

Spotlight on Chinatown

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The Chinatown Riverwalk Revitalization and Downtown Connectivity Study was developed by the Hawaii Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (HASLA) for the City and County of Honolulu, Office of Economic Development. The goal of this study was to develop a comprehensive and collaborative planning strategy for enhancing the social, economic, and environmental quality of the Nuuanu Stream Corridor in Honolulu's Chinatown. A series of interactive workshops were conducted during the study in order to engage community residents and commercial establishments in the planning process. The overall study took approximately 18 months to complete.

STUDY AREA

The project involved a limited study area of the Ewa edge of Chinatown and focused on the Nuuanu Stream corridor in order to provide preliminary revitalization concepts and recommendations for the Downtown-Chinatown and Kalihi-Palama communities. The specific study area includes the pedestrian zones on both sides of Nuuanu Stream between the H-1 Freeway and Honolulu Harbor. The recommendations are primarily in the public right-of-ways and public open spaces but one involves a private development block.



View Mauka - Nuuanu Stream

STUDY APPROACH

The study approach included current site condition and historic background analysis, review of existing documents, community surveys and interviews, interim-stakeholders meeting, and two community workshops. In the first workshop current issues along the Nuuanu Stream were identified, and a list of activities and four visions were developed. In the second workshop the four visions were further developed to a notional program. Additionally, a destination-activity matrix and improvement priority, also known as the Ten Considerations, were presented and ascertained by the workshop attendees. They are listed below:

- 1 **Reinforce existing activity zones:** identify current active/passive zones and re-program appropriately based on current zone types and land uses
- 2 **Restoring and maintaining civic life:** improve current issues such as homelessness, sanitation, and safety-related problems; revitalize right-of-ways to be more usable to the public
- 3 **Improve connectivity:** widen sidewalks and provide better pedestrian access; incorporate pedestrian access to proposed Transit Oriented Development (TOD) plan
- 4 **Activate downtown frontages:** use sidewalks for outdoor dining and entertainment
- 5 **Program Aala Park and Sun Yat Sen Mall:** provide better program and purpose for Aala Park and Sun Yat Sen Mall
- 6 **Implementation issues:** integrate Riverwalk planning into other district plans such as TOD master plan; establish a Business Improvement District (BID) association to assist with self-taxing funds and management of the district
- 7 **Improve water quality of Nuuanu Stream:** work with Foster Botanical Garden to develop and maintain a wetland park on the stream between Vineyard Boulevard and H-1 Freeway; develop bio-retention tree inlets along all cross streets that discharge storm water into Nuuanu Stream
- 8 **Interpret the cultural landscape of the Riverwalk:** provide self-guided tours, better signage and way-finding system
- 9 **Develop Chinatown Cultural Plaza and Sun Yat Sen Mall into a major cultural and commercial destination:** develop a Chinatown Historic Museum or Sun Yat Sen Museum to promote the history and culture of Chinatown; consider a mixed use redevelopment potential for Chinatown Cultural Plaza; allocate Chinatown Cultural Plaza to manage and maintain Sun Yat Sen Mall

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- 10 **Activate the watershed:** provide pedestrian access down to the Nuuanu Stream water level; program events and activities on Nuuanu Stream such as model boat sailing, dragon boat races, etc.



King Street at Nuuanu Stream and Maunakea Market

The study also looked into the connectivity between Chinatown and Downtown Honolulu. A stronger network to link Chinatown as well as the Nuuanu Stream Riverwalk with the Downtown business and historic district was recommended for increasing daily foot traffic and bridging businesses in both areas. This network was suggestively to include pedestrian-prioritized accesses and incorporation with the proposed Transit Oriented Development (TOD) plan.

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CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The study suggests several implementation actions outlined below:

Task Force

- A joint community and business task force for Chinatown is recommended to further develop an implementation strategy for the Nuuanu Riverwalk. The task force should be composed of neighborhood representatives and Chinatown business interests.

Business Improvement District (BID)

- A Business Improvement District (BID) is a formal organization which includes property owners and commercial tenants who are dedicated to promoting business development and improving the quality of life in the designated area. A BID should be considered to fund and manage improvements and programs for the Nuuanu Riverwalk such as sanitation and maintenance, public safety and visitor services, marketing and promotional programs, vice versa.

Community Patrol Group

- Currently there is a Chinatown Citizens' Patrol Group which is formed by Chinatown residents and merchants who volunteer to watch the neighborhood at any given time during week nights. The group should be continued and encouraged to enlist more volunteers during the daytime.

Funding

- Potential funding sources should be studied to fund future planning effort and demonstration projects. Implementation plans and actions may be based on the recommendations and priorities in this report, and further developed to provide needed improvements. Plans in need of funding support may include a strategic program for the Nuuanu Riverwalk, a neighborhood redevelopment plan, a socioeconomic analysis report, etc.

Programs, Activities, and Foot Traffic

- Introduce new programs for Aala Park. Additionally, work closely with community groups and participating business owners on providing periodic activities on a consistent basis. One example is a weekly food tasting event on Dr. Sun Yat Sen Mall and College Walk.

Better Way-finding System

- The City and County of Honolulu's Office of Economic Development recently opened four exhibit kiosks at various locations in Chinatown each depicting a different era of Chinatown's history. However, these exhibits and plaques only provide information regarding the history of Chinatown but do not provide directions and way-finding functionalities. A better way-finding system is recommended to include clearer signage indicating important landmarks and locations such as Aloha Tower, Izumo Taishakyo Shrine, and Chinatown Cultural Plaza.

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Views of Chinatown – Above and Below

