

CHAPTER 20

LAND PLANNING

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Group 70



“What might Hawai‘i look and feel like years from now?”

Within the next two decades, about one million acres of land in Hawai‘i may lose market viability. Close your eyes and visualize how the lands of Hamakua, Waialua, Ka‘anapali mauka, and virtually every other large agricultural parcel might look without sugar, pineapple, or cattle production. Do you see anything? No?

Well, you are not alone, for few alternatives to our current large-scale agricultural uses of land have proved to be viable. Attempts at developing crops such as coffee, macadamia nuts, and guava for two decades have yielded only 42,400 acres of land cultivated by 1991, or 2.5 percent of Hawai‘i’s agricultural lands. All that seem to thrive on ex-agricultural lands are subdivisions.

Close your eyes again and imagine the Hawai‘i of future generations. Do you see the lands of Waialua and Hale‘iwa covered by a patchwork quilt of asphalt-shingled rooftops stretching to the sea? This apparition may prove to be true, but there is an alternative. Its ingredients are housing (and other urban uses), agriculture, and tourism. Taken separately, these ingredients are competing, and they don’t add up to a preferred future. The key is to combine them in a special way.

Land use in Hawai‘i today. Agriculture, as we know it, is an endangered industry. As of mid-1993, most of Hawai‘i’s cattle are sent to Canadian feedlots and slaughterhouses at prices that seem to foreshadow the demise of that industry, except, perhaps, as a property

tax shelter. Sugar and pineapple are having difficulty competing with growers elsewhere. Small-scale, diversified agriculture is struggling with high land costs (often in competition with urban land uses for the most convenient parcels) and the high cost of infrastructure, such as roadways and water source development and distribution. In addition, diversified agriculture is hard-pressed to find large-scale markets or subsidies to ensure sustainability.

Housing is in short supply, and new housing is largely provided in faceless subdivisions and dense high-rise complexes. With high prices a major determinant, simply owning a home is the issue—a “Hawaiian” lifestyle is not. Only a generation ago, housing in Hawai‘i existed in the context of defined communities and neighborhoods. These—and with them our Hawaiian sense of place—have largely given way to impersonal sprawl, especially around Honolulu.

Hawai‘i’s tourism and its infrastructure are based on group travelers isolated in resort destinations and zones. Waikiki, Ka’anapali, Po‘ipu, and West Hawai‘i have become places where tourists experience the fantasy world of other tourists. Little of the real Hawai‘i seeps through. This situation does more than offend our sense of how things ought to be; it also flies in the face of a worldwide ecocultural tourism trend. If not addressed, this approach will eventually leave Hawai‘i at a severe disadvantage in the competitive tourist market.

Working together. We can base a new vision on the premise that housing, agriculture, and tourism are essential to each other’s viability in a preferred Hawai‘i.

Close your eyes again and picture this: modern housing clustered like the old plantation villages and surrounded by tree farms of bioengineered native hardwoods, macadamia orchards, dryland taro gardens with state-of-the-art drip irrigation, flower nurseries, grazing lands, seed corn plots, botanical gardens, community gardens, individual garden plots, and banana patches. Imagine these villages focused around little centers with a convenience store, churches, postal service, day care center, and even a McDonald’s. Several would have schools, some a library. The communities would be small enough to know neighbors, yet large enough to support common services. Critically, these communities would not expand beyond specified limits.

Agricultural lands surrounding these villages would be “perpetual



open spaces" via easements in favor of the residents of the villages. The value of these outlying lands would be maintained at sustainable agricultural levels by agreement of the village property owners, the original developers, and government. This would be feasible because of the increased values attributed to the residential component. In addition, infrastructure costs often unaffordable to farmers would be borne by residential development. This approach would reverse the current competition between small-scale agriculture and housing, where an either/or choice seems necessary. Housing would support, and be supported by, agriculture..

Envision agricultural tourism as another critical ingredient to this mix, for low land costs alone will not ensure the viability of agriculture. Locals and visitors may take tours of agricultural operations, such as the native hardwood tree farms within which other native flora and fauna are nurtured and featured; buy taro products such as cakes, cookies, chips, and slices at a farm where *kupuna* explain the importance of taro in the Hawaiian culture; and overnight at a bed-and-breakfast farmhouse on a tropical flower farm that features tours, cut flower sales, wood products, and lots of aloha. Imagine guest ranches with working cattle and horse operations which allow one to experience Hawai'i's *paniolo* lifestyle. Such places would meld host communities and visitor accommodations in a manner that would satisfy the growing desire, even among group tourists, to experience the unique cultures of their destinations. The true ecocultural tourists would be able to reside in small numbers throughout the community.

Finally, envision these villages as transit nodes interlocked in a system that gives easy access to each village as well as to urban centers. With well-planned mass transit, computer modems, telephones, and fax machines, one would not have to have an agricultural job to live in these villages.

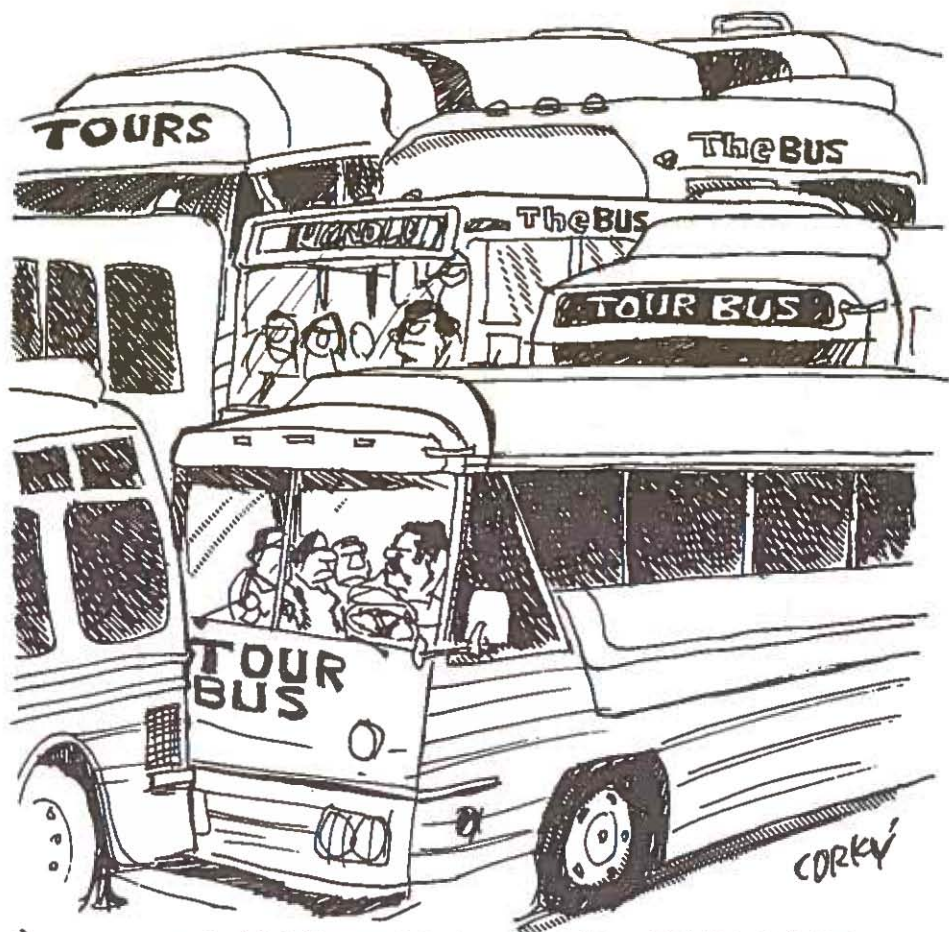
What it will take. For this vision to be realized, current concepts in housing, urbanization, agricultural activity, and tourism must change. Existing land use laws that mandate "contiguity"—urbanizing only land that is next to existing urban land—ensure urban sprawl and therefore must be rethought. Land use priorities that pit agriculture against housing and tourism must be changed to achieve an enforceable balance. The concept of contained group-tourism facilities (resort

“ghettos”) must give way to allow the thin spreading of tourist lodgings and activities throughout the community to accommodate the emerging ecocultural-agricultural tourism market.

Other communities offer models for this approach. The Swiss have firm boundaries for their settlements and have maintained a balance between urban development and agriculture for generations. A recent study of agricultural lands along the historic Connecticut River valley argues for the creative physical and economic balance of historic agricultural uses and new development. More and more notables are championing a worldwide movement toward “livable towns,” with old-fashioned principles of community design, as the consequences of not doing so become clear.

Do we have a choice? The time has come, indeed, been forced on us, to create a new way of linking sustainable agriculture, housing, and tourism in Hawai‘i. Close your eyes for a last time and reenvision the lands of Waialua sprawling to the sea in a quiltwork of forest patches and agricultural fields with a variety of crops. Villages that look like groves of trees dot the landscape, and they’re all linked by transit. Within the villages, our families, friends, and relatives live a Hawaiian lifestyle similar to that of our parents and grandparents. Guests from the mainland or abroad stay at nearby bed-and-breakfasts and experience the real Hawai‘i.

Is this dream too far-fetched? Not if we choose to set aside conventional wisdom and determine to hold on to our cherished visions of Hawai‘i.



"YOU GOTTA ADMIT THIS ALTERNATIVE PLAN GOT
RID OF ALL THOSE CARS CLOGGING OUR ROADS..."