

PLANNING COMMISSION
COUNTY OF HAWAII

HEARING TRANSCRIPT
DECEMBER 11, 2008

A regularly advertised hearing on the application of **HAWI JODO MISSION (USE 07-000009)** was called to order at 9:40 a.m. in the Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel, Hau Room, 62-100 Kaunaoa Drive, Kohala Coast, Hawaii, with Chairman Rodney Watanabe presiding.

PRESENT: Rodney Watanabe
Lani Bowman
Takashi Domingo
Frederic Housel
Rell Woodward

ABSENT & EXCUSED: C. Kimo Alameda
Andrew Iwashita
Shelly Ogata

Ivan Torigoe, Deputy Corporation Counsel
Daryn Arai, Acting Planning Director
Norman Hayashi, Planning Program Manager
Jeff Darrow, Staff Planner
Maija Cottle, Staff Planner

And two people from the public in attendance

APPLICANT: HAWI JODO MISSION (USE 07-000009)

Request to include a preschool to Use Permit No. 07-000009, which initially allowed the establishment of an elementary school (K-6). Also requested are time extensions to condition no. 2 (submittal of water usage calculations and water commitment) and condition no. 3 (submittal of plans for plan approval) and deletion of the paved driveway access and paved parking requirements in condition no. 3. The property is located at the southeast corner of Highway 270 (Akoni Pule Highway) and Ilina Road, Kahei House Lots, Hawi, North Kohala, Hawaii, TMK: 5-5-11:39.

WATANABE: Agenda Item No. 1 would be Hawi Jodo Mission. This is Use Permit No. 07-000009. It's a request to include a preschool to the Use Permit. Mr. Darrow?

DARROW: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, members of the Planning Commission. If I can direct your attention to the wall this morning. Our first applicant is Hawi Jodo Mission. This is an amendment request; they have several amendment requests to their recently approved Use Permit, which was approved to allow an elementary school, Kindergarten to 6th grade.

The location of this application is within the North Kohala District of the Big Island. More specifically, we are looking at Akoni Pule Highway running through the middle of the map; we are looking at the Hawi area. This is Hawi Road running in a mauka-makai direction, or up and down on the map. The subject property is identified in a black outline. The zoning that you see

surrounding this property is Single-Family Residential 15,000 square feet. We also have a commercial aspect within Hawi Town.

As I mentioned previously, this is an amendment to a recently approved Use Permit, which allowed a school. The applicant is requesting to include a preschool to this recently approved Use Permit. The amount of student will not increase; it will remain at 105 students. It will just add the allowance of a preschool. Additionally, they are asking for a six-month -. Let me back up here. This is an aerial photo just to kind of give you an idea of what's surrounding this particular property. The property is identified in a red outline. We do have the school shown with the green roof, and we show also the access to Akoni Pule Highway. There is a church located just to the right of the facility, and there is another school located directly across. Residences located around the particular request.

The applicant is requesting to include the preschool to the approved elementary school. They are asking for a six-month time extension for Condition No. 2, which is the requirement to submit water calculations as well as the water commitment, and a six-month time extension to comply with Condition No. 3, which is to submit the plans for plan approval. And lastly, they are asking for the deletion of the pavement requirement for the driveway and the parking that was required in the recently approved Permit under the plan approval condition.

This is the site plan on the property. All we have is the actual school building itself. There are some trees that are on the site, and there is a restroom that's located just to the rear. Akoni Pule Highway is on the right side of the map and they have a gravel driveway access as well as gravel parking on the property.

The Planning Department is recommending approval with the amended conditions that have been passed out to the Commission. Are there any questions?

WATANABE: Fellow Commissioners, do we have any questions of staff? Ms. Bowman?

BOWMAN: I just have a quick question. In reviewing this and subsequent applications, one of the conditions is, "The applicant shall install a backflow preventer (reduced pressure type)" I've looked at the other applications we have today, and it is required even for the bed and breakfast. I'm just curious why it's not required. Is that because they have to meet with the Water Department first?

DARROW: Well, we really should take out the "if required" because it appears that the Water Department is currently requiring applicants. I've just been informed by our Planning Director that this is a requirement now that Department of Water Supply is making as a condition; they are not giving an option. So in this particular case we can leave it in, but they are going to be required to place that; once they hook up to the water, they are going to be required to put in a backflow preventer.

BOWMAN: Okay, thank you.

WATANABE: Any further -? Mr. Woodward?

WOODWARD: The only thing I was going to say is, fortunately, that's not a real expensive piece of equipment. You know, every good hose system has one.

BOWMAN: Thank you.

WATANABE: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Darrow. May we call up the applicants then? For the record, there is no one signed up to testify for this. So could we call up the applicants for Hawi Jodo Mission?

APPLICANTS: Good morning.

WATANABE: Good morning. I'd like to swear you in, if I could. So would you both raise your right hand, please? Do you swear or affirm to tell the truth now before the Planning Commission?

APPLICANTS: Yes.

WATANABE: I assume you're going to begin, ma'am. So would you speak into the mike, and then state your name and address for the record? And then we can start.

SZILAGYI: Yes. My name is Juli Szilagyi. And my address is the Hawi Jodo Mission currently. And I'm assisting Mr. Jun Miyazaki with this Use Permit.

MIYAZAKI: I'm Junshin Miyazaki, Minister of Hawi Jodo Mission. And I'm living in Honokaa now.

WATANABE: Thank you. Have you had a chance to review the recommendations from the Planning Department? And do you have any comments or concerns?

SZILAGYI: I have. And of course, we are very happy with the recommendations, yes.

WATANABE: Okay. Do you have anything else that you would like to add? No concerns, then, as the conditions are written?

SZILAGYI: No, we don't.

WATANABE: Okay, great. Well, Fellow Commissioners, do we have any further questions? Ms. Bowman?

BOWMAN: Good morning. Thank you. I'm very familiar with this area. I just have a question. You are going to do the preschool; I'm just curious if the elementary school is also going to be initially a part of it. Or is it going to be just a preschool?

SZILAGYI: No. Right now, our thought is to start with the preschool and get that pretty stable before there is any thought to adding on a kindergarten or any classes.

BOWMAN: Okay, thank you.

WATANABE: Do we have any further questions for the applicants?

HOUSEL: I had one question.

WATANABE: Yes, Mr. Housel?

HOUSEL: How do the students arrive at the school?

SZILAGYI: They would arrive through the front entrance. There is a paved, kind of a paved area where the cars would enter and then it's more gravel. It seems like there used to be a lot of pavement out there, but it's kind of broken up. But there is still a lot of gravel, and it's very flat. And there've been a lot of events that have taken place in this building over the years, and the front area in front of the building has always been used for parking, and there has been no problem.

HOUSEL: So most of students are brought to school by their parents or someone -?

SZILAGYI: Yes, they would be. And so they come up from the highway and up the drive here, and they would be let off right in front of the building.

HOUSEL: Do any of the students live close enough that they would walk to the school?

SZILAGYI: I doubt it. Well, older children, if we have grades at some point. But the preschoolers, they would be dropped off by their parents.

HOUSEL: Is there any carpooling or anything like that? It seems like with 105 students, there could be a lot of cars.

SZILAGYI: That's a good question. I would hope there would be some carpooling. It's a small community and many of the families know each other. But you know, we're going to start really small; the preschool will probably have no more than 20, 23 children in the first class. I mean, if we were to add a second preschool class at some point, then it could double. But we are starting out very, very small. So the traffic won't be a problem. And we would want to have very good relations with the neighbors; we wouldn't want to upset our neighbors. And I've already started speaking with some of them, and you know, we definitely want to behave in a way that would make everybody happy in the neighborhood.

HOUSEL: Right, right. Is there a, for safety purposes, is there a shoulder that someone turning into the driveway could pull off to get off the highway?

SZILAGYI: A shoulder on the highway?

HOUSEL: Right.

SZILAGYI: I think there's a bike trail. I think there is enough area there where somebody could kind of pull over. But it's so far away from the building that no one would ever pull over and drop off their children and let them off, you know. And I don't even allow that; in our policies and procedures for the school there will be specific instructions on how to drop your children off.

HOUSEL: Okay, that's great. Thank you very much.

SZILAGYI: You are welcome.

WATANABE: Any -? Mr. Domingo?

DOMINGO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Has there been a strong desire or request to establish this K-to-6 grade school in the community?

SZILAGYI: I don't know if I can determine how strong the desire is, but there's certainly a need and a desire. I've spoken with many families already in the community, and they would like another option for their children. There is the public school, and then there is the Kohala Mission School, which is right across from our building. But there are parents who would like possibly a different type of educational curriculum as an option. And so we would be able to provide a different option to some of these parents.

DOMINGO: From a philosophical point of view and for discussion, with the present situation with the schools today with regards to the lack of funding and I want to say competition with charter schools, you know, it seems like the community in itself and the parents are somewhat losing a bit of the trust and confidence that's put in the public schools. So what we are seeing now is more charter schools coming up. And now with the talk of consolidation and closing of schools and redistricting, you know, that would cause a lot of concerns in a community. And perhaps in the future there will be more demand for schools such as yours or for charter schools. And you know, that's something that I'm seeing now. And perhaps, if your pursuit in this direction becomes real successful, you may find strong demand for enlarging your facility to accommodate more students. So have you -? What's your long-range plan? Are you just going to stop at 105 or around that figure?

SZILAGYI: Yeah, in our conversations, my conversations with Mr. Miyazaki, we don't want a large school; we'd like to keep the school small. And right now, our goal is just to have a successful preschool. And then we really don't know if we want to take the step in a direction of adding anything else. So we are really at the beginning stages. And if there was more and more of a desire from the community to grow the school, then we would seriously look at that. But we would want to do this in harmony with the other schools and the community; we certainly do not want to cause any disharmony in the community with the other families and other schools, the public schools as well. So that's really our intent, is just to provide something else. And there is a need; there is definitely a need for another preschool at this point.

WATANABE: Thank you. Mr. Woodward?

WOODWARD: I have one quick question that I was a little unclear about. And then after that, if nobody has any questions, I'm ready to make a motion. It describes that on this property there is a building that was built in 1905. Are you planning on the school being a new construction, or are you going to refurbish this old building, or -? Exactly how is this going to work?

SZILAGYI: Well, I've already started working on a building permit. We are using this existing building, but we will have to get it up to code. So we've been speaking with an architect and also somebody who can do the blueprint drawings and do the code search data and all these things. So we are working on getting a building permit, and we expect that some renovations will have to be done.

WOODWARD: So this building that was built in 1905, if you are able to bring it up to code, has enough square-footage, and that will be the school?

SZILAGYI: Yes, this will be the school.

WOODWARD: Okay. That clarifies that. In that case, unless anybody else has any other questions, I'd like to make a motion.

BOWMAN: I have a -.

WOODWARD: Okay.

BOWMAN: Just real quick.

WATANABE: Yes, Ms. Bowman?

BOWMAN: Just to inform the Commission, I have been there a lot, and the gravel driveway is fine; I mean, I've been there when it's been pouring rain and there is no runoff, so -. And I like that you are keeping that character of the area. And I think, you know, my personal concern is 105 is a lot of students for that building. But I think, having run a preschool before, you can only have so many children per square-footage, so I think that's going to limit the amount of children that they had. I just think, I personally think 105 is a lot for that area, but that's not under our purview. And I think there is another new preschool in Kohala that just opened. But I do think, with the amount of working people that there are, that another school could be, you know, very well received. Is your curriculum any type like Montessori or -?

SZILAGYI: Yes. My background is in Waldorf education, so it would be Waldorf inspired. But it would also be Buddhist inspired as well, so -.

BOWMAN: Okay, thank you.

WATANABE: I have just one comment. You are aware that there is a requirement in here that you work with the Department of Land and Natural Resources to document since this building is over 50 years old? The reason I brought that up is because you indicated that you are already working on some renovations for the building, and I think that step needs to come first.

SZILAGYI: Right. Nothing has been done; I mean, no construction, nothing, no renovations have been done yet. So we do know that, because it's a historic area and a historic site, that we have to go through that route as well, process as well.

WATANABE: Okay, that's fine, okay, great. Mr. Woodward?

WOODWARD: Well, I might make a comment because this has come up a number of times before. Despite all the hoops you have to jump through, this is not a big hoop; if it's over 50 years old, you have to take pictures, and you have to submit them to DLNR, and they put them in an archive somewhere. So it's not really an onerous condition.

But in any case, I would like to move that we approve Use Permit 07-000009 for the applicant, Hawi Jodo Mission.

BOWMAN: Second.

WATANABE: Thank you. Any further discussion on this?

BOWMAN: I just have one more quick comment. I just want to thank you. I know that, being a resident of Kohala and having my children go to every school that's been available in Kohala, that we certainly need it. And our middle school is going through restructuring. So I think the more education opportunities we can have for our children, the better. But I also, being a public school, you know, person to see the value, but I think the preschool education that you can provide and maybe early-childhood, so I thank you for your energy and effort.

SZILAGYI: Thank you for that comment. It's appreciated.

BOWMAN: Okay, thanks.

WATANABE: Mr. Darrow?

DARROW: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The motion before us is to approve this Use Permit request, amendments to this Use Permit. With that, I'll take the roll. Commissioner Woodward?

WOODWARD: Aye.

DARROW: Commissioner Bowman?

BOWMAN: Aye.

DARROW: Commissioner Domingo?
DOMINGO: Aye.
DARROW: Commissioner Housel?
HOUSEL: Aye.
DARROW: And Mr. Chairman?
WATANABE: Aye.
DARROW: The motion passes, five to zero.
WATANABE: Congratulations. You'll be notified in writing.
SZILAGYI: Thank you so much. We are very appreciative.

The discussion ended at 10:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Noriko Sauer, West Hawaii Secretary