

Successful Lobbying Results in Fewer Developments on O'ahu's North Shore

1,129 acres at Pupukea-Paumalu returned to State & City parks

By Michelle Slade

After battling a major Japanese corporation since the late 80's, lobbyists have been successful in saving more than 1,000 acres of land from development at Pupukea-Paumalu on O'ahu's North Shore, thanks to the efforts of multiple small organizations determined to prevent that fate.

The land, situated in the Kamehameha Highway and Sunset Beach Elementary School area between the COMSAT communications facility and the residential subdivisions of Pupukea Highlands and Sunset Hills, overlooks some of the most internationally renown surf beaches.

A Japanese development company called The Obayashi Corporation formerly owned the property. In the late 1980s, Obayashi produced a plan for the Lihi Lani subdivision, which included 315 one- to three-acre lots, 50 affordable housing units, stables, a campground and an 80-unit elderly housing site.

Despite community protest, in 1995 the City Council approved the company's plan, with conditions.

Intense lobbying ensued as the Save Sunset Beach Coalition and Life of the Land sued to block Lihi Lani. While a state judge rejected their challenge in 1998, and the Hawaii Supreme Court agreed in 2003 that the city had properly applied the law, the efforts of many small organizations fighting against the development worked to bide precious time.

In 2002, Obayashi retired from the project after spending millions to develop a plan and fight the lawsuits. Realizing it had to re-engineer its plan, Obayashi took stock of the situation. They realized that construction costs were on the rise, sales were uncertain and that more approvals would have to be sought so they put the land up for sale.

“Surfrider Foundation O’ahu was instrumental in supporting the lobbying efforts by helping with awareness emails, action alerts, and the donation of thousands of dollars,” states Scott Werny, O’ahu chapter member.

“We also kept the issue alive and were an important key to the victory, by introducing the involvement of Trust for Public Lands, and by initiating a conversation with Obayashi Corp, through our Japan chapter contacts.

This personal connection, along with singer Jack Johnson's trip to Japan to talk to Obayashi, all worked to a positive outcome," explains Werny.

Surfrider Foundation O'ahu worked alongside other organizations including Save Sunset Beach Coalition and Life of the Land, while the North Shore Community Trust and Trust for Public Lands took the lead in this major coup. Specific plans for the Pupukea-Paumalu land are yet to be finalized.

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PIC: pupukeapaumalu_1_nsl.jpg

CREDIT: Northshore Land

CAPTION: Proposed area, Pupukea Paumalu.

