

Should Maui Island Plan be 'The People's Plan?'

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



As the process of updating the Maui Island Plan continues, albeit on hold for a while as our County

Council works

on the county budget, some have called this document "The People's Plan."

While we do not feel it should be dubbed "The People's Plan" at this juncture, because there are still many strong concerns with the document, we do agree that widespread public participation is important in a document of this magnitude. So, how can we bring up our community's level of interest and participation in this plan? The answer is education and information.

In 2002, the Maui County Council sought to improve the General Plan update process and enacted Bill

84, which included increasing public and community participation in the planning process.

The revised general plan ordinance said "the general plan shall be developed with public notification and participation, facilitated by the use of tools such as public opinion surveys, community design charrettes, public hearings and informational meetings, radio, newspaper, television, and other types of communication and direct consultation with different age, economic, and other groups."

It is a great goal. Has this been done to a degree sufficient for the Maui Island Plan to be viewed as "The People's Plan?" We think not, not yet, anyway.

It would seem for it to be "The People's Plan" that many would be directly involved and actively participating in the development of this plan. Thus far, outside of the Planning Department, the number of citizen advisers with broad input into the plan is relatively small. The process provided for a 25-member General Plan Advisory Committee, with re-

view by the nine-member Maui Planning Commission, before going to County Council. Combined, 34 citizen advisers and planning commission members does not seem like enough citizens to refer to this document as "The People's Plan."

While a number of community meetings were held — along with other activities in 2006 — and offered opportunities for people to testify during public meetings, the process was confusing, not well understood, and challenging for many to participate in. So, if more did not come forward, does that mean people do not care? Not from our view. We believe more would come forward if they well understood the process, the plan, and the ramifications, and if they had an easy way to provide meaningful feedback.

How many should be included for it to be considered representative of "the people" — 10 percent of residents, 25 percent, 50 percent or more? Calling it "The People's Plan" implies far-reaching acceptance.

Recently, at a council hearing

where business people attended to share their thoughts on the Maui Island Plan, a General Plan Advisory Committee member had the gall to testify that those who testified before the advisory panel at night represented the community and those who came during the day were large landowners, developers, etc., as if they somehow were not part of the community and their voice should not count, or count less. Those referred to are all Maui residents who live, work, raise or have raised families here, and employ others. They also generously give both time and money to this community. To suggest that they are not part of the community or that their testimony should not be given equal consideration is absurd and would work against having a document that could be called "The People's Plan." It leads to questions about who is being referred to, all Mauians or a select few.

Additionally, in terms of participation, it is important to note that the world has changed dramatically while this process was under way.

New people may now want to ring in, while others who have rung in before may want to augment or change comments previously shared. While many of our aspirations remain the same, much of our reality has changed and the Maui Island Plan is expected to prioritize, help budget for, and help implement action items. Therefore, members of the public should have an opportunity to share their thoughts on this planning tool down to the wire.

The good news is that there is still time. More can be done to educate the public on this very important plan using radio, newspaper and television to engage and encourage the public to get involved. With increased participation, the plan may one day be considered "The People's Plan," but regardless of the title, additional input will equate to a better, more informed plan and help us create the sustainable future — economically, environmentally, and socially — that we desire.

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