

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, 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, and 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. This division administers the permitting requirements of the Zoning and Subdivision Codes where the planning director is the decision maker (e.g., plan approval, variances, subdivision approval, street naming, ohana dwelling, farm dwelling). It enforces provisions of the codes; addresses complaints and violations; staffs the Board of Appeals, including the coordination of public hearings and contested case hearings before the Board of Appeals.

Planning Division. This 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); attends and coordinates all public hearings and contested case proceedings before the Planning Commission.

Long-Range Planning Division. This division coordinates and maintains the short- and long-range requirements of the General Plan and Community and Regional Plans. It 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.

HIGHLIGHTS OF FISCAL 2000-2001

Technical capacity-building. To improve productivity and effectiveness, the department invested in upgraded computers, improved networking systems, other equipment and various software (e.g. graphics, presentation).

Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This important planning tool is a type of computer mapping and database program. The value of this tool is only as good as the amount and accuracy of the available data. Significant progress has been made in accumulating important layers of data, particularly in the acquisition of tax parcel data for the entire island.

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 department has been working on the third 10-year review since the first adoption of the General Plan in 1971. Several drafts have been presented for public review and numerous public meetings have been held. The Planning Commission is currently reviewing the draft update.

Permit processing. The volume of permit applications have been increasing while staffing levels have stayed the same.

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

FUTURE DIRECTION

Among the initiatives that this department hopes to focus on in this coming fiscal year include the following:

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.

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.

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.

Permit tracking system and streamlining. Efficiency and responsiveness will result from improved software, checklists, forms, and Internet access to information.

CIP integration with General Plan. The capital improvements program (CIP) determines what gets built where using County funds. The priorities need to be more closely integrated with the General Plan.

Countywide 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)
Mildred Mosher (1st Vice Chairperson)
Grant Togashi (2nd Vice Chairperson)
Earl Fujikawa
Florence Kubota
Aurelio Mina
Francis Smith
James Souza
Hannah Springer

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)
Harold Tanouye (Vice Chairperson)
Wayne Easley
Alfred Franco
Gerald Yamada

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:

Robert Triantos (Chairperson)
Garrett Webb (Vice Chairperson)
Ronald Aronson
Fanny Auhoy
Paul Bleck
Jay Hanson
Robin Hurlbut
Angel Pilago
Kevin Seiter

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 have not yet been appointed.