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Full-service Waianae YMCA scrapped for youth programs

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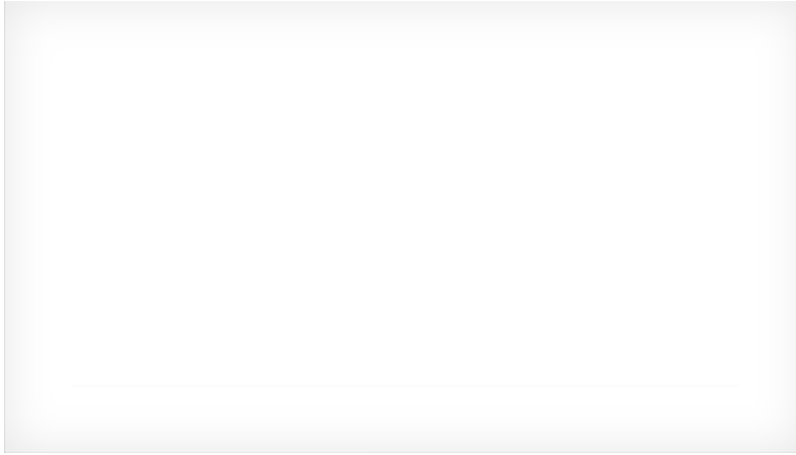
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Question: I believe it's been more than 10 years since the Weinberg Foundation funded land out here in Waianae for a YMCA. The land was cleared and is being maintained. A trailer office was installed and a small parking lot built. I used to attend monthly meetings in the trailer office way back when to discuss the upcoming YMCA. ... In one of the meetings, I remember asking when the YMCA for Waianae would be built. I recall being told by the executive director at the time that as soon as renovations for the Kalihi YMCA were done, they would start building the YMCA in Waianae. Being disabled myself, I asked if there was an accessible swimming pool in the plan, and I believe there was. Can you confirm ... "what and when" exactly is being planned for our community?

Answer: The YMCA of Honolulu no longer plans to build a full-service YMCA at its Waianae site, focusing instead on providing programs for area youth, particularly those with substance-abuse problems, according to a spokeswoman. So there won't be a swimming pool built there.

You are correct that it's been years — about 15, actually — since the now-scraped project was first publicized on Oahu. A favorable environmental assessment by the city in 2002 and newspaper reports in 2003 described plans for a facility on Leihoku Street, then envisioned to include two swimming pools, plus a large building with an exercise studio, wellness center, computer lab and more. No construction date was set, and the YMCA needed to raise millions of dollars to fulfill the original vision. Its focus changed in intervening years.

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Lisa Ontai, vice president of marketing and mission advancement for the YMCA of Honolulu, responded to your question:

"Yes, the YMCA of Honolulu owns a tract of land in Waianae located near the water-treatment plant, which is currently called the Waianae Coast YMCA Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Youth Center. The YMCA Waianae Youth Center houses a small portable trailer and grass field that YMCA youth-program staff use as a work base for our community-school based programs.

"The YMCA does not have plans to build a full-service YMCA at its Waianae site. Instead, the YMCA believes that the best use of the Y's strengths and resources would be to continue to focus on expanding and further developing youth programming on the Waianae Coast.

"Currently, the YMCA of Honolulu provides school-based substance abuse treatment program services through on-site counselors at the schools to youth attending ... Waianae Middle School and High School and Nanakuli Intermediate and High School.

"Y counselors and youth-program staff also bring students to the YMCA Waianae Youth Center from these schools during the after-school hours and school breaks to provide treatment groups and activities. We also provide a teen drop-in center after school and during school breaks at the YMCA Waianae Youth Center site. Our drop-in program provides structured activities to all youth on the Waianae Coast.

"We also provide after-care for teens discharged from substance-abuse programs at the site to assist youth in building a support network, preventing relapse and re-engaging youth in the community. And the Y has recently launched a new mentorship program called 'Reach and Rise' for challenged teens and an opportunity for adults in the community to be trained and to serve as mentors."

For you, the nearest full-service YMCA facilities are the Leeward Y (in Waipahu) and the Mililani Y. Ontai said both have swimming pools with chair-lift access.

You might also check out the Salvation Army's Kroc Center in Kapolei. It's not a Y, so a separate membership would be required, but it is closer to Waianae and has a pool.

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