

computers and textbooks.

Investigators believe that the blaze may have begun in the building's wiring or electrical outlets, Kane said.

U Building is part of a three-building complex that serves as the school's ninth-grade academy.

Vice principal Ryan Oshita said about 120 students will spend the remainder of the school year taking classes in the library.

The school was on spring break this week. The school is still scheduled to resume classes Monday.

Reach Curtis Lum at clum@honoluluadvertiser.com or 525-8025.

Journalists got a rare opportunity to visit the top-secret Pacific Command Joint Operations MacArthur Pacific Command headquarters at Camp Smith. At the center, military officials ca

Command center go

By Will Hoover

ADVERTISER STAFF WRITER

The world's largest combat command now has a technological facility equal to its geographic span.

"In the military, this is as high-tech as it gets anywhere," Army Maj. Gen. Ron Lowe told a press contingent

visiting the normally restricted areas inside the new \$152 million Nimitz-MacArthur Pacific Command Center yesterday at Camp Smith. "Bill Gates might have something that compares with it, but ..."

The facility's high-tech communications capability dramatically increases the

command's capacity to focus on all 105 million square miles in its area of responsibility — an expanse equal to more than half the Earth's surface.

Its Joint Operations Center can monitor military activities, video-teleconferencing with Washington and far-flung military leaders,

SATURDAY, APRIL 3, 2004 HONOLULU ADVERTISER

Renters say city plan jeopardizes them

Council opposes selling apartments because of a lack of affordable housing

By James Genser

ADVERTISER URBAN HONOLULU WRITER

About 75 people crowded into a City Council Budget Committee meeting yesterday worried about how Mayor Jeremy Harris' plan to sell several city-owned apartment buildings would affect them.

Many of the residents live in affordable rental units that would either be sold to the occupants or to an investor, and some fear they will be forced to move with no place to go.

"I'm coming up on retirement and don't want to move," said Joe Spatola, a nine-year resident of Marin Tower. "I qualify for the (rent-to-own) program, but there is no guarantee I can qualify for the loan. And if I don't buy, I have to move."

The city-owned Marin

Tower, the Chinatown Gateway Plaza and the Harbor Village are part of a plan to sell city-owned buildings to private investors and be converted to condos. Affordable units would be sold to occupants who qualify for federal loans. The city administration also plans to sell 10 other buildings, but they would be sold outright and not be part of a rent-to-own program.

Deputy City Managing Director Malcolm Tom said anyone in the affordable apartments in the three buildings will have the first option to buy their apartments. He added that for those who buy, payments will be set at the same level as their current rent.

Tom said this will provide home ownership opportunities for renters while, in turn,

Public hearing

► **WHAT:** Public hearing on the plan to sell city properties

► **WHEN:** 4 p.m. April 22

► **WHERE:** City Council chambers, third floor, Honolulu Hale

the sale the properties will reduce the city's overall debt by \$116.6 million.

But City Councilwoman Ann Kobayashi said many of these apartments were built decades ago by the city to provide affordable homes. She said one of the obligations of government is to help provide for low-income people, and already there is a lack of affordable rentals.

"We are not in favor of selling these buildings," Kobayashi said. "We feel there are not enough rental units now and we would definitely not sell any buildings for low in-

come, Section 8 or the elderly. We don't believe in that."

Committee members also criticized Tom for holding informational meetings last month at the buildings being considered for rent-to-own, saying the gatherings were poorly handled and have frightened the residents.

"None of the council members knew about those meetings," said Kobayashi, the committee chairwoman.

City Council approval is needed to sell the buildings, and Kobayashi said the committee won't agree to sell any buildings without requirements for affordable rental housing in perpetuity.

Tom detailed how the rent-to-own program would work and said it includes interest-free loans and requires no down payment from existing low-income tenants.

The three properties comprise 526 units, according to Tom, and 452 families are ex-

See RENTALS, B5

where all businesses last night after a fire heavily damaged two apartment units at 94-333 Pupū'ole St. in Waipahu. No one was seriously injured in the two-alarm fire.

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Rentals: City doesn't plan to replace affordable units

FROM PAGE B1

pected to qualify for ownership. Those families are low- or moderate-income tenants.

Retired teacher Judy Naniole, who lives in Harbor Tower, said she attended one of the meetings but is still not sure how the program works.

"I heard after one year, if I don't buy, the price of the rent can go up," Naniole said. "I'm on fixed income and not sure if I can afford it."

Tom said renters would have one year from the sale of the building

man Capt. Emmitt Kane said. Damage was estimated at \$60,000 to the building and its contents.

What caused the fire was not

trol at 8:09 p.m. Eight people lived in the three-bedroom unit.

There was heavy smoke damage to the apartment directly above. Its four occupants also are homeless.

treated at the scene for smoke inhalation but did not require hospitalization.

The American Red Cross was assisting the residents.

to purchase their unit. If they choose not to buy, they have five years to move. If they buy, they resell their apartment in less than five years, profit from the sale would go to the city. After five years they would be free to sell with no penalty.

City Councilwoman Barbara Marshall said the plan would take 452 units permanently out of affordable housing within five years.

Marshall asked Tom if the city has any plans to replace the affordable units, and he said no.

The remaining nine buildings have nearly 750 apartments, and the city would not require any of them to remain rentals after being sold, Tom said.

The West Loch Elderly building was taken out of the rent-to-own program because many of the residents said they would not be likely to buy their apartments at such advanced ages, Tom said.

The remaining nine buildings that could be sold are the old Bachelor's Quarters in Ewa, Chinatown Manor, Manoa Apartments, Kūlanā

Nani Apartments, Manoa Gardens Elderly, Pauahi Hale, Westlake Apartments, Winston Hale and Foster Gardens Commercial Property, which does not have apartments.

Kobayashi has asked for a list of all city properties and plans to create a volunteer task force to make decisions on whether city property should be sold.

Reach James Conser at 535-2431 or jconser@hono.iaa.com.

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