RES24-176
Testimony

MISC. COMM. 554

COUNCIL

COUNCIL Meeting

Meeting Date: Dec 11, 2024 @ 10:00 AM

Support: 10

Oppose: 2

I wish to comment: 0

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Gerard Elmore	gerard.elmore@gmail.com	96744
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Support	Dec 6, 2024 @ 11:01 AM

Testimony:

I'm writing in support of this resolution.

The Queen Theater has been the conversation in Kaimuki for quite some time and the community is ready to set in to help restore the theater. It will take millions of dollars to fully restore the theater into useable shape.

While it's great to see progress happening, a lot of years have gone by and it will take a number of partners and organizations working in unison to restore the theater.

A theater that has great future hub potential for the community.

I hope that the city can step in to finally provide a viable path forward.

Mahalo nui,

Gerard Elmore

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Adam Wong	adam@acwventures.com	96816
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Support	Dec 10, 2024 @ 07:40 AM

Testimony:

As a lifelong East Honolulu and current Kaimuki resident, the time has come to finally take action on Queen Theater. The current owner and her family have allowed it to go into disrepair and become on a blight on our community. While I am sure the new owner is well intentioned, the reality is she is clearly naive when it comes to what it will take to restore the theater. If she has been working on this for 3 years where are the engineering estimates to fix the roof, to fix the plumbing, to fix the electrical, to make sure it is up to code and safe to occupy first and foremost. Not to mention adding AC, seats, and all the technology needed for having events. This is a multi year multi million dollar restoration project with zero chance of providing a return to any private landlord. It is time for the city to take action and begin the process of returning this asset back tot he community. Mahalo.

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Christopher Yogi	christopher.yogi@gmail.com	90065
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:

Self	Support	Dec 10, 2024 @ 09:15 AM

Testimony:

Aloha, my name is Christopher Makoto Yogi and I am a filmmaker who was born and raised in Honolulu and now live in Los Angeles. I am a graduate of Iolani School and UH Manoa, and received my MFA film degree at USC. I have since made two feature films that have been shot and produced in Hawai'i that have gone on to garner worldwide acclaim and I am now gearing up to shoot my third feature film in the islands next year.

I grew up in Palolo Valley and spent my youth frequenting the many small businesses on Waialae Avenue with my parents and grandparents, who also lived in Palolo most of their lives. It was a much different time and place, but I still have fond memories of walking home from elementary school past the Queen Theater, asking my grandma stories about what it used to be. Even as a young boy, I'd look up at the old structure and imagine the beacon of Kaimuki that it once was, wondering if it could ever be that again. Since I was a keiki, I have not forgotten that vision.

As a filmmaker and cultural proponent, I understand deeply the power of stories and images. Imagine a Waialae Avenue where the Queen Theater is not an eyesore, but instead a community gathering space, lit up in bright lights, where people from all over the island converge to engage in local culture, to uplift one another in our stories, to share and spend time with the people of Kaimuki and Palolo. Imagine a space where during the day there is free programming for our keiki, where they can drop in after school and have tutoring, or media literacy training, or speak to visiting artists and educators from around the world. And then at night, where families can convene and celebrate the latest in local and international entertainment, food, music, art, while commemorating the history of the neighborhood. Imagine the uplifting effect this would have on neighboring businesses and on pride in the district.

Imagine the Queen Theater, at the top of the hill in Kaimuki, as a bright and shining community lodestar.

Name:	Email:	Zip:
GUY KAULUKUKUI	guykaulukukui@gmail.com	96817
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Support	Dec 10, 2024 @ 11:16 AM

Testimony:

The former Queen Theater property is a Waialae Avenue icon that the landowner has neglected for decades. As such, I fully support the City's intention to acquire the property and place it into some form of public use so that it can once again be a gathering place for our community.

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Lori Yamada	lorikyamada@hotmail.com	96816
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Envision Kaimuki	Oppose	Dec 10, 2024 @ 12:08 PM

Testimony:

I wish to submit written testimony but need a little bit more time. Otherwise my oral testimony will suffice.

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Ciara Lacy Kwock	ciaralacy@gmail.com	96822
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Support	Dec 10, 2024 @ 03:01 PM

Testimony:

As an Emmy-nominated filmmaker of 20 years, I know that this type of infrastructure is needed and would do much to help shift the local economy to provide more venues to show local work. Growing our local film community is workforce development. The theater would also support the local economy of Kaimuki, which has a rich restaurant and small business culture that theater goers could patron. And with Hawai'i International Film Festival's move to the Kaimuki neighborhood (two blocks away from the Queen), it would be a truly amazing project to work on in creating a film and arts hub for the community, a home for HIFF to present local, national and international films, provide workshops, masterclasses, and other partnership opportunities with other organizations on a year-round basis. The need for a more community driven theater in on Oahu is huge, given there are very few.

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Bart Kellner	kellnerpt@gmail.com	96816
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Support	Dec 10, 2024 @ 05:17 PM

Testimony:

I have lived and worked in Kaimuki for the past 25 years, and in that time The Queen Theater property has never been something to be proud of. If restored properly or rebuilt it could be the cornerstone of a thriving Kaimuki community, potentially motivating other property owners along Waialae Ave to initiate improvements of their own. As a resident and business owner (Fysiotherapie Hawaii, Inc) I fully support the city acquiring the property as the current owner has neglected it for far too long. A quick paint job won't help.

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Myrtle Kobayashi	leiko_2000@yahoo.com	96816
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Support	Dec 10, 2024 @ 08:05 PM

Testimony:

As a resident of Kaimuki, I strongly support this measure.

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Ryan Kobayashi	rkk0322@gmail.com	96816
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Support	Dec 10, 2024 @ 08:47 PM

Testimony:

As a resident of Kaimuki, I wholeheartedly support this measure. As a child I spent many a weekend at my grandmother's house on Center St. I have many fond memories in the mid-1970's of Queen theater as once a month on a Sunday, my grandmother and I would walk down the hill to watch a Disney matinee. I can also remember driving from the windward side of the island with my parents to my grandmothers house in Kaimuki (especially at night) and seeing from the H-1 freeway the shining blue and gold QUEEN marquee that was a landmark that stood at the top of Waialae Ave that was the equivalent of dropping a pin on a digital map in today's technological age that indicated, we are getting close to grandma's house!

At some point in the 80's the owners of Queen theater, must of thought it would be more profitable to switch genres from wholesome family entertainment to adult films which was a sad turn of events not only for my childhood memory of the theatre, but for the community as well. As it seemed that the owners only cared about profitability while completely ignoring what that genre change would do to the image of Waialae Ave and Kaimuki.

At some point, after more than a decade of adult films the theater finally closed for business and the building was used for a recording studio, and into disrepair with the owners doing nothing to cure the blight that it has now become, a sad and decrepit reminder of what it used to be, and the fond memories that I have of that theater as a child.

This City Council gave the owners of the property a few years back a chance to begin the renovation and revitalization of Queen theater and nothing until last week was done at all. The most the owners could muster was to slap a token coat of salmon colored paint on its exterior walls (which will be covered in graffiti) in a months time, because there are no occupants to secure the theater to prevent further vandalism.

Painting of the building shows how little the owners know about renovation, as paint and exterior cosmetics are usually one of the last things to be done before opening a renovation for occupancy. The reason being, that construction and renovation work in the interior of a premises could easily ruin a fresh paint job with scrapes and bumps resulting in having to repaint the building once the interior work is done, and again with no occupants vandalism is much more likely to happen as the owners have just provided a fresh new canvass for vandals.

Additionally, the amount of money that the owners said they have set aside for renovation is not even close to what it would take to complete a half-decent renovation of the Queen theater. Refurbishment of the marquee alone could cost what they have set aside for renovations as replacing the actual neon lights are rarely used nowadays and would likely have to be commissioned by a specialty contractor, not to mention refreshing all of the wiring it takes to power the marquee.

If the City were to delay this resolution on promises of future acts taken by the owners of the Queen theater, we could be waiting another 10 to 15 years for any viable solution to this blight on the community taking into account their understanding of the renovation process and the amount of money it could take to restore the theater to its former glory.

Therefore, I STRONGLY SUPPORT Resolution 24-176

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Adoree Yu	yu.adoree@gmail.com	96816
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Oppose	Dec 10, 2024 @ 09:34 PM

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Becky Gardner	policymattersllc@gmail.com	96816
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Support	Dec 11, 2024 @ 08:38 AM

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Becky Gardner	beckypgardner@gmail.com	96816
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Support	Dec 11, 2024 @ 09:44 AM

Testimony:

Aloha:

I've already submitted testimony in an attachment detailing the discussions before the Kaimuki Neighborhood Board about the Queen Theater; however, I thought it might be helpful to supplement that testimony with the Kaimuki Neighbhorhood Board Minutes from which the summary I provided was based. I was unable to submit as testimony the pages of the board minutes - as the document was too large. Instead, I've uploaded it to a google drive accessible at this link here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ycY2y4olNM1ppYjerXdCjWdopMPNclwB/view?usp=drive_link

I also forgot to highlight in my earlier testimony the contrast in ********* the owner's projections for restoration of the theater; which across 3 phases, is estimated to be $800,000. ******** The industry and business leaders familiar with theater operations testified before the Committee on Executive Management in November 2024 that such renovations typically cost in the *******millions or low billions.**********

Thank you for allowing me to provide this testimony in support.

December 10, 2024

Honorable Tommy Waters, Chair
Honorable Calvin K. Y. Say, Vice Chair
Honolulu City Council
530 S. King Street #202
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Adoree Yu
Queen Mgmt, LLC
4348 Waialae Avenue, #285
Honolulu, Hawaii 96816

RE: TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO RESOLUTION 24-176, ACQUIRING THE QUEEN THEATER PROPERTY

Aloha Chair Waters, Vice Chair Say, and Council Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony **in opposition** to Resolution 24-176. My name is Adoree Yu and I am the owner of the Queen Theater property. Although I write in opposition to this resolution as it relates to the proposed condemnation**, I strongly support its intent to restore the property and stand fully committed to revitalizing the property so that it can once again be a landmark that the community can be proud of.** In fact, since the Executive Management committee meeting last month, I have already initiated Phase I of the revitalization plan, and immediate enhancements to the appearance of the property are currently in progress, including new paint, implementing security measures to restrict access and deter illicit activity, and other improvements to the exterior to enhance its appearance and eliminate any potential safety concerns. In addition, the permit application for the sign and marquee has already been submitted. **In light of the immediate actions I've taken, I respectfully ask that the City Council consider as well intended as this resolution may be – at least in the interest of restoring the property, the negative impact the resolution will have on the property's marketability and future tenant prospects, and in turn, my ability to open the Queen to the public once again.**

My parents are long-time residents of Kaimuki, and I was born and raised in the area as well. My family has fond memories of the theater as a gathering place in the neighborhood. In or around 2021, we had discussions about the redevelopment of the theater as a gathering place for Kaimuki residents. Although we intended to restore the property then, we did not have the necessary resources to do so. 2021 also posed significant challenges for my family as my parents were both diagnosed with serious medical illnesses that required our full and long-term attention.

Today, I am ready, willing, and able to execute the plan to restore the theater – the first phase of which has already been started. I now live full-time in Honolulu, have full authority to make decisions relating to the theater's redevelopment, and importantly, have a financial plan in place to pay for the work needed.

The plan comprises a multi-phased approach.

- Phase I – Exterior enhancement. I have already engaged with contractors to improve the Queen Theater's façade, including refurbishing the sign and marquee, new paint, implementing security measures to restrict access and deter illicit activity, and other improvements to the exterior to enhance its appearance and eliminate any potential safety concerns. This work is already in progress and the permit application for the sign and marquee has already been submitted. The projected completion date for Phase I is April 30, 2025 (to account for permit processing for the sign and marquee).
- Phase II – Interior repairs and improvements. Plans include preparing the lobby area and second floor of the theater for immediate use by potential tenants. The projected completion date for Phase II is December 31, 2025.
- Phase III – Auditorium repairs and improvements. Plans include rehabilitating the auditorium to leasable condition so that it is ready for potential tenants to customize based on its specific use. I understand the Queen Theater was beloved as a community gathering space, so we welcome the opportunity to work with potential tenants interested in a similar vision/use for the space. The projected completion date is December 31, 2026.

My plans are also flexible to the extent that I am committed to a continuing partnership with the community.

Lastly, while I understand that community safety was negatively impacted by unauthorized and illicit activity in and around the theater in the past, I addressed many of those concerns in 2021, once I became involved with the project, and I remain fully committed to ensuring that the property does not contribute to similar problems in the future. One of the objectives of the Phase I work in progress is to mitigate and deter such activity, and I intend to make the safety of the property a priority throughout the revitalization process.

Having attended multiple neighborhood boards and meetings with area legislators over the years, I understand the importance of the Queen Theater to the Kaimuki community and the calls for more progress, which I am committed to delivering. Accordingly, I respectfully urge the City Council to defer this Resolution so that I am allowed sufficient time to complete the aforementioned plan to revitalize the Queen into a gathering space that the community deserves – without the threat of impending condemnation.

Thank for you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to Resolution 24-176. I look forward to working with you in the future on this important community project.

Respectfully,



Adoree Yu
Owner

December 11, 2024

Honolulu City Council
530 King Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Testimony for Honolulu City Council
Wednesday, December 11, 2024 at 10:00am

Re: Resolution 24-176, CD1 - REQUESTING THE CITY ADMINISTRATION TO TAKE THE STEPS NECESSARY TO ACQUIRE THE QUEEN THEATER PROPERTY, INCLUDING, IF NECESSARY, THE PREPARATION OF A RESOLUTION FOR THE COUNCIL TO INITIATE PROCEEDINGS IN EMINENT DOMAIN.

Dear Chair Waters and Members of Honolulu City Council:

Thank you for hearing this important Resolution, which promises to address significant community concerns over health and safety in the Kaimuki area.

My name is Becky Gardner; Owner of Policy Matters LLC; however, I have not received any compensation for my advocacy on this matter. I am submitting this testimony because the dilapidated state of the Queen Theater is concerning to myself, my family, and to my small business – all located in Kaimuki.

Safety & Sanitary Concerns

I used to live on Center Street, very close to Queen Theater from 2016 - 2021. I, along with my two young daughters went out of our way to avoid walking in front and around the corner of the theater as it was consistently frequented by vagabonds using illicit substances. (This may have been exacerbated by the Owner's tenants - shops selling Marijuana paraphernalia and Vape products.). This is particularly concerning to myself and many parents who bring their children to various family-oriented activities and businesses near the theater - such as dance, yoga, martial arts, restaurants, etc.

I have also personally witnessed falling debris from the sign; and people climbing up and on top of the theater, throwing bicycles, luggage, and other belongings in nooks and crevices on the roof and back side of the theater. (A video of which I have saved.). Perhaps the most unpleasant experience I had was walking by the theater and seeing human feces (with toilet paper next to it).

Kaimuki Neighborhood Board Activity

I have been an active member of the Kaimuki Neighborhood Board (Board) since 2017 – and during my near 100% attendance and participation on the Board over the last 8 years, I have witnessed, time and time again, community members bringing to us their safety concerns over the Queen Theater and its negative impact on community morale, business, and property values.

To address these concerns, the Board passed a resolution asking the City and County of Honolulu to take action on Queen Theater in March 2021. In August 2021, Ms. Adoree Yu (A. Yu) began to appear before the Board as its Owner. I have gone through the minutes of Board meetings to summarize discussions over Queen Theater since June 2020 below.

- **June 2020:** Kaimuki residents inquire about status of Queen Theater.

- **January 2021:** Board discusses Envision Kaimuki Survey on Queen Theater; options to address safety concerns (i.e. letter, legislation, condemnation, etc.); historic significance acknowledged.
- **March 2021:** Kaimuki Neighborhood Board Passes Resolution Concerning Status and Safety of Queen Theater.
- **September 2021:** A. Yu appears before Board as Owner- reports she's working to find a theater tenant, preparing for walk-throughs in October 2021; plans for the theater to be a multipurpose venue.
- **October 2021:** Board discusses commotion outside Queen Theater with Honolulu Police Department.
- **November 2021:** A. Yu states she'll provide more detailed update in early 2022.

- **March 2022:** Kaimuki resident suggests developing Kaimuki as an Arts District – incorporating Queen Theater.
- **May 2022:** Kaimuki Business & Professional Association expresses interest in restoration of Queen Theater.
- **August 2022:** A. Yu reports theater was cleared out; did walk-thru with Council Chair Waters; Realtor will start showing the space; Board expresses concern over safety of marquee sign.
- **October 2022:** Realtor states it's in discussions with potential theater tenants.
- **November 2022:** Community interest in restoring Queen Theater is expressed.

- **January 2023:** Kaimuki Resident expresses safety concerns over marquee sign; A. Yu discusses repairs and plans to address safety concern over falling hazards from sign; Realtor says they hope to confirm theater tenant soon.

- **February 2023:** Kaimuki Residents reassert safety concerns over marquee sign – particularly volunteers working on tree wells on street; A. Yu discusses improvements made to sign; A. Yu states they're still evaluating candidates for theater tenants.

- **March 2023:** Owner and realtor for Queen Theater discuss repairs made to address safety concerns of marquee sign; stated they were in discussions with prospective theater tenants; board discusses concerns about Owner's Vape Store tenant in family friendly area.

- **April 2023:** Realtor for Queen Theater discusses repairs made to address safety concerns of marquee sign; reports that interior of theater is only in shell condition.

- **May 2023:** A. Yu reports plans for improvements; no report on theater tenant.

- **June 2023:** Board notes the Queen Theater owners had not given an update on finding a lessee for the theater in 3 months; Board discusses concern over another tenant in Queen Theater Owners' property: a Vape Store.

- **July 2023:** A. Yu reports continuing to look for best theater tenant.

- **September 2023:** Kaimuki Resident shares ideas to restore Queen Theater as educational and arts center for youth. *[This resident later reports progress in her negotiations with Queen Theater Owners at April 2024 Meeting]*

- **January 2024:** A. Yu stated her plan to apply for Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits on state and federal levels.

- **April 2024:** Kaimuki Resident follows up on her September 2023 address to the Board about education & arts plans for Queen Theater; reports progress negotiating with A. Yu. *[This resident has since moved away from Oahu.]*

- **November - December 2024** : City Council Hearings on subject Resolution

(I will try and scan and upload the relevant minutes as testimony in a separate submission.)

Last month, when this Resolution was before the Committee on Executive Management, I was surprised to hear A. Yu testify that her circumstances had changed significantly, and that "*What's different NOW*", as opposed to the multiple years she has been appearing before the Kaimuki Neighborhood Board, is that she *NOW* has "full authority" to make decisions about the theater. Watch here at minute 23:50 https://youtu.be/aQ9MkZsmmhQ?t=1397 .

Ms. Yu failed to represent her *limited* authority to make decisions as the theater's "Owner" while addressing the Kaimuki Neighborhood Board over the last several years. I find this disrespectful to the significant and earnest efforts and time dedicated by the community to work *with* her to help achieve Queen's Theater's highest greatest purpose.

Residents' Emotional Connection with Queen Theater

Based on my long experience hearing and understanding the public's perspective and distress over the deteriorating state of the theater – I encourage this Council to take favorable action on this Resolution, as this action has inspired several members of the public to come forward with their stories and experiences with the theater – as well as their hopes and dreams of restoring it to its former glory.

A few years ago, I was also active in a community organization called Envision Kaimuki – led by then Neighborhood Board Chair, Sharon Schneider. She worked hard to conduct a survey, results/feedback of which I've provided as testimony in an earlier Committee hearing; along with the Neighborhood Board Resolution that we passed as a result – which I encourage this Council to give its due consideration.

Thank you for allowing me to provide this testimony and your continued action to improve the health, safety, and welfare of Kaimuki residents.

With Aloha,



Becky Gardner, Esq.
Owner-Founder
Policy Matters LLC