

KAPAIA SWINGING BRIDGE (LĪHU'E, KAUA'I)

"MAINTENANCE NEGLECT AND RESISTANCE FROM COUNTY LEADERS CREATED THE DILEMMA WE HAVE STRUGGLED WITH FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS."

LARATNE MORIGUCHI

WHAT IS IT?

Built in 1948, the Kapaia Swinging Bridge is a 125-foot-long suspension bridge with two tall, wooden towers anchored by steel cables. The last in a series of bridges used by plantation workers from the Kapaia Camps, footbridges over Kapaia stream have been used since the 1900s. Connecting the communities of Kapaia, Hanamā'ulu and Līhu'e, the Kapaia Swinging Bridge, and its more modest footbridge predecessors, is a historical crossroad of the plantation culture.

WHAT THREATENS IT?

The bridge was last repaired in 1965 and, today, the wooden structure is badly rotted. In 2006, the county closed the bridge, citing safety concerns. Since then, the commu-

nity has organized a restoration effort: In 2008, it was put on the state register of historic places, and, in 2010, the county of Kaua'i agreed to a preliminary engineering report for restoration.

The news wasn't good. "The vast majority of the wooden structure was in very poor condition and there was little that could be salvaged. The recommendation was therefore made to rebuild

MONEY ON THE HOUSE

Both the state of Hawai'i and the federal government give significant tax benefits for people who preserve their historic homes and businesses. Surprisingly, Hawai'i property owners don't take full advantage of either of these programs, says Angie Westfall, of the State Historic Preservation Division. Here's her quick guide to the money you could be making.

RESIDENTIAL

Pay only \$300 a year—forever—in property tax if your house is on the state or national historic register by applying for the Hawai'i Historic Property Tax Exemption. "It fosters preservation by adding a financial incentive to preserve—rather than demolish—older buildings that are significant to a sense of place," says Westfall. If your property isn't yet on the register, now might be the time to apply. Information is available at the State Historic Preservation Division website: hawaii.gov/dlnr/hpd/hpregistr.htm.

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Find out how to apply for the exemption, if your home is already on the register, at the Hawai'i Historic Foundation website: historichawaii.org/HPRC/tax/HITaxExemptions.html.

COMMERCIAL

The federal tax credit is for commercial properties, but would include a residence used as a business, such as a bed and breakfast. You have to be on the national register to apply, and the tax credit is 20 percent for costs associated with rehabbing an old property. It's a joint program between the Hawai'i State Historic Preservation Division, the National Park Service and the IRS, so there are a few stages to the process, and rules with which to comply. However, having taxes go down permanently may make it worth the effort. For information on the program and the application process, visit nps.gov/hps/tps/tax/incentives

There's also a local commercial historic property tax exemption that covers 50 percent of the real property tax. It requires a maintenance plan for applicants and only applies to registered historic properties in the City and County of Honolulu. It does not cover resorts or agricultural properties. historichawaii.org/HPRC/Commercial_Prop_tax.html

the entire wooden portion of the bridge," says Kaua'i County engineer Larry Dill.

The proposed restoration would alter the look of the bridge, because it includes parking areas on each side of the bridge, a switchback ramp for wheelchair access and other modernization.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

In August, Dill announced the county would restore the bridges' two towers, buying the community about five years to raise the funds necessary to restore the entire bridge and work out the details of its physical restoration.

"Maintenance neglect and resistance from county leaders created the dilemma we have struggled with for the past five years," says Laraine Moriguchi, director of the group Save Kapaia Swinging Bridge. "The administration's willingness to at least stabilize the bridge by replacing the two towers was a welcome surprise," she said. Though the County Council appropriated \$230,000 for the restoration, only \$80,000 will be used to replace the towers.

"It would be wonderful if they would use the remainder to finish the bridge restoration," Moriguchi said. The group plans to keep the pressure on to move restoration plans forward. **PAU**