

# COMMUNITY IMPACTS

## A Report to Hawai'i Energy Forum

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### BACKGROUND

In May 2002, the Hawai'i Energy Policy Forum convened representatives from utilities; oil and natural gas suppliers; environmental groups; participants in the renewable energy industry; legislators; federal, state and county agencies; the business community; and major energy consumers. The Forum's purpose is to chart an environmentally friendly, renewable, safe, reliable, and affordable energy future for Hawai'i by facilitating discussion of relevant issues, and incorporating a wide range of perspectives into its planning.

Six workgroups were convened at the Forum's December 2, 2003, conference, including one that addressed Social and Cultural Issues. Section 3 of the Workgroup's Report listed factors to consider when discussing siting in communities. These included (Sec. 3.iv) requiring community benefit agreements when siting is proposed, (Sec. 3.v) reaching out to impacted communities to glean full knowledge of the breadth and depth of issues affecting siting, and (Sec. 3.vi) engaging diverse elements of communities.

The commitment to collecting mana'o (thoughts) on issues of importance to communities is still being realized. This report reflects community discussion about where to place infrastructure needed in Hawai'i, who should decide, and the process and criteria used to make such decisions.

### PURPOSE

To initiate discussion of a process that can be broadly relevant to understanding, prioritizing, and appropriately addressing the issues of infrastructure placement that affect Hawai'i's communities. To provide a report of discussions to decision-makers to use when considering placement of infrastructure sites.

### METHODS

A facilitated focus group model of discussion was employed. Participants were chosen based on experience with sites in their communities, or familiarity with such sites. Many were residents of Kapolei, Palehua, 'Ewa Beach, Makakilo, Nanakuli, Wai'anae and Makaha, but representatives of environmental organizations, the Legislature and other stakeholder groups also attended. Invitees were asked to participate in three sessions during December 2003 and January 2004. However, participants felt the issues and recommendations had been exhausted by the end of two sessions. Participants sat in a semi-circle at each meeting. Each gathering opened with a pule wehe (opening blessing) and included dinner and beverages; introductions were followed by two or more hours of discussion.

Pre-designed questions stimulated discussion and participants were encouraged to clarify and/or fully explain their ideas. Each discussion was led by a facilitator. One notetaker recorded participant comments on paper while another took notes on a laptop computer. Specific recommendations were culled and are included with the many issues of site placement.

The two sessions were facilitated by Linda Colburn and Kim Ku'ulei Birnie, respectively. Kim Birnie, Frank Cho, Trudy Wong-You and Anne Worth took notes.

### **Questions**

Questions were designed to stimulate open-ended discussion and probe more deeply when necessary:

- a. How does infrastructure impact the host communities? Probe: what are the physical, social, economic or education system impacts; compare short-term vs. long-term impacts; how do they interrelate?
- b. What might be a mechanism or process through which infrastructure impacts are addressed, and who should be involved?
- c. How have other communities addressed such impacts, and what results have been achieved? Is time an appropriate measure? (For example, if Wai'anae has to accept the Kahe Power Plant for X years, then how might that be quantified and balanced?)
- d. If social justice is the goal, what are the mitigating measures toward that end? How can communities ensure that promises are kept?

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## **DISCUSSION**

### **Uneven distribution**

Distribution of major infrastructure sites is uneven on O'ahu; for example, most of the island's power plants and landfill sites are located along the Leeward coast. The burden is not shared among the greater populace, resulting in the perception that communities are not equal.

The perception was voiced that communities with less tend to share more, be more tolerant and giving, be less assertive, and accept what is unfair. This appearance of social and environmental injustice impels over-burdened communities to demand that basic rights be accorded them, such as the right to be a valued part of the discussion. Communities need to

believe that social justice is attainable, and that, most importantly, veto power is an option. Communities, particularly those that are not accustomed to hosting such facilities, are urged to understand the responsibility and impacts of bearing burdens.

### **Defining impact**

Impacts were described in terms of diminished air quality, aesthetics, natural and cultural resources, and possible negative health consequences. It was pointed out that burdens are exacerbated when there is lack of involvement of appropriate stakeholders, lack of foresight, lack of long-range planning, lack of enforcement, high management turnover (particularly within government), and when general planning models, rather than island-style resource management, are applied to Hawai'i's distinctive geography.

### **Addressing impact**

In determining where a major facility is placed, it was felt that a community consultation process should be utilized, with greatest weight given to members of communities that would be most heavily impacted (home rule). Communities can be further defined by geography, ethnicity, culture, voting district, or other appropriate category. Processes should be developed to access and influence communities through leaders who are accountable to their communities. Decision-making should anticipate growth and include planning that involves community input at all phases from development to evaluation, full disclosure of risks and benefits, clearly delineated boundaries and limits, interagency cooperation and interaction with community members, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Sometimes, it was noted, the most creative solutions arise from disasters or disaster preparedness (such as post-hurricane transportation and waste solutions). However, research is critical. Planning should be thoughtful and based on hard data that will facilitate informed, short- and long-term decisions on policy and program implementation. A clear desire was expressed to resist real or perceived sense of urgency that tends to override long-term planning. A precautionary approach is best.

Most importantly, communities want to be shown respect by being asked permission. This allows for aloha to be freely shared and the culture to be practiced.

### **Criteria**

Criteria for infrastructure site placement are true need, high benefit, low risk, cost and duration (length of time any impact will be felt). Assessments should be based on hard data, and should consider short-, mid-, long-term and cumulative impacts. Weight should be given to the value of the project to help decide site placement.

Needs assessment should consider the type of facility being proposed, its interaction with other nearby facilities, and the area of need or high use (e.g., a recycling center may be needed by the Waikiki hotels more than any other consumer group). True needs should be identified and the reasons for siting retained in the written record. For example, a participant noted, if a power plant is sited in a rural area in order to prevent air pollution in downtown/Waikiki, but not to centralize, avoiding an urban area isn't a valid consideration in placing the next facility.

## **Benefits and risks**

Assessment should measure the benefits and risks of hosting a facility. Benefits might include the long-term effect on a community, or improved readiness in case of a disaster. The downside might also be the vulnerability of a site in the event of a disaster.

The social risks are mostly long-term in nature. Unequal distribution of community site placement over time creates elitism (perception of class distinction), diminished pride of place—for both self and community—and a perception of inevitability, resulting in little or no motivation by the younger generation to act on faulty decisions of their predecessors. Further, an instrument to measure cultural impact is necessary.

Negative health consequences, possibly including future genetic irregularities, might result from magnetic fields generated by transmission lines, land pollution, increased concentration of heavy metals, and diminished air and water quality.

What is the impact of multiple sites? There is a need to evaluate the compounded and cumulative effects, the interaction of facilities, and particularly the exponential increase in consequences of having multiple sites in or near a single community.

Financial cost should assess the true cost of the site, including anticipated health care costs resulting from subsequent negative health consequences, and projected social cost. One suggestion is to divide the cumulative cost among all benefiting communities. It is also recommended that the length of time a site will be in use should be projected and that an assessment of ultimate removal and clean-up costs be made. The value of the project should be given priority over profit.

It is also crucial to understand risks and seek ways to measure and address risks that are unanticipated or not yet known.

## **Justice**

In addition, ethical consideration should be given to whether it is socially just to overburden a community with such sites. Where unequal burden is requested, participants felt processes should be developed that are responsive, and that feel inclusive, fair and equitable to the hosting community. They demanded full understanding of all risks and costs – health, social, economic, aesthetics – and ongoing re-evaluation of all needs, risks and benefits. When overburdening is indicated, there should be clearly delineated buffer zones established in anticipation of future growth. Regional caps might be instituted to reduce unequal burden. Discussion should include potential areas of negotiation or mitigating options that permit a community to offer its resources in exchange for having needs addressed that may or may not be related to the burden of hosting a site. For example, the community might seek facilities, services, or reduced fees in exchange for accepting a site.

## **Accountability**

To assure accountability, there needs to be a central tracking agency that monitors sites throughout all phases. There is currently an assumption that government would do this, but

there are concerns about continuity. High government turnover tends to weaken institutional memory and separate it from the process of making new decisions. More thought needs to be put into how to enforce agreements that are likely to outlast the policy-makers who created them.

Government has the responsibility to protect communities through enforcement, promoting concrete, meaningful input to processes of planning, implementation and evaluation. In the permitting process, boundaries appear to be arbitrary. Flawed decisions, sometimes based on politics unrelated to the function of the facility, become the basis for future decisions, exacerbating the negative impact. Additionally, communities are concerned in the negotiation process that small concessions will become footholds for later expansion. Policy-makers need to re-assess current zoning policies that, if unchanged, will ensure that particular communities continue to bear a disproportionate burden.

Ongoing, regular evaluation is necessary. Systems and attitudes should be evaluated based on cause and effect. Lessons must be learned from the past, from near and far.

All these factors will differ by community, but the criteria for decision-making can be generalized to all islands.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Mahalo to all the focus group participants who willingly shared their mana'o.

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## REFERENCES

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Hawai'i Energy Policy Forum Web site

[http://hawaiienergypolicy.hawaii.edu/pages/project\\_description.html](http://hawaiienergypolicy.hawaii.edu/pages/project_description.html)

Communications Pacific (2003). Community Impacts Discussion Notes, Wednesday, December 10, 2003.