

**ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMISSION
COUNTY OF HAWAII**

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, August 27, 2025
9:05 a.m. to 11:57 a.m.
Hilo Council Chambers, Hilo, and Zoom

A video recording is made part of these minutes, which is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDi1RsOf5M8&list=PLtluYxDZK7NLxoEY70SEmb9VwgUetmTzf&index=1>

Timestamps are provided for reference in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 92, Hawaii's Revised Statutes.

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County staff present:

Wesley Segawa, Director, Craig Kawaguchi, Deputy Director; Mike Rivera, SWD Chief; Kelly Hartman, DEM Planner; Christopher Laude, TA Wastewater Division Chief, Kahula Guinn-Lacy, HR Program Specialist; Robin Bauman, Business Manager; Christy Swafford, Information and Education Specialist; and Sinclair Salas-Ferguson, Deputy Corporation Counsel.

Others present:

Alan Fukamizu, Barbara Bell, Roy Takemoto, Terri Napeahi, Sharon Landry and others.

I. CALL TO ORDER [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 0:00 – 1:55]

Chair Perez called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m., noting that quorum was present.

Present:

- Jim Beets (District 1) In-person
- Dell Otsuka (District 3) In-person
- Erica Perez (District 4) In-person
- Justin Canelas (District 6) In-person
- Gonzalo Garcia (District 7) Zoom
- John Kometani (District 9) In-person

Vacancies

- District 2 seat vacant
- District 5 seat vacant
- District 8 seat vacant

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR June 25, 2025 [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 1:57 – 2:15]

The Environmental Management Commission will consider approval of the minutes from its meeting held on June 25, 2025.

Chair Perez opened the item and confirmed a quorum with six commissioners present

Motion 1: Commissioner Beets moved to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Canelas seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

III. INTRODUCTION OF NEW COMMISSIONER [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:17 – 2:40]

Chair Perez welcomed Commissioner Justin Canelas, newly appointed to represent District 6.

Commissioner Canelas expressed his honor to serve the County in this important role, and Chair Perez noted the Commission's excitement in having him join.

IV. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRPERSON FOR REMAINDER OF 2025 [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:42 – 4:44]

Following the transition of Commissioner Dot Norris, the Commission held an election to fill the Vice Chair position. Chair Perez asked for nominations, and Commissioner Canelas expressed his willingness to serve.

Motion 2: Commissioner Kometani moved to nominate Commissioner Canelas as Vice Chair of the Environmental Management Commission, and Commissioner Otsuka seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

V. PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON ITEMS ON THE AGENDA [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 4:50 – 24:40]

Public Testimony – Agenda Item III (Introduction of New Commissioner)

Alan Fukamizu [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 05:44 – 06:37] So just my question, just in transparency, Justin works for Recycle Hawaii, you're the director of operations. Okay, so as your role of director of operations today or in Recycle Hawaii, will that become an issue with anything with this commission regarding conflict of interest?

Chair Perez I'm sorry if you could just leave it to testimony and not questioning.

Alan Fukamizu Oh yeah, sorry. Okay, so as Justin's, like I said, this is nothing against you, just in transparency. So, Justin's role is their director of operations at Recycle Hawaii. So, I just. Yeah, sorry. No questions. Yeah.

Public Testimony – Agenda Item VI.1 (Puakō Cesspool Conversion Project)

Barbara Bell [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 07:15 – 11:15] Good morning. I'm here with Roy Takemoto. We're with Puakō for Reefs, a nonprofit, to working on a sewer collection line in Puakō and the agenda item 6.1 about a pilot project. So, we submitted a big packet for testimony. So, there's a lot of data in there that you can peruse at your leisure or if you have insomnia. The problem, the lack of a model for community initiated solutions. In response to the state's 2050 mandate to eliminate all cesspools, there are three choices. Every homeowner on their own, wait for the county to implement a plan according to their priorities, or communities organize to partner with the county. So, in certain areas, replacing a cesspool with a septic or aerobic ATU may be an appropriate solution, in which case every homeowner could carry out this solution on their own. However, where the only appropriate solution is a sewer system due to either small lot sizes or a coastal area where septic and ATUs are still contaminating waters, either the county or the community must initiate this solution. So, waiting for the county may be too late to save coral reefs that are sensitive to wastewater effluent. For example, several scientific studies have documented that the Puakō reef could still recover if the stress from wastewater effluent was removed. But we have about a 10-year window. And as you know, these projects are a little bit complicated. So, in that window, that would be before damage becomes irreversible. So, this urgency prompted our community, Puakō community, to take action. Over the past 10 years, Puget Sound community has partnered with three successive county administrations.

And so local residents have donated more than \$3 million to support this work and agreements were reached under two administrations, but ultimately the project has stalled. The root problem is not a lack of support, but a lack of a process. So, we're looking for a pathway. The county does not currently have that pathway for community initiated sewer projects. The only pathway offered by the county is a CFD process, Community Finance District, but that's designed for developers and it requires an initial deposit of \$75,000 to kick it off. So, for a community that's a little tricky. So, we are suggesting that Puakō be a model where Puakō is not alone. Other communities in the county face similar circumstances, but Puakō is the most advanced in planning and preparedness. This presents a big opportunity. By using Puakō as a pilot project, the county can establish a clear, replicable framework to guide future projects across the island. With the support of the EMC and the Cesspool Conversion Task Force. We formed a nonprofit. We have a solution, and we have a whole list of questions that are like threshold questions. And a lot of it boils down to we need a pathway and how would a community do this? So, thank you. I'm sorry I was so long-winded. We really would like your support for Puakō to become a pilot project.

Public Testimony – Agenda Item VI.1 (Puakō Cesspool Conversion Project)

Steve Holmes [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 11:51 – 14:03] Yeah, I'd like to congratulate Barbara Bell and Karen Anderson, all the hard work that they put in over the years. It's kind of shocking that they haven't got a better response from the county in the past. And it's time that we need to address both Puakō and the Kahalu'u area that Aunty Cindi Punihaole has been working on to also sewer. Both are similar in that they're connecting to private treatment plants. Neither one of them is covered under an existing AOC, but both are priority one projects under the Department of Health. Both represent a clear and present threat to the public. Dye testing has shown that raw sewage is entering into nearshore coastal waters in both of these areas. However, the CFD process, and I'm the author of the ordinance for Honolulu on CFDs, is very laborious. Only a community as dedicated as Puakō could have gotten this far. What we really need to meet the thousands of homes that are included in the countywide AOC and Naalehu and Pahala is a streamlined fast-track sewer improvement district process. And I look forward to coming back to the Big Island in a week and meeting with many of you to talk about what the options are. EPA has offered the assistance of their financing center, and I think we can proceed on both that and the larger financial plan for the \$1 billion worth of work that needs to be done. Under all three of the AOCs and the Kealakehe Federal Settlement. A lot of work to be done and we need to be able to meet deadlines and only a fast-track process is going to be able to do that in a timely fashion. Thank you.

Public Testimony – Agenda Items VII.C, VII.G, and VI.2

Terri Napeahi [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 14:40 – 24:40], testified on multiple agenda items.

On Item VII.C (Public Communications and Engagement) [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 14:40 – 19:23], Aloha mai, my name is Terri Napeahi. I'm originally from Hilo, Keaukaha, Hawaiian homelands. I'm here to testify and I think you have a really large agenda. So, I'm going to kind of put all three that I chose together by starting with the community engagement. Issue. So that one first. The number on the. This one would be. Oh, where am I? Okay, we're going to start first with. Update regarding the DEM's public communications and engagement first, which is a 7C. Real quick, so I'm going to start with this issue and I have connected this with our participation, Keaukaha Action Network. I'm the founder of this organization that was a committee that began in the Keaukaha Community Association. And this, our mission was to identify toxic release inventory companies that were built in and around our Hawaiian home community that would include Keaukaha and Pana'ewa. We've identified seven major toxic facilities and in 2014 have managed to find infractions on seven where EPA came to Hilo to check the seven TRI companies that were excessively exposing for decades. This particular situation is one of the

toxic release inventory companies that have been put in our community, in our Hawaiian homelands beach, since the early 60s and 70s. We were invited to participate in a section, NHPA Section 106. I'm not sure if you are familiar with that particular invitation that was given to Keaukaha Action Network and several other interested parties, NHOs. We were asked to do two Section 106s, the one development in wastewater treatment plant and the one that's doing the Pua Force Main project through Hawaiian homelands. So, this Section 106 that we are participating in is the Pua Force Main project that goes through Kapili, Andrews, Nahāle'a, Pua, and to the ocean. So, this project has a footprint that discusses the footprint from the plant under the runway to the shoreline and not connecting to the outfall. So, in our comment that was due on October 12th, we were waiting for a response. And this response was a request for us to have mitigation with our community leaders, our Native Hawaiian community, so that we could discuss some of the requests that we'd like to ask. One of the items was to ask that they extend the APE, the area of potential effects, to include the outfall in the ocean and the shoreline. We had submitted this request in October. It took seven months for the county to respond. They responded May 14th. I believe the Department of Health was the agency that did the review on the comments. They allowed the Department of Environmental Manager to do the comment and response. Our mitigation request was denied, and we are continuing in the process. We wanted to ensure that our request was accepted. So, we have been in the process of working with SHPD, who is now waiting for the Department of Environmental Manager and DOH to make the decision and a determination on all the comments that was submitted. It is now ongoing. It just confirmed that it's still ongoing and we are just waiting to continue the next process, which will be a judicial challenge. And that is one of the why I started with this first.

On Item VII.G (Reporting Requirements to DOH and EPA) [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 19:24 – 22:45], Okay, this would be item 7G. DEM will provide an update regarding the reporting requirements to the State of Hawaii Department of Health and Federal Environmental Protection Agency, EPA. So, in the continuation of our research, we had asked for government request records requesting, I'm sorry, my mouth is really dry, requesting inspection reports from the Department of Health since the inception of the wastewater treatment plant that is on the opposite side of our community, Hawaiian homes. That was originally at Puhī Bay, and they moved it in 1991-92 to the opposite side of the runway. We did our study and asked also for a collection from the Department of Environmental Management of the spill reports since the inception of the plant and the building of the development of the plant. We believe that the degradation of the sewer plant has been neglected by our county, our state and our federal government have asked multiple times for a study to be done. No one has ever done a study on the impacts of the wastewater treatment plant. Ever. Recently there was a study to do cesspool. They were also asked to do the Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant and if you read this study they did not do that. We as a native community has participated in that shoreline personally with my family as their icebox. We have seen the degradation of this shoreline for many years. The depletion of fish, the damage of the coral, and no one has addressed it. We are here now to say that we're addressing it. We are participating in Section 106 and moving forward on a judicial challenge as soon as you're done with the ongoing comments. The Department of Health, the SHPD is waiting for the comments from the DEM, a collaborative collection of all the comments from those who participated in the NHPA Section 106. They have not yet received it. Although they concurred with the HRS 6E8, they still collect, they're still asking for additional information from the DEM that has not been dispersed. As soon as we get the decision from SHPD, we will continue our process for Judicial Challenge. And that is it for G.

On Item VI.2 (NPDES Permit Application) [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 22:46 – 24:40], Okay. Item 6.2. The Department of Environmental Management would like an EMC to provide comment on documents related to the DMC application for the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination. I've seen the fact

sheets that was submitted from the (Kaua'i ?) Hawai'i Community and County on their request for a permit. I know, we know that every five years the permit for the Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant is discussed and signed off by the Department of Health and Army Corps of Engineers. We have seen with all the documents we've collected, the neglect of the Department of Health, the neglect of the Department of Environmental Management on the reports that was given by the Department of Health of the spills and the infractions. They've looked the other way. We have all this documented. I sent all of the records to Colorado scientists to come up with a summary that will be used in our case. Thank you very much.

Chair Perez asked whether the report on the seven major toxic facilities in Keaukaha could be provided. **Terri Napeahi** confirmed and offered to give a 10-minute presentation at a future meeting. Napeahi concluded by offering to present a 10-minute briefing to the Commission on toxic facilities in Keaukaha.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 24:59 – 36:16]

1. **Consideration of Draft Letter** [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 24:59 – 33:15]: The Commission considered a draft letter entitled *Recommendation to Use the Puakō Cesspool Conversion Project as a Model for Cesspool Conversion*. The letter recommended that DEM take the Puakō community proposal to the Cesspool Conversion Task Force to be used as a model for a scalable cesspool conversion approach.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioner Garcia expressed initial confusion but noted he did not see a downside to supporting the recommendation.
- Chair Perez referenced earlier testimony from Barbara Bell, agreeing that Puakō's work with professionals, NGOs, and the community could serve as a viable model for scalable cesspool conversion.
- Commissioner Garcia moved to adopt the draft letter, seconded by Commissioner Canelas.
- Commissioner Beets raised a question regarding whether the letter requested a Community Facilities District (CFD) or another mechanism, noting Barbara Bell's earlier testimony seemed to suggest an alternative.
- At Chair Perez's request, Roy Takemoto clarified that the proposal was indeed for a CFD, not an improvement district, explaining the flexibility of CFD financing to accommodate Puakō's diverse community.
- Commissioner Beets thanked Takemoto for the clarification.

Motion 3: Commissioner Garcia moved to adopt the draft letter recommending Puakō as a model for cesspool conversion, seconded by Commissioner Canelas. Commissioners Otsuka and Kometani abstained. The motion received four ayes (Commissioners Beets, Garcia, Canelas, and Chair Perez) and therefore failed.

2. **DEM's Request for EMC's Review** [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 33:16 – 36:16]: The Department of Environmental Management (DEM) requested that the Commission provide comment on a document related to DEM's application for a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit for the Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant, specifically regarding DEM's standard operating procedures for the pretreatment of fats, oils, and greases (FOG).

Discussion

- Chair Perez asked whether the document in question had been shared with the Commission for review.
- Acting Wastewater Division Chief Chris Laude clarified that DEM already holds a permit, and the August 2025 date noted did not align with current deadlines. He explained that DEM has revised the suggested ordinance for the pretreatment and FOG control programs, as required under the new permit, and that these documents will be transmitted to the Commission shortly.
- Chair Perez asked whether the Commission's role would be to provide comments and recommendations.
- Laude confirmed that the revised documents will be submitted for Commission review and comment, prior to a formal submittal to the County Council, which the Commission will also be copied on.
- Chair Perez thanked Laude and noted the Commission looks forward to assisting with the review.

VII. UPDATES FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT [SEE TOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 36:17 – 2:42:35]

A. DEM's final list of legislative bills enacted in 2025 that relate to DEM:

Planner Kelly Hartman reported on legislative bills enacted in 2025.

Bills Directly Impacting DEM:

- House Bill 1091 (Act 145, May 2025): Relating to sewer transmission lines. Requires the County to accept dedication of sewer lines serving Hawaiian homelands within 60 days of receiving a completed request, provided the lines are brought into compliance by the Department of Hawaiian Homelands.
- Senate Bill 946 (Act 60): Relating to wastewater management. Clarifies that the prohibition on discharging wastewater into state waters after December 31, 2026, applies to treatment plants, and repeals a prior exemption for facilities using sewage to produce clean energy.

Bills Not Directly Impacting DEM but Affecting Related Work:

- House Bill 242 (Act 209): Relating to electric vehicle batteries. Establishes a working group within the Hawai'i State Energy Office to develop recycling and reuse recommendations, with a report due to the Legislature.
- House Bill 736 (Act 198): Relating to wastewater systems. Funds a three-year pilot program through the UH Water Resource Research Center to test new wastewater technologies.
- House Bill 750 (Act 103): Relating to the environment. Requires the Department of Health to conduct a statewide needs assessment on waste reduction and recycling to support an extended producer responsibility program for packaging and paper products. Report due by 2027.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioner Canelas (District 6) asked whether SB 946's prohibition on wastewater discharges after 2026 would impact the Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant or cesspool conversion projects.
- Acting Wastewater Division Chief Chris Laude responded that Hilo, Pāpa'ikou, and Kulaimano facilities already hold NPDES permits and are not directly impacted. Plants potentially affected include Kapehu, Honoka'a, Uluwini, Kealakehe, and the two new Ka'ū facilities. He noted that while the law implies all plants need permits, the state may need to explore NPDES general permits for those without direct discharges. Laude recommended further discussion with DOH to clarify implementation.

B. Update regarding DEM’s preliminary priority ranking report submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency. The report details the priority status of certain DEM projects. The final report is due Dec. 31, 2026:

Planner Kelly Hartman provided an overview of DEM’s preliminary priority ranking report, submitted to the EPA in summer 2024 as required under the Administrative Order on Consent (AOC). She explained that the report was developed with consultant support using a capital improvement prioritization matrix to assess projects based on environmental, socioeconomic, and cost factors. The purpose was to prioritize projects ahead of capital budget submittals. Hartman noted that although the tool is useful, DEM’s project priorities continue to be driven primarily by legal mandates and deadlines. The final priority report is due December 31, 2026, and will incorporate updated facility plan information currently being developed under contract with Carollo Engineers.

Commission Discussion

- Chair Perez asked whether the report addresses alternative collection systems (such as low-pressure systems) to reduce costs, along with associated workforce training needs. Hartman responded that the report is limited to prioritizing existing assets and does not evaluate alternative systems at this stage.
- Acting Wastewater Division Chief Chris Laude added that this report is a starting point to identify and cost necessary projects, though the initial budget figures are very high. Future steps will involve assessing whether projects are needed, whether they can be combined, or whether alternative technologies may reduce costs. He also noted that workforce and training needs will have to be considered if non-traditional collection systems are pursued.
- Chair Perez emphasized the importance of exploring alternative systems to reduce costs and encouraged DEM to continue evaluating innovative approaches.
- Commissioner Canelas (District 6) asked whether new wastewater technologies being piloted through HB 736 (UH Water Resources Research Center three-year program) could be integrated into current projects and whether EPA deadlines would allow flexibility.
- Laude responded that DEM is already coordinating with UH on technology exploration. While EPA generally expects projects to begin on schedule, they have shown flexibility if designs incorporate innovative approaches, provided DEM can demonstrate long-term operability and compliance.

Chair Perez concluded by noting that the Commission looks forward to monitoring updates on the report and potentially weighing in on project priorities before the December 31, 2026, deadline.

C. Update regarding DEM’s public Communications and Engagement:

Information and Education Specialist Christy Swafford provided an overview of DEM’s public communications and outreach efforts. Highlights included:

- Project Websites: Dedicated pages have been created for the Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant (launched at the groundbreaking), Pāhala and Nā’ālehu facilities, the Integrated Wastewater Management Plan, and Laupāhoehoe Transfer Station. Additional project tracking pages are under development.
- Campaigns: Ongoing work on pretreatment and FOG (fats, oils, and grease) campaigns, including the development of a mascot (“FOG monster”), in progress. DEM has also contributed to the Mayor’s Cesspool Conversion Task Force communications plan.

- Community Outreach: Engagement on coconut rhinoceros beetle response (radio ads, HPR spots, planned TV commercials), the Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant groundbreaking (over 100 attendees and positive press coverage), and the upcoming Pāhala/Nā'ālehu semi-annual community meeting. Participation at school events such as Waiākea Elementary Career Day and Waiākea Intermediate projects where students are designing educational websites.
- Social Media: DEM now maintains an active presence, with Instagram reach up 92.6% since January. Top posts have included the CRB voluntary compliance campaign (34K views), Hilo WWTP rehabilitation (8K views), and generator delivery to Hilo Benninghoff Medical Center (7.6K views). Positive community connection posts and crew updates have been well received.
- Education and Workforce Development: Collaborations with Hawai'i Community College (internship discussions ongoing) and UH Hilo's "Work for Water" program to promote wastewater operator career pathways. Outreach includes encouraging candidates to enable job posting notifications and pursue entry-level trades helper positions leading to certification advancement.

Chair Perez commended Swafford for her extensive efforts, noting the high need for outreach and communication across both Solid Waste and Wastewater Divisions. Commissioners expressed their appreciation for her work.

D. Cesspool Task Force update:

Planner Kelly Hartman reported on the Mayor's Cesspool Task Force, for which she serves as co-chair. The purpose of the task force is to update and refine the statewide Cesspool Working Group recommendations for application in Hawai'i County. Key objectives include:

- Developing an action plan to identify cesspool conversion projects in at least three priority areas.
- Identifying resources to initiate planning, design, and construction.
- Establishing strategies to fund and complete prioritized conversions by 2030.

Hartman noted that DEM has been working with Pa'akai Communications on a communications plan to gather community feedback on priority areas. A campaign, branded under the theme "*For the Water We Share,*" is being developed to carry messaging through to the state's 2050 cesspool closure mandate.

She further reported that the task force has convened at least two full meetings to date. At the most recent meeting, DEM's Integrated Wastewater Management Plan consultants presented a draft of the plan, outlining facility needs, costs, and strategies for prioritization and funding.

Chair Perez thanked Hartman for the update. No questions were raised by the Commission.

E. Update regarding future agenda items before the Hawai'i County Council that relate to DEM's functions:

Planner Kelly Hartman reported that DEM will appear on the Hawai'i County Council agenda on September 2 to request additional appropriations for the Kealakehe R-1 project. She noted that Council agendas are typically confirmed only a week in advance, and the best way to stay updated is by checking the Hawai'i County Council calendar and individual committee agendas online.

Commission Discussion

- Chair Perez asked whether DEM provides regular updates to the Council regarding Administrative Orders on Consent (AOCs) and related deadlines.
- Hartman responded that DEM has not been asked to provide AOC updates on a standing schedule. However, Councilmember Michelle Galimba has requested an update, anticipated for October or November 2025.
- Chair Perez thanked Hartman for the clarification.

F. Update regarding DEM’s budget for Fiscal Year July 2025 through June 2026:

Robin Bauman, Business Manager, reported that DEM’s Capital Improvement Project (CIP) budget for FY 2025–2026 was approved by the County Council as Ordinance 25-46, which is available on the County Council website under council records.

Planner Kelly Hartman demonstrated how to access the County’s capital budget documents online through the Department of Finance website. She explained that the budget provides project details, funding sources (including federal grants and GEO bonds), prior allotments, current appropriations, and long-term financial planning figures. As an example, she reviewed the fiscal impact sheet for the Pāhala Wastewater System.

Bauman outlined the annual budget process:

- November–December: DEM begins preparing the draft budget for the next fiscal year.
- March 1: The Mayor submits a proposed budget to the County Council.
- April: Council’s Finance Committee holds budget review meetings with opportunities for public input.
- May: The Mayor submits a revised budget to the Council.
- June: Final adoption by the Council after two readings.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioner Otsuka (District 3) requested that commissioners receive a copy of the draft budget as it progresses, noting that it is difficult to locate specific information on the County’s website and that earlier access would allow commissioners to provide more informed comments.
- Bauman responded that once the Mayor’s budget is submitted to Council in March, it becomes publicly available online, and DEM could provide commissioners with a link at that time.
- Hartman added that placing budget review on future EMC agendas would help ensure timely updates and avoid missing opportunities to brief commissioners.

Chair Perez thanked DEM staff for clarifying the process and noted the importance of providing information early enough for the Commission to prepare meaningful feedback.

G. DEM will provide an update regarding its reporting requirements to the State of Hawai’i Department of Health and the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 1:18:34 – 1:25:27]

Planner Kelly Hartman noted some initial uncertainty about the specific request but explained that DEM submits numerous reports to EPA and DOH, in some cases as frequently as monthly.

Chair Perez clarified that the Commission’s interest is in updates related to the Administrative Orders on Consent (AOCs) and associated reporting requirements.

Chris Laude, Acting Wastewater Division Chief, provided the following overview:

- Facilities with discharge permits must submit monthly discharge monitoring reports with sampling and testing results.
- Quarterly spill reports are submitted for spills at plants, pump stations, and collection systems.
- Semiannual reports (two per year) and an annual report are also required, summarizing plant operations.
- Under the AOCs, DEM meets quarterly with EPA and DOH to review challenges, progress, budgets, and schedules.
- Solid Waste Division has separate permitting and compliance reporting obligations.

Commission Discussion

- Chair Perez asked about the Asset Management System (AMS) report due July 1, 2025, and whether it was submitted. She cited concerns related to gravity sewer line conditions, spare parts inventory, and workforce training.
- Laude confirmed that the AMS reports required under the AOCs were submitted and are logged in DEM's NexGen asset management program, though he was unsure if copies are online. He offered to provide the reports to the Commission.
- Perez requested access to the reports for Commission review.
- Laude noted that a sewer rate study is underway but explained that rate structure updates are separate from the AMS requirements. The existing rate structure was submitted to EPA under AOC Appendix 1, Item 3, while the new rate study is still in progress. He emphasized that EPA's focus is on progress rather than penalties, encouraging DEM to begin improvements.

Chair Perez acknowledged the difficulty of staying current with all reporting requirements, expressed appreciation for DEM staff's efforts, and affirmed the Commission's intent to remain informed and provide input when appropriate.

H. Staffing update: DEM will provide updates regarding current vacancies at DEM, recruitment, and operators training program. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 1:26:14 – 1:45:34]

Kahula Guinn-Lacy, HR Program Specialist, reported that DEM has filled **22 vacancies year-to-date**: 10 in the Wastewater Division, eight in the Solid Waste Division, and four in Business Services. Currently, **29 positions** are in active recruitment, with assessments, interviews, and conditional offers in progress.

Commission Discussion

- Commissioner Canelas (District 6) asked about recruitment methods. Guinn-Lacy explained that DEM partners with UH Hilo's *Work for Water* program, posts positions through the County's HR site, and uses external sites such as ASCE Hawai'i for engineering roles. Minimum qualifications are reviewed and adjusted when appropriate. She added that while blue-collar recruitment often relies on internal opportunities for advancement, applicants are screened and referred through the Department of Human Resources.
- Canelas asked whether DEM has flexibility in salaries. Guinn-Lacy confirmed that DEM can request pay adjustments for hard-to-fill positions with HR approval.
- Commissioner Otsuka (District 3) noted that only five DEM positions were visible on the County website despite reported vacancies. Guinn-Lacy explained that many vacancies are filled through internal recruitments not posted online, giving existing staff promotional opportunities. For example, five equipment operator positions in Hilo are being recruited internally. She also confirmed that Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant currently has only one vacancy (Working Supervisor), with two employees on long-term leave.

- Otsuka asked about operator staffing levels at smaller plants (e.g., Pāpa'ikou, Pepe'ekeo). Guinn-Lacy deferred to Acting Chief Chris Laude, who acknowledged the system is woefully understaffed. He emphasized the need to determine proper staffing levels for each facility, especially as Pāhala and Nā'ālehu plants come online. He also highlighted a new operator training and education program to prepare internal candidates for advancement.
- Otsuka raised concerns about safety and workload for single-operator facilities and suggested exploring recruitment through Alu Like and Altres to expand the labor pool.
- Laude agreed, noting DEM must balance attracting **qualified hires** with bringing in **entry-level helpers** who can be trained. He stressed the importance of professional development for both white- and blue-collar staff.
- Otsuka also raised concerns about low pay for scale attendants (approx. \$18.84/hour), noting the lack of advancement opportunities and high turnover. Laude agreed, stating DEM and HR are brainstorming ways to make such positions more substantial, with higher pay, added responsibilities, and clearer career paths.
- Commissioner Canelas followed up with questions on employee retention. Laude noted that retention remains a challenge, especially for engineers, but DEM is working to rotate staff, expand training, and provide advancement opportunities. Guinn-Lacy added that civil engineer positions are recruited at multiple levels (CE I–IV), allowing entry-level hires to promote upward. Wastewater operators can also advance as they obtain licenses, while Solid Waste attendants can pursue CDL training and move into Equipment Operator III roles.

Chair Perez thanked DEM staff for their efforts and acknowledged the significant progress being made in staffing and recruitment.

I. **Solid Waste Division Updates:** [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 1:47:06 – 2:14:05]

Public Testimony – Agenda Item I (Solid Waste Division Updates)

Sharon Landry (Hilo-Na Alliance) testified regarding interest in pyrolysis oil reactors and referenced a Senate Resolution 85 proposing a task force on pyrolysis oil research. She described potential private-sector implementation, alignment with the County General Plan 2045, and markets for pyrolysis oil (e.g., refiners). Chair Perez clarified the EMC's purview is County DEM; state-level items should be directed to the appropriate agencies. Landry expressed willingness to present to the Commission at a future meeting.

Division Update (Mike Rivera, Solid Waste Division Chief)

Recent work and near-term plans included:

- Laupāhoehoe Transfer Station – Retaining wall project on schedule; backfilling underway; relocate reuse center and pave. Target completion: Feb. 2026.
- Wai'ōhinu Transfer Station / Ka'ū Baseyard – Hiring Equipment Operator and Working Supervisor to add an additional day of service; coordinating service day with Ka'ū community and logistics with Ocean View and Pāhala. Longer-term: rebalance baseyard coverage island-wide.
- Pu'uanahulu Landfill – Demo of old scale area completed; assisted State CRB response at Kona Airport by hauling ~1,800 cubic yards (~290 tons) of green waste to WHOF.
- Pāhoa Transfer Station – Fire Department connection/hydrant repair completed.
- Pāpa'ikou – Erosion control completed; tree trimming pending.
- Honoka'a – Tree trimming completed (safety improvements).
- Abandoned Vehicles – ~100 vehicles removed via VDAP last quarter; 337 abandoned vehicles removed island-wide over the last three months.
- Household Hazardous Waste (Aug.) – High turnout (~600 vehicles in Hilo; ~500 in Kona).

- Upcoming/Planning – Kealakehe Transfer Station cleanup/improvements; Ocean View site modifications; landfill siting work restarting internally.

Commission Discussion & Responses

- Solid Waste System Operational Analysis Report – In final internal review (language cleanup) before release (Rivera).
- Ka'ū Baseyard details / staffing – Baseyard will support HI-5, recycling, and improved chute/wall configuration to manage traffic/operations; Working Supervisor position is the remaining prerequisite to proceed (Rivera).
- Landfill life & diversion – Current landfill life estimated 15–18 years. Diversion opportunities: recyclables (~20%), C&D (20–25%), and organics; reducing ~600 tons/day to ~300–350 tons/day could extend life 15–20 years (Rivera).
- Diversion investment concept – Commissioner Canelas discussed budgeting near-term funds (e.g., \$30–\$40M) for diversion technologies (e.g., in-vessel/onsite composting) to defer a future landfill (potentially ≥\$500M). Rivera noted pilots have not launched yet; current focus is operations and staffing, but concepts are under discussion with Recycle Hawai'i and Wastewater.
- Regulatory coordination – Canelas asked about working with DOH to treat organics as an agricultural commodity to enable community-scale composting. Rivera: worth exploring.
- Wastewater/Solid Waste synergies – Acting Wastewater Chief Chris Laude noted opportunities to:
 - Produce compostable biosolids to divert sludge from landfill;
 - Support hotel food-waste composting programs;
 - Explore biochar (a pyrolysis byproduct) as a wastewater treatment medium.
- Future landfill planning – Commissioner Otsuka emphasized parallel planning for a new landfill given long lead times; mentioned existing incineration at Pōhakuloa as a potential (limited) diversion; raised concerns about reuse center canopies and storage conditions. Rivera: reuse-center upgrades (containers/buildings/canopies) are on the next budget year agenda.
- Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle (CRB) – Rivera: County hauls treated material; State manages fumigation/tenting; material mulched at WHOF once temperatures achieved. Deputy Director Craig Kawaguchi added DEM has a BISC-C canine detection contract to check transfer stations/green waste sites and potential hotspots; complemented by ongoing outreach (per earlier update).

J. Wastewater Division Updates: [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:14:10 – 2:31:15]

Status Updates (Chris Laude, Acting Wastewater Division Chief)

- AOCs & Deadlines (2025–2026): Generally on track; principal challenge is funding.
- Ka'ū Projects:
 - Pāhala – Collection system installation has begun; treatment plant package is out to bid (bid period closes in September).
 - Nā'ālehu – Design ongoing for collection system and treatment plant; low-pressure collection under consideration to reduce costs.
- Information sharing: DEM will propose a policy/process to share draft materials with the EMC for input while protecting pre-decisional work.

Commission Discussion

- Support for reporting workload: Chair Perez acknowledged numerous AOC updates due across late-2024 to early-2026; the Commission offered support to help keep reports on schedule.
- Advisory role & materials timing: Commissioner Otsuka noted commissioners need timely background to give meaningful advice; Laude agreed and committed to streamlining EMC access to materials.
- Kahalu'u Cesspool Study:
 - Laude noted early findings indicate significant cultural/historic constraints, making conventional construction difficult; low-pressure systems may minimize disturbance.
 - Chair Perez asked about community engagement by DEM/consultant; Laude will review work to date and ensure public meetings (budgeted or added) occur, with feedback integrated.
 - Broader discussion included tailoring approaches by geography (e.g., near-shore vs. upland soils) and coordinating with DOH on appropriate solutions.
- Water Reuse:
 - Chair Perez emphasized using conversion efforts to advance recycled water (R-1) reuse for environmental protection and resilience.
 - Laude agreed; wastewater should be treated as a resource (e.g., irrigation/firebreaks).
 - Commissioner Beets highlighted potential revenues/value-add from reuse and building a client base (e.g., agriculture); Laude noted a phased approach (start with value-add, then pricing as demand grows).

Pretreatment & FOG Program

- Laude has updated the pretreatment ordinance and drafted FOG program sections for County Code. Internal edits are nearly complete; upon director approval, drafts will be transmitted to the EMC for comment (and likely concurrent submission to Council).
- Laude clarified pretreatment elements follow federal/state requirements; EMC input will be especially relevant on policies and procedures that implement FOG controls.

K. **Integrated Wastewater Management Plan Updates:** *[SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:31:36 – 2:39:43]* Update (Kelly Hartman, Planner)

- Draft IWWMP anticipated in Fall 2025; final draft targeted for early 2026.
- Integrated plan includes:
 - Cesspool Conversion Plan (aligned with statewide priorities).
 - Facilities Plan (assessment of existing assets, costs, and rehabilitation needs).
 - Long-term framework extending to 2050.
- Public review period expected Summer 2026, beginning with EMC, then County Council committee, then the public.
- Coordination is ongoing with the Mayor's Cesspool Task Force to avoid sending mixed messages during public outreach.

Discussion

- DOH & Research Collaboration: Chair Perez inquired about coordination with DOH and researchers conducting cesspool prioritization studies under legislative mandate.
 - Hartman explained DEM's analysis is more detailed (hydraulic and cost-based) than the general desktop analysis being conducted under legislative action.
 - DEM will not release preliminary data before the official public draft to prevent miscommunication, but stakeholders (including UH/Sea Grant) are on the list for notification when the draft is released.
 - Location of cesspools derives from state-maintained databases, which DEM also uses.

- Task Force Records: Commissioner Otsuka requested minutes or summaries from Mayor’s Cesspool Task Force meetings.
 - Hartman noted she does not oversee those records; Chair Perez clarified it is the Mayor’s Task Force and recommended directing requests to the Mayor’s Office.
- Timeline Clarification: Otsuka asked if the draft IWWMP was originally expected this month and how it relates to the AOC budget schedule.
 - Hartman reiterated that DEM expects a draft this fall, acknowledged progress has been slower than hoped, and confirmed Commissioners will be included on the stakeholder notification list for updates and meetings.

L. **Update regarding areas where the EMC could provide comments and recommendations:** [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:40:19 – 2:42:35]

Discussion

- Chair Perez noted that opportunities for EMC input had been interspersed throughout the agenda but invited DEM to provide any further direction. She also reiterated her willingness to assist in developing a clearer process for communication and information sharing between DEM and the Commission.
- Kelly Hartman (Planner) suggested that future agendas could be refined to focus on fewer, higher-priority topics where the Commission can provide substantive advisory input, rather than a long list of updates.
- Hartman also recommended including the communications plan as part of this streamlined process.
- Chair Perez expressed agreement and emphasized that the extended agenda for this meeting was intended to help the Commission gain a comprehensive understanding of DEM activities under the new administration.

VIII. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS** [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:42:37 – 2:43:01]

Chair Perez reminded Commissioners that recommendations for agenda items may be submitted to her and noted that the deadline for submission for the following month’s agenda is Friday, September 5, 2025.

IX. **ANNOUNCEMENTS** [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:43:06 – 2:44:03]

Chair Perez announced that the Commission currently has vacancies in Districts 2, 5, and 8. She encouraged filling these seats to help the Commission more easily achieve quorum and advance recommendations.

She also shared information about Closing America’s Wastewater Access Gap Community Initiative, a U.S. EPA program that provides no-cost technical assistance to communities with failing septic systems or lacking wastewater infrastructure.

The next meeting of the Environmental Management Commission is scheduled for Wednesday, September 24, 2025, in Kona.

X. **ADJOURNMENT** [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:44:08 – 2:45:00]

Chair Perez called for a motion to adjourn.

Motion 4: Commissioner Otsuka moved to adjourn the meeting, and Commissioner John Kometani seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 11:57 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tiffany Wallace, Secretary

DRAFT