

March 20, 2025

Keith Okamoto
Department of Water Supply Chief Engineer
345 Kekuanaoa Street, Suite 20
Hilo, HI 96720

Dear Mr. Okamoto,

The Puna Community Development Plan (PCDP) prioritizes infrastructure improvements that enhance the quality of life for residents and support sustainable community growth. In alignment with these objectives, we urge the County of Hawai'i to construct a water line and establish a water hauling and spigot station along Orchidland Drive to address the pressing needs of residents and businesses in the area.

Critical Need for Public Water Access

Orchidland Estates and surrounding neighborhoods currently lack adequate access to public water. With Puna's annual rainfall decreasing, reliable water access has become a more urgent issue than ever before. Orchidland Drive serves as a central location between Kea'au and Pāhoā, making it an ideal site for a water hauling station. Establishing this facility would allow water haulers to shorten delivery distances and provide residents and farmers with more convenient access to essential water resources—without requiring travel on Highway 130.

Supporting the PCDP Goal of a Village Center

The PCDP (Section 3.1) envisions the development of Village Centers that provide essential goods and services within residential communities, reducing reliance on major highways. A water line along Orchidland Drive is a critical first step in realizing this vision by enabling the future establishment of a Village Center. Potential businesses, such as a grocery store and laundromat, could serve the daily needs of residents while decreasing traffic congestion on Highway 130.

Additionally, a major development was initiated along Orchidland Drive between 35th and 36th Avenues, possibly as the foundation of a Village Center. However, the project has stalled. Installing a county water line could help revitalize this project and attract investment to the area.

Enhancing Community Spaces

The local non-profit Orchidland Neighbors has taken proactive steps to enhance community infrastructure by purchasing a four-acre lot on 36th Avenue to develop a community center and park. Their plans include a multi-purpose facility with classrooms, a commercial kitchen, a meeting hall, and outdoor recreational spaces. However, the lack of public water access remains a major obstacle to the realization of this project. Extending a water line to Orchidland Drive would also directly support this community-led initiative.

Request for County Action

In accordance with the PCDP's priorities, we respectfully request the County of Hawai'i to construct a water line along Orchidland Drive, extending at least to the 37th Avenue intersection. This would facilitate the establishment of a water hauling station and public spigot access, directly benefiting residents, businesses, and future developments.

We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with relevant county departments to advance this essential infrastructure project. Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Leilani DeMello, Chair
Puna Community Development Plan Action Committee