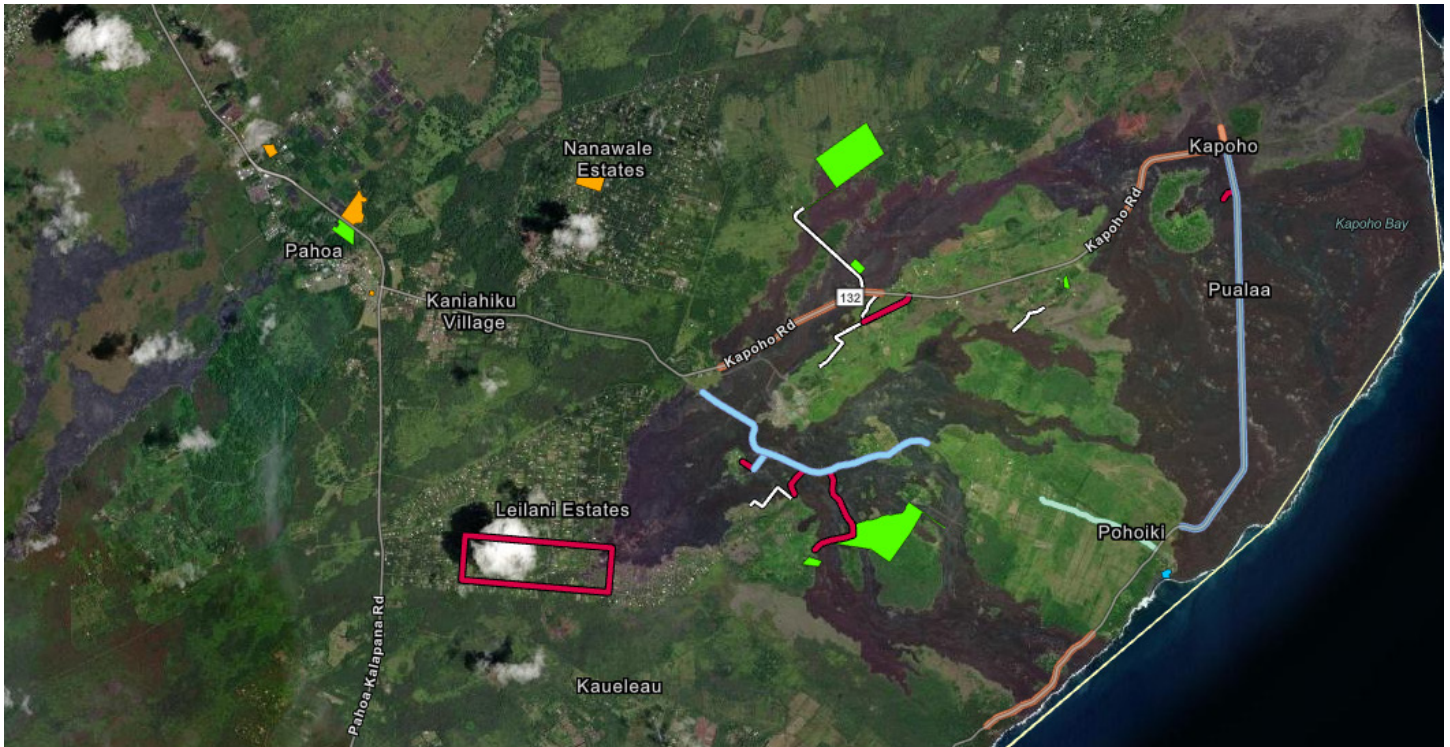


NEWSLETTER



recovery.hawaiicounty.gov

September-October 2021



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An interactive map shows recovery projects supported by the County or State. Visit recovery.hawaiicounty.gov to view.

Mapping Recovery

The County of Hawai'i is investing in Puna's recovery through grant programs and infrastructure projects that help the community become stronger and more resilient following the 2018 eruption.

To learn about specific programs and projects, including timelines and funding sources, check out this updated interactive map at recovery.hawaiicounty.gov.

At the website, click on "Project Map" at the top of the home page. Click the "Query" tool to zoom in on specific projects by category. Puna-wide projects can be viewed by clicking on the Puna district boundary.

Second Quarterly Community Activation Held Virtually Oct. 12

The County of Hawai'i's Disaster Recovery Division and County Council District 4 will host the second quarterly Revitalize Puna community activation event virtually via Zoom from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 12.

Participants can register via the County's Kīlauea Eruption Recovery website – recovery.hawaiicounty.gov – or <https://bit.ly/RevitalizePuna2021>.

“These events are focused on supporting community action and encouraging collaboration between residents and the County,” said Douglas Le, the County's Disaster Recovery Officer. “We encourage anyone interested in implementing projects to build community resilience to join and find ways they can get involved.”

These community activations kickoff 90-day action cycles involving Resilience Capacity Areas (RCAs) and Action Teams that are overseeing community-based actions as part of implementation of the Kīlauea Recovery and Resilience Plan. See Page 3 for a list of RCAs and co-chairs.

“Revitalize Puna in June was a defining moment, highlighting the value of County and community coming together for collective action,” said Ashley Kierkiewicz, Councilmember for District 4. “As we continue to navigate the challenges brought by the eruption and pandemic, these quarterly activations will be a platform to share information, communicate progress, and implement projects that support recovery and increase resilience. Convening regularly in this way keeps everyone accountable and moving forward.”

RCA co-chairs include both community and County representatives who assist Action Teams with technical guidance and support for their projects. For a full list of RCA co-chairs and Action Team projects, or to get involved, visit recovery.hawaiicounty.gov.

At the virtual event, which is open to the public, RCA co-chairs and Action Team members will share what they've learned, accomplished, and plan to do going forward. Updates from the County Administration on various recovery initiatives and priorities will also be provided.

Through the registration form, participants also can sign up for community resource bags which include a meal kit, recipe card, and other support materials from local nonprofits. A limited number of bags are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Pick-up for those confirmed to receive a bag will take place at 3 p.m. in Puna. Mahalo to Puna Geothermal Venture for donating meal kit ingredients!

Prior to the activation, the Zoom room will be open beginning at 3:30 p.m. and feature short presentations from local organizations on resources available to Puna residents including financial empowerment and emergency



assistance for rent, mortgage, and utilities.

More than 100 residents attended the first Revitalize Puna in June held in Leilani Estates. Going forward, the quarterly events will be held on the second Tuesday of October, January, April, and July.

Resilience Capacity Areas

Community-County Co-Chairs Announced

About a dozen community members and County of Hawai'i staff members are teaming up to lead Resilience Capacity Areas (RCAs) as part of implementation of the Kīlauea Recovery and Resilience Plan, a strategic guiding document created following the 2018 eruption.

These RCAs address six resilience categories – Social, Cultural, Economic, Natural Environment, Built Environment, and Youth – and include community-driven projects headed by Action Teams that advance the plan's three strategies: Recovery, Readiness, and Resilience.



Social

- Sharon Hirota (County)
- Greg Armstrong (Community)
- Smiley Burrows (Community)



Cultural

- Bob Agres (County)
- Leila Kealoha (Community)



Economic

- Ashley Kierkiewicz (County)
- Susie Osborne (Community)
- Brent Norris (Community)



Built Environment

- Garrett Smith (County)
- Ku'ulei Cooper (Community)



Natural Environment

- Michelle Agbigay (County)
- Bethany Morrison (County)
- Franny Brewer (Community)



Youth

- Misty Carter (County)

For more information, or to get involved,
visit recovery.hawaiicounty.gov.

Voluntary Housing Buyouts

Staff working hard to serve displaced Puna residents

By Julie Leialoha Housing Program Manager

Since the launch of the County of Hawaii's Voluntary Housing Buyout Program (VHBP) on April 30, our team has been working diligently to assist applicants through the process and make accommodations due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staff are conducting intakes both in Hilo and the Pāhoia Village County Office by appointment only, or by phone. We ask that you please follow all COVID policies and procedures, including wearing a face mask and temperature checks. If you choose to have your intakes done by phone, staff will mail you the mandatory documentation in advance of your scheduled appointment.

As of mid-September, we were processing nearly 300 Phase 1 applications that are potentially eligible for a Buyout (eligibility is confirmed as part of the review process) and have completed 162 intakes and 288 preliminary contacts.

Though the application period for Phase 1 (Primary Residences) closed on July 30, the VHBP program will accept primary homeowner applications during Phase 2 and Phase 3 as well. The Phase 2 application period begins on Nov. 1, 2021, for secondary residences, including long-term rentals. Our goal is to get intakes done for all Phase 1 applicants before moving into Phase 2 in November.

It is imperative that all documen-

tation be returned to us as soon as possible to avoid delays in processing your application or the possibility of having your application considered "inactive" due to lack of communication between the applicant and the program staff. We encourage our applicants to contact us if they are having difficulties that we could possibly assist with to avoid delays. Because this is a vol-



Julie Leialoha

The intake process involves the applicant providing proof of residency, ownership, income, and other documentation. But I want to assure people that the staff are here to support you every step of the way in ways that they can and walk you through the process.

Here is a basic outline of VHBP process:

- Initial notification verifying receipt of your application. You will be given a list of required documents you will need to provide during your intake.

- VHBP staff will then contact you and set up an intake appointment and answer any potential questions prior to your formal intake interview.

- During your intake interview, a VHBP staff person will walk you through the document process

to ensure that you understand each document and meet eligibility standards set by the program and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

- Upon verification and final review of all documentation, applicants will receive a formal eligibility letter.

- Once an applicant is deemed fully eligible, then we move into the financial review process to determine a potential purchase offer of up to \$230,000 based on the 2017 pre-eruption assessed market value.

- If the offer is accepted, the applicant will then move into the escrow process.

The entire process is estimated to take between six and nine months from the date of your "intake" appointment, which is why it is important to complete your documents to avoid unnecessary delays in the application process.

I want to express that we want the process to move as quickly as possible. Therefore, we ask applicants to come prepared and be able to discuss issues that could impact your application so that we may better serve you in our attempts to get you qualified and deemed fully eligible.

The VHBP is funded by \$107 million in U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery funds.

The County of Hawai'i announced in September updates regarding roads and water lines damaged by the 2018 Kīlauea eruption and use of Public Assistance grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

“The County based these decisions for use of federal recovery funding on continued engagement with communities impacted by the eruption in order to provide the best benefit for the Puna community in the long-term,” said Douglas Le, County Disaster Recovery Officer. “That includes addressing important issues such as participation in the County’s Voluntary Housing Buyout Program (VHBP), traffic circulation, emergency evacuation, and social and economic needs for the area. FEMA funds not used for restoring particular infrastructure will be used to support alternate projects in Puna.”

Decisions and updates are presented in the following categories:

Water

- The water system to Kapoho subdivisions inundated during the eruption will not be restored. As a next step, the County will work with communities in Puna to deploy available recovery funds received from FEMA for water infrastructure projects in Puna.
- Use of FEMA funds for restoration of the water line to Isaac Hale Beach Park will be pursued. This depends on feasibility due to geological decisions and FEMA approval, including Environmental Assessment (EA).

Roads

- FEMA funds will not be used to restore Hinalo and Lauone streets, both inundated by the eruption. Any additional decisions regarding these roads will be based on participation in the VHBP.
- The County is working with FEMA to commence the review of Highway 137 and Lighthouse Road based on final designs of the roads. The County anticipates FEMA requiring an EA for Highway 137 due to the need to design the roadway to safe standards over the new terrain following the eruption.
- FEMA to conduct EAs for restoration of upper Pohoiki Road and realignment of lower Pohoiki Road.

The EAs will ensure proper consultation with lineal descendants, and assessment and documentation of historic, archaeological and environmentally sensitive resources, including any impacts and mitigation actions. EAs for road and water projects can occur concurrently.

The County plans to restore inundated sections of upper Pohoiki Road, realign lower Pohoiki Road to provide safe two-way access while preserving historic mango trees, restore about 1,000 feet of Leilani Avenue from Pohoiki Road to Kahukai Street, and restore Highway 137 and Lighthouse Road, with the use of FEMA and State recovery funds.



Restoration of Highway 132 in 2019.

The County of Hawai'i's Disaster Recovery Division welcomes two new team members as part of the Lead for Hawai'i program. Hōkūlani Fortunato and U'ilani Kualii will be with the team for two years supporting the recovery effort in Puna.

Lead For Hawaii

Informed by the Past +
Grounded in the Present +
Solving for the Future

Hokulani Fortunado
Community Resilience
Facilitator

Uilani Kualii
Community Resilience
Coordinator

U'ilani Kualii is a 2017 B.A. graduate of Ka Haka 'Ula o Ke'elikōlani School of Hawaiian Language at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. Since March of 2020, she has been a Kumu at Pūnana Leo o Hilo guiding nā Keiki o Hawai'i (as well as their families) into a Hawaiian immersion education and instilling cultural practices, protocols, and traditional knowledge with children. U'ilani will support the County of Hawai'i in its efforts to coordinate recovery from the 2018 Kīlauea eruption, in alignment with both near-term and long-term goals of the Kīlauea Recovery and Resilience Plan -- ensuring that recovery investment addresses digital equity and access challenges.

Hōkūlani Fortunato lives in Puna and she previously attended Ke Kula 'o Nāwahīokalani'ōpu'u; a school that ignited her passion for revitalizing the Hawaiian language within the community, learning Hawaiian knowledge, and seeing the people of Hawai'i progress. She recently graduated from the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, with a B.A. in Business Administration, as well as a minor in Hawaiian Studies. Hōkūlani will work to evaluate, develop, and implement strategies, policies, and projects that protect public health and safety, enhance community well-being and help create a resilient economy islandwide, with a specific emphasis on leveraging digital tools to grow rural economies and increase access to information and key county services.

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