







Maui News Editorial

Sunday, February 24, 2002

C. Brewer land worth buying

In a perfect world, government would be confined to doing what private enterprise could not or would not. In this perfect world, county government would be largely a supervisor of the private delivery of services, an instigator/facilitator of projects involving coalitions of private enterprises, and planning for the needs of the future.

Of course, Maui in 2002 is far from being a perfect world and county government is called upon daily to provide a wide range of taxpayer-funded services. It could be argued that this daily demand is one of the reasons those in county government seem to seldom look very far into the future, never mind the real need to make plans stretching 25, 50 and 100 years beyond today.

Mayor James "Kimo" Apana's notion of forming a public-private partnership to buy 20,800 acres of conservation and agricultural land from C. Brewer is visionary and seems to fit into the kind of perfect world described above. C. Brewer, incorporated in 1826 under the monarchy, has put a \$100 million price tag on its Maui property, which includes 13,200 acres of conservation land.

Apana has suggested — and it may be a political trial balloon — the county partner with "several major landowners and with government entities." He acknowledged the Office of Hawaiian Affairs would be one. On Maui, major landowners would include Alexander & Baldwin along with Maui Land & Pineapple Co. A&B is known to be interested in the land it leases from C. Brewer for sugar cane and ML&P would like to have more pineapple land closer to its Kahului cannery.

As envisioned by Apana, the deal could result in the county, i.e., the public, owning vital watershed and recreation land in lao and Waihee valleys while keeping agriculture going in Central Maui. That should also work toward limiting urban sprawl and the further erosion of Maui's basic character.

The C. Brewer sale is a rare opportunity for the public to take control of a major part of the island. It's worth pursuing, for Maui today and tomorrow. The major obstacle is political will, and that will be determined by just how much support the public is willing to give the proposal.