

PUNA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN
ACTION COMMITTEE
COUNTY OF HAWAI'I
FINAL MINUTES
February 26, 2026

Call to Order

Chair Leilani DeMello called the meeting of the Puna Community Development Plan (CDP) Action Committee (AC) to order at 5:03 p.m. The 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://youtu.be/bDcMSAzVBVw?si=XOINe_3lwPZ1gaLs

Roll Call

AC Members Present (in person):

- Leilani DeMello, Chair
- Stephanie Bath
- Martha Morishige
- Susan (Susie) Osborne

AC Members Present (via Zoom): Leila Kealoha

AC Members Absent:

- Gregory Henkel, Vice Chair
- Jennifer Scheffel
- Frances Brewer

Planning Department Staff Present:

- Janice Hata
- Maryam Palma
- Kawelo Kalili (via Zoom)

There were approximately nine members of the public in attendance (seven in person and two via Zoom).

Approval of the Minutes

Chair DeMello requested approval of the August 28, 2025 draft meeting minutes at approximately 5:06 p.m. AC Member Osborne moved to approve the minutes as drafted, and AC Member Bath seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 03:19]

Public Testimony on Agenda Items

Chair DeMello called for public testimony on agenda items at approximately 5:07 p.m. No public testimony was provided at this time. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 04:30]

Third-Party Reports; Government Officials

Pursuant to Hawai'i Senate Bill 405 (2025), signed into law as Act 72, the AC may receive and discuss information from third-party reports by any government official not included in the publicly noticed agenda, but may not make decisions on matters raised through such reports until a later meeting with proper notice. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 05:56]

Road Connectivity Update

Patti Pinto, Recovery and Redevelopment Assistant, provided a road connectivity update following earlier discussions with the former Department of Public Works (DPW) Director Neil Azevedo. She reported that three connectivity points had been approved:

- Eden Roc to Fern Forest;
- Fern Acres to Kopua; and
- a connection from the top of Hawaiian Acres toward Highway 11 to improve access for Orchidland and Hawaiian Acres

She explained that the work would improve emergency egress for seven subdivisions. She also noted that the Eden Roc connection has encountered a property ownership issue involving a dissolved corporation, which may require either title action under recently adopted state legislation or county eminent domain. AC Member Bath raised a question regarding flood concerns on the Ola'a side; Patti reported that mitigation had been discussed. She said she would follow up with DPW and return with an update at a future meeting. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 06:23-09:37]

Council Member Ashley Kierkiewicz Update

Council Member Ashley Kierkiewicz joined by Zoom and provided a high-level update on district and county priorities. She asked the Committee to consider submitting support for the proposed Pāhoa Special District legislative package before the Windward Planning Commission hearing scheduled for April 2, 2026. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 09:50]

Her update also covered ongoing work related to economic development code updates; a "Made on and Grown on Hawai'i Island" designation; General Plan redrafting; Chapter 11 affordable housing amendments; revisions to county code relating to animals, dangerous dogs, and dangerous flora such as albizia; ahupua'a signage; native plant legislation; Public Access, Open Space, and Natural Resources Preservation Commission (PONC) coordination and land acquisition work; emergency management and disaster recovery institutionalization; Lower Puna interpretive

signage; community activation events; and geothermal-related water quality monitoring. Committee members thanked Council Member Kierkiewicz for the breadth of work underway and noted the Committee's intent to track items that may warrant future letters of support. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 11:28-20:06]

In regard to Cape Kumukahi, Council Member Kierkiewicz noted that the Mayor had filed the PONC report with the County Council on Friday, February 20, 2026. The Council expects to review this at the mid-March meetings. Council Member Kierkiewicz's office has drafted a resolution to authorize the Finance Director to enter into negotiation on all of the properties that were presented in the report. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 21:31]

Business

- 1. Pāhoa Special District Proposed Legislative Suite:** The AC will review Communication No. 2026-01, a draft letter regarding the proposed Pāhoa Special District legislative suite. The AC may approve the letter as written or with revisions and authorize Planning Department staff to transmit the letter to the Windward Planning Commission.

This item was called to order at approximately 5:26 p.m. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 23:17]

There was no public testimony at this time. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 24:05]

AC Member Osborne noted that she had worked closely with Council Member Kierkiewicz's office on the draft letter and believed the content accurately reflected the proposal.

AC Member Bath moved to approve the letter as drafted, and AC Member Osborne seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously, and Planning Department staff were authorized to transmit the letter to the Windward Planning Commission. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 25:10]

- 2. Support for Cape Kumukahi – Letter to PONC:** The AC will consider whether to submit a letter to the Public Access, Open Space, and Natural Resources Preservation Commission (PONC) in support of Cape Kumukahi (Tax Map Key (3) 1-4-002-052), which is on PONC's prioritized list. The AC may provide direction on the letter's content, approve the letter with any revisions, and authorize Planning Department staff to transmit the letter on behalf of the AC.

This item was called to order at approximately 5:30 p.m. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 26:39]

There was no public testimony at this time. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 29:09]

106 AC Member Osborne clarified that Cape Kumukahi has already advanced through the
107 PONC prioritization process and will now proceed to the County Council, as
108 mentioned by Council Member Kierkiewicz. She also identified revisions needed to
109 the draft, including corrections to language and spelling, and noted an outstanding
110 question regarding whether certain state-owned portions of the area could affect
111 eligibility for stewardship funding. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 27:31]

112 AC Member Osborne moved to approve the letter with revisions, and AC Member Bath
113 seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. The Committee authorized
114 Planning Department staff to transmit the revised letter on its behalf. [SEE YOUTUBE
115 TIMESTAMP 29:40]

116 This item concluded at approximately 5:33 p.m.

117 **3. Election of Chair and Vice Chair – 2026 Calendar Year:** The AC will elect a
118 Chair and Vice Chair to serve for the 2026 calendar year.

119 This item was called to order at 5:34 p.m. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 30:27]

120 There was no public testimony at this time. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 30:50]

121 Chair DeMello opened nominations for the 2026 Chair and Vice Chair of the
122 Committee. AC Member Kealoha nominated Susie Osborne to serve as Chair. After
123 discussion regarding continuity and committee turnover, the nomination was
124 seconded by AC Member Bath and was approved unanimously.

125 Susie Osborne nominated Leilani DeMello to serve as Vice Chair. The nomination was
126 seconded by AC Member Morishige and was approved unanimously. [SEE YOUTUBE
127 TIMESTAMP 31:20]

128 This item concluded at approximately 5:37 p.m.

129 **Public Testimony on Matters Not on the Agenda**

130 This item was called to order at 5:37 p.m. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 33:52]

131 Diane Ware provided testimony on the Volcano Community Association's ongoing efforts
132 to address large-scale "pin-to-pin" clearing and to protect native forest resources in the
133 Volcano area. She noted that these efforts have continued since the original Puna CDP
134 process and remain active today through initiatives such as a Forest Overlay Committee,
135 as well as ongoing coordination with Council Member Matt Kaneali'i-Kleinfelder. [SEE
136 YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 34:56]

Sandee Maeda, Secretary of the Hawaiian Paradise Park Owners Association Cultural Preservation Committee, testified about ongoing concerns involving iwi kupuna protection, burial preservation planning, and internal governance disputes within the association. She stated that the committee has been working with the State Historic Preservation Division and cultural descendants. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 43:26]

This item concluded at approximately 5:56 p.m.

Proposed New Business

Committee members and members of the public suggested several items for future agendas, including:

- an update from Council Member Matt Kaneali'i-Kleinfelder;
- follow-up discussion and proposed action on grading, grubbing, and native forest protection issues affecting Volcano and Upper Puna;
- continued monitoring of road connectivity and emergency egress issues;
- information regarding the Kea'au Benioff medical center project; and
- information from PONC staff or commissioners regarding current nominations and the property prioritization process

[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 52:50]

Shannon Matson testified in support of including a discussion on road connectivity at the next meeting. She also noted that the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Kea'au Benioff Medical Center project had recently been published and was open for public comment through March 25. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 58:38]

The Draft EA is available at the following link:

https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/erp/Doc_Library/2026-02-23-HA-DEA-Hilo-Benioff-Medical-Center-Medical-Offices-in-Keaau.pdf

Patti Pinto suggested that a future agenda include a presentation by a member of the Public Access, Open Space, and Natural Resources Preservation Commission (PONC) on the nomination process and the types of properties the Commission is interested in acquiring. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:02:57]

Announcements

The next meeting of the Puna CDP Action Committee was announced for Thursday, April 23, 2026.

The Planning Department is continuing to seek applicants for the Puna CDP Action Committee and encouraged interested community members to apply through the County's boards and commissions process. The link to the boards and commissions

171 website can be accessed here: [https://www.hawaiicounty.gov/our-county/boards-and-](https://www.hawaiicounty.gov/our-county/boards-and-commissions)
172 [commissions](https://www.hawaiicounty.gov/our-county/boards-and-commissions)

173 **Adjournment**

174 Chair DeMello adjourned the meeting at 6:10 p.m.

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