

Agricultural Discussion Group
Central O‘ahu Sustainable Communities Plan Review
HARC Office, Aiea
July 25, 2008

Those present:

Alec Sou	Aloun Farms
Alfredo Lee	Agribusiness Development Corporation
Alicia Maluafiti	Hawaii Crop Improvement Association
Allan Zawtocky	Mark Robinson Trust
Bob Stanfield	Department of Planning and Permitting
Brandon Bajo-Daniel	ILWU; Kunia Community Association
Daniel S. Nakasone	Wahiawa Community and Business Association
Dean Minakami	Castle & Cooke
Earl Yamamoto	Hawaii Department of Agriculture
Fred Perlak	Monsanto Company
Janice Fukawa	NAVFAC Hawaii, US Navy
Kathy Sokugawa	Department of Planning and Permitting
Kevin Chang	Trust for Public Land
Laura Kodama	Castle & Cooke
Laurie Goodwin	Syngenta Seeds
Lea Hong	Trust for Public Land
Mark Stoutemyer	Pioneer HiBred
Mark Takemoto	Dole/Castle & Cooke
Stevie Whalen	Hawaii Agricultural Research Center
Tracy Kubota	Rep. Marcus Oshiro's office
Wayne K. Ogasawara	Mililani Ag Park, LLC
John Kirkpatrick	Belt Collins
Noa Ching	Belt Collins

Main theme for this afternoon’s discussion is the vision for agriculture in the Central O‘ahu Sustainable Communities Plan (CO SCP).

Is The CO SCP Vision For Agriculture Still Valid Today?

- Vision policy is being implemented, but there can be more changes to further promote Ag. Examples:
 - Kunia road currently has police jurisdiction issues. When something happens on Kunia road, the police respond slower than necessary because the road is policed by multiple jurisdictions.
 - The road is also overused. Big traffic problems during rush hour, and many Ag workers use that road to move produce and commute to work.
 - Access to the road, which is controlled by the State, is an issue for farmers.

Review of Protected Lands and Urban Community Boundary

- The sale of the Campbell lands to buyers committed to agriculture is good, and means the vision is being realized.
- Military land is not under local government land use laws. City and County policy is to work collaboratively with federal agencies in support of the military in Hawaii.
- Near Schofield:
 - The Army acquired an expansion of the South Range training area in 2004
 - Actus is in the process of acquiring, for the Army, lands for expansion. Announced plans are for this to stay largely in agricultural use for the foreseeable future. Some of this land may be turned to residential use to accommodate need for housing at Schofield.
- The shading on the CO SCP maps for the lands being acquired by the military for military training use will need to change to reflect the change from agricultural use, but the areas would still be outside the Urban Community Boundary (UCB) since they would remain in open space use. However, lands acquired for expansion of residential or military industrial or commercial uses should be included inside of the UCB.
- How does the Plan deal with the problem of agricultural areas next to residential areas? The Plan is adopted by the City Council and states that it is City policy that agriculture be supported and protected in the areas outside the Urban Community Boundary. There is some language in the Plan which talks about buffering between ag areas and residential areas. There also is the Right To Farm legislation which is supposed to put new residents on notice that previously existing farms have the right to continue operating. Agree that there is need to build relationships between farmers and the adjacent residential areas.

Mililani South: Do You Feel Ag Has Been Protected There?

- It has. Adequate water has been supplied there. There have been complaints by residential neighbors from time to time. There are buffer zones, and access to the farm area is through a single gated and guarded entry, limiting theft and vandalism problems.

Royal Kunia

- Will there be a new school in Royal Kunia as the second phase of Royal Kunia goes forward? If so, will it be located near the ag land? No, the new school site is already designated. It is located near the center of the Royal Kunia project and not next to Ag land. The agricultural areas above Royal Kunia are buffered from the Royal Kunia residential areas by the State Ag Park area and an Industrial/Retail area.

- The Royal Kunia State Ag Park is currently located inside the UCB. Council made the change to put the State Ag Park area inside the UCB at 3rd Reading of the Bill adopting the CO SCP but since then, the Ag Park has been conveyed to the State, and the Royal Kunia Project has come out of bankruptcy. We will be proposing to move the UCB to show the State Ag Park outside.

Galbraith Lands

- Schofield Barracks training needs support keeping the Galbraith lands in agricultural use.
- Prices per acre paid by seed corn research farms being used to justify high prices asked for Galbraith lands.
- Monsanto and others in the seed business are not comparable to most diversified agricultural operations because they are research operations which can spend much more per acre to produce their crop than could be afforded to produce a standard crop for consumption.

Plantation Villages: Do The Central Oahu Policies Work Well For Kunia And Poamoho Villages?

- Kunia village: HARC does not want to preserve all houses, only some. May have some problem with historical preservation language. Wants to keep housing for Ag workers and affordable on an Ag worker's income. Campbell has asked Council to approve allowing credit for affordable housing preserved in Kunia Village to be used to meet some of the required affordable housing for the Makaiwa Hills project in Ewa. The Bill authorizing this is still under review at Council.

Poamoho Village: Owned by Hawaiian Island properties, but is transferring ownership to residents with common areas in community ownership.

Reactions To Ag Vision:

- The types of crops are changing. From sugar and pine to smaller crops specializing in high demand and low maintenance products. Farmers need incentives to diversify crops. Crops need to be diversified to survive in the long run. Case study: sugar and pine. If well diversified, Central Oahu's Ag becomes less affected by economic swings.
- Need to also help farmers sell produce, and create more farmers markets which support small business farmers.

What If We Protect Ag Lands, But They Are Not Used And Turn Into Scrub Land?

- The CO Ag lands can be used if done correctly and innovatively. Examples:

- Use water reclaimed from wastewater for orchid farms.
- Specialize in high value crops
- Even if the economics don't work out today, they may work in the near future, with changes in biotechnology. So it's important to save land for future agriculture
- Incentive programs are a MUST if Central Oahu wants to maintain and expand its Ag. County incentive programs such as grant programs, tax breaks, land trusts, water subsidies, gas credits, potable water for farmer residences, etc....must be given in order to aid farmers. Otherwise Ag will not expand and many current Ag operations will eventually shut down like sugar and pine.
- We are successfully running cattle on those "scrub" lands. If we had the needed lands and a slaughter plant, we could raise, fatten, and provide locally grown beef for the Honolulu market.

Fake Farms or Gentleman's Estates:

- Statewide there is significant demand by developers wanting to subdivide large lot agricultural parcels which are not actually for agricultural use, but are for buyers who want a large residence in an isolated area, often with a view. This affects the price of agricultural land.
- Central Oahu has not seen this kind of development yet, but there are a number of agricultural subdivision projects in the adjacent North Shore SCP area, and the Galbraith Lands are attracting interest of developers who would like to subdivide it and develop it as such a project.
- Existing subdivision rules and zoning requirements on Oahu are not protecting ag lands from this kind of development. Minimum lot size for Ag-1 zoning is 5 acres, and for Ag-2 zoning is 2 acres. Requirements for agricultural planning, restrictions on home size, and requirements that residents of homes in these subdivisions earn income from ag activities are not sufficient to keep the lands in significant ag use.
- Maui has regulations requiring farm plans and prohibiting cooperative farming where workers farm a portion of the subdivision and pay lease rents to the residents living in the subdivision.
- Failure to control agricultural subdivisions which are used to create residential projects is making acquisition of the Galbraith Lands more difficult. Land developer speculators are driving up prices for the Galbraith lands. The State Department of Agriculture and the Trust for Public Lands are trying to assemble sufficient funds to acquire the lands but have to compete with developers who want to turn the land into 5-acre Gentleman's Estates.

- To discourage the construction of Gentleman's Estates, limit the value of the house (Currently the City and County restricts the area that can be covered by the farm house and accessory structures like a garage to 5,000 sq. ft. which is somewhat the same idea).

Questions and Answers:

What Is The Definition Of A Viable Hawaiian Farm?

- Aloun Farms is currently farming 2,700 acres. Even at that size, the loss of 100 acres means that they would be unable to supply one crop to the local market because they need that many acres to provide supply of one crop throughout the year. They are concerned about the future urbanization of ag lands they are farming which are inside the UCB and are scheduled for development in the next ten to thirty years.
- No such thing. There are too many different goals and situations each farm owner has and faces. There are farmers who are making a living off of one-acre farms.

Will The Urban Community Boundary (UCB) Expand To Include More Agricultural Land In The Future?

- The Department is not recommending expansion. The UCB was drawn to protect the most important agricultural lands in the State for the foreseeable future. There is more than enough land within the UCB on Oahu to provide for the expected population expansion on Oahu through the foreseeable future (40 to 50 years). City and County policy is to direct urban development to the Primary Urban Center, 'Ewa, and areas of Central Oahu inside the UCB, and to provide capacity for development around the transit stations on the new rapid transit system.

Do Boundaries Between Urban Development And AG Co-Exist Together? Are There Bills Introduced For 5-Mile Buffer Zones?

- There is some language in the Plan calling for buffering between adjacent residential and agricultural use. There is no requirement for a 5-mile buffer. Urban residents have to deal with Ag land uses under the Right to Farm law. They should be notified of the presence of adjacent agricultural uses as part of the full disclosure when they purchase their unit and should know what they are getting into. There is need for outreach to residents to build understanding of farmers needs and operations and support and markets for their products. Some mainland farmers are selling shares in their crops to local residents who either go to the farm to pick up the crop or have the crops delivered to their houses. Some residents even hire the farmers to come and plant a vegetable garden on their property!!
- Waipahu Festival Marketplace is starting to be successful in providing local farmers market where residents can easily buy local produce. Fresh produce stalls are becoming more prevalent than craft and other types of products. It has great potential to expand.

- [Note: not reported at the July 25, 2008 meeting: Bill 64(07) was introduced and received a public hearing at the City Council in 2007. The Bill calls for fire buffers to be established on ag lands where ag lands are adjacent to residential areas, but leaves it to the fire chief to determine how big the buffers must be. The Bill was sent back to committee in October 2007 without passing second reading, and has not been taken up again. The CO SCP does have fire buffer guidelines of 20 feet which are to be established on the residential side of the property line to protect against fires from wildland areas.]

What Is Planned for Navy Land On Waipi‘o Peninsula?

- This land is identified in the Plan as Ag. It can be leased for Ag uses, but the Navy is currently not leasing the land.

Why Do Seed Companies Farm In Hawaii?

- Seed corn is a research crop. While the firms are aware of higher costs in Hawaii, they don't need to meet competitive market prices for this crop. Instead, they need a reliable supply, harvest after harvest. Hawaii offers:
 - A year-round growing season in contrast to the US Midwest or Chile
 - Available labor force
 - Better infrastructure than other countries such as Brazil.
 - Less pest control. problems
 - Less hazardous climate.
 - Reliable, responsive, science-based US laws and regulations and
 - Location within the US economy
 However, Hawaii also has high labor costs and more extended permitting requirements.
- Research cropping involves only about a third of the acreage in corn at a time – rotation is done to assure continuing production.

Next meeting tentatively scheduled for August 7, 2008. Topics to include:

- Agricultural tourism
- Important Ag Lands bill