

## **Parking Public Meeting Notes**

**11/15/24**

Maria (Meeting Facilitator):

- Family law, real estate law

### **Meeting Overview:**

- Save Kona town from becoming a ghost town
- Culture is at stake
- Standing up for community, access to the shoreline, equity issue (people of all means should be able to come downtown)
- Parking prices are unreasonable
- Quality of life issue, not just an economic issue
- Many locals feel priced out of their town
- Small businesses are struggling
- Many locals are boycotting downtown because of the parking prices, but the small businesses are the ones suffering
- This is an urgent situation for small businesses
- Community is united on this issue
- Number of vacancies in the major Ali'i shopping centers is high
- Tourists are also complaining online and to local business owners
- \$25/ hour in some lots due to surge parking
- Explanation of how the parking ticketing works
- Workers are having to park in the Safeway lot and walk to their place of employment
- Server tips are declining because of people paying for parking
- Everyone is indirectly impacted
- We have the power to improve this situation
- Thank Rebecca Villegas for attending the meeting
- Other government officials were invited and are interested in seeing the video/ notes of the meeting
- Rules: Conduct the meeting with Aloha, explain meeting format
- Reminder about Facebook Group "Fix Paid Parking in Kona"

Julie – 365 Kona:

- Intro, parade, social media (people not coming downtown because of paid parking)

Derrick – Papa Kona's Restaurant Owner

- Opened October 2019, survived covid
- Mid-2022 revenues dropped
- 30% reduction in sales
- Clients not willing to spend \$40 to park on top of \$30 meal
- Coming to Kona since teenager, coffee farm, travel back and forth, retired now and seen so many changes in Kona town; used to be much livelier than today.

Chris - Woodworking business in Ali'i Gardens, new shop in Kona Market Place

- No idea about parking situation until opening his business on Ali'i
- Attended Derrick's first meeting

Julie:

Synopsis of the Parking issue

- 1978 – Kona Inn was given parking spaces for their business (250 from city and county) – now the Kona Farmer's Market
- Paid parking has been in town for a long time (Diamond Parking)
- 2 Years ago (post-covid), some parking lots started becoming paid, this pushed cars to other parking lots, which made it difficult for actual customers to park, this caused most parking lots to go to paid parking Parking Prices inflated greatly
- Private property issue is important, but surge parking made it such that people didn't even know what they'd be paying
- Surge parking is a tactic on other islands as well
- What parking spots could be available if the county opened up land?
- 3 kinds of parking: private, archeological sites downtown, zoning

Chris

- Work with business owners to solve affordable parking
  - Checked prices at 4:30 pm on a Monday (\$7, \$12.50 - \$17.50, with handicap spaces being most expensive)
  - Counted parking spaces to see how full the lots were; busiest lot was just over 50%, but most were empty at about 8%
  - Interviewed business owners. Many business owners are reluctant to speak up due to worries about retaliation in their leases; also worried about losing that if they speak up.
  - Talked with locals (~50), 4% take advantage of the 90 min. free parking, most don't because they don't want to give their driver's license info to a private company on the mainland
  - Define Problems:
    - 1) Locals don't feel welcome in their own town
    - 2) Business owners have to pay a lot to park at their own businesses
      - § Parking for 2 owners and 2 employees is close to the base lease (example); the parking company is willing to work with them on this to be fair, but there shouldn't be a situation where it costs so much to park at their own businesses
- Ali'i Garden Market Place
- § Talked to visitors there
  - § Overwhelmingly, tourists reported that they were there due to free parking
  - § Chris's business makes 5x more at Ali'i Gardens than his downtown business
- 3) This is not a black and white issue

- § If lots are completely free, locals leave their cars all day and tourists park overnight to avoid resort parking fees
- § If free and unregulated, who is going to provide security to these lots?
- § We need to look down the line at what problems come with free parking

#### Derrick (Meetings with business owners to look for solutions)

- Owner of Papa Kona and entrepreneur in various companies
- Look for creative solutions among all the constituencies
- Employ 90 people at Papa Kona, many over 5 years
- When people leave, they mainly state it is because parking is too expensive for the \$25/hr they make; they have to Park at Safeway and don't feel safe walking so far to their cars late at night
- Parking passes are available to management staff, but not possible to purchase for all employees (\$100 per pass)
- Business was good in 2022 in the post-Covid boom; that was short lived. Locals stopped coming, and tourists were on a tight watch because of the parking timing; Tourists are opting for Waikoloa instead to avoid parking hassles in Kona
- Local businesses are suffering, and tourists are being driven up to Waikoloa instead

#### Possible Solutions:

- 1) Ordinance that puts a cap on parking price and this is the same across all lots
  - § \$2/\$3/\$5 – Nobody agreed to \$5, most supporters (~80%) were reluctantly ok with \$2; ~50% were ok with \$3
    - This is just to gauge where the parking fees need to be get people back downtown
  - § Several people stated having less of an issue with the price and more of an issue with giving their personal information; 100% of attendees are not comfortable sharing their personal information
  - § What about a daily cap?
    - Need both
  - § What's the value of what you are getting for parking?
- 2) Annual parking pass for locals (Need locals to come to town for a sense of community)
  - § Pay x dollars a year and can go whenever for as long as desired (50-60% of people supported this)
  - § \$40/ car - most people ok with this, \$80/ car – few people ok with this
  - § \$100/ year for a transferrable permit between vehicles owned by the same family is an absolute limit
  - § (Question) – Why can residents be free at Kahalu'u?
    - This is an issue between the difference in public vs. private property
  - § A lot of people want it to return to all free parking as it used to be

- 3) Public vs. Private parking lots/ Spaces that could become available for downtown, but there are different ownership structures in all of them
  - § How do we arrive at fair solutions for everyone (private lot owners, business owners, locals, tourists, all user groups)
  - § Explanation of possible extra parking/ map and pros/ cons of different areas

**Solution Discussion to solicit ideas from the attendees** (2-minute limit per speaker)

**Attendee #1**

- Local Business Owner (near Triangle Lot)
- Severe loss of revenue, nearest lot is the county triangle lot, houseless encampments, vehicles parked and left, needs to be repainted to accommodate more spaces

**Attendee #2:**

- Eminent Domain to acquire the lots
- If we don't feel we can win, this won't even start
- Need to be willing to fight the county

**Rebecca Villegas (District 7 Representative for Hawai'i County)**

- Proud of the community for showing up tonight
- Humbly remind everyone that everyone here is the "county"
- Elected officials may be the leadership, but everyone in the room is the "county"
- New mayor will be inaugurated in a month
  - § Will focus more on Kona
- Commodification of parking is the problem
  - § Cited zoning code and requirements for parking spots; if it doesn't say they can't charge, they can do it again many years down the line
- Dedicated and committed to finding out if there is an ordinance that can be passed
- Landlords are making decisions based on P&L statements and spreadsheets – just numbers
- Kona is a village
- Need to protect our community and values of the village to take care of one another
- \$3/ hour is a great price – this is what Waterfront Row used to be and is doable
- Here to support the initiative

**Attendee #3:**

- Be realistic that at \$3/ hr, you'll never get a parking spot (supply-demand)
- Employees will take all the parking spots; they get to work early and they will get the spots that are inexpensive
- \$20/ hr will get anyone a spot at any time
- Need to be realistic. Need more spots, not price control

**Attendee #4:**

- Need services and protection
- Occupancy rate is very low, so not a win for lot owners
- Charge a lower rate so we can all win together

#### Attendee #5

- Old Airport Parking Lot (500 spots)
- The city should take it over, repave it and fix it
- The workers in downtown businesses could be bussed from there to places of business, this would open many parking spaces for locals and tourists
- Old Airport had money set aside to repave and refurbish the facilities, but the money went away (Rebecca clarified that this funding is still allocated for those improvements)

#### Attendee #6

- Kamiana discounts should be consistent across all parking lots and allow people to come and go in the same day

#### Attendee #7

- Lives next to Coconut Grove (9 years)
- Beware not to have a mob mentality on this (but big fan of the mob support on this issue)
- Price needs to be controlled to be reasonable, but we shouldn't be infringing on private property rights

#### Attendee #8

- Lower taxes on the property owners of the lots so the cost of parking goes down for users

#### Attendee #9

- Open up Hale Halawai parking lot, county manages it during events
- Add 50 diagonal stalls along Hualalai Rd; repurpose what we already have

#### Attendee #10

- Employee lot
- Other lots for swimming at the pier and other activities that don't require commerce in the community
- 90-minute free parking, validation with restaurants instead of having to use Parking
- Be able to renew if there is a waitlist that will take up much of the 90 minute validation

#### Attendee #11

- Airport parking was improved; look to their model for improvements

#### Attendee #12

- Build 2-3 level parking garages with solar panels on top to increase revenues

#### Attendee #13

- Representative for Jack's Diving Locker
- County should offer a tax incentive for businesses to validate customers and offset costs for security
- 16 spots for employees
- Venture capitalist learned they could make over \$1M for parking
- Wiki bus (paid security) to get employees safely to where they parked

#### Attendee #14

- Speaking for visitors
- Art gallery owner
- You can shop and park at Target and uber into town
- Just keep coming to town to support businesses there – that's the most important for now

#### Attendee #15

- Need solutions for users that aren't coming to businesses, but rather to use the bay, watch sunset, swim, etc. – we need to account for these users

#### Attendee #16

- Sad to see the age group here; not many families
- Many families can't afford to come down to the village anymore
- Really important to create a parking lot for employees; had experience with her lot being entirely used by another business's employees

#### Attendee #17

- Need compromise
- Tax breaks to small business owners who validate parking for their customers
- All business owners could come together to negotiate pricing for their employees
- Annual pass, also monthly, weekly, day passes to accommodate visitors
- Where can new ideas get posted? (Fix Paid Parking in Kona Facebook Group)

#### Attendee #18

- Utilize the parking at Old As with assistance from the county to have a regular free shuttle (example in Oahu)
- Hale Halawai parking lot; during festivals, all vendors have access to parking there
- County really needs to step up to the plate, get us a shuttle from Old A.s

#### Attendee #19

- Free days, especially when there are community events (parades)
- Parking should not be more expensive than what servers/ employees make per hour

#### Attendee #20

- Pancho Lefties
- Paid parking is impacting business

- Free day once a month
- \$3-4/ hr is fine, but we need free parking for employees; employees should not have to pay to come to work
- Create an employee parking lot

### **Meeting Wrap-Up**

- Subcommittee to continue helping on this issue
- Pass around the QR code for the Kailua Village Parking Community Volunteers
- Kailua Village Business Alliance
- Fix Paid Parking in Kona Facebook Group – Post new ideas!!
- Sign the Petition, post the QR code at business locations

### **Next Steps (Julie)**

- Get the new mayor involved (he will be inaugurated on December 2<sup>nd</sup>)
- Provide notes to the mayor
- State representatives are interested in getting involved
- Follow-up public meeting with Rebecca and the Mayor in a larger space
- Investigate the possibility of a bond measure to pay a little in taxes to build a parking structure?
- Suggestion to collect donations to organize and help this effort

*Estimated Attendance: 250 people*