



**Date:** January 30, 2024  
**To:** Project Files  
**From:** Townscape, Inc.  
**Re:** Pololū Trailhead Management Plan – Community Meeting on the Draft Plan

**Meeting Attendees:** Meeting attendees were asked to sign-in via a sign-in sheet prior to entering the meeting venue. A total of 61 participants signed in. Participants from the consultant team included Gabrielle Sham, Rachel Kapule, and Sherri Hiraoka (Townscape, Inc.). The State Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) staff (Jackson Bauer and Steve Bergfeld) also attended the meeting.

This memo documents the in-person community meeting held on Tuesday, January 30, 2024 at the North Kohala Intergenerational Center. The purpose of the meeting was to share the Draft Plan for the trailhead, which included three alternative scenarios, and gather input from the community.

Gabrielle Sham started the meeting at 5:00 p.m. She and Ms. Kapule provided a slideshow presentation that highlighted key points of the Draft Plan. They gave an overview of the planning process, approach, issues, and vision for Pololū before sharing potential solutions and parking scenarios for the trailhead.

Questions and/or comments from participants are provided below. Comments were shared verbally as well as written down on the “Comment Form,” which were collected immediately after the meeting. Responses from the community meeting are shown in *italics*. Additional clarifications from the planning consultants are provided in red text.

- How much are you going to charge visitors for a parking reservation?
  - *To implement a fee for parking, we will need to revise the Nā Ala Hele Trail and Access Program rules first. DLNR DOFAW is currently working on a fee schedule, which will go out for public review in a couple of months. The fee will be about \$10 in order to be consistent with State Parks and Forestry rules.*
- In recent years, I experienced the reservation system in California. It was a really good experience. I feel really enthusiastic about the reservation system. But I wish that you were making more space for people with disabilities. The population of disabled is growing. You should have two handicap stalls instead of one. Unless there's a way that a space can be converted into a handicap stall if needed.
- How are you going to enforce the time limit for parking?
  - *We're probably going to be working with the trail stewards to do so. It's something that we still need to think about.*
- Commercial activities should be prohibited. Throw away the trail restoration idea. It's a trail it should be the way it has been. Don't mess with the trail.

- What about larger vehicles when they show up? Like 16-passenger vans? You haven't included that kind of traffic. How do you manage bikes, pedestrians, etc.?
  - *Who's arriving in passenger vans?*
  - Families and schools.
  - **We will consider bikes and pedestrians in the pre-final plan.**
  - **No groups larger than 10 are allowed at any one time. Commercial tours are restricted to 10 people total daily; no weekends and holidays allowed.**
- All scenarios amount to one scenario. There's no difference between them. It's a development plan not a management plan; you've labeled the plan incorrectly. What about hunters? We have a lot of hunters here in Kohala. What are the hours of operation?
  - *In the plan we are proposing longer hours, especially in the summer.*
  - **The scenarios are meant to just show alternative parking options. The solutions remain the same throughout all the scenarios.**
  - **Hunters are included in the cultural/special access at the trailhead.**
- What if people come in a 16-passenger van and just drop people off? Will they be allowed to hike down? We might have tour companies dropping people off.
  - *That would be considered a commercial tour. You would need a permit to do that.*
  - **DOFAW does not allow more than 10 people total per day for commercial permits. Weekends and holidays are prohibited.**
- How many commercial tour companies have you approved?
  - *One and they don't come very often.*
  - Lately there have been commercial groups that come on the BackRoads bicycle tour company.
- What about weddings?
  - *Weddings are not permitted on State land in Pololū. If they have permission from a private landowner in the valley, we can't control that.*
- I'm concerned about having just one handicap stall and how far it is from the trailhead. For those that are handicap, they should be as close as they can. What you're suggesting is far away.
- I don't have anything against some commercial activities. For example, a Hawaiian guy just selling coconut hats; he needs to make a living.
- Do you have any idea the cost of land acquisition for Surety's lands?
  - *We have engaged Surety in the planning process, they have seen these scenarios. They don't want to subdivide any parcels, only sell entire parcels. For the cost, we would have to get the land appraised. DLNR DOFAW can only pay the appraised value.*

- When 100 cars come down the road without reservations every day, at what point do you have a sign or turnaround for people who aren't aware? This is something you should be aware of.
  - **An educational outreach initiative will be essential to improving visitor awareness about the managed reservation system.**
- You said the whole reason for this was for residents to have more parking. But if a van comes and drops people off, they're not taking any parking space at all. Should we be turning them away? Is it fair for us to do that?
  - *I don't think it's just a parking issue. As a resident, if you limit the number of people, it's a better experience for you too.*
  - **A shuttle service dropping off visitors at the trailhead will be considered a commercial activity on lands under the jurisdiction of DLNR DOFAW, which requires a commercial permit from DOFAW. Commercial permits for Pololū do not allow more than 10 people total per day. Weekends and holidays are prohibited.**
- I think to the point of having to acquire large pieces of land, there was a creative solution earlier for a parcel consolidation re-subdivision. The small amount of land required for these scenarios could be acquired without having to purchase the whole parcel. There are ways to do that without it costing millions of dollars.
- My family owns land in the valley, when I go there, where am I going to park? Am I going to get turned away? We've been fighting gates and people keeping us out of the mountains. A lot happened with Surety putting up fences in 70s-90s. What do I get as a landowner?
  - *That would be included in special access.*
- Where I'm from, he's right. This management plan is a development plan. There will come times when his scenario is happening. This is nice and pretty but when the rubber hits the road it fails. The sting won't come to the people that fly here. People that come here to visit are tourism entitled. There is a huge difference between that and local rights.
- What about trucks with horse trailers?
  - **We will consider this in the pre-final plan.**
- I support some use by local residents. I wonder if there's other places in Hawai'i that has been challenged? Is it in place in other places in Hawai'i? I didn't hear any idea of having a ceiling of the number of people on the trail at any given time. Set a number, and just don't hit the ceiling.
  - *The elements of the reservation system and having visitors reserve online and pay a fee are inspired by other places already in place in Hawai'i, mostly State Parks. Like Hāpuna, Diamond Head on O'ahu, Hā'ena on Kaua'i, Hanauma Bay, and 'Akaka Falls. This is a system that's already in place and practiced by multiple agencies.*

- How far down do the horses go on the trail? [Question directed to Aunty Sarah]
  - [Aunty Sarah] All the way down.
- And that's cool by you? [Question directed to Aunty Sarah]
  - [Aunty Sarah] Yes, if they're hunting. Hunters go down earlier so that they don't have to deal with the crowd.
- Is that cultural as well?
  - *Yes. The current form of the trail is built as a mule trail. So folks can continue to use mules on the trail; it's considered customary and traditional practices.*
- Are you considering Pololū like a park? Pololū is not a park.
  - *No, we are not treating this as a park. State Parks, although a part of DLNR, is very different. What I meant is that the reservation systems and charging fees are similar to State Parks. Nā Ala Hele manages wildlife, trails, and animals for people, including access. Because these are resources, we need to allow cultural and traditional practices. We are not trying to restrict access. Our goal is to ensure that there is access. State Parks is more people centered. Nā Ala Hele is more resource centered.*
- Pololū has historical value.
- The parking lot is the only solution?
  - *Parking is the thing we can control. You have a right to go on the trails but not a right to park.*
  - *The management plan proposes a number of potential solutions, including continuing the trail steward program; providing portable toilets; re-designating the current lookout area for cultural/special access; dedicating parking spaces for Hawai'i residents; implementing a managed reservation system that is required for non-Hawai'i residents; and restoring and maintain the historic trail.*
- We're creating a parking lot for tourists. You're saying you're going to knock off that extra 400 visitors. That seems like a big chunk.
  - *At our last meeting in April 2023, a big takeaway was that there are too many people there, especially during those peak days. It does reach a point where it is too much.*
  - *The parking area is for both Hawai'i residents and non-Hawai'i residents. Vehicles currently parking on the side of the roadway are parking on private property.*
- You guys are going to cut off the parking? No parallel parking on the road anymore?
  - *Right, it would be restricted to the designated parking.*
- Right now, it's not illegal to park on the side of the highway. We don't get tickets.
  - *The County right-of-way is just the pavement. People parking on the side of the highway are parking on private property.*

- Unless you have permission from Surety, the landowner, to park on the side of the highway, then you are parking there without permission. At any point you could be ticketed and towed.
- So, 24 hours a day it will be illegal to park on the side of the highway?
  - Yes. Surety currently owns the side of the highway and they are trying to sell their land. The new landowner could enforce no parking.
- I go and hike down, I see when it's open and when it's busy. People come and go, they're not there all the time. To make that illegal for 24 hours, I don't think a lot of people would want that. That's what's making us come to this meeting. We don't want a restroom there, we don't want more parking. You guys are creating that no parking area.
  - Are you advocating for leaving the numbers as they are?
  - Yes. I see that shoulder part of the road open a lot of time. People come and they go. Maybe a few people are parking along that shoulder area. That's where I go to park.
- You're going to make that illegal to park along the shoulder? We're going to get ticketed if we come at 6pm?
  - Correct.
- Don't change anything. It's going to cost millions.
- What do the residents living near the trailhead say?
  - This plan was developed in close collaboration with the residents living near the trailhead.
- For ADA access, there are federal guidelines that must be adhered to. It's got to be close to there.
- It seems like you're creating 22 parking spaces. And 10 of them are available for locals.
  - That was just an example. In order for DLNR DOFAW to implement a reservation system, they have to own the land.
- I go out there quite often, some days I count almost 100 cars. All these people will have to turn around and go back. It looks like the problem is parking spaces and developing the area. What about people that already own the land? And developing a parking lot themselves.
- Will parking on the side of the road be illegal?
- If your scenario comes to fruition, it will be illegal to park on the side of the road?
  - Correct.
- Are you going to exterminate cattle in the valley? In the draft plan, it says that you want to eliminate the cows.
  - They're feral cows.

- The solutions presented in the draft plan do not include getting rid of the cattle in the valley. That was a comment from a community member that was included in the “Community Voices” section of the plan.
- Taking away access for Kohala residents is unacceptable. This is Kohala. I don’t see a scenario that says leave it alone. Where is that scenario. It’s being overlooked. Leaving it alone may actually prove to be uncomfortable for you. I live out in Niuli’i and I go across every single one of the bridges, I’m almost hit head-on daily. Your plan does nothing to address that. You call it a highway but there’s so many potholes. I’m very frustrated with your plan because it’s very misguided.
  - This management plan does not propose to take away access for Kohala residents; rather, it suggests to better manage the volume of non-Hawai’i residents to the trailhead. Dedicated parking spaces will be provided for Hawai’i residents, along with the cultural/special access space. A managed reservation system will reduce the number of non-Hawai’i residents to the trailhead at any given time, thus, the number of vehicles accessing the trailhead will also be reduced.
- Leave em as it is. The reason why we don’t go there is because the way it is now. We used to run from Pololū to second valley and back just to exercise. We used to go fishing there, hunting. Catch ‘o’opu during the big water. But we don’t go because the way it is. My sons like to go, but they no like go, because it’s a mess.
- Over the last few years, I was not a big fan of parking lot solutions for Pololū. I had an opportunity to go to Hā’ena back in November with the non-profit that stewards it. One thing that hasn’t been mentioned, there’s been a very big campaign of people that send information out so that visitors understand that they cannot just drive out there and expect to come to Hā’ena and have a parking. I think it changed my possibility of this. We have to work with the numbers. The people who live right there and have land in the valley need to be prioritized. There needs to be education for people that they cannot just drive out there for it to work.
- I don’t think any of the scenarios are sustainable. If you have the pressure of 600 people per day and two porta potties, it’s a temporary solution. You should look at a long-term solution. Eventually, you should separate the lookout from the trailhead; they’re two separate things happening. This community has long experienced purchasing coastal land for public space and access; there’s plenty land out there. Long term, these should be purchased. I agree with people who say we should do nothing. Long-term solutions should be a part of your report.
- What options have been looked at besides a parking lot? For instance, a shuttle system from Hāwī or Kapa’au.
  - *We did look at the shuttle service scenario. Hā’ena on Kaua’i does offer this experience. They said that to financially sustain it was hard. The community who we spoke to for Pololū were concerned about bringing more and more people in just to cover the cost of running the service.*

- I think it should be a public service, not private. That can be looked at. And you wouldn't be purchasing land.
- The shuttle would be for tourists.
- I just suggest educating the tourists. A lot ask me about Pololū valley. I suggest putting a laminated book about all of the dangers. Parking might not work. Do a trial first.
- I think the shuttle idea is great. I'm surprised it's not in your plan. It would save millions of dollars. Tourists would have to pay. Residents could just show a pass to ride the shuttle. And don't make it illegal to park at Pololū.
  - The shuttle service would require significant infrastructure development near the trailhead as well to provide the required accessible space to drop-off and pick-up visitors and for the shuttle to turnaround. In order to implement this turnaround and drop-off/pick-up space, acquisition of land owned by Surety would still be required.
- Education should happen on that shuttle on the way.
- It sounds like an overuse industry. Even if you move it to Hāwī and make them ride a shuttle. What would happen to Hāwī itself? Hāwī as it stands right now will change. Is that an appropriate change? To bus people in to Pololū? I think that's also something to consider. A lot of these scenarios that are getting thrown out, this is transitional. This does not sound like it's there yet.
- About shuttling people to the site, what if they get hurt? Who's responsible? The shuttle should be totally out of the question. If they hike down and get hurt, the shuttle will have left.
- Back to the shuttle issue, I know a couple business owners in Hāwī who would appreciate more business in town. Hāwī has no parking currently. But maybe a shuttle service could find parking. It could be a benefit to a lot of businesses and a lot of people. And get a lot of people off the street. Maybe there's a happy medium without spending millions of dollars.
- What about if residents have a sticker on their vehicle? And they can park at Pololū.
- The problem is attentiveness. They want 20-40 minutes of this and then they leave. You have two worlds colliding, and that's what you have to deal with. It's not economically advantageous to approach it like that. I think about Ka'ū and how that's changed over the years. Are you casting a wide enough net? I wonder if the plan is tight enough. This is a special place.
- I was born and raised here in Kohala. You heard the term "Keep Kohala Kohala"? If we keep bringing people here, they're going to run over the place. Not everyone comes with respect. Some people don't like to stop and listen to the trail stewards. If more people come in, Kohala is going to change. People who move here, don't try come and change

Kohala. The highway is named after my grandfather. I tell people about the stories of Pololū, that's the good guys. But we have to deal with the bad guys.

- Eō!
- Who's sitting down with Surety? They've been here a long time and made a lot of money. Why aren't they here? Are they in the room? I don't mean any disrespect, I just really want to know, they are just one of the elephants in the room, where are they at?
  - *We have met with Surety. They have seen all these scenarios, nothing different.*
  - *We've had public meetings over the years in Kohala. One of the meetings years ago they were willing to donate land for parking. Since this process is taking so long, they've told us time is of the essence. They're willing to participate in what the community decides on. They're trying to sell off all their agricultural lands. After saying they'd donate 5 acres, the community said they didn't want a parking lot. Now we came up with these scenarios.*
- The 5 acres they attempted to donate were not parkable. 2/3 of the land were swales, gulches, etc. It would take a lot of work to bring it up to standard. They also wanted something in return, that the community didn't want. And they pressured the community by saying we're out of here in 5 years. Surety is a huge, huge landowner. I just want to know what the price would be of the parking area? Surety is a serious part of the problem.
  - *We spoke to Surety. They are not looking to subdivide so we would have to buy the whole parcel.*
- We need to look long term. There are two kinds of people, the ones who just want to drive out there and look around. Make it possible for people to go to the left and build an area where people could really see all the valleys. Maybe go all the way out to the point. That seems like an obvious solution. Get these people moving.
- Maybe put a stairway down from the lookout on state land. Maybe a 5ft wide walkway and then a viewing area at the end.
- That wouldn't alleviate any of the parking problems.
- If there was a loop for people to drive around and keep on going, instead of just a dead end. Parallel parking seems crazy. It seems like there's so few parking spots in your design.
- Not too many people have been talking about the reservation system for non-residents. I think that's a good idea.
- What about a reservation system for non-residents plus a turnaround area for people who just want to get in and get out. That's much better than the current situation.
  - **Scenario C proposes a reservation system that is required for non-Hawai'i residents, and it allows vehicles to enter the mule station parcel to turnaround.**



The following comments were received via the “Comment Form” from meeting participants.

- Re: no parking on the side of the road → parking for residents only (maybe with sticker) or no parking from 8 am to 5 pm for example.
- Sign in Kapa‘au: no access to Pololū without reservation.
  
- Cost of parking – DLNR
- More ADA parking, 2 stalls, not one. Federal Law.
- Enforce time limit.
- Prohibit vending.
- Large parking spaces (trucks).
- Hunters?? Cultural.
- 22 million Surety? 20 acres?
- Sign to get reservation online.
- Special access for property owners.
- Development plan/not draft.
- Horse trailers cultural.
- DOCARE must consider HISTORICAL.
- 8 – 4 summer hours.
- Has Bennet been fully made known these three ideas.
  - We are unsure as to who you are referring to.