



WPI



**CHINESE CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE OF HAWAII**

Revitalizing Honolulu Chinatown – A Whitepaper Initiative

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Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii

Executive Summary

Honolulu's Chinatown is one of the most historically and culturally significant districts in Hawaii, serving as a center for commerce, heritage, and community life for well over a century.

However, in recent years, the district has faced growing challenges, including economic decline, reduced foot traffic, public safety concerns, urban blight, and shifting demographics.

These issues have impacted both the business environment and overall community vitality.

In response, the Chinese Chamber has launched the **Honolulu Chinatown Whitepaper Initiative** — a comprehensive, business-led effort to assess current conditions and develop actionable, community-driven solutions.

This initiative aims to provide a unified voice for stakeholders while supporting policymakers, city agencies, and community partners in prioritizing revitalization strategies.

The project focuses on gathering and analyzing key data, including business composition, tenant turnover, space utilization, and demographic trends. It also incorporates stakeholder engagement through interviews & surveys with merchants, residents, and community organizations to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented.

In addition, the study evaluates best practices from other successful Chinatown districts across the United States.

A structured SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis highlights Chinatown's unique cultural assets and economic potential, while identifying critical gaps in safety, cleanliness, and infrastructure. Based on these findings, this whitepaper presents targeted recommendations aligned with city planning priorities and long-term economic development goals.

Ultimately, this initiative seeks to strengthen Chinatown as a vibrant, safe, and economically sustainable district while preserving its rich cultural identity.

The final report will serve as a strategic roadmap to guide future investment, policy decisions, and community collaboration, ensuring that Chinatown continues to thrive as a vital part of Honolulu's urban and cultural landscape.

Revitalizing Honolulu Chinatown – A Whitepaper Initiative

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Introduction

Chinatowns all around the world each have a unique and vibrant history, and are very culturally rich in their own ways, important to their local people. Despite this, however, Chinatown neighborhoods have struggled historically due to factors such as discriminatory legislation, gentrification and dilution of authenticity. Chinatown in Honolulu is one of Hawaii's oldest and most culturally rich neighborhoods, as well as one of the most historically and culturally significant Chinatowns globally. Like most Chinatowns, however, it is faced with some challenges which pose threats to local businesses, as well as the residents living in the neighborhood. Honolulu's Chinatown is faced with challenges related to the lack of infrastructure preservation, conflicting political factors, as well as ground level challenges related to the mentally ill, homelessness, and drugs which create a negative perception of the neighborhood, driving tourists away and ultimately becoming consequential for the local businesses.

There is no unified documentation which outlines the current economic and social landscape of Honolulu's Chinatown, nor is there a consolidated voice representing the diverse set of stakeholders involved in the district. Without information regarding Chinatown's current conditions being widely public and known, or backed by any credible evidence, the challenges faced by the neighborhood are far less likely to be properly addressed. Chinatown as a neighborhood includes involvement of many stakeholders who have a strong stake in revitalizing the neighborhood. With that, the Chinese Chamber and WPI work together to identify goals and strategies to benefit Honolulu's Chinatown based on the views of key stakeholders.

Other Chinatowns' Revitalization Efforts

Despite their wealth of cultural and historical value, many Chinatowns in the United States and Canada face similar challenges concerning safety, business, and poverty. Published analyses of Chinatown revitalization case studies in San Francisco (Xie, 2019), Vancouver (AECOM, 2011), Philadelphia and Boston (Acolin 2018), reveal similarities and unique differences in details such as research methods, stakeholders consulted, challenges identified, recommendations posed, and outcomes of revitalization efforts. All of the four case studies utilized quantitative data sets including demographic, economic and business data. The San Francisco and Vancouver case studies utilized interviews; Vancouver also utilized a business survey and developed a SWOT analysis. Stakeholders consulted across case studies spanned property owners, business owners, community organizations, and city council members. The most overlap across the case studies appears in the challenges identified. The following concerns were identified in all or multiple of the case studies:

- Low median income, high poverty compared to rest of city
- Increasing cost of living
- Chinese population moving elsewhere

- Small businesses struggle to stay in business
- Safety concerns due to homeless activity
- Vacant storefronts, deteriorating buildings
- Lack of nightlife, streets unsafe at night due to lack of foot traffic

Solutions that have had effective outcomes have included:

- Helping small businesses improve advertising
- Funding support for building renovation
- Night markets and block parties

A complete summary of similarities and differences between the four mentioned case studies can be found in **Appendix A**. Of course, unique case studies will offer unique opportunities for solutions. Yet, understanding best practices in other Chinatown Revitalization studies provides valuable insight into effective data collection methods, and solutions which may be considered for replicability.

Honolulu's Chinatown

Among the oldest Chinatowns in the United States, Honolulu, Hawaii's Chinatown is celebrated for its rich culture, diverse population, and unique history. From the 1850s to the 1880s, Chinese laborers were shipped to Honolulu by English colonists to work on sugar cane plantations under five-year contracts (Chang, 2003). When these contracts expired, the Chinese laborers began settling in the area along Honolulu Harbor, which became known as Chinatown, opening their own shops and restaurants close to their homes. The neighborhood soon became home to many immigrants from other parts of Southeast Asia as well, such as Japan and Vietnam, bringing to the area a diverse cultural makeup. Due to two major fires that occurred in the neighborhood, one in 1886 and the other in 1900, most of Chinatown's original wooden architecture was destroyed and replaced by the brick structures that remain in the present day (Chang, 2003). Throughout the 20th century, as the population of Honolulu increased dramatically with an influx of tourism after Hawaii was annexed by the United States, people of higher socioeconomic status flocked to the outskirts of the city, isolating those who were less fortunate in the downtown area, which includes Chinatown (Daws, 1967). Even in the downtown area, however, the cost of living has increased dramatically over the past century due to a booming tourism industry and continuous tourism-focused development, posing challenges to the families who lived in the area beforehand.

Chinatown in Honolulu is a historically significant neighborhood that is part of Downtown Honolulu. It is roughly 0.82 square miles (522 acres) in size, though boundaries vary slightly depending on planning and historic designations (National Park Service [NPS], 2019). Honolulu Harbor to the west, Nu'uuanu Stream to the north, Beretania Street to the east, and Nu'uuanu Avenue to the south define the boundaries of the district. Chinatown is part of Neighborhood Board 13 (Downtown–Chinatown), whose official map sets the limits for planning and civic engagement (City & County of Honolulu, 2025). The neighborhood's significance to Hawai'i's commercial and immigrant history is reflected in its listing as the Chinatown Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places and its dense concentration of historic resources (NPS, 2019). Chinatown is home to 79 restaurants, 88 retail shops, 115 service-specific businesses and 12 art galleries (CoreGroupOne, 2025).

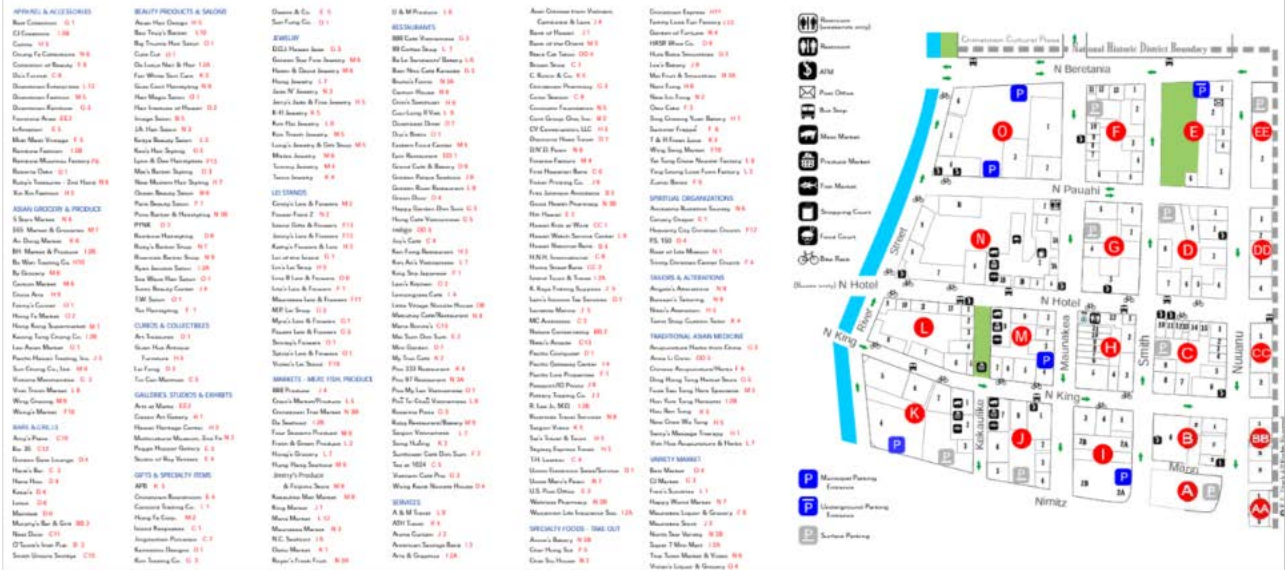


Figure 1. Honolulu Chinatown Business and Restaurant Directory (CID, 2025).

Development patterns have historically been determined by the unique riverfront condition created by the neighborhood's northern edge along Nu'uanu Stream, seen on the left of the map in Figure 1. One noteworthy feature of Chinatown is that the City and County of Honolulu hold a sizable amount of the land and buildings, providing the local government an exceptionally powerful influence in redevelopment decisions. In terms of socioeconomic status, Chinatown is a section of one of Honolulu's most varied and low-income metropolitan districts, with a higher percentage of immigrants and small, family-run enterprises than the city as a whole.

Chinatown was recently included in the City and County of Honolulu's Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Action Plan, which highlights the neighborhood's importance for future development because of its closeness to the city's rail system and important transit routes. While acknowledging the need to maintain the neighborhood's historic and cultural character, the TOD Chinatown Action Plan places a strong emphasis on promoting walkability, boosting mixed-use development, supporting affordable housing, and upgrading public spaces (City & County of Honolulu, 2025). Concerns of public safety, business retention, and the compatibility of new construction with existing cultural assets were brought to light via community engagement during the planning process. The TOD framework offers a strategic planning vision, but its implementation has been slow, and many small enterprises are still having trouble keeping up with growing expenses and uncertainty.

Chinatown in Honolulu was particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, which made the neighborhood's already-existing social and economic problems worse. Small businesses—particularly eateries, marketplaces, and family-run stores—saw protracted closures, sharp drops in foot traffic, and protracted financial difficulties. Many businesses were unable to recover, leaving storefronts empty and undermining the commercial ecology, according to personal correspondence with Sonny Zhang and Jon Cook of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (Personal communication, January 2026). Chinatown was particularly vulnerable during the epidemic because of its emphasis on in-person business, tourism, and nightlife.

In addition to causing financial harm, the pandemic worsened the public's opinion of the neighborhood's cleanliness and safety, deterring patrons and tourists from coming back. The region's capacity to recover was further hampered by decreased activity and scarce public resources. Businesses in Chinatown continue to report reduced client volumes and persistent uncertainty, despite the fact that other neighborhoods of Honolulu have witnessed a greater comeback. These effects draw attention to fundamental weaknesses like old infrastructure, reliance on small businesses, and restricted access to financing. The COVID-19 aftereffects highlight the necessity of focused recovery plans based on the experiences of business owners and current circumstances. Developing practical, community-focused solutions going forward requires an understanding of how the pandemic shaped Chinatown's current problems.

Representing Chinatown's business community and promoting its cultural and economic viability are major responsibilities of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii (<https://www.chinesechamber.com/>). The Chamber, one of Hawaii's oldest business associations, acts as a vital liaison between local residents, government representatives, and small company owners. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce sought a business-driven white paper that was solely focused on Chinatown after realizing that there was no thorough, business-led evaluation of the neighborhood's current state.

The Chamber's engagement in this project is part of a larger effort to make sure that business viewpoints are included in policy and planning conversations that have traditionally prioritized physical redevelopment above economic realities. By delivering this study, the Chamber hopes to record present issues, pinpoint areas for development, and give decision-makers easily accessible, locally relevant information.

Methodology

The goal of this project was to document and assess Honolulu Chinatown's current conditions and develop recommendations for actionable, community-driven solutions which leverage the neighborhood's existing strengths. This project is primarily a business-led study, focused on supporting the local businesses with input from the merchants themselves, but also from other general stakeholders who can play a part and support as well. From the findings, we've developed a whitepaper to inform city, business and nonprofit decision-making towards revitalization of Chinatown. We pursued the following objectives to achieve the goal:

1. Understand the perspectives, concerns, and priorities of Chinatown businesses.
2. Develop a SWOT analysis to understand Chinatown's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
3. Develop a whitepaper to report project findings and present actionable, community-driven recommendations to stakeholders.

All research activities carried out for this project were reviewed and approved by the Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) Institutional Review Board (IRB-26-0294).

Objective 1: Perspectives, Concerns, and Priorities of Chinatown Businesses

Our first objective was to learn and understand the perspectives, concerns, and priorities of Chinatown businesses with a focus on a few different areas. Given that this is a business-driven study, we looked for things such as the distribution of different business types, the tenure of various businesses in Chinatown, revenue trends over the years, as well as the merchants' input on the various challenges and concerns regarding safety/security and general business operation.

To gather this information, we conducted a survey. We distributed a survey form (See **Appendix B**) to 136 merchants in Chinatown by going door to door with the surveys, informing them of our mission and seeking their support in it. To collect the surveys, we visited each of the merchants once more about a week later. Out of the total 136 forms that were distributed, we were able to collect 44 responses, yielding roughly a 32% response rate.

After collecting the surveys, we entered the data into an Excel spreadsheet, which we used to perform quantitative analysis and generate graphs. For open-response questions, we grouped responses by theme to determine patterns of agreement. The aim for the conduction of this survey is to determine the business landscape of the neighborhood, as well as determining which of the neighborhood's widely discussed challenges are of the most concern from the perspective of the merchant owners.

Additionally, we held a meeting with Honolulu Police Department Major Henry Roberts and Lieutenant Steve Lin. They provided insight into some of the work they have been doing as a department, particularly over the last five years. With the meeting, we were also provided with crime statistics since the pandemic. With this meeting and the information that it provided, we looked to analyze any trends over the years to see which direction crime has been going, and its correlation to the work HPD has been doing. It additionally provides insight from the law enforcement point of view on the overall concerns and priorities of Chinatown's safety and security.

Objective 2: Develop a SWOT Analysis

Our second objective was to develop a SWOT analysis to understand stakeholders' views on stakeholders' views Chinatown's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. We sought perspectives from diverse stakeholders' views across different groups, spanning nonprofit, business and government, to gain thorough insight to inform the analysis, and to also understand unique impacts faced by specific groups. This analysis was intended to provide a basis for understanding where people involved in Chinatown want to see change, and what specific opportunities exist for such change. We sought to answer the following research questions:

- What are Chinatown's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?
- On what topics in these areas do different stakeholders agree and disagree?
- Where can quantitative data bridge gaps between conflicting viewpoints?
- What actionable opportunities for improvement exist in the Chinatown community?

To satisfy this objective, we conducted interviews (see **Appendix C**) with ten nonprofit leaders, eight business leaders, and four government officials including, state, city, and law enforcement (see **Appendix D**). These interviews were coordinated by Sonny Zhang of the Chinese Chamber. We asked open-ended questions which we altered slightly to address the specific interviewee's background, such as asking government officials what changes they actually have the power to enact. Interview responses, as well as responses to open-ended questions from the merchant survey, were then sorted

into a table (see Appendix D) based on whether they reflected strengths, weaknesses, opportunities or threats. Repeated mentions of the same claim were omitted from the table for simplification. Opportunities were then sorted based on which particular stakeholder group they pertain to, for consideration in the next objective of our project.

Objective 3: Develop a Whitepaper

The third objective was to develop a whitepaper to report study findings and present actionable, community-driven recommendations to stakeholders. The aim of the whitepaper was to provide a unified document for information about Chinatown to inform potential business investment, government planning efforts, nonprofit advocacy for merchants and residents.

To develop the whitepaper, we compiled the data collected throughout the study to present findings on Chinatown and provide context for a set of five-year goals and recommendations. We have selected to work with a five-year timeframe, as the Chinese Chamber plans to conduct another whitepaper initiative five years from now to reassess the neighborhood’s progress towards revitalization.

To develop a set of five-year goals, we identified Chinatown’s most cited weaknesses according to the study, and selected metrics to monitor progress in those areas. Working with Chinese Chamber of Commerce Executive Vice President Sonny Zhang, we proposed specific goals for improvement of each metric in five years’ time.

Additionally, building on study findings, and aiming to support the five-year goals, we developed specific recommendations for stakeholders which we presented in the whitepaper. In developing the whitepaper recommendations, we sought to answer the following research questions:

- How can Chinatown’s strengths be leveraged to address the neighborhood’s challenges?
- What actions are both feasible and supported by community input?
- Where can revitalization efforts that have already been made be expanded?

RESULTS

This section begins with Chinatown’s crime statistics provided by Honolulu Police Department, followed by a summary of findings from the survey of business owners in Chinatown, highlighting their perceptions of the business climate (See **Appendix E** for full results). We then present strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats highlighted by key stakeholders we interviewed.

Crime Statistics From 2021-2025

CRIME CATEGORY	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
1. Homicide	1	1	0	0	0
2. Aggravated Assault	48	86	68	55	66
3. Simple Assault	265	271	167	147	163
4. Sex Assault	21	20	18	23	15
5. Robbery	99	113	69	43	50
6. Burglary	69	69	82	47	34
7. Theft	675	572	448	332	327

8. Threatening	71	53	65	34	35
9. Theft From Motor Vehicle (UEMV)	202	240	224	135	142
10. Motor Vehicle Theft	110	122	116	97	97
11. Weapon Law Violations	20	18	13	11	14
12. Drugs / Narcotics	183	89	81	150	102
13. Liquor Law Violations	209	129	52	243	59
TOTAL CRIME COUNT	1,973	1,783 (-9.6%)	1,403 (-21.3%)	1,317 (-6.1%)	1,104 (-16.2%)

Figure 2. Crime Statistics Per Category since 2021 (Per Honolulu Police Department)

Figure 2 shows the crime statistics of Chinatown over the past five years, broken down by crime category. In the midst of the pandemic (In 2021), crime was significantly higher than it is now in nearly all categories with the total number of crimes decreasing by 44% during that time, reflecting an annual average decrease of 14%. Though total crime has decreased significantly over the years, there are still some types of crime which remain a challenge. Notably, aggravated assault has increased. The frequency of general assault and theft also remain a concern with hundreds of cases consistently taking place each year.

In the meeting with HPD Major Henry Roberts and Lieutenant High Shin (Steve) Lin, we were informed that since the pandemic, Honolulu Police Department has been working more in conjunction with other organizations such as Chinatown Task Force and C.O.R.E, and expanding their network to work towards enforcing the common safety and security concerns experienced by those in Chinatown. Though overall homelessness and crime have gone down, it is the few repeat offenders which account for much of the safety and security concerns, so HPD’s focus in working with other groups is to place more focus there and look to reduce the quantity of frequent offenders (Personal Communication, Henry Roberts and Steve Lin, February 27th, 2026).

Merchant Perspectives on Chinatown’s Business Climate

Our sample space of survey respondents was mixed but consisted primarily of restaurants and retailers. As shown in Figure 3, 39% of our merchant participants identified their business to be restaurants, and 42% identified as retailers. The other 19% included services such as hair and nail salons, tattoo shops, art galleries, jewelers, and non-profit organizations.

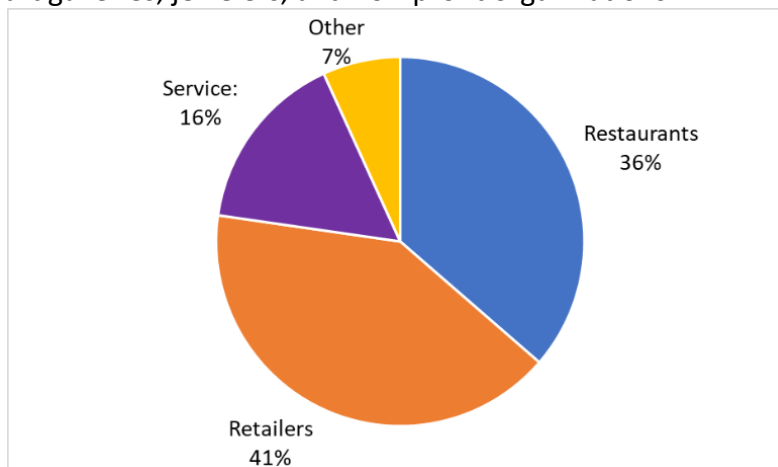


Figure 3. Distribution of Business Types Among Survey Responses (N=44)

A large portion of the survey participants included businesses which have been operating in Chinatown for a long time. Over 50% of the merchants which participated in the survey have been operating in Chinatown for over 15 years. **Figure 4** displays the distribution of business age reported by the survey respondents.

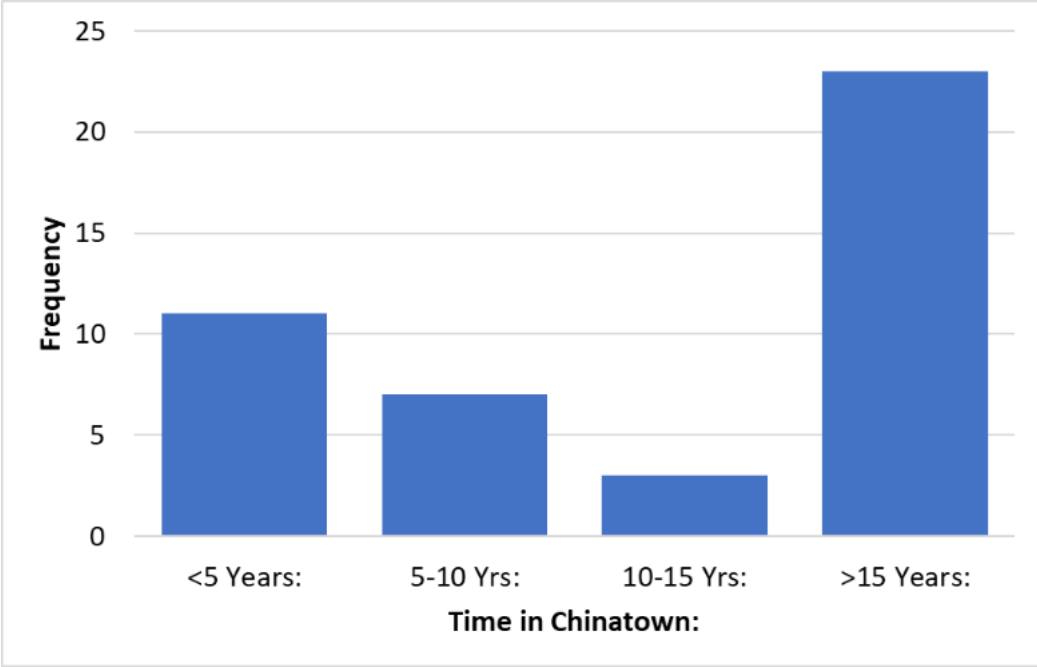


Figure 4. Survey Respondents' Number of Years Operating in Chinatown (N=44)

Generally, the different merchants' years of operation corresponded to their methods of attracting customers with longer running businesses relying more on traditional word of mouth, while newer and younger merchants were more likely to utilize more modern methods such as social media/internet marketing. 92% of the survey respondents reported that they rely fully or partially on word of mouth to attract customers, while only 44% reported use of social media marketing.

There was still quite a variation in business growth over the years, as reported by our participants. As seen in **Figure 5**, the responses regarding revenue trends over the years were very mixed with roughly a third of respondents reporting a revenue decrease, and another third of respondents reporting an increase in revenue over the last five years. The remaining responses didn't lean very strongly one way or the other.

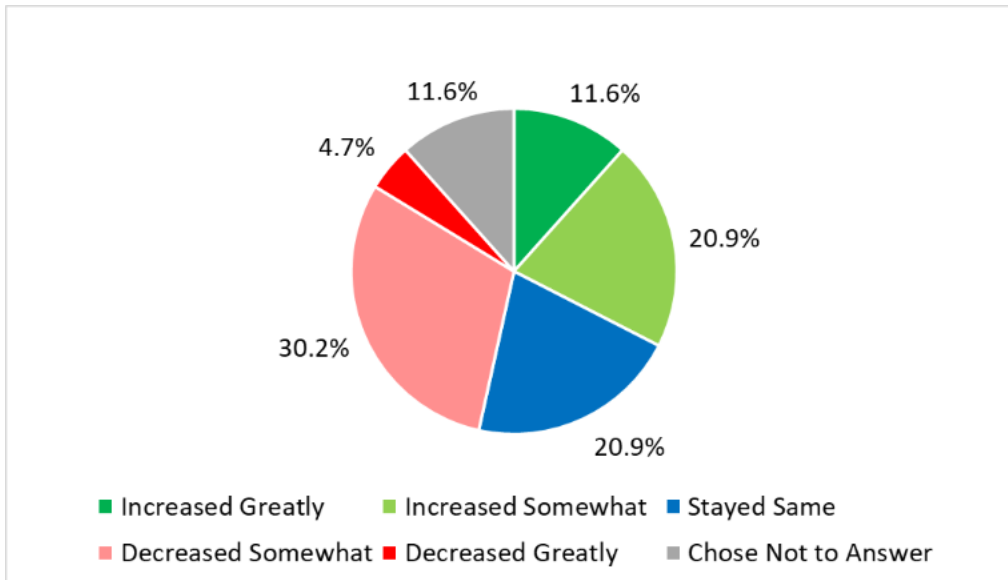


Figure 5. Survey Respondents' Reported Revenue Trends Over Last Five Years (N=44)

Survey respondents reported high levels of concern with a range of business challenges. **Figure 6** shows the percentage breakdown of responses for each area of concern, representing how much each merchant agrees that the respective issue is a challenge for operation of their business. Response values in dark and light red represent higher levels of concern, while light and dark green represent lower levels of concern. As can be seen, the areas of broadest concern among respondents were parking limitations and the high cost of rent and doing business.

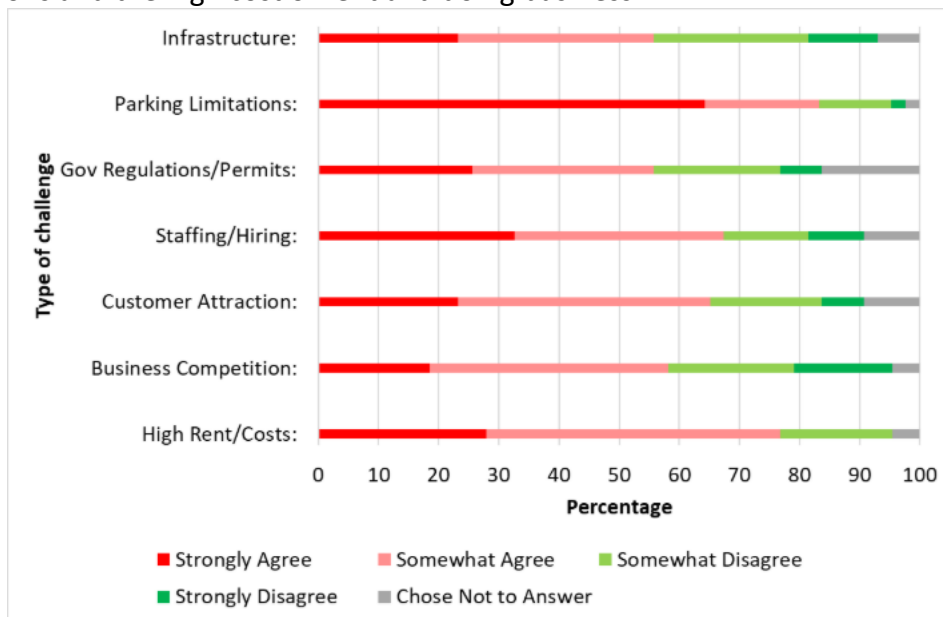


Figure 6. Survey Respondents' Degree of Concern for Business Challenges (N=44)

These challenges faced by merchants are important, however, there are much more than just business operation factors which pose a challenge for them, especially in terms of safety and security. The most common increases in safety and security concerns reported by businesses were in the presence of homeless people and drug addicts in Chinatown. **Figure 7**, Each bar in graph represents a percentage

breakdown of the extent to which the merchants believe each of the issues has increased/decreased over recent years.

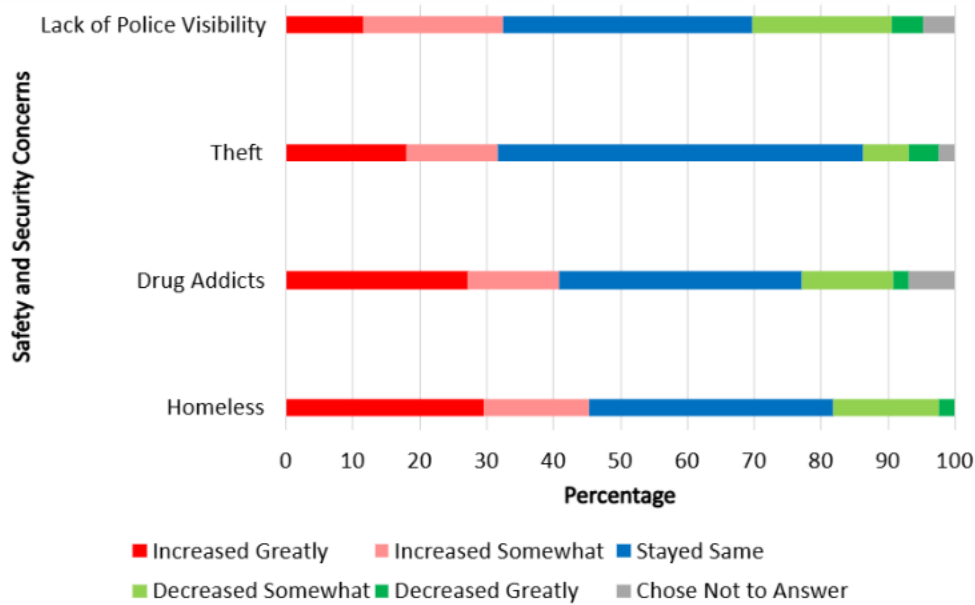


Figure 7. Survey Respondents' Feedback on Safety and Security Trends Over Recent Years (N=44)

A majority of survey respondents thought that increasing public restrooms would draw more visitors to the district, but as can be seen in **Figure 8**, almost 40% disagreed. Survey comments suggested that some businesses are concerned that more public restrooms will draw more homeless attention, which is represented in **Figure 9**. The argument for public restrooms is quite nuanced in this case, as there are many factors to be considered.

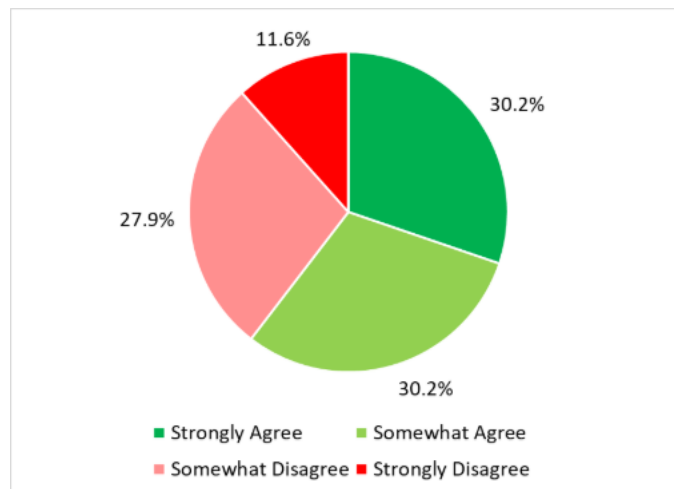


Figure 8. Survey Respondents on Whether Increasing Availability of Public Restrooms Will Draw in More Visitors

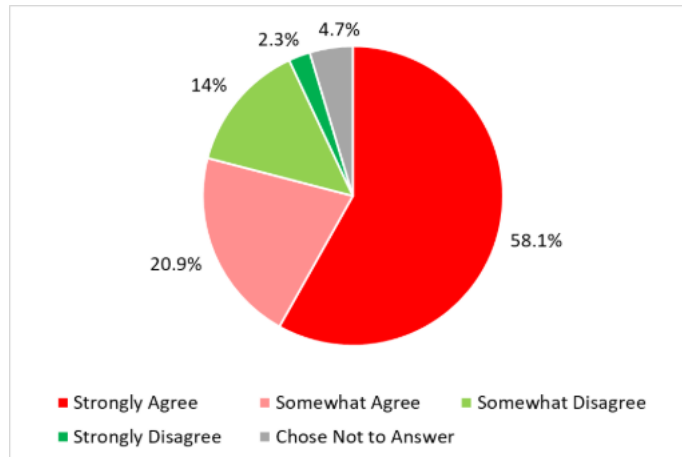


Figure 9. Survey Respondents on Whether Increasing Availability of Public Restrooms Will Increase Homeless Activity

Unsurprisingly, a majority of respondents believed that Chinatown’s needle exchange program for drug users should be moved outside the district. **Figure 10** shows that over 75% of the survey respondents believe that the needle exchange station being moved outside of Chinatown would be beneficial for the safety and security of their business and Chinatown overall.

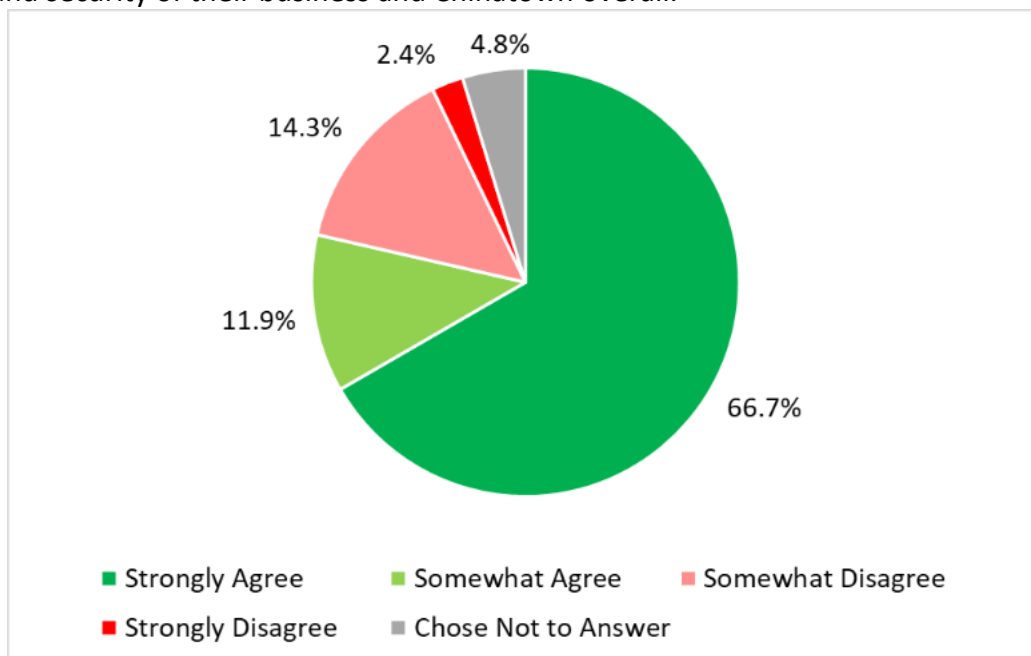


Figure 10. Survey Respondents on Whether Needle Exchange Station Should be Moved Outside of Chinatown

Many of the survey participants stated that Chinatown’s surveillance cameras are ineffective for Chinatown’s security, however the concept is quite complex as there are many layers to it. There is an argument that there should be a higher quantity of cameras for one, however there's another argument that maybe more emphasis can be placed on the monitoring of the cameras. Additionally, some claim that increased awareness of the presence of cameras through methods such as signage/labeling can improve the camera system. **Figure 11** shows the responses from the survey referring to these different aspects of camera surveillance, and which ways the participants feel the overall camera security can become more effective.

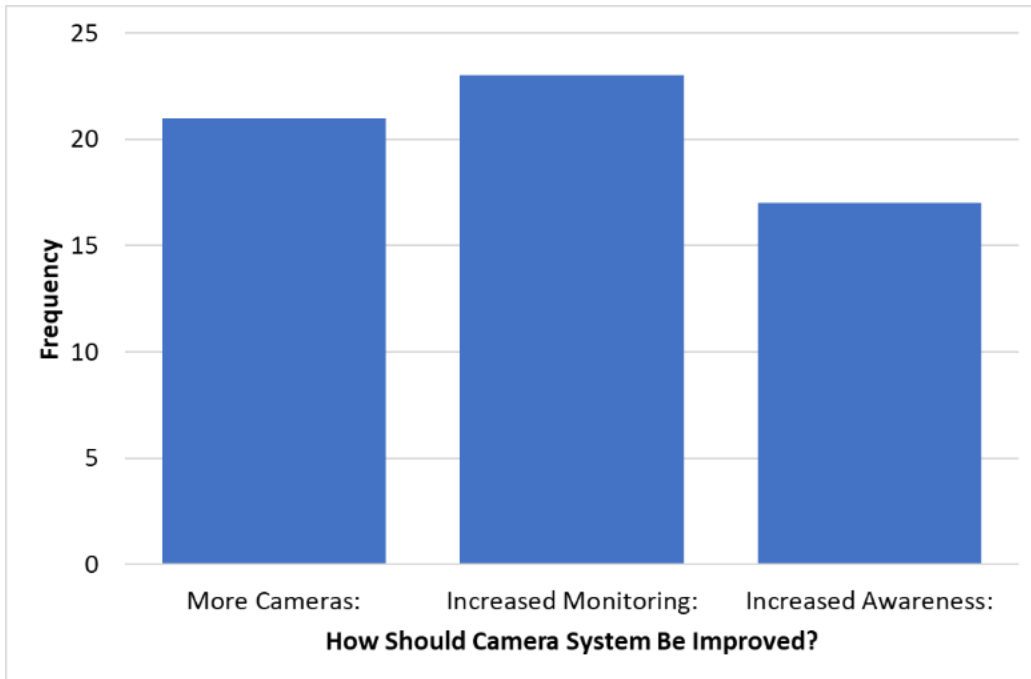


Figure 11. Survey Respondents on Ways to Make Chinatown’s Camera Surveillance More Efficient (44 Respondents)

Many of the survey respondents expressed challenges they experienced operating their business in relation to neighborhood infrastructure shortcomings, particularly electrical and sewage/plumbing challenges. **Figure 12** shows the number of those who responded that each of these neighborhood infrastructure categories pose a challenge for their business. Some also responded with other open-ended responses such as parking, bike lanes, and overall road utilization.

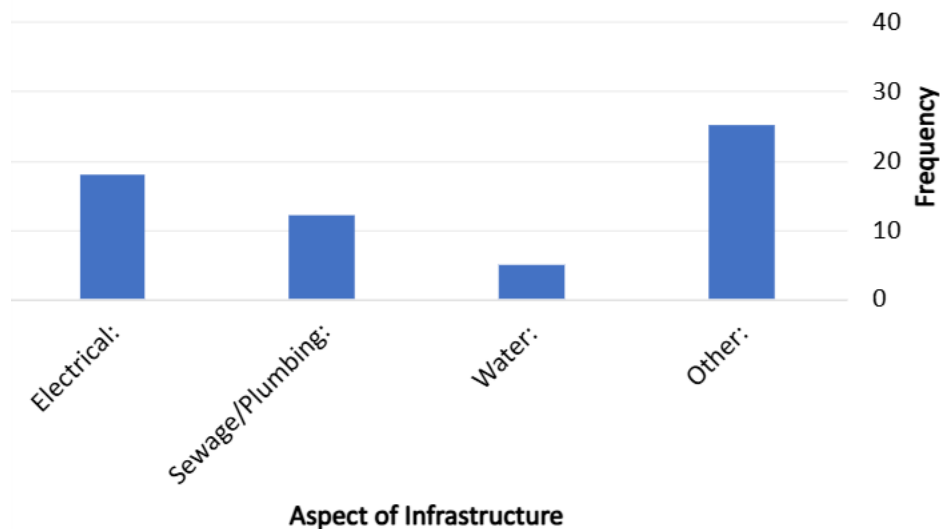


Figure 12. Survey Respondents on Which Aspect of Neighborhood Infrastructure Poses the Greatest Challenge

A majority of survey respondents expressed lack of interest in expanding their business, or hours of operation. 73% of respondents said they have no business expansion plans in the future. 60% said they

have not and would not consider extending their hours of operation later into the day, citing reasons such as staffing, safety and security, and lack of evening foot traffic in the neighborhood.

SWOT: Stakeholder Perspectives

Common ground themes across stakeholder groups

While different stakeholder groups raised some unique views from one another, a lot of common ground views arose as well (see **Appendix D**).

The most common strengths noted across all groups included the neighborhood’s vibrant history and “melting pot” culture, in harmony with strong preservation of Chinese traditions.

Weaknesses highlighted across the board included reduced foot traffic in the neighborhood, particularly in the evening and since the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviewees attributed the decrease in foot traffic to the homeless population on the streets, noting that it is a select few disruptive homeless individuals who are responsible for the majority of the neighborhood’s homeless-related incidents, driving visitors away from the neighborhood and making residents feel unsafe on the streets.

Key threats addressed included Chinatown’s negative reputation as an unclean, unsafe neighborhood, which is believed to deter tourists and Honolulu locals from visiting the neighborhood, as well as the uncertainty that accompanies the impending mayoral election, two years from now, and whether or not the next mayor of Honolulu will prioritize Chinatown issues to the same extent as the current mayor.

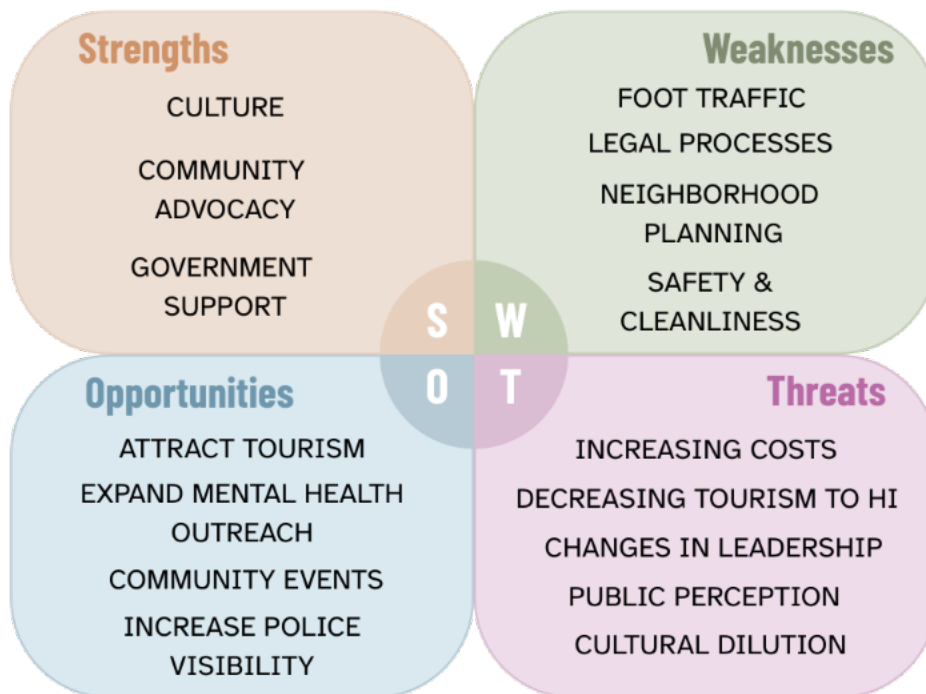


Figure 13. Categorized SWOT Analysis

Businesses

Of the stakeholder groups interviewed, business leaders are the ones who often spend the most time in Chinatown, running their business. Therefore this group provided unique insight on the lived Chinatown experience. Chinatown's "melting pot" culture was cited as a particular asset to businesses in the area, because the neighborhood is welcoming to a variety of business types from a variety of backgrounds. Weaknesses cited often by stakeholders under the business umbrella included:

- Struggling to employ people to work at night to extend business hours.
- Merchants are very busy trying to make a living and lack lobbying strength.
- Permitting process is very slow for opening or expanding businesses (often 1-2 years).
- Poor planning and maintenance of infrastructure such as electric, sewer, trash pickup: electric is expensive for Hawaiian Electric to maintain in Chinatown because the system is underground.

Note: Hawaiian Electric has made recent improvements to Chinatown's electrical infrastructure (see **Appendix F**).

Government

Local government representatives spoke of efforts that have already been made to address the weaknesses raised across stakeholder groups, such as the homelessness crisis. The C.O.R.E (Crisis Outreach Response and Engagement) program in Honolulu, introduced in 2021, responds to non-violent reports concerning homeless individuals, seeking to provide shelter and care with the ultimate goal of getting people off the streets. This program, however, fails to address the issue of those who refuse treatment, and those are often the same people involved in the most problematic incidents in Chinatown. Despite pushback from civil liberties advocates, State Senator Karl Rhoads has highlighted the opportunity for the C.O.R.E program to more often utilize ACT (Assisted Community Treatment) petitions. An ACT petition allows for individuals to be mandated treatment, when they refuse treatment but are deemed a danger to themselves or others. Despite the many challenges and obstacles that the C.O.R.E team faces with their everyday tasks, their work in conjunction with the Honolulu police department has been making significant progress. According to their team, Chinatown is about "a dozen people away from having most of the regular, chronically mentally ill individuals off the streets in Chinatown and placed" (Andy Sugg, Chief of Staff of Mayor Office, email, Feb 26th, 2026).

With regard to challenges surrounding permitting, a recently introduced bill to Honolulu city council, Bill 10 (2026) (see **Appendix G**), calls for an amendment to the city's permitting process, allowing businesses under certain categories to bypass bidding, a factor which causes great delay in the permitting process. One of the categories highlighted in the bill is any operations located in the Chinatown Special District. In response to public interest in increasing street closure allowances in Chinatown for community events, Bill 50 (see **Appendix H**) has been both introduced and passed, to limit street closures in Waikiki and allow for more to take place in the Downtown/Chinatown area.

Nonprofit

One of Chinatown's strengths is its large presence of nonprofit organizations interested in supporting the neighborhood's residents, culture and businesses. However, there exist gaps in communication between these organizations, and the opportunity exists for greater coordination among organizations

in revitalization efforts. Interviewees often praised Chinatown for its festivals and celebrations, but the frequency with which these festivals and celebrations occur is limited. Interviewees suggested that more regularly occurring events can increase foot traffic on a regular basis and shift Chinatown's reputation more towards its regularly anticipated events.

DISCUSSION

In this section, we pose five-year revitalization goals and specific recommendations to different stakeholder groups to aid in pursuing the goals, based on findings from this study.

Five-year Goals for the Revitalization of Chinatown

Informed by project findings, we offer the following five-year goals for the Chinatown community:

- Increase the percentage of visitors to O'ahu that visit Chinatown from 5% to 10%. Achieving this can address business concerns about decreased foot traffic.
- Decrease the number of homeless persons responsible for a disproportionate amount of street crime from ten, to less than five. This will also address business concerns, with relation to safety and security.
- Achieve a 10 % average annual decrease in overall crime rate in Chinatown over the next five years. This will continue the recent trend of steady annual decreases since 2021.
- Expand business operating hours to an average of 10 hours per day. Of the 40 businesses that shared with us their hours of operation in the survey, it was found that the businesses were open for an average of 8.4 hours per day. Extended business hours, particularly in the evening, is another factor that could draw more foot traffic to the neighborhood.

Recommendations

Here, we offer recommendations to government, nonprofit and business stakeholders which aim to support the five-year goals offered.

Government

The study's conclusions indicate that for Chinatown's long-term revitalization, government intervention must focus on structural stabilization, regulatory efficiency, and enhancement of public safety. One basic suggestion is to give tax incentives for renovating older buildings. Many of Chinatown's buildings are not taken care of because renovations are too expensive, even though they are important from an architectural and cultural point of view. Tax breaks or credits that are only available to certain property owners could encourage them to make improvements to their facades, upgrade their electrical and sewage facilities, and make sure they are safe while keeping the district's historic character intact.

Safety reforms should also be a top priority. Authorities could use Assisted Community Treatment (ACT) petitions more often to make repeat offenders who refuse voluntary services get treatment, which would put their own or someone else's safety at risk. One of the main gaps this strategy fills is the difficulty of managing people who go through crisis situations repeatedly without long-term help. In addition to this strategy, increasing foot patrols by the Honolulu Police Department could make merchants feel safer, act as a visual deterrent, and help local businesses and police work together.

Another structural suggestion is to move the needle exchange station to a place other than Chinatown. Stakeholders think that Chinatown bears an unfair share of the negative effects of the city's social service delivery because harm reduction programs are mostly located there. Relocating the needle exchange station would maintain the city's public health services while lessening the burden on the Chinatown district.

Support for Bill 10 would speed up the process for getting permits in the Chinatown Special District. Long waits for permits stop people from investing and growing. Making administrative processes easier would help both new and established businesses.

Last but not least, organizing monthly or quarterly events in Chinatown area at Fort Street Mall or road closures on street to support organized street markets could be an effective way to use public space. The district's identity could be positively changed, foot traffic could increase, and tourism could be encouraged by the creation of such pedestrian zones.

Non-profit organizations

Nonprofits in Chinatown are in a unique position to bring people together, organize events, and build community. The study's results show that there are a lot of charitable groups working in the area, but they often don't work together. Better cooperation between groups could have a big effect on impact. By holding monthly meetings between different organizations, sharing a communication platform, or a single newsletter, and working together on safety, events, and advocacy, nonprofits could work together better, avoid doing the same work twice, and plan better. A shared digital calendar for advertising events could also make things more open and collaborative.

The main goal of programming should be to make public spaces more active in ways that encourage health and positive participation. Organized, family-friendly activities at monthly street markets on street from 12 to 8 p.m. would help local businesses by bringing in more people. Regular, predictable events that encourage people to visit the district on a regular basis change how people see it over time.

Nonprofits could also add more volunteer foot patrol programs, especially in the evening when safety is most important. Volunteer patrols don't replace official law enforcement, but they do help with more visibility, community stewardship, and unofficial public space guardianship.

Nonprofits could also look into partnerships to make Chinatown a more integral part of Honolulu's tourism infrastructure. A dedicated space for a tourist trolley stop would connect Chinatown more directly to the flow of tourists. This move would not only increase business income, but it would also make Chinatown more important to Honolulu's overall tourism story.

When taken as a whole, nonprofit organizations can serve as the intermediary between companies, citizens, and governmental entities. Nonprofits can help stabilize and rebrand Chinatown by improving coordination and keeping programming consistent.

Businesses

Businesses in Chinatown could benefit from updating their marketing tactics and improve internal cooperation in order to support public and nonprofit initiatives. Establishing a cooperative property

security network based on models like Maunakea Marketplace is one suggestion. Coordinated monitoring systems, increased surveillance camera coverage, and shared security personnel are a few examples of such a network. District-wide deterrence can be improved, and individual burden reduced through collective investment. The perceived and real security environment can improve when merchants work together instead of separately.

Modernizing marketing is equally crucial. According to survey data, many Chinatown businesses have been slow to develop an internet presence and still rely on word-of-mouth advertising. Businesses could work together to create a single web platform that advertises all Chinatown merchants. Organized initiatives like weekly “business spotlight” features, event promotions, and coordinated campaigns based on cultural festivals or seasonal themes could strengthen already-existing social media pages. A unified digital brand would reestablish Chinatown as a single destination rather than a collection of disjointed enterprises and expand reach beyond audiences of individual storefront audiences.

Lastly, there is a strategic opportunity to incorporate the arts into revitalization initiatives. Chinatown’s cultural identity can be strengthened, and public space transformed through art installations, live performances at street markets, murals, and collaborations with local artists. In addition to improving visual appeal, artistic activation can draw in a variety of audiences and media coverage.

In conclusion, cooperation, technological adaptation, and innovative placemaking offer great potential for business-led collaboration in Chinatown. These strategies build a multi-layered framework for sustainable revitalization when paired with nonprofit coordination and government reform.

Study Limitations

Although the study participants and interviews provided insightful information on stakeholder perspectives, the interpretation of these results is influenced by a number of limitations. Because participation was restricted to those who were accessible and willing to participate, some voices, especially those with fewer formal network connections, might not be represented. As a result, rather than representing a representative cross-section of the entire community, the findings represent influential viewpoints.

Furthermore, perceptions at a particular time period are captured in the results. Seasonal and policy-related changes impact dynamic issues like corporate performance, tourism flow, and safety conditions. Therefore, rather than reflecting long-term patterns, the conclusions reached here should be interpreted as reflecting current circumstances.

Synthesizing narratives that occasionally contain situational or emotionally charged reports is another requirement for interpreting qualitative data. Thematic arrangement is inherently shaped by researcher interpretation, despite efforts to uncover recurrent themes rather than isolated instances. By defining the parameters within which findings should guide lobbying and planning initiatives, acknowledging these constraints improves the report's rigor.

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