

PUNA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN
ACTION COMMITTEE

COUNTY OF HAWAII
DRAFT MINUTES
AUGUST 28, 2025

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Leilani DeMello called the Puna Community Development Plan (CDP) Action Committee (AC) to order at 5:01 p.m. This meeting was held in person at the Pāhoa 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=9fn3ARNAbdU&t=890s>

ROLL CALL

Members Present (in person): Stephanie Bath, Franny Brewer, Leilani DeMello, Martha Morishige

Members Present (via Zoom): Gregory Henkel and Susan Osborne

Members Absent: Kanoe Wilson, Jennifer Scheffel, Leila Kealoha

County Staff Present (in person): Maryam Palma, Janice Hata, Kim Tanaka

There were approximately 12 members of the public in attendance, 12 in person and 2 via Zoom.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Committee Member Henkel moved to approve the minutes of the June 26, 2025, meeting as drafted. Committee Member Osborne seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 3:50]

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

There was no public testimony at this time.

BUSINESS:

1. **Downtown Pāhoa Special District & PVD Guidelines** – Council District 4
Council Member Ashley Kierkiewicz will present on three proposed items: (1) draft legislation to designate Downtown Pāhoa as a Special Commercial District to expand permitted uses for property owners; (2) a discussion of the Pāhoa Village Design Guidelines, which the County Code requires the Action Committee to review every ten years; and (3) proposed legislation to clarify how the PVD

Guidelines Committee is convened and collaborates with the Planning Department. Council Member Kierkiewicz is requesting feedback from the Action Committee on all proposed items.

This item was called to order at 5:07 p.m.

Council Member Ashley Kierkiewicz presented three proposed bills related to the Downtown Pāhoa Special District and Pāhoa Village Design (PVD) Guidelines. The first bill would designate Downtown Pāhoa as a Special Commercial District, Downtown Pāhoa Special District (DPC), to expand permitted uses such as light industrial, agricultural processing, and creative studios supporting local economic growth and cultural identity without imposing new taxes or obligations on property owners.

The second bill involves a district reclassification to establish the boundaries of the special district, focusing on properties fronting Pāhoa Village Road between Post Office Road and Akeakamai Loop, with rezoning intended to provide flexibility while maintaining existing tax rates.

The third bill clarifies the role and selection process of the PVD Design Review Committee, proposing that the Action Committee review and confirm its members every two years to increase transparency and connection with the Planning Department. Additional discussion included potential tax incentives, enterprise zone benefits, and a revitalization fund supported by Transient Accommodation Tax revenues to aid small businesses and downtown improvements. Community meetings are scheduled for September 10, with a September 19 filing deadline and potential Council introduction on October 7, aiming for adoption by summer 2026.

Committee Member Bath asked how the proposal would affect home occupancy, and Council Member Kierkiewicz explained that home-based businesses currently require a special permit but will confirm details with the Planning Director.

Committee member Brewer requested clarification on the bills, and Council Member Kierkiewicz noted they would be submitted as a package, with the Pāhoa Village District and revitalization fund handled separately. A pre-bill addressing the metes and bounds section of Chapter 25 was already sent to the Council to establish this foundation.

Committee Member Osborne suggested agendizing the PVD design guidelines and reviewing the Waikīkī guidelines and asked if the AC could provide a letter of support to the Planning Commission or Department. Council Member Kierkiewicz confirmed that a letter of support would be helpful but not necessary by the October deadline.

RJ Parker provided testimony regarding whether it would be beneficial to have meets-and-bounds surveying for the perimeter of the special district to avoid future boundary disputes or confusion among property owners, whether the proposed special districts are limited only to portions of downtown Hilo, Pāhoa, and Kailua-Kona and not extended to other areas like Volcano, why these particular bills were not mentioned in the Puna Community Development Plan, whether the landscaping requirements could include

75 native and traditional food-producing trees and plants such as ‘ulu, mango, and green
76 tea to support sustainability and local food sources, and whether there could be
77 consideration for affordable or tiny home villages, like the one once located in Pāhoa
78 near Sacred Hearts, to help economically challenged residents be included rather than
79 marginalized. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 41:23]

80 Councilmember Kierkiewicz responded that while there isn’t a formal meets-and-bounds
81 map, the special district boundaries are clearly shown on a map using TMKs, so there’s
82 no risk of partial property inclusion. They clarified that Enterprise Zones, which offer
83 certain tax benefits, exist in most communities except Waimea, and that creating a
84 Special District requires legislative initiation by a council member. Regarding RJ’s
85 concerns, Kierkiewicz noted that urban forestry isn’t addressed in the zoning bills but is
86 being considered through other ordinances and confirmed that emergency and tiny
87 homes built after the eruption have helped kupuna transition to stable housing, with
88 opportunities for expansion supported by Hope Services Hawaii and the Catholic
89 Church.

90 David Aden provided testimony regarding clarification on the Pahoia Zone Map [SEE
91 YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 50:04]

92 Community member (name unknown) provided testimony regarding whether developers
93 could potentially buy and demolish all buildings on Main Street in Pāhoa, expressing
94 concern about preservation of the town’s character [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP
95 54:04]

96 Councilmember Kierkiewicz explained that none of the properties are historically
97 protected, so a developer could theoretically do that, but it’s unlikely. Guidelines can
98 encourage preservation, but they are not binding, and maintaining old buildings can be
99 costly and impractical for the community.

100 Hannah Hendricks provided testimony regarding whether the planned hub-and-spoke
101 transit project with the library in Pāhoa is still moving forward [SEE YOUTUBE
102 TIMESTAMP 1:00:12]

103 Councilmember Kierkiewicz confirmed the project is still in progress despite leadership
104 changes, explaining that planning, funding, and coordination with the state are ongoing,
105 and co-locating the library and bus hub makes the project more feasible.

106 This item concluded at 6:03 p.m.

107 **PUBLIC TESTIMONY ON MATTERS NOT ON AGENDA:**

108 Patti Pinto reported that planning staff met with the acting DPW Director, Neil Azevedo,
109 and his team, who reviewed connectivity data and supported starting projects. Work will
110 begin on three key connectivity points, Fern Forest/Eden Rock, Puhala extension to
111 Kopua, and a route from top Hawaiian Acres to Ola’a Road, improving highway access
112 for multiple subdivisions. She also highlighted the Pāhoa Village Design Guidelines,

noting their strong foundation in the Action Committee's work. Additionally, she discussed a bill that would allow property owners in certain subdivisions to deduct road fees from their property taxes, helping address long-standing road maintenance issues without the county taking ownership or liability [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 1:03:25]

Hannah Hedrick spoke about inter-subdivision connectivity in Puna Mauka, highlighting six priority locations and noting challenges with local road boards resisting the projects. She emphasized the need for ongoing support and visible involvement from the Puna CDP AC to advance these connectivity efforts despite opposition from some landowners [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 1:08:12]

RJ Parker provided testimony on Puna inter-subdivision connectivity, emphasizing that several subdivisions, Eden Rock, Fern Forest, Kopua Farm Lots, lack adequate emergency ingress and egress, which could pose serious safety risks during lava flows or other disasters. They also discussed broader sustainability concerns, including renewable energy opportunities, protection of native trees and agriculture, and the importance of cooperative planning to enhance community resilience [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 1:11:27]

George Salazaar provided testimony sharing their lifelong experience living in Pāhoa since 1939, noting local amenities like a nine-hole golf course, and offered to provide knowledge about the area. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 1:19:07]

PROPOSED AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING:

1. Letter of Support for Special District
2. Letter of Support PVD Guidelines
3. Federal Lobbyist

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:32 p.m. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP: 1:01:25]

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