

Kona CDP Action Committee
General Plan (GP) Questions and Answers
Tuesday, September 17, 2024

Land Use

Q: What is the reasoning behind removing 400,000 acres from agricultural designation in the General Plan?

A: Many of these areas are in high-elevation regions, above 2,500-3,000 feet, and are largely forested. If they were not already under State Land Use Conservation, the plan proposes designating them as natural areas. While some of these lands are still zoned for agricultural use and can support certain agricultural activities, areas with dense forest and native canopy are being shifted into the natural designation to protect those ecosystems.

Q: What is the significance of moving certain areas into a rural designation in the General Plan?

A: While the proposal to move some areas into a rural designation does not change the underlying agricultural zoning, it reflects the current use of the properties, many of which are already divided into relatively small lots. The goal of this designation is to better utilize rural land across different communities and to create some transition between smaller lots in urban areas and larger lots in agriculture areas.

Q: Does the General Plan change existing County zoning, and what is the process for any potential zoning changes?

A: No, the General Plan does not change existing County zoning, such as agriculture on five acres (zoned Ag-5a). Any changes to zoning would require a separate process involving notification and participation from all affected landowners. This typically happens by application from the landowner, but it is unclear if the County has ever initiated such changes on a large scale.

General Plan Process and Implementation

Q: After every meeting, what happens to the questions collected in each district?

A: The Planning Department will have a Q&A document for each General Plan community meeting. All public comments will be available on the Planning Department website. All comments received during this period will also be packaged and submitted to the Planning Commissions to help inform their review and recommendation to the County Council.

Q: Will the comments be a part of this draft?

A: No, there have been several drafts published within the past few years. This is the Planning Director's Final Recommended Draft. All comments will be

forwarded to the Planning Commissions and County Council for their consideration.

Q: What is the timeline for public comments regarding the draft?

A: Public comments can be submitted from July 29th until September 29th, marking the first phase for gathering input. All comments received during this period will be compiled and presented to the Planning Commissions for their review and recommendations.

Q: Will there be additional opportunities for public input after this initial phase?

A: Yes, public comments will also be accepted during the Planning Commission phase and the County Council phase, ensuring ongoing community engagement throughout the process.

Q: How does the General Plan affect the Community Development Plans (CDPs)?

A: The current CDPs, which are adopted by ordinance, remain in effect even after the new General Plan is adopted. The General Plan does not automatically change the CDPs, but over time, CDPs will be revised to align with the new General Plan's goals. If there is a conflict between the new General Plan and an existing CDP, the General Plan prevails. However, communities will have the opportunity to update their CDPs to reflect both their values and the General Plan.

Q: How does the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) bill impact the draft General Plan?

A: The ADU bill was introduced separately from the Draft General Plan and was not considered during its drafting. Any changes to reflect the ADU bill would need to come from the Planning Commission or County Council. However, since the ADU bill is now part of the County Code, it is law and will be allowed regardless of its inclusion in the General Plan.

Sustainability

Q: Does the General Plan address the need for the County and its residents to become more sustainable?

A: Yes, the General Plan highlights sustainability by addressing key areas such as environmental conservation, climate resilience, sustainable land use, and local agriculture. However, there are larger factors at play. Some limitations to achieving sustainability include implementation challenges and economic constraints. The plan encourages creating more local economies and reducing dependence on imported goods. For example, food sustainability is highlighted, as the island has very limited food stores, which could be devastating during a major shutdown. Expanding local food production would be crucial for the island's self-sufficiency.

Q: How does the general plan promote sustainability for residents?

A: The plan encourages the development of a circular economy, where more local goods and services are produced, reducing the island's reliance on imports. This would lead to greater self-sufficiency for residents, particularly in areas like food sustainability, where local food production is vital to being less dependent on outside sources. The plan also encourages compact, mixed-use development, limiting urban sprawl and promoting sustainable communities. It focuses on active living opportunities and reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT), which help reduce our environmental impact. The plan also prioritizes protecting natural resources. Its policies encourage the preservation of open space and conservation of native ecosystems, which will help protect our unique biodiversity.

Transportation

Q: How feasible is it to get everyone out of their cars and shift to walking, biking, or using mass transit?

A: It is not realistic to expect 100% of people to stop using cars. However, even if just 3% of people make the shift, it could reduce traffic by 30%, improving everyone's experience. The goal is to provide more transportation options, especially for those who can't afford vehicles. By improving walkability, biking, and mass transit, we aim to offer people alternatives to driving.

Q: What is the focus of the transportation plan in terms of reducing car dependency?

A: The focus is on giving people more choices. Not everyone can afford a car and buying even a cheap one can be a financial burden. By improving infrastructure for walking and biking within communities and enhancing mass transit options, we strive to offer alternatives that make life more affordable and sustainable. It is about making small changes that, over time, improve the transportation system for everyone.

Q: Will wealthy residents and newcomers really adopt these transportation changes?

A: It is true that some people, especially those who can afford luxury cars, may continue to drive and pay for gas and taxes. However, the plan isn't about forcing change on everyone but creating options for those who want or need alternatives. It's about striking a balance between personal choices and improving community-wide transportation options.

Q: Is a 50% increase in bus ridership really feasible, especially considering current ridership trends?

A: Yes, this is achievable. While ridership declined by a third between 2010 and 2018, the goal is to regain that lost ridership, which represents a 50% increase from the current levels. With ongoing improvements, such as making mass

transit free until at least 2025 and offering free bike-share options, we believe this target is attainable.

Q: How are current efforts helping to encourage more people to use mass transit?

A: The county is focusing on creating a system where people can easily walk or bike to a bus stop within a short distance. Additional improvements include the potential introduction of e-bikes for hilly areas, making it easier for residents to navigate the terrain. Investments and grants have also made mass transit free, along with complimentary bike-share services, further incentivizing public transportation use.

Q: What challenges remain for achieving higher ridership in the future?

A: While increasing ridership is possible, challenges like the island's difficult terrain remain. The introduction of e-bikes and technological advancements will help address these issues, but it will still require effort and adaptation to shift away from a car-centric culture.

Comments

Sustainability

- A key issue is the distinction between energy and fuel; we import fuel, not energy, and we have abundant local energy sources like ocean, wind, and waves that should be clarified in your final draft. While tourism is our main economic driver, COVID-19 showed our vulnerability, so we need to refocus on conservation, agriculture, and culture.

Transportation

- We should explore affordable rail transit options like a ribbon track system, as well as reactivate fishponds and consider plant-based meat as an export item.

CDP Priorities

- The general plan sets the direction for what our community development plans (CDPs) should focus on and how they should approach planning. Every time a general plan is updated, it controls the scope of the CDPs. This isn't in the county code, but it's determined by the general plan itself.
- I'd like to suggest that moving forward, each CDP update should include a clear priority list for public facilities—things like parks, senior centers, and roads—so the community can engage and decide what projects should come first. We can't control what private developers do, but we can decide which public projects should take priority in each region.
- With limited county budgets, it's important to know which projects are most critical. Right now, we have a long list of priorities, but not enough funding to get through them. For example, Kona has a list of about 14 major projects, but they would cost over \$100 million. Prioritizing will help us focus on what we can actually get done,

rather than hoping for a windfall, like when the county got federal funding to build the Ane Keohokalole Highway. This approach could also help us deal with issues like sprawl and traffic. A lot of our traffic problems come from old subdivisions and approving new projects without considering their long-term impact. If our CDPs included a clear ranking of priorities, it would help us make better decisions about where and when to build and help manage the growth that's impacting areas like Royal Vistage.

- Thank you for the insights shared today. I appreciate the comments on prioritizing the CDP, but I believe we should focus on larger projects like the Kona Open Space Network to create a solid foundation for our plans. Allocating small amounts for minor initiatives risks losing an integrated approach. We need to prioritize significant investments in infrastructure and open space to truly implement our vision and promote sustainable transportation.

Natural & Cultural Resources

- I want to check in with the chairs and share important insights from our ancestors regarding our community's future, which I have documented and communicated to county officials and the Hawaii Legislature since 2010. Recently, I learned that the restoration of the Kingdom of Hawai'i is imminent, and at the recent mayoral forum, I reported that the ancestors advise against new developments along the 40 miles between Kaloko and Honaunau, including Royal Vistas. I stand here today representing the ancestors and urge everyone to heed these messages, as they hold the key to our community's future. Thank you.
- I am concerned about the Hokulia situation, where five lots on Pu'u Ohao, designated by the Hawaii Island Burial Council as a road mausoleum, are included in the general plan land use map and not classified as conservation. These lots on the north slope of Hokulia should be moved into conservation to prevent potential conflicts, as they are identified as a burial site. I urge the planning director to address this issue to avoid significant problems if homes are built in this area.
- I want to highlight the importance of the 1978 Congress law that protects the freedom of religion, which also supports the first faith of Hawaii. This is a significant matter that should be included in the general plan, as it heralds real change that is already happening. The restoration of the Kingdom of Hawaii is not just a concept; it is a reality gaining recognition and support daily. I urge you all to discuss this with local leaders and to ensure this crucial information is documented in our planning efforts, as it is vital for our community's future.