

Commentary from the Honolulu Advertiser: Tuesday, January 29, 2008



## Kapolei ready for big leagues

By [Lee Cataluna](#)  
Advertiser Columnist

It has been like watching a kid grow up. It seems a slow, imperceptible process, but turn your attention away for a moment and all of a sudden, wow, who's this poised person ready for bigger things?

The determined, willful use of the term "second city" to describe Kapolei has sounded almost too hopeful and a tad delusional over recent years. Second city? Just because it has its own movie theater and Kmart doesn't make it a city. It just makes it another, albeit newer, burb of O'ahu's only city.

Downtown Kapolei? Where is that? Same as uptown Kapolei. There's only one road, right?

But Kapolei is growing up. Just yesterday it was a handful of government workers who lived out on the Leeward side gamely staking out empty offices like deserted outposts.

Today, Kapolei is practically bustling.

The Kapolei library has books. Remember when it didn't? Now it does. Plenty of books. Plenty of book borrowers, too. In fact, the library's circulation staff was named 2007 Team of the Year for the Hawai'i State Public Library System.

The restaurants are many and varied, from the exotic to the ubiquitous. Starbucks features a drive-through window (though you do have to drive behind the strip mall to get there). Home Depot has an indoor lumber department.

What else does a city need? Yes, there is a Chili's.

The bus stops are busy. The stores are busy. The bulldozers are busy clearing land for more second city action.

There's even the perpetual traffic gridlock of a city. The "main drag" of Kamokila Boulevard is almost always jammed, which backs up traffic into the store parking lots.

Now comes a decision by the Honolulu City Council to allow buildings as high as 150 feet on 13 blocks in Kapolei. At this point, the tallest building there is 90 feet, which is six stories.

The new height limit will take the tallest building to 10 stories — hardly a skyscraper.

Certainly not everyone will think that's a benign proposal, for as so often happens, somebody's best idea is somebody else's worst nightmare.

But looking at what is there in Kapolei already, the orderly, aesthetic plan has begun to take shape. Except for the traffic. Much of the architecture is of the island-living theme. The Bank of Hawaii building is reminiscent of the lovely Alexander and Baldwin building Downtown. More in the same style, even a bit taller, would make a true second city out of the fields of buffalo grass and koa haole.

Right now, it's still in a wanna-be stage. But whereas it used to be only true believers could picture the Second City of Kapolei, now it is more apparent that someday Honolulu won't be the only town in town.

*Lee Cataluna's column runs Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Reach her at 535-8172 or [lcataluna@honoluluadvertiser.com](mailto:lcataluna@honoluluadvertiser.com).*

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