

January 23, 2019

Councilmember Mike Molina,  
Governance, Ethics, and Transparency Committee Chairman  
Maui County Council

RE: Testimony on Appointment and Removal of Administrative  
Heads of Departments (Planning Director) GET-1(8))

My name is Susie Thieman, and I am the Executive Director of Lokahi Pacific. I am speaking in favor of approving the appointment of Michele McLean as director of the Planning Department.

Over the past years it has been my pleasure to work with Michele and the Planning Department as we built two affordable housing projects, the most recent being the Mokuhau Affordable Subdivision right here in Wailuku. As our plans worked their way through the review process, one of the plan reviews discovered that we could not build the project as presented. We had turned in plans for 16 houses on the property which we had purchased in April 2014. The size of the property was 1.932 acres and according to the code, we were only allowed 15 houses as there is no rounding up allowed. Being .068 acres short of 2 acres, the 16<sup>th</sup> house had to go. Or?

At this point we had all the engineering work completed for the utilities, new lot layouts, etc. There would definitely be a significant cost if we were to have to redo our plans, eliminating one lot/house. In discussing our options, it was Michele who suggested strongly that we go for a Variance to allow us to build the 16 houses on this property. While this could take five months to accomplish, other work was going on so there was no delay on the project.

My main concern was the justification for asking for the variance. Was it enough to say we, as an agency have a mission "to **improve the quality of life**, both economically and socially, of residents of the **County of Maui** and other rural Hawaii communities. With goal-oriented vision and broad collaboration, Lokahi Pacific develops sensible and successful projects that **enrich the economic climate** of the county, increase the inventory of **affordable and special needs rental housing** and ensures that residents participate in that enrichment and share in its benefits. "

So we moved forward with the requirements to get our request heard by the Board and with the emphasis on the fact that we were really asking to be able to build one more house to help with the lack of affordable housing, we concentrated on the 16<sup>th</sup> family that would lose out on being able to buy their own first home vs just 15 homes for sale. How do we tell the 16<sup>th</sup> family that we did not try our best to build their future home? The Board unanimously approved our request and we moved forward and completed the project just shy of four years after the purchase of the property.

Some have said that was impossible, we did it by meeting every deadline, having well prepared plans to present for review, complying with all County and State construction requirements, and working with wonderful, caring people who understood what we were building and why, like Michele McLean.

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