

New Turtle Bay plan still unacceptable

By Kent Fonoimoana and Tim Vandever

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The revised master plan for the 880-acre Turtle Bay property fails to address the most significant community concerns about development in an attempt to provide "adequate" return on investment to yet another group of offshore land speculators.

In 2010, the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled that California-based Oaktree Capital was required to conduct a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) because the conditions surrounding development of the resort had changed in the 25 years since then-owner Prudential entered into a unilateral agreement with the City and County of Honolulu.

Like its predecessors, the consortium of 30-plus banks that acquired the resort through a deed in lieu of foreclosure gambled on the prospect of developing a multimillion-dollar resort on the property in spite of continuing opposition from the local community, a global economic downturn and a maturing Hawaii tourism market.

At a May 2011 commu-

nity "talk story," hundreds of Koolauloa and North Shore residents gathered to discuss the future of Turtle Bay. The Koolauloa North Shore Alliance invited representatives from the owner's planning company, Replay Resorts, to talk about the SEIS process.

Elected officials, community leaders and environmental organizations shared ideas about alternatives to large-scale hotel development, including public-private land preservation partnerships and trading development rights for city-owned land near rail transit right-of-ways.

A representative from former Gov. Linda Lingle's Turtle Bay Advisory Working Group presented its 2009 plan, in which the vast majority of resort property would be placed in preservation. This plan stressed developing within the existing footprint of the resort and preserving the surrounding 5 miles of coastal wilderness that contains critical habitat for endangered sea turtles and monk seals and known burial grounds of many iwi

kupuna. The community overwhelmingly expressed a desire that future plans lean heavily toward preserving the pristine property that surrounds the existing hotel at Turtle Bay.

For their part, the Replay representatives acknowledged the passion area residents have and promised to take utmost care in "artfully balancing the interests of the environment, community and investors" with plenty of "pono" to go around.

However, based on the recently unveiled "preferred plan" for development at Turtle Bay, it seems that Replay missed the point.

On the surface, the new proposal appears to be a significantly downsized version of the original five-hotel Oaktree plan. In reality, however, it's just "Oaktree-light": a sprawling mega-resort encompassing the entire property from Kawela Bay in the west to Kahuku Point in the east.

The SEIS process is just beginning and we, the people of Hawaii, need to be involved. The questions we ask — especially questions

from residents and those who frequent the North Shore — must be addressed.

If the absentee owners continue to pretend they understand this community but act only in the interest of profit for themselves, we must ask the governor to exercise special powers granted him by the Legislature to condemn the property for the common good of Hawaii's residents and native culture.

The point is that this community is not interested in how Replay Resorts will develop the property. We want to work with the owners of Turtle Bay to figure out a way to preserve these precious rural lands.

We are not obligated to provide a return on a poor investment, but we do have an obligation to future generations who will enjoy the oceans and beaches and land the way we do today.

We want to Keep the Country Country.