



**PUAKŌ FOR
REEFS**

**Q2 May
Newsletter**



PUAKŌ FOR REEFS UPDATE

Puakō Moves into the Next Phase

This has been one of the most important quarters yet for the Puakō wastewater project.

Puakō for Reefs has reached major milestones at the County, State, and Federal levels — including new State legislative support, submission of a federal earmark request through Senator Brian Schatz's office, a national environmental grant from the American Water Charitable Foundation, and completion of the technical, engineering, environmental, and financial preparation needed to move the project into formal County review and approval.

Puakō is now further along than any other Hawai'i community working toward a comprehensive wastewater solution. This progress is all thanks to you, our Puakō community.

In this newsletter, we share these important updates, explain the next critical steps in the approval process, introduce upcoming community conversations about project costs and financing, outline what comes next for the Puakō wastewater project, and announce an exciting community meeting in June you won't want to miss.



PUAKŌ FOR REEFS AWARDED 2026 AMERICAN WATER GRANT

We are deeply grateful to the American Water Charitable Foundation for awarding Puakō for Reefs a 2026 Water and Environment Grant.

The grant will support efforts to raise awareness and catalyze action among Hawai'i's coastal communities about the severe damage wastewater from cesspools and inadequate septic systems is causing to coral reefs, fisheries, and coastal waters.

Thirteen years ago, the State identified Puakō as one of Hawai'i's highest-priority communities for wastewater intervention. A few years later, that list expanded to 26 communities. **Yet not a single comprehensive solution has been implemented.**

Communities including Kahalu'u on Hawai'i Island and Hanalei Bay on Kaua'i are already reaching out to learn from Puakō's work.

Our focus remains clear: to build a Puakō sewer collection system that is equitable for the community, begin reef recovery, and help create a pathway other Hawai'i communities can follow. This grant will help support community education, statewide collaboration, and the broader effort to move these solutions forward.

[Read the Full Press Release](#)



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Puako For Reefs | 69-1536 Puako Beach Drive | Kamuela, HI 96743 US

STATE LEGISLATURE PASSES RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE PUAKŌ SEWER PROJECT

Both houses of the Hawai'i State Legislature passed a concurrent resolution encouraging Hawai'i County, the Department of Health, the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, and other stakeholders to **work together to complete the Puakō Sewer Project**.

The resolution was introduced by Puakō's State Representative Nicole Lowen, whose continued support has been instrumental in advancing awareness of the project at the State level.

Mahalo to the many Puakō community members who submitted testimony and letters of support. Your voices helped demonstrate the strength of community commitment behind this effort.

The resolution recognizes both the urgency of Hawai'i's wastewater crisis and Puakō's potential as a statewide model for helping other coastal communities address wastewater challenges more effectively.

[Read Resolution](#)



FEDERAL FUNDING REQUEST SUBMITTED THROUGH SENATOR BRIAN SCHATZ'S OFFICE

Puakō for Reefs has submitted a \$1 million federal earmark request through Senator Brian Schatz's office to support advancement of the wastewater project.

These grants are highly competitive nationwide. However, Puakō is in a strong position because of the extraordinary work already completed by the community, including the newly passed State resolution and completion of the full Community Facilities District application and supporting technical materials which were delivered to the Mayor three weeks ago.

To help build support for the request, **Mayor Alameda will make the project a priority conversation with lawmakers when he visits Washington, D.C. during Hawai'i on the Hill in June.**

Regardless of the outcome, the submission itself represents another important milestone in bringing statewide and federal attention to the urgent need to protect Puakō Reef.

[Read the Executive Summary of the Earmark Application](#)

PROGRESS TOWARD COUNTY APPROVAL

We are making meaningful progress with the County as a partner in protecting and restoring Puakō Reef. Our monthly meetings with Mayor Alameda and his leadership team continue to move the project steadily forward.

Over the past year, with your support, Puakō for Reefs has completed the technical and planning work needed for the County to begin formal review of the project, including:

- Securing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mayor
- Coordinating with County departments on the proposed system and financing structure
- Completing the engineering, environmental, and cultural analysis, financing studies, route planning, and project management work required by the county.
- Submitting the full Community Facilities District (CFD) application with 21 supporting exhibits

Mahalo to Hawai'i County Council Member James Hustace for his continued leadership and support in helping advance this effort through County processes.



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A MAJOR MILESTONE FOR PUAKŌ

For more than a decade, the Puakō community has worked to move this project from concern, to science, to engineering, to a real and implementable solution.

This progress exists because this community chose to act.

Now, for the first time, we are approaching the threshold of formal County review and project evaluation.

Reaching this next phase will require significant technical, legal, financial, and community coordination work — including the County's required review process, outside engineering and financial experts, continued community engagement, development of project financing models, and preparation for the next stages of implementation.

Over the coming weeks, Puakō for Reefs will launch a community fundraising effort to help raise \$250,000 needed to carry the project through this next phase of work.

This is a major milestone for our community.

We are closer than we have ever been to turning years of planning into real progress for the future of Puakō Reef.

NEXT STEP: DEVELOPING PROJECT COST ESTIMATES

One of the most important questions we continue to hear is: **What will this cost homeowners?**

We understand this concern deeply. Puakō is a diverse community, and from the beginning our goal has been to develop a financial approach that is equitable, realistic, and sensitive to the different circumstances within our neighborhood.

Until now, we have not had enough technical information to responsibly estimate costs. But with much of the engineering work completed and a preferred route selected, Puakō for Reefs can now begin developing more reliable project cost estimates.

We have prepared a Request for Proposals (RFP) that will be sent to a couple dozen contractors to gather construction bids for the sewer collection system. Those bids will help establish more accurate costs and allow us to begin discussing potential financial models that combine philanthropic support, public funding, and an equitable distribution of costs within the Puakō community.

The initial bids are expected in June, and we hope to begin sharing and discussing this information with the community in July.

As always, transparency and community discussion will remain central to the process, and this project will only move forward with strong community support and participation.

COMMUNITY MEETING

FROM VERO BEACH TO PUAKŌ

How One Coastal Community Successfully Installed a Low-Pressure Wastewater System

The coastal community of Vero Beach, Florida, implemented the same type of Orenco low-pressure wastewater system that Puakō is now strongly considering.

Now, the leader of that implementation effort, Robert Bolton of Vero Beach County, along with Mike Saunders from Orenco Systems, is coming to Puakō to share firsthand experience about implementation, operations, maintenance, and homeowner connections.

This is a rare opportunity to hear directly from people who have already navigated the process our community is exploring.

Bring your questions and come learn what a system like this could mean for the future of Puakō.

Saturday, June 13

2:00 PM

Hokuloa Church, Puakō

Hosted by Puakō for Reefs

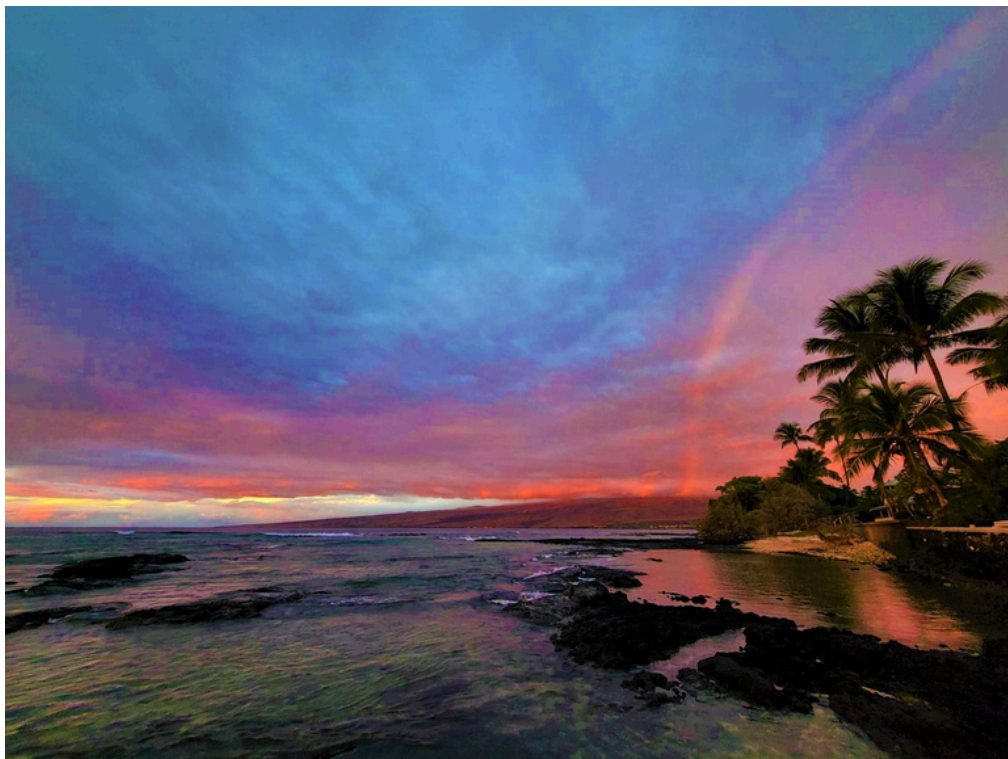


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