

HAWAIIAN HOMES COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING NO. 2

Minutes of February 26, 2025

Grand Naniloa Hotel, Sandalwood Room

93 Banyan Drive, 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

Chair Watson called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m. Seven (7) members were present in person, establishing a quorum.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Moved by Commissioner Freitas, seconded by Commissioner Neves, to approve the agenda. 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 Kalei Kailikini

K. Kailikini, a resident of Moloka'i from Ho'olehua homestead, testified on behalf of, expressing his concerns and frustrations regarding land and energy management in Hawaii. He mentioned that he is still on the waitlist for a homestead lease despite being part of the Kalima lawsuit, where payments were made but many, including himself, have yet to receive land. He voiced disappointment that while 12 acres of land were being considered for other purposes, he and others were still waiting for just one acre. Regarding energy issues, he questioned the involvement of companies such as Hawaiian Electric, Hawaii Land and Power, and Lotus Infrastructure Group, stating that he was familiar with Hawaiian Electric but not the others. He emphasized the need to determine whether their intentions were truly about producing energy for the people or simply about making money, stressing the importance of prioritizing community safety over profit. Kalei expressed his belief that energy should be controlled by the people, particularly Kanaka Maoli, rather than the government or corporations, as they have the intelligence and resources to manage it effectively. He underscored that the primary concern should be ensuring reliable electricity without blackouts, rather than financial gain. He concluded by advocating for community control over energy to guarantee functionality, stability, and safety rather than corporate profit.

PT-2 Grace Mamo Bezilla

G. Bezilla testified on behalf of the Keaukaha Action Network, where she serves as president, opposing a proposed project in Waiākea. She highlighted that Waiākea, particularly the area between Keaukaha and Pana'ewa, already housed over seven toxic release inventory facilities, creating an excessive burden on the land and its residents. She emphasized that this ongoing environmental degradation posed a significant threat to the quality of life of Native Hawaiian beneficiaries and the broader community. G. Bezilla condemned the approval of another such facility as an act of environmental and social racism, arguing that the beneficiaries had long suffered from exposure to harmful toxins. She urged the board of commissioners to fulfill their fiduciary duty by prioritizing the well-being of Native Hawaiian beneficiaries and rejecting the project, warning that its approval would lead to further harm. She concluded by demanding the immediate cessation of the project and expressing gratitude.

PT-3 John McBride

J. McBride, a third-generation resident of Keaukaha and a mechanic and welder by trade, testified before the commissioners, emphasizing the need to prioritize Native Hawaiian beneficiaries in negotiations involving the proposed project. He acknowledged that technological advancements have led to strong safeguards in such facilities but argued that beneficiaries consistently receive the least benefits in these deals. Reflecting on past developments in Keaukaha, such as the sewer treatment and petroleum plants, he pointed out that the community always lost in negotiations. J. McBride urged the commissioners to ensure that benefits from the project reach the directly affected communities, particularly Pana‘ewa and Keaukaha. He highlighted the agricultural potential of Pana‘ewa, suggesting that if the facility is developed, it should include programs that support local farmers by providing funding, land-clearing assistance, and opportunities to supply raw materials like palm oil. He stressed that a mutually beneficial arrangement could be created where farmers contribute to the facility’s production while receiving meaningful financial and infrastructural support. He criticized the current negotiation process, asserting that the proposed financial incentives were insufficient and calling for a stronger commitment to direct community benefits. He urged the commissioners to plant the idea of a fairer distribution of benefits early in the process, comparing it to the time it takes for palm trees to grow, and concluded by thanking them.

PT-4 Bob Douglas

B. Douglas strongly opposed the biofuel plant, arguing that it was not a green technology and still emitted CO2 pollutants. He urged the commissioners to reject the project, stating that relocating it would prevent further harm to the community. He dismissed promised job opportunities as misleading and raised concerns that DHHL might divert community benefits elsewhere. B. Douglas questioned why a photovoltaic plant with energy storage was not considered instead, citing its success in Waikoloa. He warned that the plant would primarily serve external interests like the military and observatories while imposing pollution on the local community. He also highlighted the dangers of transporting biofuels, referencing past truck fires that led to evacuations. He called for rezoning the area for commercial use with low ecological impact rather than industrial development, condemning the project as environmental racism and urging the commissioners to protect Native Hawaiian beneficiaries.

PT-5 Keoni Payton (ICT Zoom)

K. Payton strongly criticized DHHL for failing to uphold its fiduciary duty to Native Hawaiians, arguing that the agency consistently neglected its promise to return land to Kanaka Maoli. He claimed that public meetings were merely procedural to justify project approvals rather than enact real change and accused a previous speaker of being planted to create the illusion of support. He emphasized that there was enough land for every Native Hawaiian to receive at least one acre, yet many remained on waitlists and died without receiving land. Payton condemned DHHL for its lack of action, calling for justice and real commitment rather than empty promises. He also raised concerns about a conflict of interest, alleging that board member Mike Kalikin was receiving paychecks from both DHHL and pro-geothermal OMAP. Additionally, he criticized the community being forced to fund environmental impact statements for foreign investors. Frustrated by technical difficulties that prevented him from speaking earlier, he accused the commissioners of failing to engage with the community and only conducting meetings to justify predetermined project approvals. He ended by reaffirming his strong opposition and warning that the public was closely watching DHHL’s actions.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT

NEXT MEETING


Chair Watson announced that the commission would convene a special meeting later that morning to decide on issuing a right of entry permit for up to three years and granting conditional approval for a general lease to

Hawaii Land and Power LLC. The lease, initially set for 25 years with extension options, would allow the company to conduct due diligence and develop a renewable energy project on 12.75 acres of Hawaiian homelands, identified as TMK 32-1-025-086 in Pana‘ewa, Hawaii Island.

ADJOURNMENT

12:23 AM

Respectfully submitted:



Kali Watson, Chairman
Hawaiian Homes Commission

Prepared by:



Leah Burrows-Nuuanu, Commission Secretary
Hawaiian Homes Commission

Attachments: