

PUNA ROAD UPDATE

'More problems'

Plans moving ahead to barricade road that links Hawaiian Acres, Ainaloa

By **JASON ARMSTRONG**
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Life may get worse before it gets better for motorists who rely on the private road linking Puna's Hawaiian Acres and Ainaloa subdivisions.

The Ainaloa Community Association plans to barricade the bypass road just as two area lawmakers are working to have Hawaii County acquire it.

The association will lock its gate June 1 to motivate county officials to resume negotiations over the road's future, said Philip Brazier, association vice president.

The 3.1-mile Ainaloa Boulevard, which forms the road's lower portion and intersects Highway 130, belongs to the community association.

The county in 2000 paid \$1.7 million to pave the Hawaiian Acres section and buy a lot between that community and Ainaloa, creating a faster route between Kurtistown and Pahoa.

Closing the road and giving it to the county was the "overwhelming" response to a recent survey completed by more than 70 percent of Ainaloa's 3,300 lot owners, Brazier said.

One longtime landowner is Puna Councilman Gary Safarik, who said it would be "totally unacceptable" to again lock the gate that was closed between

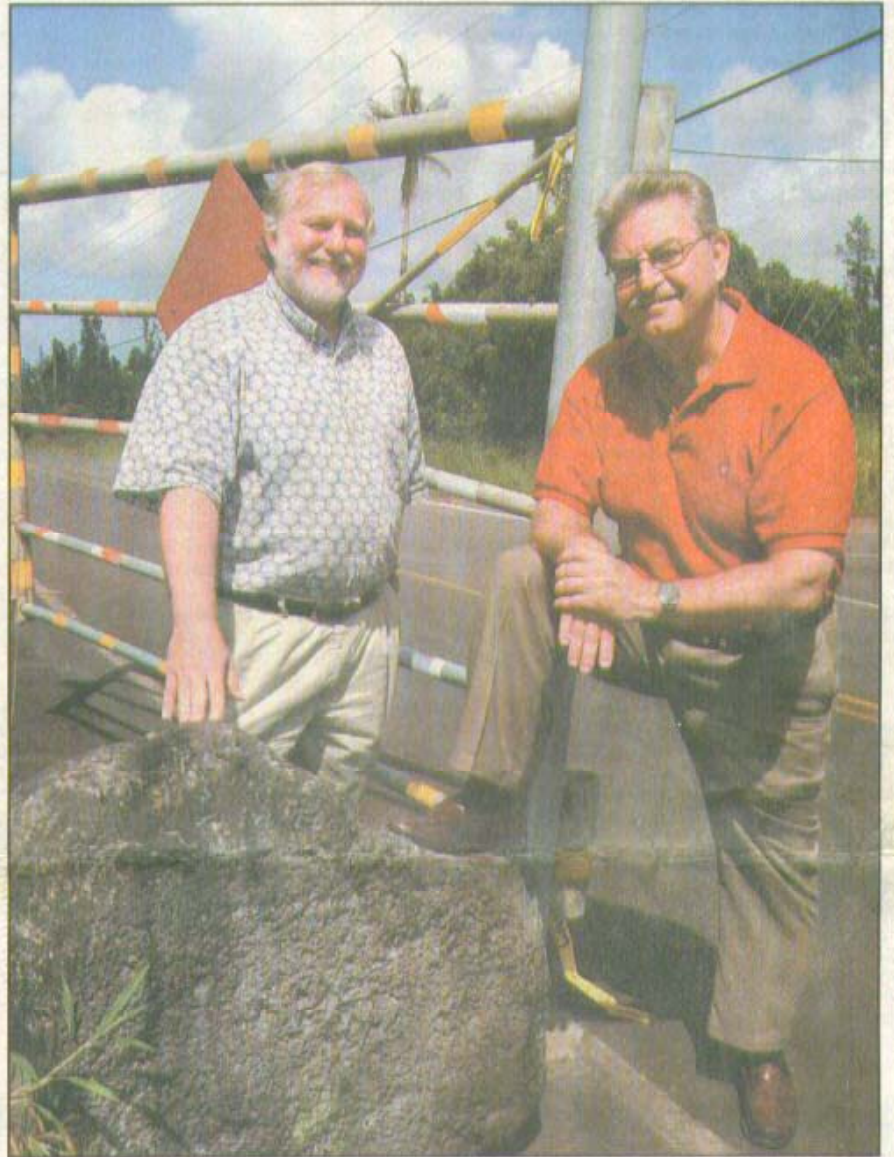
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— **Gary Safarik,**
Puna councilman



WILLIAM ING/Tribune-Herald

County Councilmen Bob Jacobson, left, who represents upper Puna, Ka'u and part of South Kona, and Gary Safarik, who represents lower Puna, are pictured Wednesday at the gate installed by the Ainaloa Community Association on Ainaloa Boulevard, a bit over three miles in from Highway 130.

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June 2002 and last July.

"It will only cause more problems, so I don't think that would be the best solution," he said.

Also wanting the road opened permanently is Councilman Bob Jacobson, who represents upper Puna, Ka'u and part of South Kona.

Jacobson has introduced a resolution authorizing the administration to use its powers of eminent domain to acquire the 5.3-mile section running through his Hawaiian Acres neighborhood.

However, Jacobson said he will seek to have the measure deferred when it appears Tuesday before the council's Public Works and Intergovernmental Relations Committee.

That will provide time to work with Safarik in drafting a replacement resolution calling for county ownership of the entire 8.7-mile road, Jacobson said.

"It makes us legal," Jacobson said in reference to an environmental assessment in which he said the county committed to assuming control of the road.

The replacement resolution is tentatively scheduled to be heard June 1.

Accepting the entire road also is needed to gain the support of the county administra-

tion.

"It makes no sense to acquire only a portion of the road. ...," Public Works Director Bruce McClure wrote last month in an e-mail to Managing Director Dixie Kaetsu.

But the Hawaiian Acres Community Association is against county ownership, said Jack Russell Brauher, association vice president.

"The existing board would be opposed to it," he said. "We enjoy our private road status."

The association will soon survey the 4,009 Hawaiian Acres lot owners to learn their position on the ownership issue, but the results won't be known for several months, Brauher said.

The group also is considering putting up its own gate to gain some control over access, he said.

Not all Hawaiian Acres landowners agree with the board, however.

"I'm totally in favor of the county taking over the road," said Hawaiian Acres resident Sheldon Lehman. "We need a good, maintained road, and we don't have the funds to maintain it ourselves."

Lehman, chief of the Hawaiian Acres volunteer fire department, said the locked Ainaloa gate once prevented a fire truck

from responding to a call in Ainaloa.

"We were unable get through the gate," he said.

Devra Reeves said she and other Hawaiian Acres residents rely on the road to access their lower Puna farms.

"It's an economic impact, not just a pain (to go the longer way through Keaau)," she said.

The Hawaiian Acres portion is owned collectively by the subdivision's 4,009 owners, each of whom must be notified of the condemnation. That has created a hurdle for the county.

Jacobson said he hopes the owners will simply sign a quitclaim deed. The other option is to serve them with condemnation papers, which could cost \$100,000, he said.

Jacobson said he thinks the owners will sell the 5.3 miles of Hawaiian Acres roads for \$1.

Those problems don't exist with the Ainaloa section, which has a single owner, the association.

The council in 1997 voted unanimously to take over Ainaloa Boulevard, only to quickly rescind the action after lawmakers learned the resolution mistakenly called for the county to accept all Ainaloa subdivision roads.

Safarik followed up in 2002 with a replacement resolution.

That measure is stalled before his committee.

Ainaloa then offered its road only if the county spent millions to improve it with costly sidewalks, street lights and a traffic signal at the intersection with Highway 130.

Those conditions are no longer being sought, Brazier said.

"We're quite willing to talk with (county officials) to see what they can do for us," he said. "We are willing to do anything they want, within reason."

Citing the results of an engineering study completed in March, Brazier said an average of 103 cars use the road each hour, with some clocked driving up 80 mph.

Up to \$2 million in county money is being pursued to enlarge drainage culverts in the Hawaiian Acres section and correct limited sight distances along Ainaloa Boulevard, Safarik said.

The money is part of a bill authorizing Mayor Harry Kim to borrow \$40 million for unspecified roadway improvements. Some \$7 million would go toward fixing Puna roads, according to the bill set for adoption Wednesday when the council meets in Hilo.

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