

Puna Community Development Plan Action Committee

Responses to Submitted Questions

Are there any plans to expand the campus to include an adjacent hospital? If so, is there a general timeline for when planning or design might begin?

At this time, there are no plans to construct an additional hospital adjacent to the campus. The site can support expanded outpatient services, additional medical office space, and long-term care facilities. However, the population base is not expected to support another full-service hospital located such a short distance from Hilo Benioff Medical Center (HBMC).

In what ways will Hilo Benioff Medical Center support employment and career pathways for high school students in Kea'au?

HBMC intends to continue offering the high school workforce development programs currently available in Hilo, but at the Kea'au Benioff Health Center (KBHC) site as well. We are actively exploring the possibility of offering a Medical Assistant training track at KBHC, similar to the Certified Nurse Aide program that Waiākea High School operates using HBMC facilities. We also welcome discussions with Kea'au High School and Ke Kula 'O Nāwahīokalani'ōpu'u about what pathways or programs would be most beneficial for their students.

How will the Medical Center ensure staff are appropriately trained to serve the local community, including understanding local traditions, values, and communication styles?

For providers who join us from outside Hawai'i, HBMC offers both cultural orientation and ongoing mentoring to ensure a foundational understanding of local values and traditions. For clinical and support staff, we expect many employees to be residents of Kea'au and greater Puna. Approximately half of our patients already come from the Puna region, and our staff have longstanding experience providing care with cultural sensitivity, respect, and awareness of community norms.

How will native plants be incorporated into the project's landscape design?

The landscaping plan incorporates a blend of native Hawaiian plants, Polynesian-introduced species, and selected ornamental plantings. This approach is intended to reflect the cultural, ecological, and aesthetic values of a wide range of community stakeholders. The landscaping is not an afterthought; it is integrated into the comprehensive project design (see Leonard Bisle's narrative Attachment 1).

What partnerships or relationships are being established to demonstrate the Medical Center's commitment to being a long-term community steward?

The development of this facility—an \$80–\$90 million investment—demonstrates the East Hawai'i Regional Board's commitment to expanding healthcare access and infrastructure in Puna. We are also engaged in a long-term partnership with W.H. Shipman, a legacy landowner and key partner in broader community development efforts. As the facility becomes established, we anticipate expanding additional collaborations with local schools, organizations, and community leaders.

How will the design of the facility reflect the community it serves, both structurally and aesthetically?

The architectural design for the Kea'au Benioff Health Center blends modern healthcare functionality with the distinct cultural and rural environmental character of the Puna District and surrounding Kea'au environment. By prioritizing local materials and climate-responsive forms, the building endeavors to feel less like a sterile institution and more like a natural extension of the Kea'au landscape. The result is a facility that feels like a "Place of Healing" specifically designed for the people of Hawai'i Island, honoring both its rugged volcanic roots and its lush, welcoming spirit.

The building was intentionally designed to be one-story to reflect the prevalent architecture of the surrounding community and to provide an inviting and welcoming impression reinforcing its role as a "place of healing". The design avoids intimidating, fortress-like walls. Instead, it uses expansive glazing, sheltering overhands and open walkways.

Materials were chosen to be connections to the land and generally consist of lava rock (pōhaku) masonry for building and landscape accents; Puna is a landscape defined by volcanic activity. Incorporating rock walls anchors the building to the literal earth of the region.

Rather than cold clinical whites or industrial grays, the solid portion of the facade features the appearance of warm wood siding. The metal panel siding on the exterior walls and overhead soffits have similar dimensions and configurations as traditional single-wall building aesthetics familiar to the community while consisting of modern robust materials suitable for the local climate. Wood is associated with the lush, forested parts of Puna; using these tones makes the medical center feel approachable and "warm," which can help reduce the anxiety often associated with healthcare visits.

Large floor-to-ceiling glass panels allow the interior spaces to look out onto the covered outdoor walkways and landscape spaces reinforcing the Hawaiian value of *mālama* (to care for) both the person and the land. By making the interior visible and the exterior public-facing portions of the building “porous”, the architecture signals transparency and inclusivity. It reflects a community-based approach to health where services are easily accessible and integrated into daily life.

The building utilizes a long, low-profile silhouette with deep, extended eaves supported by angled columns and serves as a modern interpretation of the sheltering “Hale”. These covered walkways and overhangs are provided along the length of the public approach to the building entrances and are essential for the Kea’au climate, providing critical shade and protection from the frequent, heavy tropical rains while allowing for outdoor circulation. The expansive, shaded walkways invite the community into a protected, naturally ventilated space. The angled columns add a contemporary rhythmic energy that references the exposed support structure found in traditional Hawaiian architecture.

Will there be a focus on local hiring, and if so, what processes will support that effort?

Hiring decisions will continue to be based on qualifications rather than geographic preference. However, many current employees who live in Puna are expected to request transfers to the new Kea’au facility, minimizing commute time. Over time, applicants from Kea’au, Volcano, and lower Puna will likely make up a significant portion of the hiring pool, resulting in a workforce that reflects the local community. To further support local access to employment, we will host a job fair in Kea’au as we move into the staffing phase.

Keaau Benioff Medical Center Wellness and Behavioral Health Landscape Planting Description

PLANTING:

The proposed planting will consist of a mixture of exotic ornamental (O), native Hawaiian (N) and Polynesian-introduced (P) plants. Planting for the site falls into a number of distinct areas, as described below:

Roadside / Entry Landscape:

The landscape along either side of the project entry driveway will consist of open, mower-accessible, grass areas that slope gradually (+/-7') into what will serve as detention basins for the project drainage. Large *Aleurites moluccana* / Kukui trees (P) will punctuate this area giving it a park-like feel.

The project entry landscape will consist of a tree and palm-lined driveway consisting of *Thespesia populnea* / Milo trees (N) and *Pritchardia hillebrandii* / Loulu palm (N) with turf and stone groundcover below. A +/-4' tall *Hibiscus arnottianus* / Koki'o keoke'o (N) hedge will create a backdrop for these plantings and visually separate this area from the detention basins beyond.

Parking Lot Landscape:

The landscape in the parking lot will consist of a mix of *Cassia spp.* / Shower trees (O) and *Bauhinia tomentosa* / Yellow Bauhinia (O) trees. Groundcover beneath the trees will consist of ¾" diameter gravel groundcover over weed mat where tree wells are located along the outer perimeter and *Phymatosaurus grossus* / Dwarf Lauae Fern (N) groundcover and *Crinum asiaticum* / Green Spider Lily (O) where tree wells are located close to the buildings. The same +/-4' tall *Hibiscus arnottianus* / Koki'o keoke'o (N) hedge is proposed around the perimeter of the parking lot to clearly define the current limits of the development. *Pinanga kuhlii* / Ivory Cane palms (O) will be used to screen the trash enclosure at the west side of the parking lot.

Public Landscape:

The landscape around the perimeter of the buildings is proposed to be very clean and simple. A limited number of plant species are proposed to be used. The plant palette will include more exotic plants to emphasize flowers, bold form, color and scent but will include selected native or Polynesian-introduced plants that offer some of the same attributes. The plant palette for the public landscape areas will include the following plants:

- Adonidia merrillii* / Manila Palm (O)
- Cyrtostachys renda* / Sealing Wax Palm (O)
- Asplenium nidus* / 'Ekaha (N)
- Bromeliad spp.* / Bromeliad (O)
- Cordyline fruticosa* / Ki (O)
- Crinum asiaticum* / Spider Lily (Green) (O)
- Dichorisandra thyrsiflora* / Blue Ginger (O)
- Gardenia taitensis* (Dwarf) / Dwarf Tahitian Gardenia (O)
- Hibiscus arnottianus* / Koki'o Keoke'o (N)
- Microlepia strigosa* / Palapalai (N)
- Philodendron "Rojo Congo"* / Philodendron (O)

Peperomia obtusifolia / Baby Rubber Plant (O)
Peperomia obtusifolia / Baby Rubber Plant (Variegated) (O)
Phymatosaurus grossus / Dwarf Lauae Fern (N)
Turf Grass (O)

Private Viewing Garden:

The private viewing garden will be located adjacent to and visible from selected therapy rooms and provider offices. The gardens will be surrounded by staggered privacy walls punctuated with decorative privacy screens. Landscaping in the garden will consist of earth mounds embedded with large boulders and covered with decorative stone. Planting will be minimal but impactful. Planting will be selected and placed to create interesting views or “vignettes” from each room or office with the plants serving as sculptural elements. The garden is intended for viewing only. The garden will be accessible for maintenance but not for general use. The plant palette for the private viewing garden will include the following plants:

Phoenix robelenii / Pigmy Date Palm (O)
Bromeliad spp. / Bromeliad (O)
Microlepis strigosa / Palapalai (N)
Philodendron "Rojo Congo" / Philodendron (O)
Peperomia obtusifolia / Baby Rubber Plant (Variegated) (O)