

OUR OPINION

Hoopili project fits goal for growth in West Oahu

THE ISSUE

A developer has proposed to build a 1,600-acre housing and commercial project in Ewa. A PROPOSED development of 1,600 acres in Ewa conforms to the city's desire to direct urban growth to West Oahu, but the project has a ways to go before residents can move in and businesses set up shop.

Called Hoopili, developer D.R. Horton's Schuler Division will first need the former sugar lands' reclassification from agriculture to urban use by the state Land Use Commission, a process that could take more than a year.

Should the commission approve, the developer envisions a pace of construction that stretches from five to 25 years, building an astonishing 11,700 homes, as many as five schools, a regional park, retail units and other commercial space.

The huge undertaking also requires surrounding communities to buy in to the project. The developer has sensibly solicited the ideas and concerns of residents who have seen traffic and other problems swell as other housing projects rose up around them.

The project is intended to replicate a small-town feeling by mixing business and residential units, most of them multifamily, instead of building bedroom communities where people drive to and from work and shopping malls.

Streets will be narrower to slow traffic, and emphasis will be placed on creating a community in which it is safe to walk and ride bicycles. Stores, restaurants, businesses, industrial areas and offices would provide employment opportunities so residents can stay closer to home.

Hoopili would blend with other development in the works, including a West Oahu campus of the University of Hawaii and residential plans by the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands.

It would fit in well with the city's mass transit project, which will run a line and transit stations through Hoopili, allowing residents an easier ride to town and back.

Reclassification of the land, now in cultivation of diversified crops, will be the project's initial hurdle, although the city's designation is urban. Another sticking point could be the availability of water resources.

As for infrastructure, developers say the city's expansion of the Honouliuli sewage plant would accommodate the project's needs. Moreover, its plans for building schools could help the Department of Education ease the district's shortage of classroom space.

When built out, Hoopili would be the among the largest planned communities on Oahu. Its effect on the housing and commercial markets, and its demand for power, water and safety services like police and fire will be significant. That said, the project's mixed-use configuration makes sense for an increasingly crowded island and sets a model for other development.