

Appendix II: COVID-19 Guidance

Growth and Planning



Issues Highlighted by COVID-19:

- **Fluctuating demand for commercial office space.** Work-from-home and other remote work arrangements have grown substantially more mainstream since the advent of COVID-19. This could potentially mark a long-term re-thinking of office space in the downtown and central business districts and eventually, some shifts in usage. Additionally, demand for shared workspaces and as-needed facilities may increase.
- **Challenging perceptions of high-density/city living.** While it appeared initially that the COVID-19 virus spread more rapidly/easily in dense urban environments, sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic eventually spread in every kind of environment. There are however, common considerations for staying safe in city and rural communities. These include attending to ventilation and HVAC systems in buildings, providing space to quarantine for folks who cannot safely distance at home if infected, and practicing social distancing in public places.
- **Reduced interest and focus on other urgent issues, such as tackling climate change.** Urgency and sustained focus has been required to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic health impacts and the concurrent economic impacts felt across the world. This has redirected much of the urgent energy and attention away from climate change-related concerns, which still loom large. It is therefore important to move quickly to “bake in” climate change considerations and mitigation actions into normal planning and operations processes, freeing up more focus for other pressing issues in civic life.

Short-Term Plan Actions

Support research and pilot projects in Smart Cities, data driven planning, and expanded wi-fi/broadband/5G [CIV-3.1]

Increased use of mixed-use zoning to allow for neighborhood stores within and near existing residential areas [Policy GD-1.2]

Prepare contingency plans for rapid construction of short-term medical facilities [??]

Conduct pro-active Pre-Disaster and Emergency Preparedness planning [HC-3.3]

Leverage new FEMA resilience programs such as Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities [SLR 3.2]

Invest in neighborhood-focused adaptation and engagement [SLR 2.3]

Integrate gray, green and blue infrastructure planning [WR-1.1]

Long-Term Plan Actions

Strive to create “15-minute Cities” that provide decentralized access to services [GD-1.1]

Support revitalization of suburban centers and redevelopment of single-use shopping centers over time [GD-1.3]

Construction of permanent community health clinics and resilience centers [CIV-2.2]

Enable increased local availability of modular construction materials for building of immediate medical care facilities or temporary housing [H-1.3]

Continue to integrate climate risks into planning, permitting, capital investment, and budget decisions [SLR 3.1]

Secure new financing for nature-based climate solutions and long-range adaptation efforts [SLR 3.2]

Housing



Issues Highlighted by COVID-19:

- **Instability in the housing market.** Some residents struggled to pay rent due to pandemic related job losses or absence. National eviction moratoriums and City financial relief efforts helped to stem crisis in the short term. However, secure housing remains unaffordably high for many in Honolulu. Pandemic pressures clearly illustrated nationwide that housing instability is a real concern for many individuals and families in the event of emergency. Property owners too suffered losses, payment delays, and difficulty due to the pandemic.
- **Project delays.** COVID-19 disrupted many timelines, including the sensitive process of financing and approving housing projects, inserting another hurdle in the path to increasing the supply of housing units. Shipping and supply chain issues as well as labor shortages are other challenges that add time and expense to increasing the supply of housing.
- **Trouble distancing and/or poor ventilation.** Health protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in residents staying in their homes far more than usual. Those already living in close conditions have trouble social distancing or quarantining, causing further stress if a household member is infected. Further, a significant portion of the PUC's housing stock is fifty years or older, constructed before modern building codes were in place. Inadequate HVAC systems or poor internal air circulation is another concern for both transmissibility or chronic respiratory problems.

Short-Term Plan Actions

- Implement eviction protections to keep residents in their homes *[GD-5.2]*
- Create a rental and mortgage assistance program *[GD-5.2]*
- Require more affordable housing units from new developments *[H-1.2]*
- Increase enforcement of unlicensed vacation rentals *[H-1.1]*
- Build supportive housing and services for chronic homeless populations *[H-2.4]*
- Establish vacancy fee on empty units to raise funds for affordable housing *[H-2.1]*

- Continue to adjust 201H permitting processes to streamline requirements for affordable housing developers *[H-2.2]*
- Coordinate among City agencies to centralize housing-related functions in one Department and define metrics to track city progress *[H-2.2]*

Long-Term Plan Actions

- Require or encourage larger and high-quality private lanais and terraces in new residential developments *[PL-2.1]*
- Require or encourage developments to include rooftop and vertical gardens *[PPOS-1.3]*
- Require or promote use of operable windows, re-engineered ventilation systems, and wider staircases *[PL-2.2]*
- Encourage all future housing developments to include indoor-outdoor spaces *[PL-2.1]*
- Provide regulatory support for “horizontal” skyscrapers, or “a “city lifted in the air”

Parks & Public Open Space



Issues Highlighted by COVID-19:

- **Importance of access to a variety of open space.** Though the COVID-19 pandemic did not dampen interest in the PUC's parks and green spaces, not all residents have ready access to, for instance, community parks or sports fields. Comprehensive parks planning should be pursued by the City in the near term to best utilize existing assets and identify gaps.
- **Crowd control in highly-used recreation areas.** The pandemic sent many out onto trails and State Parks to recreate and escape the indoors. Pandemic crowding concerns necessitated changes in fees, reservations, and other new access procedures to avoid overcrowding and increased stress on overused facilities and historic sites. Many of these changes were already needed.
- **Open streets programs.** The silent streets of the early pandemic resulted in one bright spot, the occasional use of city streets in Waikiki for car-free recreation. The success and enjoyment of these events should spur plans to periodically repeat them in more locations, long after the pandemic has passed.
- **Need for more flexible-use public spaces.** Structured recreation programs and sports teams suffered during the pandemic, but so too did other arts, recreation, and civic events. Future space planning and facilities planning should consider the potential needs of social distancing so that not all activity grinds to a halt.

Short-Term Plan Actions

Require that public golf courses remain open for public recreation use [PPOS-3.3]

Extend park hours later at night during summertime (with additional lighting and parks staffing) [PPOS-3.3]

Painting six foot 'circles' in public parks to delineate safe spacing [PPOS-3.3]

Temporarily repurposing/closing streets into recreational areas (*see Oakland Slow Streets program as an example*) [HC-2.3]

Allow temporary use of parking lots for pop-up gyms, staging areas, outdoor food banks, and testing sites [ED-1.2]

Rapid permitting of restaurant seating expanding into alleys and sidewalks [ED-1.2]

Long-Term Plan Actions

Enforcing and strengthening joint use agreements with public schools [PPOS-3.4]

Painting six foot 'circles' in public parks to delineate safe spacing [PPOS-3.3]

Quick-build programs for improvements at dangerous pedestrian intersections ("Shared Spaces") [HC-2.3]

Formalize and streamline permitting for parklet and pop-up uses [ED-1.2]

Designating and designing public spaces/facilities for public services such as a food pantry, community library, or cooling center [CIV-2.2]

Mobility / Transportation



Issues Highlighted by COVID-19:

- Challenges for mass transit.** Throughout the pandemic, challenges existed for staffing, social distancing, and planning for fewer numbers of passengers on public transit nationwide. Revenue losses and a fluctuating rebound of ridership are continued considerations for transit agencies. Financial implications resonate throughout capital operations, maintenance, and transit planning. However, many remain reliant on public transit for daily commuting and other transportation needs.
- Bike paths and bike share.** Cycling provides one alternative to those who wish to avoid crowds on commuter transit. However, the City is still building out a bicycle network robust and separated enough to attract less confident riders. Biki, the PUC's privately operated bikeshare was highly successful prior to the pandemic, but was hit hard by the loss of tourism eating into its ridership. Some riders may have also been more reluctant to use shared equipment.

Short-Term Plan Actions

Implement dedicated bus lanes to shorten travel times and improve existing highly-used bus stops/shelters *[MC-1.2]*

Provide opt-in incentive programs for employers and schools to reduce personal public transportation costs *[MC-2.1]*

Establish design standards for safe and efficient curbside pick-up/drop-off zones *[MC-2.2]*

Subsidize the bike sharing program (if needed temporarily for fiscal solvency) *[MC-1.3]*

Continue implementing Complete Streets projects, and continue implementing Safe Routes to School improvement projects *[MC-1.1]*

Long-Term Plan Actions

Look to widen sidewalks whenever possible *[MC-1.4]*

Continue redesigning streets to be friendlier for pedestrians by adding automatic walk signals *[MC-1.4]*

Pursue data tracking on the use of pedestrianized public spaces to optimize usage and safety *[MC-2.2]*

Explore permanently free transit *[MC-1.2]*

Seek permanent conversion of some streets into bicycle and pedestrian-only paths, especially near transit (see *Seattle Stay Healthy Streets program*) *[HC-2.3]*

Invest more heavily in separated-lane bicycle facilities and similar bicycle infrastructure *[MC-1.3]*

Healthy Communities



Issues Highlighted by COVID-19:

- **Reliance on imported food.** O’ahu (and the State overall) is overwhelmingly reliant on imported food for the vast majority of supply with a short window of back-up supply. This means that any disruptions in the supply chain are felt acutely by residents and there is a clear need for increased local food production.
- **Inflation and food insecurity.** The latest chapter of the long pandemic recovery has been a surge of inflation to a 40-year high. Spiraling costs are sure to exacerbate difficulties for the already high numbers of Hawai’i families with children experiencing food insecurity. **(Citation)**
- **Communication hurdles.** The pandemic virtually halted all in-person City government or project engagement events, forcing communication online. While a welcome option, virtual events do not always provide the same level of interactivity or reach the whole community. In addition, early on in the pandemic highlighted that public health information was unevenly reaching the island’s communities and that improvements should be made to language services and outreach.

Short-Term Plan Actions

Encourage and standardize procurement practices that prioritize local food purchasing *[HC-3.1]*

Incorporate local products stands into public facilities where possible *[HC-1.4]*

Support the establishment of more farmer’s markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs *[HC-1.4]*

Encourage and attract vertical farming in light industrial areas *[ED-1.4]*

Continue expanding (and streamlining) the ability to grow food and raise small animals *[HC-1.4]*

Long-Term Plan Actions

Increase local food production to reduce dependency on imports in the long run *[HC-1.4]*

Encourage and attract vertical farming in light industrial areas *[ED-1.4]*

Provide institutional support for more community gardens *[HC-1.4]*

Support the establishment of more farmer’s markets and CSA programs *[HC-1.4]*

Economic Development



Issues Highlighted by COVID-19:

- **Lockdowns and other business disruptions.** Some retailers, shops, restaurants, and service providers temporarily or permanently closed their doors after months of challenges. However, despite the losses, some new businesses also have sprung up during the twists and turns of the pandemic.
- **The tourism economy.** Drastic decreases in tourism early on in the pandemic may have been welcomed by some residents but not by the tourism-dependent economy. Tourism is a huge sector in the PUC, and a revenue generator for the whole state. Although tourism has shown an ongoing recovery, calls to “diversify the economy” have grown louder. Many businesses not necessarily part of the hospitality industry are nonetheless dependent on tourism spending.
- **Changes in shopping habits.** Long-term growth of e-commerce crowding out some brick-and-mortar shops is not a new phenomenon. However the pandemic has only heightened the shift toward online shopping. One notable addition to the pandemic shopping menu that is likely to last (and that can only be done locally) is curbside pickup.

Short-Term Plan Actions

Allow businesses that respect social distancing protocols to remain open [ED-1.1]

Allow expanded outdoor dining [ED-1.2]

Allow expanded home-based businesses [ED-1.2]

Support existing businesses by relaxing zoning/code requirements such as: [ED-1.2]

- Allowing pop-up retail/outdoor display and temporarily relaxing sign restrictions,
- Allowing temporary loading zones for pick-ups

Provide additional support tailored to businesses on city websites [ED-1.2]

Allow bike corrals and/or parklets in street parking spaces (with minimal or expedited permitting) [HC-2.3]

Long-Term Plan Actions

Develop ways to financially support local small businesses (during the next public health crisis) such as a small business continuity fund [ED-3.1]

Support a gradual shift in emphasis away from tourism towards prioritizing other economic sectors: [ED-2.1]

- Sustainable agriculture and indoor farming
- Green energy + transportation jobs
- Local education and research