**Managed access to Haiku Stairs better than taking them out**

**ISLAND VOICES**

**By Jay Silberman**

The Honolulu City Council’s Housing and Economy Committee met on July 20 to discuss Resolution 21-154, which calls for the Haiku Stairs’ destruction. Some 1,440 pieces of written testimony from the public were submitted; 1,336 of them (92.8%) opposed the resolution. Despite this overwhelming lack of support, the resolution was adopted. Why?

The measure now goes before the full Council next month for final approval. Unfortunately for Hawaii citizens, the resolution is inaccurate and/or misleading in several respects, and would result in a very unfortunate, unnecessary and expensive decision. Rather than providing an honest statement of the issues, it repeats myths that have kept the Stairs closed to the public for more than 30 years.

For example, the resolution strongly implies that reopening the Stairs would cost the city more than $900,000 in repairs and other commissioned by the Board of Water Supply (BWS). BWS went into improvements — when in fact City Council Resolution 20-323 last December, which the Council voted down, would have put this burden on the Stairs’ private-sector operator. Even with these stringent conditions, 14 potential bidders provided detailed plans for operating the Stairs, in response to the city’s 2020 request for interest. For example, the Friends of Haiku Stairs Concept Plan for managed access (see 808ne. ws/2TCZlub) is a serious plan, for people who are serious about solving this problem.

Resolution 21-154 also misrepresents conclusions of the environmental impact statement (EIS) the EIS process determined to remove the stairs, but by the end, had concluded that the managed-access alternative — reopening the Stairs to the public under controlled management and supervision, funded by the operator from hiking fees — scored the highest, even better than tearing them out. Managed access would in fact make money for the city, in the form of a percentage of the revenues. The original access to the Omega Station up Haiku Road could be restored, and an off-site shuttle could take hikers up to the Transmitter Building. The neighbors would not even see the hikers, much less feel their impact. After spending $1 million on repairs in 2002 to restore public access, how does spending $1 million of taxpayers’ money to tear out the Stairs make any sense?

It might help the City Council to make an informed decision if it understood what prompted 20,000 people a year to hike the Stairs in the 1980s, when it was legal to do so.

As the Kaneohe Neighborhood Board 2017 resolution (see 808ne. ws/3l7MAmL) strongly supporting managed access noted, trespassing in the Haiku neighborhood is not acceptable, and must cease. Managed access cannot work unless this intolerable intrusion on people’s privacy is eliminated. An advanced, 24/7 security system with high-tech monitoring equipment is critical from Day One for the success of managed access. A Security Planning Group, inclusive of neighbors and other stakeholders, should be set up to help the operator develop security, and should meet as often as necessary to improve the operation.

In sum, tearing out the Stairs is the worst option. What would it say about our state and our government if we destroyed a worldclass resource because we couldn’t figure out how to reopen a facility that used to operate with managed access, with no trespassing, and no impact on the surrounding neighborhoods? It’s time for people of goodwill to come together and solve this problem.

The Stairs have meant a lot to people over the past 75 years, and still do. Hundreds of thousands of people (yes, many of them illegally) have climbed the Stairs since they were opened in the 1980s. We should not discard our heritage — and spend an additional $1 million to do so — or dismiss its value, as if it means nothing to us, as if it is just another disposable piece of trash.

It would be an incalculable loss of an incomparable recreational, educational, historic and cultural resource. The Stairs are irreplaceable, and future generations should get to see why.

*Jay Silberman is a retired U.S. Coast Guard environmental protection specialist who served as the USCG project manager for the Haiku Stairs prior to the Omega Station closure; he is a board member of the nonprofit Friends of Haiku Stairs.*