

HONOLULU FIRE COMMISSION

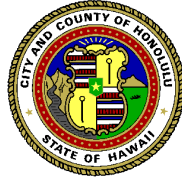
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DEBBI ELENKI

MAX HANNEMANN

ARNOLD WONG

GERARD GIBSON

DENNIS MORTON

Minutes of Regular Public Meeting
Honolulu Fire Department Headquarters
Honolulu Fire Department Auditorium
Wednesday, August 20, 2025

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Matlin called the meeting to order at 10:33 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: David Matlin, Butch Galdeira, Max Hannemann, and Gerard Gibson.

MEMBER EXCUSED: Debby Eleneki, Arnold Wong, and Dennis Morton.

IN ATTENDANCE: Fire Chief Sheldon Hao (HFD), Deputy Fire Chief Jason Samala (HFD), Assistant Fire Chief Joseph Kostiha (HFD), Assistant Fire Chief Christopher Cabasa (HFD), Assistant Fire Chief Reid Yoshida (HFD), Assistant Fire Chief Kevin Mokulehua (HFD), Battalion Chief Ethan Ae'a (HFD), Battalion Chief Matthew Nakapuahi (HFD), Battalion Chief Jason Torres (HFD), Fire Fighter I Blake McElheny (HFD), Brian Ancheta (Department of the Corporation Counsel), and Nadine Murata (Commission Secretary).

II. PUBLIC TESTIMONY ON ALL AGENDA ITEMS. Chair Matlin asked if there was anyone from the public who wished to give public testimony. There was none.

III. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF JULY 16, 2025. Chair Matlin called for any comments or corrections to the minutes of July 16, 2025. Commissioner Gibson moved and Commissioner Hannemann seconded to approve the minutes of the open session of July 16, 2025. There being no further comments or corrections and with a unanimous vote in favor, the Commission approved the minutes.

IV. APPROVAL OF THE EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES OF JULY 16, 2025. Chair Matlin called for any comments or corrections to the executive session minutes of July 16, 2025. Commissioner Hannemann moved and Commissioner Gibson seconded to approve the executive session minutes. There being no further comments or corrections and with a unanimous vote in favor, the Commission approved the minutes.

Chair Matlin mentioned he would like to defer agenda items XII and XIII, Selection of Chair and Selection of Vice-Chair to next month so all members of the Commission will be able to cast their votes.

V. REPORT OF THE FIRE CHIEF.

Fire Chief Hao briefly went over workforce with the Commission. Details can be found in the July 2025 monthly report handed out at the meeting.

Fire Chief Hao briefly discussed and showcased a peer support activation graph (report section A.1.b, Page 1), and said there were 16 activations in the month of July.

Fire Chief Hao said the department is finding that recent retirees mentioned that they felt they lost their purpose within the department, and Fire Chief Hao is currently working on better supporting its personnel by educating them through transition and briefly touched on how the retirement system has changed.

Regarding vacancies (report section A.2, Pages 2 - 3), Fire Chief Hao said currently there are 92 vacancies within the department and 70 HFD recruits in training.

Fire Chief Hao mentioned that the department has a meeting with the Department of Budget and Fiscal Services (BFS) the following day and will be asking for their support as the department would like to over-hiring, as it takes 8 ½ months to process paperwork. The next recruit class will be in January 2026.

Fire Chief Hao said the department will present its case to see whether it's a financial situation which prevents the department from over hirings or if it's an ordinance or law situation.

Fire Chief Hao went over vacancy spikes and said he wants to hedge it so when retirement comes, the department will have its new recruits ready.

Fire Chief Hao said back in 1999 the department hired 83 individuals, in 2000, 70 individuals, and in 2001, 110 individuals.

Commissioner Gibson asked if BFS has been flexible.

Fire Chief Hao answered they have been flexible.

Commissioner Gibson asked if there is a program that allows one to work part-time (3 - 4 days) and if it would be of benefit.

Fire Chief Hao answered he has heard of a program when one retires and still holds their position and instead of getting paid the City will put their funds on the side and when they decide to separate, they will receive the lump sum.

Commissioner Hannemann asked about the attraction to this program.

Fire Chief Hao answered this idea is something that is floating around.

Vice-Chair Galdeira asked if the total number of recruits (62 excluding Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting Unit (ARFF) was part a larger class.

Fire Chief Hao explained it was cumulative of multiple classes.

Fire Chief Hao discussed the on-boarding processing as well as the releasing of candidates during training.

Fire Chief Hao explained the department's recruitment process.

Assistant Chief Cabasa- Administration Services Bureau

Assistant Chief Cabasa mentioned that the department's budget for its facilities has not changed and the construction seen at headquarters is up keeping with facility maintenance, completion is scheduled for next week.

Assistant Chief Cabasa went over the following:

1. Station improvements:
 - a. Wailupe- Received a new roof
 - b. Kalihi Kai- New cabinets
 - c. Makiki- Unexpected hurdles will be completed by the end of the month.
2. Equipment:
 - a. Quint 31- Currently in the process of being transported to the west coast.

In addition, two (2) platforms and two (2) apparatuses were executed and the department will be using its purchase option to purchase four (4) additional engines.

Assistant Chief Cabasa mentioned that the build time is an additional four and a half (4 ½) years and the department will be receiving nine (9) pumpers.

Assistant Chief Cabasa discussed the department's 2026 sollicitating request for two (2) more additional mini pumpers, tiller apparatus quint aerial, rescue boat, and auxiliary vehicles.

Fire Chief Hao explained the solicitation process and how funding was made available to the department.

Assistant Chief Cabasa mentioned that equipment solicitations now contain flexible language, to avoid having to cancel and redo the solicitation.

Assistant Chief Cabasa shared that the department is in the process of submitting its 2027 budget.

Assistant Chief Joseph Kostiha- Fire Operations.

Assistant Chief Kostiha said external agencies (Hawaii Department of Transportation (HDOT), Federal Fire Department (FFD) and the military) have provided assistance to the department in extinguishing recent fire outbreaks in Kunia.

Assistant Chief Kostiha mentioned the department has received helicopter assistance from different agencies during the previous day's fire outbreak (State of Hawaii, contract helicopters, Air I and Air 2, two (2) Hawaii National Guard, one (1) Army, and twenty-five (25) ground units from Honolulu Fire Department (HFD), and seven (7) FFD) and expressed that by working together the department can effectively coordinate something that becomes out of control.

Assistant Chief Kostiha shared that there has been suspicion of someone starting these fires.

Assistant Chief Kostiha said the fires are slowly moving into the conservation area.

Vice-Chair Galdeira asked what is the department's protocol on activating Fire 1, 2, and 3 on the scene.

Fire Chief Hao answered when it gets to third alarm status, Fire 1, 2, and 3 will all be alerted by the Fire Communications Center (FCC).

Assistant Chief Kostiha shared that he is the third alarm and that eleven (11) resources (eight (8) engines, two (2) aerials and a rescue) will arrive at the scene and they are staffed with a crew of five (5). He noted that an auxiliary apparatus does not count as an element resource.

Assistant Chief Kostiha explained his role as Fire 3 and how he supports the Incident Command Unit (ICU), external agencies, coordinate command post locations, and his relationship with other partners in agency leads.

Assistant Chief Kostiha mentioned he reviews video footage and notes before going to a scene, most of the time when help is needed two (2) personnel from his department will deploy, a Battalion Chief (BC) and a Captain who will assist the ICU with post locations, potential evacuations, coordination of extra resources and meals.

Fire Chief Hao indicated that the department is working with the director of the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) and said he has a different philosophy on how DEM is utilized. He is trying to migrate DEM to be more of an active 24/7 role.

Deputy Fire Chief Samala added that most of the Chiefs in the department will assemble and the ICU will do their job and coordinate with the Joint Traffic Management Center (JTMC).

Deputy Fire Chief Samala mentioned currently the department is handling the role of DEM, as DEM is not yet fully structured and they do not have the man-power on standby who can be readily activated.

Deputy Fire Chief Samala said the department is in the process on getting the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), JTMC and other agencies on the same communication and coordination level.

Vice-Chair Galdeira asked does HFD make the evacuation call.

Fire Chief Hao mentioned that the department is a trigger but the Honolulu Police Department (HFD) is the department to make the call.

Assistant Chief Reid Yoshida- Support Services

OSHO

1. Assistant Chief Yoshida mentioned that recently the department's OSHO branch conducted a health screening and utilized the remaining funds from the Fire Fighter's Grant which was approximately \$1,582, and Fastletics is conducting the testing.
2. Vice-Chair Galdeira asked if this health screening differs from last year's cancer related screening.
3. Assistant Chief Yoshida answered yes.
4. Assistant Chief Yoshida said approximately 400 personnel participated in the test, and the test's given were for comprehensive ultra sound, cardiac calcium scan, heavy metal, and functional movement screening.
5. Assistant Chief Yoshida said feedbacks was positive.

Prevention

1. Assistant Chief Yoshida mentioned that the department's Public Information Officer (PIO) recently responded to nine (9) incidents.

2. Vice-Chair Galdeira expressed appreciation in seeing more involvement from the PIO.
3. Assistant Chief Yoshida mentioned that the Accelerant Detection Canine Team (K9/handler) went to seven (7) incidents and said the handler recently received his recertification.
4. Assistant Chief Yoshida explained the long lines at the recent Made in Hawaii event at the Hawaii Convention Center. Assistant Chief Yoshida said the department sent an inspector to inspect, and the inspector found no violations and reported seeing two (2) metal detector screens, one on the parking level and the other on the ground entrance of the Hawaii Convention Center, and due to capacity doors were shut for about 15 – 20 minutes which could explain the long lines.

Assistant Chief Kevin Mokulehua- Planning and Development.

Assistant Chief Mokulehua passed out the 7th edition of the departments Na Lei Kukui newsletter and said on the cover is Fire Fighter (FF) III David (Taio) Shipman who is from the Mokulele Fire Station.

Assistant Chief Mokulehua briefly discussed the newsletter articles (Eddie Aikau Big Wave Invitational, 45th Annual Hawai'i Fire Chief's Association Training and Business Conference, and Talkin' Story).

Assistant Chief Mokulehua thanked BC Nakapuahi, and FF I McElheny for their support and contribution to the newsletter.

Assistant Chief Mokulehua gave an update on the land acquisition for the Pearl City Fire Station and mentioned that the department is working with the Department of Planning and Permitting (DPP) on the land subdivision process.

Assistant Chief Mokulehua gave an update on the Waialua Fire Station and said its currently going through DPP.

Assistant Chief Mokulehua spoke on property for the live fire program, and said currently the program is being operated on Department of Facility Maintenance (DFM) property at Kalealoa. The current challenge is scheduling with DFM, as DFM has increased its activities on site.

Assistant Chief Mokulehua mentioned he will be reaching out to HDOT and other State agencies for possible relocation of the live fire program.

IX. DISCUSSION ON REACCREDITATION 2025 – 2026 with BATTALION CHIEF ETHAN AE'A.

Battalion Chief Ae'a introduced himself to the Commission and gave an overview of the re-accreditation process.

Battalion Chief Ae'a pointed out that the department received its first accreditation in 2000 under the leadership of former Fire Chief Attilio Leonardi, and has since then achieved re-accreditation status every five years and is looking forward to its 6th.

Battalion Chief Ae'a said re-accreditation enables the department to self-assess, and provide quality improvement to its public service.

Battalion Chief Ae'a explained Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE) and Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) to the Commission.

Battalion Chief Ae'a briefly went over the department's organizational improvements based off CFAI accreditation recommendations and said the department uses planning, development and improvement as its modules.

Vice-Chair Galdeira asked if there were other accreditation agencies.

Battalion Chief Ae'a answered no.

Battalion Chief Ae'a went over past accreditation managers.

1. 2000- Chief John Clark
2. 2005- Chief Wassman
3. 2010- Chief Adams
4. 2015- Chief Simeona/Chief Naone
5. 2020- Chief Kahaulelio/Chief Mokulehua
6. 2025- Chief Ae'a

Battalion Chief Ae'a went over the Accreditation Organizational Chart.

1. Fire Chief Sheldon Hao
2. Assistant Chief Kevin Mokulehua- Accreditation Sponsor
3. Battalion Chief Ethan Ae'a- Accreditation Manager
4. Battalion Chief Matthew Nakapuahi- Deputy Accreditation Manager
5. Assistant Chief Joseph Kostiha- Community Risk Assessment/Standard of Cover (CRA/SOC) Manager Emeritus
6. Captain Chad Koide- Self Assessment Model (SAM) Team
7. Captain Dean Baldeviso- CRA-SOC Team
8. Battalion Chief Ethan Ae'a- Strategic Plan Team

Battalion Chief Ae'a went over the re-accreditation process proposed timeline 2025 – 2026.

1. March 31, 2025- SAM and CRA/SOC Internal Targets met for Draft Documents
2. April 1025- HFD delegation to Excellence Conference

3. On-going- HFD SAM and CRA/SOC Team continue Document production
4. June/July 2025- Final draft documents submitted to F6 office for review
5. August 2025- FCO Final review
6. September 2025- Document submittal to CFAI/CPSE
7. October 2025- Peer Assessor Document Review and HFD Accreditation Team reviewing and addressing CFAI/CPSA questions via track changes.
8. December 2025- Projected Peer Assessor Team Site Visit (pending successful document review)
9. Mar/April 2026- Projected Accreditation Hearing at CPSE Excellence Conference (Orlando, Florida pending re-accreditation recommendation at site-visit)
 - Projected Re-Accreditation

Battalion Chief Ae'a mentioned the department is in the process on preparing documents for submission and planned site visit from the panel come March/April 2026.

Battalion Chief Ae'a went over proposed attendees for HFD re-accreditation hearing (pending successful site visit).

1. Fire Chief Sheldon K. Hao- Fire Chief
2. Battalion Chief Ethan Ae'a- Accreditation Manager
3. Captain Dean Baldevisio- SOC
4. Captain Chad Koide- SAM
5. Battalion Chief Matthew Nakapuahi- Deputy Accreditation Manager
6. Assistant Chief Joseph Kostiha- SOC Emeritus
7. Assistant Chief Kevin Mokulehua- Accreditation Sponsor
8. Honolulu Fire Department Fire Commissioner (proposed)

Battalion Chief Ae'a shared slides of the accreditation team.

Battalion Chief Ae'a went over proposed activities for the Peer Assessors site visit in 2025.

Battalion Chief Ae'a discussed the requirements after being re-accredited.

1. Accreditation is valid for a five-year period
2. The department is required to submit an Annual Compliance Report (ACR) and to submit an annual fee to maintain accreditation.
3. The ACR demonstrates continued compliance with the departments core competencies, addresses the status of recommendations made by the Peer Assessor Team, and continuous improvement.

Chair Matlin thanked Battalion Chief Ae'a for his presentation.

VI. UPDATE ON JANUARY 6, 2025 MCCULLY FIRE INCIDENT (1645 YOUNG STREET).

Chair Matlin asked if there were any updates to the January 6, 2025 incident.

Assistant Chief Yoshida mentioned that the Line of Duty Death (LODD) report is being reviewed and will be finalized soon.

Chair Matlin asked Assistant Chief Yoshida if the LODD report is completed by next month could the Commission get an overview of the report.

Assistant Chief Yoshida answered yes.

Chair Matlin asked if this will be the final report.

Assistant Chief Yoshida answered this will be the last report and currently action is being taken by the committee.

Vice-Chair Galdeira asked about communication with the family.

Assistant Chief Yoshida answered communications are on-going with the Fiala family, the most recent follow-up was on August 6th, and the family reported that Jeff has received his headstone.

Assistant Chief Yoshida pointed out that the QR Code that former Assistant Chief Uchimura created was dispersed to its members so they may be able to locate/visit him at the gravesite.

Assistant Chief Yoshida shared that he also keeps in touch with personnel at Station 9 to see how they are doing.

VII. UPDATE ON ALLEGED FEBRUARY 14, 2025 SEXUAL ASSAULT INCIDENT AT HFD HEADQUARTERS.

Chair Matlin asked the executive staff if there has been any update.

Fire Chief Hao answered there has been no update.

Chair Matlin asked what steps are currently being taken place.

Fire Chief Hao answered the department is waiting for replies from the parties' attorneys.

VIII. CITIZEN COMPLAINT LETTER RECEIVED FEBRUARY 18, 2025 ALLEGING CONCURRENT EMPLOYMENT OF A FIRE FIGHTER AND MISREPRESENTATION OF HFD HOURS WORKED.

Chair Matlin asked the executive staff if they would like to go into executive session to discuss.

Fire Chief Hao answered yes.

Commissioner Gibson moved and Commissioner Hannemann seconded that the Commission go into executive Session meeting on this item to “consider the hire, evaluation, dismissal, or discipline of an officer or employee or of charges brought against the officer or employee, where consideration of matters affecting privacy will be involved” [HRS Sec. 92-5(a)(2)] and to “consult with the board’s attorney on questions and issues pertaining to board’s powers, duties, privileges, immunities, and liabilities” with regard to this matter [HRS Sec 92-5(a)(4)]. By unanimous vote, the Commission went into executive session at 11:43 a.m. and the regular public meeting reconvened at 11:48 a.m.

Chair Matlin said that in executive session the Commission received an update on the Citizen Complaint and mentioned there are possible new entities being involved and that an outside entity will be hired to assist with the process.

X. REPORTS ON ASSIGNED COMMISSION WORK- BUDGET REVIEW, ANNUAL REPORT, AND FIRE CHIEF’S EVALUATION.

Chair Matlin asked if there are any updates to report. There were none.

Vice-Chair Galdeira mentioned that he would like to thank the administration for allowing the Commission the opportunity to engage with the department as it allows the Commission to see how different elements/aspects work within the department.

Chair Matlin reminded the Commission that they will be using the new evaluation report come December.

Fire Chief Hao mentioned he would like to conduct a year-end-closeout on the budget sometime in July 2026.

XI. UPDATE ON AUGUST CITY COUNCIL MEETING: RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF THE HONOLULU FIRE COMMISSION, PURSUANT TO CHAPTER 3, ARTICLE 15, REVISED ORDINANCES OF HONOLULU 2021.

Chair Matlin mentioned the Council meeting was positive, and Council didn’t see a need to change the Commission.

XII. SELECTION OF CHAIR.

Chair Matlin said this agenda item will be tabled to next month.

XIII. SELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR.

Chair Matlin said this agenda item will be tabled to next month.

XIV. ANNOUNCEMENT: The next monthly Commission meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 17, 2025, at 10:30 a.m. in the Honolulu Fire Department Auditorium.

Chair Matlin asked the Commission to come with any recommendations for a future off-site station visit in early 2026.

Chair Matlin asked if there were any questions. There were none.

XV. ADJOURNMENT: There being no other business, Vice-Chair Galdeira moved and Commissioner Gibson seconded that the meeting be adjourned. By unanimous vote, the meeting was adjourned on August 20, 2025, at 12:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by: Nadine Murata, Secretary.

APPROVED:

DAVID A.K. MATLIN, Chair