

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA PĀKA A ME NĀ HANA HO'ONANEA
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

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March 27, 2026

The Honorable Andria Tupola, Chair
and Members
Committee on Housing, Homelessness & Parks
Honolulu City Council
530 South King Street, Suite 202
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Tupola and Councilmembers:

SUBJECT: Resolution 26-65, Urging the City Administration to Restore the Mauna Lahilahi Cultural Garden by Activating and Implementing the Mauna Lahilahi Cultural Garden Master Plan

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) appreciates the intent of Resolution 26-65 and supports the goal of restoring and activating Mauna Lahilahi as a valued cultural and community resource. DPR acknowledges and thanks the residents of Mākaha, including Nā Kia'i o Mauna Lahilahi, for their dedicated stewardship and ongoing efforts to mālama and protect Mauna Lahilahi.

The Department offers the following comments in response to the specific provisions of the resolution:

Regarding implementation of the Master Plan, DPR supports the overall vision of a low-impact cultural garden; however, DPR recommends reviewing and updating the 2010 Archaeological Site Preservation and Development Plan and 2009 Burial Treatment Plan for Mauna Lahilahi, which were commissioned by DPR in response to an inadvertent discovery of iwi kupuna in 2007. These plans were prepared in accordance with Hawaii's Administrative Rules (HAR) Chapters 13-275 and 277 and in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Division (SHPD), SHPD-recognized descendants, DPR, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, and other community members and consulting parties.

The plan established four categories pursuant to HAR § 13-277: conservation, rehabilitation, interpretation, and appropriate cultural uses. Notably, the conservation category prohibits ground disturbance using mechanical equipment in perpetuity to protect significant cultural resources at Mauna Lahilahi. The consultant, however, recommended

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the inclusion of a fifth category—stabilization—which would have encompassed activities such as Native planting, invasive species removal, and a community garden; however, due to concerns of additional iwi disturbance, this category was not adopted by DPR and was therefore omitted from the Plan. Notwithstanding the prohibition on construction within the conservation category, there may be potential for a low-impact garden, as suggested by the consultant.

Given the date of the final plan, subsequent site activity, and the effects of climate change and erosion, DPR recommends a review and update of the preservation plan to guide any future low-impact improvements to the area.

Regarding community partnerships, DPR strongly supports collaboration with community members and cultural practitioners, and is open to exploring a formal partnership framework.

Regarding maintenance and site management, DPR agrees with the importance of consistent maintenance, security, and monitoring. The Department notes that past underinvestment has contributed to site challenges, and that ongoing erosion within the approximately 10-acre park area underscores the need for an updated conservation approach.

DPR supports the intent of this resolution and recommends a coordinated path forward that includes updated cultural and site assessments, continued community partnerships, and development of a feasible, culturally appropriate plan to guide the restoration and long-term stewardship of Mauna Lahilahi.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Resolution 26-65.

Sincerely,


g Laura H. Thielen
Director

APPROVED:


Michael D. Formby, Managing Director
Office of the Managing Director