

Testimony regarding Use of Lahaina Banyan Tree Park – Agenda item IEM-79  
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Aloha Committee Chair Cochran and Members

Thank you for having this hearing and allowing the community to give input. As members may be aware our County Parks Director requested a transfer of the County's responsibility for Banyan Tree Park to the state. The State BLNR was set to award a lease of the area, however it held up decision making when they were informed that the community had not been given an opportunity to give input at the County level and that an item was actually pending at the Council regarding use of the Park.

As you may also be aware, problems erupted when our West Maui Hospital Foundation filed for a permit allowing us to be a participant in events at the Park. The process did not work and resulted in extremely divisive testimony, false accusations and denial of equal access.

Rather than resolve the issues that have plagued the use of the Park, (well before our request was ever made) the Parks Department "passed the buck" to the State. I disagree with this approach and believe that the Council should take whatever action is appropriate to correct the problems so that issues do not keep cropping up with each new request to utilize the area.

My recommendation is to appoint a Council subcommittee to investigate the matter and make recommendations on how best to resolve the use of the site that is consistent with the terms of the Executive Order. In this way, information can be gathered and then transmitted to the Council as to what actions should be taken to resolve any problems identified and make the needed changes.

Data should be gathered from existing participants, community members and agencies that have or could have involvement in the management and/or use of the property. Some potential questions should address the history of the site, the cost to maintain the site (including grants), the use and capacity of the site, the revenues generated by the site users and their participants, compliance with historic district rules and regulations, executive orders relating to the site and whether or not the State or the County should oversee the process.

I am more than happy to provide additional information or suggestions on how the Council could proceed and what questions may be useful to ask to help resolve these matters. The animosity and unkind comments that have been made due to our simple request for equal access to this site do nothing to help resolve the issues surrounding the use of the area. We are not the problem – it is the flawed process that is to blame.

RECEIVED AT IEM MEETING ON 9-17-18