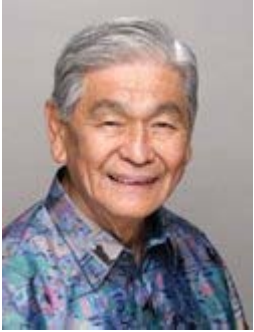


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Leadership Lessons

Save Turtle Bay? Yes!

GEORGE R. ARIYOSHI, GOVERNOR OF HAWAII 1973-1986



As a person who stuck my neck onto the political chopping block on behalf of preserving the windward and north shores of Oahu, I welcome the governor's recently stated desire to contain development and preserve open space on the island's northern tip at Turtle Bay.

No single idea about a strategically located piece of land could more influence the long-term character of the island of Oahu.

I wish her every success in her stated vow to acquire the Turtle Bay Resort area before her term is out. Because this will be so costly, it will require a sustained effort and widespread political support.

At the same time, her surprise statement in January's State of the State address is a reminder that a "good idea" can amount to little without a roadmap. Planning is needed to back up new initiatives. A plan creates a context in which the individual leader can take action. With a map, the twists and turns of public policy become more manageable and success becomes more likely.

When the owners of the Turtle Bay resort announced in 2006 their desire to build five new hotels, new amenities and condominiums, I took a position in this column flatly opposing such development. Their proposal, in my view, was based on outdated zoning that long since should have been trimmed back based on the overall pattern of development on Oahu and within the entire state. At that point the scale of the Turtle Bay proposal should have set off a meaningful search for ways to tailor the area to the public's needs and desires.

My own frame of reference was with the public's desire to save Windward Oahu from further development when I became governor in 1974. In response to an ever-widening controversy over growth management, we held many community meetings and also took extensive, rigorously honest surveys of public opinion. On that basis we were able to confidently champion a policy of preserving open space, agricultural lands and any land that was rural in nature.

With this as a foundation, I was able to weather the storm that resulted from my engaging in controversial land banking, most notably in Waiahole Valley but also in scenic spaces up and down the coast, such as Heeia Kea, Matson Point, Sacred Falls, Kaiaka Point and Malaekahana Bay.

As I often have tried to point out, at the time we had a much stronger long-range planning ethic at work throughout Hawaii. The Windward Oahu Regional Plan provided important information and experience for formulating the Hawaii State Plan.

My base of support for specific actions came not so predictably from the Legislature as from the public's underlying desire to preserve the character of the windward coast. In the years since, development increasingly has threatened the nature of the North Shore, and anti-development sentiment basically has turned the corner at Turtle Bay and gone up the coast. The recent crusades to preserve Waimea Valley and the Pupukea-Paumalu upland were driven by public sentiment, with most political figures trotting along behind.

Since the announcement of the Turtle Bay "five-hotels" plan, the same underlying public sentiment has asserted itself. In a word, that sentiment is "No" — no massive new development along the several miles of land where the windward shore and the North Shore meet.

Given all of this, we have an opportunity and a challenge. The governor's task is to devise an appropriate plan so people can work together to achieve what virtually everyone now wants. Given that cost estimates run from a half billion toward one billion dollars, given that complicated zoning issues are at work, and given that the resort must remain viable and somehow in private hands, this will be no small task.

If we had a proactive, goal-oriented planning process, the entire situation likely would be more manageable. But let us go on. Let us try. Let's find a way to make this work. In the process I hope we find a new agreement about the importance of long-range planning, in which we honor our feelings about the land and our desire to pass on a special heritage to future generations.