

## INTRODUCTION

Puna District is considered to be the area in Hawaii with the highest rate of population increase. US Census data released at the time of writing indicates the population of Puna to be \_\_\_\_, a 25% (?) increase over the 2000 census. This is an astounding rate of population increase! It is due almost entirely to in-migration from other parts of Hawaii and from the US mainland. It occurs against a backdrop of mostly inexpensive, undeveloped land available for sale, an apparent craving for residential property by wealthy buyers, a residential environment in land zoned for small agricultural lots, with a vastly under developed infrastructure. It is in this context that the Puna Community Development Plan (September, 2008) was conceived, extensively debated, and now is being implemented.

The role of the Action Committee is to articulate and prioritize activities that have been expressed in the Puna Community Development Plan, as well as to provide a conduit of communication between County agencies and the public. The adoption of the PCDP by ordinance of the County Council represents new approach between the land use and development authorities in County government and local communities. Implementation is now partly the responsibility of citizens, with support from the Planning Director and other relevant departments. The PCDP Action Committee serves as a communications link between members of the community and the executive branch of County government. The Action Committee serves to keep the communities engaged in the planning process and to recommend implementing actions, through the Planning Director, to the executive departments. In certain instances, implementation will be undertaken directly by communities, perhaps with endorsement from the departments or with help from state or federal agencies. Such an arrangement is likely to speed the process toward achieving goals, solving long standing problems of infrastructure deficiency, and improving communications among government and community entities.

The Action Committee is entirely voluntary. Nine members of communities throughout Puna District serve on the committee. The committee holds monthly meetings, usually in late afternoon in the Kea'au Community Center, where the affairs of the PCDP are discussed in public forum. A good part of the first year was spent simply filling positions, developing protocols, and establishing an operational rhythm. Taking this long to establish an operation is understandable, considering the importance of the committee to long range planning and that community-driven plans and committees are uncommon extensions of County government. The PCDP, furthermore, was controversial at the outset, as amendments to the plan were proposed shortly before the plan was to be voted on by Council, and the Council at that time was about to be reformed due to scheduled elections. The Plan was adopted nevertheless, with the understanding that amendments would be considered subsequently and before any actions would be taken. As expected, a good part of the Action Committee's first year was spent evaluating proposed amendments, presenting testimony to County Council and Planning Commission, and generally expressing concerns over the impact proposed amendments might have on implementation. Substantive Action Committee work began by the end of 2009, foremost being the clarification and prioritization of PCDP projects.

The Action Committee organized into three primary and two secondary sub-committees. The primary sub-committees are **Malama I ka `Aina** (Land and resources management,) **Managing Growth**, and **Transportation**. The two secondary sub-committees are **Amendments** and **Finance**. The primary sub-committees assume responsibility for the three main themes of the PCDP. They are led by AC members who have special interest and/or expertise in the subject. The sub-committees set forth to engage the community in their subject areas, mainly by re-visiting issues raised by the Steering Committee and to confirm community values and interest. Subsequently, sub-committees gathered consensus on subject issues and developed project priorities that would serve as focal points for near-term implementation.

Subject areas identified for subcommittees are:

**Land management** (Malama I ka `Aina) Eight action items are identified, listed in priority order as follows:

1. Manage wastewater disposal in Puna Makai, with emphasis in Kapoho area
2. Designate an International Biosphere Reserve for Volcano and environs
3. Enable funding for the County Cultural Resources Commission
4. Assemble a working group to develop a shore area management program
5. Implement special zoning and development controls for Kapoho shore area that will mitigate subsidence issues
6. Prepare a comprehensive watershed management plan for the Volano Village to Mountain View and Hawaiian Acres to Orchidland areas to address localized flooding
7. Amend the County grading ordinance to require consultation with the Historic Preservation Commission prior to the issuance of a grading permit
8. Amend the County building code in order to accommodate traditional Hawaiian building design and construction methods for structures not intended for dwellings.

### **Transportation:**

Public busses: routes, schedules, stopping points

Roads and Routings: Hwy 130 (Kea'au to Pahoia route) and Puna Makai Alternate Route (PMAR)

### **Managing Growth:**

Town and Village Center planning, with emphasis on Pahoia and Volcano

Facilitating community organization and development

Public recreation and sub-urban parks, with emphasis on HPP

Two other sub-committees, namely Amendments and Finance, were formed in order to provide information and guidance on issues that didn't emanate from the PCDP but that needed attention.

The **Amendments sub-committee**, especially, was active in reconciling amendments to the PCDP that were proposed mostly by members of County Council that would delete certain components of the Plan, and thus alter its authority to implement projects. Amendments were approved by County Council as Bill 194, in (month, 2009.) Amendments did much to improve the editorial quality of the text and especially to reconcile certain maps and illustrations with the text body. However, amendments deleted: 1) references to provision for a transfer of development rights and a concept of "floating zone," that would provide certain flexibility in town and village center development, 2) formulae for strengthening rules for keeping large blocks of agricultural land intact, 3) provision for protecting the water quality of the greater aquifer between Kea'au and Kapoho, and 4) syntax throughout the plan that expressed action rather than condition. The resulting PCDP, nevertheless, remains a fine and workable document. The Amendments Subcommittee will remain intact in anticipation that other amendments will be proposed, as is proper for a dynamic and vibrant long range community plan.

The **Finance subcommittee** [[can Jeff write a par or two here?](#)]

## **ACHIEVEMENTS**

Action Committee assigned organizing tasks to three primary sub-committees, each with an AC member serving as Chair person. In some instances, sub-committee tasks become complicated, and sub-sub-committees evolved. Assigning organizing work to sub-committees has the advantage of interfacing with community members and groups more informally than would happen in full Action Committee meetings, and with fewer requirements for notice, venue, and attendance. Such an informal setting usually enables more open discussion and a more dynamic agenda. Unfortunately, sub-committee meetings sometimes draw fewer participants, but nevertheless take the time of sub-committee chair persons to organize and attend.

Sub-committee chair persons are obliged to report the proceedings of their meetings to the full Action Committee. This has the result of informing AC members of progress being made in PCDP matters, as well as enabling comment and opportunity for re-direction of programs to keep programs in line with PCDP overall objectives. Full AC meetings are open to all members of the community, and their opinions are vital in keeping people engaged and informed.

## **Project Priorities**

Action Committee identified six Action projects considered to be the most important in the Puna Community Development Plan. These project proposals comprise the focus for Action Committee near-term work. The proposed projects are, in priority order:

- 1. Manage Waste Water Disposal in Kapoho Beach Lots and Vacationland Settlements**
- 2. Prepare a District-Wide Mass Transit Master Plan**
- 3. Prepare a design Plan for a Puna Makai Alternate Route (PMAR)**
- 4. Designate an International Biosphere Reserve for greater Volcano and environs**
- 5. Design Transit Hubs for County Busses**
- 6. Initiate Town and Village Center Development Plans for Pahoia and Volcano**

### **1. Manage Wastewater Disposal in Kapoho Beach Lots and Vacationland Settlements**

This project proposal emanates from Ch 2, Sec 3.3 of the PCDP. It recognizes the high value of the greater Puna Aquifer, and the potential for deterioration of the quality of water from contamination by settlements. Contamination will deteriorate sub-surface, near-shore, and shoreline waters. Subcommittee discussions with community members indicated a very high concern for water quality in lower Puna. The sub-committee recognized the inevitability of eventual deterioration of the quality of water in the Aquifer, mainly because of contamination from use of cesspools as the historic method for disposing of waste water. This problem begs attention, as settlement density is increasing in the area that overlies the aquifer and there appears to be minimal recognition by public officials of the potential for long-term problems. Human health as well as the need for protection of near-shore and sea resources are at risk.

Sub-committee members recognized a near-term, critical problem at the shoreline communities of Kapoho Beach Lots and Vacationland, where most (est 60%) of some 220 private homes, situated over a very low sub-surface water strata, utilize cesspools to dispose of waste water from their homes. The intense mixing of near-shore sea water and discharge water from the aquifer is well known here. Preliminary data indicate abnormally high levels of contamination, highly likely from human effluent and agricultural uses. Anecdotal reports of sickness, skin disorders, and intestinal discomfort by recreational users of near-shore water indicated to sub-committees a critical need for a solution. This problem has

been long recognized, in fact, by both County and State agencies. State provided funding for a feasibility study that concluded a low-pressure centralized sewer treatment facility for the area would work. No follow-up action has been taken. It is the purpose of this proposed project to provoke new discussion of the issue, to re-visit alternatives to a central waste-water treatment facility, and to promote a solution before public agencies and officials must endure litigation for neglect.

The Action Committee considers this proposed project to be of utmost urgency.

## **2. Prepare a District-Wide Mass Transit Plan**

[Wes ?]

## **3. Prepare a Design Plan for a Puna Makai Alternative Route (PMAR)**

## **4. Designate an International Biosphere Reserve for Volcano and Environs**

residents of Volcano desire legal recognition of the greater Volcano area as part of an International Biosphere Reserve, in association with Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. The result would serve to protect the native forests and biodiversity of the Volcano community. This includes maintaining its rural landscape and formal protection of remnant and stands of native forest trees, particularly the dominant species, *ʻōhiʻa lehua and associated native trees, shrubs, ferns, and herbs*. As well, residents desire to protect native bird populations, where in some areas it is still possible to routinely see and hear native *ʻApapane, ʻ Ōmaʻo, , and others*, in contrast to other parts of Hawai'i where native birds are uncommon or absent.

Volcano Village is nestled among two state Natural Area Reserves and the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. The protected lands form a rare cradle of native forest that is evident to every person who resides there. The distance across the community from one protected area to another is about four miles. The Volcano community serves as a corridor for native species to move between the national park and other surrounding protected areas.

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park was designated a Biosphere Reserve in 1978 based on its mandate to protect endemic (unique) native plant and animal communities. Biosphere Reserves are areas recognized by UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program for protection of their biological diversity and ecological integrity and for the research, monitoring, and education that support the perpetuation of native ecosystems. Biosphere reserves are also designated as potential models of sustainable economic development. Such are communities which strive for economic development while maintaining the natural biological diversity of their areas.

Increasing settlement of Volcano leads to loss of forest canopy as individuals clear forest stands for home sites and commercial development. Such developments threaten the tranquil rural and natural environment that Volcano residents have consistently indicated they favor.

The Volcano Community Long Range Plan and the Puna Community Development Plan (PCDP) recognize the rural, historic, and biological values of the Volcano community and surrounding lands. These community-driven planning documents clearly advocate protection for the qualities indicated here, as well as for blending land development with the adjacent protected areas. The PCDP goes further in advocating designation of the greater Volcano community as a Biosphere Reserve Buffer Zone that would link the community landscape with that of the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

Recognition of Volcano as an International Biosphere Reserve would oblige the community to promote three characteristics: 1) ensure conservation of native forest landscape, the ecosystem and biological diversity that it supports; 2) provide a model of a community striving for economic and social sustainability; 3) establish learning sites for scientific research and sustainability of the natural and social environment.

Numerous regional and local social and economic advantages would develop if the community were to adopt this strategy:

- Provide a model for sustainable development and forest protection for other regions and communities in Hawaii
- Provide Hawaii County government with the opportunity to demonstrate a will to embrace a progressive regional land use concept which enables County and State governments to maintain jurisdiction of their areas while taking measures to significantly improve the functioning of the greater area
- Attract external sources of funding interested in supporting sustainable approaches to agricultural, business, and tourism developments
- Address some of the educational needs of residents who desire to develop sustainable means of providing power, methods of forest protection and restoration.
- Assert the validity of a concept of land use that recognizes the value of a core protected wilderness (National Park) and a gradient of increasing human occupation of the land with increasing distance from the core, through transitional and a buffer areas
- Demonstrate the validity of recognition by an international organization of a community of people and natural resources (UNESCO,) while living within the jurisdiction of local authorities (County and State)

The following challenges are evident:

- 1) Investment of time, perhaps decades
- 2) Perpetual engagement of community members
- 3) Acceptance by County government agencies and the legislative council, with the special challenge of creative land use zoning
- 4) some amount of funding

The Volcano community is at a crossroad: we can either continue to allow the living environment to degrade into mediocrity so typical of rapidly urbanizing centers all over the state, or we can guide the growth of our community to be compatible with the biological treasure of native forests that nearly surround us. The latter choice is the one the community believes is biologically sustainable, economically productive, and representative of the life style we choose to enjoy.

## **5. Design Transit Hubs for County Busses**

[Wes/Stephanie ?]

## **6. Initiate Town and Village Center Plans for Pahoia and Volcano**

[Frank or Jeff ?]

Other developments are happening in Puna, outside of stimulation from the PCDP. These are:

1. Development of a Neighborhood Place social service center in Mountain View. This center provides shelter, financial assistance, counseling, and other services for families. Neighborhood Place is a not-for-profit organization, staffed by persons who are specially trained in trauma therapy and family assistance.
2. Fire and police stations in Pahoia
3. Senior citizen center in Pahoia
4. Renovation of the gymnasium at Mountain View Elementary School

The Puna Community Development Plan Action Committee will meet at least once a month, usually at the Kea'au Community Center, usually beginning at 3 PM. It is possible the Committee will change venue and possibly time in order to encourage wider participation. Of course, such changes will be announced in the usual manner. We greatly appreciate the time and energy given by community members, both in subcommittee and full committee meetings. We are grateful for the commitments and trust from our friends and neighbors, who live and work among us, in public and non-government entities. Without you, we would not matter.

Gratefully submitted,

Your PCDP Action Committee

Dan Taylor, Chair person, Malama I ka 1Aina Subcomm (Hawaiian Orchid Island Estates)

Jeffrey Krepps, Vice Chair person, Managing Growth, Finance Subcomms (Hawaiian Acres)

Keikiki Kealoha, Member (Kalapana)

Barbara Bell, Member, Wastewater management Subcomm (former Chair person (Kapoho)

Madie Greene, Member, Managing Growth, Finance Subcomms (Pahoa)

Frank Commendador, Member, Amendments and Town Center Planning Subcomm, former Vice Chair person(Aloha Estates)

Tim Tunison, Member, Malama I ka `Aina Subcomm (Volcano)

Wesley Owens, Member, Transportation Subcomm (Hawaiian Acres)

Greg Braun, Member (Kapoho)