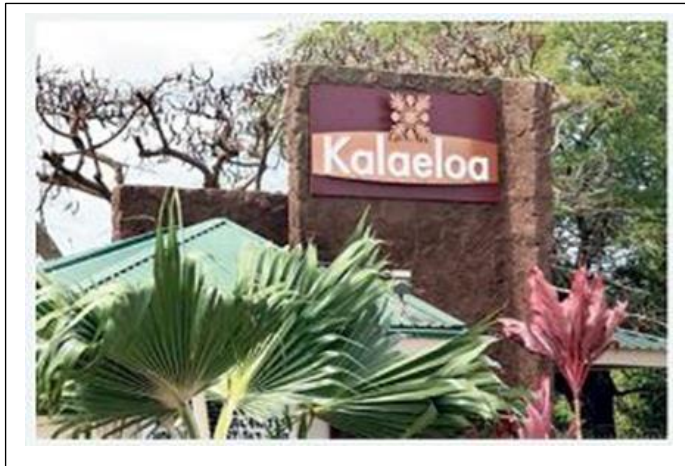


The promise and potential of Kalaeloa

The old Barbers Point military site is on the cusp of major revamp, even as a preserve draws attention to its natural resources

By Vicki Viotti POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, May 05, 2013



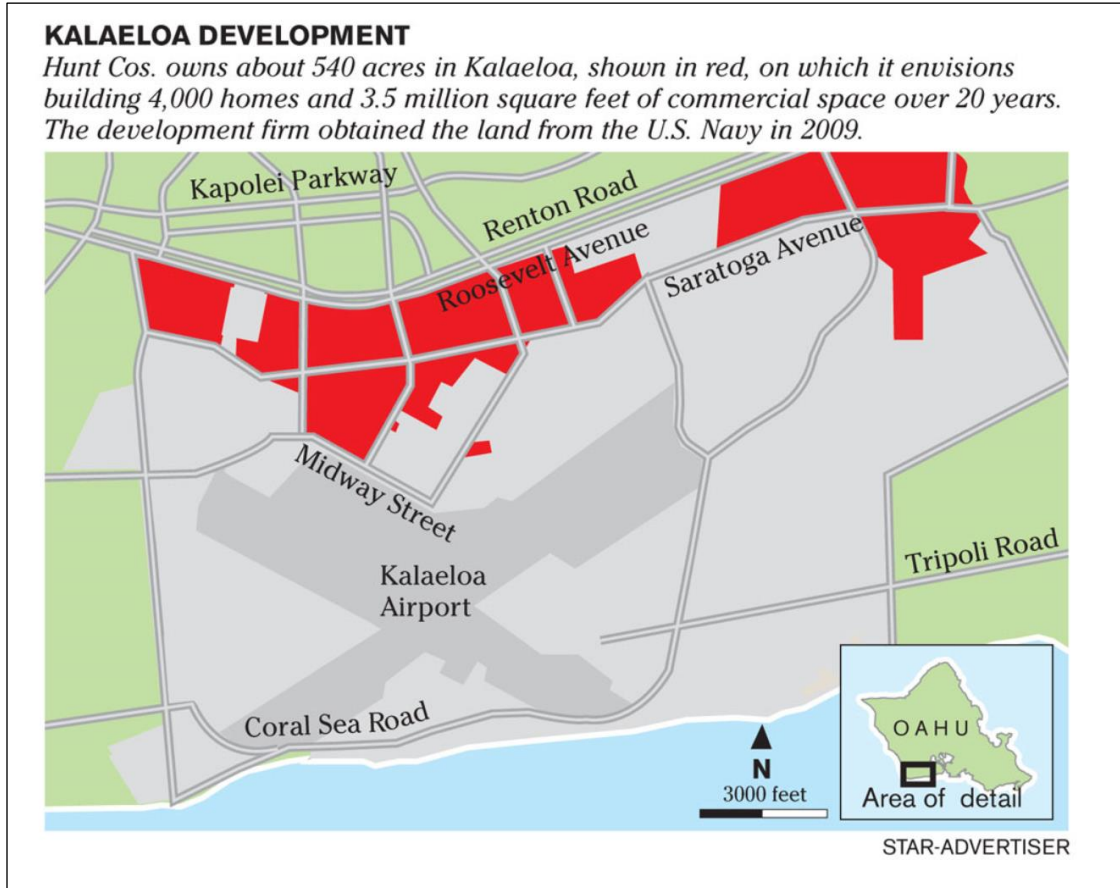
There are 3,700 acres of land, formerly under the control of the Navy, that were turned over to the state as part of a national series of base closures. The transfer of land comes with a pretty spectacular stretch of shoreline in Hawaii, a place that's world-famous for its land values. It shouldn't take long for it to be developed.

Or so one would have thought. The redevelopment of Kalaeloa, formerly known as Barbers Point Naval Air Station, seems at last to be picking up steam, with a plan to add 4,000 homes, but this is not a typical Hawaii real estate story. To the casual passerby, the area has looked for years like an unremarkable expanse of haole koa scrub, abandoned roadways and scattered buildings that once served the base.

It still looks like that, said community activist John Bond.

"There's a real separate world south of Roosevelt Avenue," said Bond, who has been primarily an advocate for the preservation of the region's environmental and historic resources. "You just see all these fences. It's like going to Kaena Point, or something."

There's a lot hidden behind the fences, though. Geological conditions and a half-century of Navy custody here have shielded some endangered species and cultural artifacts — which many now want to preserve.



There is also the outdated infrastructure. For example: The Navy ran its own power grid, so turning Kalaeloa civilian can't happen until some expensive connections to the utility grid occur. Water supplies and sewage are still military facilities, too.

The closure of Barbers Point in 1999 was ordered by the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission, but 14 years later about 615 acres of land still hasn't been transferred to the state. One of the problems is that an endangered plant best known by its Hawaiian name, akoko, grows on some of the land on the makai side.

The Navy has to ensure that the plant has protected habitat and would like the state Hawaii Community Development Authority — the agency overseeing Kalaeloa's redevelopment — to take over that duty, said Anthony Ching, HCDA executive director. No deal on that has been inked yet.

"I think they're putting much on us," Ching said. "They're not going to do it and they want us to do it. And we're, 'Hmm, OK, I'm not so sure.' So we're sort of talking about it."

The people most eagerly awaiting the resolution of this conflict are advocates for preservation. They now realize what natural and cultural resources were ultimately shielded from damage because the military had long restricted access to so much of the land. This was largely because of the need to secure its stored weapons, airfield and other facilities, Ching said.

"They didn't want a lot of disturbance here," he added. "This was necessarily kept open and relatively undisturbed."

HCDA is also working with nonprofit partners on plans for a cultural heritage park makai of the residential and business sectors. The aim, he said, is to preserve artifacts such as a heiau, burial sites and the remnants of an ancient stone-paved trail. This roadway connected those working in the dry makai reaches to the mauka uplands where many more people lived. *Star-Advertiser*

The result of these discoveries is that Kalaeloa is likely to retain many distinctive rural characteristics as it builds out.

And it is going to build out. Already a vote of confidence has come from the FBI, which built its new headquarters at the entrance to the community. The Coast Guard and the Army National Guard have installations at Kalaeloa, too, and actively use the airfield.

The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands has plans for development, but residential life now is limited primarily to small rental subdivisions, managed by Carmel Apartments. Barbers Point Elementary School is nearby, a reminder of the large military presence before the base closure.

There will be a demand for more classroom space starting in early 2015. That's when Hunt's first residential expansion, the conversion of former base quarters into workforce housing, is due to open.

"One of the messages has got to be that change is happening now, and it's positive," said Steve Colon, president of the Hawaii development division of Hunt Cos., the Texas-based firm that's just unveiled its master plan. Hunt acquired about 540 acres of the former Barbers Point station in 2009, and is roughly following an outline for the area and the zoning rules that the HCDA adopted.

Hunt's already made a start at its upgrade since taking title, reopening the bowling alley and tennis courts, managing the degraded community sports fields and installing new tenants, such as Tamura's Market and the child-care nonprofit Kama'aina Kids.

Colon said Hunt is taking charge of the rental renovation — rental housing is a principal part of the company's business model — and has managed to get the existing tenants up and running on the Navy power grid.

The rest of the development, however, is a far more long-term proposition, rolling out over the course of the next decade or two, depending on market conditions, Colon said.

Various sections will be parceled out to other developers that will buy the land and execute the plan, he added. And all of that will require hookup to the Hawaiian Electric Co. grid.

The development will include a wide range of housing, primarily in a broad strip along Roosevelt Avenue. Saratoga Avenue will become a main street in the "downtown" area, with a mix of retail, commercial and residential properties.

Like Kakaako — the other redevelopment district under HCDA's charge — the new Kalaeloa is envisioned as a walkable community, with parking generally set on service roads behind business frontages and a lot of street-level activity, Ching said.

The current plans make allowances for a future connection to the rail alignment, too: The project originally was conceived to begin at the Kalaeloa end of the Ewa plain.

However, in addition to being forward-looking, the final shape of Kalaeloa should conserve a connection to natural and cultural history, Ching said.

"If you came here you'd be blown away, because you would see clear remnants of a trail, mauka and makai, and some sinkholes — you'd see the possible uses and significance of those sinkholes.

"Historically, without all these roads and impervious surfaces, you had a system of underground rivers that actually drained from the mountains to the sea," he added. "They had function as a source of water for agriculture."

Last week a small group did take a close look at these sinkholes, also called anchialine pools, during a tour of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wildlife preserve.

Activist John Bond was in the group, along with Mike Lee, a Hawaiian practitioner who expressed amazement at the range of native plants that had survived and were even thriving. The 37-acre preserve is spotted with the anchialine

pools — pits in the coral strata of the land that connect to the nearby ocean tides and sometimes to the freshwater that drains from the uplands.

The ponds are breeding grounds for the Hawaiian shrimp, opaeula. Lee also noted the presence of Hawaiian plants, such as maiapilo, usually seen only on relatively new lava flows rather than amid the remnants of ancient reefs.

Dave Ellis of the Fish and Wildlife Service said the ecology of the pools is still very much under study.

"It's new and there's not a lot we know about them," he said.

The development of the cultural heritage park and the settlement of the endangered akoko habitat are critical issues, Ching said, but the biggest technical challenge will be getting utility services in place.

"Now that we have zoning and some certainty, then the next thing is to make sure you have the tools by which there can be development," he said. "This could be not a Kapolei, but a very diverse area as it evolves."

LONG HISTORY FOR 'LONG POINT'

The Hawaiian place name for Barbers Point is Kalaeloa, which means "long point." High points in its story so far:

>> **1796:** On Oct. 31, Capt. Henry Barber shipwrecks on the coral shoals off Oahu's southwestern shore and with 16 survivors lands there, an area that later bears his name.

>> **1930s:** Navy leases a 3,000-square-foot parcel at Barbers Point from Campbell Estate for dirigible operations. Lease expires in 1940; Navy then buys 3,500 acres from Campbell for Ewa Marine Corps Station.

>> **1941:** The advent of World War II speeds up base construction.

>> **1942:** Naval Air Station Barbers Point is commissioned on April 15, its airfield originally designed as an auxiliary to Ford Island's Fleet Air Base.

>> **1993:** Barbers Point is identified for closure under federal Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC).

>> **1994:** Barbers Point NAS Redevelopment Commission is created Dec. 2.

>> **1995:** Navy identifies 2,600 acres of land as surplus, to be conveyed to the state, on Sept 26. Redevelopment commission solicits applications for use of property.

>> **1999:** Barbers Point Naval Air Station closes July 1, and the Kalaeloa Community Development District opens the following day.

>> **2000:** 31 percent of surplus lands are conveyed to the state since the base closure.

>> **2002:** Navy is due to convey the remaining surplus land, but by 2013, more than 600 acres remain in Navy hands.

>> **2002:** Responsibility for Kalaeloa is transferred from the redevelopment commission to the Hawaii Community Development Authority. In the years since, HCDA has cited the uncertainty over the possible homeporting of a carrier strike group at Pearl Harbor and its air wing at Kalaeloa as a major reason for the delay in development.

>> **2005:** HCDA issues its Kalaeloa strategic plan.

>> **2009:** Hunt Cos. takes ownership of 540 acres for its residential and "downtown" Kalaeloa redevelopment plan.

>> **2012:** HCDA approves its zoning rules for Kalaeloa.

>> **2013:** Hunt Cos., the master developer, presents its conceptual plan for 4,000 new homes