

APA Participating in State Land Use Review Task Force

**By Dean Minakami, AICP, APAHI Director-at-Large and
Legislative Analyst with the City and County of Honolulu**

Hawaii has a long history of land use planning, having enacted the nation's first land use law in 1961 with a purpose to "preserve, protect and encourage the development of the lands in the State for those uses to which they are best suited for the public welfare". The 1961 law, codified as Chapter 205, Hawai'i Revised Statutes, classified all land in the State into one of four districts (Urban, Rural, Agricultural and Conservation), and established the Land Use Commission as the body charged with administering the state-wide zoning system.

In the 1970's two key changes affected implementation of the State's land use law. Due to the Supreme Court's Town Decision in 1974, the Legislature mandated that the Commission adopt a quasi-judicial, contested case process for considering individual applications to redistrict lands and simultaneously eliminated the requirement for the Commission to conduct 5-year boundary reviews. Together, these changes turned the Commission away from comprehensive planning reviews and towards case-by-case rezoning actions.

In order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the State land use review process without compromising the original intent of the law, the State Office of Planning has convened a task force of diverse stakeholders to provide specific and implementable recommendations to the State Land Use Commission, Governor, and the Legislature. APA Hawai'i has been invited to be a part of the task force and Chester Koga and I have been attending task force meetings on behalf of the Chapter.

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Some of you may recall that about ten years ago the Chapter proposed reforming the State land use system in a policy paper titled “The Land Between” (see related posting). We are using this policy paper as the starting point for our recommendations to the Office of Planning, along with input received from members. We plan to have more meetings to obtain input from members so it's not too late to chime in if you missed the past meetings!