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opinion

Has Maui reached its tourism limit?

When the plantations mechanized in the 1950s, there were no jobs and Maui's workers had to leave to find employment elsewhere. Elected officials, government agencies and appointed commissioners facilitated tourist projects by minimally enforcing regulations. They entitled vacant plantation and ranch land for hotels, condominiums, golf courses and shopping centers.

Both unemployed agricultural workers, and recent graduates found on-island jobs. Construction companies benefited, while growing numbers of Realtors made money selling properties to tourists. The growing tourist industry saved Maui's economy.

However, the biggest beneficiaries were off-island investors. They exported their profits, instead of providing promised affordable workforce housing and paying higher salaries. Investors loved Maui's low property tax assessments with Hawaii's lowest hotel property tax rate.

Economic prosperity disguised negative and often unwelcome impacts to the environment, local traditions and culture. Tourists, not Maui residents, selected Maui as the "top tourist-destination island!"

Locals find that the quiet beaches that families previously enjoyed are congested with tourists, kayak rentals, scuba operations, weddings and beach chairs. Beaches lack parking and access. Tourist guidebooks and social media highlight our "special secret places."

Tourist spots are overburdened. Twin Falls has hundreds of parked cars with visitors streaming to waterfalls. Helicopters fly over residential areas. Downhill bikers



VIEWPOINT
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endanger local traffic. Hana residents cannot deal with the Hana Highway traffic. Haleakala National Park requires advance permits for sunrise viewing.

Overtourism results in long commutes, day and night shifts with unattended children, multiple jobs, overcrowded schools, a shortage of doctors, dangerous intersections, wastewater finding its way into the coral reefs, lost views, pesticides draining from golf courses, brown-water advisories, etc.

Tourist industry salaries do not keep up with housing costs; families have to co-habit residences. Second home "McMansions" are built for part-time tourists, while needed affordable units are neglected. Infrastructure for a quality community is not built because tourist facilities do not have to pay needed impact fees.

State bureaucrats and tourism champions advocate shifting Oahu's tourism onto Maui by increasing Kahului Airport capacity, increasing short-term visitor rentals in residential neighborhoods, and constructing even more hotels. Local residents suffer as off-island investors convert potential housing into vacation rentals.

Unfortunately, as Maui's quality of life deteriorates, political leaders do not acknowledge or even address the situation. Many politicians are stuck in the past thinking that they must promote a bigger tourist industry. Those days are over. Maui now has a mature tourist industry that needs to protect itself from overtourism. We need political leaders who will assist residents, not corporate investors, and who will enable affordable housing, not more hotels and gated communities.

The Hawai'i Tourism Strategic Plan recognized the change from 50 years ago when it warned, "The relationship between the number of residents and visitors on the island at any given time cannot be overlooked as an important public policy discussion point. Resort communities ...

have grappled with the "golden goose" debate, whereby the tourism experience may be compromised by the very nature of the area's popularity."

Fortunately, Maui's legal tools can promote a tourist industry that will protect jobs, and not disappoint future tourists with a deteriorating visitor experience. Our County Council in 2012 passed the Maui Island Plan (part of the General Plan), a legally binding county ordinance. The plan makes tourist industry regulation an important requirement to preserve and protect Maui's quality of life.

The Maui Island Plan (Pages 4-14) states: "Maximize residents' benefits from the visitor industry" and "Promote a desirable island population by striving to not exceed an islandwide visitor population of roughly 33 percent of the resident population."

That means that if Maui island has 156,000 residents, as we now have, then we should not have more than 52,000 tourists on an average day. However, in July 2018, we had an average of 75,000 tourists each day! Obviously, we already have too many tourist accommodations, most legal, but enough illegal, to reduce housing availability for residents.

The plan (Pages 4-12) states: "Increase the economic contribution of the visitor industry to the island's environmental well-being and for the island's residents' quality of life."

We must elect leaders in November who will restore and preserve the high quality of life that Maui residents deserve, while carefully protecting our existing tourist industry from overtourism and killing itself.

■ Dick Mayer is a retired, 34-year Maui Community College economics and geography professor, former vice-chair of the Maui General Plan Advisory Committee and former member of the Maui Planning Commission. He lives in Kula.

VISITORS ON MAUI ISLAND

MAUI ISLAND VISITORS 2008 - 2018 from the Hawaii Tourism Authority											
YEAR	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total Visitor Arrivals (Thousands)	2,075.80	1,892.40	2,092.10	2,168.50	2,309.20	2,358.80	2,417.40	2,540.20	2,634.20	2,745.00	2,914.10
Visitor Days (Thousands)	15,832	15,140	16,751	17,429	18,527	19,264	19,770	20,724	21,530	22,059	23,537

The Maui Island Plan (Page 4-14, Policy 2.2.3.a) promotes "a desirable island population by striving to not exceed an island-wide visitor population of roughly 33 percent of the resident population."

We are now way over the desired goal. Visitors are now 41.3% of the resident population and growing.

Average Daily VISITORS on Maui Island	43,300	41,500	45,900	47,800	50,600	52,800	54,200	56,800	58,800	60,400	64,500
Resident Population - Maui Island	140,900	142,900	144,500	146,300	148,300	150,300	152,400	153,300	154,800	155,600	156,300
Ratio of visitors to residents	30.7%	29.0%	31.8%	32.7%	34.1%	35.1%	35.6%	37.1%	38.0%	38.8%	41.3%
Ratio of residents to visitors	3.25	3.44	3.15	3.06	2.93	2.85	2.81	2.70	2.63	2.58	2.42

Sources: from the Hawaii Tourism Authority - via UHERO

https://data.uhero.hawaii.edu/#/category?id=36&data_list_id=40&view=table	https://data.uhero.hawaii.edu/#/category?id=36&data_list_id=36&data_list_id=41&view=table	https://data.uhero.hawaii.edu/#/category?id=36&data_list_id=39&view=table	https://data.uhero.hawaii.edu/#/category?id=36&data_list_id=36&data_list_id=36&data_list_id=41&view=table	https://data.uhero.hawaii.edu/#/category?id=23&data_list_id=25&view=table	https://data.uhero.hawaii.edu/#/category?id=36&data_list_id=39&view=table	https://data.uhero.hawaii.edu/#/category?id=36&data_list_id=40&view=table
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TO: West Maui Community Plan Advisory Committee
From: Dick Mayer dickmayer@earthlink.net

October 1, 2019

Tourism is a lot like eating. We need to eat in order to sustain ourselves and support our health. Youngsters need to nourish their development. However, as we mature, eating too much can cause a host of problems and eventually poor health, disabilities, pain, social and psychological problems, and possibly worse.

Similarly, tourism initially provided our community with good jobs, a higher standard of living and a more interesting lifestyle. However, as tourism grew it began to threaten the very viability of our island community and ultimately it can destroy itself, much like cancer damages the body in which it lives, or excessive eating can cause health concerns. At first, there may be only small irritations and minor pains, but then we may find growing limitations on our activities, well-being, and quality of life.

After 1959 when jet planes began flying here and Hawaii became a state, Maui's business and political leaders had to make a decision as to what kind of tourism should be supported on Maui. They could have chosen small-scale tourism with visitors staying in B&Bs or ohanas, allowing local residents to earn a supplemental income.

However, since plantation workers' homes were usually small units that could not accommodate additional visitors and were far from beaches, the business leaders designated West Maui's Kaanapali and later South Maui's Wailea for large-scale hotel resort developments operated by off-island corporate investors.

With the steady growth of tourism in the past few decades, Maui has become bloated and many residents feel a need to moderate our tourism diet. We must eat selectively and carefully. In fact, we probably need to go on a modest diet to limit actual negative impacts that have been listed by others and are well documented.

We now recognize the symptoms and impacts of overtourism and we should selectively manage various aspects of the tourism industry.

What we need to do now is to protect our tourism industry from destroying itself, rather than allowing tourism and hotel construction and illegal vacation rentals to grow and kill both our economy and quality of life.

Therefore, I would like the West Maui Community Plan Advisory Committee to consider the following:

Please help implement the Maui Island Plan to protect Maui's future and to protect West Maui's environmental and infrastructural resources

The Hawai`i Tourism Strategic Plan pointed out that, "the "Maui County Tourism Goal" is: To strategically manage tourism on Maui, Moloka`i, and Lāna`i in a sustainable manner that promotes economic well-being, quality of life for residents, preservation of natural and cultural resources, and quality experiences for visitors."

The Maui County Council in 2012 and 2014 adopted the Maui Island Plan as a legal binding part of the Maui County Code that states in MCC 2.80b.030.B, that "All agencies shall comply with the general plan, and administrative actions by agencies shall conform to the general plan,"

The Maui Island Plan explains that, "The relationship between the number of residents and visitors on the island at any given time cannot be overlooked as an important public policy discussion point;"

Resort communities all around the world that are dependent on tourism have grappled with the “golden goose” debate, whereby the tourism experience may be compromised by the very nature of the area’s popularity, thus threatening both the desire for tourists to visit the area and the employment of local tourism industry employees;

The Maui Island Plan (Chapter 4 Economic Development, Pages 4-8 to 4-14) states two policies, “Policy 4.2.1 Increase the economic contribution of the visitor industry to the island’s environmental well-being for the island’s residents’ quality of life,” and “Policy 4.2.1.d Provide a rich visitor experience, while protecting the island’s natural beauty, culture, lifestyles, and aloha spirit.”

As the scale of the visitor industry has expanded, the Hawaii Tourism Authority has reported a decline in the satisfaction of residents in their quality of life;

As tourists impact Maui more and more, the Hawaii Tourism Authority reports that we have many more visitors coming to Maui, but that they are spending less here, on an inflation-adjusted basis;

Maui now has such a low unemployment rate that if new hotels were built, workers would need to be imported from elsewhere adding to the pressure both on traffic and on housing for our existing residents;

Many of the people who work in the tourist industry at hotels, restaurants, rental-car facilities, and activity centers are unable to afford a house that their family can rent or buy;

Eight or nine new hotels are now beginning their planning, entitlement and construction process;

While local, long-time residents seek housing, many wealthy tourists come to Maui, fall in love with the island, and then return here to buy a second or third expensive home, thus out-bidding local residents for housing; these 2nd homes are really very fancy accommodations for part-time visitors;

Maui’s hotels are owned by off-Island investors who take their profits elsewhere, rather than having the funds circulate within the County;

The Hawai’i State Constitution provides in Article IX, Section 6 for the *Management of State Population Growth* “to protect and preserve the public health and welfare; except that each political subdivision, as provided by general law, may plan and manage the growth of its population in a more restrictive manner than the State”; and for Maui County the Maui General Plan implements Article IX, section 6;

The Countywide Policy Plan, on page 60, directs policy makers, such as Councilmembers, to: “Monitor the carrying capacity of the islands’ social, ecological, and infrastructure systems with respect to the economy.”

The Maui Island Plan declares as Objective 4.2.2 that we need to “Comprehensively manage future visitor-unit expansion;” and in Policy 4.2.2.a “Mitigate the impact of tourism on the host culture, natural environment, and resident lifestyles.”

The Maui Island Plan provides a call for Council legislation by stating in “4.2.2-Action 3 “Develop programs and/or regulations to: (2) Cap the number and type of visitor accommodations that can be permitted; and (3) Manage the number and type of visitor accommodations that can be permitted;

Management of the number and type of visitor accommodations is necessary to achieve the goal of Maui Island Plan Policy 4.2.3.a, “Promote a desirable island population by striving to not exceed an island-wide visitor population of roughly 33 percent of the resident population;” and

Maui Island now has a visitor to resident ratio of 41.3%, which significantly exceeds the recommended 33% basis in the Maui Island Plan.

Maui has been traveling on a road that has taken us from an agricultural, plantation economy into one based on tourism. We have now reached a fork in that road (a sort of “Tipping Point”), and we must decide which branch of the path we will want to travel.

The left fork will continue the present road of rapid population growth, increasing tourism dependence, more McMansions, gated communities, and a decreasing quality of life for Maui’s long-time residents.

The right (and correct) fork will mean that we will change our direction significantly by preserving and restoring a high quality of life that residents of Maui deserve, while carefully protecting our EXISTING tourist industry and workforce from overdevelopment.

Although there are financial forces that might try to seduce County decision-makers down the left road of over-development, Maui has the legal tools that can keep us on the road to long-term stability and prosperity.

What do we need to do? We have to recognize the importance of preserving Maui’s high quality tourist industry, and not let it be eroded by continued, excessive development. With our present full employment, any new development will mean more people moving here, further damaging and diminishing our quality of life.

Please adopt a strong West Maui Community Plan. It is a good first step along the right path for West Maui.

What could endanger and kill our “Golden Goose”?

Beaches Occupied, Parking Was Difficult, Beach Access.

Infrastructure, Traffic Congestion, Crowded Intersections,

Golf Course Runoff, Brown Water, McMansions + Gated Communities.

Long Commutes, Night Shifts, Unattended Children, Rising Crime Rates.

Changing Demographics Ethnic Retirees 2nd Homeowners

Land Prices, Housing Prices, Portable Classrooms,

COUNTYWIDE POLICY PLAN ADOPTED IN 2010 BY THE MAUI COUNTY COUNCIL

<https://www.mauicounty.gov/DocumentCenter/View/11132/Final--Countywide-Policy-Plan---Complete?bidId=>

Objective F: Strengthen the Local Economy

Goal: Maui County's economy will be diverse, sustainable, and supportive of community values.

3. Support a visitor industry that respects the resident culture and the environment.

POLICIES:

- a. Promote traditional Hawaiian practices in visitor-related facilities and activities.
- b. Encourage and educate the visitor industry to be sensitive to island lifestyles and cultural values.
- c. Encourage a spirit of welcome for residents at visitor facilities, such as by offering kama`aina incentives and discount programs.
- d. Support the renovation and enhancement of existing visitor facilities.
- e. Support policies, programs, and a tax structure that redirect the benefits of the visitor industry back into the local community.
- f. Encourage resident ownership of visitor-related businesses and facilities.
- g. Develop partnerships to provide educational and training facilities to residents employed in the visitor industry.
- h. Foster an understanding of local cultures, customs, and etiquette, and emphasize the importance of the Aloha Spirit as a common good for all.
- i. Support the diversification, development, evolution, and integration of the visitor industry in a way that is compatible with the traditional, social, economic, spiritual, and environmental values of island residents.
- j. Improve collaboration between the visitor industry and the other sectors of Maui County's economy.
- k. Perpetuate an authentic image of the Hawaiian culture and history and an appropriate recognition of the host culture.
- l. Support the programs and initiatives outlined in the Maui County Tourism Strategic Plan 2006-2015.
- m. Promote water conservation, beach conservation, and open-space conservation in areas providing services for visitors.
- n. Recognize the important contributions that the visitor industry makes to the County's economy, and support a healthy and vibrant visitor industry.

RECOMMENDATION: In the West Maui Community Plan make a reference to the need to follow the policies contained on page 62 that deal with the Visitor Industry.

MAUI ISLAND PLAN Page 4-10

The County's principal role involves regulation of land uses, including visitor units and related recreational real estate, in addition to commercial attractions. It is envisioned that Maui will play a more active role in tourism planning through the County's Office of Economic Development and other agencies that play a supporting role in job creation and economic growth.

The Maui County Strategic Tourism Plans is intended to provide specific guidance, and build on the themes and policies set forth in the statewide Hawai'i Tourism Strategic Plan. In the plan, the "Maui County Tourism Goal" is stated as follows:

To strategically manage tourism on Maui, Moloka'i, and Lāna'i in a sustainable manner that promotes economic well-being, quality of life for residents, preservation of natural and cultural resources, and quality experiences for visitors.

Maintaining the strength of the visitor industry by keeping Maui a desirable destination for visitors, and home for residents, will be a critical challenge.

The goal of the visitor industry should be to continue to promote visitor revenue and attract higher-spending visitors that address and complement the needs and goals of the local communities.

The relationship between the number of residents and visitors on the island at any given time cannot be overlooked as an important public policy discussion point. Resort communities all around the world that are dependent on tourism have grappled with the "golden goose" debate, whereby the tourism experience may be compromised by the very nature of the area's popularity.

Particular opportunities lie in agri-tourism, eco-tourism, educational tourism, heritage tourism, voluntourism, and health and wellness tourism. Developing strategies to reduce the leakage of the expended tourist dollar out of Maui is an important way to increase the economic benefit of tourism for Maui.

To protect the quality of Maui's visitor industry, and the island lifestyle, the County must carefully manage and control any future expansion of visitor units on Maui island.

Maui's visitor industry is diversifying from one dominated by hotels to one with a mix of visitor unit types. Alternative forms of tourism, such as timeshare, resort condos, second homes, cruise ships, vacation rental homes, bed and breakfasts (B&Bs), and other types of visitor accommodations, have social, fiscal, and economic implications that need to be understood, monitored, and managed.

The conversion of housing from long-term residential use to transient-vacation-rental use raises a number of potential issues including, loss of community due to the transient nature of neighborhoods, disruptions such as overflow parking or partying, purported avoidance of the TAT by some operators, loss of residential housing stock to visitor use, and higher residential property taxes.

Concerns have also been raised about the gentrification of Maui neighborhoods, the proliferation of gated communities, and the allocation of scarce resources, such as water, to developments targeted to offshore buyers.

TOURISM -- GOAL, OBJECTIVES, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

GOAL:

4.2 A healthy visitor industry that provides economic well-being with stable and diverse employment opportunities.

OBJECTIVE:

4.2.1 Increase the economic contribution of the visitor industry to the island's environmental well-being for the island's residents' quality of life.

POLICIES:

4.2.1.a Engage the visitor industry in the growth of emerging sectors where practicable.

4.2.1.b Support the implementation of the Maui County TSP, when consistent with the MIP.

4.2.1.c Focus economic growth in the visitor industry through enhanced visitor experiences and an emphasis on attracting higher-spending.

4.2.1.d **Provide a rich visitor experience, while protecting the island's natural beauty, culture, lifestyles, and aloha spirit.**

4.2.1.e Diversify the tourism industry by supporting appropriate niche activities such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, voluntourism, ag-tourism, health and wellness tourism, educational tourism, medical tourism, and other viable tourism-related businesses in appropriate locations.

4.2.1.f **Recognize the important economic contributions that the visitor industry makes and support a healthy and vibrant visitor industry.**

4.2.1.g Support the increased availability of kama`āina discount programs. Implementing ACTIONS:

4.2.1-Action 1 Conduct and regularly update an impact assessment (social, economic, and environmental) of the costs and benefits of mega-resort, timeshare, vacation rental, and other types of visitor accommodations.

4.2.1-Action 2 Seek additional revenues to offset the potential loss of HTA funds that will help support niche activities.

4.2.1-Action 3 Develop a yearly performance report to the Maui County Council that describes the returns resulting from expenditures of public funds/grants that are awarded for the visitor industry.

OBJECTIVE:

4.2.2 Comprehensively manage future visitor-unit expansion.

POLICIES:

4.2.2.a **Mitigate the impact of tourism on the host culture, natural environment, and resident lifestyles.**

4.2.2.b Allow, where permitted by the community plan, the development of business hotels and small, sensitively-designed inns.

4.2.2.c **Manage impacts from transient vacation rentals, hotels, bed and breakfast units, timeshares, and resort condominiums on residential communities, public infrastructure, and community facilities.**

4.2.2.d **Discourage supplanting of existing island housing to visitor accommodations that may have a negative impact on long-term rental housing, price of housing, and price of land.**

4.2.2.e Allow the designation of retreat/mini-conference centers in appropriate locations through the community plan process.

4.2.2.f **Community plans should consider establishing standards such as limits on building size, room count, and the number of inns, if any, that will be allowed in small towns.**

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS:

4.2.2-Action 1 Manage transient vacation rentals through permitting in accordance with adopted regulations and community plan policies.

4.2.2-Action 2 Work cooperatively to establish a comprehensive set of resource management standards, including protection of Native Hawaiian rights and certification programs for ecotourism.

4.2.2-Action 3 Develop programs and/or regulations to:

(1) Allow for the development of small, locally-owned inns and B&Bs in the commercial cores of Maui's country towns and business districts if permitted, and as defined in the community plans;

(2) Cap the number and type of visitor accommodations that can be permitted; and

(3) Manage the number and type of visitor accommodations that can be permitted.

4.2.2-Action 4 Develop design guidelines for small, locally-owned inns, retreat centers, and like-kind accommodations.

OBJECTIVE:

4.2.3 Maximize residents' benefits from the visitor industry.

POLICIES:

4.2.3.a Promote a desirable island population by striving to not exceed an island-wide visitor population of roughly 33 percent of the resident population.

4.2.3.b Use the required General Plan Annual Status Report to monitor trends related to residents and visitors.

Existing 1996 WEST MAUI COMMUNITY PLAN

GROWTH. Unconstrained growth places severe stress on infrastructure systems, the availability of housing, environmental and natural resources in the region and the social fabric of the community. The region's de facto population is made up of three major components: the residents who live here, the tourists who stay here and the commuters who travel back and forth to jobs in the region. Unconstrained growth of any of these groups adversely affects the quality of life within the region. The plan needs to address resident and de facto population levels, density and distribution.

Page 25

4. Maintain a stable and viable visitor industry.

a. Limit visitor facilities to the existing planned resorts of Kaanapali and Kapalua as designated on the land use map and coordinate future growth with development of adequate infrastructure capacity and housing for employees.

b. Encourage the renovation and improvement of existing visitor facilities without a substantial increase in the room count. Promote activities and industries that compliment and support the use of existing visitor industry facilities, such as sporting events, eco-tourism and conferences

To: WEST MAUI COMMUNITY PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

BASIC PLANNING GOALS

A good way of looking at the basic planning goals is to ask what a normal, healthy, well-functioning town would have as a mix of uses. Clearly, the ratio of tourists to residents is excessively high, and the ratio of expensive homes to truly affordable homes is too high as well. What about the ratio of commercial to industrial uses? Number of parks per resident? Commercial beach parks to noncommercial ones? Other ratios? Standard ranges of ratios exist, and the community plan is the tool that should be used to bring things in West Maui back into balance.

DESIRED POPULATION in the MAUI COUNTY CODE 2.80.B

The directions contained within the Maui County Code for the preparation of a community plan make it explicit that population projections may be one way of looking at changes to be incorporated in a plan. The alternative (cited twice in the Maui County Code) should also be presented, i.e., a plan should be prepared based on what people would like to see in their district -- their desires.

Here is the actual Maui County Code wording:

MCC 2.80B.030.E- General plan.

Section E The general plan shall: indicate **desired population** and physical development patterns for each island and region within the County;

And in **MCC 2.80B.070 E.**

E. Each community plan shall contain:

13. A statement of **desired population** density including visitors and residents;

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Make sure you leave room at the end of your planning process to include a strong section on **PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**, with requirements for who will implement the plan and the schedule that they need to use to enforce the Plan’s provisions.

QUESTION: If you propose and have adopted an excellent West Maui Community Plan, will County officials, the County Council, and the many Boards and Commissions actually implement your plan? What measures can you take to ensure the implementation of the plan?

RECOMMENDATION: Create within the your Plan a 7 to 11 member "**West Maui Community Plan Advisory Committee**" (much like the one already existing in Hana, and now being proposed for both South Maui and Paia-Haiku districts). Give that Committee powers to monitor and implement the plan's progress. Let us make sure all your hard work results in an actual operating plan for West Maui's future.