

AH Committee

From: Gordon Firestein <gfirestein@seapact.com>
Sent: Sunday, June 23, 2019 3:47 PM
To: AH Committee
Subject: testimony re: Makila 201h Projects

Aloha, Committee Members,

My name is Gordon Firestein, and I am writing as the chair of the Launiupoko Firewise Committee.

I testified at the meeting on June 19th, and am submitting this additional testimony to supplement my remarks.

Many testifiers spoke forcefully and emotionally about the trauma they experienced from the Hurricane Lane fire and evacuation. This was perhaps the first time people were able to speak publicly about their pain, fears and frustrations due to the catastrophic wildfire. It is obvious from their testimonies, and from common sense, that this area is completely unsuitable for the proposed development projects. It is also obvious that almost nothing has been done yet to mitigate the dangers of recurrence.

I was among the many evacuated from Launiupoko in the middle of the night, in the middle of a hurricane, and could think of nowhere else to go except the Launiupoko Beach Park. Sitting there in the dark in our truck, looking in one direction at the surf and wondering if the hurricane waves would breach the reef, and looking in the other direction at the hillside and wondering if our home would be there when the sun came up, I thought about the disastrous fire in Greece that had made headlines only a month before. In that case, as in ours, residents fled downhill to the beach. But the fire followed them there, and over 100 died, some of them drowning when going into the sea was their only option. The Attica fire in Greece became the second most deadly wildfire of the century. We had the same ingredients here and were lucky to escape the same fate.

We shouldn't push our luck too much further.

To that end, I would like to propose an idea, inspired in part by the testimony last week of Kai Nishiki. She spoke of convening a working group to consider the best locations for affordable housing in Lahaina and ways to get that housing built. Wonderful idea! I would like to propose a working group on wildfire mitigation on the West Side, with a focus on ways to deal with the vast quantities of vegetative fuels that exist in areas where housing might one day be located.

This is a complex problem, and many stakeholders will need to be included. As a Firewise chair, I would be happy to participate. I know others in the fire prevention field, on Maui and elsewhere in the state, who would also be happy to contribute their expertise. County officials, first responders and large landowners will be especially important participants.

We should start the discussion as soon as possible, because we know it is only a question of when, not if, the next big fire will strike.

And in the meantime, in no way should a dense development be considered for these risky areas. The current residents are already extremely vulnerable to the next disaster, and clearly still traumatized by the last one. We ought not add to the problem before the risks are mitigated.

Thank you for considering my comments and proposal.

Sincerely,

Gordon Firestein

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p.s. for more information on the Attica fire: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018_Attica_wildfires