

Vacation rental solutions possible

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



The Alternative Accommodations/Vacation Rentals Workshop held by the Maui Chamber of Commerce

on March 8 demonstrated that there are many possible solutions to allow this industry to peacefully co-exist in residential areas through industry standards, fees, reasonable regulation, and appropriate enforcement, since all agreed that we must protect our neighborhoods.

This workshop came about because Council Member Gladys Baisa suggested that it would be helpful if community members had a chance to review and comment on the proposed bills from the Planning Department before the council began its work on them this week. The bills deal with bed-and-breakfast regulations, allowing bed-and-breakfast operations in rural and agricultural districts, conditional permits, and how transient vacation rentals (TVRs), where the owner lives elsewhere, can be managed. We agreed that a workshop would be helpful. We also wanted to assist by reviewing the draft legislation and providing suggestions to aid the council in its deliberations.

Given national and international trends, the Maui Chamber of Commerce long has recognized that alternative accommodations and vacation rentals

are an important aspect of the visitor industry, and that Maui County will have some sort of an alternative vacation accommodations industry. Therefore, the premise of the workshop was simple — how can Maui County accommodate its existing vacation rental industry, not whether there should be such an industry.

The workshop was designed to be solutions based. We brought together interested parties in the community to address key alternative-accommodation concerns, identify remedies and draft a report with reasonable legislative recommendations on the bills presented by the Planning Department. The recommendations would allow Maui County to keep its alternative-accommodations and vacation rental operations; reap the economic benefits this industry brings; preserve important agricultural lands; help meet critical affordable housing and rental needs; not overly impact our infrastructure; address visitor safety; and protect residents and neighborhoods.

Eighty people registered for the free three-hour event in advance and 70 attended, including four chamber staff members.

The workshop comprised four main components: a review of the proposed bills by Planning Director Jeff Hunt to help participants better understand the Planning Department's point of view and elements of the legislation; a panel of seven speakers who addressed key issues; five working groups to discuss various aspects of the bills and to devel-

op recommendations; and reporting of the working groups' recommendations.

Following the speaker presentations, workshop participants were assigned to one of five working groups, labeled as follows:

- Use of Ag Lands & Farm Income Tests.
- Cottages, Wider B&B Proprietorships & Breakfast Service Requirement.
- Conditional Permits, Pure TVRs & 20 Room Inns.
- Transition Period/Grandfathering, Fees vs. Taxes & Caps.
- Residential Use Requirements & Protecting Neighborhoods.

Each working group had to address a set of specific questions that corresponded with language in the draft bills. A lot of material was presented to be covered in a very short time frame, and not all questions presented were acted upon within the working groups. However, all groups kept to task during the time allotted and opted not to take planned breaks so they could respond to as much of the material as possible.

Through the process, participants also demonstrated that we, as a community, can unite in a cooperative manner and discuss contentious topics while being respectful of differing ideas and opinions, and can come together on compromises and resolutions.

Many recommendations were made that day, and they have been compiled — along with information on the workshop itself — into a 12-page workshop report (not including

attachments). This report was provided to the mayor, each council member's office and the planning director early Tuesday morning, before the council's Planning Committee addressed the issue during its scheduled meeting. A copy of this report can be found on our Web site at www.maui-chamber.com.

We believe it is important for the community to recognize the value of this industry to: our economy, the visitor industry, the business sector, and the overall marketing of Maui as a place to visit and do business. This industry reportedly brings in between \$230 million and \$319 million a year and creates between 2,500 and 3,400 jobs. With continued economic slowing predicted, this is not the time to be shutting down an industry that benefits us.

Therefore, we've asked that the County Council:

- Give serious consideration to the recommendations contained in the workshop report.
- Allow this industry in broader areas than just resort areas.

• Stop the closure of vacation rentals until new, appropriate legislation is in place with a reasonable permit process, and have permit applications reviewed and decided upon prior to any enforcement.

Win-win solutions are possible, and we are asking for workable legislation that we, as a community, can live with to permit alternative accommodations and vacation rentals.

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