

Sustainability effort gets another chance

Imagine that 44 years from today, we would produce most of the food we consume right here in Hawaii. We would have a balance between a quality of life for residents and preservation of our beloved aia. Issues like crushing traffic and dwindling water supply will have been resolved.

That's an elusive but not necessarily impossible dream if the correct priorities are established now and then supported by actions, especially from state and county governments.

The state has started in that direction with a 2050 Sustainability Plan that's targeted for presentation to the Legislature in December 2007.

It would fulfill a mandate from the 2005 Legislature and the process, started last year with a task force, was officially launched two weeks ago at a community forum in Honolulu attended by 500.

For an island state whose lifeblood depends too much on the whims of resources thousands of miles away, sustainability is critically important. We wholeheartedly support the process because the outcome could mean the difference between a stagnant and vibrant state.

Pressing issues

1. Steady deterioration of public infrastructure
2. Lack of affordable housing
3. Dangerously low groundwater supplies
4. Reliance on low-wage tourism jobs
5. Vulnerability in volatile global energy market
6. Interruptions in travel and food supplies
7. Threats to fragile island ecosystems
8. Population growth, especially outside Oahu

SOURCE: HAWAII 2050 SUSTAINABILITY TASK FORCE REPORT

If there is a note of skepticism, it's because of the track record of governmental entities in seeking and then ignoring public input.

The most recent example is the Economic Momentum Commission, charged with making longer-range plans for economic sustainability.

Even the last Hawaii State Plan adopted in 1978 had minor impact.

As the 2050 Sustainability Plan moves through meetings and hearings across the state in the coming year, there are ways to ensure that the results are effective:

■ **Keep it simple:** A preliminary task force report written by the state auditor last December says the previous

Check it out

The Web site for the Hawaii 2050 Sustainability Task Force is www.hawaii2050.org. The task force report from the state auditor last December is at www.hawaii.gov/auditor. Click on reports, then 2005.

plan was too elaborate and cumbersome to allow for practical application and implementation.

■ **Expectations:** Action from the last 1978 plan was made difficult, the auditor

says, because there were insufficient resources and a lack of benchmarks to measure progress toward achieving goals.

■ **Collaboration:** State and county officials made up about 80 percent of the task force that prepared the initial outline of how to proceed with developing a 2050 sustainability plan. They are all competent individuals, but they also bring a limited perspective that can result in the same impediments that restricted success of the last plan.

■ **Resources:** There are actually a couple of very good sustainability plans developed in 2004 and 2005 that contain substantial insight, though more from the tourism viewpoint. One

was prepared by the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism over several years and the other is from the Hawaii Tourism Authority.

The 500 people who came to the first community forum did represent many walks of life in Hawaii.

One participant was Jim Tollefson, president of the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii. He wrote to his members, urging that the business community play a role in developing the sustainability plan because "we all have a stake in what we want for the future of our state."

We enthusiastically agree. The input from businesspeople will be vital to ensuring that the ideas for a sustainable economy are viable.

If the economy is strong, the other elements — communities, quality of life and environment — become more realistic.

The important issue is doing something now.

As the task force report puts it, "Unless we act now to resolve the pressing long-term issues, we put Hawaii's lifestyle and natural legacies in our trust unnecessarily at risk."