

PLANNING COMMISSION
GENERAL PLAN SPECIAL MEETING
COUNTY OF HAWAII

MINUTES
NOVEMBER 21, 2024

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The Leeward Planning Commission met in regular session on Thursday, November 21, 2024, at 9:30 a.m. in the West Hawai'i Civic Center, Council Chambers, Building A, 74-5044 Ane Keohokālole Highway, Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i, with Chairperson Barbara DeFranco presiding. This meeting was streamed live on YouTube.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Vice Chair Mahina Paishon-Duarte, Dean Au, Clement "CJ" Kanuha III, Donna "Kinuko" Noborikawa, Armando Rodriguez, and Barbara DeFranco (Chairperson).

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT AND EXCUSED: Michael Dela Cruz

ALSO PRESENT: Suzanna Tiapula, Esq. (Deputy Corporation Counsel to the Commission) Jean Campbell, Esq. (Deputy Corporation Counsel to the Planning Department), Zendo Kern (Planning Director), and Planning Department staff.

Approximately ten members of the public were present in the audience.

A quorum was present. Chairperson Barbara DeFranco called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. and introduced the Commissioners. Staff introductions were made. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 10:50]

Chairperson Barbara DeFranco began by asking each Commissioner to confirm they had reviewed all materials related to the agenda items for today's meeting. The Commissioners confirmed they had. She then made some housekeeping announcements, requesting attendees turn off their cell phones and put them on silent. She pointed out the location of the public restrooms and drinking fountain, both accessible through the door on the right. For anyone wishing to testify in person, Chairperson Barbara DeFranco asked them to fill out the yellow signup forms at the staff table and submit any written testimony not previously sent. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 12:01]

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Chairperson Barbara DeFranco explained that the purpose of today's meeting is to allow public comment on the County of Hawai'i's General Plan 2045 final draft and for the Commission to review and provide recommendations to the County Council. The Commission will hold meetings to review the plan until February 2025, with a final recommendation due by March 24, 2025. Each meeting will include a staff presentation, public testimony, and Commission discussion. Commissioners can make changes to the draft until the last meeting, when they will vote on the final recommendation. The draft plan can be accessed on the Planning Commission website. Chairperson Barbara DeFranco introduced the staff presentation, starting with the Planning Director, and asked the Commissioners to note any questions they want to ask the Director, as questions would be reserved until after hearing public testimony. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 12:53]*

STAFF PRESENTATION

At 9:46 a.m. Planning Director Zendo Kern gave the presentation. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 15:53]*

STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON AGENDA ITEMS

At 9:56 a.m. the Commission took up this item with approximately eleven members of the audience in the Council Chambers. Planning staff member Maija Jackson confirmed there are testifiers, and she handled the in-person testimony section. She instructed the testifiers to turn on the microphone, raise their right hand, and swear to tell the truth. She also clarified that each testifier will have three minutes, with a 30-second warning, and requested that they state their name and town before beginning their testimony. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 27:00]*

Seven individuals provided testimony in-person at 9:58 a.m.:

- 1) Amanda Hatcher – *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 28:11]*

Chairperson Barbara DeFranco reminded everyone to direct their comments to her as the chair and to speak with respect, considering everyone present to listen. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 31:32]*

- 2) Leilani Pulmano – *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 31:48]*
- 3) Nakoolani Warrington – *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 33:42]*
- 4) Rebecca Melendez – *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 37:20]* *did not state her name or town that she resides in*
- 5) Moriah Kramer – *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 42:13]*
- 6) Valerie Yamagata – *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 43:15]*
- 7) Sharon Willeford – *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 47:11]*

Four individuals provided testimony on zoom at 10:20 a.m.:

- 1) Maile Lu'uwai – *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 50:57]*
- 2) Kalei Kailikini – *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 55:14]*
- 3) Charles Flaherty – *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 59:16]* *did not state his name or town that she resides in*

- 4) Tariq Aboufakhr – [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:03:06] *did not state his name or town that she resides in*

Statements from the public concluded at 10:34 a.m. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:05:17]

DISCUSSION AND DELIBERATION

Chairperson Barbara DeFranco asked the commission if they had any questions for the testifiers. Vice Chair Mahina Paishon-Duarte had a question for Maile Lu`uwai, who was testifying via Zoom, but she was not present on Zoom at the time. Later, Chair DeFranco asked the commission if they had any questions for the Planning Director, Zendo Kern. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:05:25]

Commissioner Armando Rodriguez asked if the new administration would affect the General Plan they were currently working on. Planning Director Zendo Kern responded that he did not know. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:07:01]

Commissioner Dean Au then raised concern about the General Plan, noting that the 4,420+ people who participated in community meetings and workshops were seeing the same draft plan without any changes since the initial meeting. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:07:23] Planning Director Kern explained that the 4,420+ number was cumulative over time, representing participants in various stages of feedback since 2015, with different numbers of people involved in each draft iteration. The total reflected ongoing public input through multiple rounds of feedback. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:08:00]

Commissioner Donna “Kinuko” Noborikawa asked if people who commented on the first draft (2015) were notified each time a new draft was released, and if subsequent groups were also notified. Planning Director Zendo Kern replied that, to his knowledge, anyone who signed up to receive communications (by providing their email) was kept informed. He acknowledged that his program manager, April Surprenant, who handles this more specifically, was not present to provide a more detailed answer, but he believed they had communicated with everyone who wanted to stay updated. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:09:06]

Chairperson Barbara DeFranco asked Planning Director Zendo Kern about the relationship between Hawaiian Homelands and the General Plan. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:10:10] Planning Director Zendo Kern explained that they met with the Department of Hawaiian Homelands (DHHL) and reviewed their Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), which is included in the General Plan's appendices. They also went over DHHL's own General Plan to ensure consistency. He also stated that the relationship with DHHL has been positive, and they have worked collaboratively throughout the process. He mentioned that they have reviewed DHHL's comments and verified the MOA's inclusion but needed to double-check some details, such as issues related to roads. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:10:18]

Chairperson Barbara DeFranco sought clarification on the Community Development Plans (CDPs), specifically regarding the South Hilo CDP, mentioning she had heard about a South Hilo CDP and that the process began a long time ago. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:11:33] Planning Director Zendo Kern explained that the original CDP for Hilo was adopted in the

1970s, but it wasn't formally adopted by the Council and is not a mandate like the newer CDPs. He noted that CDPs were brought forward in the early 2000s, but South Hilo currently does not have a refreshed CDP. Chairperson Barbara DeFranco clarified that the 1971 CDP was not incorporated into the newer ones formed in the 2000s. Planning Director Zendo Kern explained that each area went through a CDP process, which was a large effort, and that they conducted these processes around the island. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:11:58]* Deputy Corporation Counsel Suzanna Tiapula then reminded the meeting to allow one person to speak at a time for clarity. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:12:59]* Planning Director Zendo Kern explained that as the county initiated CDPs, areas more aligned with future growth were prioritized. In contrast, Hilo, being more developed, may not fit into a traditional CDP framework. Instead, there has been ongoing discussion about a Redevelopment framework for Hilo, focusing on adjusting the development in the area. Kern noted that while the CDPs were adopted with good intentions, they presented challenges, and now the focus is on how to adjust them for greater benefit to the communities. He suggested that before starting a new plan for Hilo, it might be better to reassess and enhance the existing plan, potentially shifting it into a Redevelopment plan. However, he acknowledged that such an effort would require funding, staffing, and time, and whether it should be a traditional CDP, or a Redevelopment plan remains a key question. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:13:11]*

Chairperson Barbara DeFranco asked about the “OSCER”, which Planning Director Zendo Kern clarified as the Office of Sustainability, Climate, Equity, and Resilience. This office was adopted by the County Council earlier this year and is currently operational. Bethany Morrison is serving as its Administrator Director. The concept behind OSCER is to create a central coordinating agency that integrates sustainability practices across various county departments, such as energy efficiency, fleet utilization, and transitioning to electric vehicles. The goal is to have a central point of coordination to make the county more sustainable. Planning Director Zendo Kern explained that similar agencies exist in other regions, like Oahu, to focus on sustainability efforts across multiple departments. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:14:40]*

Chairperson Barbara DeFranco asked the commissioners if they had any further questions for Planning Director Zendo Kern. Commissioner Clement “CJ” Kanuha III followed up on the South Hilo issue, emphasizing that even if it's classified as a Redevelopment plan, the area should be updated, as it has not been addressed since the 1970s. He stressed that areas like Panaewa and Keaukaha should be included in the plan, given their significance to the native community. Deputy Corporation Counsel Suzanna Tiapula interrupted to clarify if this was a question, which Kanuha confirmed. Planning Director Kern responded that efforts had been made within the existing plan to highlight South Hilo areas, and they hoped to provide more details at the next meeting when program manager April is present. Commissioner Clement “CJ” Kanuha III also raised a concern about community engagement, suggesting that the county should use radio ads to inform the public about the changes. He noted that many community members were unaware of the developments. Planning Director Zendo Kern acknowledged the challenge but said they could explore the possibility of additional outreach, though there was no dedicated funding for it. He agreed to look into the budget for this purpose. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:16:34]*

Commissioner Dean Au asked Planning Director Zendo Kern to clarify where the Community Development Plans (CDPs) are designated in the document, specifically referring to page 263.

He wanted an overview of which CDPs are active, which are not, and the status of the plans. Planning Director Zendo Kern explained that the CDPs were integrated into the General Plan, particularly in the policy and rationale document, which outlines the policies derived from both the original 2005 General Plan and the CDPs. The key areas where CDPs influenced the General Plan were the land use maps, where adjustments were made to reflect the future land use determined by the CDPs. Policies consistent across communities were incorporated broadly, while more community-specific policies remained in their respective CDPs. He also highlighted a tool that allows users to visually compare the existing land use maps with the new ones by swiping, making the changes more accessible. The policy and rationale document, which should have been received by the commissioners, provides further details. Commissioner Dean Au confirmed that he was seeking these details for reference as the commissioners move forward in the process and asked if the information could be found in the maps between pages 263 and 275. Chairperson Barbara DeFranco encouraged commissioners to ask questions about any part of the General Plan during the review process. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:19:19]*

Vice Chair Mahina Paishon-Duarte thanked Planning Director Zendo Kern and the department for their work on the General Plan and followed up on Commissioner Au's question regarding the rationale and policy document. She asked if the document was available to the public, and Planning Director Zendo Kern confirmed it was. Vice Chair Mahina Paishon-Duarte inquired where the public could find it, and Janice Hata from the Planning Department clarified that it can be found on the Planning Department's website under the "General Plan" tab, then through the "Comprehensive Review" page, where the document is available for download as a PDF or online viewing. Vice Chair Mahina Paishon-Duarte then asked about the 2002 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Hawaiian Homelands (DHHL), confirming it is included in the appendices of the General Plan, which Planning Director Zendo Kern confirmed. She next inquired about who is responsible for addressing issues related to roads and roadways, and what the next steps are. Planning Director Zendo Kern explained that the Planning Department has been working with the Department of Public Works and the state's Department of Transportation regarding roads. If any changes are made to the roads in the plan, the department would need to confirm with these agencies to understand how those changes might affect the broader transportation system. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:23:05]*

Vice Chair Mahina Paishon-Duarte asked how the community could be assured that the South Hilo CDP (Community Development Plan) will be included in the 2045 General Plan, especially in light of the suggestion to consider a redevelopment plan instead. Planning Director Zendo Kern responded that the inclusion of the South Hilo CDP will depend on consensus from the department, administration, and County Council, as it would require significant funding. To create a CDP, the county would need to hire a consultant and go through a multi-year public process involving outreach, feedback, and revisions. This process typically takes 2 to 5 years and costs around \$500,000 to \$700,000, with funding needing to be approved by the County Council. While the department supports the idea, the current priority is to finalize the 2045 General Plan, which has been in development since 2015. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:25:43]*

Vice Chair Mahina Paishon-Duarte asked if there is a matrix tracking significant changes to the plan since 2015, including updates after community meetings, County Council reviews, and

other events. Planning Director Zendo Kern responded that the policy and rationale document serves as one way to track changes. Additionally, the Conveo platform, an online tool used for gathering data and feedback, provides analysis and tracks iterations of the plan. There are also council resolution responses that document changes. However, he clarified that there is no formal “ramser” format; instead, the document has evolved as a living document, with adjustments made over time. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:27:58]*

Commissioner Donna “Kinuko” Noborikawa asked if the community could request updates to their Community Development Plan (CDP) in light of the changes being proposed in the General Plan 2045. Planning Director Zendo Kern responded that the community could indeed request CDP updates, either through the department or the council. However, updating each CDP individually can be challenging and time-consuming, as plans become outdated by the time they are completed. Instead, he suggested addressing common themes across all CDPs, such as land use, transportation, and cultural elements, to create broader updates. This approach would be more efficient than updating each CDP separately. He also explained that once the General Plan is complete, CDPs would be updated collectively, potentially including new CDPs or redevelopment plans. These updates would be part of a broader cycle, where the General Plan and other functional plans would be updated in five-year intervals, contributing to a longer-term, comprehensive planning approach. He also mentioned that a graph illustrating how these plans relate to one another would be presented at a future meeting. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:29:34]*

Commissioner Armando Rodriguez asked if there is anything in the General Plan to help secure grants for converting cesspools into septic systems in order to protect resources. Planning Director Zendo Kern responded that the General Plan supports and encourages efforts like securing grants for such initiatives, but the General Plan itself addresses these issues at a higher level. The specific details and mechanisms for obtaining grants would likely be addressed in functional plans or policies, which would follow from the General Plan. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:33:01]*

Commissioner Clement “CJ” Kanuha III raised two concerns based on community testimony. The first concern was about changes from residential to conservation zoning. Planning Director Zendo Kern explained that some of these changes stemmed from consistency with Community Development Plans (CDPs), while others were due to errors in the mapping system. The GIS mapping system had sometimes incorrectly moved areas to conservation, which is being corrected. Planning Director Zendo Kern also clarified that these changes to the land use map do not affect zoning or individual property rights; they only reflect potential future changes in land use. This is a common misconception that the planning department is addressing. The second concern involved the policy on vehicle miles traveled (VMT), which some testifiers questioned. Planning Director Zendo Kern explained that the policy aims to reduce vehicle miles traveled by promoting collaboration between various county departments to improve transportation. The goal is to reduce dependence on cars, integrate mass transit, and encourage alternative transportation options like biking and walking paths, in order to create communities where driving is not the only option. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:33:52]*

Chairperson Barbara DeFranco asked if there was anything frequently mentioned during the meetings that could help clarify public understanding of the general plan. Planning Director Zendo Kern responded that one major source of confusion has been the land use maps, which they have been addressing. He also mentioned the challenge of balancing a plan for such a diverse community, emphasizing that the process was done with kindness and a genuine desire to serve the community. He apologized if anyone felt offended, as the intent was never to cause harm. Planning Director Zendo Kern reiterated that the plan's goal is to create a vision for a thriving future for the island, especially for the next generation. Chairperson Barbara DeFranco expressed appreciation for the focus on ensuring a future for children on the island. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:38:12]*

Chairperson Barbara DeFranco asked if there were any other questions before moving on. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:39:58]*

Action: Commissioner Donna “Kinuko” Noborikawa moved that a favorable recommendation be forwarded to the County Council on the application to amend the County of Hawai‘i General Plan 2005 based on the Planning Director’s County of Hawai‘i General Plan 2045 Final Recommended Draft dated 2024, which shall be adopted. This was seconded by Vice Chair Mahina Paishon-Duarte. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:40:27]* During Discussion, Commissioner Donna “Kinuko” Noborikawa suggested considering amendments to the general plan. In response, Chairperson Barbara DeFranco indicated that this would likely be a recurring process. Deputy Corporation Counsel Suzanna Tiapula clarified that any amendments would be made to the main motion through subsidiary motions, not directly to the general plan itself. She offered to discuss this further in an executive session. Commissioner Donna “Kinuko” Noborikawa, as a new commission member, expressed that this clarification would be helpful to her. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:41:01]* Commissioner Clement “CJ” Kanuha III made a motion for executive session. Seconded by Commissioner Armando Rodriguez. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:41:51]* Voice vote was taken, and the motion carried with six ayes with one absent and excused. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:42:02]*

****EXECUTIVE SESSION 11:21 A.M. to 11:23 A.M.****

Chairperson Barbara DeFranco reconvened the meeting at 11:24 a.m.

Approximately five members of the public were present in the audience.

Chairperson Barbara DeFranco explained that the commission had taken an executive session to clarify legal questions and was now ready to continue. Commissioner Noborikawa commented that there is a large amount of material to review and that she intends to make motions gradually throughout the review process, rather than all at once. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:53:10]* Commissioner Dean Au emphasized the long-standing community involvement in the general plan process, which began in 2015. He pointed out that over 4,000 people have participated in community meetings and that the public has had ample opportunities to engage, especially with the availability of information online. Au acknowledged the hard work of the commissioners and the planning department in reviewing the extensive documents and making amendments. He

reiterated that, regardless of the outcome of any proposed amendments, everyone involved is committed to doing their best to move the process forward. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:54:25]* Chairperson Barbara DeFranco expressed her support for the general plan, emphasizing the importance of reinvigorating the Community Development Plans (CDPs) and continuously checking in with the community to address changes. She praised the plan's structure, which allows for open discussion, input, amendments, and recommendations, and highlighted the responsiveness of the planning department. DeFranco reassured the commissioners that they have her full support to take the time needed for careful discussion and consideration of the plan, acknowledging its complexity. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:56:09]* Commissioner Armando Rodriguez emphasized the importance of the general plan, noting that it will impact future generations, including children and grandchildren. He acknowledged that while information is available online, some community members, especially older individuals like his parents, may struggle with accessing it. He recommended using alternative methods, such as radio stations, to share information and engage a broader section of the community, stressing that the focus should be on serving the community as a whole. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:57:20]* Vice Chair Mahina Paishon-Duarte acknowledged the significant effort that has gone into the planning process since 2015 and appreciated Commissioner Armando Rodriguez's concerns about reaching the ESL (English as a Second Language) and kupuna (elder) communities. She suggested that the County Department tap into additional resources to improve outreach, such as notifying these communities about where to find information on the website. She also expressed gratitude for the written and in-person testimonies from the community, emphasizing the importance of these inputs. She highlighted the need for the commission to carefully review and verify community feedback, ensuring that it has been considered throughout the planning process. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:58:07]* Commissioner Donna “Kinuko” Noborikawa expressed agreement with Vice Chair Mahina Paishon-Duarte's points, acknowledging the numerous community meetings and the over 8,000 public comments received. She emphasized the importance of community members coming forward to share their thoughts and stated that she would be reviewing the comments raised during the meeting to prepare for the next one. She thanked everyone for their participation in the process. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:00:16]* Chairperson Barbara DeFranco mentioned that she needed a motion to continue. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:01:11]*

Action: Chairperson Barbara DeFranco mentioned that she needed a motion to continue. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:01:11]* Commissioner Dean Au made a motion to continue this meeting to tomorrow, November 22, 2024. Seconded by Commissioner Clement “CJ” Kanuha III. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:01:17]* No discussion. Voice vote was taken, and the motion carried with six ayes with one absent and excused. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:01:30]*

This hearing item ended at 11:31 a.m.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chairperson Barbara DeFranco announced that the meeting would be continued until the next day and adjourned for lunch until noon. *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:01:35]*

Chairperson Barbara DeFranco adjourned the meeting at 11:32 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kelsie Chang

Kelsie Chang (Apr 22, 2025 11:12 HST)

Kelsie Chang
Secretary

ATTEST:

Dean Au

Dean Au (Apr 22, 2025 13:35 HST)

Dean Au, Chairperson
Leeward Planning Commission