

Initial Findings: Synthesis of Public Testimony

➤ DR-4724-HI

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Purpose and Methodology

Purpose: Synthesize testimony that has already been given to Government to inform recovery planning, and for integration into future engagements

- Two committees under the Maui County's Council held space for public testimony following the Lahaina Town Fire
 - Government Relations, Ethics, and Transparency Committee
 - Disaster, Resilience, International Affairs, and Planning Committee
- A team of FEMA analysts reviewed 165 testimonies given at nine of these meetings from 9/27-11/2, reviewing over 30 hours of council proceedings
- Through an iterative process, the testimony was coded by the team into themes and tagged with key words, which was then synthesized into themes



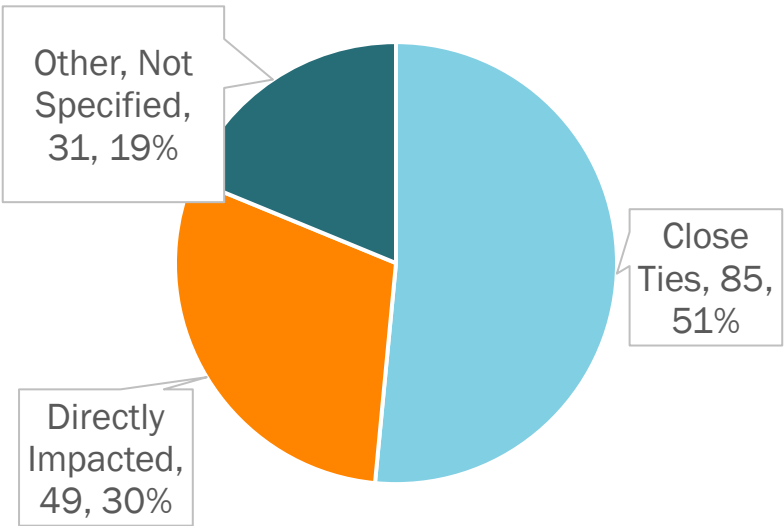
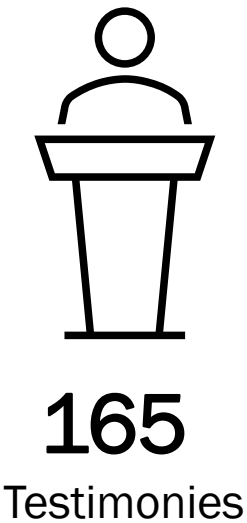
Limitations

- Testifiers only had three minutes to speak
- Written testimonies were not included in this synthesis
- Not everyone that was impacted was able to testify (language barriers, trauma, timing, transportation, etc.)
- This analysis was done rapidly and involved subjective coding on the part of our analysts. It should not be considered an exhaustive understanding of community sentiment
- The unit of analysis is a testimony, not an individual

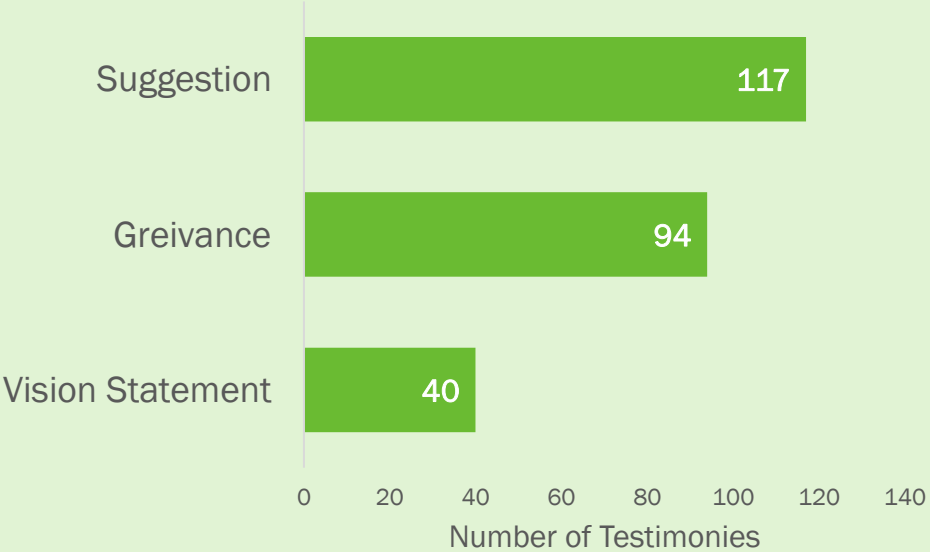


Who Testified and About What

Who Gave Testimony*



What they Expressed**

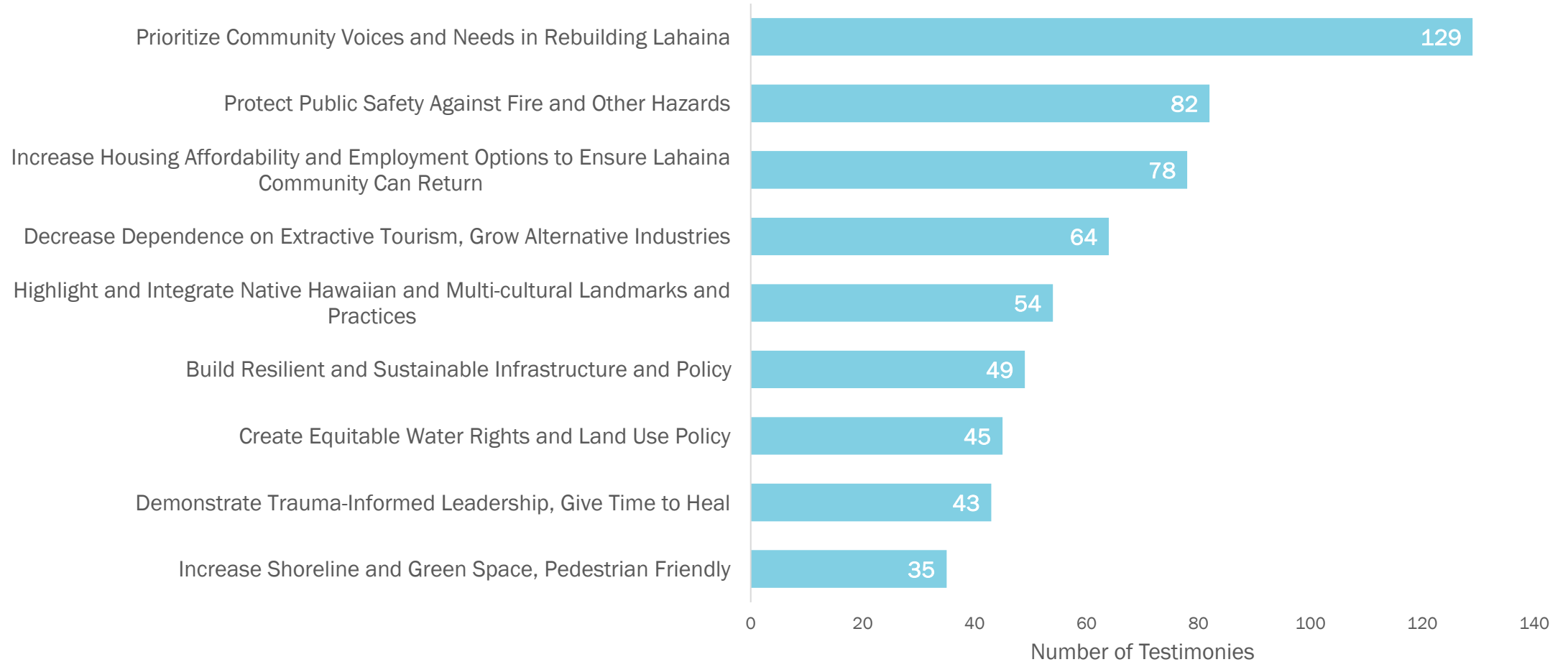


*If an individual testified on more than one occasion, they are counted more than once

** Individuals could express more than one sentiment in one testimony



Key Themes Identified



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Key Words

“The community here has shown that they are ready to build something new”

- Testimony from the 9/27 GREAT meeting
from a resident with close ties to Lahaina



Key Themes

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Prioritize Community Voices and Needs in Rebuilding Lahaina

- The community has been supporting each other (hubs, housing, etc.)
- Do not make decisions about the community without community input. Community participation is essential to recovery (55)
- Listen to community ideas in the rebuilding, including policies and programs proposed in the testimony (45)
- Desire to:
 - Increase transparency (22), create accountability (23), decrease uncertainty (16) and have clear public communication about services, the recovery, and the timeline (22)
 - See a greater County presence in West Maui (19)

"We need to listen. If you're not from here, listen. If you don't know about the subject, listen. Keep listening to the Kūpuna, the people of this land."

- Survivor testimony from the 9/27 GREAT meeting

"Show us that our government cares for us."

- Survivor testimony from the 9/27 GREAT meeting

39

Directly Impacted

66

Close Ties

24

Other





Enhance Public Safety for Fire and Other Hazards

- The rebuild should prioritize making sure this does not happen again
- Concerns about:
 - The safety of the reopening of Lahainaluna School (19)
 - Debris removal (8)
- Desire for:
 - Evacuation routes (29)
 - Better wildlands and fire management (27)
 - An Advanced Warning System (14)
 - Air/Water Quality Monitoring (10)
 - Accountability for maintaining agricultural lands

“Our main concern is our future safety, we need to be sure this will never happen again, we need responsible land management.”

*- Testimony from the 9/27 GREAT meeting
from a resident with close ties to Lahaina*



32

Directly
Impacted

38

Close Ties

12

Other



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[*Photo from 2018 Fire: 7 Homes Damaged or Destroyed in Lahaina Fire : Maui Now](#)



Increase Housing Affordability and Employment Options to Ensure Lahaina Community Can Return and Thrive

- Fear over having to leave Lahaina area because of lack of affordable housing (28)
- Uncertainty over shorter-term sheltering (29)
 - Community members focused on where they will be sleeping, not on being able to heal or figure out longer-term solutions
- Desire for:
 - Financial relief: Rental assistance (7), home financing (9), property tax relief (8)
 - Short-term rental ban or adjusted permitting to allow short-term rentals to rent longer-term to survivors (16)
 - Expedited permitting for residential housing (21)



“Housing has to come first. We cannot move forward the business side of things until we have housing for our workforce.”

- Testimony from the 11/2 GREAT meeting

from a resident with close ties to Lahaina

28

Directly
Impacted

33

Close Ties

17

Other



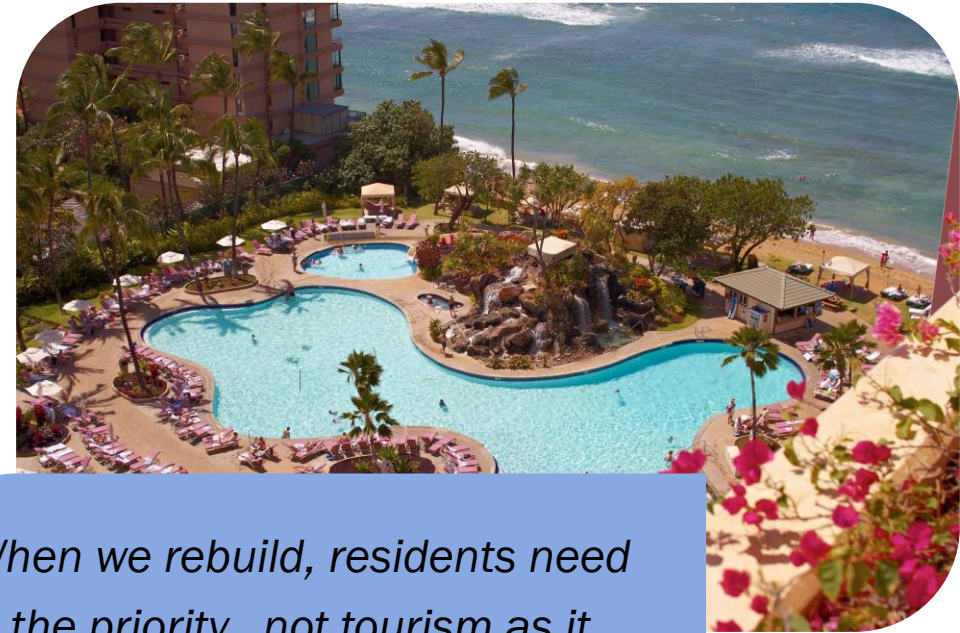
DRAFT – DO NOT DISTRIBUTE

[*Maui wildfire survivors camp on the beach to push mayor to convert vacation rentals into housing - Washington Times](#)



Decrease Dependence on Extractive Tourism, Grow Alternative Industries

- Outcry from the community against the October 8th reopening (14)
- Desire for:
 - Decrease dependence on tourism (53)
 - Alternative industries (6)
 - Increased economic resilience to threats such as the fire, or COVID, is needed
 - Workforce development (6)
 - Regenerative tourism
 - Increased agriculture (17)
 - Adjusted water rights (36)



“When we rebuild, residents need be the priority...not tourism as it has been in the past where there were imbalances and abuse.”

20
Directly
Impacted

30
Close Ties

14
Other

- Testimony from the 9/27 GREAT meeting
from a resident with close ties to Lahaina



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*<https://th.bing.com/th/id/OIP.LlcoNYlq8T7cJn1sRVQUhAHaE8?rs=1&pid=ImgDetMain>

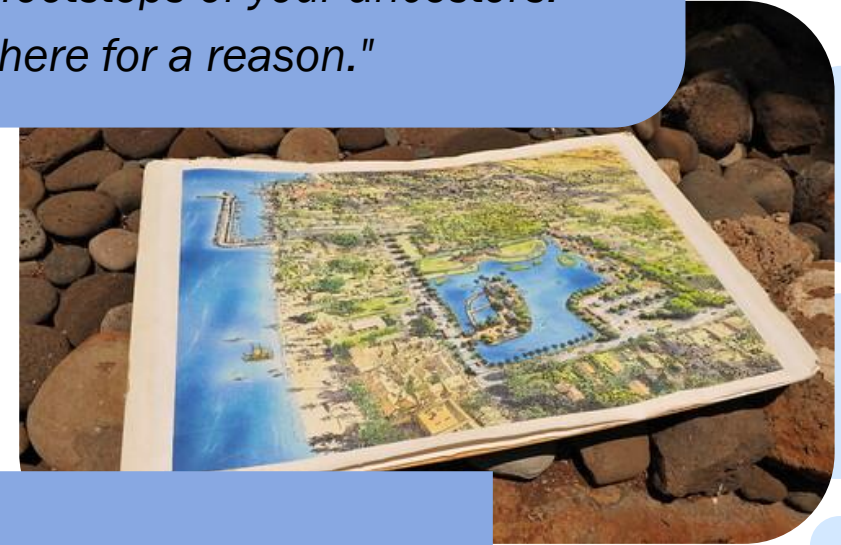


Highlight and Integrate Native Hawaiian and Multi-Cultural Landmarks and Practices

- Apply indigenous wisdom (15) and use it as a guide for rebuilding
 - Respecting 'Aina
 - Land management to prevent fires and restore water (27)
- Desire to:
 - Honor Lahaina's cultural diversity (9)
 - Preserve Hawaiian culture (40)
 - Honor ancestors (10)
 - Rebuild or restore historic cultural landmarks
 - Moku'ula/Mokuhinia (8)
 - Maintain sense of community

*"Walk the footsteps of your ancestors.
They are there for a reason."*

- Testimony from the
9/27 GREAT meeting
from a resident with
close ties to Lahaina



*"I would like to see that we have
culturally significant places, not just for
Hawaiians, for Latinos, Italians,
Samoans. We are a diverse community,
so we need to have that diversity."*

- Testimony from the 10/25 GREAT meeting from a resident with close ties to Lahaina

18

Directly
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30

Close Ties

6

Other



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[*Moku'ula Island and Mokuhinia Wetland Restoration in Lahaina Maui
and remembering Akoni Akana - Maui Times](#)



Build Resilient and Sustainable Infrastructure and Policy

- Rebuild more sustainable (14) and resilient infrastructure with impacts of climate change in mind (4) and considering future generations
- Desire for:
 - Updating utilities (20), including grounding electrical lines and connecting to sewer lines (cesspools, septic)
 - Alternative energy sources
 - Reliable water access
 - Use R1 water systems (7)
 - Use green building materials and practices
 - Sustainable agriculture (17)
 - A hospital in West Maui (6)

"To hear the sea we must hear the mountain. We need to expedite the regeneration of our island. Everyone's footprint on the island matters"



- Testimony from the
9/27 GREAT meeting
from a resident with
close ties to Lahaina

15
Directly
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23
Close Ties

11
Other



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Create Equitable Water Rights and Land Use Policy

- Equitable water rights (36) are a priority issue that relates to many of the other themes
- Changes to zoning (12), particularly along the shoreline were also a key issue
- Desire to:
 - Increase water access for residents of Lahaina
 - Require private water purveyors tie into county lines
 - Make zoning and zoning enforcement more equitable and transparent
 - Change taxation and enforcement of land use
 - Implement measures in the July 2021 Cost of Government Report on Wildfire Prevention and Cost Recovery on Maui



"We are in this together, all we have now is time, we have to be a part of this recovery, we have to do this right, but we cannot be stewards of this land if there is no water."

- Survivor testimony from the 9/27 GREAT meeting

19

Directly Impacted

23

Close Ties

3

Other



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**It Will Be Years Before Clean Water Is Restored In Lahaina - Honolulu Civil Beat*



Demonstrate Trauma-Informed Leadership, Give Time to Heal

- Many testifiers shared personal stories of their survival, the destruction of their homes, losing loved ones, and mourning the loss of their community
- Desire to:
 - Postpone the October 8th reopening (14)
 - Give the community time to mourn
 - Support mental health services (21)
 - Acknowledge the trauma
 - Create art (2)
 - Center the rebuilding around the needs of displaced children (18) and the elderly (9)



"We are all awake, we are raw, we are feeling everything, we are feeling our tears, we are feeling each other and we get to do this as a community together."

- Testimony from the 9/27 GREAT meeting from a resident with close ties to Lahaina

19
Directly
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19
Close Ties

5
Other

15



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[*Maui wildfire survivors camp on the beach to push mayor to convert vacation rentals into housing | Nation & World | meridianstar.com](#)



Increase Shoreline and Greenspace, Pedestrian-Centered Design

- Testifiers did not want to build back with the same footprint as before
- Desire to:
 - Push back Front Street (14)
 - Implement managed retreat along the shoreline (7)
 - Create a memorial (2)
 - Increase green space
 - Use indigenous and fruit bearing plants (17)
 - Make the town pedestrian friendly, not centered around cars



"Just before the fire, if you walked down Front Street - it was not the street that I grew up on. It became very dirty, there was no soul in the town, there was no opportunity for our community to participate in the economy down there"

- Survivor Testimony from the 10/25 GREAT meeting

14

Directly
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19

Close Ties

2

Other



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[*Maui proposes major improvements to Lahaina's Front Street | Honolulu Star-Advertiser \(staradvertiser.com\)](https://www.staradvertiser.com)

Next Steps



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Next Steps



- Draw on public testimonies to inform the Recovery Plan process
 - Disseminate key findings to relevant RSFs
 - Propose/validate project development based on community ideas
 - Project design should be an iterative process and include community members
- Consider the results of this synthesis when planning January kickoff and future community engagements
 - Communicate results back to community at a future engagement, gather feedback



Additional Data (Backup Slides)

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Policy Suggestions

Topic	Recommended Policies/Suggestions
Zoning, Land Use, and Natural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agricultural land should be used for agriculture - the county should not allow landowners to build mansions on agricultural land• Alanui Ka Mo'i can become the new Front Street• Allow increased density to allow for ADUs/Ohanas so that community members can more easily accommodate displaced families.• An ordinance to require that for every ornamental plant a native plant or fruit bearing tree should be planted.• Create an additional tax rate for unused land, provide incentives for these properties to include agriculture• Create penalties for those not taking care of their land to fire standards (I.e cutting grass)• Future zoning for the rebuilding on Front Street should follow historical building codes• Have agricultural landowners pay commercial or residential tax rates to avoid neglecting agricultural land.• Implement managed retreat on shoreline.• Integrate private entities and waterways with county water lines.• Irrigate fire prone land.• Provide government subsidies for agriculture• Require buildings to implement native or useful foliage• Require larger set back along the shoreline, demolish those buildings that do not meet the code.• Revise the Resident Alien Act to give land back to Hawaiians.



Policy Suggestions

Topic	Recommended Policies/Suggestions
Schools and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Every student and their families should plant trees on DOT highways and schools.• The council should mandate that the state shuts down the school due to unsafe conditions.• There are unsafe conditions at the school. We all know that it is so that parents can go back to work. Council should pay for kids to get baseline tests now with their doctors.• We need to move elementary school from Front St, when the fires started we were put into a death trap with only one evacuation route, we need more than one evacuation route.
Response and Recovery Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add more Lahaina focused planner positions• Audit funds that are donated.• Create hubs in locations where there are engineers, architects, planners and permitting all in one place• Employ emergency grant writers and experts to go after Federal funds such as from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Grid Resilience, Federal Hazard Mitigation post-fire Grant Program• Implement the West Maui Community Plan and the Climate Action and Resiliency Plan.• Initiate investigation on the response to the disaster.• Put west Maui under an emergency proclamation.
Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish a community cultural farm program, similar to the one in Hana• Put a moratorium on the Jones Act to get supplies sooner and cheaper• We need to clean up Kaho'olawe, it has been abandoned since the WWII.



Policy Suggestions

Topic	Recommended Policies/Suggestions
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow for temporary units/tiny homes on wheels to be hooked up to water/sewer, which is currently against county code.• Allow short-term rental owners to pause their short-term rental and transition to a longer term 6 month rental .• Build temporary housing up north.• Cap permitting costs, or make them free.• Deferral of property taxes.• Do not require property tax on destroyed properties.• End short term rentals in Lahaina• Extend and enforce the eviction and rent raise moratorium. This has been put into place but is not being enforced.• Extend short-term rental taxation exemptions for people who own short-term rentals to incentivize owners to give housing to displaced citizens.• Fast track permits to build houses.• Fast-track permitting and home models are needed.• Give first right of refusal to those that are displaced, do it soon to take advantage of FHA disaster loans.• Give individuals in neighboring areas access to FEMA and SBA financing to build additional housing to accommodate survivors.• Give property tax relief.• Grant extensions to short-term rental owner permits if they rent for six months or a year.• Short-turn rentals into long-term housing• HRS 26/27 - there is a provision after state of emergency that allows structures to be rebuilt but there are certain hurdles. If we don't do something about certain properties, perhaps only a 1br could fit.



Policy Suggestions

Topic	Recommended Policies/Suggestions
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leverage statute 127A-12C to convert vacation rentals into long-term housing.• Make pre-approved building plans to fast track and mainstream permitting process• Make the tax deferral happen.• Mandate higher tax rate for out of state housing owners.• Moratorium on having at-market houses for sale.• Need to look at potential moratorium on short-term rentals which have contributed to the existing housing crisis.• Prohibit out of state investors from buying real estate under a certain price point to make home ownership attainable for local people.• Provide housing to external engineers and architects of hire retired engineers and architects across HI• Provide mortgage deferrals.• Reduce permit fees for construction, or get rid of them entirely.• Stop inflated taxes and mortgage payments on destroyed homes, moratorium on rent.• Stop short term rentals.• Tax tourists, and give that money directly to rebuilding homes.• The County should work with the State Insurance Commissioner to address difficulty insuring, which is preventing financing and permitting.• The mayor should activate 127A-12C to shut down vacation rentals.• There are well over 2000 short term vacation rentals operating in West Maui w/o permits that are legal under an exemption. You have the authority under HRS 127A-13C to declare that they no longer operate as short term rental and should operate as long term rentals to help displaced people.



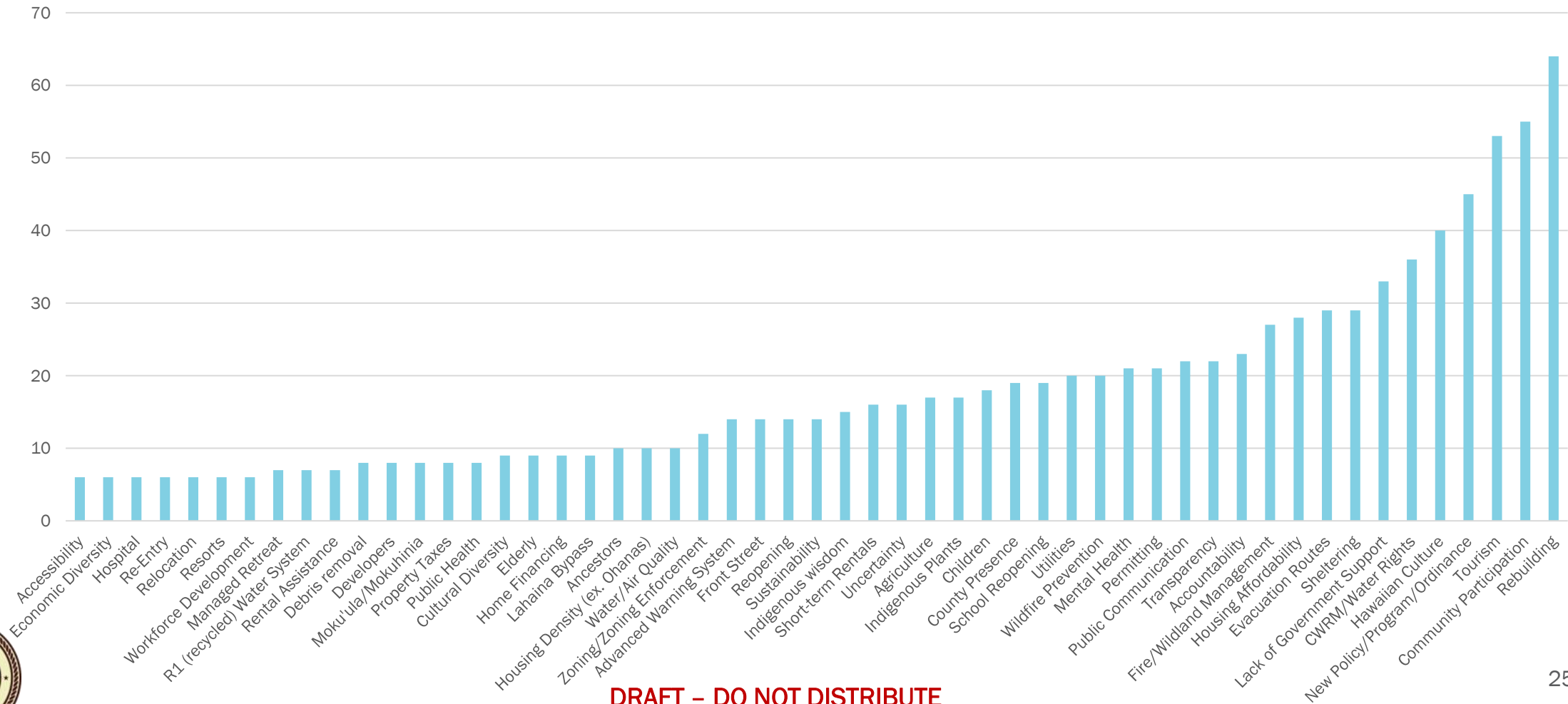
Policy Suggestions

Topic	Recommended Policies/Suggestions
Public Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create fines if not maintaining land for fire management• Demand that the DOE superintendent turns over the remaining list of no-contact received.• Develop emergency evacuation plan for all types of disasters• Get an advanced warning system that gives direct information over loudspeakers.• Have a National training center for wildfires in West Maui, and better training for firefighters.• Hire twice as many firefighters to manage the land and create fire lines, create more fire stations, increase ambulance services and establish a hospital.• Hold private landowners accountable for fire mitigation - if they do not there should be fines/enforcement.• Install an intercom system that can give more specific advanced warnings.• Leverage Recommendations from the Report on Wildfire Prevention and Cost Recovery on Maui• Pass legislation for large landowners to have to do fire abatement• The county could get thermal cameras to pre-emptively detect fires.
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create an initiative for mental health based on cultural and religious groups.• Creation of West Maui Hospital, seek funds through USDA.• Have Aloha Care present in the resource center.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a committee that would establish accountability for organizations that are donating money to see where that money is going and make sure that it is equitably dispersed• Before Kūpuna pass we need to use their historical knowledge of Lahaina• Divide neighborhoods into blocks and nominate 1-2 captains to represent their neighborhoods.• Maui County should buy more land in West Maui so we don't have to rely on Hawaiian homelands or private sector• Organize events to talk story.



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Keywords with > 5 Testimonies



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DRIP Committee

From: Josiah Nishita <Josiah.K.Nishita@co.maui.hi.us>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 2:11 PM
To: DRIP Committee
Subject: Presentation
Attachments: Testimony_Synthesis_120823_2.pdf

See attached for my presentation given at today's meeting.

CM's bcc'd on this email.

Thanks,
Josiah