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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION, BUSINESS, & MILITARY

Rep. August L.K. McKelvey, Chair

Rep. Isaac W Choy, Vice Chair

HB 2217

RELATING TO THE OFFICE OF PLANNING

Hawaii's Thousand Friends, a statewide non-profit land and water use planning organization, supports HB 2217 that establishes the planning special fund for personnel costs and operations of the Office of Planning.

Ever since the Office of Planning (OP) was moved from the Governor's office this vital agency has been treated as the proverbial stepchild out of sight, out of mind. The latest blow was the recent elimination of seven positions including three land use planners leaving the agency with a bare-bones staff.

In addition, there were attempts to eliminate federally funded positions from the Coastal Zone Management Program (CZM), which is embedded in OP. Unfortunately the CZM program manager position was eliminated leaving a void. The intent was for the OP director to manage both the Office of Planning and the Coastal Zone Management Program, a highly specialized position, for which the current director is not qualified. Fortunately, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which funds the CZM program, knows how critical it is for our island state to have a qualified, knowledgeable, and dedicated CZM program director and is temporarily funding that position.

The Office of Planning was established to look after the State's interest and public trust responsibilities and "works to maintain an overall framework to guide the development of the State through a continuous process of comprehensive, long-range, and strategic planning to meet the physical, economic, and social needs of Hawaii's people, and provide for the wise use of Hawaii's resources in a coordinated, efficient, and economical manner - including the conservation of natural, environmental, recreational, scenic, historic, and other limited and irreplaceable resources which are required for future generations."

The three main objectives of OP are: 1) Fix responsibility and accountability to successfully carry out statewide programs, policies and priorities; 2) Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the operations of the executive branch; and 3) Ensure comprehensive planning and coordination to enhance the quality of life of the people of Hawaii.

Under the past director and with funding from the legislature the Office of Planning proceeded with the GIS Program to lead a multi-agency effort to establish, promote, and coordinate the use of geographic information systems (GIS) technology among State Government agencies. OP is responsible for the planning and coordination of activities that are critical to the State's GIS with the goal to improve overall efficiency and effectiveness in government decision-making.

OP is mandated to undertake a review of the classification and district of all land in the State every five years in order to emphasize long-range planning in the land use decision-making process. (HRS 205-18) The last five-year boundary review was completed in 1992 and has not been mentioned since.

When asked if OP could fulfill all its responsibilities with the new bare-bones staff it was acknowledged that some projects may fall through the cracks or face automatic approval. Too much is at stake to let that happen or become the norm.

We urge the committee to pass HB 2217 enabling OP to be self-sufficient and not be subject to the whims of each administration.