



Panel to Outline a Redone Blaisdell



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Mayor Kirk Caldwell is advancing an idea to redevelop Honolulu's aging Neal S. Blaisdell Center through a panel of consultants who will share their preliminary findings and recommendations at a presentation Friday.

The panel was arranged by the Rose Center for Public Leadership, part of the Urban Land Institute.

The Rose Center selected the Blaisdell project as an initiative under Caldwell's leadership and has come up with a preliminary strategy and ideas for a redevelopment plan.

The Urban Land Institute said the Rose Center will continue working with the city to help refine and enact a plan through a final report expected to be issued by the end of the year.

Caldwell said in a statement Friday that the panel will help explore big-picture ideas derived from diverse views.

"They'll take a fresh look at a place we all know and treasure -- and based on state-of-the-art review of what cities around the world have been able to accomplish -- they will give us some ideas of what might work here in Honolulu," he said.

The city intends to commission a consulting team to help craft a vision for "a cultural and entertainment venue" on the site that is financially self-sustaining, and then seek out potential development partners, the Urban Land Institute said.

Work by the Rose Center panel comes about nine months after the Hawaii Community Development Authority, a state agency governing development in Kakaako including the Blaisdell, suggested potential redevelopment of the 22-acre city site as part of a draft plan for transit-oriented development near two planned city rail stations in the area.

The agency suggested the city could work with a private developer to replace Blaisdell facilities, most of which were built as the Honolulu International Center in 1964, with uses that might include a new performing arts complex, a 700-foot residential tower, a business hotel, multiplex cinema, parking and a large park.

Since then Caldwell has touted the potential to enhance the site as the core of a revitalized culture and arts district in Honolulu.

"We have all grown up going to events and concerts there for the last 50 years, and now it's time to make sure it's as vital a place for our children's children through the next century," Caldwell said.

Gerald Saito, director of the city Department of Enterprise Services, added that the Blaisdell's 50th anniversary presents a perfect opportunity to reflect on what the Blaisdell has provided the people of Hawaii as a gathering and entertainment hub in the past and looking ahead with a vision for the next 50 years.

The Rose Center panel includes private- and public-sector consultants from the fields of planning, development, art, transportation and finance from several mainland cities and Honolulu.

Harrison Rue, the city's administrator of community building and transit-oriented development, said the panel will help assess possible arts, culture and music facilities that might work with potential housing and mixed-use development on the Blaisdell site.

"While they are working for free, their preliminary ideas and questions will be invaluable as we start this planning process," he said in a statement.

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