

**House of Representatives
The Thirty-Third Legislature
Interim of 2025
Simplifying Permitting for Enhanced Economic Development (SPEED) Taskforce Meeting #1
Thursday, September 13, 2025
9:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.**

**Hawaii State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street. Rm 325
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
Via Videoconference & In-Person**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55a1eYPsoXY>

Members/ Designees Present*	Rep. Greggor Ilagan, Chair Councilmember Yuki Lei Sugimura Cameron Deptula Seiji Ozawa Ciara Kahahane Martin Anzellini Garcia-Reyes Dean Minakami Mary Alice Evans Cameron Black Mohan Samtani Jennifer Salisbury Jessica Puff Jon Nagato	Howard Wiig Ka'aina Hull Aaron Spielman Jordan Molina Dawn Apuna Sheryl Abellanosa Jordan Odo Brian Kung Monica Toguchi Denise Nakanishi Perry Arrasmith Darryl Oliveira Morgan Gerdel Christine Camp
Members/ Designees Excused:	Senator Glenn Wakai Councilmember Addison Bulosan Councilmember Dennis Onishi Councilmember Esther Kia'aina Brian Lee	Adam Tanga Mark Clemente

*Others present on last page

1. Call to Order

Meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Chair Ilagan.

2. Introduction of Members

Members and guests introduced themselves and who they represented.

3. Chair's Report on SPEED Taskforce Orientation

Chair Greggor Ilagan opened asking if there was anyone wishing to testify on this agenda item. No one participated.

He shared that he has been conducting statewide presentations to share the SPEED Task Force's work on simplifying permitting, emphasizing transparency and compliance with sunshine laws by identifying where presentations occurred and which members attended.

He reported that on July 18, 2025, he made a presentation (included in the board packet) to the TOD Council. Mary Alice Evans, Dean Minakami, and Seiji Ogawa were in attendance. He asked if others were present to identify themselves.

He then summarized additional outreach:

- Aug 13 to the Maui Chamber of Commerce (with Jennifer Salisbury present),
- Aug 14 to the Kona–Kohala Chamber of Commerce,
- Aug 28 to the Japanese Chamber of Commerce on Hawai‘i Island,
- Sept 2 to the Hawai‘i Island Chamber of Commerce,
- Sept 4 to the Hawai‘i Island Native Hawaiian Chamber, and
- Sept 5 to the Kapolei Chamber of Commerce, noting that no task force members were present at those meetings and again welcoming corrections if anyone was missed.

He concluded by asking for comments from members before moving on to the scheduled presentations.

4. **Presentation by County of Kaua‘i on Building Permit Process Overview**

Chair Greggor Ilagan asked if there was anyone wishing to testify on this agenda item. No one participated.

Ka‘āina Hull, Planning Director for the County of Kaua‘i, began by explaining the island’s bifurcated permitting system. Unlike Honolulu’s one-stop model, Kaua‘i separates zoning and building permits: the Planning Department oversees zoning permits, while the Building Division within Public Works processes building permits. Zoning permits focus primarily on form and character consistent with community plans, whereas building permits address health and safety concerns. Hull outlined the two tiers of zoning permits—ministerial permits for outright permissible uses (e.g., single-family homes in residential districts), which must be acted on within 30 days, and discretionary permits requiring Planning Commission review and public hearings. He noted that discretionary permits, particularly when contested, can become lengthy quasi-judicial processes lasting several years. He also highlighted the Special Management Area (SMA) permit process, which requires additional scrutiny for projects in coastal zones, with opportunities for intervention that can extend timelines

Hull emphasized that zoning permits feed into the building permit process: once form, character, and design are approved, the Planning Department signs off on building permits. He also described a safeguard introduced for ARU and ADU applicants, allowing simple hand-drawn plot plans to be routed through agencies before hiring architects, thereby ensuring infrastructure availability before costly plans are developed.

Leolynn Escalona of the Building Division then described the building permit process in detail. Applications may be submitted online or in person, and applicants are encouraged to first confirm zoning eligibility, water availability, flood zone issues, and wastewater capacity with relevant agencies. Building permits also require review by the Fire Department, which may mandate on-site water tanks or sprinklers for structures located more than 300 feet from hydrants. Escalona noted that the County uses Central Square and Novotix ElementsXS integrated with ArcGIS, and has been fully electronic since 2017 through ProjectDox, which allows simultaneous multi-agency reviews and real-time applicant access to comments. In fiscal year 2024, the County issued 1,372 permits valued at \$434.9 million.

Escalona also reviewed infrastructure constraints: many properties rely on individual wastewater systems, with DOH requiring cesspool conversions before building permits are approved. He reported that the County has over 5,900 active wastewater connections, while DOH estimates approximately 12,000 cesspools remain. Staff capacity remains a challenge, especially at the front counter, with vacancies for permit clerks slowing processing. Both presenters noted that small homeowners often face difficulties navigating electronic systems, while developers sometimes fail to account for external agency requirements.

In response to questions, Hull acknowledged that strict timelines had sometimes led staff to prematurely deny permits rather than provide comprehensive comments, and the department is working to improve this. Escalona clarified that permits remain valid as long as activity occurs every 180 days, with provisions for extensions or renewals subject to updated building codes. He also confirmed that applicants can see review comments in real time via ProjectDox. Both presenters underscored that while the system is complex, Kaua'i staff strive to assist applicants, particularly small homeowners, in navigating requirements. They concluded by reaffirming the importance of early coordination with Planning, DOH, Water, and Fire agencies to avoid costly delays and ensure projects are feasible.

5. **Presentation by County of Hawai'i on Building Permit Process Overview**

Aaron Spielman and Neal Tanaka presented an overview of the County of Hawai'i's permitting system, which operates through the Electronic Processing and Information Center (EPIC). Spielman explained that EPIC's primary goal is to ensure a permitting process that is clear, predictable, and supportive of applicants while maintaining public safety and code compliance. Applications begin when documents are uploaded and the plan review fee is paid, after which the system tracks timelines. Both the property owner and design professional must be listed as contacts to promote transparency. Supporting and construction documents vary by project but must be complete at intake to avoid delays, as missing information leads to returns for correction.

Since July 2021, all building permits have been processed digitally, with standardized formats and naming conventions to ensure consistency. Corrections must follow the "cloud plus delta" method, where changes are highlighted on revised plans and accompanied by a narrative summary. Spielman emphasized that this policy streamlines resubmissions and reduces the risk of missed changes. Applications move through multi-agency parallel review, where each reviewing agency focuses on its area of responsibility (e.g., Fire, Engineering, DOH). Comments are posted live in EPIC, allowing applicants to view them in real time and submit revisions. Once reviews are complete, a project declaration form tying licensed trades or owner-builders to the project is required before issuance, and permits are only released when projects are "shovel ready."

Spielman and Tanaka also described challenges, including high application volume, limited staffing, and occasional poor-quality submissions. To address these, the County has implemented efficiencies such as consolidating building, plumbing, and electrical permits into a single unified permit, increasing transparency through EPIC's 24/7 status tracking, and posting public bulletins or memos to clarify recurring issues. They noted that clerical staff are hired at entry level with on-the-job training, while inspectors and plans examiners must have relevant trade licenses or construction experience.

Recent improvements have cut intake times from months to five days, and residential permits can now be approved in about 45 calendar days, compared to three months under paper systems. The County is also exploring new digital tools, including AI-assisted pre-screening software such as CIF Check, to further improve efficiency. Spielman concluded by noting that while concurrent reviews are generally effective, incomplete or incorrect information—such as construction type—can still

create cascading delays. Tanaka added that weekly staff meetings help ensure consistency across reviewers, and memos are issued when broader clarification is needed. Both presenters stressed their commitment to transparency, efficiency, and continuous improvement to better serve applicants and support responsible development.

Chair Ilagan called for a short recess and resumed county presentations.

6. Presentation by County of Maui on Building Permit Process Overview

Chair Greggor Ilagan opened the session asking if there was anyone wishing to testify on this agenda item. Several individuals testified:

Angela Melody Young, CARES

Rocky Mold, Hawaii Solar Energy Association.

Greg Miskin, KOKUA Council

Jordan Molina, Director of Public Works for the County of Maui, provided an overview of the county's permitting structure and recent improvements. He explained that the Department of Public Works oversees three divisions—Engineering, Highways, and Development Services Administration (DSA)—with DSA responsible for construction permitting and building code compliance for building, plumbing, and electrical permits. DSA also coordinates reviews with other county and state agencies tied to the permitting process

Molina highlighted the launch of MAPPS (Maui's Automated Planning and Permitting System) in April 2022, replacing the county's older paper-based system. Developed by Tyler Technologies, MAPPS is fully digital, eliminating paper submittals and physical routing of plans. The system offers online application and tracking, real-time progress updates, automated notifications, improved recordkeeping, and enhanced reporting and analytics. Applicants submit plans electronically, upload supporting documents, and track agency comments in real time, while agencies conduct concurrent reviews through the system

He noted that Maui issues about 1,300 building permits annually, ranging from small sheds to large commercial structures. The process includes an initial completeness check by permit clerks, multi-agency review, and final review before issuance. Challenges include IT outages, versioning of electronic plans, and difficulties faced by applicants with poor internet access or limited technical skills. Additional inefficiencies arise from applicants making late design changes, delays in fee payment, substandard plans, or inadequate responses from design professionals.

Molina pointed to staffing shortages and turnover as major constraints, especially after the loss of highly experienced staff. To address capacity, Maui has contracted with Four Leaf Consulting to provide third-party plan review services, initially for wildfire-related rebuilds in Lahaina and later expanded to regular building code reviews. While onboarding took time, the partnership has helped manage workloads and maintain service levels.

In response to questions, Molina explained that affordable and workforce housing projects with executed agreements are prioritized in the review queue, though coordination across agencies remains complex. He confirmed that building permits generally carry a five-year expiration period, with flexibility in cases where projects are near completion, and that a plan review fee is required in addition to permit fees. He also noted that while MAPPS includes functions for collaborative electronic plan review, the county has not fully leveraged tools such as Bluebeam for this purpose. He concluded by emphasizing that staffing remains the greatest bottleneck and encouraged applicants

to proactively consult with agencies on infrastructure availability—particularly for water—before entering the formal review process.

7. Presentation by City and County of Honolulu on Building Permit Process Overview

Dawn Apuna of the City and County of Honolulu’s Department of Planning and Permitting (DPP) provided an overview of the City’s permitting process and recent system improvements. She explained that the department launched HNL Build on August 4, replacing the older POSSE system and fully integrating with ePlans. Through HNL Build, applicants submit permit applications online, which then undergo pre-screen formatting checks, followed by multi-agency code review involving DPP divisions (e.g., mechanical, electrical, building) and external agencies such as the Honolulu Fire Department and Department of Health. Applications move through multiple review cycles until comments are resolved; while a strong submittal could be approved in one cycle, most require two to five, and poorly prepared applications may extend to nine or more cycles.

Apuna highlighted the department’s partnership with CivCheck AI, which guides applicants through building code requirements for single-family new builds, alterations, additions, and certain commercial tenant improvements. Initially launched with select residential designers, the tool will expand to all applicants after the pilot phase. By providing a pre-check certification, CivCheck is expected to reduce the number of review cycles by improving applicant understanding and compliance with codes. Other improvements with HNL Build include expanded permit types (over 60, including conditional use and subdivision approvals), greater GIS parcel data integration, online payments, automatic permit issuance for certain minor work, and real-time permit tracking akin to a “Domino’s pizza app” that shows applicants exactly where their submittal is in the process

She emphasized that the DPP now requires upfront submission of complete documents to avoid delays, involves landowners directly in the process for greater accountability, and continues to use third-party reviewers for certain electrical and single-family permits. Apuna underscored that while DPP processes approximately 14,000 to 16,000 building permits annually, delays are not always due to the department. A recent snapshot showed that 75% of pending permits were with applicants, who were responsible for addressing review comments. She also pointed to challenges with staff vacancies and retention, particularly as private industry and federal jobs offer significantly higher pay. While new positions have been authorized to increase capacity, filling and retaining qualified engineers remains difficult.

Apuna concluded by stressing that the permitting process must balance speed with health and safety. She urged legislators and stakeholders to recognize that new ordinances and frequent code changes add complexity and slow reviews, while limited staffing hampers progress. She recommended pilot funding for recruitment and retention, extending building code cycles, and improved coordination with other agencies to reduce bottlenecks. She noted that although the system is not a “black box,” better communication with applicants and design professionals, combined with continued investment in staff and technology, will be key to reducing backlogs and supporting housing development across Honolulu.

8. Presentation by State Historic Preservation Division (SHPD) on Chapter 6E: Historic Preservation Compliance Overview

Chair Greggor Ilagan opened the session asking if there was anyone wishing to testify on this agenda item. Angela Melody Young with CARES provided testimony.

Jessica Puff outlined SHPD’s legal framework and clarified common misconceptions about preservation review. She explained that SHPD’s mandate arises from the National Historic

Preservation Act of 1966 and HRS Chapter 6E; the laws do not require preservation of every resource, but they do require agencies and applicants to identify historic and cultural resources and consider project effects before proceeding. Puff reviewed three federal–state programs that often inform permit decisions: (1) the State and National Registers of Historic Places (honorary listings that help identify character-defining features but do not prohibit alteration or demolition), (2) the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit program (whose Park Service standards can shape permitted scopes of work), and (3) the Certified Local Government (CLG) program—Hawai‘i uniquely has 100% county participation, and 10% of SHPD’s ±\$750,000 annual federal allocation is passed through to CLGs as grants, including current studies supporting Lahaina recovery.

Turning to review pathways, Puff distinguished Section 106 (federal undertakings) from HRS 6E processes, noting that consultation typically involves SHPD, agencies, consulting parties, Native Hawaiian organizations, and OHA. Under HRS 6E, three review types apply: §6E-8 (state and county projects), §6E-10 (work affecting listed properties), and §6E-42 (county building permits), with §6E-43 recognizing burial sites (iwi kūpuna) and informing how reviews are conducted. She highlighted recent legislative language affecting residential projects under §6E-42 and emphasized that, regardless of exemptions, property owners remain responsible under §6E-43 to preserve and protect burials; early consultation with SHPD is strongly encouraged. Puff walked through SHPD’s four-step review (define APE, scope of work, identify historic properties, assess effects) plus a fifth, mitigation step when effects are found (e.g., documentation, avoidance buffers, archaeological monitoring). She summarized decision timelines—e.g., 30 days for “no historic properties/effect” letters and 45 days for “effect” letters with mitigation—and displayed flowcharts that help applicants determine the appropriate track.

Puff specified submittal essentials (agency cover letter, drawings with site plan, a clear written scope including depth/location of ground disturbance, and—where applicable—identification effort, effect assessment, proposed mitigation, and comments from CLGs and Native Hawaiian organizations for §6E-8/106). She identified SHPD’s top processing challenges as incomplete or inaccurate submittals and time-consuming mitigation negotiations; many files arrive with only partial plan sets or no site photos, forcing staff to backfill basic information. Current average review time is ~56 days across all projects. In the last reporting period, SHPD issued ~60 “adverse effect/effect with mitigation” determinations, ~1,189 “no adverse effect/no historic properties affected” determinations, and over 1,000 “incomplete” determinations (not counting email/phone follow-ups).

On staffing, Puff reported 34 filled of 52 positions, with most vacancies created in 2022 now moving through HR; active recruitments include three archaeologists and two architectural historians with additional archaeology positions pending, and the division aims to post or fill remaining roles by next summer. She stated that earlier delays were largely process-related reorganizations rather than pay, and that recent recruitments have yielded strong candidate pools. To streamline workload, SHPD is expanding programmatic agreements (PAs) and MOAs: long-standing PAs with federal partners (e.g., Joint Base Pearl Harbor–Hickam, HART, FHWA/HDOT) and new state/local agreements, including Maui County’s MOA in which county qualified staff now handle many §6E-42 architectural reviews for Lahaina recovery (and an archaeology MOA is in development). SHPD is also coordinating with the City & County of Honolulu on a rehabilitation loan program PA and working with DHHL on 106 and 6E programmatic approaches to pre-consult on project types. Puff noted legislative direction to reduce duplicative reviews (e.g., a single SHPD 6E determination may satisfy multiple citations), emphasized HICRIS system updates, and described training and outreach for counties, federal partners, and project proponents to improve submittal quality and predictability. She concluded that sustained progress depends on complete early submittals, continued county partnerships, and filling critical positions so SHPD can focus on projects most likely to affect historic and cultural resources.

9. Presentation by Wastewater Branch, Department of Health on Individual Wastewater System (IWS) Permit Process Overview

Jon Nagato broke the process into four common scenarios and showed where county building permit workflows interface with DOH review.

New building + new IWS: County building permit and DOH IWS application may start independently. DOH iterates with the engineer until issuing Approval to Construct; later, DOH compares the approved IWS plans against the county's building plans to resolve any discrepancies before clearing the wastewater component. Contractors may then proceed with IWS installation; after key milestones (e.g., slab/footing placement for setback verification), the engineer completes the final inspection report, and DOH issues Approval to Use, which is separate from county building permit issuance.

Existing building renovation with compliant IWS: County routes the building permit to DOH; if records confirm compliance and plans align, DOH clears the wastewater portion and returns the file to the county.

Existing building renovation where IWS is non-compliant or a cesspool exists: County routing to DOH triggers an upgrade requirement (e.g., to septic/aerobic or sewer). DOH then follows the full design–review–Approval to Construct–installation–final inspection–Approval to Use sequence before clearing the building permit.

Cesspool-to-IWS upgrade only (no building work): The process runs solely through DOH—review, Approval to Construct, installation, final inspection, Approval to Use—with no county building permit if the building itself is unchanged.

He reviewed the variance pathway under HRS §342D-7, stressing it is not a routine exception and requires meeting three criteria (public interest, no substantial risk to health/safety, and that strict compliance would cause serious hardship without equal/greater public benefit). DOH first expects an engineer to exhaust feasible design options before seeking a variance so that variances are reserved for sites that cannot reasonably meet rule requirements (e.g., setbacks, soils). He also flagged process considerations that cause delays: unlicensed or inexperienced professionals, complex projects, and interpretation disputes (e.g., bedroom counts, post-legislation changes to dwelling caps). Because IWS and county building permits are intertwined, an IWS Approval to Construct becomes invalid if a county building permit is not issued within one year, if IWS construction does not begin within one year of approval, or if the county revokes the related building permit.

Q&A highlights include:

Standard designs/pre-approvals: Asked whether pre-approved templates could speed simple projects, Nagato said site soils and percolation rates drive both treatment sizing and disposal field dimensions, making universal templates difficult. Pre-planning can work in master-planned settings (he cited DHHL subdivisions historically) where soils and lot layouts are uniform, but for individual homeowners it is “tricky” without robust soil data.

Legislative changes to variance statutes (HRS 342D / HAR 11-62): He noted the Legislature can amend statutes, but he does not recommend altering §342D's variance framework, which applies across multiple programs beyond wastewater.

Older systems lacking final DOH approval (“approval to use”): In response to concerns about costly as-builts on systems that have functioned for years, Nagato said DOH targets enforcement to homeowners (responsible parties) and does not regulate engineer licensing practices; the branch must adhere to HRS/HAR and cannot waive required close-out steps simply because a prior engineer dropped a project. He acknowledged counties now commonly withhold final building sign-off until DOH issues “Approval to Use,” addressing past gaps where upgrades were never installed.

Policy on holding county actions until cesspool upgrades occur; one-year clock: He clarified some internal policy links between county progression and DOH approvals, and reiterated that for cesspool-to-IWS upgrades without building work, an IWS can proceed without a county building permit. Regarding the one-year validity, he said the timeline is set in rule and primarily ensures projects do not stall indefinitely; extensions are possible when engineers keep DOH informed, but “month 13” requests with no communication are difficult to accommodate.

Workload mix: Most IWS projects are septic systems (primary treatment) because they are least costly; aerobic units are a smaller share and typically required by proximity to sensitive resources (public water sources, shoreline, groundwater). DOH can provide a breakdown later.

Density thresholds: Asked about the “50-lot” threshold (for lots <1 acre) at which a package plant is expected, he said the rule’s historical rationale is being researched during ongoing rule updates; the engineering basis relates to density and cumulative pollutant loading, with policy intent to steer higher-density development toward centralized treatment. On the one-year limit rationale, he acknowledged it may have been set to prevent dormant approvals; in practice, proactive communication can support time extensions.

Nagato closed by emphasizing that complete, accurate submittals, early engineer–architect coordination, and proactive communication with DOH and county agencies are the best ways to avoid rework and keep projects moving, especially where cesspool conversions and infrastructure constraints intersect with building permit timelines.

10. Establishment of Three Permitted Interaction Groups (PIGs)

Chair Ilagan closed the meeting by establishing three permitted interaction groups (PIGs) to dig deeper into key permitting challenges:

Building Permit PIG – This group will investigate the building permit process, develop recommendations, and conduct a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) for each recommendation. Members include the following:

1. Chair Sue Keohokapu-Loy, *Greggor Ilagan**
2. Troy Hashimoto
3. Cameron Deptula, *Chico Figueiredo**, *Ian Withy-Berry**, *Tami Whitney**
4. Seiji Ogawa
5. Martin Anzellini Garcia-Reyes
6. Mohan Samtani
7. Jennifer Salisbury
8. Jessica Puff
9. Howard Wiig
10. Leolynne Escalona
11. Aaron Spielman, *Neal Tanaka**
12. Lance Nakamura, *Kristin Shimada**
13. Dawn Apuna

14. Yuki Lei Sugimura
15. Monica Toguchi Ryan
16. Morgan Gerdel
17. Christine Camp

Chapter 6E PIG – This group will focus on the historic preservation review process under Chapter 6E, working closely with SHPD Administrator Jessica Puff and the following individuals:

1. Chair Tyson Miyake, *Greggor Ilagan**
2. Troy Hashimoto
3. Cameron Deptula, *Chico Figueiredo**, *Ian Withy-Berry**, *Tami Whitney**
4. Seiji Ogawa
5. Martin Anzellini Garcia-Reyes
6. Cameron Black
7. Jennifer Salisbury
8. Jessica Puff
9. Neal Tanaka, *Aaron Spielman**
10. Jordan Molina
11. Michael Kat
12. Yuki Lei Sugimura
13. Morgan Gerdel
14. Christine Camp

Individual Wastewater Systems (IWS) PIG – With participation from DOH’s Wastewater Branch (John Nagato) and other individuals, this group will review and recommend improvements to the IWS permitting process.

1. Chair Mike Lee, *Greggor Ilagan**
2. Cameron Deptula, *Chico Figueiredo**, *Ian Withy-Berry**, *Tami Whitney**
3. Seiji Ogawa
4. Jennifer Salisbury
5. Jessica Puff
6. Jon Nagato, *Joanna Seto**, *Kevin Ihu**, *Kaitlin Arita-Chang**
7. Aaron Spielman, *Neal Tanaka**
8. Yuki Lei Sugimura
9. Mark Clemente
10. Jordan Odo
11. Monica Toguchi Ryan
12. Denise Nakanishi
13. Morgan Gerdel
14. Christine Camp

Asterisk (*) Indicates a PIG Member designee — backup member who attends and participates if the primary PIG member is absent, ensuring continuity and progress.

Each PIG is tasked with preparing a set of recommendations and SWOT analyses to present at the next task force meeting in January 2026. Once reports are delivered, the PIGs will be formally dissolved. Chair Ilagan clarified that while the three processes overlap with building permits, each PIG must keep its recommendations within its assigned scope, though they may identify related agencies as sources of delay

11. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 2:51 p.m.

Guests/ Attendees	Vice-Speaker Linda Ichiyama Representative Kyle Yamashita Representative Sue Keohokapu-Lee Loy Representative Tyson Miyake Representative Mike Lee County of Maui Council Member Tom Cook Andrew Okabe Ian Withy Berry Leolynn Escalona Neal Tanaka Lance Nakamura Wade Shimabukuro Kristen Shimada Michael Kat	Dan Orodenker Aaron Topple Angela Melody Young Rocky Mould Greg Miskin
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