

EDITORIAL

Waimea deal signals valley's bright future

Many chapters are yet to be written on the preservation and rediscovery of Waimea Valley, but at least the book has been cracked open.

A tentative agreement to settle the condemnation suit the city filed against landowner Attractions Hawaii was hammered out, hastily, just before the holiday weekend.

A consortium of public agencies and nonprofit entities has formed for the purchase of the 1,875-acre valley and, except for the continued operation of the nature park by the Audubon Society, this will keep the ahupua'a essentially as it was in olden times.

The biggest share of the money comes from the city — \$5 million — but the Army is adding \$3.5 million and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs will contribute \$2.9 million from its Native Hawaiian Trust Fund.

This is a far better than the earlier proposal — that the city buy only the front 300 acres and leave the bulk of the acreage to Attractions Hawaii.

Audubon officials stated that this narrower outcome may have quashed the society's long-term interest in running the park, which would have been disappointing to those pleased with the organization's vision for the preserve.

Now the work of drawing up the blueprints for the future of the valley remains. That must proceed with as much public discussion as possible, something that to date has been lacking.

Even the current settlement proposal was unfurled before elected leaders only on Friday, in an 11th-hour, closed-door meeting of the City Council. But that approach won't shed much light on the remaining, critical details.

For starters: Under the tentative agreement, title would be held by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. However, OHA's intent is to maintain the valley in trust for a future Hawaiian government entity similar to the state's plan for Kaho'olawe. If this plan is carried out, it must allow for equal access by all taxpayers, not only Hawaiians.

Now that there's no heated rush, the conversation about Waimea must keep the public clued in and allow everyone to examine the fine print.