

BEHIND THE ALOHA

for Hawaiian Hospitality Magazine

Balanced Economic Growth

By Peter Apo

May 30, 2007

The 2007 Legislative Session drew a profound state of the State remark from Governor Linda Lingle who issued a public policy challenge that development cannot continue to be the pillar upon which Hawai'i's economic future is constructed. She struck a nerve with many people who are losing their tolerance for traffic congestion, an affordable housing crisis, the dramatic altering of large sections of coastal landscapes, second home residential development that stand as gated enclaves whose wealthy owners live aloof from the community that surrounds them. Development with a big D is drawing fire resulting in hostile calls for moratoriums on all new development. Although there is significant public sentiment that would curb development I believe that any public policy strategy that suggests discouraging investment in any segment of Hawai'i's future is not the answer. Development, like any other economic activity, is a neutral activity - until the specific business model begins to unfold. Only then does it become clear how the development will affect the community's sense of place and whether it will result in a quality of life step forward or backward for those who have to live in and around it.

Draw a triangle. At one corner write *Economic Activity* (in this case you can say development). At a second

corner write *Place*. And the third corner should say *Host Community*. The challenge I see is that most business models are so economic activity-centric with narrowly defined measures of success that they often *succeed at the expense of the the Place and the Host Community*. For instance, our visitor industry business model was very lineal in its maturation process. Visitor industry. Visitor. The model rushes to accommodate all the creature comforts of the visitor and in the process begins to change the place into looking like the place the visitor was trying to escape from. Changes to the place are in some cases so profound that entire communities undergo a dramatic "sense of place" conversion. One chilling effect is that people who work there can no longer afford to live there. A cartoon that says it all is one of an older man sitting in a rocking chair on the lanai of an older house. The house and yard are ringed by highrises. The caption reads, "I used to live in the country...now I live in the city...and I haven't moved".

An economic activity is not good or bad in and of itself. It's the specific business model that grows the activity that makes it good or bad depending on which corner of the triangle you are perched. Tourism often takes a bad rap for for bad public policy proliferation that allows inappropriate

development to occur. Planning and permitting processes that ask the wrong questions makes it worse not better. Tourism is about welcoming and hosting strangers. As an activity it is fundamental to the host culture. Aloha is an innate condition of Hawai'i people. So why this love-hate relationship with tourism? Because the business models have more often than not come at the expense of the communities in which it landed and the people who live there. The measures of success were narrowly defined. Basically job quantification and profit. Sustainable economic development must give equal weight to all three corners of the triangle. Pono. Balance. Triple bottom line. Here's a few questions that might be included in every EIS or planning and permitting application. I call it the *Pono Prism*. How does the activity make Hawai'i a better place? How does the activity create opportunities for prosperity for all segments of the community? How does the activity help connect the community's past to its future? How does the activity bring dignity to the community and the people who live around it? How does the activity insure that the people who live in and around it can continue to live there? When things are out of balance they are not "pono" and so there is cause for "ho'oponopono" - to restore the balance and make right. The time for ho'oponopono is now.