



*REALTORS®
Association of
Maui, Inc.*

441 Ala Makani Place
Kahului, Maui, HI 96732-3507
Phone: 808-243-8585 ~ Fax: 808-243-8585
Dave DeLeon, Government Affairs Director
Cell: 808-281-3269
E-mail: GAD@RAMaui.com
www.RAMaui.com

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TESTIMONY

Good Morning and Aloha. I am David DeLeon, speaking on behalf of Maui's 1,500 licensed, professional Realtors. I can not begin to tell you how excited we are to see today's agenda: The County of Maui is finally making moves towards being a part of the housing crisis solution, instead of being part of the problem.

Both Governor Ige and Mayor Arakawa have stated that a key to fixing our housing shortage is for government to stop being an impediment to housing development and instead to recognize its responsibility to become a housing facilitator. The creativity represented in today's agenda demonstrates that Maui County is coming to grips with the depth of our housing dilemma and is willing to step out of its comfort zone to address it.

Actually, this effort began last year with Bob Carroll's proposal to allow more density in the residential district by allowing ohana units on properties as small as 5,000 square feet. We recommend that the Council approve the measure without any stipulations except a prohibition on their use as vacation rentals. There is no need to add requirements that these units be used for affordable housing because clearly 450 square foot dwellings will not be luxurious. Adopting detailed requirements may actually impede their development.

One obvious strategy for addressing our housing shortage is to increase allowable densities in existing neighborhoods and to make better use of our existing housing stock. That's why we seriously recommend that the County consider allowing additional cooking facilities, beyond one standard kitchen in "single-family" residential units. It is time to realize that families have been adding density without permits for decades, and to recognize that the additional families who share these homes should also have access to safe, healthy cooking facilities. Call it a "wetbar" or whatever, but recognizing these families' existence and needs would be another step outside of our collective regulatory box, and towards making these dwellings safe.

Finally, we would like to praise the Planning Department's ambitious offering of other potential "out of the box" housing solutions. Last year, RAM surveyed a variety of knowledgeable housing and planning professionals and came up with a number of the same steps that the Planning Department is offering here. Key elements on this list include added density and making better use of both existing homes and undeveloped properties. We would suggest one more: Maui County hiring a "housing czar" whose sole job would be the promotion of affordable housing development.

If this Planning Department's list is fully implemented, Maui County will have gone from being part of the problem, to becoming an important part of the solution to our housing crisis.

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