

**From:** [Stephen Holmes](#)  
**To:** [Sur. Peter](#)  
**Subject:** PIG input  
**Date:** Thursday, August 22, 2024 10:54:04 AM

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EMC Commissioners:

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The recommendations by the PIG really need amendment to recognize the impacts of the recently signed EPA Countywide Consent Decree.

The County is now mandated to establish Service Areas and connect large numbers of homes to County treatment plants. This precludes cesspool conversion to septic in these locations. This serves to increase the customer base needed to run a utility and provide adequate funding for O&M so that we never get in this mess again. It supports the AOC financial planning requirements as well.

Cesspools conversion to septic is both a financial hardship for homeowners and has no real environmental benefits. Septic doesn't work with high rainfall, proximity to coastal waters, small lot sizes, sloped lot conditions, and other real world limitations. It is not a one size fits all solution.

All over the country, water bodies are seeing pollution caused by septic. In Puako, dye testing has shown that septic leachfields rapidly convey pollution to coastal waters. The average cost of septic is around \$30,000 to \$60,000 and homeowners then have to start saving up for replacement. Tree roots are the bane of septic leachfields and may require homeowners to remove cherished trees and denude their yards.

Connecting homes to proper treatment with sewer improvement districts that spread costs out over 20 years and leverage government backed low interest loans and grants for low to moderate income families is the better approach. In areas where private wastewater plants can expand and add more customers, this too can address large numbers of homes currently on cesspools. In areas like Puna where no treatment exists, the answer is decentralized package plants with low pressure collection systems. These should be done by private firms with access to capital as the County is in no position to empire build.

Currently, we have no treatment plants with the required equipment for septage handling, so continuing to force new homes to install septic is just making the situation worse. A discussion needs to be had with State legislators. The focus needs to be on connecting homes to existing County facilities as EPA is now requiring, finding a legal way for private wastewater operators to extend service, and to follow the advice of AECOM to advance decentralized treatment to areas like Puna where density and high rainfall make septic a really bad solution and put drinking water wells at risk.

The County also needs to amend the current sewer ID process to reflect the federal mandate as the County has already agreed to connect homes under the AOC.

I appreciated the time the PIG gave me to present, but it is important to stress that the need to establish Service Areas and connect thousands of homes is now legally required. We can and must do better than septic.

Steve Holmes

On Aug 22, 2024, at 9:36 AM, Sur, Peter <Peter.Sur@hawaiicounty.gov> wrote:

<https://records.hawaiicounty.gov/weblink/Browse.aspx?dbid=1&startid=127586>

Aloha,

The agenda and other documents for the next meeting of the County of Hawai'i Environmental Management Commission have been posted and may be accessed at the link above.

DATE: August 28, 2024

TIME: 9:00 a.m.

IN PERSON: Community Meeting Hale (Building G) of the West Hawaii Civic Center, 74-5044 Ane Keohokālole Highway, Kailua-Kona

ONLINE: Via Zoom <https://www.zoomgov.com/j/16031058165>

(Meeting ID: 160 3105 8165)

PHONE: +1 669 254 5252 (Enter the meeting ID, see above)

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<!--[endif]-->**Peter Sur**

Private Secretary  
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