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FINAL DRAFT OF SUSTAINABILITY PLAN RELEASED

Residents now have a chance to provide input on the final draft of the state's sustainability plan.

by Terrie Henderson
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The Hawaii 2050 Sustainability Task Force is seeking public comment regarding the draft of the Hawaii 2050 Sustainability Plan to ensure it is taking the right steps toward building a bright future for all who live here.

The final draft was released last week.

While the term "sustainability" is gaining popularity, it is important to not lose sight of the need to create a plan for sustaining Hawaii's future, said Sen. Russell Kokubun, chairman of the 25-member task force.

Kokubun said gathering the opinions of residents on the Big Island regarding sustainability is particularly important.

"There are concerns that apply statewide and in Hilo as well," he said. "(Hawaii County) is blessed with natural resources. I think the Big Island possesses the most potential for sustainability."

He said a major goal is creating more renewable energy for both homes and businesses.

"I think we are headed in the right direction," he said.

Focusing on education and work-force development on the Big Island is also a major goal, Kokubun said. But those are just a few pieces of the puzzle, he said.

"I think agriculture plays a big role in the Big Island's economic diversity," Kokubun said. "It is important that we focus on the long-range future of Hawaii. If we make bad decisions today, it could have a negative impact down the road."

A community meeting will be held from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Oct. 3 in Hilo at the Aupuni Center Conference Room, 101 Pauahi St. Residents will be able to voice their opinions on the draft and give insight on what could help the task force achieve its goals.

In Kailua-Kona, a meeting will be held from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Oct. 4 at the Gateway Center of the Natural Energy Lab of Hawaii, 73-4460 Queen Ka'ahumanu Highway.

The public can also comment on the draft through Nov. 10 on the task force's Web site, <http://www.hawaii2050.org>.

Following the input received from the community this fall, the draft plan will be revised. The final plan will be presented to the state Legislature in 2008.

"The expressed opinions and desires of our communities for the future of our state are front and center with Hawaii 2050. Thousands of Hawaii residents have invested their time, energy and ideas in this process, and the draft plan embodies the input we have received. It is truly the people's plan," Kokubun said.

The report is the result of 18 months of extensive community outreach by the task force, he said.

The 73-page document, which can be viewed on the Web site, includes the draft, results from the Hawaii 2050 Public Opinion Survey from July 2007, and the task force's community engagement report.

According to the public opinion survey, 61 percent of people believed the state should implement a mandatory recycling program. Fifty-eight percent of people thought improvements need to be made to the educational system, no matter what the cost. And of the people surveyed, 43 percent thought the problems Hawaii will face in the future are solvable.

The draft outlines strategic actions to better the environment, the community and the economy.

The goals for improving the environment include: Reducing the reliance on fossil fuels; conserving water; increasing recycling efforts; conservation of agricultural open space and resources; and researching and strengthening management initiatives to respond to rising sea levels, coastal hazards and erosion.

The goals for boosting the state's economy include: Developing a more diverse and resilient economy; supporting the building blocks for economic stability and sustainability; and increasing the competitiveness of Hawaii's work force.

Goals for bettering the community and social well-being of Hawaii's residents include: Strengthening social safety nets; reducing traffic congestion; identifying and prioritizing infrastructure "crisis points" that need fixing; and strengthening public education. The plan also looks at ways to ensure island cultures and values can thrive. It also addresses ways to make sustainability a way of life.

The task force has proposed a sustainability council to ensure implementation of the plan.

The proposed council would be composed of a cross-section of Hawaii citizens, state government and county representation, charged with carrying forward Hawaii 2050. Issuing a public report card would be among the council's functions.

"Our state pioneered sustainability and long-term planning in the 1970s, when the visionary Hawaii State Plan was created," said Kokubun. "Now a new generation of Hawaii citizens is honoring that tradition by working to ensure a more sustainable long-term future for our islands."

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