

Chaos continues with the General Plan process

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



On Monday, the Maui County Council's Planning Committee tried to make headway on both the draft countywide Policy Plan and draft Maui Island Plan, but little progress was made. Why?

Because chaos continues at this critical juncture when the public wants to weigh in on these plans.

From our view, numerous issues contribute to the confusion and disorder, including:

- Reviewing both documents simultaneously. The Policy Plan, stated to be the overarching document for the island plans, should be completed first.

- Uncertainty about what document(s) will comprise the new General Plan. With the Policy Plan and island plans, people struggle to understand how these documents will function as (or part of) the General Plan and how they will relate to the community plans. Some believe the Policy Plan replaces the General Plan, while others think the Policy Plan and island plans constitute the General Plan.

THIS SITUATION then leads to inquiries about:

- Possible inconsistencies and conflicts be-

tween the layers of plans, especially since the community plans have not been updated yet.

- Which document ultimately will guide conflict resolution, with the Policy Plan noted as a "top-down" method and community plans mentioned as a "bottom-up" approach.

- How these documents will be used in administrative decision making.

- Too full an agenda for review and discussion. Planning Committee Chairman Sol Kahohalahala stated it is difficult for the committee to have discussion when so many come to testify. We feel the meeting agendas are problematic. The Maui Island Plan, or MIP, is a massive document, with numerous chapters and sections, each with goals, objectives, policies and actions. For example, Chapter 4 on Economic Development includes sections on Economic Diversification; Tourism; Agriculture; Emerging Sectors; Small Business Development; Health Care; and Education & Workforce Development. So, when an agenda includes several chapters, the agenda is too stacked for testifiers to share their concerns.

CONTINUING in the above manner can:

- Make it difficult for council members to remember relevant testimony on a particular section because they may have heard it some time ago versus just before deliberations.

- Limit testimony since many testifiers cannot compress all of their comments into the

three minutes provided, especially those who testify on multiple sections or chapters. We suggest paring meeting agendas to specific chapter sections, manageable in an allotted timeframe, so the public can testify fully on the material the committee will address that day. The sections could be scheduled well in advance, giving the public time to prepare and council members more notice to avoid scheduling conflicts.

OTHER FACTORS in the draft countywide Policy Plan/draft MIP scenario are, as follows:

- The documentation can be confusing and hard to access, and new information often is not available until the 11th hour (which may not comply with the Sunshine Law). While most MIP documentation is in the Planning Department section of the county Web site, some of the new information (such as matrices with numbered line items for ease of review) is available in the County Council's Web site area, but many do not know to look there. Without the matrices, the public is confused when watching hearings and trying to correlate the discussion with plan elements. With the matrices, which are relatively new, some refer to matrix line items while others refer to numbered plan elements; thus, people unfamiliar with the plan may find it even more challenging to follow along. We recommend consistent use of the matrix for improved understanding.

- "Johnny come lately comments." County

council members have asked for input and specific suggestions, yet some testifiers are met with, "Where were you?" or "Why are you providing this now?" The process of updating the General Plan has been a long and elaborate one, with many layers and drafts along the way. People have wondered when they should provide testimony (as each reviewing body made changes) and when their testimony best would be heard. Regardless of when testimony is provided, the County Council should appreciate it, without chastising testifiers.

- Inappropriate conduct. Sometimes people may make false and/or divisive statements, but a particularly jarring incident occurred when Council Member Wayne Nishiki loudly pronounced, "Rape!"; then read a definition of rape and insinuated that such a thing somehow was taking place in an open, public forum, in the light of day, where rules of conduct govern. This grandstanding was inappropriate, to say the least.

During this final stretch, let us work together to better understand plan interrelationships, make information more readily available, allow testimony and constructively consider varying points of view, in order to achieve a comprehensive General Plan with broad community support.

■ Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.