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Oahu split over plans for Kakaako

About half of the island's residents believe development is growing too fast

By [Andrew Gomes](#)

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Complaints about condominium tower development being too rampant in Kaka-ako have gushed this year at the Legislature and at meetings of a state agency governing such development. Yet a new poll suggests that this view is held by only about half of Oahu residents.

The Hawaii Poll conducted by Ward Research Inc. for the Hono-lulu Star-Advertiser and Hawaii News Now shows that 54 percent of Oahu residents think too much development is planned for Kaka-ako and that it's happening too quickly.

On the flip side, 43 percent of residents think that it's better to satisfy demand for new housing by building in the urban area instead of elsewhere on Oahu. The survey had a margin of error of 4.5 percentage points.

State officials established a vision nearly 40 years ago to transform Kaka-ako — a 450-acre area bounded by Ala Moana Boulevard and King, Pii-koi and Punchbowl streets — from a largely decaying industrial landscape into a mixed-use neighborhood largely populated with residents living in high-rises.

The Hawaii Community Development Authority was set up in 1976 to carry out the vision and has spent more than \$200 million upgrading sewer systems, roads and other infrastructure to encourage private landowners to create a dense urban neighborhood.

There have been a couple of condo tower development booms in Kaka-ako over the past three decades. However, the present level of ongoing and planned development has elevated concerns about impacts on traffic, views, wastewater capacity and other quality-of-life issues.

In particular, two master plans from Ward Centers owner Howard Hughes Corp. and major Hawaii landowner Kame-ha-meha Schools call for 29 new towers that could be built over 90 acres through the

next decade or two.

The concerns over development in Kaka-ako have led to several bills being introduced at the Legislature this year aimed at thinning, slowing or stopping development in the area.

One relatively new factor in the mix is that some towers now under construction or approved for development will block views from existing towers — an issue that largely didn't exist during previous decades of high-rise development in the area.

Much of the opposition to development in Kaka-ako comes from Kaka-ako condo unit owners, but concern also exists in the broader community.

Gary Li, a home health care provider who lives near Punahou School, said he's concerned that services including water, sewer, police and medical care along with road capacity will be inadequate to handle all the new condos.

"I think (building) high-rises everywhere could be problematic," he said.

Others prefer to see residential development directed to the urban area.

Jason Kau, an air-conditioning technician who lives in Pearl City, recognizes that housing needs to be developed to accommodate population growth, and believes such production is better off happening in Kaka-ako than other parts of Oahu where suburban sprawl is claiming green open spaces.

"There's already tall buildings in Kaka-ako," he said.

Li and Kau, who were both born and raised in Hawaii, were among 484 Oahu residents who participated in the Hawaii Poll earlier this month and answered one question pertaining to Kaka-ako.

The question was, "Some people say that there is too much development planned for Kaka-ako, and it's happening too quickly. Others say that there is demand for housing, and it's better to build it in the urban area, rather than see more development in other areas of the island. Which of these statements best matches your opinion?"

According to breakdowns by resident demographic information, it appeared that people who were older or made less money were more likely to agree that too much development is happening too fast in Kaka-ako.

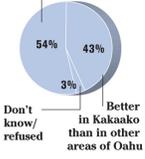
For people age 55 or older, 65 percent agreed with the view of too much, too fast. For people under age 35, 57 percent felt development is preferable in Kaka-ako.

By income, 59 percent of people in households who earned less than \$50,000 a year felt that there is too much development happening in Kaka-ako. That compared with 47 percent for people in households with an annual income over \$100,000.

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Too much too quickly



Poll was conducted among 484 Oahu residents by telephone (land lines and cell phones) Feb. 1-11 by Ward Research. The margin of error is plus or minus 4.5 percentage points.

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