

**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=PLtlYxDZK7NLxoEY70SEmb9VwqUetmTzf&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 Testimony #1; Item 5E: [6:58-9:48]**

I'll just go ahead now, if that's okay I do plan to stay on, but in case for whatever reason I'm not able to, I'll just go ahead and make comments now. Aloha, I'm Sharde Freitas. I'm a Chapter Organizer with the Sierra Club of Hawaii, and I have some questions that I had sent over to Chris Sparber, and I have not yet received the response. I hope that raising these questions today can bring forth some of the conversation and answers that I'm seeking. As some background, this all relates to agenda item 5E and the administrative order on consent. And as a further background, a group of us had attended a Pua Pump Station site visit, and one of the things that came to light as part of that site visit is the importance of public outreach and education. Especially in Keaukaha, many of the community members did not know that the Pua Pump Station was still in operation. They thought it was bought out by the neighbor, UH Hilo. And another thing that came up was the extreme burden that things like flushable wipes or even FOG, fat, oils, and grease that this commission has talked about at many commission meetings, and the importance of addressing that. And there's no sense in updating our wastewater system if it's only going to get clogged by the flushable wipes or other things that shouldn't be in our wastewater system.

And then lastly, all of this comes down to funding. And so that's all of the background that leads me to my questions. And first, in what ways has the county made progress to fulfill requirements to the administrative order on consent since the emergency proclamation has been signed? There has been two or there was an initial one at the beginning of the year, and then it was extended a similar version was signed again after that, I think, 60 days was up or whatever that time period is. And so, I'd like an update on that. And also, what is the county's communications plan to facilitate the requirements of the AOC and transitions from Cesspool to sewer? It was shared at the Pua Pump Station site visit that DEM would be posting on social media a post on Fats Oils in grease, as well as looking into community meeting to be more transparent with the community with the Pua Pump Station in operation. And so, I'd like to know the status on those two items. And lastly, what is the DEMs or the county's financial strategy to secure funds needed to make necessary upgrades as mandated in the AOC?

Thank you. Okay.

**Sharde Freitas Testimony #2; Item 5E: [01:07:58 – 01:10:12]**

Okay, thank you. Hi, Chris. This is Sharde. I'm a Hilo resident and also a Chapter Organizer with the Sierra Club of Hawaii. I had sent you some email questions that I restated at the top of this meeting, and I just wanted to follow up on the NPDES permit, did you have a chance to see the testimony submitted by the public and DOH's responses?

Chris Sparber, Acting Wastewater Chief: As far as DOH's responses to testimony submitted by the public, I have not reviewed that. I've just been focused on implementing the operational parameters of our active permit.

Sharde Freitas: Okay, thank you. I could just give a quick update. There was testimony submitted by the public expressing their concern with regards to what they have experienced as Keaukaha community members, as Hilo residents, and their use of the of Hilo Bay, Keaukaha, near shore waters, and from a health perspective, which that's part of DOH's mission. And part of the comment period for DOH with the renewal of the NPDES permit had indicated that if the public submitted testimony saying that they would like a public information hearing or workshop or some more public forum to discuss the NPDES permit, that would be next steps would be discussed. DOH's response to the testimony that was submitted was that there wasn't enough of a public submission, I guess, for that request. And so, my question is, if DEM would be able to provide that public forum for the community.

Craig Kawaguchi, Deputy Director: Yeah, we'll be open to I think if we could... I'll get your contact information.

Sharde Freitas: Okay. Thank you so much.

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'okeo 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 (3rd 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)

- i. Trailer Study: Completed under previous administration; recommendations under review. If accepted will be part of the next admin rules.
- ii. Laupāhoehoe is 100% closed while the new station is under construction.
- iii. Community Outreach for Laupāhoehoe, Honomū, and Pāpa'ikou 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,

