

# West Hawaii Today

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## Old Country living design is new again

Transit-oriented design concept could cut commute times

by Erin Miller

*West Hawaii Today*

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The Kona Community Development Plan, approved by the County Council last year, lays out a vision of communities in which people live near their workplaces and schools and don't need cars to get there.

That type of design, called transit-oriented development, is reminiscent of how villages and cities are built in Europe and is seen in smaller towns across the United States, planner Alan Salavea said, recalling his own childhood in North Kohala. It's also a design engineers are returning to and is being touted in the Kona Community Development Plan as an alternative to land use-based zoning. Just how such a development would look in Kona, however, is uncertain, and planning officials point out on their own Web site that they don't yet know what the concept means for Hawaii County.

To get a better idea of how transit-oriented development will unfold, the Planning Department is hosting a week-long series of public planning and design meetings, starting Wednesday evening, at the Sheraton Keauhou Bay Resort and Spa. They're working with PlaceMakers, a mainland consulting firm that has experience with mixed-use, form-based zoning. The \$150,000 contract with PlaceMakers covers the cost of teaching county employees about transit-oriented development, preparing educational materials for the public, running this week's meetings and taking community suggestions to form guidelines that will define how a transit-oriented development is put together, Salavea said.

This set of planning exercises will focus on Honokohau Village, the name county officials gave to a 40-acre site surrounding the West Hawaii Civic Center, which is currently under construction. No developers have submitted plans or requested permits for the surrounding undeveloped land, though Salavea and Deputy Planning Director Margaret Masunaga seemed optimistic that developers would want to pursue a mixed-use development around the county government building.

The meetings will be mostly on weekdays, with workshops during the day and talk story sessions in the evenings. Salavea and Masunaga said they want to see residents and developers attend as many of the sessions as possible, but conceded that the number of meetings may make it difficult for people to attend.

The meeting times may be more convenient for developers, but Salavea said he did not think that would affect the final guidelines.

"It won't skew the results," he said. "It's a constant feedback loop. The discussion is to get reactions -- what do you think, what do you feel?"

Each day's suggestions will be incorporated into the overall plan, so if people come to just one meeting, their ideas will still be included.

Masunaga said she thought it was a good thing to get developers involved at the start of the process, to form guidelines they would be able to use.

"If you're going to be doing business on the Big Island but your office is in Honolulu, we want them to know and embrace the Kona Community Development Plan," she said.

Even as transit-oriented development guidelines are created, the county will not require new developments to adhere to the concept, Salavea said. The current use-based zoning code, which sets up residential, commercial, industrial and mixed-use areas, will still be available for developers.

But, he said, he thinks developers will see the advantages in transit-oriented development, which typically has higher density areas in the center, with less parking to encourage more mass transit use. The areas also mix residential with commercial, meaning residents don't necessarily need to drive to work or to the store. It's an attractive idea to workers who want to live near their jobs and to businesses that want employees close by, Salavea said, and it can cut down on commuting time and create more family and leisure time.

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## Be there

### Help plan development in Kona

The Planning Department and its consultant, PlaceMakers, are holding a series of planning exercises to set guidelines for transit-oriented development in North and South Kona. All meetings are at the Sheraton Keauhou Bay Resort and Spa. Community members are invited to participate at one or more of the following sessions:

- 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday: Opening presentation, talk story
- 10:30 a.m. to noon Thursday: Resource management discussion
- 1 to 2:30 p.m. Thursday: Economic development discussion
- 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday: Calibration talk story
- 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday: Open house and design work
- 6 to 8 p.m. Saturday: Pin-up and talk story
- 10:30 a.m. to noon and 2 to 3 p.m. Sunday: Open house
- 3 to 4 p.m. Sunday: Resource management discussion
- 1 to 4 p.m. Oct. 26: Open house
- 6 to 8 p.m. Oct. 26: Open house and discussion
- 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Oct. 27: Closing presentation