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75 attend West O'ahu meeting on 3 rail hubs

Residents urged to brainstorm on 'live, work and play' areas

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KAPOLEI — About 75 West O'ahu residents, and a few curious people from outside the region, gathered last night to learn more about three Transit-Oriented Development hubs planned for the East Kapolei region.

While the three hubs have been identified, the city and its planners want the community to offer input about what the areas around the rail transit stations will look like.

Architect Tim Van Meter urged West O'ahu residents to think big, to come up with plans where people can "live, work and play in an urban development. You can do it all right here."

During brief brainstorming sessions, residents said they like plans for a "greenway" and mixed-used districts. They also raised concerns, chief among them parking.

Planning for the TOD sites are being closely watched because as hubs for housing, business and employment, they could spur development for those areas and increase property values.

That's especially true for the three East Kapolei TOD sites, which are all on what's now vacant land.

Specifically, the sites are at:

- The planned Salvation Army Kroc Center on North-South Road, at or near the proposed East-West Connector Road. It would be the westernmost stop for the first segment of the rail project.
- A short distance from the eastern border of the University of Hawai'i-West O'ahu's first phase, also along North-South Road. Previous plans called for putting the TOD closer to the middle of the campus, but that idea was rejected by UH-West O'ahu officials.
- In the heart of the proposed Ho'opili community, a 11,500-unit project that would rival Mililani in size. The project still needs approval from the state Land Use Commission in separate proceedings that begin today.

Wai'anae resident Barbara Keola, 60, said she wants to ensure that the needs of seniors are incorporated into the TOD plans.

"We have a need for low-income housing for seniors, supermarkets, doctors and hairdressers," said Keola, a volunteer for AARP's Wai'anae office.

Chad Haili, 32, who works for a tugboat operation, drove all the way from Nu'uuanu to listen to the plans. "This whole concept is designed for younger generations," Haili said, noting that he's looking at relocating his family into West O'ahu.

The planning process for the three TOD hubs is expected to take at least a year. The next step for the Kapolei TOD plan is a tentative proposal that will be brought back to the community in mid-May.

At Waipahu Elementary School Tuesday night, concerns about being forced to leave their properties due to the TOD process were top of mind for some of the approximately 125 people who attended.

But city officials said the administration has no plans to develop the hubs, or use its eminent domain power to force the sale of lands, beyond what is necessary to directly establish the transit stations themselves.

The city is in the final stages of forming the guidelines for the Waipahu hubs, and the city presented a draft plan to the public there for two TOD hubs.

One is in the Mokuola portion of Waipahu and the other is on the Leoku side.

Richard Oshiro, chairman of the Waipahu Neighborhood Board, said the TOD plans provide a shot in the arm for the region.

"It's not about the train so much as it is the orderly development and planning of the future of Waipahu," Oshiro said.

After the plans for the Kapolei and Waipahu hubs are completed, the city will work on Transit-Oriented Development plans for the Pearl City/Aiea and Kalihi regions.

The city Department of Transportation Services is seeking construction bids for the \$5.4 billion project.

Construction is expected to be begin in late 2009 and the first portion, between West Loch and Waipahu, is expected to begin operations in 2013. Service to Ala Moana is slated to be available by the end of 2018.
