

William P. Kenoi
Mayor



Duane Kanuha
Director

Bobby Command
Deputy Director

West Hawai'i Office
74-5044 Ane Keohokalole Hwy
Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i 96740
Phone (808) 323-4770
Fax (808) 327-3563

County of Hawai'i PLANNING DEPARTMENT

East Hawai'i Office
101 Pauahi Street, Suite 3
Hilo, Hawai'i 96720
Phone (808) 961-8288
Fax (808) 961-8742

March 10, 2015

Ms. Patti Pinto, Chair
and Members of the Puna CDP Action Committee
101 Pauahi Street, Suite 3
Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

Dear Ms. Pinto and Members of the Puna CDP Action Committee:

SUBJECT: Volcano Long Range Plan – July 2014

Thank you for your letter dated October 14, 2014, transmitting on behalf of the Volcano Long Range Plan Subcommittee (VLRPS) and the Volcano Long Range Plan - July 2014 (VLRP) for review and comment by the Planning Department.

We acknowledge the extraordinary effort by the membership of the VLRPS in creating such a comprehensive and well-articulated vision and "Plan for Action" for the greater Volcano community as an entirely grass-roots project. The VLRP should serve well as an example to other communities throughout Hawai'i County in expressing the goals and objectives of a local community that cares about preserving its history, sense of place, and environmental setting while recognizing the inevitability of population growth and the development that comes with it.

Over the past couple of months, members of the Planning Department staff have studied and discussed the VLRP and its action statements. In an effort to comprehend the overall scope and impact of the actions proposed in the VLRP, we have organized the thirty-two (32) recommended actions by four (4) types of strategies to help identify who may be engaged to help achieve the community's objectives. The strategy types include: County Policies, County Actions, Non-County Advocacy Strategies, and Community-Based Collaborative Actions. We have highlighted each VLRP action in *italics* and have included more specific comments and recommendations as noted below.

1. **County Policies** refer to the official land use policies for growth management and serve to inform County actions and recommendations to other agencies, including but not limited to, the State Land Use Commission regarding district boundary amendments, subdivisions, and special permits. The land use policies are primarily embodied in the

General Plan and the Hawai‘i County Code, Chapters 23 and 25 (Subdivision and Zoning Codes respectively).

a) *Priority 1: Establish by ordinance a Volcano Village Historic District*

The Planning Department can take the lead in a collaborative effort with the Puna CDP Action Committee, VLRPS, and Volcano Community Association (VCA) to draft amendments to the Zoning Code that would establish a Volcano Village District (VVD) under Article 7, relating to Special District Regulations. This would be similar to the process to establish the Downtown Hilo Commercial District (CDH). A more specific geographic area within the proposed special district could further be identified as a design district with design guidelines or standards, such as what was drafted for Pāhoa and exists for Kailua Kona.

Recognizing the potential for many other local communities throughout the county to seek a meaningful process for local review and comment on development proposals within their respective communities, the Planning Department, in collaboration with the Pāhoa Regional Town Center Subcommittee of the Puna CDP Action Committee, has already drafted amendments to the Zoning Code. The proposed amendments strive to establish a process for the identification of local design review committees that can be applicable to any special district established under Article 7 of the Zoning Code for which architectural design guidelines and/or standards have been adopted by County Council.

If a historic district is desired pursuant to certain criteria for designation under State and Federal guidelines for historic preservation, the County does not have the authority to establish this through an ordinance. Interested landowners would need to apply directly and collectively to establish a registered historic district through the State Historic Preservation Division and/or the National Park Service.

b) *Priority 2: Establish a Special Overlay District for Volcano that would protect natural forest cover.*

The VLRP call for “designation by County Ordinance of a Special Overlay District” suggests (without actually saying so) that special land use controls and incentives are envisioned to encourage or require adherence to development practices more restrictive than what is permissible under the relevant sections of the current County Code. However, the project description in the VLRP talks about education and encouragement for people to subscribe to a rural area model for communities that neighbor World Heritage Sites and International Biosphere Reserves, thereby suggesting a more voluntary program. If or when this action is pursued, the process should include research to show various alternatives and how they may achieve community objectives along with extensive community outreach and input.

While it is possible to establish a separate Special District under Article 7 of the Zoning Code with provisions to satisfy the intent of this action, the complexities and range of issues to be considered will probably require the services of a professional land use consultant with expertise in natural resource preservation to draft implementing legislation and/or rules, as well as an effectively balanced palette of incentives. Given the limited County resources and recent budgetary uncertainties stemming from the current Pu'u 'O'ō lava flow and the imminent comprehensive update to the General Plan, it may be some time before the Planning Department will be in a suitable position to take on such a project.

In the meantime, members of the community or VLRPS could begin broader outreach to potentially affected subdivisions and community groups to gauge support and gather ideas, while also looking for funding sources and mechanisms for the County to employ at a later date.

- c) *Priority 3: Revise commercial zone boundaries to promote economic growth in order to promote responsible economic growth in Volcano.*

As seen with the recent Planning Director initiated amendments to the Land Use Pattern Allocation Guide (LUPAG) map of the General Plan that were introduced and approved for Pāhoa, the Planning Department can play a leading role in a similar process for Volcano. It would be appropriate to consider LUPAG amendments for Volcano within the context of the comprehensive update to the General Plan, which is estimated to be adopted by the County Council within the next thirty-six (36) months.

Amendments to State Land Use boundaries and changes to the Zoning Code to allow for commercial zoning may not ensure that the desired kinds of development will actually occur and that what development does occur will be compatible with the desired "rural forested environment." However, as mentioned above, establishing a Volcano Village District (under Article 7 of the Zoning Code) could incorporate adopted design standards and/or guidelines with a distinct list of permitted uses and zoning regulations. This could be accomplished as a collaborative effort with the community, VCA, Puna CPD Action Committee, and the Planning Department without necessarily requiring the services of an outside planning consultant. Again, we would first recommend engaging the broader community to demonstrate and measure overall support.

2. **County Actions** are the official County policies to guide future County priorities and initiatives, including operating and capital budgets (CIP). These policies are not mandated, legally-binding, or self-implementing. Rather, they often require additional legislative and administrative directives before being implemented (e.g., land acquisition, capital improvement appropriations, code changes, incentive measures).

- a) Priority 4: *Collaborate with Hawai'i County DEM to construct a full service waste management facility.* The Department of Environmental Management has just recently contracted for the design and construction of a total refurbishing of the Volcano Transfer Station that appears to be consistent with the VLRP project description. However, this is an excellent example of a capital project that (with local community support) the Puna CDP Action Committee can propose for inclusion in the County's CIP budget.
- b) Priority 8: *Promote granting of small property conservation easements in residential subdivisions.* As suggested in the VLRP, conservation easements may be established as one of several strategies in a thoroughly developed Special Overlay District designed to induce voluntary participation by individual lot owners. Identifying appropriate tax incentives and agricultural or forest dedication programs, should be investigated in the process of defining an effective balance of regulatory and incentive measures needed to achieve the desired results. See comments under item 1. b) above.
- c) Priority 9: *Support road connectivity among upper Puna subdivisions.* The action steps under Project Implementation in the VLRP for this project clearly recognize the need to engage the various subdivision communities where private roadway ownership predominates in a complex process of identifying and agreeing on connectivity alignments. The efforts by the Connectivity and Emergency Response Subcommittee of the Puna CDP Action Committee over the last year and a half has provided a good start towards identifying potential connectivity locations for consideration by the Department of Public Works. Additional participation and community support for their efforts will probably serve as the most effective means of identifying road connection priorities and getting them included in the CIP budget.
- d) Priority 11: *Continue support training and equipment purchases for Volcano Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and FIREWISE Community.* As stated in the VLRP, the community should continue to work with the various partner agencies to achieve the four CERT and one Firewise program objectives.

- e) Priority 12: *Redesign main thoroughfares for shared bicycle, vehicle, and pedestrian use.* The Planning Department has contracted with SSFM International to prepare a “Complete Streets” program for Hawai‘i County. The project will provide a variety of options that could be applied to smaller communities in the county. The VCA could work with the Puna CDP Action Committee, Planning Department and Department of Public Works to identify and recommend road priorities for inclusion in the CIP budget.
 - f) Not Prioritized: *Establish a police substation in Volcano.* While the Puna CDP does not directly call for the establishment of a police station in Volcano, Goal 3.4.1a and Objective 3.4.2a do support the notion of equitable levels of police, fire, and paramedical services in Puna. The VCA could work with the Puna CDP Action Committee and Police Department to define a mutually acceptable project recommendation for inclusion in the CIP budget.
 - g) Not Prioritized: *Collaborate with County Mass Transit Authority (CMTA) to establish a permanent transit hub in Volcano and to establish fixed stopping points with shelters.* See response to item i below.
 - h) Not Prioritized: *Collaborate with CMTA to establish public bus service to the Hilo International Airport, to provide bus service to commercial centers in Hilo, Kea‘au, Pāhoa, and elsewhere.* See response to item i below.
 - i) Not Prioritized: *Collaborate with CMTA to develop transit service to main routes from interior residential areas.* Items g, h, and i are being pursued by the Mass Transit Subcommittee of the Puna CDP Action Committee, and the VLRPS and VCA can support those efforts through active participation on the subcommittee.
3. **Non-County Advocacy** strategies are actions by non-County agencies and organizations that would help advance implementation of the VLRP with the assumption that potential government partners (Puna CDP Action Committee, elected officials, and various government agencies) will work jointly and in collaboration with the VLRPS and VCA to advance the VLRP advocacy projects.
- a) Priority 5: *Establish healthcare services for Volcano.*
 - b) Priority 15: *Designate hiking and biking trail linking Volcano community with Volcano National Park.*
 - c) Not Prioritized: *Identify and record historic trail and rail routes in Volcano.*

- d) Not Prioritized: *Collaborate with the National Park Service and the Federal Aviation Administration to reduce aviation noise.*
- e) Not Prioritized: *Support restoration and improvement of the 14-mile Old Volcano Trail from Kea'au to Volcano.*
- f) Not Prioritized: *Prepare a management plan for access and improved communication for recreational hunting in adjacent forest reserves.*

4. Community-Based Collaborative Actions are initiatives that should or must be led by the community with support from a broad range of organizations and agencies.

- a) Priority 6: *Continue recording, protecting, and educating people about historic properties.*
- b) Priority 7: *Prepare a manual for residential and commercial development in Volcano.*
- c) Priority 10: *Update a master plan for Cooper Center.*
- d) Priority 13: *Designate Highway 11, Volcano to Mountain View, as a National Scenic Byway.*
- e) Not Prioritized: *Establish a working group to develop enforceable amendments to the County ordinances for sign, outdoor lighting and noise. Once sufficiently identified, this could become a County Action.*
- f) Not Prioritized: *Encourage all Volcano neighborhoods to form a Neighborhood Watch (NHW) programs with a goal of one (1) Watch Captain for every ten (10) house sites.*
- g) Not Prioritized: *Educate residents about native plants and animals, forest restoration, and threats to native ecosystems.*
- h) Not Prioritized: *Sponsor workshops to educate residents about recycling, composting, energy conservation, renewable energy, waste management, and generally about low-impact use of the settled environment.*
- i) Not Prioritized: *Continue to publish the "Building in the Forest" brochure.*
- j) Not Prioritized: *Establish a cooperative arrangement among the National Park, Kilauea Military Camp, Volcano School of Arts and Sciences (VSAS), Volcano Art Center, Cooper Center Council (and other community entities) to enable access, development, and expansion of recreational and educational opportunities.*
- k) Not Prioritized: *Support relocation of VSAS campus.*

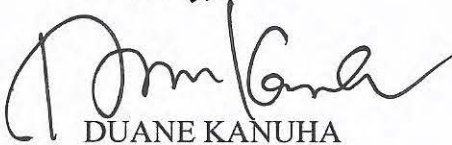
- l) Not Prioritized: *Improve information about local health care services through classes, newsletters, etc.*
- m) Not Prioritized: *Sponsor public education to encourage bicycle and pedestrian use.*

The Planning Department does not consider the VLRP to be suitable for adoption by the County, but it would be more appropriately used as a strategic plan to guide a collaborative process for implementation of the thirty-two (32) recommended actions articulated in the plan. It reiterates and expands upon appropriate policies from the Puna CDP, while adding other priority action items specific to the Volcano community.

In view of the above, following any adjustments to the plan deemed appropriate in light of comments herein and through a process that clearly demonstrates broad community support, it is our recommendation that the VLRP be considered by the VCA as a community-based action plan and perhaps seek endorsement from the Puna CDP Action Committee as an implementation strategy for the Volcano area that strives to implement the goals, objectives, and specific actions as articulated in the Puna CDP.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Hans Santiago of this department at (808) 961-8165.

Sincerely,



DUANE KANUHA
Planning Director

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cc: Volcano Community Association
P.O. Box 600
Volcano, HI 96785