

Summary Notes of an attendee at the July 8, 2008, Community Meeting hosted by Mayor Tavares and Councilmember Mateo

The July 8 community meeting was held at Mitchell Pauole Center; it was reasonably well attended. The format followed most meetings of this nature: the County representation was there to hear the concerns of Molokai residents. At the outset of the meeting, the Mayor provided a handout listing questions about the water situation with attempts to respond to the questions. (That handout is posted on this website.) A formal agenda was not provided.

The Mayor and Council welcomed the community each with a short narration of how they are working to resolving the problem with MPL and that “together” the community would prevail. The prevailing theme was unity and it was noted by a couple of speakers that the unity could be “felt” in the room. The Mayor expressed concern about rumors and accusations being circulated and attempted to clarify the County’s role in continuing water and sewer services. While the County clearly has a role in this, it is the position of the Mayor that the basis of law holds the State responsible for public health and safety. The Mayor wrote a letter to Governor Lingle, July 8, 2008, (a copy is posted on this website), asking that she invoke her powers to declare an emergency. In that letter, she cites Hawaii Revised Statutes that assign responsibility to the State for continuity of service by public utilities.

The Mayor indicated her displeasure over what has been characterized as “finger pointing” among the State, County, and the PUC, however given the tenor of communications among those entities, that characterization seems reasonable. The County entities complained that MPL has not provided financial information to assist it in assessing the health of the utility and indicated that MPL had not “invited” them to assess the physical condition of the system. (The Advisory Committee to WMA Board had provided the name and phone number of an individual with whom the County could meet to review the physical water system; that person was never contacted by a County representative.) It was disappointing to hear the Mayor more than once, refer to only West Molokai as the affected area.

A number of speakers recognized that government entities cannot force MPL or any private owner to continue operations but they also pointed out that those same entities held a public responsibility to oversee the utilities and the failure does not rest solely with MPL. Also recognized was the probable game playing in process with MPL and the corporate owner, Guocco Leisure. One speaker who resides in East Molokai provided a scenario whereby the State could exercise eminent domain and obtain MPL assets to provide ongoing operation of the utility.