

The Maui News

Planning panel gives blessing to Waikapu Country Town project

Atherton's 500-acre development calls for 1,500 housing units



Mike Atherton (right), project developer of Waikapu Country Town, prepares for the Maui Planning Commission's vote Tuesday afternoon on his community plan amendment and change in zoning requests. The commission unanimously recommended both requests. The project now moves on to the Maui County Council. The Maui News / COLLEEN UECHI photo

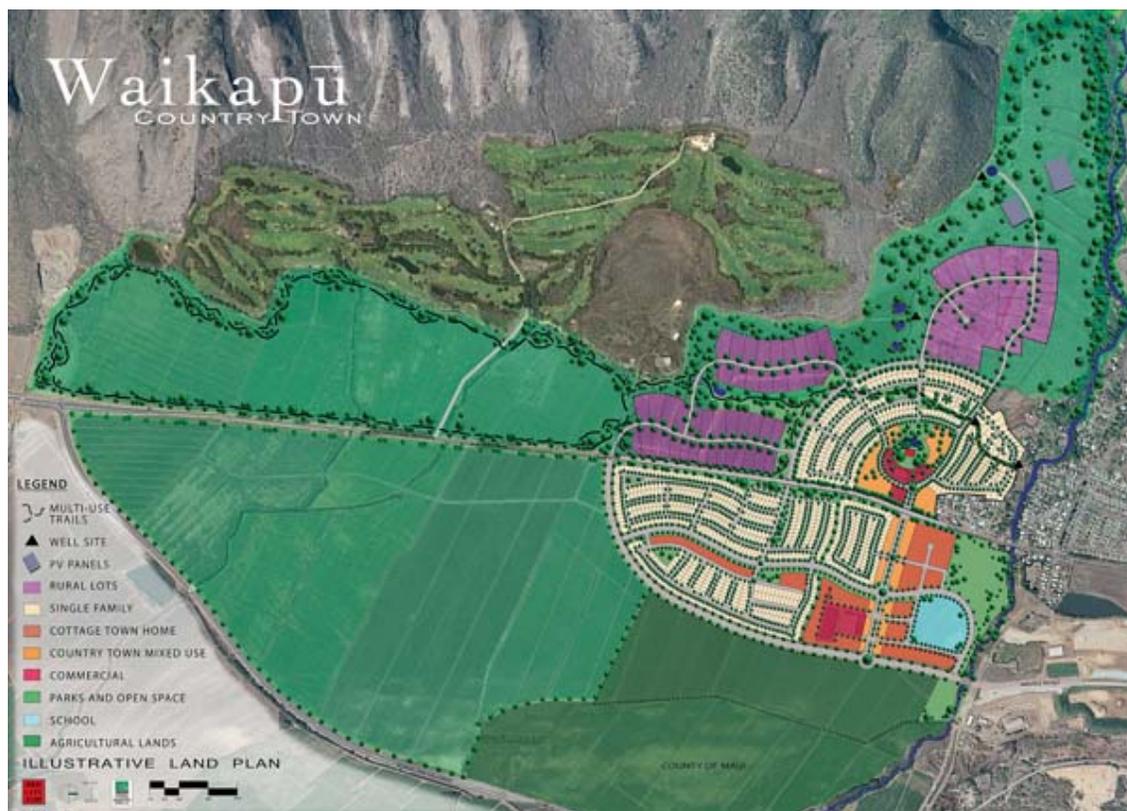
WAILUKU — Saying “*go get it, go build it,*” the Maui Planning Commission unanimously recommended a community plan amendment and change in zoning for Waikapu Country Town, a project that’s generated widespread support for its mix of housing and agricultural land.

“*I’m looking forward to building this little town,*” project developer Mike Atherton said following the decision Tuesday. “*I feel blessed that we’re able to put this together . . . and get the support that we’ve gotten.*”

The project now heads to the Maui County Council's Land Use Committee, and the full council will later have final say. Developers are asking to reclassify nearly 496 acres to a new community plan category titled "*Waikapu Country Town*" and a new county zoning district of the same name.

Council approval is the last step in a long process that goes back to 2007, when the General Plan Advisory Committee recommended that the project be included in the Maui Island Plan, former committee member Dick Mayer recalled.

Project plans call for 1,433 single-family, multifamily and rural units, as well as 146 ohana units; 200,000 square feet of commercial space; 82 acres of parks and open space; 8 miles of sidewalks, paths and trails; a 12-acre elementary school; and a 910-acre agricultural preserve. (Previous plans said 800 acres, but Atherton said a recent survey showed there was more land than developers thought.) An additional 277 acres would be subdivided into no more than five agricultural lots.



The master-planned Waikapu Country Town is located within and around the Maui Tropical Plantation. The project would include 1,433 residential and 146 ohana units, commercial space, an elementary school and more than 1,000 acres of agricultural land.

Testifier Mike Takehara, whose family has longtime roots in Waikapu, said he supported the project because "*we need the homes.*"

"I lost my house about two and a half years ago, and this is my last attempt to get a house," Takehara said. *"If I don't have a shot, maybe some other people like me*

that's suffering will have a chance to buy, because it's so limited right now it's unbelievable."

Bobby Pahia supported the project because of the farming opportunities. Pahia started out leasing 5 acres from Atherton and now leases 310 acres. He grows dryland kalo, bananas and mangoes on 90 acres and leases out the rest to young farmers, who often tell him that *"the biggest obstacles is getting land and water."*

"A lot of developers, they come over here and they exploit all our resources in Hawaii," Pahia said. *"This is one developer that I know personally that is not only taking. . . . It's not only that he going be taking, it's that he going be giving."*

Atherton said 12 acres will be donated to the state Department of Education for an elementary school. Waikapu Country Town plans to contribute \$2.6 million for construction costs.

Another 5 acres will be used for Punana Leo o Maui. Joylynn Paman, president of Na Leo Pulama o Maui, a nonprofit that supports Hawaiian language immersion, said that *"there's such huge demand"* for cultural and language programs. However, Punana Leo o Maui can only take 30 students, and sometimes more than 70 applicants vie for 10 or 12 spots.

She said she hoped the 5 acres within Waikapu Country Town would provide a bigger location for students and a resource center where people could learn Hawaiian language and have meetings in Hawaiian.

Affordable housing would be located next to the elementary school, said Atherton, who planned to sell lots to nonprofits like Habitat for Humanity and Lokahi Pacific *"at a reasonable price so they can produce truly affordable housing."* He added that he's also picked out several spots in the project for his California-based company Atherton Homes to build affordable housing.

Atherton said there are currently three wells on the project site, each of which supplies 1 million gallons per day. The maximum daily potable water demand for the entire project, not including irrigation of open space and agricultural lands, is estimated at 968,363 gallons per day, according to the project's final environmental impact statement. The project would need a permit from the state Commission on Water Resource Management before drawing ground water from the Waikapu Aquifer, which has a sustainable yield of 3 million gallons per day.

The project also includes a 650,000 gallon-per-day water reclamation facility to generate recycled water for irrigation. Atherton plans to create a private water company to manage, operate and maintain its water and wastewater systems.

Waikapu resident Joanne Dennis had questions about traffic, which she said has *“gone from bad to nearly impossible over the 24 years of trying to make a left turn coming out of Wilikona Place.”* Commission members asked Atherton how Waikapu Country Town could contribute to the southward extension of Waiale Road, which didn’t make it into the current county budget.

Atherton said he was *“ready to work”* if a fair cost-sharing plan could be devised.

“What makes it difficult for me is I got to put in a sewer treatment plant. I got to put in a water facility,” Atherton said. *“That’s about \$40 million before I build the first house. If I can get a program where I can pay for Waiale Road over a period of time, then it’s a lot easier for me to get started and build those houses, where I don’t have those huge off-site costs up front.”*

On Tuesday, the commission also deferred action on a request from David Pyle of the Krausz Companies to push the construction date on its Downtown Kihei project six more years to 2024. The project calls for 257,098 square feet of gross leaseable area on a 27.4-acre parcel to be used for business and medical offices, shops, a movie theater, a 150-room select services hotel and a parking structure.

The project’s construction start deadline was July 31, but Pyle said costs for site work have gone up, and developers need to adjust plans to move parking out of the expanded flood zone. Staff Planner Candace Thackerson said Krausz Companies did apply for an extension before the deadline.

Because the commission had a bare quorum and could not agree on a time extension — a motion for four years failed — members decided to defer the issue for 30 days to allow more members to vote.

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