

Planning Department

Role and Duties

The use of land affects us all. Urban development in the wrong places can cut off access to the ocean, adversely affect the quality of drinking water or coastal waters, or change the rural ambience of our island. On the other hand, we need good development to meet our food, shelter, recreational and other needs. We need jobs. The role of the Planning Department is to develop comprehensive long-range plans to guide future growth in a manner that balances public and private rights. The policies set forth in the plans are implemented through the zoning code, subdivision code, other regulatory permits, capital improvements budgeting, and coordination with other departments in terms of property tax incentives and other programs. The department also provides technical advice to the Mayor, Planning Commission, and County Council on all planning and land use matters.

Organization

The operations of this department are carried out through the following divisions:

- **Ministerial Division**: administers the permitting requirements of the Zoning and Subdivision Codes where the planning director is the decisionmaker (e.g., plan approval, variances, subdivision approval, street naming, ohana dwelling, farm dwelling); enforces provisions of the codes; addresses complaints and violations; staffs the Board of Appeals.
- **Planning Division**: administers the permitting requirements of the Zoning Code, State Land Use Law, Coastal Zone Management Act, and General Plan where the Planning Commission and/or County Council are the decisionmakers (e.g., Use Permits, Special Permits, Special Management Area (SMA) Use Permits, State Land Use Boundary Amendments, Rezoning, General Plan Amendments, Shoreline Setback Variances).
- **Long-Range Planning Division**: coordinates and maintains the short and long range requirements of the General Plan and Community and Regional Plans; is responsible for the General Plan Comprehensive review program and recommends actions on other policy documents; monitors bills during legislative sessions and helps to prepare draft ordinances and statutes; conducts public meetings as required in the adoption of rules for the department; administers the SMA major and minor permit requirements; is responsible for the County's participation in the State CZM program; and administers funds and grants under this State/Federal program.
- **Administrative Services**. This division provides overall direction, control and coordination of the department and its programs; advises the Mayor and Council on planning matters; provides support graphic and clerical services to the divisions within the department; manages the Tax Mapping and GIS

programs; and coordinates the prioritization of the CIP program for the county.

- **West Hawaii Office.** This division administers and implements permitting requirements of the Zoning code for the West Hawaii region; prepares and processes West Hawaii applications which must be heard by the Planning Commission; staffs the Kailua Village Design Commission; and coordinates special planning projects in West Hawaii.

Major Goals

The major goals of the department are:

- 1) To develop a long-range vision that protects and enhances our island's assets while fostering a diverse and vibrant economy;
- 2) To develop and administer a land use management system that is based on clear and objective standards and efficient process;
- 3) To develop alternative methods to seek community and interagency input that encourages broad-based participation in planning and regulatory decision making;
- 4) To strive for competence, sensitivity, and responsiveness in the delivery of planning services to the people and other agencies of the County.

Highlights

Past Fiscal Year Accomplishments

1. **General Plan.** The General Plan embodies the goals, objectives, and policies for the long-range development of this County. To keep this plan current and relevant, the plan is updated every ten years. The draft is currently with the County Council. The department has conducted workshops with the Council around the island.
2. **Permit processing.** The volume of permit applications have been increasing while staffing levels have stayed the same. The number of contested cases in particular has increased, resulting in increased costs and demands on staff time.
3. **Special projects.** The department has worked on several changes to the zoning and subdivision codes: simplifying *de minimis* setback variances; clarifying the criteria for determination of preexisting lots; and closing the CPR loophole where the CPR process is used to circumvent minimum lot size and subdivision improvement requirements especially in the agricultural district. At the time of this writing, the Council passed the *de minimis* revision, the preexisting lots and CPR bills. Other projects being worked on include a public access inventory, Keahole-to-Honaunau

- regional transportation circulation plan, and hazard mitigation plan (with Civil Defense).
4. **Geographic Information System.** An important planning tool is a type of computer mapping and database program called Geographical Information Systems (GIS). New GIS layers continually are being added with the latest being a coastal resources inventory.
 5. **Capacity-building.** To improve service in Kona, the department reallocated three positions from the Hilo office to Kona. The Hilo office moved to Aupuni Center, which should improve operations with a conference room, more storage, and larger individual workspace.
 6. **Permit and Complaints Processing.** Generally, the volume of permit applications has been leveling in comparison with previous years.

Permit Applications	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2001-02
Building Permits	2,877	3,153	3,456	3,462
Ohana Permits	13	9	15	18
Plan Approval	270	270	190	171
Subdivision/Consolidation	169	174	191	205
Variances	107	93	123	82
Rezoning	30	21	26	25
Special Permits	16	13	41	44
Use Permits	8	4	4	10
SMA Major	8	9	16	13
SMA Minor	55	46	10	13
Shoreline Setback	1	1	1	0
State Land Use District Boundary	5	14	12	16
General Plan Amendment	1	-	-	0
Board of Appeals	4	9	9	25
	3,564	3,816	4,094	4,084

Future Direction

There are a number of initiatives that this department hopes to focus on in this coming fiscal year, including the following:

1. **Community development planning.** Community development plans further define the General Plan goals, objectives, and policies. The department will develop a framework for meaningful community involvement in the planning process.
2. **Agricultural lands policies.** Agricultural lands are an important economic and open space resource. However, residential developments have been encroaching onto these lands and circumventing zoning and subdivision laws through the condominium process. The department will develop policies to direct these types of developments to appropriate areas and ensure consistency with zoning and subdivision requirements.
3. **Public access policies.** Access to the ocean and mountain areas for recreational and subsistence purposes are basic enjoyments of Big Island

- residents. The department will develop rules and an inventory of accessways to preserve this enjoyment for future generations.
4. Permit tracking system and streamlining. Efficiency and responsiveness will result from improved software; checklists, forms, and Internet access to information.
 5. CIP integration with General Plan. The capital improvements program (CIP) determines what and where gets built using County funds. The priorities need to be more closely integrated with the General Plan.
 6. County-wide GIS and database system. This department is committed to working collaboratively with other departments to save costs and increase efficiency using cost-effective technology.

Boards/Commissions

The department provides staff administrative support to several appointed bodies.

Planning Commission

The nine-member Planning Commission has decision-making powers for Use Permits, Special Permits, SMA Major Use Permits, Shoreline Setback Variances, and Geothermal Resource Permits. The Commission makes recommendations to the County Council on General Plan Amendments, rezoning, and State Land Use District Boundary Amendments involving less than fifteen acres. Planning Commissioners in the past fiscal year include:

Geraldine Giffin (Chairperson)
Florence Kubota (1st Vice Chairperson)
Earl Fujikawa (2nd Vice Chairperson)
Fred Galdones
Jeffrey McCall
Aurelio Mina
Francis Smith
Hannah Springer
Grant Togashi

Board of Appeals

The seven-member Board of Appeals hears appeals on decisions by the Planning Director and Director of Public Works. Board members during the past fiscal year include:

Evarts Fox (Chairperson)
Gerald Yamada (Vice Chairperson)
Anson Chong
George Curtis
Wayne Easley
Alfred Franco
John Langenstein

Kailua Village Design Commission

The nine-member Kailua Village Design Commission advises the department on matters affecting development in Kailua-Kona, and provides architectural and design review of proposed projects in the Kailua Village Special District. Commission members during the past fiscal year include:

Garrett Webb (Chairperson)
Fanny Auhoy
Jay Hanson
Robin Hurlbut
Angel Pilago
Kevin Seiter
Vacant (3)

Arborist Advisory Committee

The six-member Arborist Advisory Committee recommends to the County Council exceptional trees to be protected by ordinance, and advises landowners on the preservation and enhancement of exceptional trees. Committee members during the past fiscal year include:

Leonard Bisel (Chairperson)
Mike Kraus (Vice Chairperson)
Jan Anderson
Mike Isanhart
Susan Loewenhardt
Planning Department representative