

Brewer to revise plans for Punalu'u expansion

HILO — C. Brewer & Co. has packed off its pending resort expansion at Punalu'u and is going to revise its plans, company officials informed the Hawaii County Planning Department last week.

Brewer ran into a storm of criticism at a public hearing held by the county Planning Commission last January after reviving its interest in Ka'u tourism.

Since then, little had been said about the resort until May, when Brewer withdrew its shoreline management application because of the criticism.

Then last week Leroy Uyehara announced Brewer has filed a preparation notice with the county that it is planning to do an environmental impact statement on its Punalu'u project.

In the 1970s, Brewer opened a resort golf course, tennis facility and a restaurant in Ka'u. But it halted its development before any hotels were started.

Uyehara is vice president of C. Brewer Properties, a subsidiary that owns and operates Punalu'u. By doing an EIS, Brewer will "ensure that the

resort can be properly integrated into the Ka'u community," he said.

The EIS will "cover the effects of site improvement and physical changes to the roadways and infrastructure at Punalu'u," Uyehara added in a prepared statement.

At January's hearing, Ka'u residents expressed concerns about roads that would be closed, asking about access for residential fishers and campers and expressing concern over possible blocked evacuation routes in the event of a tsunami.

The planning commission then voted to grant a request for a contested case hearing on Brewer's then-pending request to rezone 206 acres, relocate four holes on the Seamountain Golf Course and realign Punalu'u Road.

The preparation notice said Brewer intends to develop 500 to 600 hotel rooms, a commercial village with 65,000 square feet of commercial space and up to 500 residential units and to expand and "enhance" the existing Punalu'u Beach Park.

HAWAII TRIBUNE HERALD

8/3/86 SUNDAY

Vast changes in store for Ka'u?

Punaluu Resort expansion could shift district economy

PUNALUU — The sleepy district of Ka'u, a sparsely populated region larger in size than all of Oahu, could undergo an agriculture-to-tourism economic transformation similar to that seen in North and South Kohala in the 1970's, if C. Brewer has his way.

The headlines may be going to developer Christopher Hemminger's ultra-luxury Hyatt Regency Walkolua project, but Brewer plans to develop its Punaluu Resort with over 1,400 more units than the Hyatt.

And Brewer officials, previously hesitant to put a price tag on the Punaluu project, have now come up with a figure considerably in excess of the \$160 million Hyatt development.

"We have to be in the half-a-billion range, retail," said Levy

Uyehara, the Harvard-trained executive who is Ka'u area vice president for C. Brewer Properties, in an interview last week.

A key difference between the Brewer and Hemminger resorts is that the Hyatt's financing is already complete, while Brewer is seeking investors. Also, Hemminger plans to have completed his project by 1989, while the Brewer timetable extends as far as 2005.

But Brewer's plans — to build three major hotel properties and 1,300 multi-family condominium units — are grand by any standards.

And the Punaluu Resort expansion, which could create jobs for as many as half of Ka'u's adult population, portends a profound change for the isolated district, whose economic base consists of

sugar and macadamia nut plantations, and little more.

The resort, presently includes the 18-hole SeaMountains golf course, a 75-unit condominium, a conference center, tennis complex, restaurant and 19 single-family bungalow, employing about 70 people.

Brewer officials envision a resort with a 300-room "European style" hotel integrated into a 65,000-square-foot village commercial center, a 325-room hotel near a restored Ninole Cove and a 150-room hotel near the Punaluu Black Sand restaurant and beach. The multi-family condos would be slightly upslope from the coast.

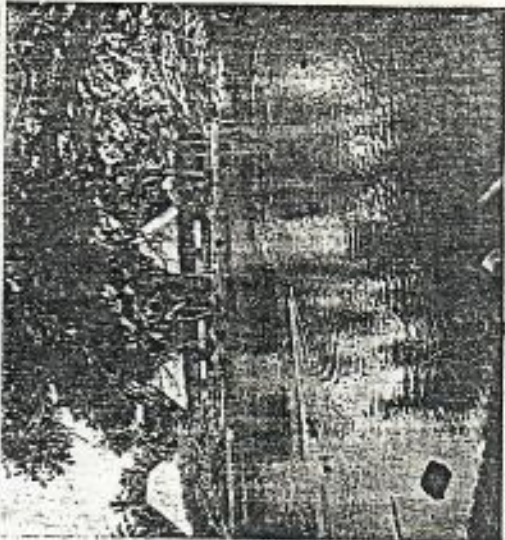
Uyehara said Brewer hoped to begin construction next year, after final regulatory approvals are granted by the Planning Com-

mission and the County Council. Brewer will give the Planning Department a draft environmental impact statement for the project this month, with public hearings on the EIS expected soon after.

When completed, the 630-acre resort would create "at least" 1,450 jobs, preferably for Ka'u residents, according to Uyehara.

"Ka'u has 4,100 residents spread over 620,000 acres. Unemployment is about 13 percent and it could be higher. And we have 600 students in the school system... Sugar and ranching are not doing well. With the resort, the dynamics of the community will change," Uyehara said.

The Brewer executive said See KA'U Page 10



—T.H. photo by Larry Cook/PH
KA'U CATALYST — C. Brewer's plans to build more than 2,000 hotel and condominium units in several phases at its Punaluu Resort could transform Ka'u's agriculture-based economy. Brewer associates say the resort expansion could create 1,450 or more jobs.

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effects were being redoubled to make sure Ka'u natives understand his company's plans.

"All communities fear what they do not understand. I take responsibility for the community knowing what it is we're attempting to do," Uyehara said.

"I've spent a lot of time in small presentations, to obtain the feelings and comments of the people. I think most of the people in this community support this project. They see it as mostly beneficial.... It's not just economics. It's the break-up of the

family unit (in Ka'u) that happens when people have to leave to find jobs."

Brewer has company in its plans to develop a Ka'u resort, though it is much further along in the planning and regulatory process than other potential developers.

Mt. Leihani has floated plans to develop a 500-acre resort north of Manuka Natural Reserve.

Another project, known as Hawaii Ka'u Aina, could include up to 1,200 hotel rooms and two golf courses.

By Chris Reed