

An Existential Threat to Quality of Life in Princeville

United We Stand, Divided We Fall.

Aloha:

As some of you already know, there is an existential threat to our quality of life in Princeville. Waimaunau/Queen's Bath Valley is the large parcel of open space (27 acres) that sits between Wyndham Bali Hai, Ali'i Kai I and Ali'i Kai II on the East, and Kapiolani Loop on the West. The parcel is quite steep, and goes all the way down to Queen's Bath. The developer's team wants to create a major tourist attraction- a "Hawai'ian Village" with luaus, weddings, and other social events, as well as cultural exhibits, botanical gardens tours, yoga classes and physical fitness activities. There would also be a paved path to the end of the parcel that would dramatically increase the number of people going to Queen's Bath.

At our initial meeting with the developer's team, one of them said they would work hand in hand with the Hawaii Tourism Authority to heavily advertise and promote the business to make Queen's Bath the #1 visitor attraction on Kaua'i. With tourism quickly approaching pre-pandemic levels, even if they only attract 25% of visitors, that's 30,000 people a month coming to Princeville. If they get 50% of visitors, that's 60,000 people per month coming to Princeville.

1,000 to 2,000 people per day coming to Princeville- every day of the year. How long will it take you to get to the roundabout? How much time will it take to turn left onto Kuhio Highway?

This massive traffic increase will be felt throughout Princeville, as the relentless advertising and promotion will drive far more visitors than can ever be accommodated by the developer's 33 car parking lot. Those visitors will then look for other ways to access Queens Bath, creating additional traffic and parking issues on Punahale Rd and Kapi'olani Loop, as well as increasing pressure on destinations such as Hideaways Beach, creating more traffic and parking issues around Hale Moi, Pale Ke Kua, and Pu'u Poa. Those who can't park near access points will drive through every neighborhood in Princeville looking for things to do and places to park.

With the exponential increase in traffic will come a corresponding increase in noise, trash, road damage, and exhaust fumes, including diesel fumes from the buses they talked about bringing in daily. How much will the additional road repairs cost due to the massive traffic increase?

All of this will be terrible for humans, but an absolute disaster for various species of wildlife in the parcel, like the endangered Hawai'ian Hoary bat and the large colony of Shearwaters that nest there. This area (for now) is a wilderness that is home to a large variety of native birds and trees. The proposed walkway to Queen's Bath could also provide easier access to Turtle Cove, a critical habitat for an endangered species that already has too much human visitation.

There are other serious environmental concerns, such as storm water runoff. The gravel that will be used to cover the proposed parking lot will, during heavy rain events, wash into the stream valley and onto the nearshore reef. Garbage and vehicle fluids will also be flushed into the stream valley and onto the reef from the parking area.

Greatly increasing the number of tourists coming to Queen's Bath will also greatly increase the number of injuries and fatalities. It's simple math. Queen's Bath is a dangerous place when there is any surf, and extremely dangerous during high surf. The current trail to Queen's Bath is somewhat difficult, and holds down to some extent the number of people attempting the hike. The new proposed walkway to Queen's Bath would be 2-3 times as long as the current one, with a long stretch traversing across the lava shelf, providing even more opportunity for injury. Worse, the paved path would be a smooth and easy walk down to the lava, giving tourists a false sense of security, and putting even more people into potentially critical situations.

All of the above is the bad news.

The good news is that we have an opportunity to buy this land and preserve it forever as open space.

About 15-20 Princeville residents met with the developer, John Davenport, on Friday. This was our first time meeting with him directly, as previous meetings had been with his team. Things went about as well as we could have hoped for in an initial meeting. He said he originally bought the property to help out a friend who was in financial difficulty and that he was simply looking to monetize his investment. After some discussion, he said he was willing to sell the parcel to the community, and that he had offered to sell it to Princeville through the PHCA board when he originally bought the property.

We were courteous and respectful, and emphasized our desire to work with him to buy the property to preserve it as open space. We also went into great detail about the issues involved with their plans and the fierce resistance he would face in attempting to develop the property. He said they were envisioning a smaller scale project than what was originally proposed, but also that the parcel would be a commercial venture that would pay for itself. Given the costs involved to grade and excavate the property, install infrastructure, build the "Hawai'ian Village", employ staff, etc, even a smaller scale version would still require driving mass numbers of tourists into Princeville every day to generate sufficient revenue to make a profit. It seems Mr. Davenport got a good sense of the level of opposition he will face if he tries to move forward with this project, as he texted me later in the day to let me know that he had met with Sam George and Maylette and told them that PHCA should buy the property. He said he would send them proposed terms, and that Sam and Maylette told him they would bring it up at our PHCA meeting on Thursday. Sam is personally very supportive of the concept of

buying the land to preserve it as open space, although he only counts for one vote on the board, so this is not the official position of the PHCA board.

This is a golden opportunity to take control of this land and protect it forever by dedicating it as a nature preserve or something similar. This should be the model for how to preserve open space in the future in Princeville- buy the land and take developers out of the equation entirely.

We can set a strong precedent for the inevitable negotiations with Starwood over the golf courses by doing this, as the possibility of this development emboldens companies like Starwood and others looking for development opportunities in Princeville. Stopping this development will show the strength and unity of the community.

Just as Starwood attempted to divide and conquer with their glamping project by trying to pit residents of different areas of Princeville against each other, John Davenport's reps have taken a similar approach with this project. These developers position their projects as only affecting a portion of Princeville, but any increase in development affects all of Princeville, and inevitably leads to even more development.

The only way to win the battle for preserving open space is a united front, with a zero-tolerance policy towards development of open space in Princeville.

Please forward this to any PHCA members you know and make sure they're registered for the meeting on Thursday, as we will be discussing this issue and want as many voices as possible to be heard. Our presentation will be the last item on the agenda, so that we have as much time as we need.

"United We Stand, Divided We Fall."

Mahalo nui loa,

Michael Cole

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