

C. Kimo Alameda, PhD.
Mayor



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County of Hawai'i

KONA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN ACTION COMMITTEE

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May 13, 2025

Hawai'i County Mayor's Office
County of Hawai'i
25 Aupuni St #2603
Hilo, HI 96720

Subject: Request for Support in Reinstating Tree City USA Designation

Aloha Mayor Alameda:

The Kona Community Development Plan Action Committee (AC) met on May 13, 2025, at the West Hawaii Civic Center. Included on the agenda was discussion and decision-making on whether to submit a letter to the Mayor requesting support in reinstating the Tree City USA Designation. Following deliberation, the committee voted unanimously to submit the letter collectively, identified as Communication 2025-14.

Sincerely,

[Charles Young \(May 22, 2025 07:16 HST\)](#)

Charles Young, Chair
Kona Community Development Plan Action Committee

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No. 2025-14 Tree City Letter.pdf

March 13, 2025
Mayor Kimo Alameda
Hawai'i County Mayor's Office
County of Hawai'i
25 Aupuni St # 2603
Hilo, HI 96720

Dear Mr. Alameda,

The Kona Community Development Plan (CDP) Action Committee is reaching out to ask for your leadership in reinstating Hawai'i County's Tree City USA designation, a national recognition we previously held but likely lost due to changes in staffing and administrative turnover.

Our goal is simple: to meet the third core requirement of the Tree City USA program by investing at least **\$2 per resident per year** into community tree planting, maintenance, and care. We believe this is a **small, high-impact investment** that can yield tangible benefits for Kona and the entire county.

Why This Matters to Our Community

The Kona CDP, adopted in 2008, reflects our residents' priorities: protecting what makes Kona special while planning for a strong future. This includes:

- **Preserving Rural Character and Open Spaces:** Tree-lined roads and shaded public areas are part of what makes Kona feel like home not just for us, but for the generations who come after us.
- **Enhancing Visual and Scenic Resources:** Trees help maintain our island's natural beauty, something visitors admire and local's treasure.
- **Encouraging Community Stewardship:** Our residents take pride in hands-on participation to keep our communities safe, beautiful, and economically resilient.

According to the U.S. Forest Service, every dollar that goes into planting and caring for a tree provides benefits to the community two to five times the investment. Benefits include:

- Sequestering and storing carbon dioxide, thus helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change
- Providing oxygen
- Filtering air and water
- Conserving water and reducing soil erosion
- Serving as a habitat for wildlife
- Lowering air temperature for nearby buildings, which in turn helps to conserve energy
- Providing shade for humans and wildlife
- Reducing noise pollution
- Providing mental and social benefits

- Creating and reinforcing a sense of community

What the County Gains

Reinstating our Tree City USA designation is more than symbolic; it is a smart policy that checks key boxes:

- **Access to Resources:** Tree City status improves our chances for grant funding and technical assistance in keeping more federal and nonprofit dollars working here in our county.
- **Economic Sense:** Healthy urban forests increase property values, reduce stormwater costs, and lower cooling needs in public buildings. Trees are the only city infrastructure that appreciates in value over time.
- **Restoring Civic Traditions:** Public events like Arbor Day celebrations help bring our community together, strengthen civic pride, and educate the next generation on the value of local stewardship.
- **Local Empowerment:** This initiative is community driven. We're not asking for new programs, we're asking to recognize and strengthen the work already being done by county staff.

Our Request

We respectfully ask for your help with the following:

1. **A Designated Point of Contact in the Finance Department** to help us understand where urban forestry spending currently exists in the budget and determine if we already meet or can easily reach the \$2 per capita standard.
2. **Coordination with the Department of Public Works and the Department of Parks and Recreation** to identify tree-related maintenance or planting programs already in place that can be counted toward the requirement.

With your support, we can bring back a national recognition that reflects well on your administration and on the residents of Kona and Hawai'i County. The return on this modest investment is substantially cleaner air, cooler neighborhoods, and a stronger, more self-reliant community.

We appreciate your attention and leadership and welcome the opportunity to follow up at your convenience.

Respectfully,



Charles Young (May 22, 2025 07:16 HST)

Charles Young

Chair, Kona CDP Action Committee