

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMISSION COUNTY OF HAWAI‘I

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 26, 2025
9:04 a.m. to 12:20 p.m.
Hawai‘i County Building, Hilo, and Zoom

A video recording is made part of these minutes, which is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVFCXnosi1o&list=PLtluYxDZK7NLxoEY70SEmb9VwgUetmTzf>

Timestamps are provided for reference in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 92, Hawai‘i Revised Statutes.

Disclaimer: *These meeting minutes were generated with assistance from AI and are intended to provide a summary of discussions. While efforts have been made to ensure accuracy, they may not capture the full context or details of the meeting. Please review and verify for completeness and accuracy.*

County staff present:

Wesley Segawa, Director; Craig Kawaguchi, Deputy Director; Gene Quiamas, Acting SWD Chief; Chris Sparber, Acting WWD Chief; Kelly Hartman, DEM Planner; Christy Swafford, Information & Education Specialist; Tiffany Wallace, Secretary; Sinclair Salas-Ferguson, Deputy Corporation Counsel

Others present:

Dr. Tracy Wiegner, others.

I. **Call to Order & Roll Call**

Chair Perez called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. Roll call conducted:

- **Present:**
 - **Jim Beets** (District 1) In-person
 - **Dell Otsuka** (District 3) In-person
 - **Erica Perez** (District 4) In-person
 - **Lee McIntosh** (District 6) In-person
 - **Gonzalo Garcia** (District 7) Zoom
 - **Dorothy Norris** (District 8) Absent
 - **Georjean Adams** (District 9) Zoom
- District 2 seat vacant
- District 5 seat vacant

II. **Approval of Minutes from January 29, 2025**

Motion 1 to approve Executive Meeting Minutes by Georjean Adams; seconded by Commissioner Otsuka. Vote: Approved unanimously

Motion 2 to approve minutes by Commissioner Adams; seconded by Commissioner Otsuka. Vote: The minutes were approved with one nay from Commissioner Adams who requested corrections for spelling errors. The requested corrections will be made accordingly.

III. Introduction of Director Wesley Segawa

Chair Perez introduced the new Director of Environmental Management Wesley Segawa.

IV. Public Statements on Agenda Items

Sharde Freitas, see VI New Business, Item 4.

V. REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 00:03:33 – 01:15:22]

1. Director’s Informational Report

A. Legislative Update

- i. Kelly Hartman provided a legislative update, noting that the department has been tracking approximately 64 bills, with a focus on waste diversion and cesspool conversion. There have been 24 submitted testimonies to date.
- ii. The first round of testimony has been submitted, and a second round will occur at the first crossover.
- iii. Note that letters and/or bullet point recommendations are being accepted.
- iv. Kelly Hartman will provide the Legislative Report to EMC for review and advisement.

B. Solid Waste Division Updates

- i. Gene provided an update on Solid Waste operations, confirming that all facilities were open as scheduled.
- ii. The active project is the upgrade of the Laupāhoehoe Transfer Station, awarded to Isemoto Contracting. The project is set to begin in the summer with a full closure of the station. Community input on alternative service locations is still pending.
- iii. Gene also discussed ongoing issues at the closed Kailua landfill, particularly complaints about odors, and emphasized the need for precise location data when reports are made.
- iv. Deputy Director, Craig Kawaguchi reported on the recent household hazardous waste collection events in Hilo and Kona, which served over 1,000 customers and collected thousands of gallons of used motor oil. Future events are planned for Waimea and Pāhoa.

C. Wastewater Division Updates

- i. Chris Sparber provided an update on major Wastewater projects, including:
 - a. Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant rehabilitation, which has begun under an emergency proclamation. Initial construction activities will start in a few months.
 - b. The Hale Halawai Force Main Replacement project, now out for bid.
 - c. Pāhala treatment plant design is 100% complete, while Nā'ālehu is at 30% design.
- ii. Chris discussed the emergency proclamation's role in expediting procurement and bypass construction to prevent catastrophic failure at the Hilo plant.

D. Integrated Wastewater Management Plan Updates

- i. The plan is still under internal review, with a draft expected in Q2 2025.
- ii. Collaboration with the state Department of Health and the University of Hawaii continues cesspool conversion planning.

E. Update Regarding Mayor's Task Force to Fill County Employee Vacancies

- i. The DEM has a representative on the task force, focusing on recruitment and retention.
- ii. A new HR Program Specialist has been hired and will participate in these discussions.
- iii. Commissioner Garcia shared information on a potential partnership with the local community college to develop training programs for future DEM employees.

VI. NEW BUSINESS [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:15:33 – 02:36:29]

- The presentation from Barbara Bell (Item 3) was rescheduled to the May meeting.
- The presentation on the Keaukaha Wastewater Study (Item 2) was moved up and addressed earlier in the agenda.

1. Action Item: Emergency Proclamation for Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:01:26 – 02:02:35]

The Commission discussed whether to issue a letter to the County Council and DEM regarding the emergency proclamation. After a brief discussion, the Commission decided not to issue a letter at this time and will continue to monitor updates during monthly meetings.

2. Presentation on Keaukaha Wastewater Study [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:15:33 – 02:00:50]

Dr. Tracy Wiegner presented findings on wastewater contamination from OSDS (onsite sewage disposal systems) in Puakō, Hilo, and Kailua-Kona.

3. Rescheduling Barbara Bell's Presentation

The presentation on community-based solutions for sewage impacts in Puakō was rescheduled for the month of May.

4. Action Item: Letter Regarding House Bill 1362 [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:03:03 – 02:36:29]

Testimony from Sharde Freitas: [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:14:15 – 02:15:47]

Aloha, this is Sharde Freitas I just wanted to say that I'm looking at the testimony submitted for HB 1362, and it says that the proposed allocation of 6 million for fiscal years 2025 to 2026 and 2026 to 2027 represents a crucial investment in environmental sustainability and the well-being of Native Hawaiian families. And so that's the description, I guess that's provided. This is the county's testimony in support of HB 1362. And I also wanted to encourage the commission to continue supporting; being that it's still a bill going through the legislative process, a new amount can be proposed or advocated for to whatever amount you think is appropriate. And just generally looking at Keaukaha as a community and the weight of the environmental injustices that they've been experiencing, I think it's a win, win, win all around. Especially what was previously presented in terms of the environmental impacts to the near shore area that Keaukaha prioritized. And this would be, you know, monies provided to DHHL to do that work. So, the lessees are provided that, at no cost to them. This gets fixed at no, no, you know, it's DHHL funds and so it seems like a win all around. Thank you.

Discussion: The Commission deliberated on whether to provide verbal or written support to the Department of Environmental Management (DEM), urging them to support HB 1362, which seeks \$6,000,000 appropriation for the expansion of Keaukaha's sewer network.

Motion 3 to support DEM for House Bill 1362 (verbal or written support) by Commissioner Otsuka; seconded by Commissioner McIntosh

Vote: Ayes 5 (Otsuka, McIntosh, Beets, Garcia, Perez); Abstain 1 (Adams); Absent 1 (Norris). The motion was approved.

5. Commissioner Otsuka's Update on DEM Staffing Letter [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:37:02 – 02:40:00]

Commissioner Otsuka provided a draft letter in written testimony addressing staffing issues within DEM. Deputy Corporation Counsel, Sinclair Salas Ferguson will assist Commissioner Otsuka with the draft letter, which will be presented at the next meeting for further review.

VII. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:40:00 – 02:44:11]

- Follow-up on action items from this meeting.

The commission was reminded to contact the Chair Perez agenda items for the March meeting by March 12, 2025.

IX. Announcements [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:44:11 – 02:45:52]

1. Next Meeting: March 27, 2025, in Kailua-Kona at the West Hawai'i Civic Center, Community Meeting Hale (Building G).

X. Adjournment

Motion 4 to adjourn approve by Commissioner Beets; seconded by Commissioner Adams. Vote: Approved unanimously (Ayes: 6). Meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tiffany Wallace, Secretary