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Developers challenged to go small

Finalists offer plans that squeeze about 100 “micro unit” apartments into a lot in Kakaako

By [Andrew Gomes](#)

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Three developers are vying to build roughly 100 micro-sized rental apartments on a lot in Kakaako that at one time was considered the typical size for a single home on Oahu.

The developers responded to a request for proposals issued in December by a state agency that owns the 10,409-square-foot lot at 630 Cooke St. and regulates development in Kakaako.

The Hawaii Community Development Authority asked for bids to build small efficiency apartments, also known as “micro units,” to help address a shortage of affordable housing in Hawaii, and selected the three developers as finalists among seven submissions.

All three developers responded with plans in which rental rates would be affordable to low-income tenants earning no more than 60 percent of the annual median income in Honolulu, which equates to monthly rent of about \$1,000 for a studio to a single person earning up to \$40,300.

The project with the most units is a 17-story tower with 104 apartments proposed by EAH Housing, which is a California-based nonprofit affordable-housing developer active in Hawaii, in partnership with New York-based affordable-housing development and management firm Bronx Pro Group LLC.

“This is a new product for Hawaii,” said Kevin Carney, EAH’s vice president in Hawaii. “We see it as a potential template for other sites.”

Units in the EAH/Bronx Pro plan are 330 square feet. Of the 104 units, 99 would be for tenants earning up to 60 percent of the median income, and five units would be for tenants earning 30 percent.

Local developer Stanford Carr submitted a competing proposal for 109 units in a 9-story building.

“We just did this to challenge ourselves,” he said. “We actually fit 109 units on 10,000 square feet. It’s amazing.”

Carr’s project includes 86 studios and 23 one-bedroom units ranging from 232 square feet to 550 square feet. All the units would be affordable for tenants earning up to 60 percent of the median income. Carr also offered an alternative with 87 units in a 6-story building, and said such small living spaces are appealing to urban-dwelling millennials.

“This is what they’re building in San Francisco,” he said.

The third proposal is from local nonprofit affordable-housing developer Mutual Housing Association of Hawaii, which proposes 93 studio units in a 12-story building.

David Nakamura, executive director of the organization, said all the units, which range from 310 square feet to 350 square feet, would be affordable for tenants earning up to 60 percent of the median income. Some units also would be reserved for tenants earning up to 30 percent and 50 percent of the median income.

All three developers made confidential presentations to HCDA's board Tuesday, but agreed to share general aspects of their proposals publicly.

The Hawaii Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice said in a 2013 report that there is a great need for single-occupant housing in Hawaii but that such units haven't been widely produced.

"Almost one out of four households is composed of one occupant, a rate more than double what it was in 1950," the report said. "In light of this, (single-occupant homes) represent significant untapped potential for development of much needed affordable housing in Hawaii."

The site proposed for the micro apartments, which is zoned for buildings up to 400 feet, was once a Seafarers International Union hiring hall but is currently a parking lot and community garden.

HCDA has owned the lot since 1990 when the land was condemned in connection with Cooke Street infrastructure improvements and expansion of Mother Waldron Park.

HCDA is expected to make a staff recommendation on Wednesday. A decision by HCDA's board is expected to be made then or at a later meeting.

MICRO-HOUSING SITE

This small parking lot owned by a state agency is slated for small rental apartments.



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COURTESY MUTUAL

HOUSING

ASSOCIATION OF

HAWAII Among proposals for "micro units" on Cooke Street are a 12-story complex of studio units by Mutual Housing

Association of Hawaii,

above. COURTESY

EAH HOUSING AND

BRONX PRO GROUP

Among proposals for

"micro units" on Cooke

Street are a 12-story

com- plex of studio

units by Mutual

Housing Association of

Hawaii, (not shown),

and a 17-story tower

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*proposed by EAH
Housing, above.*

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