

Great Committee

From: Nancy Makowski <nancy@hdep.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 21, 2023 2:14 PM
To: Great Committee
Subject: GREAT committee meeting Sept 27: testimony
Attachments: Reimagining Lahaina v4.1 09-18-2023.docx

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Dear members of the GREAT Committee

We understand that the GREAT Committee is holding a hearing on September 27. We wanted to submit written testimony, since we can't attend in person that day, but the website given to submit testimony is limited to a few online comments and doesn't allow for uploading documents.

We have been working with various community members, and have some forward-looking "Lahaina Re-imagining" thoughts we hope the Committee will find useful. We would appreciate your kind acceptance of this document for review. We know there will be many other ideas, but perhaps ours will prompt some creative and feasible thoughts for the future of our town.

With our best regards,

Nancy Makowski and Virendra Nath
Lahaina

Re-imagining Lahaina, v.4.1

Respectfully submitted by: Virendra Nath and Nancy Makowski

September 18, 2023

Version Description:

This is version 4.1 of the Reimagining Lahaina document. This version incorporates the feedback received and is restructured as follows:

- Reimagining Lahaina Town separates the commercial and residential parts of the town, and adds additional detail on steps that can be taken to increase the housing stock for local families.
- A separate document outlines the project to green the hillsides behind Lahaina Town to protect against future fires.

REIMAGINING LAHAINA TOWN:

Difficult to recreate Front Street as it was:

It will be difficult, if not impossible, to rebuild Front Street as the commercial and tourist center it is, because:

- a. There is a Maui County law that prevents any construction up to 150 feet from the ocean's high-water mark. The law would encompass the makai side of Front Street, all of Front Street itself and part of the shops on the mauka part of Front Street.
- b. The commercial areas on the water at Front Street (and elsewhere in Lahaina town) were constructed decades ago. Before reconstruction of those structures, the land will need to be examined by archeologists for Hawaiian remains (iwi). Lahaina was the capital of the Hawaiian kingdom and it is likely that unexcavated iwi exist on the makai portions of Front Street (and elsewhere in Lahaina Town).
- c. The sea level rise maps show that most of Front Street from Papalaua to Lahainaluna will be under water with 3.2-foot sea level rise. The maps can be found at:

<https://climate.hawaii.gov/hi-adaptation/sea-level-rise-viewer-flowchart/>

These factors eliminate the possibility of Front Street becoming as it was – a tourist hub of West Maui – unless political pressure by commercial interests can waive State law, county ordinances and overcome the planning parameters that have guided community plans.

Therefore:

Lahaina Town – public memorial:

The new Lahaina town should have a public memorial park along the ocean, stretching from Shaw Street

on the south side to perhaps Papalaua Street on the north side of Lahaina. Public input may increase or decrease the extent of the park, but these boundaries are suggested because they would include the sacred site at Shaw Street and will not disturb the currently zoned residential areas along Front Street.

Residential versus Commercial Zoning:

This proposal does not disturb the current zoning of residential or commercial areas of Lahaina Town. No rezoning is anticipated as part of this proposal.

Economic driver for a reimagined Lahaina Town:

Lahaina will continue to be a tourist draw, but not the way it was before the fire. It should be a place to nurture the local community, as well as a place for a respectful, thriving tourism industry that focuses on the host culture and provides a unique experience available nowhere else.

The new Lahaina Town can be a center for food, healing, art, entertainment and water sports, with the harbor central to the memorial park, anchoring Native Hawaiian canoes and other ocean voyaging vessels connecting to the islands of the Pacific. Museums and memorials depicting the important history of Lahaina from pre-contact to the present would provide a further attraction and educational experience for both tourists and the community.

The economic drivers for Lahaina Town should provide local people the option to work within the town itself, as opposed to having to commute to the resorts north of town. The employment opportunities offered should be organized so that people have a pathway to increased personal and economic growth. Jobs in the hospitality industry often provide few avenues for personal growth or economic betterment.

Lahaina Town as the cultural center of Hawaii and the Pacific:

There can be many entertainment and recreational opportunities in the new Lahaina. The driver of the economy of Lahaina Town should be centered in the education, training and prosperity of artists, healers, water-people and others, based on an identity as the cultural capital for all of Hawaii, and the Pacific islands.

Possibilities include:

- Special consideration to enhance and promote the host culture and its arts.
- A focus on indigenous art and culture, including indigenous cultures from the Pacific islands.
- The harbor reconstructed to accommodate Pacific voyaging and formal schools for sailing, surfing, fishing, navigating using stars, canoe building etc., with a section for the commercial vessels that used to be there. Suggestion: this complex could be placed at the site of the former Kamehameha III school, with the school moving up-hill, closer to the residential areas.
- A center for the study of whales and the impact of climate change on marine life.
- Music, dance, sculpture, film, painting, tiki carving, poetry, fiction given space to flourish.
- A theater for hula and music performances. Smaller venues for poets and writers.
- The Maui College food innovation program could be moved to Lahaina and become a center for innovative restaurants and food businesses.
- The University of Hawaii Art School could be moved to Lahaina.

- The film school and infrastructure could be moved to Lahaina.
- In the memorial park along Front Street, mobile carts selling the art and food that is created in Lahaina town. Permanent galleries and restaurants would have locations in the commercial section of town.
- Student accommodations nearby.

The thrust of the new Lahaina Town as the cultural capital of the State would honor the history and the people of Hawaii and celebrate their return to prominence after the 100+ years of suppression.

Once rebuilt, Lahaina Town could be designated as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations.

There will be people who understand how to profit from such a place, and their meaningful contributions would be essential, but a guiding body would keep the balance between profit and the mana of Lahaina Town...that body would be tasked to approve new ventures and ensure that new profitable ventures foster the vision for Lahaina and its people.

Where will all this happen – the commercially zoned areas of Lahaina:

This proposal assumes no change in the current zoning. Commercial land comprises much of Lahaina Town from Papalaua to Shaw, and from the ocean to Wainee Street; additional commercially zoned parcels lie north of Papalaua and mauka of Honoapi'ilani Highway. The educational and commercial activities outlined above will be located in the currently commercially zoned areas of Lahaina Town. No current residential zoning will be affected by this proposal.

The schools, churches and community centers that serve the Lahaina residents are generally located in the commercially zone areas.

Additionally, approval of low-rise multi-family structures within the currently commercially zoned areas should be considered.

The need for residential housing for local people in Lahaina:

There is some residential zoned land mauka of Wainee Street and south of Lahainaluna Street. There are churches, cemeteries, and historically important sites in that area. Most of the residential land in Lahaina Town is mauka of Honoapi'ilani Highway, on either side of Lahainaluna Street.

Residential zoned land should remain residential zoned. There is a severe shortage of housing in West Maui and in Lahaina. This is an opportunity to increase the residential housing stock by:

- a. Allowing for more density per lot. Many local families live as multi-generational and extended family units, and since almost all housing in Lahaina will be rebuilt, multiple units on a lot would increase the housing stock.
- b. Rapid approval of single family or low-rise multifamily housing development on the large tracts of undeveloped land mauka of Honoapi'ilani Hwy and makai of the Lahaina Bypass, extending from Keawe to Puamana.
- c. Restrictions on resale of homes to non-residents in the newly approved tracts. One of the driving forces of rapid price increases for housing in West Maui is the sale of existing housing

stock to non-residents who use it for part of the year when they visit Hawaii, and as short-term vacation rentals for tourists the rest of the time.

These measures would increase the housing stock in Lahaina, reduce or cap rents, make housing for West Maui residents more affordable, and – in the end – help reduce the outflow of local residents because they are unable to afford a home.

Lahaina Town – A Blue Town:

As the detailed planning of the town begins, the following items may be considered:

- Front Street, especially bordering the memorial park, be designated as walking only, with consideration to the movement of elderly and disabled.
- Wainee used for truck/supply access to the commercial/retail operations, as well as any residential sections.
- Parking lots for cars designed at the edges of the town.
- Commercially zoned areas mauka of Honoapiʻilani Hwy designated as primary centers for local consumers: grocery stores, vet clinics, medical offices, gas/electric charging stations, banks, restaurants and other needed services of a residential community.
- Kamehameha III school moved from its current oceanfront location to a site mauka of Honoapiʻilani Hwy, closer to its students homes.
- Commercial zoned areas makai of Honoapiʻilani Hwy, from Papalaua to Shaw, designed as “villages”, each with its own focus, to include: focus activity; retail; food establishments; essential services; etc.
- A “pallet” of acceptable design elements throughout Lahaina Town, reflecting its history: precontact; missionary; Kingdom to World War 1; post war to current, and so on. Each “village” to choose one of the pallets.

Lahaina Town and the entire residential area of Lahaina should be organized as a town where recreation, work, and health are prioritized. There should be parks, walking paths, places for children to play. The streets should be shaded by trees, the town pleasing to the eye and the soul.

Other Issues:

The following are issues identified by initial reviewers of this proposal. As more people review the document, additional issues will come up and need to be addressed by the Lahaina community.

1. The vision, design and scope of the memorial. For us to remember Lahaina as it was, and to build a future as we want it to be ... the memorial will embody our memories as well as our hopes.
2. Balancing the interests of the current owners and the future design of Lahaina Town. This proposal does not anticipate zoning changes and, other than the Front Street commercially zoned property, this proposal does not anticipate any changes to the ownership of land in Lahaina.
3. Method of land acquisition on Front Street. Whatever methods are chosen, the owners should be fairly compensated, offered alternative locations for homes and be given first priority to return to Lahaina Town once the new town is created.

4. Once the new town is created, how are land and housing to be sold. The process should balance the interests of current home owners and the need to house the people who will become key members of the new Lahaina.
5. Working within the constructs of Federal, State and local laws and ordinances to make the new town. For example: there will be many thorny issues that are in opposition to Federal laws and, unless those issues are carefully thought through, the entire effort could become bogged down in long-running civil litigation which would grind everything to a halt.
6. Issues related to energy independence and food independence.
7. The assumption that financing the creation of the new town will not be an issue.

This is a small list of the issues to be faced by the reimagining effort. There will be many others. If the community agrees to move forward as one, balancing the various interests with aloha, we believe that a new Lahaina Town can emerge.

Respectfully submitted:

Virendra Nath and Nancy Makowski, Lahaina, Hawaii