Wailea 670 opponent asks developers to rethink project

By Susan Halas
PBN Contributor

Some Maui residents are expressing reservations about Wailea 670 residential development on the island’s south side.

"There could be benefits from a development like Wailea 670, but not in its present form. It should be rethought," said Ron Sturtz, a Maui attorney and a founder of the Wailea 670 opposition group.

Sturtz says there's a need for more open space and infrastructure support. He also believes there should be more emphasis on making immediate water improvements.

"Taken together they will have enormous impact on traffic, water and the quality of life," Sturtz said.

Sturtz contends Wailea 670’s own traffic study predicts a 42 percent increase on Pilihau Highway by 2010, regardless of new development. The developer has voluntarily contributed money to making immediate improvements.

Sturtz adds that the developer should be more concerned about the needs of the county, which has what he considers to be more pressing housing needs than building another upscale development.

Sturtz acknowledges the new owners have spent more than $1 million so far on understanding entitlements, he says.

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In the intervening year, the owners hired Charles Jencks, former Maui County director of public works, as a representative and continued to modify their plans.

Their remit, which was recently presented to the planning commission, calls for 1,400 residential units and a cap on commercial property at 100,000 square feet. It would have an entirely private water system as well as a private road system. The exterior gate issue has been removed, but they do not rule out a series of smaller gated areas within the project. The developers still request all parks, schools and affordable housing be located off-site. One key issue has been the plan to include a private golf course.

As the owners’ representative, Jencks has met with members of the affected community organization and the resubmittal provides the commission with a verbatim transcript of those meetings, his other contacts, as well as his written follow-up responses to questions.

Should the commission approve the project, it would be sent to the Maui County Council for consideration and zoning.

Ron Halas, a Maui-based free-lance writer, at halas@maui.net.

Wailea 670, again, sends its proposal to planning officials

By Susan Halas
PBN Contributor

Wailea 670’s application for a change in zoning, project district development approval and community plan project district approval is expected to be heard at the Sept. 11 meeting of the Maui County Planning Commission. Substantial opposition, especially in regard to traffic, water and long-term impact on community resources, is anticipated.

The proposed Wailea 670 project has a long and complex history, doesn’t seem to conflict of interest between his present job and his former job.

Jencks first had contact with the proposed project in 1986. In the intervening years, he supervised other large-scale construction projects before taking over the county’s public works department. The owners last year hired Jencks to be their project spokesman.

Jencks describes himself as a former employee with a three-year contract who does not have any beneficial interest, options or stock in the project.

"Don’t call me a ‘front man,’" he says. "A front man is the guy at the carnival who announces the alligators. This is a responsible position and I think it should be handled with respect. I am the owner’s representative."

He sees the post as an opportunity and a challenge.

"My goal is to get the approval of the community and the policy makers," he says. "When I was hired, I read the transcript of past meetings, read every letter and every comment. I could see right away there was a disconnect between what we were saying and what the public perceived."

Jencks made it his priority to respond in person and to writing issues like traffic, water, housing and recreation.

"No, I haven’t met anyone who says, ‘I love the project,’ but I have found that people appreciate having input and getting honest answers to their questions," he says.

Despite the scale of Wailea 670, he knows that the final scope of the development still are evolving. The current owners have spent less than $1 million so far on understanding entitlements, Jencks says.

"They do not yet know the costs of a private water system envisioned to transport water from Ulupalakua Ranch. They do not yet know the costs of a public water system," Jencks says.

"If the project is approved it will be bisected at some future date by an extension of the Pilihau Highway, which was then envisioned as an upscale, gated community with a members-only golf course and substantial community recreation. The project does indicate a willingness to meet requirements for parks, schools, recreation facilities and affordable housing, but requested locating such facilities outside the project district."

Reacting to the new proposal, the planning commission felt there were many questions still to be answered on traffic, water and long-term impact on community resources. It deferred action and instructed the developers to resubmit their proposal.

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Their remit, which was recently presented to the planning commission, calls for 1,400 residential units and a cap on commercial property at 100,000 square feet. It would have an entirely private water system as well as a private road system. The exterior gate issue has been removed, but they do not rule out a series of smaller gated areas within the project. The developers still request all parks, schools and affordable housing be located off-site. One key issue has been the plan to include a private golf course.

As the owners’ representative, Jencks has met with members of the affected community organization and the resubmittal provides the commission with a verbatim transcript of those meetings, his other contacts, as well as his written follow-up responses to questions.

Should the commission approve the project, it would be sent to the Maui County Council for consideration and zoning.

Jencks, the former director of public works for Maui County who now works as spokesman for the proposed Wailea 670 residential development, doesn’t see a conflict of interest between his present job and his former job.

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