

Planning essential to avoid residents being boxed in

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



Kudos to the Planning Commission for voting 6-1 to defer action on the bill to ban big-box or superstores and for recognizing

that this is not one of our community's top issues right now. As noted in the comments of commission members, we should be dealing with more urgent matters, such as

water and traffic. We agree and would add: infrastructure, in general.

There is no question that residents are feeling boxed in by our water, roadway/highway, harbor, lack of affordable housing and rentals, and other resource constraints. Over the years, we have not invested consistently in infrastructure improvements, as we should have.

For example, water continues to be a huge and ongoing issue for us, yet the county water department has lagged way behind in infrastructure improvements and expansion. As reported in The Maui

News in May 2007, the county Department of Water Supply spent only 34 percent of its budget for capital-improvement projects in 2006, encumbering only \$6 million out of \$17.6 million appropriated for water projects in that fiscal year. Moreover, the department acknowledged that it has struggled continually to keep up with capital-improvement projects and that it frequently leaves much of its infrastructure budget for planned and anticipated projects unspent. The point is not to criticize the department but instead to showcase where more attention could be paid.

The Water Environment Federation is a global network of member associations that provides water-quality professionals worldwide with education, training and business opportunities. The federation's Web site reported that much of the U.S. water infrastructure — the systems that treat, distribute, collect and clean water — was built nearly a century ago. With quiet consistency, this infrastructure has provided the foundation for economic prosperity and quali-

ty of life that have made the United States the envy of the world, until now. The water infrastructure suffers from age and exponential population growth and demands our attention. Without reinvestment, we are headed for a crisis.

So, while we are not alone in falling behind in water infrastructure investment, why have we allowed it when water is vital for life?

Water is only one example. Our community has multiple serious concerns that need immediate attention. Due to our rapid growth, infrastructure is a challenge everywhere, including West Maui, which is a tremendous economic engine for the county. Solutions for traffic, parking, sewage and a West Maui hospital — to name a few issues — definitely are needed and are being worked on by the Maui Chamber of Commerce's Westside Committee. However, while these are serious West Maui concerns that must be addressed, the chamber does not think that a temporary development moratorium on West Maui agricultural lands is fitting. We want to focus

attention on addressing long-term results (versus creating moratoriums), specifying important agricultural lands, and getting the General Plan update done.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce is against all unilateral governmental moratoriums. We support growth that promotes the quality of life in Maui County and enhances the attractiveness of Maui as a visitor destination. We advocate for a fair review of each project based on rules and processes already in place. Our position is that development should occur only in conjunction with the planning process — including the General Plan, community plans and implementation plans, and that future development should be coordinated with the development of adequate physical and social infrastructure.

We think that consistent planning is essential to avoid being cornered. Advance community planning allows us to evaluate our resources, and determine where growth can and should take place, as well as where it shouldn't. Planning enables us to establish goals,

set guidelines for future decisions, create timelines and allocate resources. Through planning, we can take a "proactive" instead of a "reactive" approach, and implement actions that are consistent with our values and priorities. Planning is a means to employ sustainable measures, reduce negative impacts, support suitable economic growth, protect our environment, improve our quality of life, and more.

On one hand, moratoriums could serve to solve a limited challenge, to prevent particular businesses or to provide stop-gap measures. However, we believe a better answer is improved planning to address appropriate development; get to and tackle the root of problems; budget correctly; spend the money; and make necessary improvements so that we are not continually boxed in. We encourage residents to speak up for planning processes and take part in community planning activities.

■ *Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.*