Bill 26 (2020)
Testimony
TESTIMONY TO THE HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL
Committee on Budget
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-3077
9:00 AM
May 12, 2020

Honorable Joey Manahan, Chair, Brandon Elefante, Vice Chair and members of the Committee:

RE: Bill No. 26 Relating to fees for certain permits and services administered by the Department of Planning and Permitting.

My name is Greg Thielen. I am a small business owner and a General Contractor with over 30 years experience building in Hawaii. I am writing in STRONG OPPOSITION to Bill 26. In order to explain my reasons, I would like to share an experience I had at a National meeting of Home Builders. At a round table discussion with 70 – 80 Home Builders from all around the country I raised the question about permit processing times. Most Home Builders explained that their permit processing time was either same day or several days to process. At this point a builder from Dallas TX spoke up and shared that their building permit processing time had gotten so bad that they viewed it as a “dumpster fire”. Their processing time was two weeks. Then some of the west coast builders from Washington, Oregon and California began to share their woes. In some counties it was taking as much as two months to obtain a building permit. Most in the room laughed at how ridiculous this was until I told them it was taking us 6 – 12 months. There was sheer disbelief. My fellow builders questioned me at length to make sure this was true and still could not imagine a situation so ridiculous.

Bill 26 looks to reward an agency for it’s incompetence which has been clearly documented by the city’s own Audit. The fact of the matter is that the council should be passing a bill that slashes the departments funding in half in 2021 if they don’t correct this unacceptible situation.

Sincerely,

Greg Thielen
President/RME
Honorable Joey Manahan, Chair, Brandon Elefante, Vice Chair and members of the Committee:

RE: Bill No. 26: Relating to fees for certain permits and services administered by the Department of Planning and Permitting.

My name is Dwight Mitsunaga, 2020 President of the Building Industry Association of Hawaii (BIA-Hawaii). Chartered in 1955, the Building Industry Association of Hawaii is a professional trade organization affiliated with the National Association of Home Builders, representing the building industry and its associates. BIA-Hawaii takes a leadership role in unifying and promoting the interests of the industry to enhance the quality of life for the people of Hawaii. Our members build the communities we all call home.

**BIA Hawaii is strongly opposed to Bill No. 26**, which proposes to impose punitive building permit fees for projects started prior to obtaining a building permit, and increase most of the developer related permitting fees, including building permits.

While we understand the intent of going after builders who start work without the proper permits, we are more concerned about the overall dysfunction with the building permit process. The recent city audit found structural, procedural, and personnel problems within the Department of Planning and Permitting (DPP) with regards to its administration of the building permit process.

DPP does not issue building permits on a reasonable or timely basis. Imposing punitive fines or fees on developers who proceed with projects due to frustration with the unnecessary delays in obtaining the proper permits from DPP is not appropriate at this time. Prior increases in development/building permit fees has not resulted in any improvement of the building permit processing time. Increasing fees without holding the agency accountable for making significant improvements to the processing time is irresponsible and unfair.

We strongly suggest the Council implement actions suggested by the City Auditor and seriously consider overhauling the building permit process to make it timely and transparent, rather than taking a piecemeal approach of addressing symptoms without identifying the underlying problem.

We are strongly opposed to Bill No. 26 and appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on this matter.