

Building a better Maui requires putting aside ‘pro,’ ‘anti’ labels

Today Maui is faced with the challenge of balancing the demand for growth with the desire to preserve our island’s special character and fragile environment. Finding the correct balance is crucial to our future, as we depend on the quality of our land and water for our physical, spiritual and economic well-being.

Since returning home to Hawaii a year ago, I have witnessed a polarizing debate unfolding on our islands. On one hand, the burden of traffic jams, strained public services and vanishing open space have led many to question the wisdom of any development. On the other hand, some argue that housing development should be unrestricted.

In the vast middle ground of this debate is a belief that it is better to proactively decide where and how to concentrate development rather than allow continued sprawl – the unintended consequence of “doing nothing.” Such an approach allows us to frankly admit past missteps and challenge ourselves to envision alternatives to “business as usual” development.

The time is ripe for us to rethink how we measure the true wealth-generating potential of our existing and future communities. Wealth is not just monetary worth, but the different kinds of value, taken together, that make up the real riches of a community. Maui’s true economy therefore includes cultural, environmental and economic dimensions. We must invest in each if we are to create lives that are prosperous, sustainable and worth living.



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Investments require measurements of success. For example, in addition to measuring income-generating activity, we must begin to measure how many of our keiki are active in a halau, how much time parents spend commuting to their jobs and how many of our children can walk or bike to school. By giving weight to these aspects of community health, we are saying that we want to imbue the next generation with an art form that helps to perpetuate our host culture, and, at the same time, find ways for families to spend more time together. In this way we can promote investments that begin to generate true community wealth.

Building community wealth in multiple dimensions requires planning, foresight and courage. It requires that we put aside simple “pro” and “anti” labels and search together for a middle way. At Maui Land & Pineapple Co. Inc., we call multidimensional wealth creation “holistic development,” and we are busy applying this philosophy in all our deliberations – including our recent decisions to set aside coastal lands for conservation, create programs for sustainable agriculture, fund scholarships, and partner with citizen groups and institutions to create new educational opportunities.

We have also decided to change how we plan major programs by opening our design process to include all interested parties. Over 600 of our fellow residents accepted our public invitation to work with us on the new community of Pulelehua. This is a community designed by and for people who work in West Maui – a place for families who want to reduce stress, commuting times and pollution by living literally minutes away from where they work and go to school. This means more time at the halau, less time in traffic.

ML&P selected Pulelehua’s West Maui location to address the need for affordable housing near Kaanapali and Kapalua – two busy resort areas that contribute to the estimated 6,000 commuters traversing the pali each day for jobs in West Maui. By providing housing options close to employment centers, we will reduce the commuting traffic on Honoapiilani Highway, improve public safety and enhance the quality of life for our existing residents.

Holistic communities offer residents the opportunity to meet many of their daily needs within walking distance – including shopping, education, fitness and civic participation – thereby reducing traffic within and beyond Pulelehua. Furthermore, the planned Pulelehua elementary school will both reduce Lahaina traffic during peak hours and emphasize the need for additional educational facilities in West Maui.

The bottom line is that concentrating development in a compact community reduces our dependency on cars while preserving more of Maui’s precious open space and reducing sprawl.

Over the past century, ML&P has done much to promote a healthy island culture for our visitors, ourselves and our children. By creating and managing holistic communities, we reaffirm the values that have made our company a leader for positive change on Maui for generations. Today, hundreds of our fellow islanders have registered their interest in Pulelehua and, in so doing, are helping to shift our collective measure of wealth to that which matters most – our families.

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■ *David C. Cole is the chairman, president & CEO of Maui Land & Pineapple Co. He lives in Kapalua.*