

Improvements to business sign code are under way

THE CHAMBER VIEW by Pamela Tumpap



When county inspectors met with businesses in Kahului and Wailuku in the past few months over

signage that did not comply with the current law, a major signage issue erupted in Central Maui. The issue is unifying members of the Maui Chamber of Commerce, the business sector, the Maui County Council, the administration and others in the community to revisit the ordinance quickly and make meaningful changes to

the 10-year-old code.

Many businesses are unaware of the code, and non-compliant signage has grown over time. However, this situation did not happen overnight nor just in the Kahului/Wailuku area. The situation has evolved for years island-wide. Some estimate that 50 percent to 60 percent of Maui businesses have signage elements outside of the existing code.

People have a growing recognition that there is room to change the older code, and understand that businesses must promote their products and services. Such promotion is critical in these economic times especially, because window signs are a cost-effective

marketing tool. So work is progressing to: revisit how signage square footage is calculated; create parameters that support enhanced design; allow window signage; and bring businesses into conformity, while affording them broader promotional opportunities that do not endanger the public or our environment.

The chamber's involvement in the signage issue began months ago, when Council Member Joe Pontanilla, hearing complaints, started addressing the matter with the Planning Department and the chamber. We, too, began hearing from businesses that had met with inspectors and shared this information with the public while reaching out to Mayor

Charmaine Tavares.

We asked the mayor for a stay from enforcement while everyone worked on making minor modifications to particular sections of the ordinance. We also requested a meeting with her and our board members. At an earlier public meeting of the mayor and Pontanilla, the mayor already had suggested that the chamber could help by bringing larger groups together, which we agreed to do.

Meanwhile, Council Member Sol Kaho'ohalahala had drafted an ordinance to amend the current law. Moreover, a group of sign-makers and other businesspeople who attended the public meeting with the mayor and Pontanilla had

formed an ad hoc committee.

The purpose of the committee was to make recommendations for amending the ordinance.

All agreed that time was of the essence to keep businesses from being fined, and, with a draft bill in play, efforts quickly ramped up.

With the ad hoc committee's recommendations in hand when Kaho'ohalahala's bill was heard, a number of recommendations were approved. The Planning Department concurred that these recommendations were to be included in the bill when it is heard. Other recommendations that required more discussion then became the basis for review in the chamber's community meetings now under way.

Two meetings have been held: last Tuesday in Central Maui and Thursday in West Maui. Two more meetings are scheduled: this Tuesday in South Maui, followed by Wednesday in Upcountry. Details are at the chamber website at www.mauichamber.com.

If you are unfamiliar with the signage ordinance, do not know whether your business is in compliance, or want to share your thoughts on signage and what you feel is needed and/or appropriate, please attend these meetings. This issue is moving quickly, and now is the time to be heard.

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