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High school, bypass road, harbors top priorities list

W., S. Maui lawmakers weigh in on issues prior to session

January 16, 2011 - By ILIMA LOOMIS, Staff Writer

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* Editor's Note - This is the first in a three-part series looking at what Maui lawmakers plan to be working on in the upcoming legislative session. Monday, Central Maui legislators discuss their priorities.

WAILUKU - Legislators from West and South Maui said they would focus on infrastructure improvements for their districts, as well as measures addressing foreclosures, medical services and other issues in the lawmaking session beginning this week.

Many of the areas' highest-priority infrastructure projects - including the Lahaina bypass road, Kihei high school and upgrades of the Lahaina and Maalaea small-boat harbors - received long-awaited funding in the last state budget, lawmakers noted. They vowed to keep those projects on track, as well as push to get appropriations for the next round of projects.

The Legislature convenes Wednesday in Honolulu for its annual 14-week session.

Democratic Sen. Roz Baker, who represents South and West Maui residents, said the new administration of Gov. Neil Abercrombie seemed committed to including the Neighbor Islands and collaborating with legislators.

"It's a whole different attitude, and I think we'll be able to do some really good legislation as a result," she said.

Baker said funding was already in place for key projects including the widening of Honoapiilani Highway through Lahaina and the first phases of the Lahaina bypass, and that Abercrombie remained "very supportive."

She said she and West Maui Rep. Angus McKelvey would be "cheerleaders," making sure the highway projects stay on track.

McKelvey said he also wanted to seek construction funds for the next stage of the Lahaina bypass project, the so-called Phase 1C, which would extend north from Keawe Street.

Other West Maui projects on McKelvey's list include securing construction funds for the replacement of the Mala Wharf dock and getting an appropriation for a Kaanapali Beach sand restoration and erosion control project.

"That's important for the visitor industry and also for the

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Going to Maui?

environment," he said.

Baker said she was continuing to monitor the progress of the planned West Maui Hospital and Medical Center, and was working with the developer to make sure the project could move forward at its new location in Kaanapali.

"There may be a little bit of legislative work we need to do if we can't do it administratively," she said.

On a broader issue, Baker, who chairs the Senate's Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee, said she was working on legislation that deals with foreclosures, with a "more holistic look at the situation affecting Hawaii, and how we might build in more consumer protection and transparency."

In South Maui, Baker said no new funding was immediately needed for the planned Kihei high school. Money was already appropriated for land acquisition and planning, and now state officials are waiting for proposals from developers interested in building the project, she said.

But she said she would meet with principals in her district this week to learn what infrastructure projects are needed at their schools.

"I do know that Kihei Elementary School is bursting at the seams, and they need new portables, so I'm working with them on that," she said.

Newly elected South Maui Rep. George Fontaine, the Maui delegation's only Republican, said Kihei high school also would be one of his top priorities, and he was hoping to find a way it could open sooner.

"I want to keep that on track," he said.

Other goals included maintaining funding for the Kupuna Care program, and introducing a tax credit to encourage more use of energy-efficient lighting, he said.

"We want to encourage people to be energy-wise," he said.

In addition to the high-profile projects moving forward in their districts, West and South Maui residents hoped their lawmakers would work on other issues.

Maury King, a founder of South Maui Sustainability who said he was not speaking on behalf of the group, said he hoped to see a renewed push for "complete streets" legislation previously championed by Fontaine's predecessor, former Rep. Joe Bertram III.

"That's about having streets that include bike paths and walking paths," King said.

Fontaine said he supported the idea.

"I totally agree with walkable and bikeable communities," he said, adding that he would welcome Bertram's help on the issue. "He has the expertise."

Kihei Community Association President John Miller said "hands down" the district's top issue was the high school, and that he'd also like to see planned improvements for Maalaea Small Boat Harbor move forward and the addition of sewage pump-out stations to the facility.

Baker said the Maalaea improvements, which include pump-out stations, were already under way, with a groundbreaking held last month.

"As far as I know it's fully funded and the money's encumbered," she said.

Bud Pikrone, general manager of the Wailea Community Association, said one important issue for the district was funding for the Department of Land and Natural Resources, especially its aquatic

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and enforcement divisions, to better protect South Maui's reefs.

"It's very difficult for them, because they don't really have the funding," Pikrone said. "But we think the health of the reefs is important for all of Maui."

"Absolutely," Fontaine said. "They're underfunded." He said he would like the Legislature to reconsider the "Recreational Renaissance" proposal put forward by the administration of former Gov. Linda Lingle, which would have used park fees and borrowing to increase funding for state facilities and parks.

In West Maui, Lahaina Bypass Now President Bob Pure was eager to see funding appropriated for the next phase of the project.

"I would want them to focus on the bypass as our number-one transportation issue, to make sure that road gets completed as planned," he said.

West Maui Improvement Foundation President Joe Pluta said he would like to see the district designated as a "medical enterprise zone," creating incentives for health care companies to locate there.

Baker said she had already signed on as a co-sponsor of a bill that would establish medical enterprise zones in Hawaii.



Pluta said the state should look at ways to support the development and preservation of Moku'ula as a cultural and historical site in Lahaina. The ancient capital of the Hawaiian kingdom is being uncovered as part of an archaeological excavation.

McKelvey said he loved the idea.

"We'll definitely want to follow up on that one," he said. "I'm writing that down."

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