

PUNA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN
ACTION COMMITTEE

COUNTY OF HAWAII
DRAFT MINUTES
JUNE 26, 2025

CALL TO ORDER

Committee Member Susie Osborne called the Puna Community Development Plan (CDP) Action Committee (AC) to order at 5:05 p.m. This meeting was held in person at the Kea'au Community Center and online via the Zoom platform.

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kry9Q9Fgz-I>

ROLL CALL

Members Present (in person): Susie Osborne, Martha Morishige

Members Present (via Zoom): Leila Kealoha, Franny Brewer, and Jennifer Scheffel

Members Absent: Chair Leilani DeMello, Vice-Chair Gregory Henkel and Kanoe Wilson

County Staff Present: Maryam Palma and Kawelo Kalili

There were approximately 30 members of the public in attendance, 15 in person and 15 via Zoom.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Committee Member Morishige moved to approve the minutes from the February 27, 2025, meeting as drafted. Committee Member Kealoha seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 3:12]

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

Diga Kern provided testimony in support of the Kumukahi Letter of Support to Public Access, Open Space, and Natural Resources Preservation Commission (PONC). [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 5:00]

Diane Ware provided testimony requesting that the committee add to its next agenda a discussion on adopting a biosphere reserve buffer zone ordinance for Volcano Village's long-range forest protection plan. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 9:16]

Mary Marvin Porter provided testimony requesting the committee's help addressing a builder putting four rental units on one parcel in Hawaii Paradise Park by misusing farm dwelling permits. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 13:38]

BUSINESS:

1. **Letter of Support to PONC** – Deliberation on Public Access, Open Space, and Natural Resources Preservation Commission’s suggestion 25-07: acquisition and consolidation of Kumukahi, Puna, HI. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 15:07]

Committee Member Osborne explained that in 1999, burials were desecrated at Kumukahi on University of Hawaii (UH) land. The area covers 2,000 acres with 14 landowners and many ancient cemeteries and cultural sites. A burial treatment plan was signed in 2023, but it can’t be implemented until the access road reopens, which raises concerns about site vulnerability.

To protect the area, a PONC application was submitted with 100% of landowners agreeing to sell their properties, allowing for a consolidated management and burial plan. Site visits and extensive community engagement have taken place with support from nonprofits, cultural institutions, and the Burial Council.

Site visits have been conducted with the PONC Commission, UH attorneys, State of Hawaii Historic Preservation Division (SHPD), lineal descendants, and landowners. Two nonprofits representing the lineal descendants have led extensive community engagement, with support from 11 other nonprofits, four cultural and educational institutions, a local grassroots group, and government entities.

Committee Member Osborne called for a vote to approve and submit the letter of support on behalf of the Puna Action Committee. Committee Member Brewer moved to approve the letter. Committee Member Morishige seconded the motion. Committee Member Kealoha offered Pōhaku Pelemaka as a non-profit organization that would be in support of this work. The motion passed unanimously. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 20:13]

2. **Puna Connectivity Update** – Update and deliberation regarding highway connectivity in upper Puna. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 23:15]

Jordan Epperson provided testimony in support of more connectivity in upper and lower Puna. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 23:58]

Kevin Kushel provided testimony in support of better connectivity in Puna. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 25:15]

Steve Sparks provided testimony in support of better connectivity in Puna. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 27:39]

Hannah Hendricks provided testimony regarding road connectivity in Fern Forest. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 29:00]

Randy Horn provided testimony supporting alternate routes for upper Puna. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 32:05]

Stephanie Bath provided testimony regarding civil defense involvement and community engagement in connectivity in Puna. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 33:10]

Geniva Jackson provided testimony regarding strong support for connectivity, stressing that “roads in limbo” and gated access have left subdivisions without reliable emergency routes and urging the committee to move this issue forward. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 36:45]

Patti Pinto, a longtime advocate for Puna connectivity, noted that despite over 15 years of community work and completed planning, the county has not implemented projects due to turnover and lack of follow-through. She emphasized that Puna, with a population larger than Hilo, lacks equitable public safety because most subdivisions have only one road in and out, making evacuations during disasters extremely dangerous. She pointed out that even small, low-cost connections such as linking Fern Acres to Kapua Farm Lots would provide critical alternate routes.

Pinto added that previous county capital improvement budgets included funding for these connections, and there are signs of potential support for at least one project. She urged stronger community advocacy to push for action, citing Waikoloa’s success as an example. She also highlighted new state legislation, effective in 2026, which will allow community associations to assume ownership of subdivision roads when corporations have dissolved, removing a major barrier to funding and maintenance.

The AC submitted a letter to the mayor and followed up but has not received a response. She also noted that she and others have coordinated with county staff, including Councilmember Matt Kaneali‘i-Kleinfelder and Department of Public Works (DPW) Acting Director Neil Azevedo, to move forward on implementing at least one connectivity project this year, emphasizing that county willingness is higher when proposed roads connect to existing county roads.

Committee Member Osborne thanked Patti and proposed making her updates a continuous agenda item to ensure ongoing progress on connectivity efforts with county staff.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY ON MATTERS NOT ON AGENDA:

Judy Hall, a 37-year resident of Hawaiian Paradise Park, expressed concern about overdevelopment in her community, citing 10 double duplexes built illegally by a single developer using multiple LLCs. Despite filing complaints and meetings with the planning director and mayor, the structures remain noncompliant, and enforcement is limited due to insufficient staffing in the Planning Department. Hall emphasized that the community is agriculturally zoned and opposes urban-style development, and she came seeking guidance on how to more effectively prevent illegal development in the future. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 49:58]

Committee Member Osborne and Committee Member Morishige agreed to draft a letter to Planning Director regarding this community concern of overdevelopment in HPP.

PROPOSED AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING:

1. Overdevelopment in Hawaiian Paradise Park
2. Puna Connectivity
3. Orchidland Park Update

109 **ADJOURNMENT**

110 The meeting was adjourned at 6:05 p.m. [*SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 1:01:25*]

111 These minutes and all related documents are available in the Planning Department's Puna
112 Community Development Plan Action Committee folder via the County of Hawai'i [Public](#)
113 [Documents Repository](#). These documents may also be requested from the Planning Department by
114 calling (808) 961-8288 or emailing cdp@hawaiicounty.gov.