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# Local News

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## Sea Grant turns to urban issues

By [Mike Leidemann](#)  
Advertiser Staff Writer

What do coastal management and good urban centers have in common?

Just about everything, according to people attending a University of Hawai'i workshop on smart growth yesterday.

Long associated with environmental and coastal issues, the university's Sea Grant College Program, a sponsor of yesterday's session, is quickly transforming its mission and reach to deal with problems of urban design and growth.

"When you live on the ocean, you look upriver and uphill to see what's affecting you. That's the approach we're taking more and more," said E. Gordon Grau, the Sea Grant program's director.

More than 30 years old, the Sea Grant program has long focused on efforts to protect coastal watersheds, beaches and coral reefs. Now it's adding Hawai'i's cities to its list, reasoning that every community in the state is a coastal one.

The program is encouraging its extension agents to interact with new and old communities struggling with the effects of decades of poor planning and urban sprawl:

- In Kapolei, Sea Grant helped sponsor seminars last May to help improve transportation and city center planning.

"Kapolei is at a tipping point," city planning official Robert Stanfield told those attending yesterday's workshop. "The question remains whether we're going to get a new city there or another regional shopping area."

Sea Grant's involvement in the earlier planning sessions on smart growth helped

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focus new attention on ideas that may help determine which way the town grows, he said.

- In Kailua, Sea Grant officials are considering opening a store-front office to help residents understand and deal with new growth pressures in both the central business district and the residential areas between the beach and Kawai Nui Marsh.

"Change is coming to Kailua and residents need to be partners in that change," extension agent Peter Rappa said. "We plan to be there physically to listen to what they want and help them get it."

- In Kawaihae on the Big Island, a port town expecting considerable growth in coming years, agents are moving to help the community deal with traffic congestion, high home prices and other issues, said agent Sara Peck.

A recent survey noted that most area residents believe the greatest threat to Hawai'i reefs comes from pollution that originates on the land, she said.

All of the community involvement represents a natural extension of the Sea Grant program's traditional mission of providing research, education and extension, said John Jacob, director of the Texas Coastal Watershed Program.

Jacob urged local extension agents to spread the word about smart growth policies, which include promoting higher community densities, creating walkable neighborhoods and preserving open space and other critical environmental areas.

"It's like connecting two ends of a pipe. We're expanding the original environmental mission to include the built environment," added Steve Meder, a UH architecture professor who also heads the year-old UH Center for Smart Building and Community design.

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