

County 'generally supportive' of Pulelehua housing project

By HARRY EAGAR, Staff Writer

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KAPALUA – Expert testimony on Maui Land & Pineapple Co.'s Pulelehua town began Thursday with county Planning Director Mike Foley telling the Land Use Commission that the county is “generally supportive” of the development.

He said that when Pulelehua comes up for a hearing before the Maui Planning Commission (at 6:30 p.m. March 29 at a Lahaina location yet to be announced), the Planning Department will have many conditions to recommend to mitigate traffic and other impacts.

The county was the first to present its case, calling police Capt. Charles Hirata, Fire Chief Carl Kaupalolo and Patrick Matsui, the chief planner for the parks department.

Hirata said West Maui is considered almost an outlying district, like Hana, Lanai and Molokai, when it comes to police staffing, because of the expense and aggravation of commuting.

Generally, officers are assigned one-year tours to the outlying districts. West Maui is not an assigned district, but Hirata does encounter trouble in persuading officers to work there.

Only five of 45 officers live in West Maui, primarily because of high housing costs.

Not only the time, but increasingly also the expense of commuting makes it difficult, he said.

“I was without a clerk for a year and a half, almost two years,” Hirata said, since it is also difficult to recruit for nonofficer positions, such as the people who process prisoners into the two-cell jail at Lahaina Civic Center.

In public testimony before the expert testimony began at Kapalua Bay Hotel, objections to the project because of traffic were prominent.

Deputy Corporation Counsel Jane Lovell asked Hirata how he expected the 882-unit town to affect traffic, especially along Honoapiilani Highway.

“If they remain true to their vision,” said Hirata, who commanded the Traffic Division for a decade, “it would actually reduce the density of traffic on the highway to the central area.”

In announcing the plans for Pulelehua two years ago, Maui Land & Pineapple Chairman David Cole said the 300-acre project district would provide homes for workers who will be needed at ML&P's West Maui projects.

That would reduce the load on the Honoapiilani Highway between Central Maui and West Maui, Cole said of the plans for the new residential project district.

On Friday, when the state Office of Planning began presenting its witnesses, a representative of the Department of Transportation said Maui can expect a complete Lahaina bypass in about 20

years.

The bypass, which has been envisioned for more than 20 years already, would allow traffic to bypass the crowded traffic corridor through Lahaina town. A first phase connecting Lahainaluna Road and Keawe Street is pending an award of a contract.

Hirata said the Police Department also is recommending that a new elementary school, which is part of ML&P's proposal, be built "concurrent" with the housing.

"I don't know why it is today," said Hirata, "but people don't want kids riding the bus."

As a result, hundreds of cars converge on area schools, three of which are accessed only from Lahainaluna Road – meaning all the cars have to pass through the main intersection with the Honoapiilani Highway.

A school in another location would relieve some of that pressure, Hirata said.

Kaupalolo said his captain for fire prevention, Val Martin, had examined Pulelehua's road plan, which calls for narrower streets than most new subdivisions, and was satisfied that they will handle the fire trucks.

The roads are to be narrower in keeping with project architects Dover/Kohl's mandate to produce a pedestrian-oriented town, with a commercial center, school and residences that will keep people out of their cars.

The key figure is 20 feet in road width, needed to accommodate the ladder truck when it has its stability outriggers deployed.

Matsui said the proposal for parks is offering "more than what is required by law and more than what is standard for other communities." He described plans for two five-acre parks with soccer/Little League fields, as well as a large amount of passive park space.

Although no agreement has been signed, talks with the developer contemplate that ML&P would maintain the parks, although the county would control them. The Wailea Resort has a similar arrangement, although it has fewer active play fields.

During the public testimony, opinion divided sharply, and approximately evenly, between those who want the new town because it promises hundreds of affordable and gap group dwellings; and those who think building on the west side should stop until something is done about the highway.

Retired professor Dick Mayer estimated that the Lahaina bypass will cost \$600 million, and he calculated that other required infrastructure needed in West Maui totals to \$849 million.

He also calculated that ML&P's Kapalua Mauka development – an expansion of the Kapalua Resort that is dependent on Pulelehua as a source of affordable housing – could bring in revenue of \$3 billion to \$4 billion.

Given West Maui needs, he said, ML&P ought to be contributing more to the costs of alleviating the infrastructural impacts.

Kapalua Mauka was approved on second and final reading by the County Council Friday. The project proposes 690 resort housing units on 925 acres, alongside the Kapalua golf courses.

Kapalua Mauka will owe the county about 173 affordable housing units. Most of these would be built at Pulelehua, which is to be half affordable, half market-price homes and apartments.

Opponents of Kapalua Mauka on the council – Michelle Anderson, Jo Anne Johnson and Danny Mateo – often have pressed ML&P executives to say that approving Kapalua Mauka would put the county in the position of being forced to also approve Pulelehua.

Although the question did not arise Thursday, ML&P Executive Vice President Bob McNatt always has said that if Pulelehua is not approved, the company has two other options: stop building Kapalua Mauka after the first 160 homes – for which affordable housing units already are on line – or find land elsewhere in West Maui to build the required affordables.

Amy Kahula, who works for Kapalua Land Co., said she and her husband rent an ohana in Kula for \$800 a month.

“It’s perfect, it’s just not in Lahaina,” where she and her husband both work.

Because “I cannot stand the commute,” she stays during the week with in-laws in West Maui.

“We cannot afford to rent our own place,” she said, because a one-bedroom ohana she found in Lahaina was \$1,200, even though it shared a bathroom with the main house.

Chairman Randall Sakumoto commiserated that that didn’t sound like desirable housing.

Daniel San Miguel, who works for ML&P at its various locations from Haliimaile to Kahului to Kapalua, lives in Wailuku, with his wife’s family.

“Of necessity,” he said, when “even modest homes (on the west side) are well over \$500,000.”

“It’s sort of beyond crisis.”

As for taking 310 acres out of agriculture, San Miguel said without a successful Kapalua Resort, “farming may very well go under, taking thousands of acres out of production.”

The reverse view was expressed by Nell Woods of Kahana, who said that if West Maui chokes on its own traffic, “the demand (for housing) will not continue to exist . . . in 10 years they won’t have jobs,” because tourism will implode.

LUC hearings on boundary amendment applications typically involve a series of hearings over several months. With Pulelehua, the state Office of Planning and ML&P will be presenting their own experts to address issues raised by opponents. The commission currently has four tentative meeting dates scheduled in April and May, but only two in March. When it will return to Maui is not known.

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