear. Several months of wet weather has been a boon to the trees and grassy areas so it looks a lot better. And thanks to repeated complaints about the homeless camped out there, they have now all gone, at last. And the city has painted the walls to cover the disturbing graffiti.

Best of all, the Ala Moana / Kakaako Neighborhood Board, under its active Chairman, Ryan Tam, has formed a Public Affairs Committee that studied the site and prepared a *Resolution to Promote Community Enhancements to the Ala Wai Promenade* which was adopted by the Board at its March 2018 meeting (see copy below). Curiously, the Promenade is not part of Waikiki - the boundary is actually mid-canal.

To save the Promenade several important things need to happen. Most urgently, the irrigation system needs to be repaired (as was recently done in adjacent Ala Moana Park). Built on dredging fill from the 1927 building of the historic canal, the trees need water and other care to survive. Secondly, the trees need an urgent evaluation of their health so no more of them die and the places where they have that produced vacancies, should be replaced by new trees of the same species in order to maintain the same aesthetic feel (the law requires such action for all of these legally protected Exceptional Trees).

Most importantly, imagination is required on how to "*Activate the Promenade*" - ways to bring people there to enjoy this magical place. Ideas under consideration include allowing coffee and snack carts to sell refreshments along the way. The Biki stand at the mauka end is also bringing new attention to the area where people can ride bikes along what has long been a dream - The Lei Of Parks. Other ideas include art fairs along the dark walls below the Convention Center and especially encouraging the Center to promote better us of its spectacular Royal Stairs that slope steeply down to the promenade.

It seems silly that at the Kalakaua Avenue end of the promenade people can only cross to continue their canal-side walk by going left or right to very dangerous major intersections that require *three* separate crosswalks to negotiate. We understand that a proposal to make a lighted pedestrian crosswalk right at the end of the Promenade is under consideration by the city's Complete Streets plan, which we fully support.

What can people do the help save the Ala Wai Promenade? The best methods are to visit it as often as you can and, if possible, suggest creative ideas to "activate" it. The good news is that this important Heritage Park does not require large amounts of money to save it. Its place in history was secured last year when the Hokule'a vessel was moored right here for several days of joyful celebration and public viewing.

ALA MOANA-KAKA'AKO NEIGHBORHOOD BOARD NO. 11

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RESOLUTION TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENTS  
TO THE ALA WAI PROMENADE

WHEREAS, Ala Moana-Kakaako Neighborhood Board No. 11 (“the Board”) formed a Community Action Committee (“the Committee”) to develop and promote ideas which could improve the community; and

WHEREAS, the Committee has initially focused on the Ala Wai Promenade, which includes a 0.3-mile walkway along the Mauka side of the canal, between Ala Moana Boulevard and Kalakaua Avenue (“the Promenade”); and

WHEREAS, the Committee has observed that the Promenade is perceived to be hidden, unsafe, and neglected; and

WHEREAS, the Committee has recently observed graffiti removal, healthier vegetation, and overall improvements to the condition of the Promenade; and

WHEREAS, these improvements show the potential for the Promenade to become a premier public space linking Ala Moana and Waikiki; and

WHEREAS, increased activity along the Promenade waterfront could enhance safety and increase the community benefits from this public space; and

WHEREAS, realizing the full potential of the Promenade will require increased community awareness, leadership, cooperation, and a sustained civic effort; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Ala Moana-Kakaako Neighborhood Board No. 11 urges local government officials and community stakeholders to achieve the following:

1. Restore and maintain irrigation, trees, and landscaping along the Promenade; and
2. Improve the connectivity and accessibility of the Promenade by installing a signalized crosswalk at the Kalakaua Avenue end of the Promenade, and also adding crosswalks to all legs of the intersections at Kalakaua/Kapiolani and Kalakaua/Ala Wai Boulevard;
3. Promote increased activity at the Promenade by identifying festivals, art or tree lighting installations, markets, mobile food/beverage vendors, or other activities that could provide needed amenities and attract users; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Board and the Committee are authorized to work with local government officials and community stakeholders to promote and advance these ideas.