

Change: Senators must fix the lack of public notice in rezoning legislation

If senators want to continue usurping the Guam Land Use Commission's power to rezone property, they need to at least follow the standards established by law to ensure public feedback and input.

Lawmakers hold public hearings on bills to rezone property and invite agencies to submit testimony, but rezoning bills rarely state who owns the property, where it's located and the reason for the requested zone change. This makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for neighbors to provide their input on proposed zoning changes.

Those who use the established rezoning procedure, which goes through the commission, must post a large sign that states "Notice to Rezone" in red letters on a white background which are no less than a foot high. The sign must state the application for a change of zone, what the proposed change is, plus the date, time and location of public hearings and commission hearings on the proposed change.

The commission must announce hearings in a newspaper of general circulation 10 days before the hearing, and hold it in the district in which the property is located. It also must send hearing announcements by mail to the mayor to all landowners within 500 feet of the property.

This gives neighbors plenty of advance notice about rezoning requests, as well as opportunity to testify for or against the proposed change.

That's not the case when senators introduce legislation to rezone property. They make no special effort to inform neighbors, nor do they require the owner or owners who want property rezoned to do so.

Senators must recognize the importance of public input when a property is rezoned; they are representatives of the people and thus are obligated to ensure rezoning bills are in the best interest of the entire community. How can they claim to do so if they don't take the appropriate steps to inform the members of the public who will be most affected?

The Legislature either needs to stop passing rezoning measures, or at least do much more to ensure the public is informed about proposed zoning changes and given adequate time and opportunity to testify in the matter.