

Senate picks Ala Wai for convention site

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By William Kresnak
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The Senate Tourism and Recreation Committee last night chose a portion of the Ala Wai Golf Course as the site for a proposed convention center.

Tourism Chairman Milton Holt said Ala Wai is the Senate choice and should have no problems earning full Senate approval.

"The feeling is we don't want to study it any longer," Holt said.

He said he was cautiously optimistic the plan could win House approval if the concerns of the public about traffic and losing the golf course are adequately addressed.

Under Holt's plan, the 25 acres at

the ewa end of the golf course would be used for the convention center and the remaining 125 acres would be rebuilt into a new golf course.

If all goes well, construction would begin within two years and the center would be completed in five, he said. Holt wants \$20 million for the project to come from the hotel room tax.

The golf course site was chosen because a convention center needs to be near Waikiki since it would be marketed to tourists, Holt said. The Honolulu Zoo and Kapiolani Park were not good sites because of deed restrictions that the property be used only for park purposes. In addition, Holt said, the much promoted Fort DeRussy site, owned by the federal

government, may be too expensive.

Under Holt's proposal, a nine-member authority would be named by the governor to build and operate the center.

Holt said "it's our intention" to spend up to \$10 million to revamp the golf course.

Holt said the Senate does not want to put off choosing the site for further study because the state is losing up to \$150 million a year in new revenues from the convention center.

House Speaker Richard Kawakami was unavailable for comment on the Senate action. House Tourism Chairman Romy Cachola said he favors selecting a convention site this year but is unsure whether the Ala Wai site is the best choice.

"Now I'm looking at the options," Cachola said. "The mood of the Legislature is changing because of the Senate position."

Cachola said he will talk to House members to see if they want to choose a site this year or study the matter further.

Holt's proposal includes \$100,000 for authority operations, \$12 million over two years for design work, and \$500,000 for drainage.

It also includes a \$500,000 grant to the city for a bridge over the Ala Wai Canal, Holt said.

Holt noted the Ala Wai site was the top choice in two studies — one by the Legislative Reference Bureau and one by the consulting firm, Pannell, Kerr Foster.