MEETING SUMMARY

Date: January 14, 2013  Project Name: O‘ahu 2035: General Plan Update
Time: 6:30 to 8:30 pm  Recorded by: Corlyn Orr
Location: Castle High School Cafeteria
Subject: Community Briefing #2
Attendees: See attached
Reference: Community Briefing #2 PowerPoint Presentation

Introductions

The purpose of the second community meeting for the O‘ahu 2035 General Plan Update was to present the Public Review Draft of the Revised General Plan (GP), and solicit comments and questions. This was the final briefing in a series of three (the first was at McKinley High School, December 4, 2012; the second was held at Mililani Middle School, December 6, 2012).

Jiro Sumada, Department of Planning and Permitting (DPP) Acting Director, convened the meeting at about 6:40 pm. He began with opening remarks, thanked the group for their attendance and participation, and then introduced Scott Ezer.

Presentation

Scott Ezer, principal with Helber Hastert & Fee, Planners (HHF), provided a presentation that included: an overview of the project status and information gathering efforts to date; a summary of the community survey and written comments received; highlights of the major revisions proposed in the Public Review Draft; and instructions for submitting written comments on the Public Review Draft.

As part of the presentation, Kathy Sokugawa, DPP Planning Division Head, explained DPP’s reasoning for proposing a new policy to allow options for visitor accommodations such as community hotels and alternative lodging in the GP (Refer to the Public Review Draft, Chapter II, Objective B, Policy 10). In sifting through the comments received during the first round of public review, DPP recognized that there may be economic benefits to revising the visitor industry policies. The issue of illegal vacation rentals has been addressed by the City Council on several occasions; however, the debates have always been focused on zoning-related, regulatory/enforcement measures. The intention was to consider the issue from a broad policy standpoint, and to encourage open public discussion. The Public Review Draft is a first draft being circulated for comment. Following the public comment period, DPP will submit a Final Plan to the Planning Commission, with the City Council having final decision-making/approval authority.

Comments and Discussion

The presentation was completed at about 7:10 pm, at which time the floor was opened to comments and questions. A total of 25 individuals provided comments, summarized as follows.

- Kailua resident. The summary report on the community survey results states that the survey is non-scientific. Survey results are skewed by the vacation rental association which notified their membership to take the survey. Survey results have no merit for decision-making, but DPP has
indicated that the comments from the survey were considered as part of the reasoning to introduce the proposed policy.

Policy 10 proposes tourism sprawl, and conflicts with other GP policies. DPP's rationale to open up the issue for discussion is upsetting. Issue was decided in 1987 when transient vacation units were determined to be a non-conforming use, and confirmed in 2010 when the City Council voted against visitor units in residential areas. Rationale for the proposed policy in the accompanying Part II Public Review Draft Report states that vacation units in residential neighborhoods are intended to serve friends and family; this is an untrue statement and DPP should be clear with their intent. A policy is needed to protect the integrity of neighborhoods.

- Kāne'ohe resident. Guiding principles of the original GP are about watershed protection. Watersheds and natural areas are important for the health of the island, and need to be protected. Watershed protection deserves individual attention, not lumped into sustainability.

Speaker also asked for clarification about the reference to a 10-year timeframe in the presentation (Concern was that the GP is a long-term plan, and the planning horizon should be longer than 10 years). In response, Scott Ezer stated that the 10-year timeframe was in reference to the City Charter language that requires GP update/review at least once every 10 years.

- Lanikai resident. Vacation rentals reduce availability of affordable housing, drive up housing costs for local residents, and encourage investments from off-island and foreign investors. They also encourage B&B in agricultural areas, and have negative impacts on quality of life. From personal experience, living next door to a vacation rental is a nightmare (major intrusion with constant noise and parties).

- Kailua resident. DPP is basing a policy decision (i.e., Policy 10) on the survey results, which is poor decision-making. Survey was unscientific (participation was based on a self-selection process), and the results were biased by misleading questions. DPP should conduct a scientifically-designed survey.

- Kailua resident. Appreciates and recognizes hard work done to date. Disagrees with DPP's reasoning to consider visitor accommodations for economic reasons; is unwilling to sacrifice residential neighborhoods for economic gains. Wants to know why a scientific survey was not done. Too much emphasis is given to the survey results, especially since DPP is acknowledging that the survey is not scientific. Proposed visitor accommodations policy conflicts with other GP policies for affordable housing (e.g., Public Review Draft proposes a new policy for the military to provide housing on-base for military personnel, which is counter to the proposal to use available housing for visitor accommodations). Military spouses and families stay at least three years and contribute/participate in the community, while visitors are only transient week-to-week. In response, Scott Ezer clarified that a scientific survey was not conducted because it was not included in the project's scope of work. An on-line survey was considered as an inexpensive opportunity to encourage broader community participation and reach residents who may not typically attend community meetings.

- Kailua Neighborhood Board objects to the proposed visitor accommodations policy, and has submitted written comments.
• Kāne’ohe resident and former City Department of Land Utilization employee. Supports fuel cell technology as a new proven source of energy that should be referenced in the General Plan.

• Ka’a’awa resident. Also a taro farmer and family physician. Did not know about survey until this meeting. Against further development at Kuilima. Disagrees with current development focus. Was raised in a family that believes in community values and taking care of kupuna; current model places too much emphasis on economics and is pushing aside people and community values for economic gains.

• Kāne’ohe resident. Involved in planning for 40+ years. Believes 1977 GP was a good plan that should not be changed; do not like DPP changing the good parts of the plan. Should address carrying capacity of the island to balance jobs/economics, natural resources and needs of the people. Should be planning for 7 generations into the future. City’s approach to planning should be to identify assets and needs of each moku (region), so that moku can trade resources. Watershed protection, agriculture, and cultural areas are important issues within the Native Hawaiian community.

• Kailua resident. Suggests that DPP conduct a scientific survey. Opposes vacation rentals in residential areas; important to preserve the integrity of residential neighborhoods. Fearful of a possible “brain drain,” as changes to residential character could cause residents to move away. Visitors want to be in areas with other visitors. Dispersing visitors throughout the island is not the correct way to enhance the tourist experience.

• Kahaluu resident. Homeowners with illegal vacation rentals are being dishonest, and are contributing to the loss of honor and fairness in our communities. Need to regulate and enforce existing laws. Do not allow vacation rentals in residential areas. Proposed visitor accommodations policy overemphasizes economic benefits, and encourages speculation.

• Ka’a’awa resident. 7th generation farmer, current president of the Ka’a’awa Community Association. Concerned about the method of distributing the survey. Did not hear about the survey before this meeting. Likes the proposed new policy to respect the host culture. Also likes the proposed new policy to prohibit urbanization outside the City’s growth boundaries (Public Review Draft Chapter II, Objective C, Policy 8), but concerned that this directly conflicts with the policy to allow resort development at Kuilima, Lāʻie and Ko Olina. In response, Scott Ezer apologized for the lack of notification. Email, announcements through the Neighborhood Boards, and the 1st community meeting were the primary means of circulating the survey announcement. The project’s email distribution list, which was originally created from DPP’s database, is currently at about 700 addresses.

• Kāne’ohe resident, formerly from Waimanalo. Member of the Koʻolau Poko Hawaiian Civic Club. (1) Protecting Native Hawaiians and the culture should be the top priority. Population of Native Hawaiians living outside of Hawaiʻi is larger than the population living here because it’s not economically feasible for Hawaiians to live here. (2) Protecting water resources is equally as important as supporting Native Hawaiians. (3) DPP could use social media and other publicity strategies (such as TV commercials) to get more public input. Disappointed that less than 1% of O‘ahu’s resident population participated in the survey. (4) Address lack of affordable housing. Unfortunate that local residents are pushed out of neighborhoods they fought to protect because they cannot afford to buy homes. Need solutions to discourage second-home, off-island investors from buying properties (such as requiring owners to live in their property for a designated period). Also address homelessness. (5) Direct new hotels and
tourist accommodations to developed areas like ‘Ewa and Kaka’ako. No more hotels in Ko’olau Loa.

- Ka’a’awa resident. Appreciates the “ramseyer” format that highlights proposed deletions/additions. Survey was poorly done. Disagree with only protecting high-value agricultural lands outside the growth boundaries, since acres of O’ahu’s high-value agricultural lands within the growth boundary were recently urbanized (Comment is in reference to Public Review Draft, Chapter II, Objective B, proposed new Policy 8: “Prohibit the urbanization of high-value agricultural land located outside the City’s growth boundaries.”) Focus on preserving remaining agricultural lands and stopping the sprawl. Cannot address affordable housing issue as long as illegal vacation rentals are allowed to continue.

- Kahuku resident. Born and raised in Lanikai during the 1960s, and upset that former Lanikai residents have moved out of the community because of housing prices. Wants to see responses of survey participants from Lā’ie because there is an entity that influences Lā’ie residents. Energy and transportation are also of concern to the Ko’olau Loa community. Opposes vacation accommodations across the island because the highway system is already overwhelmed.

- North Shore resident and member of Defend O’ahu Coalition. Wants to know criteria used to identify GP revisions. Public Review Draft has been influenced by developer interests. Opposes Turtle Bay Resort expansion. Kamehameha Highway does not have capacity for additional growth. Current owner of Turtle Bay Resort is a foreign corporation with no local ties.

- Kāne’ohe resident. Disagrees with GP policy that identifies Lā’ie as a resort area (Public Review Draft Chapter II, Objective B, Policy 7), and opposes Envision Lā’ie. Do not want to see the area’s rural character change.

- He’ieia resident. Too much focus on planning for this generation, when approach needs to plan for 7 generations into the future. The GP should focus on infrastructure needs and should honor sensible development. Cannot take any more traffic volumes on Kahekili Highway; highway already at capacity. Protect water and natural resources. Also protect Kāne’ohe Bay (too many sewage spills).

- Punalu’u resident. Concerned about the process DPP is following for this project; also doubtful that DPP will act in the interest of the community. Based on personal involvement with past planning efforts and most recently the Ko’olau Loa SCP 5-Year Update, DPP has a history of acting on behalf of landowners and special interest groups.

- Kahana resident. Accused City representatives of being incompetent and also endangering residents with their lack of action. DPP’s priority should be protecting the public good and representing the majority opinion.

- Kailua resident. Wants to see the proposed visitor accommodations policy (Policy 10) removed. Impact assessment is needed to quantify both the positive and negative impacts of visitor accommodations in residential areas. Asked if any social scientists were on-staff to assist with the General Plan Update. In response, Scott Ezer indicated that the project team did not include a social impact expert.
• Ten-year Kailua resident. Illegal visitor accommodations result from individual real estate speculation, developers, and outside/foreign investors. Possible solution would be to adopt a progressive real estate property tax, where property taxes are progressively higher for each additional property owned.

• Kailua resident. Found pages of good things in the Public Review Draft, but the proposed visitor accommodations policy ruined it. Has personal experience living next to an illegal vacation rental, and would rather live next to a military family (transient visitors are typically noisy with schedules/activities that conflict with neighboring residents, while military families become vested in the community).

• 27-year Kailua resident. Has not heard any comments in support of visitor accommodations at this meeting. Wants to know the criteria for weighting the different formats of comments (e.g., survey, written comments, comments from community meeting #1, focus group discussion, background reports), and how the background research was used to develop the proposed revisions. Policy 10 conflicts with the Ko’olau Poko SCP, which includes policies to maintain the low-rise, low-density single family character of the region, and protect the integrity of residential neighborhoods. In response, Scott Ezer indicated that a weighting system was not used to evaluate the comments. It is an inaccurate perception that the proposed revisions were based solely on the survey results and the written comments. Other forms of background research and value judgments were also considered.

• Lā’ie resident. Important to protect agricultural lands, preserve rural areas, and address coastal hazards along Kamehameha Highway. Highway was flooded and covered in sand during recent high surf/storm surge conditions. Given existing highway conditions, Turtle Bay expansion cannot be accommodated. The General Plan is a good compromise because it directs hotels and urban development to the PUC and ‘Ewa and keeps rural areas rural.

At about 8:45, after the last individual finished speaking, Jiro Sumada thanked everyone for their comments. He also recognized the DPP staff for their willingness to re-open the policy discussion, knowing that it would be an issue for public debate. He acknowledged the value of attending the public meeting and submitting comments, and encouraged continued participation in the process, as DPP would be reviewing all comments and revising the Final Plan for Planning Commission/City Council review and approval.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:50 pm.
LIST OF ATTENDEES

Department of Planning and Permitting: Jiro Sumada
  Kathy Sokugawa
  Randy Hara
  Mike Watkins

Helber Hastert & Fee Planners: Scott Ezer
  Wendie McAllaster
  Corlyn Orr
  Trisha Snelgrove

Community Attendees (57 individuals): Sandy Adamson
  Larry Bartley, Save Our Neighborhoods Hawai‘i
  Ricky Bermudez
  Barbara Burton
  Chad Christopher-Enersol
  Kevin Christopher-Enersol
  Mahealani Cypher, Koʻolau Poko Hawaiian Civic Club
  Leinaala Davis
  Nancy Davlantes
  Robert Kealoha Domingo, Kaʻaawa Community Association
  Kent Fonoimoana
  Neil Frazer
  James Gebhard
  Suzanne Gilbert
  Colin Gonzaga, Punaluʻu Community Association
  Georgia Gonzaga, Punaluʻu Community Association
  Dick Hagstrom
  Francine Hagstrom
  Byron Ho
  Choon James
  Jerry Kaluhiwa
  Rocky Kaluhiwa
  Laura Kodama, Castle & Cooke Homes Hawaiʻi
  Barbara Krasniewski
  DeeDee Letts
  Clifford Loo, Kāneʻohe Neighborhood Board
  Amy Luersen
  George Marantz
  Lisa Marten
  Creighton Mattoon
  Cathleen Mattoon
Julianne McCreedy
Rich McCreedy
Fred Mencher
Gail Myers, Office of City Councilmember Ikaika Anderson
Claire Nakamura
Jennifer Nakamura, Ko’olau Poko Hawaiian Civic Club
Flora Obayashi, Kahalu’u Neighborhood Board
Gene O’nole
Aliitasi Ponder
Chuck Prentiss, Kailua Neighborhood Board
Leigh Prentiss
Alex Ress
Bob Ress
Paula Ress
Bob Retherford
Ursula Retherford
Bill Sager, Kāne‘ohe Neighborhood Board
Michael Sakata
Ben Shafer
Stu Simmons
Frank Streed, City Council
Senator Laura Thielen
Tim Vandeveer, Defend O’ahu Coalition
Helen Walker
Grant Yoshimori