

23 Tusitala tenants sign accord

By Ken Andrade

Star-Bulletin

Nearly half the tenants in the Tusitala Street area of Waikiki have signed a settlement offer from their landlord agreeing to leave the property in return for future rent payments, and talks continue with other tenants.

Of about 50 tenants still living on the block, 23 have signed the agreement calling for the landowner to pay up to three months' rent if they move out by specific deadlines, according to Jim Boersema, spokesman for landowner U.S.A. Pensee Inc.

About 10 additional tenants are still in talks with U.S.A. Pensee's attorneys, Boersema said, and the company has decided to "leave the door open" on the offer despite its original deadline of Feb. 12.

The company is willing to provide moving trucks and help in finding new housing. Boersema said tenants may also take with them assorted items from the homes and yards.

John Miller, who helped organize the tenants late last year but has since reluctantly agreed to move, said he was told he could even take appliances.

"They have no objection if I take along my stove and refrigerator," Miller said.

William McCorriston, attorney for U.S.A. Pensee, said the company is considering such requests on a case-by-case basis.

“
If you take a look at
this, this is
someone else's
land.”

Gerri Lee

Director, Waikiki Community Center

All this has left Gerri Lee, director of the Waikiki Community Center and frequent mediator of the dispute, satisfied that the company is acting in good faith regarding the tenants after a rocky start.

"Under the circumstances, I do feel that U.S.A. Pensee has attempted to ... help the people," Lee said.

Although the tenants aren't getting what they really want — permission to live in the buildings until the developer has to demolish them to make way for a new structure — they are getting more than the landowner legally has to give, she said.

"If you take a look at this, this is someone else's land," Lee said.

McCorriston said the tenants would be unable or unwilling to pay the high rent that would be needed to support the land, insurance and maintenance costs of the

Tusitala Street property.

Miller said that even though he has signed the agreement and encouraged other tenants to do the same, it doesn't mean he will stop trying to help the holdouts or others in similar situations.

Don Bain, one of the tenants who has not signed the agreement, said he expects the holdouts' ranks to be swelled by people who are willing to leave but can't find housing elsewhere.

"There will be people left here whether they've signed or not," Bain said. "If they can't find a place to move to, I don't know what the legalities of that are."

McCorriston said the company would handle any such cases one at a time, adding that so far tenants have been fairly successful in finding alternative housing. About 10 of the original 60 tenants already have moved out, he said.

The company has no firm timetable for the new project it plans to develop, McCorriston said.

Not only is there the moratorium bill pending in City Council, he added, but the company is unsure whether it will be able to buy the portion of Tusitala Street that intersects with Liliuokalani Avenue, and doesn't know how long it will take to get the necessary permits.

U.S.A. Pensee has two plans for the project, depending on whether it is able to buy the street segment, he said. Both consist mainly of residential condominiums.