

'On behalf of my dear friend, Honolua Bay'

BEYOND THE BEACH By Norm Bezane

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Growth is inevitable. Or, growth needs to stop. This month, thanks to an amazingly fast-growing grassroots group called the Honolua Coalition, issues like these are being redefined.

One well-known former public official said “the pendulum is now swinging. There is a groundswell of support (to limit growth), and the desire is becoming loud and clear. We have lost too much open space.”

Maui Land & Pineapple Co. wants to build Maui’s 18th golf course on Lipoa Point overlooking Honolua Bay, one of the most pristine and beloved bays on Maui along the coast past Kapalua. The conceptual plan for the area also includes 40 home sites mauka of Honoapiilani Highway, surf park and cultural park.

Forty-nine community members from all age and economic groups spoke at a marathon four-hour session before the Maui County Council recently, saying “enough is enough.”

Their arguments – some hard-hitting, others filled with tears – are compelling. Let’s listen to these voices and try to find some balance between what they said and what might be possible.

“When you come around that corner, that bay, that beautiful water, it is like a clear diamond. We do not want to tarnish that diamond with another golf course,” said Fred Vermey, ocean safety officer.

We are turning back to ancient land ideas of those who were here first, to the Native Hawaiian understanding that we are not outside of nature but of it. Unborn generations have a claim on the land equal to our own. Humans must learn from nature and replenish their spirits in frequent contact with the ocean. Each generation has a rendezvous with the land.

“We need to stop the tide of commercial development which creates an ever-increasing spiral of municipal costs. Once we decide that our surroundings need not always be subordinated to payrolls and profits based on short-term considerations, there is hope. The most valuable use for the land is to leave it as it stands, preserved for future generations to enjoy,” said Brent Schlea.

“Where does the aloha come from? It comes from the land. Local people are saddened by what we see. Aloha is what brings visitors here; that’s what makes this place special,” said Kanoa Nishiki.

“To look out and see only trees and sky, to look out and to see beautify fish against a background of colorful coral, to be held in the arms of nature, to feel the love and maturity of spirit, the relaxation of the mind, the return of the child within. This is a priceless experience of nature that Honolua provides. People need beautiful places. Why not invest marketing money to

enhance the product instead of paying ever-increasing advertising dollars to attract first-time visitors? We ask you to respect the West Maui plan which designates this area conservation and recreation,” said Nikki Stange.

“Change is inevitable. There was a time when we needed development for jobs and more opportunities. That time has passed. We are entering an era of accountability? Preserve open spaces for people and not profit,” said Tamara Paltin, ocean safety officer.

“Enough is enough; we need infrastructure We need a building moratorium. We need it now,” said Doug Pitzer, general contractor and builder of homes in Kapalua.

So what is the right thing to do? It’s clear that certain vast stretches of the island, particularly coastal lands, need to be maintained as natural or open space if Maui is to retain its all-inspiring beauty. And a “green line” needs to be drawn, allowing no further development above a certain level unless we want our mountainsides to look like Oahu’s. Rural lands from the Pali, including gateways to Lahaina over one of the prettiest coastal roads in the world, should also be preserved.

Bowing to the inevitable, there are other places where further growth is perfectly acceptable – especially places where there is a need for affordable housing. In the best traditions of Hawaiian culture, it is time to bring things back into balance.

Near the end of a long day, Jill Lassen testified: “I am here on behalf of my dear friend, Honolua Bay. Walking along the edge all the way to the Windmills (a surfing area), I hear her laughing. ‘They do not have me yet.’

“And so,” Lassen said, “close your eyes, all of you here, close your eyes, take a deep breath, uncross your hands and picture your most loved memory of Honolua Bay and feel it.”

She paused, offering two minutes of silence, uninterrupted by a council gavel. And to the council, she said, “Thank you.”

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