

Notes from Pāhoa Community Update Session
Pāhoa Neighborhood Facility
Thursday, July 27, 2023
4:30pm – 6:30pm

Number of Community Members Attending: 65 in-person, 8 on Zoom

Attendees:

- Director Doug Adams, R&D
- Council Member Ashley Kierkiewicz
- Dave Kurohara, Hawaiian Electric
- Graceson Ghen, Hawai'i Energy
- Glenn Sako, Agriculture Economic Development Specialist, R&D
- Riley Saito, Energy Economic Development Specialist, R&D
- Jennifer Myers, Kīlauea Recovery Division

Agenda and Notes:

I. Introduction, Director Adams

II. Hawaiian Electric Updates

- Cost of oil has recently decreased, resulting in reduced electricity rates.
- For delays in service or payment assistance plans, [contact Hawaiian Electric](#).
- [Energy savings resources literature](#) is available online.
- Renewable energy portfolio percentage is now calculated as energy generated, not sold, totaling roughly 50%; Waikoloa AES solar project is online effective 04/23.
- Kalaoa Solar, Na‘alehu Solar estimated completion dates are 2025; will operate with shares for LMI households. They are community solar projects, which you can lease a portion of without adding solar to your house. The monthly net benefit would be \$15-25.
- Beginning in 2018, wrote an Integrated Grid Plan to expand choices, stabilize rates, and engage communities. The most important concerns of community were affordability, reliability, and resilience.

III. Hawai'i Energy Updates

- [Hawai'i Energy](#) is the efficiency and rebate program in the state that delivers energy savings and education. The Public Benefit Fund surcharge on energy bills funds Hawai'i Energy.
- Operating costs are high for water heaters, fridges, and washing machines and dryers. When buying new appliances, you can apply for rebates from Hawai'i Energy. Some appliances have direct rebates at the store.
- [Energy Smart 4 Homes](#) program offers consumers in specific zip codes (Puna included) the free installation of energy-saving appliances.

- Hawai‘i Energy also does bulk appliance purchases for communities by partnering with organizations (like Vibrant Hawai‘i).
- Graceson Ghen works with small businesses to reduce energy costs through approaches like light retrofitting.

IV. Agriculture Updates, Glenn Sako

- Big Island Feral Pig Control Project model initiated by Malama o Puna with R&D funding; first project-based plan that R&D received.
- Setting up a website to inform hunters of sightings; creating a hunter code of conduct, including a ban on snares; organizing workshops for education on hunting, butchering, and cooking to prevent disease transmission; promoting value-added products and creating a system to distribute pigs for household consumption.
- Agricultural theft is a top concern of producers, but there are limited statistics. Theft should be self-reported to save time, assist limited police resources, and collect statistics.
- R&D is generating a Self-Reporting Agricultural Theft/Trespass form, which will be on the website and distributed to police.
- Through community forums, R&D will try to publicize the identities of those who are known agriculture thieves.

V. Broadband Updates, Riley Saito

- R&D is invested in digital equity (how to access and utilize the internet), with an emphasis on underserved communities. The Hawai‘i Island Digital Equity Coalition (HIDEC) provides a space for the County and partners to collaborate on digital equity.
- With federal funding, internet service providers will build new infrastructure, but they are more focused on profit in high-consumption areas.
- R&D created an [ArcGIS Story Map](#) showing social vulnerability index (underprivileged populations) and areas desperately needing internet access.
- Underwent a process of determining where internet access was lacking on the island, and will focus on equity of delivery of broadband as new infrastructure is created; they are targeting the unserved, underserved, and community anchor institutions.
- Households can receive digital services (WiFi expenses, one-time computer purchases, etc.) rebates through the [Affordable Connectivity Program](#).

VI. R&D Updates, Director Adams

- R&D has executed an RFI for solutions for green energy production on-island that will reduce reliance on fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions.
- HTA is helping R&D implement stewardship programs in Keaukaha and Pohoiki.
- R&D just released the [Integrated Climate Action Plan](#).
- R&D utilizing ARPA funds for early childhood education efforts.

Comments:

- Why has the cost of power risen as geothermal production is increasing? Frustration for high energy bills.
- Frustration that drilling and fracking has paused in the United States.

- How does Hawaiian Electric turn a profit?
 - They are rewarded on returns on capital investments. The old model was revenues turned profits. It is now decoupled.
- What is the kW hour fee Hawaiian Electric pays to power producers?
 - \$.09/kW hour will be the price Hawaiian Electric pays to their newest grid site.
- Is PGV's power always on?
 - PGV might go down for maintenance, but it's a resource available giving power to the grid otherwise. The power provided has been at varied levels.
- Someone suggested PGV doesn't meet their quota.
- Multiple residents said PGV is poisoning the residents of Puna. They expressed frustration with Hawaiian Electric for purchasing power from PGV.
- Has Hawaiian Electric considered generating energy from the ocean or solar?
 - The company is working with research firms to explore additional renewable power sources, including thermal pumps and harnessing water differential.
- Someone suggested Hawaiian Electric should learn lessons from Puna's energy and food resilience. He also stated he was frustrated with the outsourcing of power to the rest of the island.
- Will Hawaiian Electric require PGV to be in-compliance before they purchase energy from them?
- Why doesn't Puna receive solar development projects?
 - Developers work with landowners to get leases for parcels of land to place energy projects on. New projects develop on available land, zoning codes, and other issues.
- Can Hawaiian Homestead lands receive development projects?
- One woman said PGV is hewa. She expressed frustration with its presence for nearly 50 years. She wants her concerns respected by Hawaiian Energy and PGV.
- Why can the ocean not be used for power generation?
 - The economics to generate pump-storage or thermodynamic systems aren't comparable to other power sources on this island.
- People expressed a desire for roads to be repaved for emergency accessibility in lower Puna.
- Why is Hawaiian Electric affected by the rising costs of barrels of oil?
 - The plants are diesel-powered, so they burn oil and are affected by the fluctuation in oil prices.
 - Current renewable energy contracts are being decoupled from the price of oil.
- Is there a Hawaiian Electric office that can help work with community organizers who want to develop solar energy projects?
 - The Department of Engineering works with developers, beginning with an assessment and bidding recommendations.
- Do homes that give energy to the grid receive compensation for the energy they produce?
 - Customer Grid Supply gives \$.11-\$.12 rebates for energy given to the grid. That price has reduced as the company has to pay to maintain the grid.
- One resident said Hawaiian Electric is a monopoly requiring everyone to buy into the grid, so it puts substantial resources towards grid maintenance. He suggested they should change their grid model.
 - There are 88,000 consumers on Hawai'i Island, but their grid has to cover substantial land. O'ahu has a cheaper cost per kW hour.

- How were Hawaiian Electric's focus groups discovered? Can this Puna community be a focus group?
 - Hawaiian Electric attended Vibrant Hawai'i community fairs throughout the island. They asked residents what they valued. Different communities expressed different concerns, but they were very excited and engaged. In Puna, they went to Nanawale Estates and Seaview.
- If Hawaiian Electric determined resiliency is important to consumers, PGV is not the most resilient power resource due to its location in a volatile area.
 - Hawaiian Electric maintains oil-fired power plants to offset lost energy in case of emergency to any power generators in Hawai'i. Some are on standby.
- How much energy is added to the grid by the oil-powered generators? Is Hawaiian Electric dependent on diesel generators?
 - The diesel generator usage varies by daily power output by the renewable energy sources.
- Does Hawaiian Electric own the diesel generators?
 - Hawaiian Electric owns diesel and steam generators. The power source for steam generators is bunker fuel.
- Why can't new solar projects come quicker? Why can't the state or Hawaiian Electric create their own plants?
 - Hawaiian Electric will open RFPs for solar and solar energy. The PUC historically hasn't allowed Hawaiian Electric to bid for contracts, but the PUC now allows Hawaiian Electric's self-bid team to receive awards for new developments. They are separated by a firewall from their peers.
- Is hydrogen a viable option for renewable energy?
- Can Hawaiian Electric publish how much energy is produced by the different power sources?
 - It is available on the website, but the daily percentage fluctuates.
- Can Hawaiian Electric create an online survey to receive additional responses?
 - They are online at HawaiiPowered.com
- Does Hawaiian Electric notify people when RFPs are open?
 - Developers need to sign-up to receive information about RFPs. They are given full information about bids and how to apply that way.
- Can you apply for standalone or independent systems?
 - [Green Energy Market Securitization program](#) is a loan-based program to assist households to install renewable energy. You must be on the grid to receive the royalties to offset the loan cost.
- There are USDA micro-grants and other programs to assist with renewable energy development. These developments must be done through a licensed contractor with permits.
- Can Hawai'i Energy provide a list of those they provide resources to, to ensure poor people and Hawaiians are fairly receiving these services?
- Why was The Hub chosen for the Hui Up program? Maku'u also has lots of land.
 - It was an easy, accessible corner lot.
- Malama o Puna offered to coordinate a giveaway on its property.
- Do you need to be on the grid to receive Hawai'i Energy rebates?
 - Yes. Hawai'i Energy is funded by energy bills paid to the PUC.
- 30% of the state's 100% renewable energy goal by 2045 will be completed by efficiency efforts.

- Do we lose energy from the grid? Can we move to micro-grid systems? The grid appears inefficient.
- Those interested in the pig capturing program should join Malama o Puna.
- Is there a pig contraception program?
 - There is a system that may reduce the virility of male pigs, but that is controversial and was not included in this proposal.
- Anyone wanting to receive pig meat will need to receive training.
- The feral pig issue is very pronounced in Maku‘u, with many open lots.
- One person did not want to harm the pigs. He noted that fencing is a more humane option. USDA micro-grants can be used to keep out pigs and protect produce.
- One person expressed concern about toxins in the pig meat.
- One person recommended putting footage onto a jump drive.
- Is the expansion of internet access through 5G, or is it wired?
 - Internet access will be wired. It will require the addition of poles throughout the island. The poles are paid for by the federal government.
- One person questioned whether or not the Puna community liked the expansion of internet access. She likened this to the situation with PGV. She said there are mental health concerns associated with the addition of new infrastructure.
- One person stated affordability, reliability, and sustainability are concerns of those who can’t breathe due to air pollution concerns.
- Can R&D publish the information about which Parks & Recreation sites have internet access?
- One person recommended Starlink Internet as an alternative service provider.
- What is the process used to determine whether or not a community wants internet access (created by telephone poles)? Is there a way to vote for this infrastructure?
 - When RFPs are issued, there are opportunities for public comment. An RFP will be issued for the expansion of internet access.
- The 5G tower was installed near Opihikao without much public notice. This commenter requested better efforts in securing public input.
- Is there an internet ring around the island already?
 - Yes, that infrastructure currently exists.