

County urged to purchase Honolua Bay land

By ILIMA LOOMIS, Staff Writer

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WAILUKU – Council Member Jo Anne Johnson is calling for the county to acquire lands at Honolua Bay to prevent the area from being developed.

Johnson introduced a resolution urging the county administration to negotiate for the property at Friday's County Council meeting. She said she would follow up by asking the council to earmark \$1 million in park assessment funds for the deal "as a show of good faith."

"I'm hoping we can come to some kind of agreement," Johnson said.

A Maui Land &

Pineapple spokeswoman said the company had already spoken with Mayor Charmaine Tavares about acquiring the property and would be open to working out an acquisition by the county.

Teri Freitas Gorman said it was too early to put a price tag on the approximately 100 acres at Lipoa Point.

"The company is open to a situation where we could talk about a combination of cash and something like park credits," Gorman said.

A tsunami of testifiers from the Save Honolua Coalition flooded the Council Chambers Friday, inundating the council with hours of testimony that stretched well into the afternoon although Chairman Riki Hokama advised them the resolution would be referred to committee.

"The community, I think, has spoken loud and clear," Johnson said.

Tavares confirmed she'd had "preliminary" talks with the company to discuss preserving the land in open space.

"It's not formal negotiations," she said.

"We're just exploring options."

Tavares said she wouldn't oppose the council setting aside \$1 million toward the deal, but didn't think it was necessary.

"The talks will continue regardless," she said.

"If it's important enough, it will be up to us to find the money for it."

Other council members said they were open to the idea of acquiring the property, but had reservations about dedicating \$1 million to any acquisition effort without more information.

“We need to look at the price tag and where the administration stands,” said Council Member Mike Molina.

Council Member Gladys Baisa said the county had a “responsibility” to preserve the area and should look at acquiring Lipoa Point through purchase, “swap” or some other kind of arrangement.

But Baisa said the council also had to budget for major obligations including water system and sewer upgrades and looming payments to government employee pension plans.

A recent report found the state Employees Retirement System will require an \$11 billion infusion to cover health insurance benefits for future state and counties retirees.

“There’s needs and wants, and I’m obsessed with needs,” Baisa said.

Maui Land & Pineapple has proposed an 18-hole golf course and 40 luxury home sites on lands at Lipoa Point formerly in pineapple cultivation, as well as a cultural and surf park at Honolua Bay.

The company had previously approached both the state and county to create public parks around the Lipoa Point area, but wasn’t able to generate interest in the idea, Senior Vice President Ryan Churchill told the council Friday.

Due to concerns raised by the Save Honolua Coalition, the company has “taken a step back” to form an advisory group made up of community members to develop a plan for the property, he said.

Scores of members of the Save Honolua Coalition lined up Friday urging County Council members to support Johnson’s resolution to buy Lipoa Point.

“Honolua Bay is a very special place,” said Tide Rivers.

He said growing up surfing the bay kept him out of trouble, and that today’s youth should also have Honolua as an “outlet.”

“Think of our younger generation,” he said.

Ocean lifeguard Tamara Paltin said she didn’t like the changes she was seeing in West Maui, and said buying Lipoa Point was a viable way to preserve the area.

“The kind of developments taking over the west district do not benefit the community,” she said.

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