

Notes from Hilo Community Update Session  
Aupuni Center Conference Room  
Friday, October 27, 2023  
5:00 – 7:00pm

Number of Community Members Attending: 4 in-person, 2 on Zoom

**Speakers:**

- Director Doug Adams, Department of Research and Development (R&D)
- Council Member Jenn Kagiwada
- Director Maurice Messina, Department of Parks and Recreation (P&R)
- Glenn Sako, Economic Development Specialist, Agriculture Program, R&D
- Riley Saito, Economic Development Specialist, Energy and Infrastructure Program, R&D

**Agenda and Notes:**

I. Opening Remarks, Council Member Kagiwada

- The Department of Environmental Management has received a \$1.5 million grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to pilot reusable food ware infrastructure in Hilo. They are now soliciting public feedback to prototype ideas for the program. The University of Hawai‘i at Hilo also received \$600,000 to work on this project. Zero Waste Hawai‘i and a mainland group, Perpetual, are both partnering with the County for this.
- The County applied for a planning grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation to consider how to improve the Hilo Bay watershed.
- The Office of Sustainability, Climate, Equity, and Resilience will be important in heading these programs in the future.

II. Parks & Recreation Updates, Director Messina

- Lighting retrofit upgrades are taking place around the island in six pilot sites, including in Carvalho Park. This saves the County money and energy.
- Halloween Weekend programming includes events at Kalākaua Park, Boo in the Zoo at the Pana‘ewa Zoo, and beach clean-ups at Richardson’s and Four Mile.
- A three-foot replica of the Vietnam Memorial will come to Hilo Bayfront in November.
- The Hilo Skatepark is moving ahead with permitting and planning.
- The Civic will receive electrical updates, as well as facelifts.
- The greatest issue parks in Hilo face is homelessness. Enforcement actions have resulted in help and services, no arrests, and no trespass notices.

III. Broadband Updates, Riley Saito

- R&D is invested in digital equity (how to access and utilize the internet to participate in society), with an emphasis on supporting underserved communities. The Hawai‘i Island Digital Equity Coalition (HIDEC) provides a space for the County and partners to collaborate on digital equity.
- With [Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment](#) funding from the federal government, the state will build fiber internet infrastructure in underserved communities.

Simultaneously, internet service providers are building more internet infrastructure, but they are more focused on increasing high-speed access to high-consumption areas.

- R&D created an [ArcGIS Story Map](#) showing the social vulnerability index (populations considered underserved and susceptible to disasters) and areas lacking adequate internet access on-island. This map provides the foundation for the populations and community anchor institutions that R&D will focus on as they work to expand digital equity.
- R&D is working on expanding “last-mile” internet access by establishing free Wi Fi spots at Parks & Recreation sites throughout the island, by partnering with the County’s Department of Information Technology. Hisaoka Gym already has Wi Fi. Kohala Swimming Pool will receive Wi Fi soon. Kohala Science Center is being evaluated for Wi Fi expansion. Four other sites in Waimea and Waikoloa are in the process of receiving Wi Fi, or under evaluation for expansion.
- Households can receive digital services and rebates (Wi Fi expenses up to \$30/mo. or \$75/mo. for those on Hawaiian Home Lands, one-time computer purchases, etc.) through the [Affordable Connectivity Program](#). Roughly 8,000 Hawai‘i Island households have signed up so far.

#### IV. Agriculture Updates, Glenn Sako

- The Big Island Feral Pig Control Project model was initiated by Malama o Puna with R&D funding. It was chosen as it was the first project-based plan that R&D received to deal with the growing feral pig population.
- Malama o Puna is creating 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 on it. 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 collects data for the Police Department and Prosecuting Attorney’s Office.
- The Police Department has known culprits. The County will publicize the identities of those who are indicted agriculture thieves, as it is legally allowed to.

#### V. Renewable Energy Updates, Riley Saito

- The lighting retrofit program began within R&D, and it will have valuable impacts on longstanding, old facilities maintained by the County.
- R&D issued an RFI to solicit novel ideas for accessing renewable energy (energy that exists already in sources on-the-ground). Such ideas might include biogas, solar, wind, geothermal, and water energy.

#### Questions and Comments:

- Does the StoryMap show vulnerability to natural disaster?

- Yes, it overlays vulnerability to natural disaster alongside other social, environmental, and economic factors. It also shows eligibility for programs like the American Connectivity Program. Scrolling through the website displays lots of different data.
- The vendors completing fiber optics installation are working on first-mile, middle-mile, and last-mile connections to connect internet between and throughout the islands. The vendors are paying special attention to middle-mile connections in multiple locations that expand connections between our fiber ring and Maui's and establish new connections that run between the ring and across the island.
- One attendee suggested the internet connections are strong enough as they currently are. They also expressed discomfort with the financing of the internet additions.
  - A response to this suggestion is that current internet sources might not be able to withstand natural or manmade disasters.
- Who is paying for the new internet additions?
  - American Rescue Plan Act funding is being used for the infrastructure development. Sites utilizing these funds are important for emergency first responders. The funding that will go to homes and businesses that are unserved or underserved comes from grant funding from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.
- Why was wire delivery of internet chosen over issues like 5G, which this individual who posed the question suggested might be linked to impacts on people's health? Will this impact people's phones?
  - Fiber is more effective, efficient, and able to withstand issues like copper wires, which are currently being used to deliver internet. Fiber helps with fast delivery of internet. This is not the same as cellular infrastructure, though VOIP internet can be used through the expanded internet. The type of in-home links (copper wiring, etc.) to the fiber cable will depend on who the vendor is.
- What area will the Malama o Puna pilot project cover?
  - Due to the small amount of funding the organization received, they will first be conducting a pilot program in Puna. If the concept is successful, their plan can be expanded into Hilo and throughout the island.
- Has the County considered sterilization or birth control options for the feral pigs? This is a more humane option than traps.
  - A product called "Hog Stock" reduces the virility of boars' sperm. This has received pushback from the hunting community, as they cannot tell which pigs have consumed the product and what kind of impact the product might have on human health. A different sterilization product is being researched by Louisiana State University.
- Will the Ag Theft Reporting Form be online, or is it supposed to be printed out and delivered?
  - The form will be taken through online and hard-copy submissions. It is most important for the Police Department and Prosecuting Attorney to have this information. Ultimately, the data will be compiled (though private information will be redacted) for evaluation from other County agencies like R&D.
- What is imperfect about solar energy? About wind turbines?
  - The panels have silicon in them and might have been produced with greenhouse gases, and the energy is only available when sunlight is available. However, they do still produce no emissions in their energy generation processes. Similarly, wind turbines

might be made using fossil fuels, and they connect to infrastructure that might not guarantee clean energy usage.

- Any sources of energy on the island contain these challenges. However, these renewable options are better than fossil fuel options. Fossil fuels were utilized because they were relatively cheap. The generation and distribution of these new fuel sources is resulting in more competitive pricing for clean energy.
- Director Adams supports the transition to clean energy over the mere reduction of energy usage. Mandating energy use reduction is inequitable. However, it is stanch emissions to limit the human impact on rising temperatures and climate disruptions.
- Is liquid transportation fuels factored into this consideration, or is the discussion of energy usage primarily focused away from transportation?
  - The Hawai'i Island percentage of energy emissions coming from transportation is 57%. Nationally, it is only around 26%. Electrification of transportation is a key goal here. The Mass Transit Administration is looking to electrify their fleet.
- Is it possible to use biomass to generate liquid fuels for transportation options?
  - Biomass can be used, but it still has an internal combustion component, which results in emissions. It would still result in a reduction of emissions compared to propane burning.
- Does 57% of emissions include air transit?
  - It does, but if you consider air travel that comes in *and* out, you are double-counting emissions. It is ultimately the kuleana of each place with an airport to produce their own fuel to reduce impacts.
- The marine impact of emissions from importations is large and has not yet been calculated.
- Has R&D had any conversation with Yummet recently?
  - Not lately.
- Hybrid vehicles charge their battery as they operate. This seems preferable to plugging in a vehicle.
  - The hybrid relies upon fossil fuels to operate in the first place. It therefore emits fossil fuels. The energy required to go uphill is more than the energy produced from driving downhill, so it actually has negligible positive impact, compared to negative vehicles.
- Is there any effort being directed towards reducing reliance on tourism, imports, and other factors? These would also reduce our emissions.
  - R&D is considering scaling up local food production and creating food security hubs. Reducing air transit is difficult, but R&D does hope to develop more renewable air fuel products. The Department also hopes to reduce emissions from marine transit. All of these considerations require scaling upwards from small projects.
- One attendee shared their appreciation for these presentations, calling them well-done and thorough.
- One attendee questioned whether carbon emissions are of concern, or if they are a red herring for greater issues and forces at hand. She requested the County hire a medical statistician to consider the impact of the COVID-19 vaccines and Doctor Fauci. She also requested the County conduct an arson report for the Lāhainā fires. She generally requested County employees act with greater suspicion and be a check and balance on decision-making.
- Was the state not selected as a Regional Hydrogen Hub? Does this impact the County's direction towards being a hydrogen economy?

- The hydrogen energy work will continue to be piloted and developed. The effort put into that grant application will still deliver benefits to the County in our clean energy efforts. The County now has close working relationships with partners throughout the state to further pursue hydrogen energy.
- Another attendee requested greater access to government officials. They also requested the government not prevent access to cannabis production.