

County of Kauai
Planning Department
4444 Rice Street, A-473
Lihue, HI 96766

May 3, 2016

Dear Planning Department:

Thank you for organizing and providing the opportunity to participate in the “Community Place Type and Visioning Workshop” for the east side on April 28, 2016. I appreciate the effort in planning such an event, as well as the time spent engaging with the community. I realize it is easy to be critical of such as process, so I hope the following comments will be accepted in the spirit of constructive criticism, with the hope of improving future community engagement and promoting quality of life on Kauai.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Opportunities to engage with communities and truly understand and embrace their deepest interests and concerns on a meaningful level is always a challenge. Well planned communication and facilitation, while remaining flexible in the actual engagement with communities, is absolutely essential. The process I experienced on April 18 lacked in all of these areas, leaving myself and others with the feeling that this effort was not conducted in earnest, but rather as a “checking the box” exercise. Process steps for gathering input from the community were not well articulated or organized. There seemed to be no apparent record keeping on community comments, and there was little or no communication on what is going to be done with the public input and how that will truly inform any decision-making by the Planning Commission. This left me feeling this was an exercise in futility for all of those who sacrificed their time, hoping to be heard on issues pertaining to the future of their community.

PROCESS STRUCTURE & FRAMING

The community engagement process was primarily focused on three town centers: Wailua, Kapaa and Anahola and developing a “concept” of what the centers might look like in the future – a wish list, if you will, on a range of “potential change” options largely based on private investment dollars (specifically: rural crossroads, small village, large village or town models). These 3 centers were also stove piped into 3 separate discussions, with a fourth discussion on transportation. It is easy to understand the convenience of this structure from the standpoint of creating smaller, more manageable groups, allowing for individual voices to be heard. However, as the traffic streamed by us between Wailua and Kapaa, it was hard to look at that geographic distinction in any

meaningful way. The focus on the 3 town centers also left out the conversation on the impacts from the six “planned projects” – which, I am guessing, are probably of the greatest concern to most people who care about the future of the east side and the compounding of existing problems such as traffic and access. Also, this approach took the focus off the real areas of concern, which in my best estimation have to do with zoning (land use) and infrastructure planning (not building heights, store fronts and ambiance).

I believe it is useful to start any community process by understanding and defining the “quality of life factors” and what the community considers as its major “assets” contributing to these quality of life factors. This then helps to frame what we want to protect or maintain (or even improve), and also where the community is willing to make a compromise. There was no attempt to develop and come to consensus on these definitions, which would have helped in moving towards a common vision of the future. This approach also provides an opportunity to bring into the discussion questions and concerns about food security and energy sustainability and other quality of life factors, for which barely a word was uttered.

DATA & OTHER INFORMATION

The data used on the maps in the gym were dated or not identified. In particular, the erosion data is nearly a decade old. These data would then impact the sea level rise scenarios for 1, 3 or 6 feet of change. The projections on population growth and housing data were also not cited, so hard to tell the source of the information, which is really critical when used as the basis to inform the community process and make decisions.

IN CONCLUSION

Even though the community process leaves much to be desired in terms of its content and organization, I personally am still walking away with the same thoughts and concerns that I entered the gym with last Thursday. **I strongly urge you not to allow for any new development (“planned”, “permitted” or otherwise) or changes in zoning to take place until to following has been undertaken by the county:**

1. **A comprehensive, transparent and inclusive evaluation of current zoning** and how this fits with each communities’ vision for the future (10-20 years and beyond). As part of this process, take into account quality of life factors including appropriate zoning to meet future needs for food security, energy sustainability and the reality of the need to put aside necessary open space for upland retreat based on current and projected erosion and sea level rise factors.
2. **Basic infrastructure needs have actually been addressed**, are fully executed and proving that they are directly addressing the issues related to our current infrastructure requirements. The approach(es) to addressing our current infrastructure needs must also be flexible and adaptable enough to meet future needs.

3. **When an application is submitted for a building or development permit, that the county takes full responsibility for ensuring “due diligence” oversight that basic permit requirements are being met.** This includes the following from the county:

- Ensure that all information received from the permit applicant is true and accurate (e.g., the erroneous claim about providing low income housing at Hokua Place – this is no more low income housing than the pricing differential between a condo vs single unit housing);
- ensure that an EIS is comprehensive (not just checking the boxes but also considers both cumulative impacts and mauka to makai downstream impacts (ahupua’a approach));
- ensures that the type of development meets each communities’ vision for the future (guaranteeing the protection of key community assets) while contributing to the quality of life here on Kauai (not just filling the pockets of investors).

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to following this process.

Respectfully,

Anne Walton
Wailua Homesteads