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Shady Grove permit approved

By PETER SUR

Tribune-Herald staff writer

The Windward Planning Commission had its hands full with special permits and public charter schools at its meeting Thursday in Hilo.

The panel approved a special permit for the Shady Grove satellite charter school campus in Hawaiian Paradise Park. Commissioners also postponed action on both Hawaii's Volcano Circus in Seaview and the Connections New Century Public Charter School campus in Kaumana.

Shady Grove, located on 5th Avenue in Hawaiian Paradise Park, opened in 1993 as a home-school site and as a satellite campus of the Hawaii Academy of Arts and Science New Century Public Charter School.

The school had operated without incident until January, when it was informed of an anonymous complaint to the Planning Department about the school operating without a special permit.

Dozens of current and former students, parents and teachers filled the conference room at the Aupuni Center conference room to express their support for Shady Grove, and for the approval of a permit, which had the backing of the Planning Department.

"I am asking, after 19 years (of operation) to let it continue," said co-applicant Jean McKeague, who touted the school's 100 percent high school graduation rate. After leaving Shady Grove, students matriculate to the main HAAS high school campus in Pahoa.

Brateil Ventura was one of two students to testify. She spoke of having trouble fitting in at Keonepoko Elementary and described how she blossomed at Shady Grove.

"At Keonepoko, I was bored doing math. Because of Aunty Jean (McKeague), math became my favorite subject," she said.

The only negative testimony came from Scott Reilling and June Conant, the general manager and the president of the Hawaiian Paradise Park Owners Association, respectively.

Both stressed that they did not oppose the school or education, but they were concerned about



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Many supporters attend a meeting addressing Shady Grove, Connections and SPACE at the Aupuni Center on Thursday morning.

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the increased traffic and the impacts to other members of the Puna subdivision.

In agreeing to approve the special permit, the commissioners agreed to the applicant's proposed amendments to the Planning Department's conditions.

As a result, Shady Grove will have two years to bring the property into compliance with laws, including the installation of a septic system and the securing of building permits for unpermitted structures, among other things. Also, the school agreed to comply with any road maintenance fees that HPPOA may set up in the future, with the exact amount to be determined.

The second major item on the agenda was the resumption of a revocation hearing of the Hawaii's Volcano Circus, which was continued in May to allow the applicant to submit an amended special permit.

Hawaii's Volcano Circus is the parent organization of the Seaview Performing Arts Center for Education, or SPACE, Bellyacres, and it serves as the site of Kula Kalapana, another HAAS satellite campus.

The Planning Department recommended that the revocation hearing again be continued because the amended application needed to be processed, and because the requested increase in the number of students to 75 may trigger a traffic survey.

Hilo attorney Ted Hong offered another option — that the commission dismiss the revocation hearing and start with a new special permit application. After numerous testifiers spoke in favor of HVC being granted a permit, Commissioner Ronald Gonzales moved that the matter be continued to the call of the Planning Department, and Commissioner Stephen Ono seconded. When it became time to vote, there was a little confusion.

Later in the meeting, Gonzales attempted to withdraw his motion in favor of revoking the revocation hearing, but Ono refused to withdraw his second, and the motion stood. The motion to continue the HVC proceeding received three votes in favor and one against, but it was not a valid vote because at least four votes are needed on the seven-member commission.

The 3-1 vote meant that the decision was postponed to a later date.

It was the first meeting since former Commissioner Zendo Kern left to join the County Council, and the commission had a rough start under interim Chairman Dean Au. Commissioner Raylene Moses was unable to attend due to a "miscommunication," and the commission lacked a quorum.

Commissioner Wallace Ishibashi was called in from another commitment so the meeting could start at 9:20 a.m.

When Ishibashi, a former co-chair of the Geothermal Working Group, recused himself from a discussion on the county Geothermal Asset Fund, the commission canceled that discussion for lack of a quorum.

Another controversial item that was continued to a later date was a special permit application from Connections New Century Charter School for its Kaumana campus.

Students of the school and their parents packed the conference room at the start of the meeting to support the application, but they left by the time the hearing began in the afternoon.

Hong, who represented Connections, asked for a continuation in part because a community meeting at Keaukaha Elementary to discuss the application had not been scheduled as required, and because a deputy attorney general was taking over the case from Hong.

"After today, the Attorney General's Office will be representing Connections charter school," Hong said.

Approval of the Connections permit would send the case to the state Land Use Commission. A denial of the permit would kill the proposal, but that decision would be subject to appeal in 3rd Circuit Court. In the end, commissioners agreed with the recommendation of Planning Director Bobby Jean Leithead Todd, approving the continuation by a 4-0 vote.

Email Peter Sur at psur@hawaiitribune-herald.com.

Escapee arrested by police

One fugitive down, one to go

