Scott Ezer convened the meeting at 4:15 pm. Kathy Sokugawa opened the meeting and thanked everyone for participating. Introductions were completed, then Scott Ezer provided a brief overview of the General Plan and the project purpose.

The meeting purpose was to discuss how the current General Plan could be improved to facilitate affordable housing in Honolulu. Meeting participants were emailed several items to be reviewed and considered in preparation for the meeting discussion, including: (1) 1992 General Plan; (2) Draft Affordable Housing Trend Report; (3) draft meeting agenda; and (4) a list of possible discussion questions. (See attached for meeting agenda, discussion questions, and policy evaluation questionnaire that was handed out at the end of the meeting.)

Scott Ezer facilitated the meeting discussion, which is summarized as follows:

**INTENT OF THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE**

This effort will focus on revising the objectives and policy statements. Current budgetary constraints do not allow for the extensive comprehensive review that would be involved in modifying the document’s structure and organization.

City ordinance requires the General Plan to be updated once every 10 years, although the City has not been consistent in meeting this requirement. Important for the City to obey the 10-year review schedule; community wants consistency and predictability in the review process.

The General Plan is intended to guide all aspects and levels of decision-making within the City. Permit applications approved by City agencies and the City Council are supposed to be in compliance with the General Plan, as are all the lower tiers of plans and ordinances.
Current policies and objectives are “motherhood and apple pie” statements. Problem is not with the language in the existing General Plan – it is generally acceptable (nothing glaringly inappropriate that needs to be changed). Problem is that the policies and objectives are not being executed. In reality, it seems that developers only consult the General Plan for guidance on regional population projections.

Efforts to improve the General Plan should focus on implementation. Emphasis should be on improving the lower tier of plans that provide regional and/or functional guidance for interpreting the General Plan (i.e., focus on the Development/Sustainable Communities Plans and Housing Functional Plan). Nevertheless, it was agreed that updating the General Plan to enhance clarity and address current issues could be beneficial by providing better guidance for the next level of plans.

COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT TREND REPORT
Discussion about for-purchase affordable market is missing from the Draft Trend Report. Factors affecting affordability for the for-purchase segment – including economic conditions, job stability, housing production – are very different than the factors that influence the rental market.

Important for the Trend Report to distinguish between the different affordable housing segments (i.e., homeless housing, public housing, rental and for-purchase), and recognize how the objectives and goals, funding and development mechanisms, and operating strategies differ for each group.

COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC LANGUAGE IN THE 1992 GENERAL PLAN (CHAPTER IV. HOUSING)

“Objective A To provide decent housing for all the people of O’ahu at prices they can afford.”
Suggested revision: “To promote housing opportunities for all the people of Hawai’i.”
Comments: “Provide opportunities” implies giving resources or direct support for housing construction. The use of “promote” is passive and implies less involvement, and takes away the City’s direct responsibility for housing.

“Objective C, Policy 4 Encourage residential development in areas where existing roads, utilities, and other community facilities are not being used to capacity.”
Comments: Statement is counter to transit-oriented development (TOD).

Objective A Policy 10 “Promote the construction of affordable dwellings which take advantage of O’ahu’s year-round moderate climate.”
Suggested revision: “Promote the construction of affordable and livable dwellings which minimize impact on the environment....”
Comments: Revise to address the current movement of incorporating green building practices and sustainability concepts into home construction. (See Green Housing section for additional discussion).

Use of the term “handicapped” in Objective A Policy 13 is outdated. “Disabled” is appropriate term.

Use of “discourage” and “prohibit” sets a negative tone (Objective B Policy 2, Objective B Policy 5, and Objective C Policy 5). Suggest rewriting using positive terminology.
Homelessness, special needs housing for the different groups within this category, TOD and green building/sustainability are issue areas not addressed in the 1992 General Plan that should be added to the Updated Plan.

HOMELESSNESS
Better coordination of services between State, City and non-profit sectors is needed to address homelessness. Under previous administrations, the City was involved in providing services for the homeless. The current administration has taken a position that homelessness is not a City issue, counter to the opinion of the Mayor’s Affordable Housing Advisory Group. Addressing homelessness should be City policy and added to the Updated General Plan.

SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING
Department of Community Services (DCS) currently receives and allocates funding for homeless and special needs facilities, including spouse abuse shelters, group homes for developmentally disabled, mentally ill, substance abuse clients, transitional housing shelters, and emergency shelters. Additionally, the two IHS homeless shelters are on City-owned land. Formal recognition of DCS efforts to service homeless and special needs population is needed in the Updated General Plan.

HUD, State and non-profit organizations recently participated in a community meeting to discuss a new mental health group living facility opening in ‘Ewa. City’s absence from meeting and lack of participation in affordable housing for mentally ill was evident.

1992 General Plan implies that the special needs population is limited to the elderly and handicapped. Update needs to consider identifying the other groups that fall into this category. On the other hand, identifying special needs groups may cause problems for groups not being identified, and may create impractical financial and administrative obligations for the City. The term “general welfare” is broad enough to encompass special needs groups. (It was noted that a recent court decision recognized that affordable housing was a worthy objective under the “general welfare” clause.)

FAIR DISTRIBUTION
1992 General Plan includes policy (Objective C, Policy 2) for fair distribution of affordable housing. This remains a desirable objective, although not realistic.

AFFORDABILITY FACTORS
Homelessness and the demand for affordable housing has increased drastically in recent years. Economic and employment pressures are greater, the cost of living is higher, and people are paying more for housing. Families and working class individuals are becoming homeless, where homelessness has historically been an issue for the disabled and mentally ill.

An individual’s ability to afford housing is not limited to development conditions and housing supply. There are demand-side factors that need to be addressed, such as education and social programs to break the cycle of low-income housing.
GREEN BUILDING AND SUSTAINABILITY
Government mandates to build green or LEED-certified buildings is not necessary. Better approach is to allow developers to respond to market trends. Developers have started to incorporate sustainable building and design features in response to consumer demand. General Plan should provide broad guidance for sustainability and aspire for “less resource-dependent homes that have the least impact on natural resources,” not restrictive planning policies that limit progress. Definition of sustainability is different for each developer. Need to be careful about how this term and green building concepts are defined in the General Plan. Advancements in technology are occurring at such a fast pace that the green building industry may be very different in the next five years (what is considered sustainable today may not be sustainable tomorrow).

Mandates for green building may affect affordability. Typical cost for a net-zero photovoltaics system for a single-family residential home is around $50,000, which may be considered unaffordable for some homebuyers.

Green building strategies such as solar water heating, high-efficiency cooling/heating systems, photovoltaics, and energy conservation measures reduce utility costs and promote affordability of living in a home. If public dollars are being used to finance housing, then developers should be required to incorporate green building strategies that minimize the homeowners’ cost-burden.

Sustainability differs for the rental multi-family development. Funding limitations and the need to contain development costs makes it difficult to construct green buildings.

ALTERNATIVE OWNERSHIP
Updated General Plan needs to encourage alternative ownership strategies that address affordability and provide long-term stability (e.g., community land trusts take the land value out of ownership).

TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT AND INFILL DEVELOPMENT
TOD and higher-density infill development cannot occur in Honolulu’s urban core given the limitations of the existing infrastructure systems. Updated General Plan needs policies that support infrastructure system improvements that would enable TOD and infill development.

Gentrification is a risk of TOD and infill development. Older housing stock in Honolulu’s urban core provides affordable rental housing. Housing for all income levels is necessary to support economic growth. Lack of affordable housing negatively affects recruitment, making it difficult for employers to attract and retain talent from outside Hawai’i.

ENTITLEMENT APPROVALS
Barriers that make entitlement approvals difficult to get are important to preserving land and reducing widespread development. Streamlining permit processes is not the main concern for housing affordability issues. Updated General Plan needs language to promote efficiency, such as the suggested policies: (1) “Allow technology to influence City’s procedures and operations.” (2) “Strive for continuous improvement and introduction of efficient technology to improve business practices.”
OBSERVATIONS ABOUT HONOLULU VS. MAINLAND CITIES
Honolulu’s affordable housing providers do not have the same type of resources that are available on the mainland. In general, resources are more readily-available on the mainland. There are more service agencies, more financing companies with access to CRA investment, more funding options, and more support for organizations building affordable housing. Public-private partnerships are also more common on the mainland.

Honolulu has higher inclusionary housing requirements than most mainland cities (30% in Honolulu vs. 16% mainland average). However, unlike many mainland cities that impose inclusionary housing requirements on commercial projects, Honolulu only requires homebuilders to construct affordable housing for zoning amendments to residential zoning districts (i.e., no affordable housing requirements for commercial or industrial projects).

MEETING WRAP-UP
Each participant was asked to take home and complete a policy evaluation questionnaire, and return it to HHF in the pre-addressed/stamped envelope.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:30 pm.