

EDITORIAL OUR VIEW

Editorial: First DHHL high-rise must not be last

Today - Last updated 7:08 p.m.

It's been nearly 30 years since the state Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) acquired the property where the Stadium Bowl-o-Drome once stood. The property has been idle since 2004 — and the idea for converting Moiliili's former bowling site into a rental apartment complex serving beneficiaries has been kicking around for as much as a decade.

After these long years of anticipation, groundbreaking for construction on the site took place Friday. It's a notable step forward to house hundreds of the thousands of Hawaiians languishing on a DHHL waitlist for homes.

The concept is still "new" to beneficiaries, as this will be the first urban, high-rise rental complex built by DHHL. It should not be the last. There's a great need for adequate homes among qualified beneficiaries, some of whom are currently homeless. Others have died while waiting for a home on a waitlist that has only grown longer in the past decades.



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The 23-story tower, called Hale Mo'iliili, will hold 271 rental units reserved exclusively for Native Hawaiian beneficiaries, who must be at least 50% Hawaiian. Gov. Josh Green, Honolulu Mayor Rick Blangiardi and Office of Hawaiian Affairs trustee Kai Kahele, newly elected chair of OHA's board, were all present for the groundbreaking ceremony, along with other federal, state and local officials, in a show of unified support.

Hale Mo'iliili is groundbreaking in another sense, as it's the first rental development to provide Native Hawaiian housing with partial federal funding, authorized under the Fair Housing Act by virtue of the federal and state responsibility to provide homes for Hawaiians that was established when DHHL itself was created more than a century ago.

The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which is insuring a \$59 million loan to help finance the \$154 million tower, did question earlier this year whether the tower's 271 units could be filled by Native Hawaiian beneficiaries. But it reversed its push for an agreement to allow units to be rented to non-Hawaiians if demand didn't materialize, after receiving input from the federal Department of the Interior, which stated, "Housing on Hawaiian home lands is for beneficiaries."

Some beneficiaries, and even members of the DHHL board, continue to be skeptical of any DHHL spending that doesn't go directly to develop lots on dirt, with or without homes on top. However, developer Stanford Carr and DHHL Director Kai Watson have expressed full confidence that the tower will be filled with eligible Hawaiian beneficiaries — in particular, those who haven't been able to accept a homestead lease because they can't afford to buy or build their own home.

It also must be recognized that beneficiaries can potentially save for purchase of a homestead unit while living in the DHHL rentals. The rapid housing of beneficiaries will go far in allaying concerns.

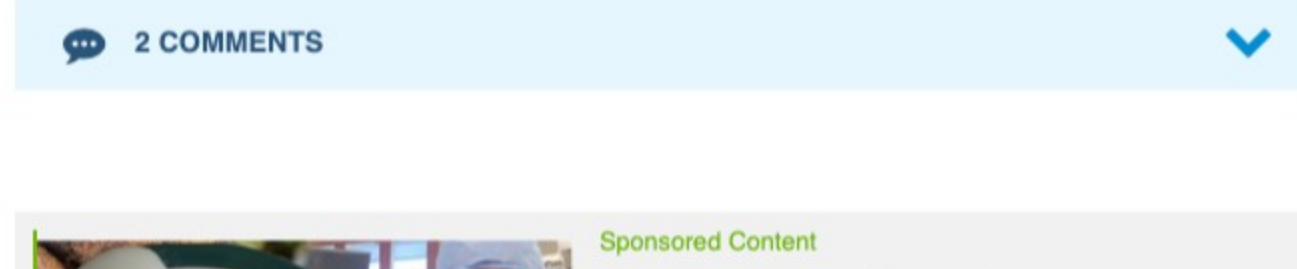
More changes could be afoot. First-term OHA trustee Kahele said he plans to work closely with DHHL to get more Hawaiian housing built. While serving in Congress, Kahele introduced legislation that would reduce a required Hawaiian blood quantum for successorship in a DHHL homestead lease, from one-fourth down to 1/32. State cooperation and legislative approval would come into play, so a public embrace at Saturday's groundbreaking between Green and Kahele, his former gubernatorial opponent, is a positive sign.

The responsibility lies with DHHL to get these projects up and running, with minimal waste and delay. Providing proof of concept to the doubters will go a long way toward creating momentum for continued development. And continued development is what DHHL beneficiaries require, to fulfill long-delayed federal and state commitments to Native Hawaiians.

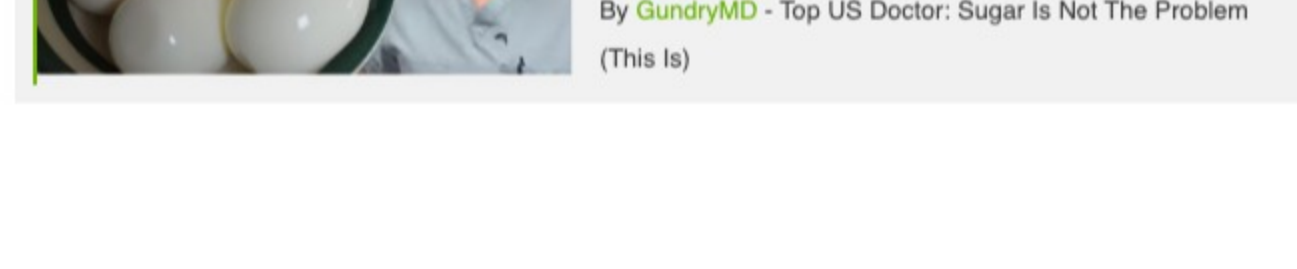
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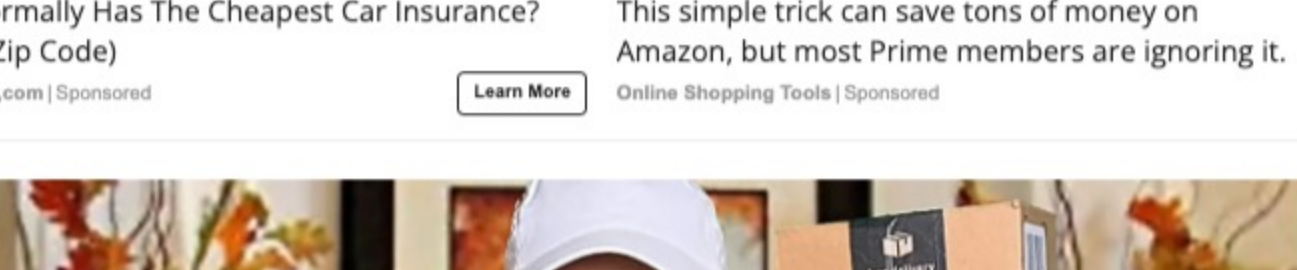
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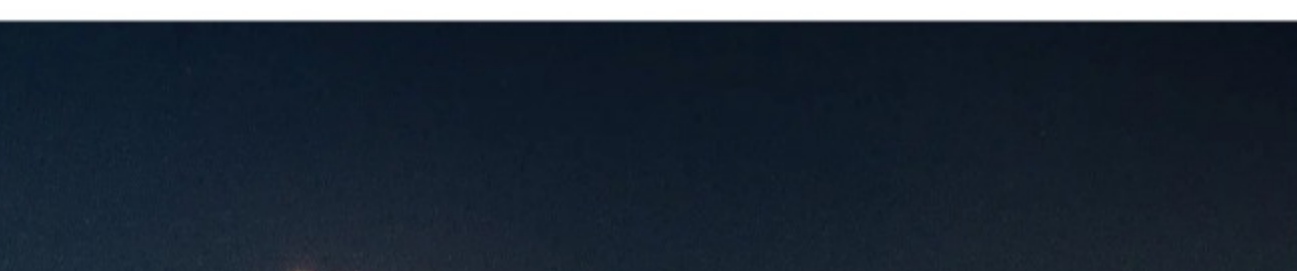
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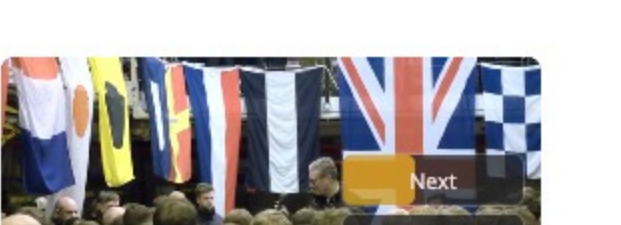
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