

# HISTORIC HAWAII FOUNDATION

**To:** The Honorable Brandon J.C. Elefante, Chair  
The Honorable Esther Kiaʻaina, Vice Chair  
Honolulu City Council Committee on Zoning & Planning

**From:** Kiersten Faulkner  
Executive Director, Historic Hawaiʻi Foundation

**Committee Date:** Thursday, January 14, 2021  
9:00 a.m.  
City Council Chamber

**Subject:** **CC-215 (2020) Draft Committee Report on the Review and Evaluation of the Oʻahu Historic Preservation Commission Pursuant to Ordinance 17-44**

On behalf of Historic Hawaiʻi Foundation (HHF), I am writing in opposition to the proposal to repeal the Oʻahu Historic Preservation Commission.

In response to a mandate for periodic review of all City boards and commissions, the Department of Planning and Permitting (DPP) evaluated the Oʻahu Historic Preservation Commission. In 1993, City Council passed enabling legislation for the Commission via Ordinance 93-55 and enacted it in Revised Ordinances of Honolulu Section 3 Article 10. Despite clear policy directive and authority from Council, successive administrations failed to establish the Historic Preservation Commission, leading to the current recommendation to remove it from the ordinances.

## **BACKGROUND and CONTEXT**

The purpose of the Oʻahu Historic Preservation Commission was to establish a means by which the City & County of Honolulu could formulate and implement a comprehensive program for the identification and preservation of historic and cultural resources on Oʻahu. These types of local government boards were envisioned and established in the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) to encourage preservation and wise use of historic resources. The Act created the Certified Local Government (CLG) program to encourage local governments to undertake local historic preservation efforts.

The framework established by the NHPA set up a decentralized partnership between the federal, state and local governments. The partnership is based on the use of common goals, standards and guidelines when undertaking preservation efforts. To help state and local governments achieve the purpose and goals of the NHPA, federal funds are provided to State Historic Preservation Offices. Of those funds, a specific percentage is passed through to Certified Local Governments to support local preservation efforts.

In Hawaiʻi, three of the four Counties have established preservation commissions that are consistent with Federal framework and the State's CLG program. Kauaʻi, Maui and Hawaiʻi Counties all have local historic preservation or cultural resource commissions.

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### **Historic Hawaiʻi Foundation**

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Historic Hawaiʻi Foundation was established in 1974 to encourage the preservation of historic buildings, sites and communities on all the islands of Hawaiʻi. As the statewide leader for historic preservation, HHF works to preserve Hawaiʻi's unique architectural and cultural heritage and believes that historic preservation is an important element in the present and future quality of life, environmental sustainability, and economic viability of the state.

The purposes of these citizen boards are to:

1. Encourage historic preservation at the local level;
2. Encourage local governments to follow the national standards for archaeology and historic buildings, sites, structures and districts in developing and administering their preservation programs;
3. Provide technical assistance through a partnership with the State Historic Preservation Division; and
4. Provide participating counties with funding to underwrite various historic preservation activities.

#### **HISTORIC HAWAII FOUNDATION COMMENTS:**

The draft committee report states that the O‘ahu Historic Preservation Commission is redundant to other land use controls (such as special districts), committees (such as the Design Advisory Committee) and State functions (via the State Historic Preservation Division of the Department of Land and Natural Resources).

However, this analysis mistakes the larger purpose of the Historic Preservation Commission. The purpose of a partnership is to complement, not duplicate, the efforts of each of the components listed by DPP.

- The Commission can help the City with proactive identification of properties that tell the full story of Hawaii’s history, not merely react to proposals brought forward piecemeal.
- The Commission can assist with planning and design activities undertaken by City departments to ensure preservation considerations and standards are integrated from the initial concept development, thereby avoiding conflicts later in the construction or approval processes.
- The Commission can help establish standards and guidelines for the treatment of historic properties that are not located within the City’s few special design districts. While those districts are vital for the protection of Chinatown, Hale‘iwa, ‘Ewa Plantation Villages, the Capital District and others, additional historic properties—both archaeological and architectural—are not located in those areas and are prevented from benefitting from those protections.

The City & County would benefit from retaining and implementing its Preservation Commission and enrolling in the State’s Certified Local Government program. The CLG grant program can provide financial assistance for start-up projects, including a Planning for Preservation program that allows newly-established preservation commissions to work closely with a preservation specialist. CLG grants can be used for planning, survey and evaluation, preparing National Register of Historic Places nominations, developing procedures to protect properties, and for public education projects. Community Development Block Grants can be used as a match for CLG funds.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

Historic Hawaii Foundation recommends that Council use this opportunity to recommit to its established policy and strengthen its practice of preserving, conserving and protecting historic properties for the public benefit. The landscapes, buildings and sites that we preserve are part of a community’s unique character and story. They provide tangible links from the past to existing communities and provide benefit to future generations.

**Therefore, rather than repeal an existing ordinance that has not yet been realized, the City should implement it fully.**

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