

**ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMISSION
COUNTY OF HAWAII**

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, May 27, 2026
9:06 a.m. to 11:24 a.m.
Puna Conference Room, Hilo, and Zoom

A video recording is made part of these minutes, which is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DqyfNS1uK4>

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. Readers are encouraged to reference official recording for clarification if needed.*

County Staff Present:

Michael Rivera, Solid Waste Division Chief; Christopher Laude, Temporary Assignment (“TA”) Wastewater Division Chief; Patrick Cummins, Program Manager; Kelly Hartman, Regulatory Administrator; Matthew Jaroslowski, Civil Engineer V; Alex White, TA Information and Education Specialist; Ashley DeVera, Private Secretary; Sinclair Salas-Ferguson, Deputy Corporation Counsel; and Kevin Soong, Deputy Corporation Counsel.

Others Present:

Three members of the public attended in-person and four members of the public attended via Zoom.

I. CALL TO ORDER [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 0:07]

Chair Perez called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m., noting that quorum was present.

Commissioner’s Present:

- Jim Beets (District 1) In-person
- Louisa “Sasa” Anthony Lee (District 3) In-person
- Erica Perez (District 4) On Zoom
- Justin Canelas (District 6) In-person
- John Kometani (District 9) On Zoom

Vacancies:

- District 2
- District 5
- District 7
- District 8

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR April 22, 2026 [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:33]

The Environmental Management Commission (“EMC”) will consider approval of the minutes from its meeting held on April 22, 2026. Chair Perez opened the item and requested a motion.

Motion 1: Commissioner Lee moved to approve the minutes, and Vice Chair Canelas seconded. The motion passed with a unanimous aye voice vote.

At 9:09 a.m., the Chair took a brief recess due to technical difficulties, and the meeting was called back to order at 9:11 a.m.

III. PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON ITEMS ON THE AGENDA [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 5:19]

There were no public statements provided at this time.

IV. UPDATES FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT (DEM)

1. Solid Waste Updates:

a. HI-5 Redemption value updates for the Keauhou Transfer Station. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 6:41]

Vice Chair Canelas stated that a resident had emailed him several times regarding service disruptions at the Keauhou Transfer Station involving Atlas Recycling’s redemption services. The resident reported that the service had been unavailable for several months, that customers were being directed to Kona, and expressed concerns about fluctuating redemption payouts. The resident also requested information regarding the formulas used to determine weight-based payouts for plastic, glass, and aluminum, and asked how the County monitored those payouts.

Mr. Alex White responded that service disruptions at the Keauhou Transfer Station had occurred because the contractor had experienced weekend staffing difficulties, resulting in intermittent service. He clarified that the facility had not been closed, but that there had been numerous Sundays when redemption

services could not be provided. He further stated that, going forward, the agreement would designate Wednesdays as the sole Hi-5 redemption service day.

Regarding monitoring, Mr. White explained that the Hi-5 program was administered by the State and that the County conducted inspections on behalf of the Department of Health (“DOH”). He stated that staff visited most sites monthly, observed transactions to ensure compliance with program requirements, verified that signage was appropriate, and tested scales using certified weights. He added that if residents experienced issues with redemption payouts, they were encouraged to contact the County so that staff could review the specific transaction.

Vice Chair Canelas asked whether the State maintained documentation of the audits. Mr. White responded that the County submitted its inspection reports to the State.

b. Update on Wai’ōhinu, Ocean View, and Pāhala transfer station operation schedules. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 11:49]

Mr. Michael Rivera reported that, effective June 1st, the Wai’ōhinu Transfer Station would add Wednesdays to its operating schedule, increasing service from three to four days per week. He noted that green waste service would also be added, with the specific days to be determined. He further stated that, as additional staff and equipment were brought to the facility, additional operating days would be added, with the goal of eventually reaching six or seven days per week.

Mr. Rivera reported that the Ocean View Transfer Station would return to a Sunday, Tuesday, and Friday schedule and that metal recycling would be added on Sundays. He further stated that the Pāhala Transfer Station would remain on its existing Sunday, Tuesday, and Friday schedule.

c. Completion of second Waste Characterization Study at Pu’uanahulu Landfill on May 8, 2026. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 12:56]

Mr. Rivera reported that the second waste characterization study had been completed, classifying municipal solid waste (“MSW”) from around the island, including both commercial and residential sources at transfer stations, and that sampling had been conducted throughout the week.

He stated that the results from the initial sampling, which was conducted during the week of the Kona Low, showed that the top three components disposed of at

the Pu'uanahulu Landfill comprised approximately 65.5 percent organics (including food waste and green waste), 26 percent paper, and 14 percent plastics.

He further reported that approximately 6 percent consisted of appliances, while special waste, including sludges, accounted for about 7 percent, and household hazardous waste accounted for approximately 3.5 percent. Mr. Rivera stated that staff would compile the final reports and provide them to EMC upon completion.

Vice Chair Canelas asked whether there were plans to increase household hazardous waste collection events throughout the island, noting that such events were infrequent. Mr. White responded that the events were very expensive and logistically challenging. He further stated that the most recent event in Wai'ōhinu had very low turnout, and that used motor oil comprised the vast majority of materials collected at those events.

Commissioner Lee stated that at the most recent event at the Afook Chinen Civic Auditorium, participants had reportedly waited in line for over three hours. Mr. White responded that this was incorrect and that wait times were approximately 20 minutes. Mr. Rivera added that the optimal arrival time for such events was around 12:00 p.m. Commissioner Lee suggested that residents might be willing to pay for pickup services. Mr. White responded that he was not aware of any such services on the island, except in cases involving commercial quantities.

Commissioner Lee asked what DEM did with collected household hazardous waste. Mr. White responded that all materials were handled in accordance with legal requirements and that there was a documented chain of custody for all items. He stated that approximately 30 different commodities were collected at these events, with some materials, such as poisons and expired prescriptions, being incinerated. Mercury was removed from lightbulbs for separate processing, and some materials were recycled. He added that used motor oil was shipped off for use as fuel.

Commissioner Beets asked whether there was progress on establishing an additional site for used motor oil collection on the East side of the island. Mr. Rivera responded that there was no update and that staff were still working on the issue, noting that it remained challenging in that area of the island.

Commissioner Beets asked whether there had been an increase in used motor oil being left at transfer stations. Mr. Rivera responded that there had not been an increase; however, if oil was left at facilities, it was set aside and transported by the County to the next household hazardous waste event.

Vice Chair Canelas asked whether the 26 percent paper component included cardboard or other types of paper, noting its potential value as a recyclable commodity. Mr. Rivera responded that the material had not yet been further characterized, but that the final report may include a more detailed breakdown by paper type. He further noted that paper volumes had increased by approximately 3 to 4 percent since the 2019 study, while overall composition remained largely similar. He added that metals had decreased compared to the previous study, and glass accounted for approximately 1.9 percent, similar to prior results.

Mr. White clarified that many of these materials had a negative commodity value once handling and shipping costs were considered. Commissioner Lee requested clarification. Mr. White explained that “negative value” meant that it cost more to collect, process, and ship the materials than they could be sold for on the market. Vice Chair Canelas asked whether it was more costly for the County to landfill these materials. Mr. White responded that, generally, landfilling remained the least expensive option. He added that in some municipalities, materials were incorporated into mulch or composting programs; however, such programs required significant infrastructure, sorting, and contamination control.

Commissioner Beets asked whether the County only recycled cardboard. Mr. White confirmed that cardboard was the primary material recycled by the County. Commissioner Beets then asked about recycling white paper. Mr. White responded that white paper was not recycled by the County but was handled by private sector recyclers.

2. Wastewater Division Updates:

a. Outreach and education needs that support infrastructure rehabilitation and replacement across Hawai‘i County. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 22:45]

Mr. Chris Laude reported that staff had compiled all available outreach and education materials and sought guidance on how best to share them with the Commissioners.

Chair Perez suggested making the materials accessible and shareable with the broader community. Mr. Laude responded that some of the materials were already available through the Department's website and requested that EMC review the documents and provide suggestions or feedback. He further noted that staff had identified additional materials they would like to develop in the future.

V. NEW BUSINESS

1. Presentation by Dana Okano regarding Hawai'i Community Foundation's (HCF) Technical Assistance and Workforce Development through the Hawaiian Islands Environmental Finance Center. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 27:12]

Ms. Dana Okano, Director of the Natural Environment Sector at the Hawai'i Community Foundation ("HCF"), provided an overview of HCF's work and initiatives. She explained that HCF is a philanthropic organization known for providing grants to nonprofit organizations and scholarships to students and noted that the organization employs approximately 90 staff members statewide.

Ms. Okano reported that in 2013, HCF began examining major challenges facing Hawai'i, including long-term freshwater sustainability. HCF convened an advisory council consisting of stakeholders involved in water management throughout the state, which developed an action plan with the goal of securing an additional 100 million gallons per day of freshwater supply. She stated that the initiative focuses on protecting Hawai'i's long-term potable water supply in response to climate change impacts, increased water demand, and the need for improved resource management. She explained that the initiative focuses on three primary areas: water conservation, groundwater aquifer recharge, and expansion of water reuse. She noted that approximately 60 percent of the state's drinking water comes from groundwater aquifers.

Ms. Okano stated that HCF recognized that Hawai'i was not effectively pursuing available federal funding opportunities to support needed water infrastructure projects. As a result, HCF worked with local partners to increase awareness of federal funding opportunities and successfully applied for and received funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") to establish the Hawaiian Islands Environmental Finance Center. She explained that the center was created to provide technical assistance to county agencies, water utilities, nonprofit organizations, and other partners throughout the state in identifying and securing funding for infrastructure projects that support the Freshwater Initiative's goals.

She further noted that because funding provided through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is limited in duration, HCF's grant funding is limited to a five-year period. To support these efforts, HCF contracted with engineering consultants, grant-writing specialists, and staff dedicated to tracking federal funding opportunities. The organization also provides one-on-one coaching to agency personnel throughout the grant application process.

Regarding workforce development, Ms. Okano reported that HCF had identified significant staffing shortages across water agencies statewide and recognized challenges in recruiting graduates from the University of Hawai'i system into water-sector careers. To address these issues, HCF partnered with the University of Hawai'i Water Resources Research Center and the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization ("UHERO") to evaluate workforce gaps and identify ways to better prepare and encourage students to pursue careers in the water sector.

Ms. Okano also discussed recruitment and retention challenges and reported that HCF had partnered with the United States Sustainability Directors Network ("USDN"), a national organization involved in workforce development and sustainability initiatives. Through this partnership, HCF has been exploring strategies to improve employee retention and has implemented a fellowship program to assist agencies in recruiting new employees. She added that HCF also provides a variety of workforce training opportunities.

Ms. Okano provided examples of several technical assistance awards during her presentation. She noted that the Kealakehe project was eligible for up to \$20 million through a grant program. Chair Perez opened the floor for questions.

Commissioner Lee asked whether HCF had explored partnerships with Hawai'i-based universities outside of the University of Hawai'i system. Ms. Okano responded that, at present, HCF was focusing its efforts on partnerships within the University of Hawai'i system. She added that the professors involved in the initiative also worked with community colleges, which helped broaden outreach and engagement.

Commissioner Lee also discussed the importance of internships and educational opportunities related to wastewater management. She emphasized the need to increase community awareness of career opportunities within the water and wastewater sectors and to better inform the public about the educational pathways available for those careers.

Commissioner Beets asked about the five-year period associated with the Freshwater Initiative. Ms. Okano clarified that the plan developed with the advisory council, as part of HCF, extends through 2030 and remains ongoing. She noted that the advisory council is a separate entity known as Hawai'i One Water. Commissioner Beets also inquired about the Environmental Finance Center. Ms. Okano responded that, under the HCF umbrella, the Environmental Finance Center is directly tied to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which is authorized for a five-year period. She stated that the EPA had already acknowledged this limitation and had issued a pause. However, the EPA granted permission for work to continue and indicated that no-cost extensions would likely be provided.

Chair Perez noted that Hawai'i County has a number of projects and asked whether HCF could assist with these projects or work with communities to identify solutions, such as cesspool conversion efforts. Ms. Okano provided an example involving the Environmental Finance Center, noting that one of the first grants they helped a partner secure was for the Mauna Kea Watershed Partnership. Regarding cesspool conversion, she explained that HCF is unable to work directly with individual property owners and can only provide assistance to nonprofit organizations or government agencies.

Commissioner Beets discussed the WaterSMART Program in Maui and noted that Hawai'i County does not currently have a similar program. Ms. Okano responded that there is a \$20 million congressionally authorized funding allocation that was approved several years ago for Kealakehe. She explained that a previous director applied for the funding in 2018, and HCF assisted in securing the first \$1 million to begin the process; however, several challenges were encountered. Ms. Okano stated that she would welcome the opportunity to revisit the discussion, assess the project's current status, and determine how to move it forward. She noted that the funding would be used specifically for upgrades to the Kealakehe Wastewater Treatment System. Ms. Okano further explained that additional competitive grant opportunities are available through the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART Program and may be used to support other facilities across the island. Chair Perez asked about the grant timeline. Mr. Matthew Jaroslowski requested contact information regarding the available funding opportunities.

2. EMC discussion and potential recommendations to DEM on HCF's Technical Assistance opportunities and support. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 1:00:23]

Chair Perez opened the floor for public testimony. No public testimony was provided at that time.

Commissioner Lee requested a follow-up regarding the \$20 million grant for Kealakehe and asked whether any funding opportunities were available to support sewer conversion for the Keaukaha community as a whole.

At 10:14 a.m. the commission took a recess, and the meeting was called back to order at 10:25 a.m.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. EMC discussion on in-vessel composting and potential recommendations on next steps for further investigation or development. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 1:09:38]

Chair Perez opened the floor for public testimony. No public testimony was provided at that time.

Vice Chair Canelas stated that the waste characterization study showed that approximately 26 percent of the material entering the landfill consisted of organic waste. He noted that, aside from the County's green waste program, there was limited composting infrastructure on the island and suggested that in-vessel composting would be a good starting point. He also recommended DEM to work with the State to pursue funding opportunities.

Chair Perez stated that it would be worthwhile to investigate what would be required to bring such a machine to Hawai'i Island. Vice Chair Canelas shared his experience at Ka'ū School and noted that there was flexibility to determine which communities would benefit most from specific machines based on the volume of organic waste generated. He recommended that the program begin at schools. Commissioner Lee expressed support for the idea, noting that she also worked at a small school that served numerous meals each year and could benefit from such a program.

Chair Perez stated that the proposal would have an impressive impact and could provide co-benefits in connection with Bill 83. Mr. White responded that installing in-vessel composting systems at schools would require agreements with participating entities and possibly incentives to encourage participation. He noted that there would also be associated costs, including staffing, union labor considerations, training, or contracted services. Mr. White further explained that the facility would require a solid waste management permit and that the composting process could take up to 180 days to complete. He clarified that Bill 83 does not mandate the use of compostable products but does include provisions related to biodegradable products.

Chair Perez asked what DEM was doing to address food waste. Mr. White responded that DEM was seeking funding from the State to conduct a study on pre-consumer and post-consumer food waste. He explained that the goal of the study was to map and quantify where food waste was being generated and where it was ultimately being disposed of or diverted. He noted that one area of emphasis would be Hawai'i Island's hog farmers, who had already established relationships with restaurants and grocery stores to utilize pre-consumer food waste as feed. Mr. White also stated that food waste generated in homes would be best managed through backyard composting.

Vice Chair Canelas asked how long the pre-consumer and post-consumer food waste study would take to complete. Mr. White responded that DEM was aiming to have results available by the end of the year and that the study would likely be contracted out. Vice Chair Canelas expressed concern about food packaging associated with food waste that pigs are unable to consume. Commissioner Lee suggested that backyard

composting education for families could begin in schools. She also noted that there was significant interest in mulch within the community.

Commissioner Beets agreed with Vice Chair Canelas regarding the importance of receiving the results of the waste characterization study. He expressed concern about the amount of paper being disposed of in the landfill and the potential impact on the landfill's life expectancy. Chair Perez noted that, at that time, the EMC was unable to provide a recommendation to DEM. Vice Chair Canelas recommended sending a letter to DOH in support of the proposed food waste study. Commissioner Lee asked how the Commission could advocate for funding to support additional waste reduction and diversion programs.

Vice Chair Canelas recommended that the next agenda include a discussion on how the EMC could work with the County Council to strengthen Bill 83, with the goal of ensuring a reliable composting stream in the future to support composting initiatives for DEM and nonprofit organizations. Chair Perez requested that Vice Chair Canelas draft a letter and present it at the next meeting.

VII. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- 1. Commissioners and members of the public may email items for consideration on the next agenda to Chair Perez by Friday, June 5, 2026. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:02:15]**

Chair Perez opened the floor for public testimony. No public testimony was provided at that time.

Chair Perez noted that the next meeting agenda could include a potential update on the Kealakehe Wastewater Treatment application process for approximately \$19 million, an update on backyard composting outreach and education efforts, and a discussion on potential modifications or amendments to Bill 83, as well as the composting recommendation that Vice Chair Canelas would present.

Commissioner Lee added that Council Member Fresh Onishi, who attended the Keaukaha Community Association meeting, discussed approximately \$4 million allocated by the State to support wastewater connection efforts and noted that, within the permitting process for short-term vacation rentals (“STVR”) and questioned if there is a requirement to verify sewage line connections.

Vice Chair Canelas further requested that DEM provide a “wish list” of unfunded priorities and funding needs so the Commission could better identify areas to advocate for and support of expanded recycling and diversion services.

VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. **The EMC has Commissioner vacancies for Districts 2, 5, 7, and 8. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:06:58]**
2. **The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 24, 2026, at Community Meeting Hale (Building G). Please contact the Board Secretary or review the agenda posted on the County Calendar within six days of the next meeting for confirmation. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:07:39]**
3. **See current schedule for EMC for 2026.**

IX. ADJOURNMENT [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:07:57]

Motion 2: Vice Chair Canelas moved to adjourn the meeting, and Commissioner Lee seconded. The motion passed with a unanimous aye voice vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:24 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ashley DeVera, Secretary