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## Column: Maui road leads to affordable housing

By Micah A. Kane • Today • Updated 12:26 am

An opportunity awaits us that could begin the journey of elevating Hawaii's people and place. It's the building of a simple road. And while its construction would lack the glamor of a new stadium or innovative facility and there would be no glitzy groundbreaking, its impact on Maui families could be profound. In fact, this simple road could catalyze affordable housing opportunities for local families at a scale Maui County hasn't seen for decades.

Infrastructure — roads and public utilities that include water, sewer, and electricity — is the foundation of a sustainable housing market. Eliminate any of these and the entire housing ecosystem falters. Over the past 40 years, Maui has not been able to build out this infrastructure and has instead placed the burden of paying for infrastructure on local homebuyers, which has resulted in the staggering home prices we see today.

For years, Hawaii has struggled to provide residents with opportunities for affordable housing. While the state has had some successes, housing costs — even those described as “affordable” — are typically beyond reach for many Hawaii families. It is undisputed that housing costs for Hawaii residents are impacting our families, our economy, and our community at large — and unfairly impacting those who need help the most.

Nowhere is this truer than on Maui, where the median price of single-family homes is the highest in the state at \$1.11 million. Even families that have managed to purchase or rent often struggle. On Maui, 24.2% of residents pay more than 50% of their household income towards housing, compared to 18% statewide.

Local working families are being priced out of Maui, forced to leave simply to survive. It is forecast that nearly 13,000 affordable homes will be needed for families making less than 140% of the area median income in Maui County by 2025. The lack of affordable housing threatens the social and economic fabric of the community.

Maui County, in partnership with the state Department of Transportation, is addressing this critical gap. It is pursuing a federal RAISE grant to help fund the Waiale Road Extension in Central Maui. If built, the extension would connect Waiale Road to Honoapiilani Highway, providing access to land for development and agriculture. Most importantly, it would mitigate development costs and make thousands of affordable housing opportunities available to local families. Eight affordable housing developments already planned adjacent to the Waiale Road Extension would yield 1,453 affordable homes.

The grant opportunity is part of the Biden administration's Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program, which aims to modernize infrastructure across the nation by making \$1 billion in funding available in fiscal year 2021 for transportation projects. A RAISE grant would provide up to \$25 million of the Waiale Road project's estimated \$35 million cost.

Pursuing this grant and building this road have the potential to set Maui on a course for sustainable growth — and provide a real solution to the need for affordable housing — for decades to come.

This isn't pie-in-the-sky thinking. It's already working on Oahu. Kualakai Parkway, which connects H-1 freeway and Kapolei Parkway in Kapolei, was the impetus for the so-called “second city” in West Oahu. Eighty percent federally funded, Kualakai Parkway helped spawn new housing developments (some affordable and some reserved for Department of Hawaiian Home Lands beneficiaries) as well as major institutional infrastructure projects, including University of Hawaii-West Oahu, Ka Makana Ali'i regional shopping center, a new public elementary and middle school, and the Kroc Center.

Real collaboration by the county, state and federal government and the private sector will lead us to lasting solutions to the affordable housing crisis we face today.

**Micah A. Kane is CEO/president of Hawaii Community Foundation, which launched the House Maui Initiative, bringing together community advocates for a sustainable housing market for Maui’s working families (see housemaui.com).**

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