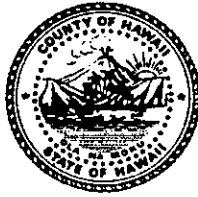


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April 6, 2026

Chair Ashley Kierkiewicz
Hawai'i County Council
25 Aupuni Street
Hilo, HI, 96720

COUNTY CLERK
COUNTY OF HAWAII
2026 APR - 6 PM 1:41

Aloha Chair Kierkiewicz and Members of the Policy Committee on Planning, Land Use and Economic Development:

Subject: Testimony from March 10, 2026, Related to Draft General Plan 2026 – Communication No. 372-192

My name is Jeffrey Darrow, and I am the current Planning Director for the County of Hawai'i. Under Chapter 7 of the Hawai'i County Charter, part of my responsibility as the Planning Director is to advise the Mayor, the Planning Commissions, and the Hawai'i County Council on all planning and land use matters. Another part of my responsibility as Planning Director is to prepare a general plan, implementation plans, and any other amendments thereto in accordance with Section 3-15 of the Charter.

Planning Director Duane Kanuha initiated the Comprehensive General Plan review process on February 6, 2015. This process has continued since then, through four (4) Administrations, four (4) Mayors, and four (4) Planning Directors. As required by law, there has been tremendous public participation and input from the state and county agencies, which is meticulously documented on our website. The proposed Draft General Plan 2026 was submitted at the end of COB on March 4, 2026. This draft is referred to as "Draft General Plan 2026" and is intended to substitute "Appendix A" which is the current Draft General Plan 2045.

After my review of the Draft General Plan 2026, I do not consider this as an amendment to the proposed Draft General Plan 2045, but a complete rewrite and consider it as a new draft plan. Based on Section 226-58 of the Hawai'i Revised Statutes, "the county general plans and development plans shall be formulated with input from the state and county agencies as well as the general public." This new draft plan did not receive input from either. Up to just before the March 10th hearing, I did not see any public comments on this proposed new draft submitted to the County Council.

Communication 372.194 states that this policy direction reflected in the Draft General Plan 2026 draws heavily on the decade-long community engagement process that informed the Draft General Plan 2045. This reliance on the input from the proposed Draft General Plan 2045 does not substitute the requirements to provide opportunities for input from the general public and state and county agencies on this newly proposed Draft General Plan 2026. The comments previously received were specific to the Draft General Plan 2045 and the public and government agencies were reviewing this particular draft and not the Draft General Plan 2026.

There is tremendous documentation of the efforts and outreach that has been done by planning staff and consultants, including but not limited to 125 public meetings, which included 67 CDP Action Committee meetings. There were also 37 public agency meetings, 37 landowner meetings, and 26 County Council updates. The Planning Department has received over 8,600 public comments on the Draft General Plan 2045.

Planning Department staff also met with each Council Member to provide an opportunity for suggestions on the Draft General Plan 2045 for their specific districts. We received excellent comments. We did not receive any indication that this plan should be vacated or replaced.

My main concern moving forward with this newly proposed Draft General Plan 2026 is that we are not allowing the general public and government agencies the opportunity to provide input on this new draft. I have read both the Draft General Plan 2045 and Draft General Plan 2026 from cover to cover. I offer the following advice to the County Council regarding decision options on this matter:

- Option No. 1. Do not approve the proposed Draft General Plan 2026 that was recently submitted and continue to make amendments to the proposed Draft General Plan 2045. These amendments will be voted on and if they are substantial, they should be forwarded to the Planning Director. The Planning Director will provide recommendations on the amendments to the Planning Commissions that will in turn provide recommendations back to the County Council.
- Option No. 2. Approve the Draft General Plan 2026. This will completely replace the Draft General Plan 2045, including all of the General Plan Land Use and Policy maps located at the back of the plan and any additional information that is not included in the Draft General Plan 2026. If you choose this option, I recommend the following steps be considered.
 - a. Do not forward this draft to the Planning Director and the Planning Commissions until all additional information is added to the plan, including any definitions, additional objectives, policies, standards, and land use and policy maps, etc. so that there is a complete document for review.

- b. Before this draft is forwarded to the Planning Director, I recommend holding public hearings around the island to provide an opportunity for public comments on this newly proposed draft. Additionally, I would suggest sending a copy of this draft to state and county agencies to include their comments.

Option No. 3. Incorporate portions of the Draft General Plan 2026 into the Draft General Plan 2045 as an amendment. These amendments will be voted on and if substantial, should be forwarded to the Planning Director. The Planning Director will provide recommendations on the amendments to the Planning Commissions that will in turn provide recommendations back to the County Council.

My last bit of advice is that we do not rush into a decision on this important matter. We have been working through this process for over ten years. Let's take our time and make sure we do this right.

Thank you,

Jeffrey W. Darrow

Jeffrey W. Darrow (Apr 6, 2026 11:57:05 HST)

JEFFREY W. DARROW
Planning Director