

Princeville Glamping Project Would Require Affordable Housing

A lawyer for the community association expects a time-consuming approval process that could end up in court.

About 10 hours ago

PRINCEVILLE, Kauai — Developers of a proposed 50-unit luxury camping resort that would be built on what is now a golf course backed away slightly Saturday from what critics in the community have charged amounts to opening the way for massive new development here.

At the same time, a lawyer retained by the Princeville at Hanalei Community Association said that if the new resort does move forward, Kauai County would require affordable housing to go with the project, a stipulation the developers had not disclosed previously.

“We know there will be some affordable housing required,” said Will Little, an executive with East West Partners, which is developing the property for Starwood. “We don’t know what that is.”



The PHCA lawyer, Laurel Loo, predicted developers would encounter a time-consuming county Planning Commission process of getting the camping resort approved as a “compatible use” for part of what is now about 290 acres occupied by

two golf courses.

However, Loo declined to offer formal legal opinions about the proposal, particularly whether building the resort is an “ancillary recreational use” of the golf course land under terms of a 1972 document that controls how open space in Princeville can be used.

Loo said she was uncomfortable taking such positions in such a public setting with the would-be developers in attendance and that her focused legal analysis could only be shared in confidence with the PHCA board.



Parts of the Makai Golf Club could be taken over for glamping.

Allan Parachini/Civil Beat

The outcome of any proceeding, Loo said, "will not be decided today. It may be the subject of a decision by a court or an arbitrator or the Planning Commission. There's that open question."

The comments came at a contentious Saturday morning online meeting of Princeville residents that saw the developers argue for their project while many residents spent the three-hour session attacking it.

The developers asked for time to assemble new concept drawings of the resort and to finish working on their formal proposal, but it was clear community opposition remains plentiful.

The proposal is being advanced by Starwood Capital Group, a Miami-based company led by the legendary hotel developer Barry Sternlicht. Starwood purchased the courses that make up the Makai Golf Club in 2018 when it acquired the nearby former Princeville Resort. The company is rebuilding the hotel to make it into a luxury health spa called 1 Hotel Hanalei Bay.

The project on the golf course would focus on "glamping," short for "glamorous camping." It would involve construction of 50 tent-like structures with luxury amenities, a spa, a commercial building and a restaurant with as many as 80 seats. Rates, Starwood has said, would start at \$500 per night. It would be the largest overnight lodging facility built on the North Shore in decades.

"This is going to be dreadful for the local people," said Princeville resident Simon Lord. The project, he said, "is only good for Starwood. Starwood makes money. Princeville suffers."

Resident Helen Linnerooth urged the PHCA board not to wait for further action by Starwood because "our only remedy would be to file an injunction."

Another resident, Mary Paterson, asserted that the camping resort plan amounts to people who now live near the site "being thrown under the bus. Their whole lives are going to be turned upside down."

The 1972 document, which was filed when Princeville was first being developed, left the acreage now occupied by golf courses as open space, but the document, known in legal terms as a "dedication," expires in February 2026.

Starwood's proposal to develop the luxury camping resort, critics have charged, amounts to hijacking the process to begin a new development now without waiting for the dedication to expire in four years.

In what was clearly intended as a concession to furor in the community over the proposal, Starwood representatives said Saturday they would separate one of the two golf courses that make up the Makai club and immediately move to re-dedicate the land as a golf course for another 50 years.

Will Little, an executive with East West Partners, which is undertaking the development for Starwood, said the company would also re-dedicate the camping resort for use exclusively for that purpose for "20 or 30 years."

Since the glamping resort would be built on land currently occupied by just three holes of the nine-hole Woods Course, meeting attendees demanded to know what development plans Starwood may have for the remaining six holes.

Little said the company's planning was ongoing and that Starwood had only decided to rededicate the larger golf

course and the proposed resort within the last few days.

“We would re-dedicate the three holes to include glamping as an allowable use, but to preclude residential building,” Little said. “We have no plans to build build homes on those lots. We can craft a dedication to put everyone’s mind at ease.”

As to the remaining land that currently makes up six holes of the nine-hole Woods Course, Little said he could make no commitments. “We have not finalized that,” he said. “We are being asked to make multiple decades-long decisions. We have not totally solved that question.”

He said that if Starwood can’t work out a plan for the golf course land, it may be put up for sale.

Little said no re-dedication documents have been drawn up yet, but he insisted that Starwood is committed to limiting use of the land not just until the current dedication expires in 2026, but for many years after that.

Princeville residents — particularly those whose homes are on the golf courses — have complained that property values have already started to decline and that some residents trying to sell their homes now have seen viewings and sales activity drop to almost nothing.

Residents have also contended that the glamping resort would create unacceptable noise levels and that the high-end

canvas structures would not survive a hurricane, but instead be blown into houses all over the community.

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