

MANAGED RETREAT IN MAUI, HAWAII

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ABSTRACT

“Aloha” brings visions of paradise and hospitality to mind. Clean, un-crowded beaches, waves and surf, a diverse sunny tropical environment, and a warm friendly culture, have earned Maui the “Best Island in the World” 13 of the past 14 years by the Conde Nast Traveler Magazine. Many oceanfront resorts, condominiums and luxury homes are being built or rebuilt along Maui’s dynamic shoreline. But, the island’s shoreline can change rapidly in response to chronic coastal erosion and episodic erosion such as storms, high winds and large surf. Maui has lost 25% of its beaches since the 1950’s and those that remain are, on average, 25% narrower. Moreover, the island’s sandy shorelines are retreating inland an average of 1.1 foot/year.

Decision-makers and the public have realized that beach and sand resources are critical to Maui’s continued development as a destination. Recognizing the imprudence of relying on a one-size fits all approach to coastal development, Maui adopted shoreline rules that consider site specific factors to determine building setbacks and construction methods on oceanfront properties. The rules use previous shoreline positions and site-specific erosion rates to determine acceptable locations for new building construction.

Moreover, the rules incorporate the idea of managed retreat, where post & pier buildings are relocated over time or site redevelopment moves inland. A number of tourist accommodations in Maui are dated and/or slated for renovation. Bigger rooms, spacious views, loftier ceilings, greater energy efficiency, and more attractive materials are part of the trend in resort facility upgrades, renovations and building replacement. Hotels, condominiums and resorts contemplating large capital investments in their facilities offer an opportunity to capitalize on the benefits, both environmental and financial, of managed retreat. Through the coastal permitting process, Maui County has been successful in having oceanfront structures removed at several large resorts during their redevelopment. Thus, managed retreat offers an opportunity to avoid coastal hazards, improve public access, and retire coastal lands in a cost effective manner.

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