

To: Maui Planning Commission

From: Karen Comcowich

RE: Support for West Maui Community Plan, particularly Policies 2.5.16 and 2.5.11

Goals 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 go really well together because they show West Maui's desire to take care of what we love through responsible stewardship. One of the fun things about developing this community plan was seeing the diverse range of testifiers from Honokahau, Plantation Estates, Napili, Ka'anapali, Lahaina, Kaua'ula Valley, Launipoko and of course Oluwalu. Because of this, the plan really represents the broader communities desires. However, individuals who are accustomed to controlling the process may feel like their voice was not as powerful.

Support for policy 2.5.16

The primary reason members stated for volunteering to be on the West Maui CPAC was the need for more affordable housing. Between 2008-2015 71.1% of home buyers on Maui were not residents. (62.7% mainland, 8.4 % foreign investors). When locals are competing with people who don't live in the local economy, property becomes unaffordable. If we are serious about solving the affordable housing crisis we need goals and policies that encourage local ownership and comfortable long term rentals.

It is important to support policy 2.5.16. We must Increase the inventory of long term housing units, by phasing out and converting existing vacation rentals to long term occupancy. Doing this would really help with the inventory of housing for all income levels in West Maui.

When I moved to Maui 15 years ago, most of my friends lived in the cane houses and older apartments in Lahaina town and Honokawai. These were awesome places to live. Every one of my friends could walk or bike to work and to surf. Rent was high, but we could afford our own room. My more professional friends could afford to rent nicer places, like Kapalua, Ka'anapali Hillside or the beach front homes in Lahaina.

Since Airbnb and VRBO have become popular most of these properties have been turned into STVR. This includes Paki Maui, Lokelani, Lahaina Roads, Puamana, Noelani, the cane houses by 505, and "Lahaina Historic Villa."

Aside from the impact on the availability and affordability of housing, STVR have other negative impacts. **Traffic:** because we could bike or walk to work, we did. Now most of us drive. **Food security:** investors usually get rid of large fruit trees, such as Mango and Ulu, because of extra landscaping cost and liability. For example, we use to call the "Lahaina Historic Villa" the Mango House because there were so many mango trees, which also kept the house cool without AC, now there are a few bananas and some Arekas. **Impacts on the beach/reef:** visitors staying in beach front condos are at the beach all day every day. Residents have to go to work, so the ocean gets a rest. **Community:** many of the beach parks, that were essentially neighborhood parks are now overrun with tourists, such as, Honokawai Beach Park, S turns, Shark Pit, 505, and Baby Beach. This was where residents went to see friends, watch sunset, play in the water and get a break from tourists.

I understand this change may not be the best for realtors and off-island owners, but it is in the best interest of our West Maui community.

Support for Policy 2.5.11

When considering the language of the policy, it is important to consider who developments will serve. Affordable and Workforce housing is for the people who work and live on Maui full time. Two examples I would like to discuss are young families and older people.

As a young family one of the easiest ways to cut expenses is to have 1 car (1 maintenance bill, 1 insurance bill, 1 gas tank). Often the parent who goes to work takes the car, leaving the other parent at home with small children and no car. I have two friends in this situation. Janelle lives at Front Street Apartments with her husband and two boys. Pre-covid both of them worked and traded off staying home with the boys. When her husband was at work, if Janelle needed to go to the store, she put both boys in a stroller and walked comfortably to the store on the sidewalk. Same for going to the beach, doctor, or town.

My other friend, Holly, also has two young boys, but she lived in an apartment in Kahana where there are no sidewalks. If she wanted to go to the beach, store, or bus stop, she loads the two boys in a double stroller and had to *walk on the shoulder of the lower road pushing a stroller*. She was often honked at to get out of the way and yelled at for being a “bad irresponsible mother”.

On the other end, as people get older, they are likely to get injured or need operations like knee replacements. It is more common now to rehabilitate at home. Often part of the rehabilitation is gentle walking, preferably on an even surface. I am picturing my Mom, last summer she was hiking mountains, then she broke her hip, right now she needs a walker to get around. She would get horribly depressed if she were stuck inside until her hip heals. Luckily, she lives in a walkable neighborhood.

When we are discussing affordable and work-force housing, we are not just talking about someone’s primary residence, rather their only residence. Therefore, these developments need to be the most livable, walkable communities developed.

It is vital to the local community that 2.5.11 **Require** affordable housing projects, *especially* projects using the State 201H or County 2.97 process, to be near jobs, schools, transit and services, and include sidewalks, parks, bus stops and other infrastructure and pedestrian-oriented design elements that create walkable and livable communities for all.”

Thank you for your time,

Karen J. Comcowich