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Waipahu zoning changes to be aired Single-use parcels will be open to mixed uses under a plan for areas near city rail stations

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POSTED: 1:30 a.m. HST, Sep 30, 2015

City officials are proposing zoning changes for about 282 acres around Waipahu's two rail stations to facilitate development of mixed-use neighborhoods patterned after the city planners' concept of "live, work and play."

The proposal to rezone land within one-fourth to one-half mile of the rail stations from various single uses to mixed uses will be presented at a public hearing by the Honolulu Planning Commission at 1:30 p.m. today at the Mission Memorial Building's conference room.

The changes "will help direct and manage growth around the rail stations" and "will expand the types of allowable uses and are intended to stimulate development activity around the transit stations," according to the city Department of Planning and Permitting, which drafted the proposal and recommended approval to the Planning Commission.

For the West Loch Station at Farrington Highway and Leoku Street, the DPP is recommending the rezoning of about 177 acres. Existing zoning in the area includes less than 1 acre for residential, 40 for medium-density apartments, 81 for community business and 55 for intensive industrial. The zoning changes would be for 33 acres to medium-density apartment mixed use, 91 to community business mixed use, 50 to industrial-commercial mixed use and 3 to general preservation.

For the Waipahu Transit Center Station at Farrington Highway and Mokuola Street, existing zoning in the area includes 34 acres for residential, 5 for medium-density apartments, 4 for neighborhood business, 48 for community business and 14 for intensive industrial. The 105 acres would be rezoned to medium-density apartment mixed use for 8, community business mixed used for 96 acres and general preservation for 1 acre.

Building heights will generally remain the same but would likely increase closer to the rail stations, according to the DPP.

The proposal will be presented to the Planning Commission before proceeding to the City Council for a final vote.

"I think there's some good things about the proposed changes. (But) there's some questions about certain specifics about the plan," said Dean Hazama, chairman of the Planning Commission. "It's great to have commercial opportunities around the stations.

(But) unless you have housing developments that are part of the TOD (transit-oriented development), I don't know how the commercial side is going to succeed.”

Started in 2007, the Waipahu transit-oriented development plan underwent a series of community workshops before the final version was adopted as a resolution by the City Council in April 2014. The contract for the Waipahu TOD plan cost \$250,000.

Transit-oriented developments, or TODs, serve as vital components of the city's rail system because special districts are modeled on a planned combination of employment, residences and recreation, officials said. TOD neighborhood plans have been taking shape over the past several years as DPP officials gather feedback from residents about what they want to see in their communities.

“The community has been saying what's important for a long time,” said Harrison Rue, the city's transit-oriented development administrator. Proposals “are based on the community plan that we've worked with the community on for several years. Baked into those are the priorities that the community has for active streetscapes and gathering places.”

The DPP is also proposing to amend the Land Use Ordinance to establish a new special district with guidelines and standards for the areas around all of the city's rail stations, except for the two in Kakaako that are under the Hawaii Community Development Authority's jurisdiction.

The special districts seek to “promote walkable, active streetscapes and usable public space” and would allow developers that meet all standards to avoid “discretionary reviews” and proceed directly to acquire a building permit, according to the DPP. The special district's new standards would include active uses such as retail shops and restaurants on the first floors of buildings, front yards with improved pedestrian-friendly amenities and parking areas located at least 40 feet from the streets.

“They (developers) will have to follow some pretty tight rules in how the buildings relate to the street, how it's placed,” said Rue, adding that in certain areas such as along Waipahu Depot Road and other key streets, “the rules are a little tougher to keep the character there.”

But some residents, frustrated with ongoing development and construction, remain worried about increased congestion and say they do not want to see the character of their neighborhoods changed. At one workshop a comment was made that sketches were “beautiful, but look more like Southern California or Arizona rather than Hawaii.”

“There's concerns about parking and where parking will be for rail riders in the future,” said Henry Aquino, executive director of the Waipahu Community Association, adding that he hopes the “unique community entities” in Waipahu will be preserved.

Some state and city officials had also expressed concerns in letters sent to the DPP last year. The Department of Education raised concerns about the impact increased development would have on school enrollment. The city Department of Facility Maintenance asked who would maintain infrastructure improvements in the area.

Rue said the DPP has been working with the DOE, adding that developers will still need to follow the department's rules on impact fees. He added that new property taxes are set to pay for the additional city services needed for increased development.

But Aquino said he hopes the character of the community will not change.

“That’s always a priority because of the uniqueness of our community in comparison to other communities that would be affected by TOD along the corridor,” said Aquino, who also represents Waipahu as a state representative. “As long as the development, I think, benefits the community and provides amenities, provides services (and) provides necessary items for everyday people, I think that’s what the ... community at large hopes to see.”

For more information visit honolulu.gov/tod/dpp-tod-implementation/zoning-and-related-policies.html.

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