



Tuesday, September 27, 2005

Mayor rejects Kahe wind farm

HECO abandons its first choice and turns to a site in Kahuku

By Crystal Kua
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Hawaiian Electric Co. won't erect up to 26 electricity-generating wind turbines on the ridges behind its Kahe Power Plant after Mayor Mufi Hannemann objected to the \$70 million project.

"Wind farms above Kahe Power Plant ... is just not appropriate and my administration will not support the siting of a wind farm here," the mayor said.

Hannemann said that if HECO continued with the project, the utility company would have had a zero chance of getting city permits.

"I would fight it tooth and nail," Hannemann said.

But HECO says it is exploring the mayor's suggestion that its wind farm project be relocated to Kahuku, the former site of a wind farm for about a decade beginning in the mid-1980s that was operated during much of that time by Hawaiian Electric's renewable energy arm.

"If the man says, 'No way,'" said Robbie Alm, senior vice president of public affairs, "I think it's time to move on."

HECO wanted the 300-foot-tall wind turbines to generate 39 megawatts of power on Campbell Industrial lands near Camp Timberline.

Hannemann said the project would need two city approvals: a conditional use permit for utilities installation and a public infrastructure map amendment for an energy-generation facility.

Hannemann said he's not opposed to wind farming, but he's opposed to the site.

City Council Chairman Donovan Dela Cruz, whose district includes Kahuku, said that it's too soon to know the reaction of the North Shore community until HECO sits down with its residents.

"People want to know how many, how big, what would be the community benefits? How does this project impact the overall county?" Dela Cruz said.

"What makes this area important is the fact of its unique history," said Shad Kane, representing the Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs. "Because cultural concerns and cultural issues are important to the health of the Hawaiian community, it's even more important that we preserve the uniqueness of places such as this."

Kane said a community of 2,000 Hawaiians lived in ancient times and among the important features included heiau, a stone school house, stone platform or ahu for religious worship and other structures.

But he and others said that while the wind farm would not have directly affected these sites, the cultural impact would still have been significant. He said the connection between the mountains and the sea is important to Hawaiian culture.

Hannemann said the biggest obstacle to HECO developing a wind farm in Kahuku is that the military, which has a training reservation in the area, now owns the site of the old farm.

Alm and Hannemann said HECO has already begun discussions with the military, and the mayor said he would talk with Hawaii's congressional delegation to try to make it happen.

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Mayor blocks Kahe wind-farm plan

By [Robbie Dingeman](#)
Advertiser Staff Writer

Community and cultural concerns have effectively killed Hawaiian Electric Co.'s \$70 million proposal to build a wind farm above the Kahe power plant, with Mayor Mufi Hannemann saying yesterday that the city would not grant two critical permits needed for the project.

"What I see before me is a community deeply divided that is caught between the imperative of renewable energy and the strong need to preserve important cultural resources," Hannemann said.

While he said he supports the concept of renewable energy and wind energy, he said this was the wrong place for this project.

Hannemann said he proposed to HECO officials that they explore building a wind farm across the island at Kahuku, where an early generation of a wind farm once existed.

To understand the need for other energy sources, he said, "one just need look at rising gas prices."

Robbie Alm, HECO senior vice president of public affairs, said the utility will pursue the Kahuku proposal and is talking with the military owners of the property about a potential shared use.

"We need renewable energy," Alm said. "We'll try everything we can."

Alm said the utility knew the Palehua Ridge plan "faced major challenges" after a series of public meetings on the proposal to develop the wind farm to help generate electricity to meet O'ahu's growing power needs.

Alm said the next signal that the proposal was in trouble came when a dozen key community members signed a seven-page letter of opposition.

Then last week, after hearing from those community advocates that the project "would desecrate a sacred Hawaiian place," Hannemann told utility officials that he would block the plan to place 24 to 26 wind mills on the ridge behind the Kahe power plant on the Wai'anae Coast.

In light of that opposition, Alm said the utility will end the project.

"We accept the mayor's decision and we'll move on to other projects," Alm said. "We were increasingly aware of the deep divisions in the community."

Hannemann announced his decision yesterday at a news conference in Kapolei. He routinely spends one day a week working from the city office building there.

Community member Jo Jordan said she came to the project with an open mind. Jordan praised HECO for what she called the company's extensive outreach into the community and its work at explaining the project in great detail.



This HECO photo illustration shows what the proposed windmill generators would have looked like along Palehua Ridge on the Wai'anae Coast.

HECO photo illustration



Shad Kane, president of the Kapolei Hawaiian Civic Club, said the wind farm HECO proposed would have come within 100 yards of an extensive and well-preserved heiau complex near Palehua Ridge.

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But the turning point for her came when she saw a video put together by students of the Nanakuli High School audio-visual program.

When she saw their depiction of the 380-foot-tall windmills — nearly the height of a 40-story building — dominating the view from the coast to the ridge line, "that dropped my heart," Jordan said.

Add to that the question of whether it was cost-effective to spend \$70 million to provide less than 2 percent of O'ahu's energy and Jordan wondered whether the resources would be better spent in other ways.

HEIAU NEAR SITE

Shad Kane, president of the Kapolei Hawaiian Civic Club, is proud to walk around some of the Hawaiian cultural structures that have been discovered high on the ridge, not far from Camp Timberline.

He said one heiau — which measures about 90 feet by 100 feet — displays unique features that seem to indicate that Hawaiians used the complex for communicating important ideas and possibly for religious purposes as well.

"It's highly possible that it's a place where chiefs spent time," Kane said.

He estimated the wind farm project would have come within 100 yards of the extensive stone structure.

Kane said the site is important because so many significant sites have been destroyed over time. He said the structure probably fared better than most because of the dry climate.

Parts of the site offer a panoramic view of the coastline, one that residents felt would be lost forever to the giant arms of the wind turbines.

City Councilman Todd Apo, who represents the Leeward Coast, praised Hannemann for listening to the community in making his decision. Apo stressed his support for renewable energy as a concept, but added, "there was great concern in this community."

In a statement, Council Chairman Donovan Dela Cruz, D-2nd (Wahiawa, North Shore, 'Ahuimanu), said "I commend HECO in its efforts to explore alternate energy sources, including wind power, given the increase in oil prices around the world. However, I encourage you to communicate with the community to receive its input and concerns, to ensure the project's success."

LESSONS LEARNED

Community advocate Eric Enos also praised HECO for working with the community to make the decision.

Enos said the utility provided excellent information about the project to the community, after the earlier contentious battle over a power-line proposal for Wa'ahila Ridge.

"They learned from Wa'ahila," Enos said.

Alm agreed that the company has changed its approach since the Wa'ahila Ridge project.

"If we hadn't learned from it, shame on us," he said.

The utility invested more than 16 years and millions of dollars pursuing the Wa'ahila Ridge project in vain.

HECO said the work was critical to meeting future power needs, but opponents forced the utility to fight for the project at more than 150 public hearings and neighborhood board meetings and to defend itself in Circuit Court.



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In 2002, the state Board of Land and Natural Resources rejected HECO's proposal to place new, taller utility poles and a new high-voltage line on the ridge, saying the project would deface the panorama for "tens of thousands of residents and visitors."

Alm and Hannemann said the Palehua Ridge project would have required a conditional use permit and a symbol on the public infrastructure map because such a project already is allowed in zoning.

Alm said the community has supported the power plant at Kahe and a new power plant proposed at Campbell Industrial Park.

He said the utility will work on other projects designed to help reach the statewide goal of 20 percent renewable energy by the year 2020.

Hannemann said the Leeward Coast community already hosts the city landfill as well as the large power plant, which makes it "a community that already bears way too much burden on behalf of the rest of the people of Honolulu."

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Wind energy may have better odds in Kahuku

The city has pulled the plug on the Hawaiian Electric Co. wind-energy site near its Kahe Point power plant. And it's fortunate that the mayor made that call now, rather than string the utility and the community along in discussions that would have led nowhere.

That would have been an unproductive and expensive exercise. HECO estimates it would have cost \$5 million to buy the land, with almost as much spent on studies and other basic costs. By then, HECO might have felt too vested in the project to be swayed by community concerns.

In Wai'anae, these concerns dealt with the placement of a bank of windmills, each about 380 feet tall, along a ridgeline endowed with cultural significance. Moreover, the neighboring Ko Olina resort was worried that the view would put off residents and hotel guests. Mufi Hannemann decided wisely against backing a project in a community where nobody seemed to want it.

Now HECO must pursue its alternative site at Kahuku, and seek support right away from North Shore residents as well as from the U.S. Army, which owns the land.

The Army seems open to talking about shared access, and that's good. The military plans to enlarge its already sizeable footprint on the Islands through programs such as the Stryker brigade. Cooperation in a venture that could benefit the Islands by producing renewable energy would be welcome at this point.

HECO executives hope the community will be more receptive, too. Kahuku already has lived with turbines during experimental wind-energy development 20 years ago. Also, the Ko'olau ridgeline location is set further back from the coastal neighborhoods.

The utility has avoided an ugly upheaval in Wai'anae, applying a lesson learned in the Wa'ahila Ridge transmission-line controversy. It wisely has moved community consultation far up on its protocol list. That process should begin again — this time, in Kahuku.

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OUR OPINION

If not at Kahe, then where?

THE ISSUE

Hawaiian Electric Co. shelved its plan for wind turbines above Kahe Point after Mayor Hannemann voiced his objections

THOUGH disappointed, officials of Hawaiian Electric Co. can't have been surprised about the opposition to the utility's plan to put up wind turbines above Kahe Point.

With the Leeward Oahu community still prickly from an unsuccessful fight over the city landfill last year, there is little wonder that residents weren't pleased to accommodate another facility, particularly one some considered unsightly, in their neighborhood.

When Mayor Hannemann, reflecting the community's sentiment, joined the opposition this week, HECO knew it could not fight City Hall and folded its blueprint. But finding another site for its wind-power plant won't be easy as long as the public is unwilling to make the trade off to gain a source of renewable energy.

No one wants to pay more in cash and environmental costs to keep the lights on, and though alternative energy is popular in concept, no one wants the infrastructure for such power generation in their backyard, either.

Wind turbine projects have met opposition elsewhere, most recently in Massachusetts where a proposal off Martha's Vineyard has run into community resistance. But others in sparsely populated areas haven't. It is the human factor that snarls development.

HECO, which engaged in a long, expensive and contentious battle over power lines on Waahila Ridge a few years back, will now explore Kahuku, where it experimented with wind power in the 1980s, as a location. However, since that time, the land has been bought by the U.S. Army. Moreover, residents on the North Shore might be just as unwilling to welcome the turbines.

By law, HECO must produce electricity from renewable sources in percentages that increase through the next 15 years. In addition, demand for power will rise in pace with population and economic growth. HECO faces formidable challenges in reaching these objectives, especially if NIMBY dominates the agenda.