

Executive Summary

Puakō for Reefs 2025 Annual Report & Work Ahead in 2026

Keep Calm and Coral On



After years of groundwork, the Puakō sewer project reached a critical inflection point in 2025. Alignment among key partners strengthened, momentum accelerated, and Puakō for Reefs (PFR) emerged as the central coordinating hub—connecting community leadership, County government, technical experts, and funding partners to advance a once-in-a-generation infrastructure project to protect Puakō Reef.

2025 Highlights

- **County Partnership Secured:** In January 2025, PFR began collaborating closely with Mayor Alameda and County departments to build understanding and alignment around wastewater solutions. In early 2026, the mayor and his leadership team agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), formally establishing a collaborative framework. The mayor affirmed the urgency of removing wastewater from Puakō Reef, expressed support for accelerating the coastal cesspool deadline, and stated that he “wants to be on our team.”
- **Strengthened Political Support:** County Councilmember James Hustace continued to be a strong advocate, opening doors and facilitating coordination across County departments.
- **State & Federal Readiness:** State legislators reiterated support for Puakō but emphasized that further funding depends on demonstrated County leadership—making the MOU a critical catalyst for renewed engagement in 2026.
- **Technical Progress:** The project’s technical approach remains a low-pressure collection system connecting to the American Water treatment facility at Mauna Lani. Four potential collection routes were evaluated, and groundwork laid for route selection, permitting, environmental and cultural review, and a formal “Will Serve” letter.
- **Community & Coalition Building:** Puakō’s leadership has attracted statewide attention. PFR engaged the Kalaimoku Group to build a coalition of organizations across Hawai‘i to support wastewater reform, protect reefs, and amplify Puakō’s model for other Priority I communities.
- **Financial Strategy Advancement:** PFR made meaningful progress across philanthropic, private, and public funding pathways, recognizing that traditional government funding alone is insufficient to address Hawai‘i’s wastewater crisis.

Financial Overview

The Puakō sewer project requires a coordinated, multi-layered financing approach as complex as its engineering. PFR advanced a **4P funding model**—Public, Private, Philanthropic capital collaborating with the People—developed by the World Economic Forum for large-scale environmental and social infrastructure projects.

- **Early-Stage Costs:** Planning, design, permitting, and project coordination remain the primary focus, with an estimated \$1.4M required to prepare the project for construction.
- **Cost Reduction Strategies:** PFR is actively pursuing measures to reduce construction and homeowner costs, including reuse of existing infrastructure, fiber-optic partnerships, future connection cost-sharing, and reuse of certain on-site systems.
- **Equity & Affordability:** Financing through a Community Facilities District (CFD) remains central to ensuring an equitable tax structure that reflects the diverse economic realities of Puakō residents.

2026 Priorities

With County partnership established and key partners aligned, 2026 will focus on moving decisively from planning toward construction readiness. Major priorities include:

- Securing CFD approval
- Selecting the collection route and vendor
- Finalizing treatment agreements and rate parity

- Advancing environmental, cultural, and permitting reviews
- Securing philanthropic Program Related Investments (PRIs) and private financing
- Expanding state, federal, and coalition support

Community at the Center

Puakō for Reefs remains a **100% volunteer-led organization**, with all funds directed toward expert work required to protect the reef. Millions have been raised in the community over the past 12 years, laying the foundation for this moment.

Puakō is not only working to protect its own reef—it is helping lead Hawai‘i toward a new, scalable model for addressing the estimated **53 million gallons of untreated wastewater** entering coastal waters each year.

A‘ohe hana nui ke alu ‘ia.

No task is too big when done together.