

# Views & Voices

## OUR VIEW

### HISTORIC PRESERVATION

## Iwi kupuna need careful handling

The Oahu Historic Preservation Commission (OHPC) has proposed that areas within Kailua where hundreds of sets of Hawaiian remains have been uncovered over the years be designated as wahi kanu, or burial sites — and that additional permitting safeguards be established to avoid desecrating iwi kupuna, revered bones of the ancestors, within wahi kanu boundaries. The 2-year-old commission, created to advise the city on protecting historic and cultural sites, follows the Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs in finding that Kailua burial sites aren’t being adequately identified or protected.

Action is warranted, but more information and analysis are required before OHPC’s proposal, highlighted at the commission’s meeting last week, can earn approval. A solution must be crafted that adequately protects Hawaiian burial sites, treating iwi kupuna with the respect and care warranted — but doesn’t add to a NIMBY playbook by hobbling housing development or other projects benefiting communities. In the tightrope act of melding Hawaiian and Western law and custom, a balanced path forward must also avoid imposing unreasonable costs or burdens on property owners, improving protections with an efficient and economical approach.

Hawaii law concerning prehistoric and historic burial sites states that areas “with a concentration of skeletal remains” have “high preservation value.” The State Historic Preservation Division (SHPD) is the frontline agency for safeguarding burial sites by requiring protective practices — but most small projects are exempt from SHPD review. For exempt projects, bones discovered are treated as “inadvertent” discoveries, and decisions on their care have tight timelines attached to avoid project delay.

Thousands of Hawaiian burials are thought to lie within the sand berm under Kailua, and remains have repeatedly been disturbed — desecrated, in the view of those upholding Hawaiian cultural practice — by “inadvertent” means. “Historic preservation practice in Kailua has missed the forest for the trees,” commissioners reported in March 2024, finding that current historic preservation practices provide only “limited benefit” for protecting burials.

In one case spotlighted by OHPC, bones were found dumped in a Waimanalo sand pile and strewn across a lot where excavated material from the project was used as filler. This is an affront to Hawaiians, whether lineal or cultural descendants of the ancestors whose bones are disturbed, and to those who recognize iwi kupuna’s cultural value.

OHPC’s proposal would designate areas where project plans go automatically to SHPD for review, with required protections based on the concentration of burials. While these protections would impose additional costs, OHPC suggests tax credits as an offset.

The proposal was labeled “reasonable” by city planners, embraced by SHPD and touted as a potential statewide model. First, though, lawmakers must ensure that new rules won’t mire construction of needed housing, including accessory dwelling units, or home improvement projects such as plumbing or drainage work.

In January, OHPC reported to the City Council that it had qualified for federal historic preservation funding, and was preparing a grant application to identify archaeologically sensitive areas in Kailua. Documentation from that study, intended to back strengthened procedures, must support OHPC’s estimate of 3,000 sets of iwi kupuna within the proposed burial sites and pinpoint areas where burials are likely.

Hawaiian groups have long called for changes in permitting rules concerning iwi kupuna, with criticism often aimed at SHPD for lack of scrutiny or inadequate review. That dissatisfaction contributed to the City Council’s creating the OHPC in 2023. This proposal puts OHPC’s policy-making ability in the spotlight. If OHPC’s strategy succeeds in Kailua, translating to new, effective statewide procedures on iwi kupuna, it will be a true advance.

## OFF THE NEWS

### Isles’ EV road use fee replaces surcharge

Hawaii’s electric vehicle owners now have two options on how to pay in on annual state roadway maintenance: either a new per-mile road usage charge (RUC) of \$8 per 1,000 miles, capped at \$50, or a yearly flat fee of \$50. Either option replaces the \$50 EV registration surcharge.

This RUC launch for EVs is the first step in statewide plans to transition to road usage fees over coming years, to help pay for road upkeep. The per-mile RUC will become mandatory for all EVs by 2028, and for other consumer vehicles by 2033. For more, visit [hiruc.org](http://hiruc.org).

### Another keiki playground is set ablaze

Vandalizing a kids’ playground has got to be high on the list of most dastardly offenses a vandal can perpetrate — and yet, lawbreakers have intentionally torched a play structure at Sheridan Park, causing an estimated \$150,000 in damage. The vile act mimics earlier destruction of the playground at Wahiawa District Park, an act of confirmed arson.

Police are asking for the public’s help in identifying the vandals who set fire to the Sheridan Park play area at about 8:45 a.m. Monday. The Wahiawa arsonists remain at large.

## Green fee is step toward sustainability

By Kainan Miranda

There are rare moments in public policy when government takes a bold step that demands attention. Seven years ago, Hawaii did just that with Act 15, committing the state to full decarbonization by 2045. With the passage of Act 96 this year, Hawaii once again stepped forward — taking bold, values-driven action. As climate change accelerates and many governments struggle to respond, Hawaii acted decisively. Our lawmakers made a clear, principled decision to invest in the long-term care of our environment and communities.

Act 96 establishes the nation’s first green fee funded by visitors. It ensures that the millions who travel to our islands and enjoy our beaches, forests, and biodiversity contribute to their protection. This fee provides a sustainable funding resource for conservation, restoration and climate resilience, easing some of the responsibility local residents have eagerly shouldered to care for the lands and waters that sustain us.

This landmark legislation reflects years of hard work across the state, but it wouldn’t have happened without the leadership of our governor and legislators. Their persistence, openness to evolving ideas, and willingness to engage diverse voices shaped a policy that reflects Hawaii’s

priorities and is built to last.

Similar ideas have been proposed before. Green fees, conservation passes and environmental user licenses have been debated in hearings and legislation. Some advanced, others did not — but all helped refine the concept, test legal frameworks and build public support. Lawmakers who introduced those early proposals deserve credit for laying the groundwork.

Act 96 increases the transient accommodations tax by 0.75% and extends it to cruise ship passengers. These changes are expected to generate \$90 million to \$100 million annually. These funds will go directly to address urgent environmental challenges: flooding, erosion, wildfires, coral reef loss, invasive species and watershed protection. In a place where environmental threats grow more severe each year, this kind of investment is essential — not optional.

Importantly, this new funding stream does not come from local families already facing Hawaii’s high cost of living. That was a core principle throughout the policy’s development. It’s also a key reason for the strong public support behind the law, and why it is now seen as a model for

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other visitor destinations globally.

Passing the law is just the beginning. Thoughtful implementation — how funds are distributed, projects prioritized and transparency upheld — will define its success. Community engagement is critical, and decisions should be informed by both traditional indigenous knowledge and contemporary science.

No single policy can solve every environmental challenge. But Act 96 marks

a significant step forward. It shows our lawmakers can lead with courage, act with foresight, and protect our islands in ways that are fair and sustainable. The benefits will ripple forward for generations.

Ultimately, the story of Act 96 is one of shared leadership. It reminds us that meaningful ideas take time, public will is built conversation by conversation, and when communities and policymakers work together real progress happens.

This moment belongs to everyone who contributed, especially the lawmakers who saw it through. They deserve our gratitude and our continued partnership in the work ahead.

Hawaii is leading. Others are watching.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Road use charge good for low-mileage drivers

Starting this Tuesday, owners of electric cars can choose to pay a flat \$50 fee or \$8 per 1,000 miles as part of the Hawaii Department of Transportation’s road usage charge (RUC) program.

It’s part of Hawaii’s slow but steady move toward a mileage-based RUC, and electric vehicles are the first group being transitioned.

This is great news for anyone that hardly uses their car, but pays a high fee for its registration. My insurance company reduced my annual premium by \$300 since I have very low mileage, so hopefully this savings will also translate to registration.

Ken Takeya  
Kailua

### China, not U.S., to blame for Philippines tension

I yearn for a return to objective, accurate reporting. In “Caught in the Middle” (June 26), what is irrevocably true is that there is one single cause for the South China Sea challenges faced by the Republic of the Philippines: the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that rules the People’s Republic of China with a very heavy hand.

Yet, the title of the article and all the words on Page 1 of the newspaper make it sound like the United States is somehow responsible. It does eventually speak accurately about the CCP threat — down a column on Page 6. All this leaves a casual reader thinking that, somehow, our country has done something wrong, when the truth is that we have done many things right and are a steadfast partner.

Objectivity is not only reporting the facts, but putting them in order and precedence reflective of the whole story.

Jim Newman  
Waianae

### U.S. wise to stay out of South China Sea conflict

The Philippine government threw the U.S. military off our bases there in 1991. Now it is crying wolf. I spent a lot of time in the Philip-



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A car wash technician and detailer wipes down a Tesla Model S, an electric vehicle, after it emerges from a car wash on Kapiolani Boulevard.

pires during my 26 years in the Marines. We don’t have a mutual defense treaty with them like we do with Japan. And we don’t have a mutual defense treaty with Taiwan, as the U.S. officially acknowledges Taiwan is a part of China.

From where I sit, the U.S. should not get involved with the defense of the Philippines or Taiwan. China is a force to be reckoned with and the only solution is for the U.S. to develop good relations with China like Presidents Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush did.

Ken Zitz  
Waiialua

### Vaccine-exempt should be more considerate

A West Virginia woman recently refused to vaccinate her child against measles for religious reasons and is suing the school district for following state law that requires vaccinations for children attending school.

I work in an understaffed school. I believe my work is important. I got all my vaccinations, but am now immunocompromised due to chemotherapy. Previous and current vaccines no longer protect me. Every unvaccinated child or parent who interacts with me puts me at an unnecessary health risk, even though I always wear a mask.

What religion commands its followers to spread disease to the public? It’s OK by me if people reject vaccinations,

but they and their families should live out their religious faith away from public places and homeschool their children out of concern for those of us who are unable to protect ourselves against contagious diseases.

Brad Smith  
Ala Moana

### Honor war dead with peaceful diplomacy

Why are so many Americans apathetic and complacent about what’s going on in the U.S. and the world? They should feel a sense of outrage that we may be headed toward another war in a foreign country.

Is it because we have not experienced the effects of a long-term war on American soil? Is it because we have forgotten the sacrifices of our soldiers? There are more than 40,000 American soldiers stationed across the Middle East. Let’s pray that Donald Trump and his advisers will not engage them in another protracted war.

Since the Vietnam War, involvement in major conflict resulted in the deaths of more than 65,000 American soldiers and millions of foreign soldiers and civilians.

While we are living our comfortable lives, let’s reflect on all those who are not with us today and take a stand for peaceful diplomacy.

Kanani Kihara  
Kaneohe

Barney & Clyde >> By Gene Weingarten

