

**ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMISSION
COUNTY OF HAWAII**

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 24, 2026

9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

West Hawai'i Civic Center – Community Meeting Hale (Building G) and Zoom

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jr4NXUPzO2w&t=1464s>

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:

Daniel Girvan, Director of Department of Environmental Management (“DEM”); Christopher Laude, Temporary Assignment (“TA”) Wastewater Division Chief; Alex White, TA Information and Education Specialist; and Kevin Soong, Deputy Corporation Counsel.

Others Present:

No members of the public attended in-person and one member of the public attended via Zoom.

I. CALL TO ORDER [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 0:26]

Chair Perez called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m., noting that quorum was present.

Commissioner's Present:

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

Vacancies:

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

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR May 27, 2026 [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 1:34]

The Environmental Management Commission (“EMC”) will consider approval of the minutes from its meeting held on May 27, 2026. Chair Perez opened the item and requested a motion.

Motion 1: Commissioner Kometani moved to approve the minutes, and Vice Chair Canelas seconded.

Motion 2: Commissioner Lee moved to amend the minutes on page 10, second-to-last paragraph, to reflect “within the permitting process for short-term vacation rentals (“STVR”) and questioned if there is a requirement to verify sewage line connections”. Commissioner Kometani seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous aye voice vote.

Motion 3: Vice Chair Canelas moved to approve the minutes with the amendment, and Commissioner Kometani seconded. The motion passed with a unanimous aye voice vote.

III. PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON ITEMS ON THE AGENDA [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 6:48]

There were no public statements provided at this time.

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

1. General:

a. Status on current consultants and projects underway by DEM. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 7:42]

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

Mr. Chris Laude reviewed a list of projects, funding, and the status of each project. He reported that the Hilo Wastewater Treatment Plant (“WWTP”) was under construction. A designer had been selected, and Nan, Inc. was the contractor. Chair Perez requested that the project list be provided in a document and transmitted to the Commission.

Mr. Laude reported that the Pāhala collection system was fully funded and under construction. Goodfellow Bros. was the contractor and continued to make good

progress. The Pāhala WWTP was also fully funded and under construction, with Alpha Inc. serving as the contractor.

Mr. Laude stated that the Nā'ālehu WWTP remained in the design phase. The project was funded and was currently with Engineering Partners. He further reported that the Hale Hālāwai sewer pump station was fully funded. AECOM completed the design, Alpha Inc. was the contractor, and construction was anticipated to be completed before the Ironman event.

Chair Perez requested the budgets associated with each project and the consulting timeline. Mr. Laude responded that the designs had been completed for all projects except the Nā'ālehu WWTP. He stated that there was no fixed due date for the design because an extension had been received from the Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA"), and staff was focused on making the project more streamlined, affordable, and acceptable to the community.

Vice Chair Canelas asked about the timeline for the Pāhala collection system and the WWTP. Mr. Laude responded that the collection system was approximately 50% complete. He added that he had not received an update on the WWTP but would provide the information in the project spreadsheet to the Commission.

Vice Chair Canelas stated that a resident had provided him with an old presentation packet regarding funding opportunities for connections to the system. He said he would digitize the packet and forward it to DEM.

Chair Perez requested that the project spreadsheet includes the date range of each consultancy, the total project budget, the contract holder for each project, and information regarding any contract extensions, including the applicable extension dates. Chair Perez noted that this item would be added to next month's agenda as unfinished business.

Public testimony – Ben Kiblinger [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 16:41]

Mr. Kiblinger stated that he had attended the previous week's Council meeting and commended DEM on obtaining the extension from the EPA and on the progress being made with its projects.

b. Review list of top priority projects that need funding and management support. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 19:44]

Mr. Laude stated that the five projects previously discussed were the Department's top priority projects and that they were all fully funded. Vice Chair Canelas stated that he would provide a meeting packet from the previous administration that had

been presented to the Pāhala community regarding funding options. He suggested that the Commission discuss the packet at a future meeting.

Chair Perez asked about the Kealakehe project, and Mr. Laude clarified that it was not one of the Administrative Order on Consent (“AOC”) projects. Chair Perez noted that, at the previous meeting, Ms. Dana Okano had indicated that she might be able to assist DEM in obtaining additional funding. Mr. Laude responded that the Kealakehe project was fully funded. He stated that staff had continued discussions with Ms. Okano regarding the requirements for the Kealakehe R-1 project; however, the funding timelines did not align, and the project would need to proceed.

Vice Chair Canelas asked whether, once the Kealakehe, Pāhala, and Nā‘ālehu projects were completed under their current designs and became operational, R-1 water filtration and distribution systems could be added during a future phase. Mr. Laude responded that one of the biggest challenges was wastewater collection. He explained that the traditional gravity collection system being used in Pāhala was invasive, expensive, and time-consuming to install. He further stated that the wastewater treatment facility in Pāhala was being constructed as a new plant and could be upgraded in the future to produce R-1 water.

Chair Perez expressed concern about the wastewater crisis facing Hawai‘i County and about the risks of delaying the implementation of R-1 water, rather than making it available sooner than later.

2. Solid Waste Updates:

a. Review DEM’s Backyard Composting resources and collateral to identify resources gaps that can be supported. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 35:38]

Mr. White stated DEM previously operated a backyard composting program that distributed black plastic compost bins. He noted that the program was effective, low-cost, and resulted in significant waste diversion. The program was discontinued prior to the pandemic, and DEM has been exploring ways to revive it. Mr. White explained that there had been community concerns about using plastic compost bins, and the department was evaluating alternative materials and creative solutions.

Commissioner Kometani asked whether the original bins were made of plastic. Mr. White confirmed that they were, noting that the bins had an estimated lifespan of 10–20 years and were a low-tech system. He added that current considerations

also include preventing coconut rhinoceros beetle (“CRB”) breeding habitat and addressing other related concerns.

Vice Chair Canelas asked whether DEM would share the final waste characterization study. Mr. White responded that the Solid Waste Division was partnering with the State of Hawai‘i on the study. He explained that the initial round of sampling had taken place in the spring, with a second round of sampling still underway. Because DEM was not managing the study directly, he was unable to provide an estimated completion date but noted that the department was assisting in facilitating the project.

Chair Perez asked whether the completed study could be presented to the EMC. Mr. White recommended inviting the project's contractors to provide a presentation to the Commission.

3. Wastewater Division Updates:

- a. DEM will provide update on collateral needs and resources for community engagement, outreach and education that supports infrastructure rehabilitation and replacement across Hawai‘i County. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 39:14]**

Mr. Laude stated that the department routinely conducted wastewater education and outreach for individual users, community groups, and apartment complexes when issues arose within the collection system. He explained that outreach efforts addressed topics such as fats, oils, and grease (“FOG”), disposable wipes, and excessive wastewater flows from specific areas. He also noted that the department participated in career days at local schools, community events, and collaborated with the University of Hawai‘i and the community college system on wastewater-related educational courses.

Chair Perez clarified that, during the previous month's meeting, it had been mentioned that some of the department's educational materials were outdated and needed to be updated before being shared with the Commission. She noted that several commissioners had educational backgrounds and were willing to assist in reviewing and updating curriculum and outreach materials. She added that commissioners were also available to help distribute the materials and tailor them for different audiences.

Chair Perez further stated that many communities across Hawai‘i Island were confused about sanitation issues and that there was a significant public knowledge gap regarding wastewater and sanitation. She emphasized that expanding education and outreach efforts would help address this need.

Commissioner Lee recommended establishing measurable goals and timelines for the department's education and outreach efforts. As examples, she suggested setting targets for the number of school visits each year and developing updated educational materials for use at community events.

Mr. Laude explained that, under the Clean Water Act, the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System ("NPDES") program is divided into two components. He stated that the first is the point source program, which regulates discharges from facilities such as wastewater treatment plants through permits designed to reduce impacts and ensure that discharged water meets standards to protect receiving waters.

He further explained that the second component is the nonpoint source program, which includes the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System ("MS4") program. He noted that the MS4 program includes six minimum control measures intended to reduce stormwater pollution, one of which is public education and outreach. Mr. Laude stated that the MS4 program establishes clear goals for informing and educating the public about stormwater management and pollution prevention. He added that comparable requirements do not exist for the point source program. While there is nothing preventing the department from taking a more proactive approach to outreach, he noted that funding and staffing limitations remain significant challenges.

Commissioner Lee acknowledged the staffing constraints but stated that developing and distributing educational materials does not necessarily have to be a significant undertaking. She recommended partnering with schools and community organizations to assist with developing and disseminating educational materials.

Chair Perez added that the primary goal of expanding public outreach and education was to help protect and preserve the County's wastewater infrastructure. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that residents understand how to properly use the system to support its long-term sustainability. Commissioner Lee added that the outreach effort should focus on both protecting the infrastructure by educating the public on proper system use and increasing transparency about the condition and operation of the County's wastewater systems.

Vice Chair Canelas asked whether the Public Education Officer position would serve the entire island. Mr. Laude confirmed that the position would be an islandwide role supporting both the Solid Waste and Wastewater divisions.

b. Status report on Integrated Wastewater Management Plan and Cesspool Integration. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 55:53]

Director Girvan reported that the department had received the draft Cesspool Conversion Plan several weeks earlier and had submitted its comments. He stated that the department had subsequently received the final version of the Cesspool Conversion Plan, along with the draft Integrated Wastewater Management Plan, and was currently reviewing both documents before submitting additional comments. He did not anticipate significant changes between the draft and final versions of the Integrated Wastewater Management Plan.

Director Girvan noted that the AOC requires both plans to be completed by the end of the year and stated that the department remains on schedule to complete them ahead of that deadline.

Chair Perez asked whether the next versions presented to the Commission would be the final reports. Director Girvan confirmed that they would. Chair Perez requested that any draft reports be provided to the Commission for review and comment before they are finalized.

At 10:05 a.m. the commission took a recess, and the meeting was called back to order at 10:10 a.m.

V. NEW BUSINESS

1. Presentation of the Sewer Rate Study by FG Solutions. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 1:07:23]

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

Ms. Debi Fortin and Mr. Art Griffith of FG Solutions, LLC, provided a presentation to the Commission. Ms. Fortin provided an overview of the Wastewater Rate Study. She explained that the purpose of the study was to project wastewater utility revenues, expenses, and rates over a five-year period, identify how the wastewater system's operating and capital expenses would be funded, and develop a cost-of-service-based rate schedule that addresses the County's needs.

Ms. Fortin reviewed the County's wastewater system, noting that it includes six wastewater treatment plants. She stated that the two largest facilities are the Hilo WWTP, which is currently undergoing upgrades, and the Kealakehe WWTP. The four smaller facilities are located in Pāpa'ikou, Kula'imano, Kapehu, and Honoka'a. She

reported that the County treats approximately five million gallons of wastewater each day and also has two large-capacity cesspools located in Pāhala and Nā'ālehu. In addition, the wastewater system includes approximately 120 miles of sewer mains and 16 pump stations, with the County cleaning approximately 20 miles of sewer mains annually. Ms. Fortin displayed a map showing the locations of the County's WWTPs and shared photographs of the facilities.

Ms. Fortin discussed several challenges facing the Wastewater Division, including maintaining safe and reliable wastewater services to protect public health and the environment while addressing increasing operating costs, aging infrastructure, and evolving regulatory requirements. She explained that planned repairs and infrastructure upgrades are necessary to maintain system reliability, avoid service failures, and reduce the likelihood of emergency rate increases.

Ms. Fortin explained that a rate increase was necessary due to several factors. She stated that aging infrastructure required ongoing replacement, including pipes, pumps, and treatment facilities, many of which were currently undergoing or requiring upgrades. She also noted that the Wastewater Division must comply with regulatory and permit requirements, which contribute to operational and capital costs.

Ms. Fortin further explained that expenses have continued to increase due to rising costs for chemicals, labor, and insurance. In addition, she stated that reserve levels are currently at or below policy targets and are not sufficient to sustainably cover recurring expenses or long-term capital needs.

Ms. Fortin acknowledged concerns regarding low-income customers and stated that the County is evaluating a new low-income assistance program. She noted that the level of discount has not yet been finalized. She added that one option under consideration for eligibility verification is the use of existing assistance programs, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP") benefits, as qualifying criteria.

Mr. Griffith explained that the proposed rates are not intended to define the full cost of providing safe and reliable wastewater service, but rather to establish a predictable funding structure to support those costs. He noted that overall revenues would need to increase, as previously discussed by Ms. Fortin.

Mr. Griffith stated that he would present the proposed service charges by customer class, followed by a comparison of monthly bills with other utilities in the State of Hawai'i. He reported that the current residential rate for customers connected to the sewer system is a fixed monthly charge of \$52. He outlined a proposed series of five rate increases, beginning in November of the current year, increasing to \$63, and rising

incrementally to \$125 by 2031. He further noted that customers served by gang cesspools in Pāhala and Nā'ālehu currently pay a fixed monthly charge of \$25. He explained that this lower rate reflects the fact that these systems do not utilize the County's WWTPs.

Mr. Griffith stated that non-residential customers pay a monthly fixed charge in addition to a usage-based charge determined by metered water consumption. He explained that the rate study introduces a new customer class for hotels, noting that hotels typically generate stronger wastewater that is more costly to treat. This new class would be subject to a monthly base rate, a fixed charge, and a usage-based charge.

He further explained that private haulers deliver wastewater from septic tanks, cesspools, and portable toilets to the Hilo and Kealahou treatment plants. He also noted that certain non-County-owned treatment plants on the island haul waste activated sludge to these facilities. He explained that while this arrangement allows those operators to avoid constructing their own solids handling facilities, it does increase loading at County facilities, and the proposed pricing structure accounts for these impacts.

Mr. Griffith then presented a chart comparing the monthly wastewater bills for a typical single-family residence in the County of Hawai'i, Maui, Kauai, Honolulu, and the West Hawai'i Sewer Company. He explained that the West Hawai'i Sewer Company serves Waikōloa Village. The comparison was based on a monthly water usage of 9,000 gallons, which is the approximate average usage of its customers. This concluded the presentation.

Vice Chair Canelas asked whether the proposed low-income assistance program would apply to the renter or the homeowner. Ms. Fortin responded that she did not have the details of the low-income assistance program at that time and would follow up with additional information. Director Girvan explained that, under the current Hawai'i County Code, wastewater charges are billed to the property owner. He noted that the County Code allows for a renter-owner agreement, which permits the County to communicate with the renter as though they were the property owner. However, he stated that he would also need to follow up regarding how the low-income assistance program would apply under those circumstances.

Commissioner Lee noted that the proposed rate for multi-unit residential properties was the same as that for single-family residential properties. She also asked whether hotels of different sizes would be charged different rates. Mr. Griffith responded that hotels are generally treated as single customers. He explained that while a hotel may have multiple water service connections, the sewer bill is based on the water

consumption recorded by the hotel's water meter. Commissioner Lee then asked about the West Hawai'i Sewer Company. Mr. Griffith responded that it is a private utility regulated by the Hawai'i Public Utilities Commission, which approves its rates.

Commissioner Lee commented that the County of Hawai'i's wastewater rates were lower than those of the other Hawai'i counties, while the County also has the lowest average income. She expressed concern about the impact of the proposed rate increases over the next five years and suggested that the County consider billing customers monthly rather than bimonthly to make payments more manageable. Director Girvan responded that the Department could look into changing from bimonthly to monthly billing. He added that the Department was also exploring options to allow customers to pay their wastewater bills online, although implementation has been delayed due to information technology constraints. He stated that the Department is actively working toward offering online payment capabilities in the near future.

Director Girvan further noted that, under the existing County Code, if a delinquent wastewater account cannot be resolved, the County may request that the Department of Water Supply discontinue potable water service to the property.

Commissioner Lee asked what other sources of funding support the wastewater system aside from annual revenue and federal funding. Director Girvan responded that capital improvement funding comes from a variety of outside sources, including local grants, state and federal grants, and bond sales, which are used for capital expenses. He explained that the annual wastewater revenue currently collected covers only a fraction of the Department's fixed operating costs. He stated that the proposed rate increases were not arbitrary but were specifically designed to gradually align annual revenue with the actual annual cost of operating the wastewater treatment system. He emphasized that the proposed rates would not generate funding for capital improvements or create excess revenue but rather would allow the wastewater system to cover its operating expenses. He added that the Department is currently able to meet its financial obligations only because of transfers from the County's General Fund and that the proposed rate adjustments are intended to make the wastewater system financially self-supporting.

Commissioner Lee then asked what wastewater rate would apply to vacation rentals located in residential communities. Director Girvan responded that vacation rentals are generally billed at the standard residential rate because the property owner is responsible for the account. However, he noted that if a property's use becomes sufficiently commercial in nature, it could be subject to a commercial rate classification. Mr. Griffith added that he would need to follow up with staff if there were specific properties or situations under consideration. Commissioner Lee stated

that she did not believe vacation rentals should be charged the same rate as owner-occupied residences.

Vice Chair Canelas agreed with Commissioner Lee's comments. He stated that, given the current economic conditions and the proposed monthly rates, he would like to explore ways for hotels and STVRs to shoulder a greater share of the financial burden than working-class families. He suggested maintaining a lower monthly service charge for residential customers while increasing rates for higher-volume users.

Vice Chair Canelas also recommended that properties operating as STVRs be identified by the tax map key ("TMK") associated with their STVR permit and be charged the commercial, non-residential wastewater rate. He noted that, based on a Google search, there were approximately 700 hotels on the island. He commented that increasing monthly service charges for hotels alone would likely not generate significant additional revenue, but increasing rates for high-volume users could help keep monthly charges lower for families who conserve water and manage their usage responsibly. Vice Chair Canelas also expressed interest in learning the current annual operating cost of managing the County's wastewater system.

Chair Perez agreed with the recommendation that wastewater rates for STVRs and hotels should be reevaluated to determine whether those properties should bear a greater share of the cost than local resident homeowners. She asked what the current gap is between wastewater revenues and expenses and, with the proposed rate increases, what that gap would be in the future. She also asked how new development and new system connections factor into wastewater revenues.

Director Girvan responded that when new customers, whether individual residences or entire developments, are added to the wastewater system, they generate additional revenue but also increase the volume of wastewater requiring treatment. Mr. Griffith explained that the Fiscal Year 2026–2027 budget includes an approximately \$3.9 million transfer from the General Fund to cover wastewater operation and maintenance expenses. He stated that operating and maintenance costs are expected to increase in future years as new and upgraded facilities, including the Nā'ālehu, Pāhala, Hilo, and Kealakehe WWTPs, require additional staffing for operations and monitoring. He noted that the projected cost of these additional personnel has been incorporated into the proposed rate projections.

He also stated that increased funding for facility repairs and equipment replacement has been included to address the County's aging wastewater infrastructure. He explained that the current rates do not fully cover these expenses, whereas the proposed rates are designed to do so. Mr. Griffith added that, by Fiscal Year 2030–2031, wastewater rate revenues are projected to total approximately \$37 million

annually, while projected operating, maintenance, and ongoing facility repair costs are expected to be just under \$35 million.

Chair Perez then asked about new developments seeking to connect new subdivisions to the County's wastewater system. Director Girvan responded that developers are responsible for constructing the wastewater collection infrastructure within their developments, including pipelines and any necessary lift stations. Once completed, the infrastructure is dedicated to the County. He explained that while developers bear the cost of constructing and delivering a complete, operational wastewater system, the County does not currently impose an additional cash connection charge beyond those construction requirements.

Commissioner Beets requested clarification regarding sewer connections. He then asked whether the rate projections considered the potential for future revenue from the sale of R-1 recycled water, particularly at the Kealakehe WWTP. Mr. Griffith responded that the rate study did not include revenue projections for R-1 recycled water because the project is not expected to be completed for several years. He explained that the rate study should be updated periodically as conditions change and that future updates should incorporate R-1 recycled water revenues once the project is closer to completion. He added that the cost of producing R-1 recycled water has not yet been determined, making it difficult to estimate pricing or potential revenue from its sale. Commissioner Beets requested that the report's recommendations include a statement acknowledging the future revenue potential associated with the R-1 recycled water project.

At 11:00 a.m. the commission took a recess, and the meeting was called back to order at 11:03 a.m.

Commissioner Lee asked whether the County could require a connection fee when property owners are required to connect to the public sewer system. She questioned whether a homeowner constructing a new residence in an area with available sewer service could be required to connect rather than install a septic system and whether a connection fee could be imposed under those circumstances. She also asked about situations where a property owner wishes to connect to the sewer system, but the County would need to extend a sewer service line to the property. Commissioner Lee stated that she supported charging developers for infrastructure improvements but did not support imposing connection fees on residents. She expressed concern that additional requirements, costs, or restrictions on residential construction could further contribute to the County's housing affordability challenges.

Commissioner Kometani asked what the most significant factors were in determining the proposed rate increases. Director Girvan responded that one of the primary

factors is the growth in the number of properties connected to the County's wastewater system, as only connected properties pay monthly wastewater service charges. He explained that efforts to bring additional customers onto the system would increase revenue available to support operating costs, although the increase would not be substantial. He added that expanding the existing wastewater collection system would be necessary to serve additional customers, but the Department currently lacks the resources to undertake those expansions because of its commitment to mandated projects.

Commissioner Kometani then asked whether significant growth in West Hawai'i, particularly in the Kealakehe service area, was expected to increase the number of wastewater customers. Director Girvan responded that there are numerous private wastewater systems on the west side of the island. He noted that communities such as Puakō are seeking long-term wastewater solutions and that one option under consideration is conveying wastewater to a nearby private treatment facility.

Chair Perez asked about the next steps following completion of the rate study. Director Girvan responded that he would like DEM to discuss the proposal internally. He noted that several important questions were raised during the meeting and stated that the Department would determine whether to move forward with the proposal as presented or make revisions before submitting a formal recommendation to the County Council.

Commissioner Lee asked about the timeline for presenting the proposal to the County Council. Director Girvan responded that the Department plans to bring the proposal before the County Council within the next one to two months and would like to see the new rates implemented later this year.

Vice Chair Canelas recommended that future presentations include revenue projections for each usage tier and illustrate the potential impacts of increasing rates for higher-volume users while maintaining lower rates for lower-volume users. He stated that providing this information, such as in a spreadsheet or similar format, would enable the Commission to make more informed recommendations. Director Girvan responded that the requested information may be available and that the Department would follow up.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- 1. EMC discussion on recommendations to DEM on in-vessel composting, next steps for further investigation or development. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:27:38]**

Public testimony – Ben Kiblinger [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:28:05]

Mr. Kiblinger stated that he had attended the previous EMC meeting and had been involved in efforts to increase community engagement by helping residents understand the impact of their individual actions. Referring to composting initiatives, he recommended developing an impact scorecard that would quantify and communicate the benefits of composting in a way that is easy for the public to understand. As an example, he noted that composting five gallons of organic waste could divert approximately 15 pounds of material from the landfill and produce about 1.5 gallons of soil amendment. Mr. Kiblinger emphasized that public education is important in helping residents understand their role in protecting the island's environment. He noted that the County of Hawai'i currently has the highest solid waste diversion rate in the state, at 32.6 percent, compared to the statewide average of 26.5 percent. He also stated that the national goal established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture ("USDA") and EPA is to achieve a 50 percent diversion rate by the year 2030.

Vice Chair Canelas stated that he had drafted a recommendation letter based on discussions at the EMC meetings, his experience in waste diversion and composting, and input from subject matter experts. He outlined three primary recommendations in the letter: first, to develop a comprehensive islandwide composting plan that prioritizes decentralized, community-based composting systems; second, to engage the State Department of Health ("DOH") to advocate for greater regulatory flexibility for commercial composting operations, including coordination with other counties and environmental management agencies across the islands; and third, to evaluate and incorporate emerging composting technologies, including in-vessel composting systems, as part of the overall plan.

Vice Chair Canelas noted that, as an island community, and based on recent waste characterization study findings indicating that organics are the largest contributor to the landfill stream, a comprehensive composting strategy could extend the life of the County landfill, reduce reliance on imported fossil-based fertilizers, support the agricultural sector, and strengthen long-term local food system resilience.

Commissioner Lee recommended postponing the recommendation letter until the waste characterization study is completed, noting that the current findings are based on a single sampling event and that a more comprehensive dataset would provide a stronger basis for the recommendations. She also stated that she had received questions from the public regarding the letter and suggested that it be revised using plain language to make it more accessible and easier for the community to understand.

Chair Perez asked about the intended user base for the proposed composting initiatives and how residents would interact with the County's backyard composting resources from a user perspective. Vice Chair Canelas responded that the development of a comprehensive composting plan would include community outreach and engagement to better understand local needs and participation. He also expressed interest in working with DEM to better understand the regulatory challenges associated with composting, particularly those related to DOH.

Mr. White responded that the Department has collected a considerable amount of data on backyard composting programs, including survey results from previous County efforts and successful programs implemented on other islands. He stated that the traditional plastic backyard composting bins have proven to be effective, durable, and capable of processing a significant amount of organic waste. However, he noted that challenges arise when compost is collected and transported to a centralized location.

Mr. White stated that backyard composting bins can achieve waste diversion at an estimated cost of approximately \$7 per ton. He added that reducing the amount of organic material sent to the landfill requires careful planning and a comprehensive strategy, and that achieving a goal of diverting all organic waste from the landfill becomes increasingly complex and costly.

Mr. White also commented on the challenges associated with compostable food service containers. He explained that many products marketed as compostable do not readily compost in practice. He further noted that, based on discussions with DOH, once these materials enter the composting stream, they are often too degraded to determine whether they are certified compostable, resulting in contamination concerns for composting operations.

Vice Chair Canelas requested that a timeline be established for the recommendation letter. Mr. White stated that he would follow up with Mr. Michael Rivera, Solid Waste Division Chief, to confirm the date of the last waste characterization study. Chair Perez recommended waiting for the final waste characterization study to be published before moving forward with the recommendation letter. She added that, if the report is not completed in a timely manner, the Commission could consider streamlining the recommendation.

Vice Chair Canelas noted that the Commission could initiate funding for the DEM to begin developing a comprehensive composting plan. Chair Perez requested a report on the in-vessel composting operation in Pāhala. Vice Chair Canelas responded that the project team is currently working with a soil scientist to conduct a historical analysis comparing previous batches of compost with current production. He stated that he anticipated providing that report to the EMC within the next couple of months.

Commissioner Kometani recommended placing greater emphasis on public education to encourage participation in composting. He suggested introducing residents to the basic concepts and practices of composting to increase awareness and participation, recognizing that composting requires time and effort.

2. EMC discussion and potential recommendations to DEM on HCF's Technical Assistance opportunities and support. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:55:14]

Chair Perez provided a brief background, noting that the topic had been discussed during last month's HCF presentation. She explained that HCF could access federal funding for the Kealakehe project and asked whether the EMC had any recommendations regarding technical assistance to put forward from that discussion. Chair Perez also asked DEM whether there had been any additional contact or conversations with Ms. Okano from HCF. Director Girvan confirmed that DEM had been in contact with Ms. Okano but explained that the Kealakehe project was fully funded, pending receipt of a bid within budget. He noted that those funds could not be used for that particular project.

VII. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

1. Commissioners and members of the public may email items for consideration on the next agenda to Chair Perez by Wednesday, July 1 2026. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:58:21]

VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. The EMC has Commissioner vacancies for Districts 2, 5, 7, and 8. [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:58:52]

2. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 22, 2026, at the Puna Conference Room. 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 2:59:29]

3. See current schedule for EMC for 2026.

IX. ADJOURNMENT [SEE YOUTUBE TIMESTAMP 2:59:53]

Motion 4: Commissioner Kometani moved to adjourn the meeting, and Commissioner Lee seconded. The motion passed with a unanimous aye voice vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ashley DeVera, Secretary

DRAFT