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Public Utilities Commission

Docket No. 05-0145

O`ahu Power Plant

Testimony of

John Whalen

re: Honolulu Power Plant

LOL T-14

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2 I am president of Plan Pacific, Inc., a land use and community planning consulting firm based  
3 in Honolulu.

4 I earned a B.A. in political science and pre-architecture at Rutgers University, where I was *Phi*  
5 *Beta Kappa*, and a M.A. in public law and government and M.S. in urban planning from  
6 Columbia University.

7 Since 1976, I have been a member of the Hawai'i Chapter of the American Planning Association,  
8 in which I served several years as President or other officer. I was admitted to the American  
9 Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) in 1982. In 1987 I was elected to Lambda Alpha  
10 International, the honorary society for land economics, and served as its Hawai'i Chapter  
11 President for a term. In 2006, I was elected to the College of Fellows of AICP, an honor that  
12 has been bestowed on only a few hundred planning practitioners and academics nationwide.

13 I have had 34 years of experience as a professional planner. My practice has been in all three  
14 sectors --- private, non-profit and public -- including five years as the Director of Land  
15 Utilization for the City and County of Honolulu.

#### 16 **Removal of the Honolulu Power Plant**

17 Removal of the power plant and replacing it with a semi-subterranean parking structure with a  
18 park above would open up the view corridor along Alakea Street, looking makai, to establish new  
19 a visual connection between downtown and the harbor.

1 Perhaps more significant, this removal and replacement would vastly improve the appearance of  
2 the Nimitz Highway/Ala Moana Boulevard corridor, which is experienced by most visitors to  
3 Hawai'i as they travel between the Airport and Waikiki.

4 Since it is often this route that forms the visitor's first impression of Hawai'i, the appearance of  
5 this corridor has significant economic importance. From another perspective, the removal and  
6 replacement would improve the appearance of the waterfront itself and the view of Honolulu as  
7 experienced by passengers in arriving and departing cruise ships. This view is also growing in  
8 economic importance with the resurgence of the cruise ship industry.

#### 9 **Aloha Tower Market Place**

10 Businesses at Aloha Tower Marketplace have been complaining about the lack of promised  
11 parking since the complex first opened. While the increase in cruise ship arrivals, which bring  
12 walk-in customers, and private trolley services from Waikiki have helped sustain these  
13 businesses to some degree, it is apparent from the continuous turnover in tenants and the many  
14 vacancies in tenant spaces, that the Marketplace has suffered due to the lack of adequate parking.  
15 Exacerbating the problem is the "barrier effect" of Nimitz Highway, which is not designed for  
16 safe, convenient or attractive pedestrian crossings from the downtown financial district.

#### 17 **Park**

18 A park at the power plant site would attract downtown office workers and residents, giving them  
19 an incentive to cross Nimitz Highway and potentially patronize businesses at Aloha Tower  
20 Marketplace, particularly the harbor-front restaurants.

1 **Parking**

2 The downtown area experiences a shortage of public park space. When all City- and State-  
3 owned active and passive park lands are counted, the Downtown Neighborhood Board area,  
4 which extends from the harbor to H-1 Freeway and from Nu‘uanu Stream to South Street, has  
5 0.4 acres of park land per 1,000 residents.<sup>1</sup>

6 The City’s planning standard for active parks alone is 2.0 acres per 1,000 residents. In addition  
7 to the nearly 15,000 people who live in this area, approximately 46,000 employees and a large  
8 number of visitors to attractions such as Chinatown, the historic Civic Center district, and the  
9 Aloha Tower waterfront swell the average daily population of Downtown Honolulu.<sup>2</sup>

10 Two high-rise residential condominium buildings are under construction at the mauka end of  
11 Bishop Street and a harbor-front residential complex is planned near the power plant itself.

12 The redevelopment of the adjacent Kaka'ako district will bring many more residents and  
13 employees, although the Hawai'i Community Development Authority has no new public parks  
14 planned for this area.

15 New park space is critically needed to accommodate the current population, let alone the  
16 expected growth in population.

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<sup>1</sup> City and County of Honolulu Department of Design and Construction and Department of Parks and Recreation, *Standards and Design Precepts for Future Park Development: City and County of Honolulu*, December 2004.

<sup>2</sup> City and County of Honolulu Department of Planning and Permitting estimates.

1 **Plans**

2 Famous author Lewis Mumford is widely credited for originating the idea of creating a “lei of  
3 green” along Honolulu’s waterfront in his 1938 report titled *Whither Honolulu?*<sup>3</sup>

4 A few years earlier, the family of William G. Irwin dedicated to the Territory of Hawai’i a small  
5 park next to Aloha Tower in his memory, serving in part as an inspiration to Mumford.

6 Over the years, significant elements of Mumford’s proposal have been implemented, with a  
7 chain of parks extending from Diamond Head to Aloha Tower, broken only in sections of  
8 Waikiki and Kaka’ako.

9 At the downtown waterfront, development of Aloha Tower Marketplace created – while not  
10 strictly speaking a park – a promenade that opened public access to the harbor-front.

11 The State also developed a small park at Piers 5 and 6. The State has still not restored Irwin  
12 Memorial Park to its original use, as called for in both the statute and adopted Master Plan for  
13 the Aloha Tower redevelopment area, because a suitable replacement site for parking to serve the  
14 Aloha Tower Marketplace has not been provided.

15 In the mid-1990’s, the Aloha Tower Redevelopment Authority proposed to build a multi-story  
16 parking garage at Irwin Memorial Park. However, the Authority was thwarted in its attempt to  
17 remove the restrictive covenants on the use of the park by a December 2001 decision in Land  
18 Court and was forced to abandon the parking garage plan. Also, Irwin Memorial Park was listed  
19 on the Hawai’i Register of Historic Place in December 1999.

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<sup>3</sup> Lewis Mumford, *Whither Honolulu? A Memorandum Report on Park and City Planning*. City and County of Honolulu Park Board. Honolulu, T.H., 1938

1 There have been several proposals over the years to abandon the power plant as part of plans to  
2 redevelop the Aloha Tower district. One of these proposals was made by Hawaiian Electric  
3 Company (HECO) itself in 1989, as part of a joint venture with Myers Development Corporation  
4 for the redevelopment of the Aloha Tower area. In the joint venture's proposal, a portion of the  
5 power plant site was to be used for high-rise residential condominium development and the  
6 remainder as park or open space.

7 HECO subsequently retreated from the proposal to abandon the power plant after another  
8 development entity was awarded the development rights for the Aloha Tower district. However,  
9 other parties have suggested the development of mechanical parking within the large volume of  
10 space in the portion of the power plant housing that is not in active use.

11 More recently, the prospective developer to assume development rights over the Aloha Tower  
12 district – led by Kenneth Hughes – proposed that the power plant be relocated so that the site  
13 could be used to expand the open space provided by the planned restoration of Irwin Memorial  
14 Park and establish a stronger physical connection between the downtown financial district and  
15 the waterfront.

## 16 **Sustainability**

17 The removal of the power plant would have a dramatic, positive impact on the downtown  
18 waterfront. There is growing recognition among civic leaders that the benefits of inner-city park  
19 development are not limited to intangible aesthetic and recreational values. City parks also yield  
20 significant economic development benefits, especially when they are developed at strategic

1 locations and tied to specific redevelopment or revitalization objectives.<sup>4</sup> The power plant site is  
2 a particularly strategic location for a park in Honolulu because of its high visibility and  
3 proximity to downtown.

4 There is also a growing body of research documenting the psychological and public  
5 health benefits of trees and other greenery in urban settings.<sup>5</sup> Urban greenery reduces the “heat  
6 island” effect resulting from paved streets and intensive building coverage in urban areas,  
7 contributing to energy conservation and mitigating global climate change.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John L. Crompton, *Parks and Economic Development*, American Planning Association, PAS Report 502, November 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Kathleen L. Wolf, Ph.D., *Urban Nature Benefits: Psychosocial Dimensions of People and Plants*, University of Washington College of Forest Resources, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> E.G. McPherson and J.R. Simpson. *Effects of California's Urban Forests on Energy Use and Potential Savings from Large-Scale Tree Planting*. Davis, CA: USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station, Center for Urban Forest Research. 2001. See also, American Forests, “How Trees Fight Climate Change”, 1999.

