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KAUAI News

Council besieged, lauded for planning

by Lester Chang - THE GARDEN ISLAND

Kaua'i County Council leaders yesterday asked the county Planning Commission to implement better planning methods to short-circuit runaway development on Kaua'i.

The lack of good planning has sped up the pace of life on Kaua'i, created unwanted traffic congestion, more development and conflicts in neighborhoods, county officials said.

"If we do good planning, then good permitting will follow," JoAnn Yukimura, who heads the council's planning committee, said after a planning commission meeting at the Lihue Civic Center yesterday.

Jay Furfaro, the vice chairman of the committee, also attended the meeting and said having the county develop good planning practices would be among his top priorities.

Planning commissioner Ted Daligdig III said the stand by Yukimura and Furfaro has merit, and a process should be set up to encourage better planning on Kaua'i.

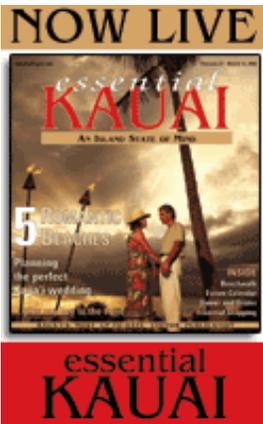
Yukimura said that type of planning is paramount now, as she believes many residents feel "something is wrong with planning on this island."

She said clear standards and requirements are not in place now to "ensure any growth or development that happens on Kaua'i addresses, first and foremost, the needs of the community."

The same planning standards and requirements also should address key issues like affordable housing and infrastructure needs, she said.

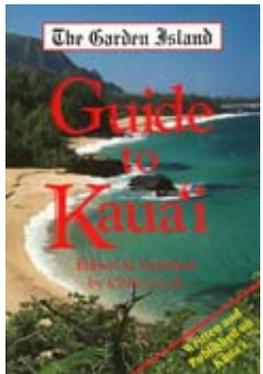
Yukimura also said the commission should direct county planning director Ian Costa to develop strategies for the island.

County planning department officials said the planning of the island is not being done haphazardly, as is evidenced by the incremental development and implementation of county land use plans.



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To bring about better planning, Yukimura suggested Costa bring to one table the commission, Mayor Bryan Baptiste, the council and the planning department staff to set goals, missions and timetables for the county department.

Once the plan is developed, the commission can review monthly progress reports from Costa, she said.

Yukimura also said other tools can be used to ensure improved planning — appraisals, performance audits, an employee survey and a periodic performance review of the planning director.

The lack of good planning hurts developers and landowners as well, Yukimura said.

“Because there are not clear standards and certainty as to what is required, the process becomes arduous and lengthy — a highly expensive and stressful proposition for permit applicants,” she said.

Yukimura said good planning stops at the doorstep of the planning department.

The department supplies information on development to the commission, Baptiste, the council and residents, Yukimura said.

The department also bears the responsibility of designing and implementing community planning processes that “involve a broad range of the community in an orderly and inclusive fashion that results in clear, enforceable plans reflecting the community’s values and well-being,” Yukimura said in a statement.

The planning commission also should be involved in that process, she said, as its responsibilities are the same as those for a board of directors of a corporation.

An example of good planing is the development of an intermodal transportation plan in Koloa and Po’ipu financed by six or more developers or large landowners from that region, Yukimura said.

“If every community had a good transportation master plan, you would know what the impacts would be of certain developments,” she said.

Citing his own ideas of what makes for good planning, Furfaro said the time is now for “us to look at an overall strategic issue, to make assessments of our zoning, our needs.”

Furfaro said the county should prepare a statement on “what rule definition should be” before the planning commission applies Act 183 to upcoming projects. Act 183 relates to identifying prime agricultural lands in Hawai’i.

In arriving at good planning, the county may want to refer to a 1992 study done by PlanPacific on impact fees for Kaua’i County, Furfaro said. The same company has a good understanding of development on Kaua’i, as it updated the county’s general plan in 2000, he said.

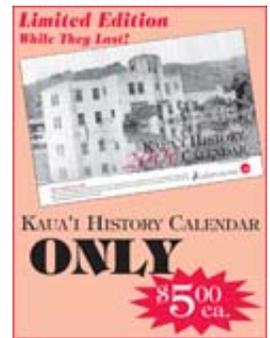
He said implementation of parts of the general plan could help bring about better planning on Kaua’i, including caring for the land, water and culture, developing jobs and business, preserving Kaua’i’s rural character, improving the infrastructure to enhance towns, building public facilities and developing services and improving housing opportunities.

Furfaro said Baptiste and the council have to be held accountable for the funding an implementation of good planning strategies.

Radolfo Ortega of Lihu’e said the mayor and the council should be the only ones developing them.

More often than not, concerned citizens will argue over how to correct problems, thereby delaying solutions, he said.

“We need good planing for this island,” Ha’ena resident Caren Diamond said,



echoing the sentiments of many. "It is painful to see it disappear."

"The North Shore plan is not being followed," said Diamond, referring to the county land use plan for that area. "Every single hale is being enlarged."

She contended the county has waived regulations to allow development to encroach on the shoreline. County officials, however, have continued to investigate unpermitted construction, including the installation of fences, on beachfront lands that are under the control of the county.

Diamond said the county should impose a moratorium on building if county planning processes aren't improved.

"Citizens really want preservation," she said, "I don't think people want a Maui or O'ahu."

Both of those counties are far more developed than Kaua'i County.

While some residents criticized the commission for lack of good planning, Lihu'e resident Barbara Elmore took the opposite tack.

"I think you are ahead of the council on this, said Elmore referring to recent discussions by planning commissioners not to approve permits for developments they felt might hurt a community.

Elmore said she felt the commission is doing as good a job as it can, even though it has been instructed to look at projects on a case-by-case basis.

By contrast, the council hasn't looked at the cumulative impacts a slew of development projects might have on a region, she said.

The council, however, has approved rezoning of land that has resulted in less density. Such was the case with the rezoning of the 1,002-acre Kukui'ula commercial, residential and resort project in Po'ipu, where the density went from more than 3,000 housing units to about 1,500 units.

Elmore said the council's decision to occasionally censor her on development projects upsets her to no end.

"I resent it," she said. "I really do."

While some commissioners thanked Elmore for her praise, they said they would not allow her to take pot shots at council members who made decisions she didn't agree with.

Elmore said she has the right to say what she feels at public meetings.

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