

Planning for Hawaii

2050 Sustainability Plan discussed at Hilo meeting

by John Burnett
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About 60 people attended a community meeting to discuss the draft document of the Hawaii 2050 Sustainability Plan -- the state's first long-term plan since the 1970s.

The draft plan, presented Wednesday night at the Aupuni Center in Hilo, represents the preliminary findings and recommendations of the Hawaii 2050 Sustainability Task Force to date.

State Sen. Russell Kokubun, D-Puna and Ka'u, is the chairman of the 24-member task force, which has three other Big Island members: Jane Testa, county director of research and development; Brad Kurokawa, county deputy planning director; and Millicent Kim, a private consultant for community action programs.

The five goals of the 71-page document are: a way of life; the economy; the environment and natural resources; community and social well-being; and Kanaka Maoli culture and island values. Each of the goals has suggested strategic actions and indicators that can be used to assess whether or not those goals are being met. The document also takes into account the continued presence of the two largest sectors of the economy -- the visitor industry and the military.

"This whole effort to look at the long-range future of Hawaii started as a legislative initiative in 2005," Kokubun said. "Typically there are two or three issues that arise that demand a lot of attention. What we lose in that methodology, that approach is the ability to plan long-term. ... We're very vulnerable here in the Pacific. We import over 90 percent of our fuel. ... We're also very dependent on imported food. ... We put a task force together that was charged with coming up with a draft report. To the task force's credit, they wanted maximum input from the community."

The meeting was conducted with five facilitators, who led breakout groups to take comments and write them on easels with chart paper rather than taking spoken testimony from the community. That did not sit well with Patrick Walsh of Keaau.

"Is this a new way to submit public testimony?" Walsh asked.

"This is a meeting, not a public hearing," Kokubun replied, adding that public hearings and public testimony will probably happen in 2008 after the draft of the plan that exists at that point goes before the state legislature for consideration.

"Once we unveiled the draft plan, we knew we had to come back out and receive public input on exactly what was in it," Kokubun said. "So the process was to start with a huge universe of ideas and concerns on the future of Hawaii, and then you refine the focus. So this is one major step in that whole process. But we need to continue to get input on the community in terms of 'are we hitting the mark or not?' There's equity here in terms of dealing with all the strategic actions and goals, the sustainability council and the implementation and accountability."

One of the measures of accountability will be an annual report card that, according to Testa, will be available to the public.

"We want a report card," she said. " ... This is not a plan that is going to sit on the shelf. We want a report card to keep this moving forward and connected to all of you."

"At this point, it's really still a concept," Kokubun added. "What the idea was for accountability to really make sense to people, I think we need to have these indicators measured on an annual basis. And the sustainability council ... will be charged with doing that grading and issuing of the report card."

Kurokawa said that principles of sustainability are probably more important on the Big Island than elsewhere in the state.

"Here on our island, we're going to be dealing with those issues," he said. "We live on a rural island, and we want to maintain the rural lifestyle."

Larry Brown, a county planner, said in one of the breakout sessions that the sustainability council should be empowered under law and "the nexus should be separate from whatever the political winds are."

Walsh said that time given the public since the unveiling of the plan and the statewide meetings is too short of notice for effective public commentary. "This draft plan was put online only five days ago," he said. In a two-page treatise provided to the Tribune-Herald, Walsh wrote that the makeup of the council "looks almost unconstitutional."

"This attempt to direct a path toward our future demonstrates a lack of faith in the current system of democracy and, on a deeper level, negates the optimal potential of future leadership," he wrote.

Organizers said that feedback taken in Wednesday's breakout groups will be included on the Sustainability 2050 Web site at <http://www.hawaii2050.org>. Written public commentary can also be provided online until Oct. 20 at that site, as well as by mail at Hawaii 2050 Sustainability Task Force, c/o Office of the Auditor, Kekuaaoa Bldg., 465 South King St., Honolulu, Hawaii 96813-2917.

There will be another public meeting tonight on the plan from 6 to 8:30 p.m. at the Gateway Center of the Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawaii in Kona.

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