

North Shore Community Supports New First Responder Facilities: Sharks Cove Among Proposed Locations

By Larry McElheny & Denise Antolini

Particularly given the rash of wildfires and brush fires recently in Mililani and on the North Shore, the increasingly long distances through congested traffic for residents to reach medical care, and the large numbers of residents and visitors who enjoy the North Shore for recreation and ocean sports, the North Shore desperately needs more emergency and disaster response services located throughout our rural communities.

Some good news! City agencies and community leaders are joining together to support new and upgraded ambulance and lifeguard facilities on the North Shore. With your support and help from our community and elected officials – the Mayor, the City Council, and State Legislature – we can make this dream for more and better first responder facilities a reality. The momentum has already started.

At the September 26, 2023 meeting of the North Shore Neighborhood Board, Dr. Jim Ireland, Director of Honolulu Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Department, provided a brief written update on the lack of ambulance services on the North Shore (through the Mayor's representative Matt Gonser). For the Sunset/Pūpūkea area, the nearest ambulance stations are 20-45 minutes away – in Kahuku, Waialua, and Wahiwa. Every minute counts in a medical emergency. More coverage is desperately needed to complement the front-line emergency services provided by our valiant Honolulu Fire Department stations.

Also at the Neighborhood Board meeting, Chief John Titchen of the Honolulu Ocean Safety and Lifeguard Services Division (Ocean Safety) provided an in-person presentation, handout, and answered questions about the vital services provided by the North Shore lifeguards and the urgent need for better facilities. As Chief Titchen pointed out, our amazing City Lifeguards are the primary responders on the beaches and in the nearshore waters (out to 1 mile) for O'ahu, covering 227 miles of coastline. Ocean Safety handles 3,000 rescues annually, 1.4 million preventative actions, 40 drownings, and 100 CPR cases. With 287 water safety officers, 42 towers, 8 rescue ski teams, 8 mobile units (trucks), Ocean Safety has only one permanent facility on O'ahu (in the former Hau'ula Fire Station).

Did you know that the North Shore Ocean Safety District is geographically huge? It runs from the Kāne'ōhe side of the Mōkapu Peninsula around Kahuku Point all the way to Ka'ena Point! The North Shore locations have seen a 33-40% increase since 2013 in attendance, preventative actions, and rescues. As Chief Titchen showed through photos, of particular urgency is the relocation of the "Rock Piles" lifeguard base station, located in a dilapidated beach house condemned years ago by the City, functioning as a base

station for this vast district only through the grit and determination of our amazing North Shore Lifeguards.

The City's discussions with the community about a new joint first responder location for ambulance and lifeguards started back in March when Dr. Ireland and Chief Titchen initiated discussion with the Sunset Beach Community Association (SBCA) at the March 18, 2023 meeting about possible locations in the Sunset/Pūpūkea area. SBCA passed a motion 22-0 to ask our Councilmember Matt Weyer to initiate discussions to acquire and locate this new center on the property across from Sharks Cove, the site of a proposed 34,500 sf commercial tourist mall. The services could include a new lifeguard station and space for EMS and other first responders (such as police and DOCARE), and low-impact government services and spaces that directly serve the local community's medical, safety, and disaster response needs.

Based on the SBCA's prior support, the Neighborhood Board passed a motion noting that our community "deeply appreciate[s] the service of these fine men and women and wish them to have the best facilities to serve our North Shore community and our island," and recognizing the urgent need and desire:

1. For HESD to establish a new ambulance station between Hale'iwa and Kahuku, and;
2. For Ocean Safety to:
 - a. retain and enhance all current Ocean Safety facilities between Hale'iwa and Kahuku;
 - b. to relocate as soon as possible from the inadequate and unsafe Ocean Safety "office" at Rock Piles; and,
 - c. create a modern Ocean Safety Center on the North Shore, ideally in proximity to the existing Fire Station such as the location across from Shark's Cove.

The Neighborhood Board concluded that it:

1. Strongly supports a new North Shore ambulance station;
2. Strongly supports new North Shore Ocean Safety stations;
3. Encourages the City to engage the North Shore community in the planning and site selection of these stations that should also have space for other first responder, resilience, and disaster services;
4. Requests Councilmember Weyer in collaboration with the City Council, the Mayor, HESD, and Ocean Safety, and other City departments, to immediately initiate the process for planning and appraisal of priority locations for North Shore HESD and Ocean Safety; and,
5. Requests a report back to the North Shore Neighborhood Board on progress by December 31, 2023.

These two strong endorsements by the North Shore community should inspire the Mayor, City Council, and potential partners to urgently continue the community engagement and planning process for EMS and Ocean Safety state-of-the-art "hub and satellite"

facilities that serve the entire North Shore and provide compatible open space for disaster resilience services when needed.

Why Is Sharks Cove an Ideal Location?

The parcels across from Sharks Cove currently owned by a private developer Hanapohaku LLC are ideally located for a first responder center: with the Pūpūkea Fire Station across the street, a cluster of co-located emergency services at this central point between Hale'iwa and Kahuku would put ambulances at mid-point to our two nearest hospitals and give the life-guards a strategic location mid-point to its North Shore towers with a full view of the ocean.

The current owner, Hanapohaku LLC, has a different vision, however, for this property. The development company is proposing to build the largest-ever commercial "Rare North Shore Oahu Retail development and destination center" on the North Shore – 34,500 square feet (larger than the Hale'iwa Store Lots built by Kamehameha Schools). In our view, the project is designed to attract and profit primarily from tourism even though the site is zoned "B-1 Neighborhood Commercial," that is, it must "serve the daily retail and other business needs of the surrounding population." The Save Sharks Cove Alliance is continuing efforts to ensure the law is followed and enforce a 2021 settlement agreement that followed a lawsuit challenging the Special Management Area (SMA) permit for this project.

On November 1, 2023, unfortunately, the developer secured City Council approval for a third extension to obtain development permits for this major commercial development. We are proud that our City Council-member Matt Weyer voted "No" on this unwarranted extension, which over 130 people wrote testimony to oppose.

Which proposed vision for this property - directly across from the Pūpūkea Marine Life Conservation District - better serves the needs of our community? What do you think? We hope the residents of the North Shore community will make their voices heard as the Mayor and City Council look at these alternative futures for supporting a resilient North Shore!

You can add your support by signing the petition on the Save Sharks Cove Alliance web page (<https://savesharkscovealliance.org/>) at this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/9FMGMBP>.

Mahalo!