

Residents want cemetery plan put to rest

Aina Haina homeowners turn out to bury the project planned for the back of Wailupe Valley

By Jim Witty
Star-Bulletin

More than 200 Aina Haina residents jammed Kalani High School gym last night to issue a resounding no to a proposed cemetery at the back of Wailupe Valley.

The City Council's Parks, Health and Safety Committee responded in kind, unanimously killing the project.

At the suggestion of committee Chairman John Henry Felix, developer National Housing Corp. of Hawaii will consider a land swap with the city.

One possible scenario: the 95 Aina Haina acres for a 2.37-acre parcel in downtown Honolulu known as "Block J," bounded by Beretania, Kukui, Fort and Queen Emma streets. The city would preserve the scenic Wailupe land while National Housing could build affordable housing on the long-vacant parcel valued at an estimated \$26 million, Felix proposed.

While Mayor Jeremy Harris called the valley "absolutely an inappropriate place" for a cemetery and urged the committee to vote against it, Councilman Mufi Hannemann chided him for not warning the developer of serious problems with the project.

Harris, area legislators, a series of city department heads and 106 concerned citizens all hammered home those problems: Potential traffic tie-ups. Unstable soils. Inadequate drainage. Environmental concerns. Noise. Ruins of a Hawaiian heiau at the back of the valley.

"Before we do any horse trading, kill the resolution," advised state Rep. Gene Ward.

Several of those testifying suggested the City Council change the preservation zoning designation to not include cemeteries.

Rep. Barbara Marumoto offered a different reason to nix the proposed project.

"Oriental residents especially consider it very much bad luck to live near a cemetery," she said. " It's not fair to put a cemetery there 30, 40 years after their homes are built."

Kealii Greene said he was "somewhat disappointed in both sides. All I hear is people talking about money. That's not the issue. What's at issue is what's back there in the valley. Shoot them down."

Company spokeswoman Lorrie Stone, who wouldn't withdraw the company's application despite repeated entreaties, said National Housing will try to negotiate a land swap with the city.

Councilman Jon Yoshimura told Stone that the city would be "helping you out of a very sticky situation" and would deserve some compensation.

In May, the Department of Land Utilization gave the developer tentative approval to subdivide the parcel for the cemetery.

But city attorneys last month said a state law gives the City Council jurisdiction over the project and the cemetery must receive Council approval to proceed.

"It goes to show that once a community comes together, nothing is ever a done deal," said Felix after the vote.

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