



Posted on: Monday, July 25, 2005

Construction plans energize UH

By Mike Leidemann
Advertiser Staff Writer

From Kaua'i to Kona, the University of Hawai'i is on a roll, planning to develop more than \$600 million in new facilities across the state in the next few years.

Supporters say the building boom is also bringing new energy to a university system trying to leave behind a decade of first lethargy, then turmoil.

The latest developments came last week as the university's Board of Regents selected private developers to build the first phase of the long-awaited West O'ahu campus and to renovate three UH-Manoa dormitories — at a combined estimated cost of more than \$170 million.

It's not just the money, though. University officials say the projects add a sense of creativity and commitment to the university system and have the potential to change the surrounding communities.

"Whenever you have something that's as visible as a new building, you are thinking about the future," said Libby Young, an associate professor of journalism at Windward Community College, which underwent a building boom that transformed the campus and surrounding community in the 1990s.

"You can't believe the sense of pride the new buildings provide," Young said. "You feel the campus growing and sense the promise that brings. It's something the community can take advantage of."

Other upcoming projects at UH facilities include:

- \$161 million telescope at the university's observatory site in Haleakala, Maui.
- \$100 million to build a new Hawai'i Community College campus in Hilo and a university center for West

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Hawai'i in Kona.

- \$175 million to \$190 million for a new laboratory and a new cancer research center near the Kaka'ako medical school complex in Honolulu.
- \$16 million for a new one-stop campus center building at Kaua'i Community College.

Those are in addition to dozens of smaller construction and maintenance projects that will do everything from repair the stage rigging at Kennedy Theatre in Manoa to upgrade the air conditioning at Leeward Community College.

The coming construction boom is made possible by a new approach taken by UH leaders, said Jan Yokota, UH director of capital improvements.

In the past, UH relied almost entirely on the state Legislature to provide money for capital improvements. That sometimes meant waiting for decades to get a large project paid for or prolonged battles that pitted one campus or department against another.

Recently UH officials have sought more creative approaches to tackle new projects, including turning to public-private partnerships, Yokota said. The telescope on Haleakala will be built with federal money, and state general obligation bonds will be used to build the new facilities on Kaua'i and the Big Island, she said.

"In the past, all roads led to the Legislature. What's changed is that we've learned there are new ways of doing things that allow us to move beyond the world of pork barrel politics. Now, we can start projects with initiative and innovation," said Kitty Lagareta, head of the UH Board of Regents.

Ironically, the new approach may be one of the legacies of former UH President Evan Dobbelle, whom the regents ousted last year.

"I give him credit for saying that the university was setting its vision too low," Lagareta said. "He helped change the attitude about what was possible. Now, we've got an administration that knows how to get those things done."

Mainland universities began pioneering the use of public-private partnerships in the past decade, particularly in projects to build student housing, Yokota said. Although the projects vary widely, universities typically retain ownership of the land, while the developer constructs and manages the dorms or apartments. Students living in the complex pay rent to the developer, who then pays a fee to the university.

Gradually the concept has widened, as in the case of the proposed West O'ahu project, to allow developers to build whole campuses that could include classrooms and administration buildings as well as profit-generating commercial and residential buildings. By selling long-term leases of public land, the university can receive money to operate the new campuses well into the future.

Initial proposals for the West O'ahu project call for the developer to build the campus on 122 acres of land near Kapolei and then be allowed to develop the surrounding land with income-generating commercial and residential buildings. In Hilo, a new campus to serve 3,000 students would be built while excess lands are developed to pay for the project.

Even before the plans are set, the proposals are paying benefits, said Rockne Freitas, chancellor of Hawai'i Community College.

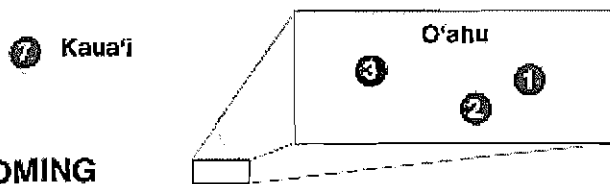
"It's like a volcano waiting to explode. You can see the swelling coming up gradually and sooner or later it's going to explode into something beautiful," Freitas said. "Nine out of 10 people I meet want to talk about the new campus, and we don't even have it yet. It's unbelievable."

That's what happened to faculty, staff and the surrounding community when Windward Community College underwent a striking renovation program in the 1990s, Young said.

After operating out of rundown, surplus state hospital buildings for 20 years, college supporters successfully lobbied the Legislature for millions of dollars to overhaul the campus and build many new buildings, using a memorable campaign slogan: "We've done much with little. Just think what we could do with enough."

The effort succeeded not only in producing renovated classrooms and offices, but also in adding several new facilities — including a theater and a planetarium-imaginarium — that help attract thousands of community residents to the campus.

"Every year since then it's gotten better and better in terms of what's happening," Young said. "Our annual ho'olaule'a used to draw just a few people. Now, we're getting 20,000 a year with more people and community groups wanting to be involved."



UPCOMING UH CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

① Mānoa

Frear, Gateway and Johnson halls will be renovated by a private developer, American Campus Communities, adding 1,700 new beds to the campus.

\$50 million

② West O'ahu

A new West O'ahu campus will be developed on 122 acres near Kapolei. Hunt ELP Ltd of El Paso, Texas, will build the campus and have rights to develop surrounding areas with residential and commercial properties.

\$120 million

③ Kaka'ako

- A second research building will be added to the John A. Burns School of Medicine in Kaka'ako, making space for an additional 300 researchers.

\$75 million to \$90 million

- A new Cancer Research Center of Hawai'i will be built on 5.5 acres of land adjacent to the medical school. The real estate firm Townsend Capital LLC was selected in March to head the project.

\$100 million

④ Haleakalā, Maui:

The National Science Foundation is financing development of the Advanced Technology Solar

Telescope at the UH Institute of Astronomy's High Altitude Observatory site on Haleakalā.

\$161 million

⑤ Kona, Hawai'i

A university center will be built on a 500-acre site above the Kona airport. It will replace a current facility in a small, leased space in a Kealahou shopping center.

⑥ Hilo, Hawai'i

A new Honolulu Community College campus will be built on land two miles from the current campus. UH officials are seeking a developer for the project.

Combined cost with Kona project:

\$100 million

⑦ Puhī, Kaua'i

Kaua'i Community College is getting a new One Stop Center that will include administrative offices, a campus center, meeting rooms, a counseling center and more. A 33,000-square-foot, two-story building is planned as the first phase of the center.

\$16 million

Source: University of Hawai'i

The Honolulu Advertiser

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