

## **Engaging Private Sector Support: A Comparative Study of Samoa, California, and Levuka, Fiji**

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**Abstract.** This paper focuses on financial and other concerns necessary to achieve conservation and revitalization in the communities of Samoa, California and Levuka, Fiji. Governmental measures, without financial resources, are often inadequate to protect the intangible spirit of a place. The private sector, coupled with support from the public and other stakeholders, must be engaged to attract revenues for preservation. Unlike individual building or structures, the survival of historic towns with multiple contributing resources requires new strategies and realistic objectives.

Few persons, even fervent property rights crusaders, argue that the retention of our shared heritage, revitalization of neighborhoods, improvements to our economic health and the creation of stable communities, are detrimental to our neighborhoods. Mandated to carry forth a noble preservation manifesto, advocates proclaim that the rehabilitation of historic resources is also a major contributor to the economic well being of communities and towns.

Unfortunately conflicts and disagreements, erupting over the process, means and funds to achieve these goals, can inhibit, and ironically even destroy, the character, fabric and identity of a place.

To highlight this situation, two towns determined to move forward with its preservation goals are presented. Both environments will require prudent financial analysis and substantial private sector funding to rehabilitate its historic and cultural resources. The once prosperous lumber town of Samoa and the colonial British capital of Levuka are faced with a fiscal impasse that seriously threatens proposed preservation efforts. In Samoa's case, the current owner's willingness to accommodate historic preservation is resisted by activists who mistrust development intentions. In addition, the approval process for Samoa's proposed development has been extended by governmental scrutiny and public reviews for several years. Meanwhile in Levuka rehabilitation is contingent on government policies, planners, international interests and a few local residents who struggle to meet basic finances for the town's yearly operations.

Both cases depend on an important ingredient to ensure preservation – money. Historic preservation is an expensive venture. Projects must secure

support, not only from policy makers and community advocates, but from the private sector especially when governmental fiscal resources are burdened with bureaucracy and uncoordinated procedures.



*Samoa Town, California, early 1900s, Samoa Pacific Group LLC.*

## **History of Samoa Town**

The name of the mill town, chosen in the late 1800s, is attributed to a time when the Samoa Islands appeared regularly in the American news as a result of various colonial land disputes. Although Samoa town was first platted for a resort community, a new mill was constructed at the site. Soon a company town, with housing and associated uses such as community and recreational facilities, was in full operations. Samoa prospered as the northern California redwood lumber industry boomed. Timber products were shipped to global locations in the South Pacific, Australian, New England and Europe. However by the 1950s, the lumber industry began to decline with the advent of new technological changes, the end of railroad transportation, and the reduction of timber production. The end of the long and prosperous milling business, originating in the late 1800s, brought severe economic hardships to Samoa and the region. By the year 2000 and according to the U.S. Census information, 19.5% of the Humboldt County's population were below the poverty line.

Organizations, such as the North Coast Strategy for Economic Development, recently reported that the County's attraction as a tourist destination was strongly impacted by transportation access to the area. Both the existing Arcata Airport's capacity and the long awaited improvements to Highway 101 from the San Francisco Bay Area have limited easy access. However, attracting visitors to existing destinations in exciting ways – and creating new destinations –

to appeal to specialized interests and encourage longer stays – were cited as crucial to drawing people to Humboldt County.

The Humboldt Bay Scenic Railroad and a Timber Heritage Museum organizations believe that the Samoa Cookhouse and significant railroad structures in Samoa can become “a Colonial Williamsburg of the West”. While significant challenges to the railroad project remain, Marcus Brown, President of the Time Heritage Museum envisions a “Redwoods and Timber National Heritage Area” that would promote many aspects of the region’s history, including its timber, dairy and commercial fishing trades. “Tying tourism to the successful traditions of other Humboldt industries has already paid off. North Coast Open Studios, which over two weekends in 2005 recorded 5,000 studio visits and \$300,000 in sales, involves not only local artists but also prominent art-based manufacturers... The right blend of entrepreneurship and industry cooperation could have similar results for local farms, dairies and lumber mills.”

### **Samoa California : Development overview**

In the year 2000 Dan Johnson, a young Humboldt County born American entrepreneur, and his Dutch investment partners purchased the entire abandoned historic and former lumber mill town of Samoa, California. The several acre site, located near Eureka, California and along Humboldt Bay, consists of many original industrial and ancillary commercial and residential wood constructed buildings from the early 1900s. Although several families rent houses and the Samoa Cookhouse, the local and visitor novelty, continues to serve meals, the majority of the town is empty and derelict.

Eight years later after the Dan Johnson’s purchase of Samoa, plans for revitalization and renovation of the town are still on hold.

### **Samoa: California requirements**

Prior to commencing with development in Samoa an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was required as part of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), an act established at the state level to ensure that environmental concerns would be considered and reviewed in their decision-making process. Essentially CEQA was intended to provide both the government and the public with information on how projects were to affect the environment. The EIR identified the environmental impact of the proposed action, any adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided if the proposal is implemented, mitigation measures proposed to minimize the impact, alternatives to the proposed action, the relationship between local short-term uses of man's environment and the

maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity and any irreversible environmental changes.

A *Cultural Resources Survey* of the Samoa Town's Proposed Master Plan was written in order to comply with these requirements. The survey, including a list of contributing buildings with recommendations for a historic district, became the basis for understanding significance and integrity of the Town's historic character and fabric. *Old Town Design Guidelines* were developed to retain Samoa's historic context and to revitalize its significant resources. *New Town Design Guidelines* for proposed new development were also prepared in order to achieve a harmonious and contextual relationship with the historic area.

In order to finance the total project, new development was proposed adjacent to the "Old Town" area. New single family and multifamily, light industrial and a business park, commercial, recreational, open space and public uses were proposed. As the review period began, a conscious effort to work with the local historic preservation community was engaged through public participation. Discussions regarding rehabilitation of the resources occurred, but still, the concern remained whether a private sector company would address preservation adequately.

Findings and recommendations from the draft *Cultural Resources Survey* of the Samoa Town, dated November 12, 2004, were primarily based on Samoa's role in the development of the redwood lumber industry and its associated physical, social, political, economic and cultural history. In addition, the study stated that Samoa embodied the distinctive characteristics of a late 19th resource with good integrity and contributing resources to a historic district, including a cohesive composite of buildings, sites, transportation networks and landscape elements. Finally in defining the period of significance (1893 to 1950), the study acknowledged that substantial changes in the redwood lumber industry occurred after the 1950s.

Based on the study, cumulative impacts were anticipated with the implementation of Samoa's proposed Master Plan development. However it should be noted that the town has already experienced major changes from its transition as a company lumber town. Since 1950, these include demolition of prime industrial and associated buildings, a new lumber corporate management and ownership, diversification of products changing markets, shut-down of numerous operations, termination of the rail line, closing of the mill production, and the opening of residential tenant occupancy to outside families. Such impacts, prior to the purchase of the property, all contributed to a change in Samoa's context. Essentially, the town lost most of its economic and industrial components and the social network of the company town. Only remnants of the residential, commercial, recreational and other ancillary uses exist today that define the "whole".

Samoa's context will continue to evolve, moving Samoa from its lumber mill historical roots to new types of industrial and commercial uses, open space and larger mixed-use residential component. The change of context will also have an impact on the intangible qualities of a lumber mill industrial based Samoa. However, after year of abandoned neglect and deterioration of the existing resources, the impact of new development, financial stimulus, and proposed retention and renovation of the cultural resources should be beneficial to Samoa's revitalization and spirit of the place.

### **Design Guidelines and District as a "whole"**

Contextual design requirements, as specified in the Samoa *Old Town Design Guidelines*, are provided to mitigate any design related impacts from new development. Compliance and enforcement of design controls for new construction within the historic area will be the responsibility of both the Samoa Design Review Committee (SDRC) and the Humboldt County Planning Department. Contextual design will be required to maintain visual compatibility and appropriateness with old town Samoa, in terms of architectural style, building heights, building setbacks, space between buildings (perceived density), front yard landscaping, fencing, signage and other issues.

Furthermore, special design considerations are incorporated into the *Design Guidelines* for transitional areas between Old Town Samoa (historic area) and New Town Samoa (newer development and uses). Transitional areas of Samoa are properties that directly abut and/or are significantly visible from old town, as well as new developments within Old Town Samoa itself. Defined in *New Town Samoa Guidelines* are also measures and recommendations for designing buildings that are sensitive to, and respectful of, historic and cultural resources. In addition, the U.S. Secretary of Interior Standards are referenced in the Design Guidelines documents.



*Aerial view of Levuka, Fiji, c.1990s, Caines, Jannif, Ltd., Suva, Fiji.*

## **History of Levuka Town**

Located several thousand miles from Samoa, California, a small settlement of Europeans first established themselves in Levuka, Fiji around 1835. Early industries centered at Levuka included the sandalwood and whaling trades. Sugar and copra followed and Levuka continued to prosper into the 1800s. East Indians arrived as early as 1879 and several families settled in Levuka along with the indigenous Fijians and Europeans. After the Kingdom of Fiji was ceded to the British Crown in 1874, the town's cultural significance for the Republic of Fiji and the South Pacific was its position as the country's first capital, a center for British, American and German interests in the early 1880s, and the site of the Cession of Fiji to the British Crown in 1872. Today the town remains an example of town settlement influenced by European colonization and cross-cultural relationships. Existing buildings, including commercial, residential, institutional, religious and educational buildings, are reflective of the period of European administration and social developments.

Levuka has many of Fiji's "firsts", including Fiji's first bank, post office, school, private members club, hospital, town hall, municipal government., first newspaper, first public school opened in 1879, and possibly the oldest hotel in the South Pacific still in operations. Even Levuka's Masonic Lodge was established in 1875 and the town was the site of Fiji's first public electricity system in 1927.

## **Levuka FIJI: Development overview**

Mayor George Gibson of Levuka has always supported historic preservation and conservation. During the 1980s George was involved with the Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA) report that assessed the cultural and heritage significance of Levuka, Fiji and recommended ways to enhance Levuka's economy. Major funds were needed to improve the infrastructure, including a survey and inventory, storm-water drainage, landscaping, parking, street amenities, new structures and alterations, and maintenance of historic buildings. At the time the estimated cost in Fiji dollars was \$2,720,000. A marketing program was also proposed to encourage short and longer termed visitors to the location. The study recommended that contacts be established within Fiji and the international tourism industry to avoid contentious issues and misunderstandings that may jeopardize the local support and commitment. Ancillary opportunities included various activities associated with the town's history, including an educational center, sports festivals, marine ecological tourism, cultural diversity, visits to historic sites, and increase of agricultural and other spin-off economic possibilities.

By 1993 PATA commissioned the *Levuka: Heritage Conservation Study* by Timothy Hubbard Pty Ltd. of Melbourne, Australia. The new study strengthened the town's historical and cultural significance and recommended that Levuka maintain itself as a living town. A system of properly administered controls to ensure gradual restoration and appropriate reuse of the old buildings, construction and use of new buildings, and finally, a mechanism to encourage the future prosperity and appropriate business and commercial activities in the town were proposed. To fund the many anticipated projects, the study also recommended that the national Government consider income tax assistance to owners of accredited buildings, create financial incentives through the Fiji Department of Treasury, and increase the current capital sum of the existing Levuka Conservation Fund on an annual basis. Incentives included, but were not limited to, re-evaluation of property assessment, rate relief, land tax exemptions, various fees, grants, loans, transfer of development rights, technical and professional advice, and acquisition.

At the 1994 Government/ Industry conference on Fiji's Leadership in the New Generation of International Tourism, Dr. Hana Ayala summarized the overall transformation of Fiji into a highly competitive model of a destination of the World Heritage quality and recognition. He proposed a masterplan that would advance a strategic blueprint to define the competitive strength of Fiji for the new tourism, conceptualize the new tourism product which would draw its strength from Fiji's unique ecology and culture, and guide integration of planning, design, management, and promotional aspects of the product development so as to maximize its distinctiveness and international appeal. Recognizing the significance of both the ecological theater and the heritage bank of the South Pacific island's diversity, Dr. Ayala called for UNESCO World Heritage recognition and sponsorship for both areas.

Today funding resources for the rehabilitation of Levuka remain problematic. Financial and other types of support from governmental and private sources are critically needed. Recommendations reiterate the use of heritage status for Levuka to securing funding, marketing materials to inform potential donors highlighting the national and international significance, and closer work relationships with others to encourage further funding support and new networks for specific Levuka heritage projects.

More than twenty years have passed by and the town continues to seek funds for rehabilitation as well as status as a World Heritage site.

## **Fiji and Levuka's Economy**

While the Pacific Fishing Company (PAFCO), specializing in freezing and shipping canned tuna is the largest private employer on the island of Ovalau, heritage tourism related business has been minimal in Levuka's overall economy. This is partially because of Levuka's isolation, underdeveloped infrastructure such as its airport, roadways, and maritime accessibility, and lack of hotel accommodations without the beaches of western Fiji.

With the nomination and potential recognition of Levuka as Fiji's first World Heritage Site, Fiji's Department of Culture and Heritage and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the town anticipates a boost in tourism and economic activity.

## **Sharing a Common Concern**

State of California historic town status for Samoa and World Heritage listing for Levuka may position each community with the recognition and public attention that both towns deserve. However, preservation projects even with official designations, are ineffective without substantial funding and private sector financial support. Success requires more than governmental subsidies or funds – the private sector must be engaged and encouraged to be part of the effort.

The protection of significant resources, such as Samoa and Levuka, has never an easy task. To counter the skeptics and critics of historic preservation, local, national and international pundits have propelled preservation into the realm of mainstay planning and economic revitalization. Preservation economic opportunities focus on the community as a whole rather than on individual owners and their finances. Regional community programs have been developed to promote local historic districting, landmark ordinances, comprehensive planning requirements, design review and guideline ordinances, and strategic plans to generate revenue. With fanfare, preservation organizations proclaim that the creation of historic districts has a positive effect on property values. “Landmark statues, whether federal, state or local, carries with it a certain amount of prestige which can lead to an increase in property value”, remarks Elizabeth Bradec in Scenic America.

Samoa and Levuka are both willing to profit, whether locally, nationally, or internationally, from the heritage tourism market. This type of tourism, coupled with an ecologically based attraction, provides an alternative from the current “sun and sea” market as less damaging to the environment. Securing economic benefits for the surrounding communities, enhancing local cultural integrity and perpetuating traditional values are often cited as reasons to promote, vigorously, heritage tourism.



However, keen observers of the global heritage tourism market know that preservation (and conservation) cannot be done without private sector investment and host governments that understand the intricacies of both environmental and economic sustainability. Such investment and support must address financing for the rehabilitation and the upgrading of existing infrastructure. The amount of investment can be significant when the government can entrust such projects to an entrepreneur. While overseeing the work, this type of setup helps the interests of both parties. As part of the business protocol investment costs should be identified early in the revitalization process so that public and preservation advocates can assist in the implementation.

Unfortunately, cost issues are too often neglected in the historic preservation discussion. In a time when true benefits of governmental subsidies, tax incentives, policies and regulations regarding historic preservation are questionable, attention is needed to review construction costs, materials, assemblies, services, labor and ongoing maintenance expenses – all are substantially increasing. An economic analysis of historic preservation projects would create a better understanding of the need to reduce expenses but retain a qualitative product. This direction, at least in the USA, would be consistent with many enacted legislative mandates to maximize economic efficiency and cost effective choices of building alternatives.

Identifying feasible alternatives (and constraints), similar to an assessment of options using preservation standards for rehabilitation, is the first step in estimating economic consequences of a particular preservation decision. Clearly associated with this process are various methods such as the life cycle cost analysis for evaluating the performance of buildings or systems. Competing design alternatives are all associated with significant costs during the economic life of the alternative. Value Engineering is another type of systematic evaluation, primarily related to the function of materials, systems, processes building equipment and other types of functions. Without sacrificing performance, safety, or other requirements, these types of analyses can eliminate or modify any proposed work that may add costs without contributing to the building's functions.

## **Conclusion**

Both Samoa and Levuka have skeptics who feel improper development can lead to the plunder of historic resources. In the American context Samoa's implementation is contested by a few who believe that historic preservation cannot be accomplished without governmental and community advocacy scrutiny, monitoring and policing. Many, however, see the overall project's contribution to the economy of Humboldt County as a secondary factor – that the deterioration of the town will exacerbate without an infusion of new uses and activities in the

depressed area. Furthermore, few seem to care that investment can only be promised for so long – the real tragedy would be if the current owner, after eight years and more, decides that a revitalized Samoa town is simply not to be.

Similarly, the town folks of Levuka have patiently listened to the government, and interested private sector parties, discuss the return economic life to the area. Heritage tourism, coupled with eco-tourism, has much appeal, but minimal financial support has been channeled to Levuka. Though World Heritage listing can be a boost, the community must still aggressively court the private sector to fund projects that stimulate the town's economy. Currently, with only few accommodations and unimproved modes of travel, Levuka cannot compete with the lure of western Fiji's high end resorts. The repair of historic buildings in Levuka will require support both from individuals and private companies with vested interests in Levuka as a historic destination.

The key issue, however, is that the basic integrity of Old Town Samoa and Levuka do not need to be compromised. Both communities must return to a dynamic and economically responsible state. New development and sensitive, contextual design can intensify and instill a new vibrancy and life back into what is perceived as a dying and abandoned mill down on the Coast or a remote island town with no beaches.

What we often dismiss, in our exuberance and passion to preserve and conserve old buildings, is that the owner of the properties must address a range of tough and complex decisions in order for any project to succeed and move forward. Although historic preservation clearly asserts the historical importance of Samoa and Levuka as the primary factor, preservation is one of many considerations for a development fiscally and socially to be sustainable. A development, in order to be successful, must incorporate rigid requirements such as new infrastructure, life safety issues, and other improvements to help subsidize the revitalization of historic buildings and places.

Dan Johnson, owner of Samoa town, and Levuka's current mayor, George Gibson, understand funds are required for proper stewardship. Both persons, in prime leadership positions, simply cannot move forward with their goals. In the case of Samoa, bureaucratic and community demands have impacted the project substantially – historic preservation and development are more and more costly with years of delay. In contrast, the town of Levuka, believes that World Heritage listing will motivate and ensure investment from the private sector.

This is the time for preservationists to resolve the stalemate by balancing and enhancing preservation policies with economic wisdom. By working together with all major stakeholders, leaders and community members, private development can be a friend to historic preservation and conservation.

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