

Construction delayed at Paoo

LANDOWNER LOOKING FOR BUYER THAT WILL PRESERVE AREA

BY BOBBY COMMAND
WEST HAWAII TODAY
bcommand@westhawaii.com

A family has postponed its plans to build a home at Paoo and will wait a year to give government or a conservation group the opportunity to purchase it at a fair price.

Jonathan Cohen will pull his conservation district use application from consideration by the state Board of Land and Natural Resources and hopes an entity will buy it to preserve the popular leeward North Kohala shoreline and archaeological features found on the property.

"While we had believed and do believe that we could build a home which would enhance the protection of environmental and cultural resources at Paoo," said Cohen, "we recognize that concerned individuals and public and private entities would like to see the property acquired by a public

agency or nonprofit conservation buyer."

Cohen, a Massachusetts-based financier, has proposed a series of structures on the property a few miles south of Lapakahi State Historic Park.

But critics say this could adversely affect the remains of an ancient village and trigger the development of two similar shoreline parcels near Paoo. Others claim a home there would block one of the few places where people can get to the shoreline along the 23-mile leeward North Kohala coast.

"It was never our intention to take anything away from anyone. It was our intention to help take care of the land," Cohen said. "At the same time, we understand the concern for the first home built in a natural area and we do not want to be the first to do so."

Even the state Department of Land and Natural Resources' Office of Conservation and Coastal Land has recommended the state Land Board deny Cohen's application, a move which prompted the owner to request a contested-case

hearing, which has yet to be resolved.

Cohen, who is represented by Kailua-Kona attorney Randy Vitousek, said he has been willing to sell the property to a group that will preserve the land, enhance protection for the cultural and environmental resources, and respect the natural and cultural values in consultation with the Mahi and Luhiau families, descendants of the people of Paoo.

"We understand that Paoo has been identified as appropriate for acquisition by both the county and the state of Hawaii," said Cohen. "We have had inquiries from potential conservation purchasers, but no person or agency has stepped up and made an offer."

Cohen said his goal was to build a home in Hawaii, protect the important sites of Paoo and continue public access to the shoreline. "If the protection and access components can be accomplished through a conservation purchase," said Cohen, "then this is our current goal."

Almost 20 years ago

the state gave the former property owner, Michael Rearden, permission to build a 3,900-square-foot home on the property. In 1994, however, Hui Lihikai-Citizens for Protection of the North Kohala Coastline filed a complaint about Rearden's activities at Paoo. The Land Board eventually extinguished Rearden's permit before he could build the house.

Rearden purchased the property in 1985 from Signal Oil for \$290,000 and eventually sold it to Heide Galke in 1996 for \$900,000. Galke then sold the property to Cohen in 2000 for \$1.5 million.

Cohen said he would wait a year for potential buyers to act, and if no one steps forward, he would re-evaluate his plans for Paoo.

"We share a concern for what happens to Hawaii's beautiful natural areas," said Cohen. "We see the coastline full of hotels, condos, 10,000-square-foot homes and we see the ravaged public beaches where only public agencies are responsible for resource protection and enforcement."