



NU'UANU/ PUNCHBOWL NEIGHBORHOOD BOARD NO. 12

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RESOLUTION

REQUESTING THE CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL HALT THE DEMOLITION OF THE HA'IKU STAIRS UNTIL COSTS HAVE BEEN FULLY ACCOUNTED FOR AND ALTERNATIVES HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED TO SAVE TAX PAYERS DOLLARS,

WHEREAS, the Nu'uano/Punchbowl Neighborhood Board is standing in solidarity with numerous Neighborhood Boards including the Kane'ohe Neighborhood Board, on an important issue that impacts numerous residents on our island and this issue is like many of the other well used hiking trails throughout the State with negative impacts to adjacent residential areas that require the State to develop a mitigation plan for all those trails; and

WHEREAS, the Ha'ikū Stairs were built in 1942 as part of a ground-breaking telecommunications feat and are internationally recognized as an iconic WWII structure; and

WHEREAS the Ha'ikū Stairs allow for a breathtaking, near-vertical ascent to the summit of Pu'u Keahiakahoe without causing erosion and without disturbing nearby rare and native plants; and

WHEREAS, the Ha'ikū Stairs are statistically one of the safest hiking trails in Hawaii, with zero deaths and zero lawsuits resulting from an accident on the Stairs in their entire 80-year history; and

WHEREAS in 2001-2002 the Ha'ikū Stairs were renovated by Nakoa Companies to make them safe for public use at a cost of \$950,000; and WHEREAS the City budget to demolish the Stairs has increased by 30% from late 2021 (when \$1 million was placed in the wrong budget) to \$1.3 million today with no explanation; and

WHEREAS the City's Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) envisioned cutting 593 intact steel modules from a steep ridgeline that is subject to severe weather and torrential downpours and lifting them by helicopter over the H3 and neighboring houses to a staging site in Ha'ikū valley, which is an intrinsically risky operation; and

WHEREAS in 2011 an estimate provided by Nakoa to remove the Ha'ikū Stairs put costs for helicopters at \$2.5 million alone; and

WHEREAS the City itself appears unsure of what steps are required, noting, "The removal of Ha'ikū Stairs will require a design review and a Site Plan Approval from the State DLNR OCCL, possibly a State DLNR permit." (FEIS Vol 1, Sec. 3-16. Gray highlight in the original document); and

WHEREAS after paying for removal the City will still be liable for rescues and injuries related to thrill seekers who will likely scale the ridge using makeshift ropes attached to the steel stumps, of which there are four on each of the 593 steel modules; and

WHEREAS the FEIS identifies the risk of landslides as well as how embedded the Ha'ikū Stairs are after 80 years in place: "Virtually all of the modules have been in place for decades and are well secured to the terrain... The preparation of the modules for removal will require freeing up the modules to be chopper-hoisted out of its emplacement. Digging around the rails, removing any vegetation and other materials securing the module will be necessary." (FEIS Vol 1, Haiku Stairs Structural Assessment, p.26); and

WHEREAS the FEIS identifies essential precautions during and after the removal process that haven't been budgeted for, including: erosion control (potential \$4 million cost alone); costs for security and policing during 2 Oahu's Neighborhood Board System – Established 1973 the three year demolition period (currently \$300,000 per year); a habitat conservation plan to mitigate impacts on endangered species; management in the form of weed control and native plant restoration; and the high cost of gasoline for helicopters (up by 40% since the FEIS was written); and

WHEREAS the City has not put forward a plan that attends to these concerns or budgets for the costs of addressing them; and

WHEREAS left intact and managed properly, the Ha'ikū Stairs have great potential to generate income for the people of Hawai'i, provide jobs and investments to the community, and anchor the cultural stewardship of Ha'ikū Valley; and

WHEREAS the Friends of Ha'ikū Stairs are partnering with local stakeholders to offer a grassroots, non-profit solution that would: restore limited access to the Stairs in a way that bypasses residential neighborhoods and prevents disruption to homeowners; operate the Stairs in a safe, environmentally sustainable, and culturally respectful manner; entail zero cost and zero liability for the City; and form part of a kuleana vision for restoration of the valley; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that the Nu'uano/Punchbowl Neighborhood Board urges the City to halt the demolition for one year in order to allow the City to properly evaluate the risks, challenges, and concerns and develop a credible, fully costed plan for public consideration; and allow time for a community-driven process to develop alternatives to demolition based on collaborative, non-profit stewardship that respects the rights of residents in Hi'iku Valley, in order that the merits of preservation vs. demolition can be properly assessed.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Nu'uano/Punchbowl Neighborhood Board stands in solidarity with numerous other Neighborhood Boards in calling for the halting of Ha'ikū Stairs demolition until costs have been fully accounted for and alternatives have been considered.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that copies of this resolution be forwarded to the Honorable Mayor Rick Blangiardi; Honolulu City Council; Hawaii Department of Transportation and Department of Land and Resources; and all Neighborhood Board Chairs.