

# ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMISSION COUNTY OF HAWAI'I

## MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, May 28, 2025

9:02 a.m. to 11:40 a.m.

Kona Council Chambers, Kona, and Zoom

*A video recording is made part of these minutes, which is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBbXNwdv9B0&list=PLtluYxDZK7NLxoEY70SEmb9VwqUetmTzf&index=1>*

*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:

Craig Kawaguchi, Deputy Director; Gene Quiamas, Acting SWD Chief; Chris Sparber, Acting WWD Chief; Kelly Hartman, DEM Planner; Kahula Guinn-Lacy, HR Program Specialist; Tiffany Wallace, Secretary; Sinclair Salas-Ferguson, Deputy Corporation Counsel

### Others present:

Megan Lamson, Kristine Kubat, 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) Zoom
  - **Dell Otsuka** (District 3) Zoom
  - **Erica Perez** (District 4) In-person
  - **Gonzalo Garcia** (District 7) In-person
  - **Dorothy Norris** (District 8) In-person
  - **John Kometani** (District 9) In-person
- District 2 seat vacant
- District 5 seat vacant
- District 6 seat vacant

## **II. Announcements: Introduction of new Commission Member John Kometani, District 9.**

- Chair Perez introduced the new District 9 Commissioner John Kometani.

## **II. (Error in the numbering on the agenda) Approval of Minutes from February 26, 2025**

**Motion 1: Motion to approve February 26, 2025, minutes was made by Commissioner Garcia and seconded by Commissioner Kometani. Vote: Approved unanimously**

**III. Public Statements on Agenda Items [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 00:07:00 –00:16:31]**

Sharde Freitas, see V Reports/Correspondence, Item E. and AOC. Freitas is the chapter organizer with the Sierra Club of Hawaii. Main concerns; addressing FOG, Funding, and public outreach/education of Keaukaha, Administrative Order of Consent, and Emergency Proclamation.

Claudia, see V Reports/Correspondence, Item E. Administrative Order of Consent and public outreach and communication access to reports and correspondence, 2018 DOH/DAR study Pepe'ekeo benthic study, future studies?

Chuck Flaherty, see VI New Business, item 2. Chair of the Hawai'i Island Group of the Sierra Club, expressed concern related to potential environmental and health impacts from importing large volumes of plastic from other islands.

**IV. UNFINISHED BUSINESS [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 00:17:16 – 00:19:32]**

1. Consideration of Draft Letter: *Enhancing Workforce Development and Hiring Efforts within the Department of Environmental Management.*

The Commission considered a draft letter aimed at enhancing workforce development and hiring efforts within the Department of Environmental Management. A motion to approve the letter was made and seconded. During the vote, Commissioners Garcia, Beetz, and Otsuka voted in favor; Commissioner Kometani abstained. With the majority in support, the motion passed, and the letter was approved.

**Motion 2: Motion to approve draft letter was made by Commissioner Garcia and seconded by Vice-Chair Norris. Vote: Commissioners Garcia, Norris, Beets, Perez, and Otsuka voted in favor; Commissioner Kometani abstained. The motion was approved.**

**V. REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 00:20:02 – 01:27:43]**

1. Director's Informational Report

A. Legislative Update: Kelly Hartman provided a legislative update as of May 27, 2025. One bill, **SB 946**, has been signed into law to close a loophole allowing certain energy-producing treatment plants to discharge wastewater into state waters.

Seven additional bills are pending the Governor's action:

- **HB 242:** Establishes a working group on electric vehicle battery recycling and reuse.
- **HB 735:** Allows individual wastewater systems (IWS) to serve up to five bedrooms, regardless of dwelling units.
- **HB 736:** Appropriates funds for a pilot wastewater system and IWS technology testing program at UH.
- **SB 750:** Requires DOH to assess statewide waste reduction and recycling infrastructure needs.
- **HB 969:** Restricts landfill construction in certain high-population counties (excludes Hawai'i County).
- **HB 1091:** Requires counties to accept sewer infrastructure servicing Hawaiian Homelands within 60 days of compliance.
- **SB 1298:** Expands electronic waste covered under the recycling program and sets updated recycling goals.

Two resolutions were also adopted:

- **SR-85:** Requests a state-level working group on solid waste management.
- **HR-184:** Requests DOH to convene a demolition waste reduction working group.  
If signed by the governor by July 9th, will become law and given an act number. Bills without signature nor vetoes will become bills by July 9th. The following resolutions have been adopted, requested SR-85, requesting the governor or the governor's designated to convene a working group on solid waste management, and HR-184, requesting the Department of Health to convene a demolition, waste reduction working group.

**Commission Discussion:**

- Questions were raised regarding the implications of **HB 735** on cesspool conversions and whether adding structures or units would still trigger required upgrades.
- Hartman noted the bill. This bill would allow multiple dwelling units to be able to get an approved permit from the Department of Health on an IWS system. That approval will be passed on to our Public Works Department for approval of any subsequent building permits, but the broader implications related to cesspool conversions would require follow-up with DOH or Public Works.
- Questions raised regarding HB1091 in regard to transmission lines to sewer treatment plant and how they are currently evaluated, monitored and maintained.
- Response (?) this is a pending bill and uncertain on the O&M of DHHL infrastructure and the DEM has yet to analyze the impact or process. Would require an Application for Maintenance Request which is a new process and is TBD. County lines undergo an initial condition assessment by Oct 2028.

B. Budget Updates: Craig Kawaguchi (Deputy Director) deferred discussion until the County budget is finalized (2nd reading scheduled June 5). Commission expressed interest in supporting budget priorities during County review and approval process.

C. Staffing Updates: Kahula Guinn-Lacy (HR Program Specialist) reported 44 current vacancies (5 Admin, 22 Wastewater, 17 Solid Waste), 12 hires made this year including Solid Waste Division Chief. 5 positions posted on the County website including Wastewater Division Chief, Wastewater Deputy Division Chief, and that a new HR staff member has been approved. There was discussion regarding use of staffing agencies and recruitment efforts with local colleges. Kahula to provide the Commission with a list of vacancies so the Commission can share broadly.

**Commission Discussion:**

- Use of Altres Staffing, or other similar staffing companies, as a potential resource to fill immediate vacancies.
- Recommendations will be passed onto the Dept of Human Resources and the recruitment division

D. Solid Waste Division Updates: Gene Quiamas (Acting Solid Waste Chief)

- Trailer Study: Completed under previous administration; recommendations under review. If accepted will be part of the next admin rules.
- Laupāhoehoe is 100% closed while the new station is under construction.

- iii. Community Outreach for Laupāhoehoe, Honomū, and Pāpa'īkou transfer station: Honomū is opened three additional days to offset Laupāhoehoe closure and is now open 6 days a week. This adjustment was made in response to feedback received from a community survey distributed by CM Kimball's office.
- iv. Household Hazardous Waste Events: Used motor oil
  - a. Hilo – 572 customers; 2,683 gallons collected.
  - b. Kona – 416 customers; 915 gallons collected.
  - c. Waimea – 277 customers; 808 gallons collected.
  - d. Pāhoa – 377 customers; 1,430 gallons collected.

**Commission Discussion:**

- Potential to add more days is dependent on staffing within DEM  
Where does the waste go that is collected during these events? Korea and is burnt in a refinery for energy.

**E. Wastewater Division Updates:** Chris Sparber (Acting Wastewater Chief)

- i. AOC update: Acting Wastewater Division Chief Chris Sparber provided an update on current projects related to the county-wide Administrative Orders on Consent (AOCs). Several key deadlines are approaching on July 1, 2025, including:
  - a. the submittal of the asset management report and status update, which remains on track, as well as the sewer line operations and maintenance and preventative maintenance program plan, led by Kelly, which is also progressing as scheduled.
  - b. The bid for the Hale Halawai force main replacement project has been completed, and the division is preparing to issue a Notice to Proceed (NTP) by the July 1 deadline.
  - c. The design phase for the second force main at the Kealakehe sewer pump station has been completed; however, construction funding has not yet been identified.
  - d. The NTP for the Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant Rehabilitation project—due August 1, 2025—has already been issued.
  - e. The Kealakehe Wastewater Treatment Plant Headworks Rehabilitation project is scheduled to go out to bid by September and is currently on track.
  - f. Pāhala and Nā'ālehu large capacity cesspool closure projects, the Pāhala collection system is already under construction, with Goodfellow Bros. as the contractor, and preconstruction activities are underway. The Pāhala wastewater treatment plant is at 100% design and is expected to go out to bid by June or early July.
  - g. The Nā'ālehu project is at 30% design as planning efforts continue, including finalizing the selection of a collection system alternative. Sparber emphasized that EPA has been a cooperative partner, allowing for flexibility when delays are justified. He concluded by noting that these AOC-related projects represent a significant portion of the division's capital improvement program (CIP) budget.

- ii. Hilo WWTP NPDES permit renewal and Emergency Proclamation update: An update was provided on the renewal of the NPDES permit for the Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant and the use of the emergency proclamation.
  - a. NPDES permit renewed effective June 1, and includes updates to increased sampling requirements (from weekly to daily) and
  - b. The permit requires new programmatic conditions, including a pretreatment and FOG (Fats, Oils, and Grease) program. Code revisions to implement the pretreatment program are a priority and expected to go to Council within 4–8 months.
  - c. Commissioners were encouraged to review and provide feedback.
  - d. The emergency proclamation has allowed the division to secure third-party electrical and hauling support, easing the burden on Solid Waste staff. Wastewater is working to become self-sufficient in sludge hauling and is recruiting for a new position. The proclamation also supports expedited procurement of critical equipment to maintain operations and increase resiliency during the multi-year rehabilitation of the Hilo plant.
- iii. South Kohala and Puakō Cesspool Conversion Plan update: Kelly shared that the Puakō and South Kohala Regional Wastewater Master Plan, completed by AECOM, along with previous plans for Puna and Pāhoa, will be integrated into the County’s broader Integrated Wastewater Management Plan.
  - a. The County will work with the administration to prioritize projects and develop a financial strategy, noting that approximately \$1 billion in AOC-related work already exists. Future planning will focus on expanding service within existing sewer areas and exploring options such as individual wastewater systems (IWS), decentralized systems, or connections to private treatment plants. Further discussion and coordination are still needed.
- iv. Nā’ālehu and Pāhala (whether the County will pay for certain lots to be connected to sewer, i.e. – the purple lots identified in reports to the community) update: It was noted that while previous administrations may have discussed or made commitments regarding the “Purple lots,” the County currently lacks funding to support all of them. The Mayor’s Cesspool Conversion Task Force is pursuing external funding to support cesspool conversions.
- v. Kahalu’u Cesspool Study update: It was reported that delays in surveying have been resolved, and a draft alternatives report for the Kahalu’u wastewater study is expected by the end of July 2025. Once received, the County will review the report, conduct public outreach, and select a preferred alternative before moving into design.

**Commission Discussion:**

- Is the County working with Army Corp to align efforts? Not currently.

**F. Integrated Wastewater Management Plan updates:** Chris Sparber (Acting Wastewater Chief)

- i. Maintenance on Collection Systems and how they are addressing sea level rise: A \$5.4 million emergency project is underway, including CIPP (cured-in-place pipe) lining and manhole rehabilitation along Kalanianaʻole Avenue and at the Wailoa sewer pump station, targeting significant inflow and infiltration (INI) issues. While

CIPP improvements indirectly enhance resilience to sea level rise by sealing pipe joints and improving water-tightness, there is currently no formal policy or coordinated approach in place that restricts development based on sea level rise impacts. Assessment and in-situ repair remain the current strategy.

**VI. NEW BUSINESS** [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:27:51 – 02:22:39]

1. Megan Lamson of Hawai'i Wildlife Fund provided a presentation related to plastic pollution and removal work in Hawai'i. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:27:51 – 01:56:43]
2. Kristine Kubat of Recycle Hawai'i provided a presentation regarding Recycle Hawai'i's programs. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 01:56:44 – 02:22:39]
3. Action item: The Commission will determine whether to recommend that the Department of Environmental Management lift the ban of trailers at the Wai'ōhinu transfer station. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:22:42 – 02:26:25]

Deputy Director Craig Kawaguchi explained that the ban was likely implemented due to safety concerns related to reversing trailers, particularly large ones, at certain sites. It was clarified that the ban is currently island-wide, though the initial request brought by former Commissioner appeared to focus specifically on the Wai'ōhinu Transfer Station.

**Action:** No motion was made to advance the recommendation.

**VII. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS** [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:26:28 – 02:28:28]

1. The commission was reminded to submit future agenda item requests to Chair Perez by June 2, 2025.  
Commissioner Garcia expressed interest in exploring how the County can better support marine debris cleanup efforts, particularly related to tire removal. He highlighted the work of Hawai'i Wildlife Fund and its partnership with Ocean Defenders Alliance (ODA), which recently removed over 96 tires from Kailua Bay and is planning additional cleanups. Given the environmental impact and disposal costs, Garcia suggested looking into potential County support, such as reduced disposal fees or other assistance. He offered to arrange a future presentation by ODA.

**IX. Announcements** [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:28:38 – 02:28:53]

1. Next Meeting: Wednesday, June 25, 2025, in Hilo at the Hawaii County Building, Puna Conference Room.

**X. Adjournment** [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 02:28:54 – 02:29:11]

**Motion 3: Motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Garcia and seconded by Commissioner Kometani. Vote: Approved unanimously (Ayes: 6). Meeting adjourned at 11:40 a.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Tiffany Wallace, Secretary