

**CULTURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
COUNTY OF HAWAII**

**MINUTES
June 18, 2025**

MEETING LOCATION:

Hybrid in-person and interactive video conference through Zoom with live observation through YouTube. The in-person location was held at the Hilo Planning Department Conference Room, 101 Pauahi Street, Suite 3, Hilo, HI 96720.

The full YouTube video of this hearing can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UmvttvsusLs>

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT VIA ZOOM: Matthew Clark (Chair) (left at 10:20 a.m.), Desmon Haumea (Vice Chair), Darde Gamayo, Roberta “Ku‘ulei” Keakealani, Kealohanuiopuna Kinney, and Aaron Spielman (arrived at 10:20 a.m.).

COMMISSIONERS EXCUSED: Nicole Lui and Janet Six.

ALSO PRESENT: Jean Campbell, Deputy Corporation Counsel; Kevin Sullivan, Planner V; Kim Tanaka, Planner IV; and Ashley DeVera, Board Secretary.

Commissioner Gamayo provided a pule to open.

Vice Chair Haumea called the Cultural Resources Commission (CRC) meeting to order at 10:13 a.m. A quorum was established with five members in attendance. It was announced that pursuant to Act 220, Session Laws of Hawai‘i 2021, which amended the Sunshine Law to allow meetings to be remotely conducted online, effective January 1, 2022, the Cultural Resources Commission meetings will be held online, with an in-person location for the public to provide testimony. The meeting can be viewed live online, and a link to YouTube can be located on the County website, as well as links to reports and surveys reviewed at this hearing. Commissioners were reminded that only one person may speak at a time and were asked to raise their hands to be recognized before speaking.

Commissioners were asked to introduce themselves and in accordance with the Sunshine Law, identify any member(s) present within the household. All members reported being alone in their location except Commissioner Gamayo who identified two individuals and Commissioner Keakealani who identified one individual.

Staff introductions were made.

There were no addendums or supplemental agenda items.

STATEMENT(S) FROM THE PUBLIC

At 10:16 a.m., Vice Chair Haumea opened the floor to receive public testimony. Procedures for testimony were provided. There is a three-minute time limit on each agenda item; statements must relate to items on the agenda.

[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 5:25] No testifiers were present on Zoom or in person.

Public testimony closed at 10:16 a.m.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

1. Approval of minutes of the meeting held on May 14, 2025.

[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 6:06] Vice Chair Haumea took the business of approving the minutes of May 14, 2025, out of order. Chair Clark motioned to approve the minutes as circulated; seconded by Commissioner Kinney. No discussion occurred. The minutes were approved without opposition with a unanimous aye voice vote.

BUSINESS OF THE COMMISSION

Chair Clark recused himself from both Business of the Commission agenda items and left the meeting at this time. Commissioner Spielman joined the meeting at 10:20 a.m., and quorum was confirmed with five commissioners.

1. Review and Discussion of Permitted Interaction Group Report and Memorandum of Agreement for the Wai‘aka Bridge Realignment (PL-CRC-2023-000007)

Location: Ahupua‘a of Lalamilo and Keanuiomano, District of South Kohala, Hawai‘i Island
TMK: (3) 6-5-001:015, 033, 6-6-001:011, 999, and 6-6-004:001

[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 9:51] Commissioner Keakealani disclosed that she had been consulted on the Wai‘aka Bridge project. After a brief discussion, it was determined that Commissioner Keakealani was not paid for her consultation services and could fairly evaluate the project; therefore, it was unnecessary to recuse herself for this matter.

[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 13:06] Mr. Sullivan clarified that this was the third and final discussion meeting for the permitted interaction group (PIG) and suggested the commission make a motion to sign the memorandum of agreement (MOA).

[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 14:24] This agenda item was called to order at 10:26 a.m. There was one team member from Hawai‘i Department of Transportation (HDOT) and one consultant in attendance. There were no members of the public present, and no public testimony provided.

[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 15:30] Mr. Sullivan mentioned that this was the opportunity

for the commission to discuss the site visit report that had been presented at the last meeting. The MOA had been provided in the meeting packet, and it outlined several stipulations, including the interpretive signage and the adverse effect determination.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 17:23*] Commissioner Keakealani had thoughts and concerns regarding the stone wall, which was connected to the pā ilina of the Phillips family, who are lineal descendants. She asked whether the stone wall would remain intact or if a portion of it would be disrupted and destroyed. Commissioner Spielman clarified that the wall was outside of the project area. The engineering team had recommended including the re-establishment of the stone wall in case it was unintentionally damaged during construction.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 19:45*] Vice Chair Haumea expressed concern about the dam regarding its usage but noted that it was outside of the project area. Commissioner Spielman clarified that it was modern construction, though its purpose remained unclear. Vice Chair Haumea wondered where the water would go and if it diverted the water flow.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 22:25*] Commissioner Spielman motioned to sign the MOA that had been presented to the CRC as a concurring party; seconded by Commissioner Keakealani. No discussion occurred. The motion was approved with a unanimous aye voice vote.

This matter concluded at 10:34 a.m.

2. Section 106 Review: Wailuku River Bridge Rehabilitation (PL-CRC-2025-000024)

Location: Hawai‘i Belt Road, Puueo & Piihonua Ahupua‘a, Hilo Moku, Hawai‘i Island
TMK: (3) 2-3-001:002, 999; 2-3-002:022, 999; 2-3-003:003, 999; 2-3-004:001, 013, 014;
2-6-001:020, 999; 2-6-002:003, 004, 012, 014, 017, 018, 019, 888, 999

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 23:21*] This agenda item was called to order at 10:35 a.m. There were eight team members from HDOT in attendance. There were no members of the public present, and no public testimony provided.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 25:36*] A presentation was provided by Ms. Jennifer Russell, HDOT Project Manager. The Wailuku River Bridge, originally constructed from 1911 to 1912, was damaged by the 1946 tsunami. In 1950, the bridge was rebuilt on the Hawai‘i Belt Road using the piers of the old railroad bridge, as part of a seismic wave damage rehabilitation project under the direction of Master Engineer William R. Bartels. Constructed of steel, an unusual choice, particularly for Hawai‘i’s extreme marine environment.

In 1973, the open steel decking was replaced with galvanized steel mesh to enhance vehicular safety, while still retaining the open-deck design to mitigate the lifting force of tsunami waves.

Located on Hawai‘i Belt Road, State Route 19 at approximately milepost 2.5 in Hilo, the Wailuku River Bridge shows signs of significant deterioration, as identified in its most recent inspection. The objective of the proposed project is to fully replace the bridge, in-kind, or as

close as possible. Planned improvements include widening the superstructure to accommodate safety-compliant railings and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant sidewalks, as well as resurfacing and restriping.

To maintain traffic during construction, two (2) temporary detour bridges are planned on the makai and mauka sides of the existing bridge. These detour bridges are intended to support continued traffic flow and serve as construction platforms.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 28:18*] The Area of Potential Effect (APE) extends approximately 2,450 feet from its southern terminus to its northern terminus. The bridge itself measures 422 feet in length. The total APE area encompasses approximately 8.2 acres, including the bridge footprint, construction staging and stockpiling areas, and the highway right-of-way. Construction staging and stockpiling activities are anticipated to occur entirely within the roughly 900-foot linear highway right-of-way makai of the Kamehameha Avenue and Hilo Bayfront Avenue median, beginning south of the Waianuenue Avenue interchange.

The proposed modifications to the bridge involves underwater work and structural changes. The outermost piers, located nearest the abutments at both ends of the bridge, are planned for removal, while the two center piers are to be replaced. The outermost piers are targeted for removal because they create a splash zone, which significantly accelerated the deterioration of the bridge.

The new spans between the abutments and center piers are anticipated to be constructed of concrete. The existing steel girders are slated to be replaced with new steel girders coated in a specialized anti-corrosion material. Upgrades to the bridge railings include the installation of MASH-compliant steel railings to meet current safety standards. The steel deck grating is also scheduled for replacement using the same steel material. Additionally, the existing wooden sidewalk is to be replaced with a wider concrete sidewalk, stamped with a wood-like pattern.

The overall intent of the project is to preserve the aesthetic character of the Wailuku River Bridge while enhancing its structural integrity and protecting the surrounding natural landscape.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 31:16*] The project remains in the Section 106 review process, with mitigation measures to be better defined as the effect determination progressed. The project site is adjacent to the Hilo Bayfront Avenue–Waianuenue Avenue roundabout project, and HDOT is considering advertising both projects jointly. Although the roundabout project is further advanced in design, coordination is ongoing regarding construction phasing and traffic control plans to minimize traffic disruptions and delays to the surrounding community.

The Section 106 process was initiated in December. State Historic Preservation Division (SHPD) concurrence on the APE was received in February. A public notice soliciting comments was published in March, but no comments were received. Comment letters were distributed in April, and the formal comment period had since concluded. At the time of reporting, work was underway on the effect determination.

Six potential historic properties have been identified within the APE: the Wailuku River Bridge, a concrete building foundation, a set of concrete stairs, the Hilo Pump Station and sewer system components, the Coconut Point Lighthouse, and a rock wall along Kamehameha Avenue. In addition, two potential historic districts were located in the vicinity: the Pu‘u‘eo Historic District and the proposed Downtown Hilo Historic District. Two areas within the APE were identified where subsurface work could uncover historic deposits—components of 20th-century Hawai‘i Consolidated Railway (HCR) alignment infrastructure, and six kuleana lots that may contain subsurface evidence of older, traditional Hawaiian occupation of the Hilo Bay area.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 33:50*] A Literature Review and Field Inspection (LRFI) report was drafted in preparation for assessment of all potentially historic properties within the APE that had not previously been evaluated for National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility. Efforts are underway to obtain right-of-entry access to conduct field surveys on adjacent private parcels, with findings to be incorporated into the final LRFI report.

In parallel, a draft Cultural Impact Assessment (CIA) had also been prepared. The anticipated outcome of the project’s impact on historic resources is classified as having an adverse effect, though no direct impacts to historic properties or historic districts are expected. Indirect impacts are projected to be limited to visual alterations resulting from changes to the bridge structure. This concluded the presentation; Ms. Russell opened the floor for any questions.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 35:02*] Commissioner Spielman inquired about the status of the Coconut Point Lighthouse. Mr. Scott King, consultant, responded that the lighthouse was located just makai of the APE and therefore not included within it. Commissioner Spielman noted that the lighthouse had recently been repainted and retained tsunami height markers, emphasizing its role as a recognizable landmark.

Commissioner Spielman also raised a question regarding the roofed structures on the southern end of the bridge and whether they would be removed or reconstructed—specifically referencing the Hilo Pump Station and its associated sewer system infrastructure. Mr. King confirmed that this structure was outside the APE and would remain intact and untouched. Mr. Randall Urasaki, consultant, affirmed this statement.

Commissioner Spielman further commented that steel grating bridges were increasingly being phased out due to safety concerns related to vehicular traction and tire grip. He asked whether a solid top bridge could be considered as an alternative. He also referred to the bridge’s unique identity as the “singing bridge,” named for the distinct sound created by vehicles crossing the steel grating. The use of concrete across the entire span could potentially reduce corrosion and increase durability, however, project representatives stated that while a solid top could be used, the steel grating produces a sound which is part of the novelty of the “singing” bridge and a key historical element of the bridge.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 39:31*] Mr. Sullivan offered his recommendation and guidance to the commission, stating that State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) concurred with the APE. He advised that the commission could concur with the APE, or not, through a formal

motion.

In accordance with procedural guidelines, Mr. Sullivan also recommended that the commission consider concurring with the adverse effect determination. This determination could potentially result in the development of a MOA and the commission may choose to remain a consulting party through the Section 106 process.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 40:53*] Commissioner Kinney raised concerns regarding the renowned surf area near the project site and inquired about planned dredging activities, as well as potential impacts the bridge modifications may have on wave breaks and access to the area. He emphasized the importance of maintaining access to that space.

In response, Mr. Urasaki explained that the outer abutments would be removed because wave action routinely strikes these areas, leading to ongoing corrosion and frequent repairs to the ends of the bridge. The two existing piers would be enlarged by adding a drilled shaft on either side, with coffer dams installed around them for the shaft and pier construction. He clarified that the overall bridge alignment would remain unchanged. However, he acknowledged that changes to wave or surf patterns were not yet fully understood. An ocean engineer on staff is currently studying tidal wave loading on the bridge, and Mr. Urasaki offered to consult with him regarding potential surf impacts.

Commissioner Kinney also voiced concern about how small changes to the coastline can significantly affect sand movement and accumulation patterns. He asked whether the enlargement of the pier structures could impact those coastal dynamics.

Additionally, Commissioner Kinney inquired about potential improvements to public access across the highway and to the shoreline area as part of the bridge replacement project. He noted that the current access to the site was either via a crosswalk at the intersection or along the bridge itself, and that there was no existing stairway to the water.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 46:26*] Vice Chair Haumea emphasized that safety was a priority for the local community, noting that he personally accessed the surf area from the Pu'u'eo side of the bridge and found it to be unsafe. He highlighted that the area was heavily used during regatta season for canoe races, which typically passed under the bridge, executed a turn, and returned through the same route. He underscored the importance of ensuring safe access and minimizing hazards for ocean-based activities.

In response, Mr. Urasaki stated that a study could be conducted to evaluate safety concerns and usage patterns. He noted that removing the two abutments could potentially result in increased space beneath the bridge, which might benefit ocean users.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 50:55*] Commissioner Gamayo inquired whether the bridge's height would be maintained at its current level or increased as part of the replacement project. Mr. Urasaki responded that the height would remain approximately the same as it is now.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 51:30*] Commissioner Spielman suggested the inclusion of interpretive signage, particularly within the expanded walkway areas on both the mauka and makai sides of the bridge. He emphasized the opportunity to share historical information about the Wailuku River Bridge and the cultural significance of the surrounding area.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 52:35*] Vice Chair Haumea expressed concern regarding community involvement, noting that projects are often approved without engagement during the early development stages. He stated that the community frequently feels excluded from the process and recommended outreach to local groups, including canoe clubs and surf clubs, to ensure their perspectives are considered.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 56:24*] Commissioner Keakealani expressed the importance of including CRC involvement as part of the proposed MOA. She emphasized the significance of the six identified kuleana lots and recommended establishing direct contact with the ‘ohana who currently use and maintain these areas. She underscored the value of integrating the ‘ike of the community, including their perspectives on the landscape, the Wailuku River, and the kai.

Commissioner Keakealani advocated for interpretive signage that would uplift the mo‘olelo and traditional narratives of the area, reinforcing how deeply important this region is to local history and identity. She also raised concerns about water flow during construction, specifically the potential for materials to be carried away and the need for appropriate containment measures to protect surrounding ecosystems and cultural sites.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 1:01:09*] Mr. Sullivan clarified the possible motions that could be made by the commissioners.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 1:04:53*] Commissioner Keakealani motioned that the CRC remain a consulting party, concur with the adverse effect determination, and agree with the APE as currently presented; seconded by Commissioner Gamayo. No discussion occurred. The motion was approved without opposition with a unanimous aye voice vote.

[*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP – 1:10:09*] A brief discussion occurred. Commissioner Keakealani motioned to include mo‘olelo through interpretive signage; seconded by Commissioner Spielman. No discussion occurred. The motion was approved without opposition with a unanimous aye voice vote.

This matter concluded at 11:32 a.m.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

2. Next meeting tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, July 9, 2025 or August 13, 2025.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:34 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ashley DeVera, Board Secretary

A T T E S T :

Desmon Haumea, Vice Chairman
Cultural Resources Commission