

From Ka'ū's Values and Visions to Ka'ū's Community Development Plan



Let's start with the bottom line.

The latest community input, along with the history of planning discussions in Ka'ū, underline core values and a shared vision. Achieving a meaningful, consensus-supported Community Development Plan (CDP) depends upon recognizing those values and that vision and assuring that the priorities they imply are reflected in the final plan.

While other communities may talk about the importance of community character and a lifestyle inspired by sense of place, Ka'ū lives it. Honoring that connection between people and place will be essential.

VALUES AND VISION STATEMENT

The Ka'ū CDP should honor Ka'ū's unique rural lifestyle, its connection between people and place, and its distinctive Hawaiian cultural heritage. It must plan for the future in ways that:

- Increase economic opportunities through a diverse, resilient, and sustainable economy.
- Protect and provide reasonable access to natural and recreational resources, including the mauka forests, the coastline, open spaces, and park facilities and programs.
- Strengthen families, communities, and the diversity of local cultures.

So how did we arrive at this conclusion?

Community Input: Building the Foundation for Planning

If you want residents, property owners, business people, and others who make up the broad constituency for planning to buy into a Community Development Plan, it makes sense to understand how they view their community and how they imagine the future. So before the planners began collecting data about the physical, economic, and cultural landscape of Ka'ū, the County of Hawai'i went straight to the experts. They went to people of all ages, all ethnic backgrounds, and from all the communities within Ka'ū.

From October of 2008 through February of 2009, the County asked two questions in surveys and in "talk story" sessions:

What do you love about Ka'ū?

What would you like to see in Ka'ū in 20 years?

The results would help frame the planning discussion, keeping the Project Team of professionals focused on what matters most to the CDP's ultimate customers, the people who live, work, and play in Ka'ū.

Almost 1,200 people responded to the County's invitation to share their values and vision for the future. That number represents 14 percent of the District's population, a record participation rate for County community engagement efforts.

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The Values: “Community Character” as Core Perspective

Since the residents’ responses will inform a CDP process that translates broad goals in the County’s General Plan into place-specific actions, there had to be an attempt to organize the responses in relation to the 13 categories in the General Plan. The County’s analysis of the community’s values and visions did that in great detail. Yet the most unavoidable inference from the analysis is less about ways in which residents ranked priorities for General Plan elements such as energy or housing or historic sites. Rather it’s about responses that could not be easily categorized or that cut across categories.

Almost one third, 1,900 of 6,500 total responses in the values surveys and “talk stories” sessions, fall under “did not fit the GP plan elements.” Most of those uncategorized reactions to the “what do you love?” question are variations on a core theme: community character. Respondents use words such as: community, family, aloha, lifestyle, pace, friendly, diversity, people, quiet, country, small and uncrowded.

Many responses also reference places or landscapes that represent community character: ocean, beaches, shoreline, mountains, open space, views. There is clearly a people/place/lifestyle connection that is central to Ka’ū residents’ affection for where they live.

VALUES

This grouping of values comments captures the people/place/lifestyle connection in Ka’ū.

‘ĀINA or NATURAL RESOURCES (natural beauty, beaches , open space, coastline, mountains, land, access, ocean, outdoor recreation, weather)

‘OHANA (people, community, family, schools, safety, aloha, diversity, church)

COUNTRY or RURAL LIFESTYLE (quiet, lifestyle, country, small, agriculture, isolation, little traffic, culture, uncrowded, history, freedom, pace)

From Values to Visions: Imagining the Future

The challenge for the community and planners is to address Ka'ū's future development in ways that are consistent with its unique character. From responses to the vision question asked on surveys and in "talk story" sessions – "What would you like to see in Ka'ū in 20 years?" – we can identify categories that rank high on the community's to-do list.

There are no surprises here. Economic issues, approached from many angles, rule. Yet even in this relatively pragmatic list, community character and lifestyle themes are implied by many of the responses.

KEY ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

This grouping of topics illustrates the top issues identified in responses to the 20-year vision question.

LOCAL ECONOMY (jobs, retail, services, dining, entertainment, agriculture, renewable energy, housing, tourism, local business)

RECREATION (facilities, youth recreation, parks, programs)

EDUCATION (more schools, improved schools, adult/vocational/higher education)

HEALTH CARE (hospital, other medical facilities, services)

'ĀINA (access, natural resource protection, coastline, natural beauty)

PUBLIC SERVICES (water, roads, mass transit, public safety, solid waste/recycling)

Off to the Side:

Coping with Vision Priorities Beyond the County's Jurisdiction

To give residents maximum opportunities for engaging in a process like this, you ask open-ended questions such as: "What do you love?" and "What would you like to see in the next 20 years?" As a result, you're likely to see concerns that require solutions beyond the scope of the project – and beyond the jurisdiction of an entity like the County of Hawai'i.

In some cases, there are overlaps of jurisdiction that are clear to government authorities but not to those who enjoy the resources. Ka'ū's shared landscape, for instance, involves privately held land and land under the control of county, state, and federal agencies. In other cases, it's a matter of clearly drawn lines of authority – in education, for instance, or in health services, where the County may have influence but not control.

Both of those categories – education and health – appear among the priorities of Ka'ū residents when they're asked about their visions of the future. If the County invites residents into a conversation in which it can offer no assurances their concerns will be addressed, how can it avoid disappointing people who are investing so much energy in engaging with the process?

The key will be building and sustaining relationships across jurisdictions. Already, that process is underway with outreach to state and federal agencies for collecting data essential to the Community Profile. Also, the Project Team is including agency officials and staffers among key stakeholders invited to participate in the charrette. In the collaborative environment of a charrette, it will be easy to see common ground.

But ultimately the task of influencing policy for the long term will fall to the people of Ka'ū, who will have to take the proposed CDP plan forward to adoption and to implementation while building on relationships that strengthened the process and its final product. The good news is that success builds on success. A CDP that acknowledges interdependencies between the people of Ka'ū and agencies and institutions beyond County jurisdiction and achieves planning goals through collaboration will leverage change that benefits everyone for decades to come.

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