

Koa Ridge Finally Happening



Harry A. Saunders, President, Castle & Cooke Homes Hawai'i in his Iwilei office, Tuesday, July 7, 2020, in Honolulu.

EUGENE TANNER | PBN

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[Harry Saunders](#) has waited 23 years to see the first homes at Koa Ridge, Castle & Cooke Hawaii's 3,500-home subdivision in Central Oahu, go to market this month.

Saunders joined Castle & Cooke 45 years ago, working on the 16,000-home Mililani master-planned community before rising to become the Hawaii division's president.

"We've gone back to what I love to do, building homes," Saunders said. "So what people see, I made a comment that it's like this is a overnight success after 23 years."

Koa Ridge was supposed to have followed Mililani in development, but the project was delayed by litigation, after getting approval from the state Land Use Commission in 2002, until 2016, when the Hawaii Supreme Court gave final approval to the LUC's 2012 urban district approval.

The developer broke ground on the 576-acre site between Ka Uka Boulevard in Waipio and Mililani in late 2017, and construction has continued during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The first homes are scheduled to be completed in the first phase by the end of this year. Sales of the first homes — 37 single-family homes priced in the high \$800,000 range, 10 attached homes in the low \$700,000 range and townhomes priced in the low \$400,000 range — will start sometime this month.

Ultimately there will be 120 single-family homes, 45 or 50 attached homes and 120 townhomes that Saunders said are “basically in the middle range of affordable townhomes” in the first subdivisions.

“Those first three subdivisions will take us about two and a half years to sell out,” he said.

Koa Ridge will also have commercial space, industrial space and a public elementary school. There will also be a new hospital — Castle & Cooke is working with Wahiawa General Hospital — and possibly limited-service hotels.

What is the major difference between the original plan for Koa Ridge and the current plan?

The best thing I can say about the delay is that we’re building a community more in style with today’s lifestyle. It’s not Mililani 2 — Mililani was planned in the ’60s and ’70s and built out through that era. It was a car-centric bedroom community and it was a wonderful community, it still is. What we look toward here is that it’s a little bit more of a compact site. It’s probably a little bit denser, closer, more compact, which makes it more of a walkable community, which is what we believe people are looking for. They’re looking for convenience, not having to get in the car and drive somewhere to go do their shopping. And you see it happening now where people are walking, riding their bicycles. That’s one good thing we got out of the pandemic and people staying at home. They’re kind of getting back into the neighborhood situation — walking, saying hello to people, etc. That’s sort of what we did here is we went back into a little bit more of a compact community. And we probably have a broader range of product types segmented, because families today are different than they were in the ’60s and ’70s and ’80s. You have a much higher proportion of working families, but you have more single parents, you have older families, young families starting out, people deferring having families. It’s really different dynamics and lifestyles and people are looking for their own niches — we really tried to design to that. And having 10 different type of product types in one community is what we’re planning here. It’s exciting.

How has the project been impacted by the pandemic?

One of the good things is, because everyone stayed at home, traffic was very light. We were able to do some of the infrastructure work on Kamehameha Highway with a

minimal disruption to traffic and we didn't have to do it at nighttime, we can have longer days because traffic was basically at 50% of normal. We were able to save a little bit because we didn't have to do night work. We were able to accelerate it a little bit, besides, we were coming into summer so there are longer days. The good thing out of this is that construction was deemed essential. So we didn't have to shut down.

Has the pandemic influenced any changes to Koa Ridge, such as adding home office space? We're testing it, but yes we've always had something like that included in our homes. Local people like open floor plans – kitchen, family room, lanai. But you still need some privacy areas. That's one of the challenges now, it's kind of hard to work in the family room with the kids running around. So, we're looking at little dens, little optional rooms. In a two-story home, sometimes we're doing a family room downstairs and a family room upstairs. That upstairs family room can be converted into an office, or a den, or a bedroom with a little study area, so you can get little nooks to get away. A lot of those we had already planned, because we found that interest five years ago in Mililani, a lot of people ... want to be able to work from home. Family sizes are getting smaller, but they still want a four-bedroom – that fourth bedroom a lot of times is the home office. We are seeing some demand for larger footprints, or floor plans.

The challenge is when we get into the small townhomes, but we'll see couples probably aren't going to buy a one-bedroom, [unit] but then a two-bedroom so they have a home office.