

# MAUI COUNTY GENERAL PLAN 2030

## MAUI ISLAND PLAN

### Rural Areas Technical Issue Paper



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# Rural Areas Technical Issue Paper

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Rural lifestyle, Settlement Patterns, and Infrastructure .....	2
Environmental and Cultural Resources .....	2
Existing Planning and Regulatory Controls.....	3
Major Threats.....	4
Key Opportunities.....	6
Works Cited .....	12

## List of Tables

Table 1: State and County Regulatory Controls for Rural Lands.....	3
Table 2: and Alternative Minimum Street Pavement Widths.....	8



## INTRODUCTION

Rural and agricultural lands are inextricably linked by way of their physical, economic, and cultural connections. The traditional role of most rural communities is to provide support for surrounding agricultural activities. Rural communities and agricultural activities evolved to form a symbiotic relationship in which each land use provided and received benefits from the other. Rural areas continue to supply agricultural operations with labor, commercial and civic services, and a local market for agricultural goods. Conversely, agricultural areas provide rural communities with employment opportunities, local agricultural products, and a connection to a rural lifestyle. The strong linkages between rural and agricultural areas dictate that policies implemented regarding one of these areas must consider the consequences and implications for the other. Rural lands do not only include rural zoned areas, but rather a mix of rural and agricultural lands within which rural activities and land uses occur.

## RURAL LIFESTYLE, SETTLEMENT PATTERNS, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Traditional rural lifestyle and settlement patterns are distinct from those of urban and suburban areas and are a product of the strong connection between rural and agricultural land uses. Rural settlement patterns typically consist of small towns, low density residential development, open space, and agricultural landscapes. Rural towns are walkable, contain human scale buildings, cater to the everyday needs of residents, and generally include an identifiable main street. Expanding out from the town's center, rural roads follow the natural topography of the landscape and residential development gives way to small and large scale farming and ranching operations. Open space in rural areas is composed of a mix of unaltered natural lands and productive agricultural lands.

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*The rural lifestyle is characterized by a slower and quieter pace of life in which neighbors know each other and as a whole the community is relatively self-sufficient.*

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Rural areas inherently possess a lower set of standards for infrastructure and public services than urban areas typically possess. Within rural areas, infrastructure and public services such as paved roadways, traffic control, trash removal, telecommunications, emergency response, and utilities are provided at a lower service level standard. Not only are reduced levels of service a key characteristic of the rural lifestyle; they are also an important element of achieving aesthetic and environmental objectives in the countryside.

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*Living in a rural area provides a lifestyle that comes with benefits as well as tradeoffs in the form of reduced infrastructure and services.*

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## ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

With a mix of natural landscapes and productive agricultural lands, rural areas often possess a high concentration of environmental resources and natural processes. Streams, wetlands, floodplains, forestlands, steep slopes, and wildlife are defining natural features of many rural landscapes. These natural resources provide numerous services and benefits to rural communities and also place constraints on rural development. Rural landscapes also contain important local and regional cultural resources which represent the history and culture of the area. These resources include a mix of historic structures, archaeological sites, and important cultural lands. Cultural resources are often tied to the agricultural activities in the area and offer a connection to the area's past.

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*Rural areas possess a high concentration of environmental resources, natural processes, and important cultural lands.*

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The parallel evolution of rural and agricultural areas on Maui has resulted in a distinct countryside which is important to both regional and island residents. With a mix of small country towns, productive agricultural lands, natural landscapes, and cultural resources, Maui's rural areas possess a unique character and provide a strong sense of place. Maui's rural lands connect us to the past and tell the tale of taro cultivation, the traditional Hawaiian ahupuaa system, small and large-scale farming, and the paniolo and ranching. However, with increasing growth pressure and limited planning and regulatory controls, the identity and productivity of

these areas are in jeopardy. A challenge facing Maui County is to guide future growth in a manner that preserves and perpetuates agricultural, natural, and cultural resources, and the unique Maui country character and lifestyle.

## **EXISTING PLANNING AND REGULATORY CONTROLS**

Land use in rural areas is governed by a combination of State and County planning and regulatory controls. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the State and County regulatory controls which guide development of rural lands on Maui.

**Table 1: State and County Regulatory Controls for Rural Lands**

	<b>Regulation</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Description</b>
<i>State</i>	<b>Rural District</b>	The State Land Use Law (Chapter 205, Hawaii Revised Statutes) establishes an overall framework of land use management whereby all lands within the State are classified into one of four Districts: Urban, Rural, Agricultural, and Conservation.	State Rural Districts allow for activities and uses characterized by low density residential development and small-scale agriculture. The minimum lot size for residential development within State Rural Districts is one-half acre.
<i>County</i>	<b>Rural District</b>	County regulatory control over rural lands stems from the County Zoning Ordinance (Chapter 19.29, Maui County Code). The purpose of rural districts is to allow for low density development which preserves the country character of the area, allow for small-scale agricultural operations, and serve as a transition between urban density development and agricultural lands.	Within RU-0.5 rural districts, the minimum lot area is one-half acre, where as in RU-1 rural districts, the minimum lot area is one acre.
	<b>Country Town Business District</b>	The purpose of the County Town Business District Ordinance (Chapter 19.15, Maui County Code) is to preserve the unique urban design character of Maui’s more remote business districts and promote the “country town” atmosphere of these areas.	The County Town Business District Ordinance establishes development standards for businesses in rural communities.
	<b>Agricultural District</b>	The purpose of the agricultural district (Chapter 19.30A, Maui County Code) is to promote agricultural development, preserve and protect agricultural resources, and support the County’s agricultural economy and lifestyle.	The minimum lot size allowed in the County agricultural district is based on the size of the lot being subdivided. The smallest lot size permitted is two (2) acres and can be as large as 40-acres for very large parcels. The intent of the Agricultural District is to reduce land use conflicts, mitigate rising property values of farm lands, discourage nonagricultural subdivisions, and preserve large contiguous areas of agricultural land.

## MAJOR THREATS

Population growth, subsequent development pressures, and decreasing agricultural activities have initiated a shift within Maui's rural landscapes. Originally, this landscape comprised a traditional mix of small country towns, limited residential development, productive agricultural operations, and natural lands. However, during the last three decades the character of this landscape, stretching from Haiku to Ulupalakua and beyond, has experienced a marked increase in exurban, land-consumptive, non-agricultural residential development. Key threats to the character and integrity of Maui's rural landscapes are summarized below:

⇒ ***Limited State and County Regulatory Controls***

The majority of land use issues within the rural landscape stem from shortfalls with existing State and County regulatory standards. Regulatory standards established by the State and County rural districts do not adequately protect the character of existing towns, rural resources, lifestyles, and heritage resources. The one acre and one-half acre minimum lot sizes permitted within the County rural districts are not compatible with rural character, but rather produce a landscape pattern more appropriately identified as urban large lot residential. The lack of site analysis and open space requirements has led to the fragmentation of wildlife habitat, disruption of natural processes, and development in inappropriate areas such as steep slopes and floodplains.



Despite the purpose and intent of the County agricultural district, rural development does occur within this district. With a minimum lot size of two acres, Maui's agricultural lands, primarily Upcountry, have experienced a large amount of non-agricultural residential development. In 1999, the County adopted the Agricultural Zoning Ordinance, which dramatically reduced the subdivision potential of agricultural lands.

While the Agricultural Zoning Ordinance has helped to discourage the fragmentation of larger agricultural parcels, residential type development is still occurring on smaller agricultural parcels.

***Ultimately, the urbanization of the countryside will threaten the long-term viability of agriculture, and the very qualities and resources that make these areas unique and desirable.***

Sprawling residential development quickly converts agricultural lands and open space to a more urban or suburban landscape which does not belong in rural and agricultural areas. With Maui's growing population and the strong appeal of the idealized rural lifestyle, more and more people are moving to the countryside. However, with every non-agricultural land use or residential dwelling that is introduced to rural areas, the more urban in character these areas become.

With increasing market demand to develop agricultural lands, many farmers are enticed into selling their land, gradually phasing out agricultural operations and paving the way for more residential development. Higher land prices also make it considerably more expensive for existing farmers to expand their operations by acquiring new lands, or for new farmers to acquire the lands necessary to launch their operations. Land use conflicts also tend to arise when residential lots are permitted within close proximity to agricultural operations due to common agricultural nuisances such as noise, dust, and foul odors. Even though the agricultural activity was generally established prior to the residential development, the ensuing land use conflict can often result in negative consequences for the farm owner.

⇒ ***Urban-like Infrastructure and Services in Rural Areas***

In addition to limited land use regulations, the County's infrastructure standards are a threat to rural areas. The County's minimum road widths and sidewalk and lighting requirements are inappropriate in rural areas. The urban-like nature of these requirements diminish the small-scale, rugged country atmosphere of rural lands. Pavement standards for roads and parking lots increase chances for flooding and negatively impact an area's hydrologic balance. Additionally, urban-like infrastructure and public services are inappropriate in rural areas because of the elevated cost of providing these services to such sparsely populated regions.

⇒ ***State Reclassification of Agricultural Lands to State Rural District***

As previously discussed, non-agricultural residential development has occurred within the State and County agricultural districts for many years, primarily on smaller sub-dividable lots. The State is currently considering reclassifying non-prime agricultural lands to the State Rural District as a means of addressing the discrepancy between permitted uses and the actual development pattern on agricultural lands. If implemented, this reclassification could spark requests from affected landowners within the County agricultural district to have lands reclassified to the County rural district. With the current one-half acre minimum lot size and urban-like County infrastructure standards, the State reclassification could lead to an expansion of the rural sprawl occurring in Upcountry Maui. Such development could further impact



the agricultural industry and place a considerable burden on fiscal resources to service this expensive development.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Numerous opportunities exist for the County to address the current problems and key threats facing rural and agricultural lands. The ex-urban rural sprawl taking place in rural areas is a physical demonstration of existing County zoning, subdivision requirements, and infrastructure standards. The following discussion offers several opportunities for addressing the threats to rural and agricultural lands. While many of the recommendations can stand alone, a combination of the following approaches should be implemented to guide rural growth in a sustainable manner.

⇒ ***Develop a  
Directed Growth  
Strategy***

Implementation of a directed growth strategy to guide growth to areas suitable for development and away from areas that are inappropriate for development is an important strategy to reduce the encroachment of urban development into rural areas. Key elements of the directed growth strategy are described below.

1. **Urban Growth Boundary (UGB):** An UGB delineates the physical extent to which an urbanized area will be allowed to grow. The UGB takes into account future growth projections, the availability of infrastructure and services, and an appropriate density of land development to determine the placement of the boundary. Land outside of the UGB is intended to remain rural in character with a strong agricultural and natural resource presence.
2. **New Towns/Urban Expansion:** Identifying new towns and urban expansion areas is a key element of a directed growth strategy and is closely linked to establishing UGBs. Communities can identify areas appropriate for urban development, which economize on infrastructure and services and avoid important natural and agricultural areas. Designating these areas as developable accommodates future growth while achieving preservation of rural lands.
3. **Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)/Purchase of Development Rights (PDR):** TDR and PDR programs have the ultimate goal of protecting agricultural land, environmentally sensitive areas, open space, or other significant regions. TDR allows a landowner to sell some or all of the development rights to a piece of property which the community desires to preserve to a property owner that owns land in

a designated receiving area where development is desired. PDR is a voluntary program through which a non-profit land trust or local government agency makes an offer to a landowner to buy the development rights on a parcel of land. Once an agreement is made, a permanent deed restriction is placed on the property, limiting the type of activities that may take place on the land in perpetuity.



- 4. Growth Policy Statements:** A directed growth strategy should also include establishment of strong growth policy statements which clearly identify the manner in which a community desires to grow in the future. These policies should be founded on the values and goals of the community and should compliment the other elements of the directed growth strategy.

⇒ ***Establish Rural Infrastructure System and Public Service Standards***

County infrastructure system and public service standards must reflect the distinct differences that exist between the needs of urban and rural areas. Creating strong policy statements regarding levels of service for rural infrastructure and services will guide development in rural areas in a manner that complements the character of the countryside. Levels of service for infrastructure and public services should protect public health and safety and the environment, be financially supportable at rural densities, and should not sustain or encourage urban development. Rural infrastructure design should support its intended function and be in balance with the area's character, land use, and density. See Table 7-3 for an example of appropriate street pavement widths for rural and agricultural areas

Table 2: and Alternative Minimum Street Pavement Widths

Type of Street	<u>District Standards</u>			
	Urban	Rural	Agricultural	Alternative (for R & A)*
<u>Collector</u>	36'	24'	22'	20'
<u>Minor</u>	28'	22'	20'	18'
<u>Cul-de-sac</u>	28'	22'	20'	18' (if permitted at all)
<u>Radius for Cul-de-sac</u>	35'	35'	35'	30'
<u>Deadend Street serving not more than 8 lots</u>	28'	28'	28'	<u>Country Lane</u> serving up to 12 lots: 18' gravel surface  <u>Common Drive</u> serving up to 6 lots: 16' gravel surface

\* Arendt, Randall. 1994. *Rural By Design*. American Planning Association Planners Press. Chicago, Illinois.

⇒ ***Utilize Rural Planning Tools and Techniques***

Implementing a combination of rural planning tools and techniques allows local authorities to positively influence the form of future development and mitigate its impact on the rural landscape. The following discussion summarizes two useful techniques:

1. **Low Impact Development (LID)**: Conventional storm water management focuses on quickly conveying all runoff to a centrally located management devise. This conventional method alters the hydrologic conditions of an area by reducing the dispersed absorption of storm water across the landscape and channeling the water to an offsite location. Utilizing LID strategies as an alternative to conventional storm water management encourages a decrease in land and hydrologic disturbances. LID attempts to mimic predevelopment site hydrology by reducing off-site runoff and ensuring adequate groundwater recharge.
2. **Conservation Subdivision Design (CSD)**: Applying the conventional subdivision process to rural lands typically results in low-density residential development which alters the natural landscape and can negatively impact community character. CSD offers an alternative approach to regulating the subdivision process on rural lands. This alternative allows for

the clustering of development within a portion of a site while the remainder of the land remains undeveloped and protected. Development potential is not taken away from the developer; rather it is concentrated within a smaller portion of the parcel allowing for the simultaneous preservation of agricultural land and open space.

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Source: The Center for Rural Massachusetts

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***Applying the conventional subdivision process to rural lands results in low-density residential development which alters the natural landscape and can negatively impact community character.***

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### **CSD Principles and Techniques:**

1. Conduct a detailed site assessment to ***identify important natural resources, cultural sites, and productive agricultural lands.***
2. Design and preserve open space to ***maximize the health of natural systems and the***

*productivity of agricultural lands, and contribute to an inter-connected network of open space throughout the community.*

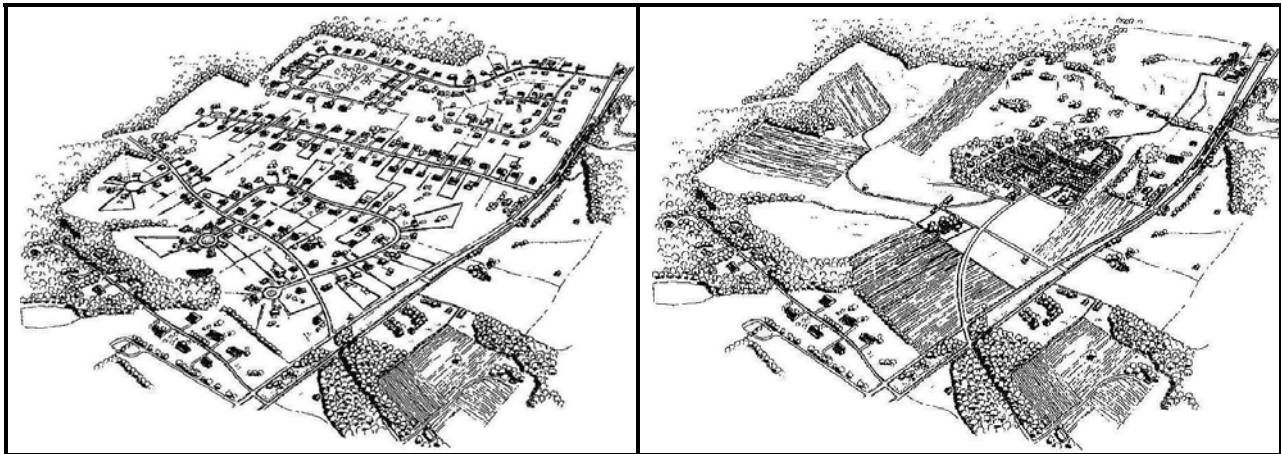
3. *Cluster development on the most appropriate portion of the site according to site assessment.*
4. *Allow for flexible and creative alignment of buildings, lots, and roads which result in a site design of the built area which compliments the rural character of the region.*
5. *Maintain development potential of parcel while reducing the extent of costly infrastructure.*



Source: The Center for Rural Massachusetts

*Conservation Subdivision Design allows for the clustering of development and the preservation of open space.*

### *Conventional Subdivision Design vs. Conservation Subdivision Design*



Source: *Rural By Design*

**CSD offers an alternative approach to designing rural subdivisions which reduces environmental impacts, promotes agriculture, minimizes the need for costly infrastructure, and preserves community character.**

⇒ ***Utilize Rural as a Town Planning Tool***

Revisions to the County Rural Zoning Ordinance must consider potential impacts on agricultural lands. Additionally, since rural development occurs within the rural district as well as the agricultural district, simply focusing on revisions to the rural zoning ordinance will not comprehensively address the key threats facing rural lands. Numerous options exist for revising the County Rural Zoning Ordinance and

managing rural lands and rural development on Maui. To best preserve rural character, protect natural systems and cultural resources, and promote agriculture, the County should take the following steps:

1. **Rename the existing rural district to “Large Lot Residential”:** With one-acre and half-acre minimum lot sizes, the pattern of development within the existing County rural district is more representative of large lot residential than rural. Density clustering should be permitted within the Large Lot Residential District, allowing for flexible and creative lot design.
2. **Utilize rural lots as a town planning tool rather than as a district:** Rural lots should be allowed within approved master planned new towns and as part of urban expansion areas identified within the General Plan. Rural lots should only be permitted in areas identified as compatible for low density development and should be utilized to a limited degree.
3. **Utilize the Country Town Business District and create a Country Residential District:** Rural villages and town centers should be allowed to form in rural areas to provide basic goods and services to more remote areas and to offer lifestyle choices to Maui residents. By utilizing the Country Town Business District and establishing a Country Residential District future rural development can be focused into more compact village centers, bounded by open space, ranching, and active agricultural lands.
4. **Require CSD plans for subdivisions creating more than five lots:** Requiring CSD will economize on infrastructure and services and permanently preserve open space. Rural lots can also be utilized as a buffer between urban and agricultural lands to reduce land use conflicts.

Implementing a directed growth strategy and rural planning tools and techniques, requiring rural appropriate infrastructure and services, and revising the rural zoning ordinance will allow the County to proactively balance development and preservation on the rural landscape. Coupled with strong preservation of prime agricultural resource lands, this integrated strategy offers an effective approach to addressing the challenges and threats facing Maui’s rural and agricultural lands.

## WORKS CITED

Arendt, Randall. 1994. *Rural By Design*. American Planning Association Planners Press. Chicago, Illinois.