From: Cj Watson [mailto:cjwatsonkona@gmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, September 01, 2016 11:30 AM
To: General Plan
Subject: Comments on GP Meeting

This letter is in response to the General Plan meeting held August 25th 2016.

1. Expectations/History

We attended the General plan update because we understood that this would be a place for pubic comment on the General Plan. Instead we were surprised to find that we were going to just vote on multiple choice questions. Most all of these questions were way too general in context.

We were not provided any chance for oral public comment. I would hope that you noticed that many people attended this meeting with yellow pads full of notes to provide well researched input if given the chance. When you polled the audience, you found that most of us were retired and have lived on the island for 10 years or more. What you probably did not know is that many in the audience were retired city planners, Police and Fire department chiefs, members of planning commissions in the mainland for several beach towns very similar to Kailua Kona. Most concerned about the continued ignoring of North Kona area.

One of the planning employees talked about tourism in Kohola and said "but not so much in Kona"

We have sat by and watched Kailua Kona be ignored and abused by the planning department for decades, even though we provide the majority of the taxes paid, both property and sales tax. This is a Resort area that is progressively getting run down. If the hired planning consultants are there for more than making a GIS map, I am sure they would tell you to put Kailua Kona on the top of your list of planning projects. This is what make every other island successful . Lahaina, Waikiki, Poipu and of course all the coastal mainland cities.

Kailua Kona could be jewel of the Big Island. We have the most calm and clearest water, the best snorkel beaches on the island, a unique old town area, cruise ships that visit weekly, the most consistent good weather on the island, world class fishing, Manta tours and more. With all this you would think that the planning commission would treat this area with respect.

But this is not the case. If you look at the 2005 CDP , only part of (a) and part of (g) has been accomplished in 10 years. That means a child on this island that was in 3rd grade in 2005 is now out of high school without getting to enjoy any of these improvements or increased job opportunities. Most tourists that would have stayed here because of these improvements are now going to other islands or Mexico (*appendix G) and spending their money there.

12.5.7.2 Courses of Action

(a) Encourage the development of community and district recreational facilities, a gymnasium and community center with easy access for residents.

(b) Encourage the development of Alii Drive within the Kailua Village area as a pedestrian mall with open space areas for passive recreation.

(c) Improve facilities at Laaloa Bay Beach Park and Kahaluu Beach Park.

(d) Implement the development of the Kailua Park (Old Kona Airport) as a major regional or district park.

(e) Encourage the development of a major multi-purpose regional recreational and sports complex.

(f) Acquire, and/or encourage the development of additional public shoreline recreation areas.

(g) Establish public access to and the development of shoreline regions along the North Kona Coast in areas such as Keawaiki, Kiholo Bay, Kaupulehu, Kukio and Kapapa Bays, Kua Bay, Kahoiawa, Makalawena, and Honokohau.

(h) Encourage the State to continue with the establishment of Kekaha Kai State Park reaching into Mahaiula, Awakee, and Maniniowali Ahupuaa.

(i) Protect the marine life at Kahaluu Bay.

(j) Protect Opaeula, Kaloko, and Honokohau (Aimakapa) Ponds as natural areas.

(k) Encourage the development of historic trails.
(l) Develop a municipal golf course.
(m) Encourage the establishment of a historic park at Kamoa Point.
(n) Encourage the acquisition and establishment of the summit area of Hualalai as a wilderness park.
(o) Increase mauka park lands.

There has been a paradigm of East side against West side for many decades. It is still alive and well today. The 70% of taxes paid on the west produce only 10% capital improvements on the West side. The remaining 90% of the 70% tax income is spent for East side projects. (* See appendix item A) This philosophy is presently slowly killing the golden goose of Hawaii Island , Kailua Kona and the rest of the West side. Tourism is down, beaches are deteriorating , Kailua Town is rotting away with many buildings that do not meet code and homeless are being allowed to take over old industrial and downtown Kailua.
The Planning director is approving unpopular and un needed permits, like a rock quarry near homes and a charter school instead of promoting changes that all of the locals and tourists could use.
I hope that the Planning consultants have the expertise to change this paradigm once and for all. There are way too many communities like Kailua Kona that have been made prosperous all over the west coast of the mainland that could be used as models for our own community.
It has been proven over and over again that once the source of a communities monetary strengths is supported , the whole population will benefit.
If we would improve our west side, it will generate more tourism, resulting in more confident businesses which will in turn have more job opportunities. Then more support service business will appear to support the Tourism businesses. The support services will be the higher paying jobs like accountants and IT specialists. Giving our kids possibilities of skilled jobs once they graduate from college here in Hawaii. Also areas improved by the county will be accessible by the residents to enjoy first class beaches, bike trails etc. Plus, with more disposable county income we can help with higher education opportunities for our kids.
All the items that I am writing about are NOT new. I have included an appendix that shows a few articles written in West Hawaii today over the last several years about these issues. I also was given a series of emails outlining these issues by a neighbor that were sent the the County Council planning department and building department just in case they don't read the newspaper.(* appendix)

2. The Hazard Chart

A hazard chart was presented on one of the slides. I took from this that this is a collection of hazards that should influence the zoning of land and the approval of building permits. This way homes and facilities are not built that will later be taken or reduced in value by these hazards. Also eliminating county expenses to assist people leaving in these areas when hazards strike.
Tsunami's, Volcanic activity, Flooding were listed.
Even though Volcanic activity is listed as a warning to reconsider permits. The County is building a $20 million dollar park in Puna that had construction stopped because of an approaching lava flow. It is still being built. (*appendix D)
But one important item was left off the list, **"Destructive Property owners"**. Hawaii county is one of the few Hawaiian islands (and few cities in general in the US) to not have Quality of life ordinances to protect property owners in neighborhoods from the "Destructive property owner".
Kailua Kona has been kept somewhat nice because there are quite a few developments that have Home owners associations (HOA). So the Buildings and grounds are kept in good condition. But the residential neighborhoods without HOA have to depend on the county to look out for them. But unfortunately we do not have this protection. There are residential streets with properties and homes that have a one or more houses that store commercial equipment on their property They run wood shops, Car repair and welding operations. Some empty lots are used for storage of landscaping equipment and Matson containers. We have had personal experience with the situation. We spent weeks writing and calling the planning

department and the building department about our issues. The inspectors were polite but admitted their abilities to handle the situation was limited by current policies.
We have a home that has a half empty pool with mosquito larvae in it and the house is structural un sound. (*appendix B) The department of health and the building department came out but were not allowed on the property by the owner. So they told us there is nothing more that they could do. It would take years to get court orders to force their way onto the property.
Since the mosquito scare with Dengue, NOTHING has been done to monitor properties for excessive trash. Now is the time to do this , not when the next crisis hits.
That is only one small story, but there are many more in many more neighborhoods. If the county cannot handle the safety or the quality of life on the West side, we can't afford to offer any more permits until this changes. Also by not enforcing these quality of life uses of neighborhoods you are raising a generation of children that don't know any different and may continue these destructive neighbor practices when they are older.
Also the housing market is at a standstill in Kona. Many homes being on the market for over a year. Maui home sales are at a all time high and values or 40% greater than in Kona. Maui takes care of it's tourist areas and has some quality of life ordinances. Just saying….

GENERAL PLAN - CHANGE

Include the addition of the "Destructive Property owner" as a legitimate hazard and call for some Quality of life ordinances to protect our neighborhoods. Provide some online ability to post images and descriptions of issues.

Stop issuing building permits in the High hazards zones. Slowly make them open space areas.

Add additional staff to the code enforcement departments and move key players (Dept Heads) in Parks and Recs, Building and planning to the Kona civic center. Kailua Kona is the anchor area of this island. Most all new development is happening here, most valuable properties are here and 90% of all visitors stay and spend their dollars in Kailua Kona and the Kohala coast.

3. Bad Planning decisions

The West side has been plagued with bad decisions from the planning department. Many projects were overwhelming opposed by the public but still approved by planning. The transparency is not very good so some projects have made it through and built before the public realized there was an issue. I know approving projects is not easy, but it is easy to see if a large majority of the population near a project has major issues, you don't proceed.
I can't include all of them here but will provide a couple examples where many complained but project was still approved.

Closing of the Hotel next to Kahaluu to allow the building of a limited access Hawaiian educational area.

A homeless shelter area was put in the Old industrial area, despite overwhelming protests by the local business owners and others. This gathers them around the tourist areas and nearby parks. It would have fine to put this shelter above Kaloko or a similar place away from visitor areas. See note by tourist from newspaper (*appendix E)

There is a property off of Queen Kahamanu Hwy that the owner wanted to created a rock processing yard in. This yard would produce as many as 20 truckloads of rocks daily that would use the already crowded

highway. The noise from operations would carry much farther than was tested by the county. This project was approved by the planning director for the West side. If it wasn't for an astute resident of Holualoa, this process would be in place today. He found out about the approval and organized over 1000 people to protest the decision. This property was 600 feet from a charter school, and two large residential developments. You have to ask yourself how a planning director could approve this. Would he want this kind of operation near his home? Not sure what the status of this permit is. But I have included the approval in the appendix (*appendix C)
We need an advocate in the planning department for Kailua Kona, that will produce and enforce some distinct plans to improve what we already have here in Kona. It is not necessary to continue to push new permits when planning has not accomplished it's previous goals as listed in the CDP.

We need architectural standards in our tourist areas so that they maintain the Hawaiiana look that tourists and locals like. If the planning department gets around to revitalizing downtown Kona, they will have a standard for property owners to meet.

GENERAL PLAN - CHANGE

Have mandatory trips for planning officials visit successful beach and Harbor towns in California and Washington to learn from them.

Upgrade the transparency of the permitting system. County should provide a full page in West Hawaii today every month that lists major commercial operation permits with location map and description to allow for more transparency and give the public time to prepare if For or against a plan. There should be an update each month in the paper of the progress of each permit in question to help monitor the departments actions.

Add additional staff to the code enforcement departments and move key players (Dept Heads) in Parks and Recs, Building and planning to the Kona civic center. Kailua Kona is the anchor area of this island. Most all new development is happening here, most valuable properties are here and 90% of all visitors stay and spend their dollars in Kailua Kona and the Kohala coast.

4. Priorities

We are a tourism based economy. It seems the planning department does not want to recognize this. Tourism areas should be developed and cleaned up as a top priority.
We thinks the whole area from the Honokahou harbor to Hokulia on the coast up to at least Kuakini Hwy be call the "Resort District". Then new rules that reflect a policy of Green, Clean and Accessible be put in to place. People that visit the island bring back their experiences from this area. About 30% of the Homes in this area a full time vacations rentals. This would mean ;

Beaches should be improved. Beautify them, Provide better access for snorkeling and launching standup paddle boards. (*appendix G - article in paper outlines this well)

Old downtown should be revitalized. Buildings are not safe and look terrible. We have cruise ship tourist in the town each week. Read the Yelp comments from them. Most won't be back.
Market Place in downtown should be revitalized. This process may take some eminent domain processes because the owner(s) of these properties have no plans to change them. Take a look at Lahaina for an example.

Limited sidewalks force people to walk in the street.

Parking downtown should be improved (Over the last 20 years Planning permitted businesses to push right up against the downtown area - not recognizing the need for parking)(*appendix F note - business owners have complained through four administrations about this issue)

Construct some mountain bike and hiking trails above town. We had a chance to buy the Hao area park (Jurrasic park) (*Appendix F) but the county process got in the way and the area was sold to a private party.

GENERAL PLAN - CHANGE

Refocus all priorities to the West side tourist areas for the next ten years.

Work directly with businesses and actually make the improvements they suggest.

Work with residents that spend their time in the water, Make better access at beaches for surfing, standup paddling, shore diving, swimming and snorkeling.

Thank you for the opportunity of voice my opinion. I hope you can see by the attachments in the appendix that I am not the only one that has the concerns voiced above. When articles appear in the opinion area of the West Hawaii today, it is because many have written in over an issue. The best worded is usually the one that makes it to print.
We also have many non resident owners that you will find agree with most of the items above. They have an even stronger attitude toward more monies being returned to the West side because as you know they pay more property taxes than us residents.

sincerely,

Craig Watson
Kailua Kona
808-430-7460

Appendix

A.

NEARLY 70%

That's how much West Hawaii pays of island's property taxes

Number of factors why eastern neighbors owe less

BY NANCY COOK LAUER
WEST HAWAII TODAY
ncook-lauer@westhawaiitoday.com

If West Hawaii property owners feel sticker shock when they open their tax bills, they may have good reason.

West Hawaii's three council districts — home to a third of the island's roughly 196,000 population — will be shouldering more than two-thirds of the property tax burden this year. That's according to a West Hawaii Today analysis applying current tax rates to certified property values released Tuesday by the county Department of Finance.

Property tax revenues across the island went up by $19.5 million, a 7.9 percent increase, because of the increase in property values. There was no tax rate increase contemplated in the proposed $462.7 million budget submitted March 1 by Mayor Billy Kenoi.

The property value increase is literally hitting home for North Kohala resident Kevin Conway. His home, previously valued at $425,000, is increasing in value by $104,000, a 24.5 percent hike. That's raising his taxes another $850 annually, he said.

"I was appalled when I saw the raise in my assessment," Conway said Friday. "It was a shock."

Conway said his neighbors are in a similar predicament, with one neighbor reporting a $240,000

SEE TAXES PAGE 4A

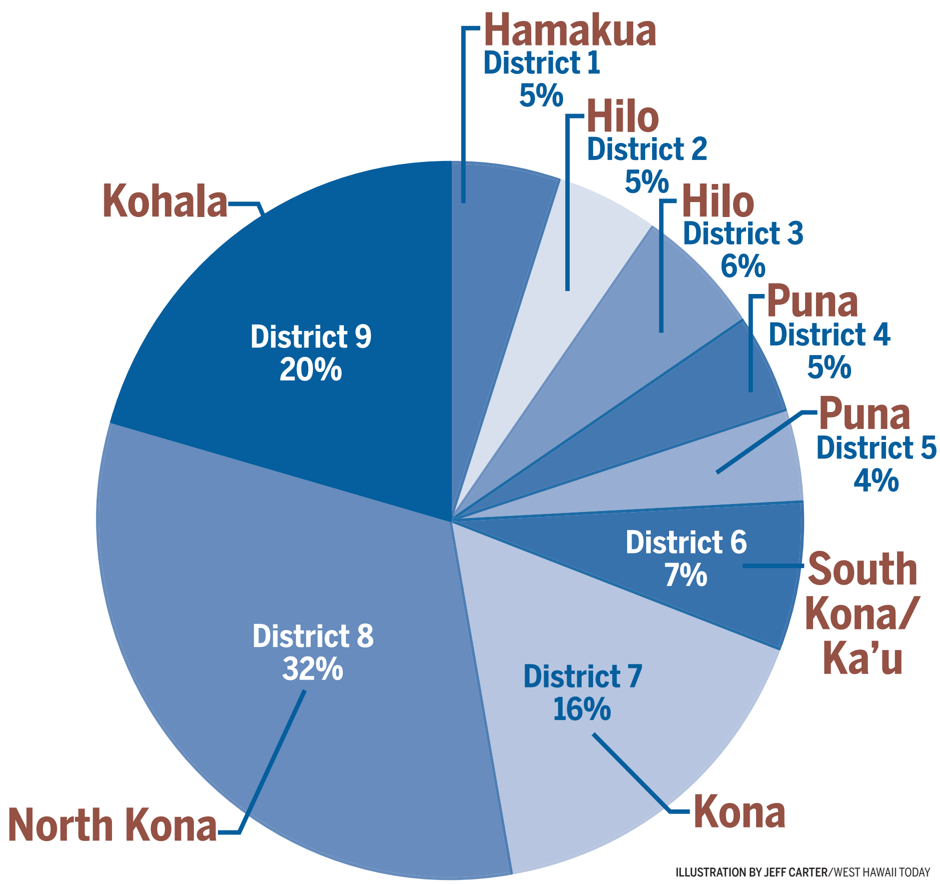

ILLUSTRATION BY JEFF CARTER/WEST HAWAII TODAY

TAXES: Property exemptions for homeowners play a role

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

increase in valuation.

"A lot of people don't look at their individual assessments," Conway said of the annual mailing that's marked "this is not a bill — do not pay."

"When they get their tax bill, they're going to hit the roof," he added.

The newspaper's analysis shows North Kona District 8 with the highest property tax burden, carrying 32 percent of all property taxes paid on the island. That's followed by Kohala District 9, with 20 percent and Kona District 7 with 16 percent.

West Hawaii's District 7, 8 and 9, the only districts with a double-digit tax burden, together account for 69 percent of all property taxes paid on the island.

The other end

At the other end of the spectrum is Puna District 5, with 4 percent of the property taxes on the island. Hamakua District 1, Hilo District 2 and Puna District 4 each contribute 5 percent.

The newspaper did the analysis by aggregating by council district all net property assessments and applying the current tax rates and proposed tax rates for each of the nine property classes within each district.

The mayor has until Thursday to submit a revised budget to the County Council, which has until June 20 to establish tax rates. The budget year starts July 1.

Kenoi said in a text message Saturday there would be no tax increase this year. The budget is balanced without it, he said.

The analysis found that North Kona's District 8 will pay about $85.3 million, Kohala's District 9 will pay $53.9 million and Kona's District 7 will pay $43.5 million of the approximately $264.6 million tax base under the proposed rates.

In contrast, Puna's District 5 will pay the lowest, $10.9 million, Puna's District 4 will pay $11.9 million, Hilo's District 2 will pay $12.9 million, Hamakua's District 1 will pay $13.5 million, Hilo's District 3 will pay $15.4 million and South Kona/Ka'u's District 6 will pay $17.3 million.

Puna Councilman Danny Paleka said his district may contain the lowest property values, but it's full of residents needing services from their county government. They shouldn't be shortchanged based on their tax contributions, he said.

"That's certainly something that I'm trying to change," Paleka said of what he sees as real needs for his district.

In particular, he's been pushing for a better bus system, road improvements for the limited accesses in and out of Puna and improvements to Herbert C. Shipman Park.

"The numbers don't lie," Paleka said. "Our property values are low. We live in cheaper type of houses and maybe unpermitted. It depends where you want to live. We live in the most beautiful place."

Billing due, appeals up

Tax bills will be mailed July 20.

Property assessment notices were sent out in late March and property owners had only until April 9 to file an appeal. Conway is one those appealing.

As would be expected, appeals are up as well. The number of appeals increased 61.6 percent to 362, and the amount pending in the appeals increased 66.9 percent to $180.7 million, said Deputy Finance Director Lisa Miura.

Appeals are heard by the Tax Board of Review, a five-member board appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the council.

In addition to the value of the property itself — West Hawaii properties in general have a higher market value — factors that play into determining tax values include various county exemptions and new construction that raises property value.

Of the estimated $244.4 million gross value for new residential construction and $29.1 million gross value for new commercial construction, a full $98.9 million is construction in District 8 and $42.9 million is in District 9, according to Finance Department data.

When new construction is taken out of the mix, property value increases over last year range from 2.8 percent for District 5, Puna, to 9 percent for District 8, North Kona.

	TOTAL TAX	
DISTRICT 1	$13,542,567	5.12%
DISTRICT 2	$12,869,077	4.86%
DISTRICT 3	$15,415,438	5.83%
DISTRICT 4	$11,905,538	4.50%
DISTRICT 5	$10,894,215	4.12%
DISTRICT 6	$17,299,049	6.54%
DISTRICT 7	$43,484,700	16.44%
DISTRICT 8	$85,251,860	32.22%
DISTRICT 9	$53,896,549	20.37%
TOTAL	$264,558,992	

Reasons for raises

Property values may increase in a neighborhood if there were a number of recent comparable sales to aid in evaluations, Miura said. She said a lull in property purchases, followed by a surge as the economy came out of the recession, could increase property values more than in recent years.

Assessed values for properties in the homeowner class and affordable rental class, not including any improvements, are capped at 3 percent annually until the property changes hands. So districts with a lot of longtime homeowners rather than those who have second homes in Hawaii would see less of an increase in value.

Property exemptions for homeowners also play a role. Homeowners receive an exemption of $40,000. Homeowners aged 60 to 69 receive an $80,000 exemption and those 70 and over receive a $100,000 exemption. Additional exemptions apply for the disabled and disabled veterans.

As expected, districts with the lowest taxes also had the highest percentage of exemptions. A full 27.5 percent of property value in District 5, Puna, is exempted from taxes, compared to 7.3 percent in District 8, North Kona.

Hilo District 3 Councilman Dennis "Fresh" Onishi said his district has one of the lowest tax burdens because it's composed primarily of established homeowner neighborhoods, and many of the homeowners are older.

"In my district, the neighborhood is older. We have homeowners who have been owning their homes for 40 to 50 years, who've been living there their lifetimes," Onishi said. "Other areas, they have people who are just moving in."

One of those areas is North Kona's District 8, a district with a high concentration of hotels and resorts as well as second homes. Those categories not only pay higher tax rates, but they also don't qualify for exemptions that lower the property values.

The mood in West Hawaii has changed dramatically over the past five years or so, said North Kona Councilwoman Karen Eoff. It wasn't that long ago that residents were clamoring for West Hawaii to break off and become its own county, because of public sentiment that the region was providing most of the tax revenues but getting very little in return.

It's different now, Eoff said. Big county projects such as the West Hawaii Civic Center, the Ane Keohokalole Highway and — less glamorous but equally important — the Kealakehe Wastewater Treatment Plant have all contributed to residents feeling they're not being neglected, she said.

"There was an outcry, and there was an answer," Eoff said.

While County Council members look out for their own districts, they also take a countywide approach, she said. Puna, for example, doesn't have a huge tax base, but it has a growing number of people in need of basic services.

"I believe that we should look at the island as a whole," Eoff said.

How the tax burden was computed: Hawaii County is required, by May 1 each year, to report certified property values for each of nine tax classes for each of nine County Council districts. The newspaper's analysis pulled out the net taxable values for buildings and land, added them together, and applied the current corresponding tax rate for each tax class. Percentages were then calculated from the totals.

B.

C.

By Bret Yager West Hawaii Today byager@westhawaiitoday.com

KAILUA-KONA — A plan for a commercial gravel crushing operation off of Hualalai Road is drawing fire from neighbors.

The application for a special permit for a baseyard and equipment staging area, commercial crushing and stockpiling of material and a security dwelling on 9 acres has the planning director's backing — with conditions and a five-year time limit.

But a group of residents from four subdivisions has filed a petition for a contested case hearing as the Leeward Planning Commission prepares to hear the permit request Thursday.

"It's going to affect property values; there's going to be noise," said Jeff Citron, who filed the petition on behalf of a group called The Community Associations of Hualalai, representing residents of Heights at Hualalai, Pualani Estates, Hualalai Colony and Kona Orchards.

"You got the sound of rock being dumped," Citron said. "You have dust."

Residents say the operation — designed to create 10 to 20 truckloads of commercial aggregate a day — will diminish property values, posing a nuisance and eyesore to people living in the area, and that the use isn't consistent with the objectives of the Kona Community Development Plan.

Joel Cooperson said residents in the past have already heard trucks backing up and the rattle of crushing equipment at the site.

"It's a slap in the face to the community," he said.

However, the operation would be surrounded by other vacant land, with the closest home 600 feet away, according to a report from Planning Director Duane Kanuha.

The requested use of the agriculturally zoned land is reasonable, given its poor soil and the fact that much of the property is in a flood zone where Bolton is proposing to do flood channelization work, Kanuha wrote. The nearest residence is 600 feet away and the two closest subdivisions, Pulanai Estates to the south and Hualalai Colony to the east, are buffered by agricultural land, Kanuha said.

The permit is being sought to clear up a complaint filed against activity at the property, which has been used for years as a baseyard and storage area for equipment and construction material, according to the county.

On Feb. 19, the Planning Department issued a warning letter to Bolton Inc. based on a complaint that gravel had been crushed at the site in April 2015 and transported in a truck with a Bolton logo to a construction area at Kohanaiki.

Investigating officials found a rock crusher on the property, a pile of rock nearby and an office-type trailer. In addition to construction equipment, investigators found four metal warehouses and a Quonset-type structure for which there was no record of building permits, according to the warning letter.

Bolton does have a current community noise permit allowing hammers, crushers and a generator. The company also has an active grading permit and two stockpile permits issued by Public Works for a flood channelization project, which Bolton is undertaking on the land.

Bolton believed that commercial excavation activities were covered under those permits, according to Planning Department documents.

The company is working to clean up the property, according to the Planning Department. The five-year time limit condition requires Bolton to come back and report to the Planning Commission on the cleanup and progress on the flood channel project. Additional conditions require dust control at the site and operation only during business hours.

A call to Bolton Inc. was responded to by the company's agent, Christy Logan.

"We are glad there is a public process we can all go through," Logan said. "(The special permit) has been applied for and we'll see how it goes."

Logan referred further questions to public documents at the planning office.

Updated:
November 10, 2015 - 8:44am
West Hawaii Today
The state Department of Health Clean Air Branch has issued a notice and finding of violations and ordersagainst Bolton Inc.

Bolton Inc. was cited for late submittal of a 2013 report and for not conducting its 2013 annual source performance test for its 475 TPH portable stone processing plant located in Kailua-Kona, according to the DOH. Violations were noted during a Feb. 7, 2014, inspection and a fine of $5,800 has been issued and a consent order is being negotiated. Bolton may request a hearing to contest the violations and penalty fees.

The DOH Clean Air Branch monitors air quality and regulates businesses that release pollutants into the air. The branch reviews and approves air permits, evaluates and enforces state and federal air standards, conducts inspections, and investigates reported incidents related to outdoor air quality.

RBolton-SPP16-188.jwd 05-09-16

COUNTY OF HAWAI'I PLANNING DEPARTMENT
RECOMMENDATION

BOLTON, INC.
SPECIAL PERMIT APPLICATION NO. 16-000188 (SPP 16-000188)

Upon review of the request against the guidelines for granting a Special Permit, the Planning Director recommends that the request **to allow a baseyard/staging yard for equipment, storage of materials, stockpiling and crushing of natural materials for commercial use, and a security dwelling on a 9.23-acre portion of 23.738 acres of land in the State Land Use Agricultural District be approved by the Planning Commission with a 5-year time limit for the life of the permit.** Since this recommendation is made without the benefit of public testimony, the Director reserves the right to modify and/or alter this position based upon additional information presented at the public hearing. This approval recommendation is based on the following findings:

D.

By TOM CALLIS Hawaii Tribune-Herald

Construction of the $22.3 million Pahoa District Park, once paused because of the June 27 lava flow, restarted last week, Hawaii County officials said.

The county gave the go-ahead to resume grubbing and grading work following a downgrade in the lava flow threat March 25 and consultation with Hawaiian Volcano Observatory and Civil Defense.

Parks and Recreation Director Clayton Honma said contractor Nan Inc. resumed the work around April 22.

The work initially started in early August but was paused after geologists began warning about the lava flow later that month.

“In collaboration with our Hawaii County Council, we are pleased to move forward with this project that will provide access to positive recreation for Hawaii Island’s fastest-growing communities,” Mayor Billy Kenoi said in a written statement.

Honma said the delay will increase the cost of the project due to remobilization of equipment and changes in labor costs, and those are currently being negotiated. The project is now expected to be finished in May 2016.

The lava flow, which has been inactive outside Pahoa since mid-March, remains active within 5 miles of the Puʻu ʻOʻo vent.

The flow initially entered Pahoa within a mile of the park location.

With the eruption continuing and lava still heading in a northeast direction, should the county be spending so much money on a new facility?

Civil Defense Administrator Darryl Oliveira said the risk is within reason.

“We understand the investment the county would be making,” he said. “Based on the benefits with the community having a park, it seemed reasonable.”

The hardened flows could also provide a bit of a barrier for that part of town, depending on which path lava follows, Oliveira said.

The project will add 29 acres of park space to the existing 15-acre park on Kauhale Street.

When it’s finished, there will be two lighted baseball fields, two multi-purpose fields, covered play courts, a new playground and restrooms. One of the multi-purpose fields will also have lights for nighttime use.

The current project is considered phase one of the park’s expansion.

In the future, a third baseball field, a track, soccer/multi-purpose field and amphitheater are planned.

Both phases are expected to cost $54 million.

The plan covers a 71-acre site, including the existing improvements.

Honma said the Pahoa Senior Center, turned back into a fire station during the lava threat, should reopen for seniors within a week or two.

E.

What happened to Kailua-Kona?

Up and down Alli Drive are pockets of homeless. Every corner homeless. Behind the bushes homeless. Down to the sea; more homeless. I offered them food, but that was refused. They wanted money. Turn off Alli, in the direction of Target at night and homeless abound walking like zombies amidst the glow of all the homeless cats. Why has this been allowed to happen?

All the travelers who make it there have spent a lot of time and money to get there and they have brought their families to enjoy their precious vacation time making priceless family memories amongst a pack of drug addicted homeless, which is very unnerving to say the least. But why, has this been allowed to happen, let alone continue? All these people are defecating outside and it is disgusting. They leave their trash all over and are constantly looking into vehicles in the parking lots. In one week, we saw three drug transactions occur in plain slight.

Why is nothing being done yet the numbers are increasing?

Suzanne Richards de Perez
San Marcos, California

F.

By Nancy Cook Lauer West Hawaii Today ncook-lauer@westhawaiitoday.com

HILO — The commission charged with prioritizing county land purchases isn't ready to commit to buying a popular Kaloko trailhead, despite advocates' concerns the land could slip from the public's hands.

The 21-acre lot off Hao Street that links up to miles of hiking paths in the Makaula-Ooma section of the Honuaula Forest Reserve has been nominated for purchase by Peoples Advocacy For Trails Hawaii, with support from North Kona Councilwoman Karen Eoff.

The property has been used for decades by hikers who traverse the private property to get to the public land. It's a popular route to the forest reserve, although it doesn't butt right up against it. Instead, hikers must cross a swath of at least one, and possibly two, adjoining properties.

"When I moved here in 1980, one of the first things people told me to do was hike this trail," Eoff told the Public Access, Open Space and Natural Resources Preservation Commission on Monday. "Everybody's probably been trespassing for the 30 years since I got here and probably before that."

The trailhead land was placed on the market in July and is priced at $579,000. The land is zoned agriculture with a minimum lot size of 10 acres, and a significant portion already is dedicated as a forest reserve.

"Time is of the essence," Eoff said, adding that the owner is 90 years old and trying to sell the property in order to set her estate in order.

Eoff and PATH Executive Director Tina Clothier told the commission that it's possible to get easements across the other two properties, even though they aren't for sale. There is also a trail loop on the Hao Street parcel that hikers use who don't want the more arduous hikes into the forest reserve, Eoff said.

The commission, however, was reluctant to agree to purchase a property without it going through the proper vetting process, although PONC funds have been used in the past under County Council direction without the property being prioritized.

"Usually, at the start of the year, we accept all the nominations and at the end of the year, we prioritize them," said commissioner Rene Siracusa.

The money comes from a charter-mandated earmark of property taxes. The balance available stood at $6.2 million as of Jan. 5.

Got sold to a private party while commission was delaying. They have bought last minute properties before, but guess what, they were on the east side.

G.

Where are the Canadian tourists, eh?

Arrivals down 11.6 percent compared to last year

BY IVY ASHE
HAWAII TRIBUNE-HERALD

HILO — Canada may have high-profile names like Justin Bieber visiting Hawaii, but tourism from the Great White North is stumbling.

June numbers from the Hawaii Tourism Authority and state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism show a statewide year-to-date drop of 11.6 percent in Canadian visitors as compared to 2015. Year-to-date visitor spending was down 17.7 percent.

The double-digit declines stand out in a year that has seen all other markets continue to grow.

"It's been on the slide for quite a while," said Ross Birch, executive director of the Big Island Visitors Bureau.

Birch

March was the hardest-hit month for Hawaii Island, he said. "And then it's just continually (down) from there."

June saw a drop of nearly 30 percent in Canadian visitor arrivals to Hawaii Island.

Big Island arrivals earlier in the year were not as affected as visitor spending, Birch said, since few people canceled trips.

"But even those who had already booked … you could see the drastic change in their spending pattern," he said. "I would say end of first quarter (of

SEE **TOURISTS** PAGE 6A

TOURISTS: Canadian visitor arrivals have been declining for nine months

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

this year), beginning of second quarter is when we really started to see the Canadian market dip."

Statewide, Canadian visitor arrivals have been declining for nine months, a trend attributed to the weak exchange rate between Canada and the United States.

"The feedback we're getting from the (travel) agents and the press is, 'Yes, Hawaii is always top of the list,'" Birch said. "But it's a hard sell with the dollar exchange."

The exchange rate was fairly even in 2012, but began to slide in favor of the American dollar in mid-2013.

As of Friday, the exchange rate was 0.76 Canadian dollars per U.S. dollar.

Hawaii also faces competition from destinations such as Mexico, which is ramping up investments in its resorts and all-inclusive travel packaging and has a more favorable exchange rate.

Still, Canada is "our number-two international market, behind Japan," said Leslie Dance, vice-president of marketing and product development for the HTA. Australia is "nipping at its heels."

Dance said that the market was showing signs of coming back, particularly since Canada's GDP has increased and air access remains strong.

Dance

On the Big Island, all direct Canadian air traffic arrives via Kona International Airport in Kailua-Kona. There has been a 50 percent increase in direct flights over the past two years, Birch said.

"We want to keep those flights in place," he said. "It's just, again, keeping that awareness that we are an option."

Both the HTA and BIVB have stepped up efforts to promote Hawaii.

HTA used to consider all of North America as a single marketing area, but has since pulled Canada out as its own focal point.

"It's a fully integrated marketing program, so PR, new trade partnerships," Dance said. "There'll be some advertising as well." The campaign also will include efforts to bring in more visitors from Canada's East Coast.

Vancouver currently sends the most tourists to Hawaii.

On Friday, Birch and his staff completed the state's first-ever "virtual press blitz," in which the group met with more than 25 travel writers from Canada and the Pacific Northwest (another BIVB focus is the Bellingham, Washington, area) via Skype and virtual conference call.

"We were just pushing this market again, making connections and trying to get a lot of these writers to come out," Birch said. "The lava flowing into the ocean is always a great angle."

The Skype chats took place from a Kohala property, showcasing the sweeping highland in the background of the video.

"It's still keeping a presence, it's keeping a reminder," Birch said. "'If you are thinking of Hawaii, keep us in mind.'"

"The increased focus should benefit the numbers," Dance said.

H. West Hawaii Today Opinion Section

More building? Is there any plan for Kona?

Is there any plan for Kona?

In 2005 the county completed a CDP — county development plan. Eleven years later they have done two things that I can find. Access to Kua Bay and the gymnasium. Now the council is approving two new developments on Alii and a large senior center. They say the we need more housing because prices are going up on existing homes. Totally false. Our neighbors and others like them selling their homes have dropped there prices steadily over that last year because no one is buying. (Just check out the Mls for this area for proof.) While Maui is at a all time high.

Where are these new Kona residents going to enjoy themselves? The council has given $17 million to fix a Hilo golf course that loses $500,000 a year. Building a $2.5 million dollar baseball/park in Pahoa directly in the path of a lava flow. Trying to build a multi-million dollar park in Kukuihaele that none of the residents want.

Are developers building near any of these areas? No! It is time the council starts taking action on the 11-year-old items in their own CDP. Which is not a plan but a wish list, unfortunately.

There is no wording about fixing zonings, buying land. They use the word encourage.

Well, we encourage you to do something right and accomplish these goals you set. Maybe in the next two years. In 2011, my children were going into middle school, they are now off island graduating from college. One whole generation that has missed having Kona be the premier place it could be.

The council saw fit to rezone a hotel next to Kahaluu to an educational area for only a small group of children that qualify to go there. Instead of keeping the zoning for another hotel that could employ hundreds of people and pay millions in tax dollars that could help with fixing Kona.

There are even free things the council can do to help upgrade the look of Kona. They can start making some quality of life ordinances to protect the neighborhoods that are not in homeowners associations from the one or two neighbors that stack trash and cars on their front lawns or run a business from their home. Parking cranes, dump trucks or unattended boats on their front lawns or in front of their neighbors homes. Even with vermin, ant and mosquito issues, the council still hasn't taken the time to draft any clean up ordinances. This is happening at homes right next to the coast, which on any other island is premium property.

If it wasn't for the many condo complexes with HOAs that keep them beautiful, Kona neighborhoods would be more junky than ever. The council is responsible for setting the atmosphere of junk around homes by ignoring the issue and in turn responsible for the hard to sell homes near these junk residences.

Graffiti is another issue, not recognized by council. Maui has these ordinances and many beach parks, why can't Kona?

We emailed the council several times over two years about these issues with suggestions for neighborhood quality ordinances, building out Magic Sands, better water access at Kahaluu, etc. and only got one council member to respond (thank you, Karen Eoff), but she was not interested in driving Kona town and neighborhoods with us to view the issues.

This is voting season, all we hear is about big issues like homelessness, energy, but what about the focus on the voters and taxpaying-resident needs. Are the kids in middle school now going to be in college when the next letter is written asking why our council doesn't maintain and better our unique Kona town and neighborhoods?

If you want to see change please email our council and this year don't vote for incumbents, let's get some new faces in that just might make something happen before it is too late.

Charles Watanabe is a resident of Kailua-Kona

Quality of life important

Excellent commentary by Norman Bezona and Charles Watanabe on July 24. Bezona: Include Trees and native plants in landscape design for our parking lots and building.

Watanabe: Pass "quality of life" ordinances to protect our neighborhoods from thrash and old cars in front lawns, monitor building permits, reduce graffiti, allow better water access at Kahaluu. In essence, Watanabe said the county should follow the Community Development Plan (CDP) we completed in 2005 — 11 years ago.

What I like about these two gents is that they both talk about our quality of life for Kona residents. This is important to me as a full-time resident. Approximately two months ago, I attended a recent presentation with Gov. David Ige and his cabinet — and the first thing out of his mouth was: "The nonstop flight from Haneda Japan to Kona will bring in millions of dollars to Kona for the first year of operation."

So what?

Everyone is always talking about the monies we are going to receive. First of all, who is receiving the monies, and are more visitors going to have a positive or a negative impact on the quality of our lives?

I was of one of the community planners for the CDP in 2005. But very little has been done. I believe, like Mr. Bezona and Mr. Watanabe, that our public servants (council members, legislators, governor) need to re-direct their efforts to accommodate the people who live here — the locals. Our quality of life is important. We live here, we pay taxes, we vote!

Lei Kihoi
Captain Cook

West Hawaii Today

Property taxes should pay for west side

Published May 29, 2016 - 7:29pm

Updated: May 29, 2016 - 7:29pm

Charles Watanabe / My Turn

Thank you West Hawaii for publicly exposing the property tax income for West Hawaii. We are at a critical time in West Hawaii's future and need the public to start putting pressure on our council to make some positive plans and changes for the west side.

Until West Hawaii is clean, green and accessible, we have to stop improving other areas of the Big Island. West Hawaii is the cash generator for the entire island's future with property tax and tourism revenue. Positive changes will benefit both tourism and local use of the west side. We now know it is not from the lack of money, just a lack of willingness by our elected officials to upgrade this area. All calls to the Parks and Recreation Department's PIO found they have no plans to do any upgrades mentioned below. After attending the Planning Commission forum meeting last month, we found they have no concrete plans for upgrading except for 2,500 Hawaiian Home Land homes near Kahalakehe High School and a possible 2,000 more on Kamehameha land near Target.

Let's take some areas that could be improved as examples:

1. Kamakahonu beach and the pier area suffer from a lack of parking for locals to launch their standup boards and swim. The four three-minute parking areas are not enforced and regularly have cars park in them all day. The pier used to be the center of town with a fish market and boats bringing in their catch for all to see. Why can't we make it that way again?

2. Magic Sands is junk. There are rocks strewn all over the beach and shoreline. Most of these rocks came from a seawall that was knocked down in 1992 from Iniki. One afternoon with a backhoe would remove these rocks. This would allow the sand to recover quickly and make more room for sitting on the beach. South of the Lua's could be a small grass park, instead of an abandoned concrete pad. The sacred area is fenced with Lowe's buckets and concrete. We can do better than that. Over 100,000 people a year visit this beach.

3. Four Mile. How about a small pier here so that we can safely launch standup boards? Also some proper safe steps leading from the parking lot would be nice.

4. Kahaluu. This was one of the finest snorkeling beaches in all the islands. Now it has 50 percent less fish and looks like a rock quarry. According to the Reef Teach organization, it is visited by 300,000 people a year. Even though it is a preserve, people regularly net hundreds of fish from the bay each day. Several letters from tourists have been written to WHT about this. There is no reason that the lifeguards can't enforce the hunting rules in this bay. And how about some green? People come to Hawaii for it's beauty, it would not be difficult to plant drought resistant flowering plants and trees around the bay.

5. Keauhou. This is a great mixed-use beach, But the walkways to the beach are crumbling and dangerous to walk down with outriggers and standup boards. If it wasn't for the outrigger clubs care of the land around the bay, it would look terrible. A thousand people fought to save this bay from the state's mooring plans, how

about our council trying to buy this inlet with the land funds. Instead of buying lands in the middle of nowhere that nobody will use?

7. Kailua Town is rotting away. Many of the buildings need to be condemned. They are full of dry rot and illegal plumbing. We sat through the planning commission meeting last month about the 2005 to current development plan. We heard they have no plans to force an upgrade. They recognized since 2005 that the area needs help. They don’t even have architectural standards in case some on actually wants to rebuild there.

3. Quality of Life ordinances protect the neighborhoods that are not covered by homeowners association against uncaring neighbors. Dengue should have taught our council a lesson on junk. All it takes is one or two bad neighbors with old cars abandoned on their yards, piles of belongings outdoors to contribute the breeding of pests. To say nothing about lowering of the property values of their neighbors. Also the running of service businesses should be regulated in neighborhoods. Our street has a home with two backhoes and a dump truck parked on the lawn.

I think you get the idea. If you agree with these things call or email the council to get on them. My kids started elementary school and are now off island in college. They saw nothing improve only get worse on the west side. Let’s not take another 19 years to make West Hawaii better.

Charles Watanabe is a resident of Kailua-Kona.