

# HAWAIIAN HOMES COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING NO. 1

Minutes of February 25, 2025

Keaukaha Elementary School Cafeteria,  
240 Desha Avenue, Hilo, Hawaii 96720  
and Interactive Conferencing Technology (ICT) Zoom

**PRESENT** Kali Watson, Chairperson  
Makai Freitas, West Hawai'i Commissioner  
Michael L. Kaleikini, East Hawai'i Commissioner  
Lawrence Lasua, Moloka'i Commissioner  
Sanoe Marfil, O'ahu Commissioner  
Walter Kaneakua, O'ahu Commissioner  
Dennis L. Neves, Kauai Commissioner

**EXCUSED** Archie Kalepa, Maui Commissioner  
Pauline N. Namu'o, O'ahu Commissioner

**COUNSEL** R. Hokulei Lindsey, Deputy Attorney General

**STAFF** Linda Chinn, Acting Administrator, Land Management Division  
Peter Kahana Albinio, Land Management Division  
Andrew Sante, Land Agent  
Lilianne L. Makaila, Planner V  
Leah Burrows-Nuuanu, Secretary to the Commission  
Diamond Badajos, Information and Community Relations Officer  
Bryan Jeremiah, East Hawaii District Supervisor  
Ruby Nuesca, HHL Assistant  
Michael Lowe, Information Specialist

## **ORDER OF BUSINESS**

### **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 pm by Chairman Kali Watson. Seven (7) members were present in person, establishing a quorum.

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Chair Watson asked for a motion to accept the agenda, Moved by Commissioner Neves, seconded by Commissioner Lasua. Motion carried unanimously.

## **PUBLIC HEARINGS ON THE PROPOSED LAND DISPOSITION OF HAWAIIAN HOME LANDS FOR A COMMUNITY-BASED RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECT AT PANA'EWA ON THE ISLAND OF HAWAI'I**

### **A. PROPOSED PANA'EWA COMMUNITY-BASED RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECT**

Presentation of proposed renewable energy project on Department of Hawaiian Home Lands at Pana'ewa, Hawaii. Hawaii Land & Power, LLC, a Hawaii limited liability company, is requesting a Right-of-Entry Permit (for up to three years) for due diligence purposes, and a conditional long-term General Lease (25 years with the option to extend), for 12.75 acres TMK No. (3) 2-1-025:086, Pana'ewa, Hawai'i Island, to develop a firm generation and energy storage project that would generate up to 60 megawatts (MW) of firm capacity energy. Following the presentation, DHHL staff and representatives of Hawaii Land & Power, LLC, will be responding to questions for clarification from the public related to the proposed project.

## **B. PUBLIC TESTIMONY ON THE PROPOSED PANA'EWA COMMUNITY-BASED RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECT**

Public testimony on any item relevant to this agenda may be taken at this time, or a testifier may wait to testify when the agenda item is called for discussion. Pursuant to section 92-3, Hawaii Revised Statutes, and section 10-2-11(c), Hawaii Administrative Rules, the Chair of the Commission has the authority to impose reasonable conditions to ensure an orderly and efficient meeting.

Chair Watson noted that the hearing was held to provide information and receive public comments on a proposed community-based renewable energy project on DHHL land in Pana'ewa, Hawaii Island. Hawaii Land and Power LLC, a Hawaii limited liability company, requested a right-of-entry permit for up to three years for due diligence purposes and a long-term general lease of 25 years, with an option to extend up to 12 additional years, to develop a firm generation and energy storage project on up to 12.75 acres of land, generating up to 60 megawatts of energy. The hearing aimed to allow all interested persons to submit data, views, or arguments, either orally or in writing, on matters relevant to the issues identified in the public hearing notice. No responses to questions were provided, as the department was in listening mode only. Testifiers were called in a set order: those who signed up in person, followed by those on Zoom, and finally, those connected via voice call. Each testifier was given up to five minutes to speak, with the possibility of additional time if permitted. Participants were reminded to be courteous and mindful of others wishing to testify. After all scheduled testimonies were heard, individuals granted additional time were allowed to present further relevant testimony.

### **PT-1 Ainaaloha Ioane**

A. Ioane testified on behalf of herself, stating that she had not yet had the opportunity to speak with the King's Landing beneficiaries about the proposed project. She expressed concern over the apparent urgency to move the project forward, noting that she does not often see the same urgency for projects that directly benefit the beneficiary community. She was conflicted by the Commission's support for this project compared to others that beneficiaries may prioritize. A. Ioane also voiced concerns about the additional burden the project would place on beneficiaries in Keaukaha, who are already surrounded by the waste treatment facility, airport, and landfill, which impact their daily lives. She emphasized that while this is only an approval for due diligence, there is significant concern in the community due to a lack of information about the project, how the energy will be generated, and how it will benefit the beneficiaries. She urged that as the process moves forward, transparency is needed to ensure that the project leads to direct benefits, particularly in the form of more Hawaiian homestead leases.

### **PT-2 Iokepa Kao**

I. Kao, a representative of the Beneficiary Trust Council voiced concerns that wait listers had been excluded from the consultation process, despite prior interest in the property. They criticized the project's fast-tracking and questioned its fairness, particularly regarding Hawaiian Electric's lease amid bankruptcy. The benefit package was deemed inadequate, as job opportunities would shrink to four highly skilled positions that most beneficiaries were unqualified for, and the estimated \$1 million annual benefit equated to only one house per year. They urged for broader consultation, multiple options, and better community education before making hasty decisions, emphasizing the need for fairness and sustainability.

### **PT-3 J. Napua-Johansen**

J. Napua-Johansen testified about her deep concerns regarding the proposed project, recalling past environmental burdens placed on Hawaiian communities. She lived in Keaukaha but was forced to relocate to Pana'ewa due to airport expansion, only to face new challenges from the sewage plant, landfill, HELCO, and commercial developments. She recounted how her family endured the harmful effects of fuel emissions from HELCO, which shifted its operations to nighttime after complaints. She feared that history was repeating itself,

with another industrial project affecting Hawaiian lands and health. She questioned whether Hawaiians would see any direct benefits, such as discounted electricity, while shouldering the negative impacts. She also cited previous proposals, like SpaceX and a water treatment plant, that sought large portions of Hawaiian land without benefiting those on the homestead waitlist. She spoke publicly to advocate for her family and community, expressing frustration over continued land use decisions that disadvantage Native Hawaiians.

**PT-4 Grace Mamo Bezilla**

G. Mamo Bazilla testified on behalf of her ancestors and future generations of Hawaiians, emphasizing the responsibility to protect the land and its people. She cautioned that silence does not always mean consent and questioned how the community arrived at this point of decision-making. She urged decision-makers to reflect on their kūpuna, the past 56 generations, and the impact their choices would have on the next 58 generations. She highlighted the uniqueness of Hawai‘i and the interconnectedness of ‘āina, stressing that land is more than just a physical space—it encompasses water, air, and life itself. She questioned whether it is easier to maintain pristine land or to repair environmental damage, and whether Hawaiians should ever have to relocate due to decisions made in their supposed interest. She reminded the audience that the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act was meant to rehabilitate Native Hawaiians, not place them in further harm. She called on decision-makers to listen to their ancestors and think of future generations, emphasizing that their choices would determine whether Hawaiians remain in Hawai‘i for generations to come. She thanked them for their role in this critical decision and urged them to approach it with a long-term, Hawaiian-centered perspective.

**PT-5 Bob Douglas**

R. Douglas testified in strong opposition to the project, arguing that biofuels are not green energy and can emit up to 200 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> pollutants. He stated that the RFP should specify photovoltaic solutions with energy storage instead of biofuels, but noted that the proposed land area was too small for such a system. If the project proceeded, he insisted the contract must prohibit petroleum-based biofuels, as industry loopholes allow petroleum products to be mislabeled as biofuels. He urged DHHL to require two additional air quality monitoring stations in Hilo, as the current one near the hospital does not measure pollutants affecting Pana‘ewa and Keaukaha residents. He also warned that the battery technology proposed was the same as that used in the PG&E Moss Landing fire, which released harmful off-gassing and required evacuations, stressing that such facilities should be in remote areas. He concluded by defining environmental racism and questioned whether the project constituted such harm against Native Hawaiian communities. He urged DHHL to reconsider the purpose of its lands and eliminate heavy industry from the Big Island.

**PT-6 John McBride**

J. McBride, a third-generation Keaukaha homesteader, testified about the ongoing environmental burdens placed on his community, emphasizing that Keaukaha has never benefited from adverse developments surrounding them. He criticized the lack of beneficiary benefits from projects like the sewage treatment plant, the airport, and the large propane tank, which he warned could cause massive destruction if it exploded. He recounted the impact of airplane fuel pollution on Keaukaha, noting that taro crops were affected, and tests confirmed fuel residue from military planes flying overhead. He expressed frustration that Keaukaha residents bear the risks without receiving meaningful benefits, highlighting the disproportionate financial gains companies make compared to the minimal compensation offered to beneficiaries. He argued that a \$1 million benefit package was inadequate, especially considering the high cost of housing, and urged commissioners to ensure that risks and benefits were balanced. He reminded them that past negotiations, like the sewage treatment plant lease for \$1 while residents paid \$66 monthly, failed to provide fair outcomes and urged them to consider equity in their decisions.

**PT-7 Patrick Kahawaiolaa**

P. Kahawaiolaa, a lifelong Keaukaha resident and homesteader, expressed concerns about the proposed biofuel energy project and its limited benefits for beneficiaries. He questioned whether the proposed \$1 million benefit

was sufficient and suggested instead that beneficiaries near the plant receive a 30% discount on their electricity rates, similar to what former HELCO employees received. He acknowledged the longstanding environmental burdens in Keaukaha, including the sewage system, fuel tanks, and deteriorating infrastructure, attributing these issues to systemic racism. He recalled growing up in Keaukaha when it was stigmatized for being an exclusively Hawaiian community and noted that such discrimination persisted, as evidenced by placing infrastructure projects like the sewage plant in their neighborhood. He also pointed out a contradiction in policy, referencing HB 1307, which sought funding for geothermal energy while aiming to eliminate biofuel use, raising concerns about inconsistent energy strategies. He urged the commissioners to use their authority to make decisions that truly benefit not just current homesteaders but also the 29,000 wait-listed beneficiaries in need of land. He concluded by thanking the commissioners and reminding them of their responsibility to future generations.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT**

### **NEXT MEETING**

Chair Watson stated the second public hearing is scheduled for Wednesday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, at 8:30 a.m. at the Grand Nanioloa Hotel Sandalwood room and on Zoom.

The next HHC meeting – February 26<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. – HHC Special Meeting, Grand Nanioloa Hotel Sandalwood room, 93 Banyan Drive, Hilo, Hawaii 96720 and on Zoom.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**9:06 PM**

Respectfully submitted:



Kali Watson, Chairman  
Hawaiian Homes Commission

Prepared by:



Leah Burrows-Nuuanu, Commission Secretary  
Hawaiian Homes Commission