

**Friends of Puna's Future**  
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***Sent by Email***

November 3, 2009

Edmund Haitsuka, Chairman  
Hawaii County Charter Commission  
75-5706 Hanama Place, Suite #109  
Kailua-Kona, HI 96740

Dear Chairman Haitsuka and Charter Commissioners:

The following is testimony on CA-25, the amendment proposal to incorporate community development plans (CDPs) in the county charter.

Specifically, I am testifying on the value of including language in CA-25 to the effect that CDP action committees are responsive to continual input from communities in their districts, and enable communities to form their own committees for the purpose of ongoing dialog with their district action committees. The integrity of the CDP process depends on involving the public down to the level of their neighborhoods so that the planning decisions of centralized government connect directly to people whether they live.

A review of the public's engagement in the Puna CDP process may help explain why addition of the above (or similar) language is so important.

The groundwork for involving the public directly was laid when the planning department provided training to volunteers who were interested in serving as facilitators. The facilitators were then made available to anyone who could find 10 people—friends, family, neighbors—to meet and discuss how they would like to see their communities designed in the future. These were Puna's 130 small groups who brainstormed ideas that established the basic planning objectives in our CDP. The small group meetings attracted the widest participation, from varying age and socioeconomic groups to ethnicities. The facilitators delivered the data to the planning department, who compiled the results and arranged regional workshops where the actual work was done to write proposals that would be submitted to the Puna CDP steering committee.

I participated from the beginning to the end of this process. I always felt that the best data came from those initial small group meetings. Some of the people attending my own small group only came because all they had to do was walk across the street and talk among friends. There was nothing intimidating about

it. After that, the process, in my opinion, did become intimidating. One regional workshop I attended had hundreds of participants. I had to narrow my interests down to a single issue and sign up for a working group. I chose natural resource preservation and my husband chose infrastructure.

At one of the first working group meetings, the facilitator asked each of us to speak about credentials that qualified us to participate on the subject matter. I had no particular academic or work experience in the topic I chose. Many of us in that crowded room did not. I reluctantly went anyway to the next meeting, where our working group had dwindled to a dozen or so volunteers. Apparently, I wasn't the only one intimidated by that first meeting! By the time we were done only a handful of us remained to actually write up proposals to submit to the steering committee. We were people who were comfortable writing documents at a computer and were willing to make the time to do so. We did our best to represent the interests of the 1300 people who met in the first small groups, but we had no mechanism for continued interaction with the general public. After our work was completed, the public could testify before the district steering committee, but public speaking at a microphone is universally an intimidating process and few participated who were not already involved.

To keep community development plans comfortably open and broadly representative of the community, a mechanism is needed to foster participation not just by specialized segments of a population, but by ordinary citizens who must live daily with the end results of community planning. Decisions about where to put the food markets, the parks, the roads and medical centers are usually made in this country by powerful and for-profit interests. CDPs offer an opportunity to also put communities at the planning table. We don't necessarily achieve that with one oversight "action committee" of 9 people appointed by the mayor and confirmed by county council. We do it by keeping the interaction going between the action committees and the people they represent.

Mahalo for your consideration,



Bett Bidleman  
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