HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL

KE KANIHELA O KE KALANA O HONOLULU

CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

No. 26-264

RESOLUTION

ENCOURAGING THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I, THE STATE OF HAWAI'I, AND THE HAWAI'I STATE LEGISLATURE TO RE-ENVISION AND REVITALIZE THE WAIKĪKĪ AQUARIUM.

WHEREAS, on March 19, 1904, the Honolulu Rapid Transit and Land Company opened the Honolulu Aquarium, which was intended to encourage passengers to ride to the end of a newly built trolley line in Kapi'olani Park and show the world the riches of Hawai'i's reefs; and

WHEREAS, the Honolulu Aquarium was a privately financed institution for the first 15 years of its existence, until the property lease expired and the Cooke Estate ceded the Honolulu Aquarium property to the Territory of Hawai'i and the newly formed University of Hawai'i assumed administration of the aquarium; and

WHEREAS, in 1949, Hawai'i's Territorial government appropriated funds to construct a new aquarium building that opened in 1955 as the Waikīkī Aquarium ("the Aquarium"); and

WHEREAS, due to a lack of sustained investment over the years, the Aquarium fell into disrepair, employed only a skeleton staff, offered no education programs, and lost its research functions to the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology and the Pacific Biomedical Research Center; and

WHEREAS, beginning in 1975, when Dr. Leighton Taylor was appointed Director, the Aquarium was revitalized with increased funding, additional staffing, new exhibits, and an extensive $3.2 million renovation in 1992; and

WHEREAS, the Aquarium has not had another full facility renovation since 1992, but has undergone gradual improvements that have largely focused on upgrading and modernizing important infrastructure, leaving some of its public facing facilities and exhibits with visible signs of wear and tear; and

WHEREAS, while the Aquarium generates revenue from ticket and merchandise sales, private events, and donations from Friends of the Waikīkī Aquarium, the nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the Aquarium, annual public funding is still necessary to operate the facility; and

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WHEREAS, a public-private partnership between the University of Hawai'i and private entity is a potential solution to funding a complete renovation and revitalization of the Aquarium; and

WHEREAS, a revitalization of the Aquarium could include the integration of a surf museum, highlighting Waikīkī's history as the cradle of surfing and the stories of surf legends such as Duke Kahanamoku, Eddie Aikau, Carissa Moore, and John John Florence; and

WHEREAS, the Art Aquarium, in the Ginza neighborhood of Tokyo, Japan, is an example of the successful integration of a museum and an aquarium into an extraordinary multisensory experience of immersive digital art and marine exhibits that is enjoyed by visitors of all ages from across the globe; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City and County of Honolulu ("Council") that the University of Hawai'i, the State of Hawai'i, and the Hawai'i State Legislature are encouraged to re-envision and revitalize the Waikīkī Aquarium; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council urges the University of Hawai'i, the State of Hawai'i, and the Hawai'i State Legislature to consider innovative solutions such as a public-private partnership and the integration of a surf museum with the Waikīkī Aquarium to ensure the financial sustainability and longevity of the Waikīkī Aquarium; and

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BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that copies of this resolution be transmitted to the Governor of the State of Hawai'i; the President of the Hawai'i State Senate, the Speaker of the Hawai'i State House of Representatives, the President of the University of Hawai'i; and the Director of the Waikīkī Aquarium.

INTRODUCED BY:

Tommy Waters

DATE OF INTRODUCTION:

NOV 9 2026

Honolulu, Hawai'i

Councilmembers

Report Title:
Waikīkī Aquarium; Waikiki Aquarium; Surf Museum; University of Hawai'i; University of Hawaii; Renovation; Funding; Public-private Partnership; Re-envisioning; Revitalization

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