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ADMINISTRATIVE STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING
HAWAI'I TOURISM AUTHORITY
Tuesday, January 20, 2026, at 1:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

MINUTES OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT:	James McCully (Chair), Joel Guy (Vice Chair), Leah Belmonte, Mericia Palma Elmore
MEMBER NOT PRESENT:	Lisa Paulson
HTA STAFF PRESENT:	Caroline Anderson
LEGAL COUNSEL:	John Cole

1. **Call to Order**

Chair McCully called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m.

2. **Roll Call to Announce Name of Participating Board Members and to Identify Who Else is Present with Board Member if Location is Nonpublic**

Ms. Anderson conducted the roll call, and members confirmed their attendance, except for Member Paulson, who was excused.

3. **Approval of Minutes of the November 7, 2025, Administrative Standing Committee Meeting**

Vice Chair Guy proposed a motion to adopt the minutes, and Member Belmonte seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.

4. **Discussion and/or Action on Policy #100-03 HTA Code of Conduct Policy**

Chair McCully reminded members that this matter had been discussed at the previous meeting, which had been chaired in his absence by Vice Chair Guy. The Chair noted that the policy was similar to the policy in operation at the time when the Board functioned as a governing board. The policy governed members' conduct and interests, provided clear reminders of Board members' responsibilities, and allowed some latitude in the Board's oversight role. The Chair referred specifically to item 5:

> "The Authority would promote full and strict compliance with all applicable laws and regulatory requirements and expected that all persons covered under this policy would adhere to this standard."

Ms. Anderson projected the policy onto the screen for members' reference, and members confirmed that the policy was visible. Chair McCully referred to policy 1(c) :

> "Board members, in their advisory capacity, [shall discharge their duties in a manner] reasonably believed to be in the best interests of the Authority."

The Chair noted that the basic policy now provided general guidance, with individual elements set out in detail. Under the Board's previous status as an auditing board, this responsibility was explicitly specified in both the Statute and the administrative rules.

After giving an opportunity for further comments or questions, Chair McCully called for a motion to adopt the policy. Vice Chair Guy proposed the motion, and Member Belmonte seconded it.

The Chair urged members to act with alacrity when motions were called, and, in the absence of additional questions or testimony from the public, he called for a roll call vote.

Ms. Anderson conducted the roll-call vote, and the motion was carried unanimously.

5. Discussion and/or Action on Resolution No. 2026-01 Delegation of Authority to Present Policy Positions

Chair McCully reminded members that this had also been discussed at length in the previous meeting. He asked for contributions, and when none were offered, he stated that previously representatives of the HTA had been identified quite narrowly, being limited under the Statute to the CEO and under the Board's rules to the Chair. In a prior resolution, authorization had also been conferred on the Chair of the permitted interaction group (PIG) responsible for legislative interactions.

Chair McCully noted that the current policy provided that the representative would be:

> "…[the HTA's] President and CEO, or its designee, the Advisory Board Chair, Co-Chairs, Vice-Chairs, or their designees, and/or the Chair, Co-Chairs,

Vice-Chairs of the Advisory Board Standing Committees to represent HTA in communications with executive and legislative branches."

He observed that this effectively included the entire Board, given that there were four standing committees, each with a Chair and Vice-Chair, totaling eight members who could potentially represent the Board to the legislature. The Chair did not consider the presence of multiple voices to be a negative factor, given the Board's advisory function, commenting that a governing board would need to be more circumspect in its representation. He emphasized, however, that members were required to respect the code of conduct that had just been approved.

Chair McCully stated that these resolutions reflected the HTA's priorities and advised members to review the eight bullet points summarizing the HTA's principal interests. He added that members chairing standing committees with particular subject-matter relevance might focus on those areas in their legislative interactions, and that the policy enabled them to inform the legislature that they were representing the HTA Advisory Board.

In the absence of further discussion, Chair McCully called for a motion to adopt the resolution. The motion was proposed by Vice Chair Guy and seconded by Member Elmore.

The Chair invited any public testimony or questions.

Ms. Anderson conducted the roll-call vote, and the motion passed unanimously.

6. Discussion and/or Action Regarding the Advisory Board's Roles and Responsibilities

Ms. Anderson projected the statement of roles and responsibilities on the screen and, in response to a question from Chair McCully, stated that the document had been provided by the Director of the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism (DBEDT) and reviewed by AG Cole.

As defined by SB1571, the roles of the HTA Advisory Board were as follows:

1. Hiring the President & CEO of the HTA;
2. Performance evaluation of the President & CEO;
3. Review and guidance of HTA plans, such as the strategic plan and the destination management action plans (DMAPs);
4. Review of marketing projects and initiatives;

5. Stakeholder engagement;
6. Transparency and accountability;
7. Oversight and advisory role for the tourism authority.

Chair McCully noted that the following page of the document outlined two methods by which the Advisory Board could introduce projects to the HTA, either at the standing committee level or at an Advisory Board meeting. The Chair added that HTA staff could also initiate projects through the appropriate standing committee.

Chair McCully noted that the document also listed the reports to be provided to the Advisory Board by HTA staff, reminding members that the Ways & Means Committee (W&M) had recently held an information hearing.

Agreeing that this was the case, Ms. Anderson stated that W&M had called on the HTA, but the Director and Deputy Director of DBEDT had made presentations.

Chair McCully commented that the HTA was required by law to submit an annual report at the end of each year, and he believed that all Board members should receive a copy. Ms. Anderson responded that Ms. Hagihara-Loo had disseminated the annual report.

Chair McCully asked whether any members had reviewed the 2025 report, noting that a business owner had asked him about the status of the Qrator program initiated in the previous budget year. The Chair asked Ms. Anderson to provide an outline of the Qrator program and its budget for members who might be unfamiliar with it.

Ms. Anderson stated that Qrator was a tourism quality-assurance program unveiled in summer 2024 and developed under contract with Kilohana, with whom she had worked closely. As of August 2025, 83 businesses had been certified. The program was intended to recognize tourism businesses undertaking positive actions for the community and the islands. Businesses could be certified in several areas, including providing excellent service, demonstrating cultural soundness, caring for the environment, and ensuring equity for their workers. The program enabled both visitors and residents to identify businesses that not only provided exceptional services but also contributed positively to the community.

Ms. Anderson stated that, at present, there was no budget to continue the program, although the website remained active, adding that it was hoped that the program would be resumed in Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27).

In response to a question from Chair McCully about Qrator's budget, Ms. Anderson said she would need to consult the records. The Chair commented that the individual who had contacted him had sent an article from *The Beat of Hawaiʻi*, which he understood to be a public-interest website. The article had stated that the Qrator budget was $700,000. Ms. Anderson reiterated that she would need to verify this information.

Chair McCully stated that Qrator had been designed to support small businesses by enabling tourists to identify them. Ms. Anderson added that the program had a website and was intended for all businesses in Hawaiʻi, including Alaska Airlines, restaurants, and smaller tour operators.

Chair McCully referred to an umbrella organization, the Rainforest Alliance, which allowed applicants who met its standards to display its logo on promotional materials, thereby assuring customers that the business behaved ethically and responsibly in relation to agriculture and the environment. The Chair added that the individual who had contacted him had noted that Qrator was no longer active, and that the article had reported the program as frozen and unfunded, despite still being cited as evidence that Hawaiʻi was advancing responsible tourism.

Chair McCully commented that, hearing such concerns, members of an advisory board would appropriately ask staff for clarification regarding the status of the Qrator program. The Chair pointed out that the key question was whether the Qrator program had been mentioned in the HTA annual report and whether the report provided the legislature with sufficient information to avoid misinterpretation based on media reports. Legislators might question the investment in the program and seek to understand the benefits it delivers to the community.

Chair McCully reiterated that this was an example of the type of inquiry Board members could make to obtain explanations from the CEO, commenting that the report submitted to the legislature had not mentioned that Qrator was unfunded or that there were concerns regarding the investment already made. The report had simply stated that the program had successfully certified 83 businesses across all sectors of the visitor industry, thereby suggesting that the program remained active.

Ms. Anderson clarified that the 2025 Annual Report covered the fiscal year from July 2024 to June 2025, noting that the events of concern had not been included in the FY25 report because they occurred in Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) and would appear in the next annual report. Chair McCully conceded that Qrator had still been active at the time the report was prepared in July 2025, and therefore, the report was accurate. He added that the program was administered by the Kilohana Collective of the Hawaiian Council, which provided reports to the HTA; after which, HTA staff worked closely with them to obtain the necessary documentation. The Chair noted that this was an example of the type of work members of an advisory board might undertake, given that questions had been raised about the precise role of the HTA Advisory Board. He added that he had introduced this example to begin discussion on agenda item 6 and invited comments from members.

Member Elmore stated that, regardless of whether a project originated with staff, a standing committee, or the Advisory Board, the final point of review was always with HTA staff and DBEDT, and that all proposals would ultimately be reviewed by HTA staff. She understood that any proposals brought forward by community members or constituents were required to move through one of these established routes, adding that if a community member approached a Board member with a suggestion, the process would be: committee, standing committee, advisory Board. Citing her museum proposal as an example, Member Elmore explained that the proposal had first been discussed in a committee, then in a standing committee, and then before the Advisory Board, after which it had proceeded to HTA and DBEDT staff.

Member Elmore asked whether standing committee chairs could serve the community effectively, noting that two standing committee meetings intended to review residents' suggestions had recently been cancelled. She asked how residents' suggestions could be considered if committee meetings did not occur, and whether such suggestions could be referred directly to DBEDT, bypassing the committee level.

In reply to a question from Chair McCully as to whether, as Chair of a standing committee, she had been informed of the cancellations and the reasons for them, Member Elmore replied that when the agenda had been circulated, she had been informed that the meeting would not take place.

Ms. Anderson explained that, since the Film Tourism and Sports Tourism Committees were newly established, the Director of DBEDT had indicated that agendas should be shared with him to ensure his approval of the proposed items. Chair McCully reiterated that on submission of the agenda to Dir. Tokioka, the Director had advised that the committee should not discuss the proposed points. Ms. Anderson added that the decision had been preceded by a discussion on the matter.

In response to a question from Chair McCully, Member Elmore stated that she had been informed that the agenda items would not be heard and that the meeting had been cancelled. An entity affiliated with the Hawaiʻi International Film Association had been scheduled to meet with her, and she had postponed that meeting. Commenting that she understood the Board's advisory role and wished to comply with the rules, Member Elmore asked whether this meant that all agendas required Dir. Tokioka's approval, noting that, based on her reading of the governing documents, she did not see such a requirement. She asked whether committee chairs were responsible for setting their own agendas.

Ms. Anderson responded that committee chairs did indeed set their agendas, but because the Film Tourism and Sports committees were new, Dir. Tokioka wished to supervise them, and for this reason, the agendas for the Film Tourism and Sports Committees had been routed through him.

Chair McCully stated that, based on previous board experience, he had concerns about unilateral cancellation of committee meetings by staff, the board chair, or any other agent. He referred to Article V, Committees, Section 1 of the revised bylaws, describing the establishment of committees as follows:

> "All committees may convene, as necessary, to receive information, updates, and recommendations from the Authority's staff and others."

He noted that this was the only language governing whether a committee could or could not meet, adding that a committee chair had the authority to convene a meeting, just as the Board chair had the responsibility to convene Board meetings. Chair McCully believed that a committee chair had the standing to convene a meeting. As Chair of the ASC, he intended to convene meetings as needed to address administrative issues. If the issue concerned the two newly created committees, he suggested discussing it with Dir. Tokioka for clarification. He believed this should be included as an agenda item at an upcoming meeting and asked Member Elmore for her view.

Member Elmore agreed and thanked the Chair for raising the issue. Member Belmonte also agreed, and Chair McCully invited further input.

Member Belmonte stated that it would be helpful for the Chair and vice chair of each committee to schedule meetings in advance with the relevant HTA staff, allowing them to collaborate on the agenda and determine whether the meeting for that month should proceed or be cancelled. She referred to the deadlines for filing agendas. Member Belmonte noted that she and her vice chair, Member Ojiri, had been meeting with Ms. Goo to stay organized, despite the drawback that meetings had to be planned far in advance. They had already scheduled meetings through May. She recommended working closely with the assigned staff member.

Member Elmore thanked Member Belmonte and stated that she and her vice chair had already made a practice of discussing agendas with HTA staff, yet meetings had still been cancelled.

Chair McCully referred to Article IV, Meetings, in the bylaws, which stated that regular meetings could be held for any purpose, and that:

> "Special meetings may be held at any time upon the call of the chairperson or upon the call of any two directors."

He noted that this issue had arisen under the previous Board, when the Chair had either failed to convene committee meetings or prevented them from being held. However, it was clear that under the bylaws already adopted, authority was conferred upon committee chairs to call for a meeting, and any two members could also do so.

Regarding the review process, Vice Chair Guy expressed his appreciation for staff's efforts in outlining the workflow. He noted that he had previously suggested to staff that some ideas had emerged from DMAP meetings, adding that he now had a better understanding of the workflow. Regarding the Qrator program, he stated that he had also read the article to which Chair McCully had referred, but the matter had not been discussed at the previous ASC meeting.

Vice Chair Guy asked whether, following the established process, the sequence should be Standing Committee, then the Committee, and finally the Full Board.

Vice Chair Guy suggested that it might be useful to recommend a presentation or report on the Qrator program to the full Board, as it was difficult to defend the program in the community or in legislative settings. He asked whether this committee was the appropriate venue to make such a recommendation, rather than expecting Ms. Anderson to address the matter spontaneously. He asked about the information staff believed the Advisory Board should have about the program, noting that there were public relations concerns and that a prepared presentation would be valuable.

Ms. Anderson stated that a status report on Qrator could be placed on the agenda for the next advisory board meeting. She explained that a request from a standing committee would typically relate to a new project and commented that a board member could email or call her for an update on an existing project.

Chair McCully acknowledged that the ASC had oversight responsibilities but believed that Qrator fell within the purview of the Hoʻokahua Committee since it related to destination stewardship. Ms. Anderson agreed with this analysis.

Noting that neither the Chair, Ms. Paulson, nor the Vice Chair of the Hoʻokahua Standing Committee (HSC) was present, Chair McCully commented that there had been previous discussions about presentations to the legislature, and he believed that Qrator was a program for which HTA staff requests for resources would be supported. He added that this was a good example of advisory board engagement, whether through the appropriate standing committee, through the full Advisory Board, or individually as a chair or vice chair in legislative discussions.

Expressing concern about timing, Ms. Anderson noted that the issue could be discussed first in HSC and before being referred to the full Board, or it could go directly to the Board for a status update.

Chair McCully agreed that any acceleration of the process would be welcome, given that the legislative session was scheduled to begin the following day.

In response to an inquiry from the Chair, Vice Chair Guy stated that he had seen the article previously discussed, although it had not been raised at the previous meeting he had chaired.

Ms. Anderson stated that the total budget for the development and implementation of the Qrator program had been approximately $750,000 in FY25.

Chair McCully reminded members that the committee's purview was to amend the administrative rules of the HTA, and the core document would be the staff handout under discussion, stating that information obtained from the Director of DBEDT and the HTA staff would serve as the floor, but not the ceiling. The ASC might choose to address broader or narrower interests as needed.

Ms. Anderson reviewed the list of reports to be submitted to the Advisory Board by HTA staff regularly, noting that the quarterly procurement status report would fulfil Chair McCully's request to be kept informed of payment status.

The list of reports was as follows:

1. CEO Report of Staff's Activities
2. Quarterly Financial Reports
3. Quarterly Procurement Status Report

4. Quarterly Market Reports

Chair McCully recalled that Ms. Chun from the DBEDT research department had previously presented a report at board meetings and asked whether this practice would continue. He suggested that Ms. Chun could be allotted a specific amount of time to present a report at the Advisory Board meeting, and Ms. Anderson agreed.

Chair McCully added that Ms. Chun could determine which information to present from the voluminous data available to her, and Ms. Anderson commented that HTA staff would work with her. Chair McCully commented that such a report could constitute some of the most valuable minutes spent in Board meetings, as it would provide the granular data that Board members needed. He added that this would be the fifth reporting requirement for advisory board meetings.

Chair McCully asked whether there were any testimonies or questions from members of the public, and Ms. Anderson reported that someone had inquired about the status of the Chief Stewardship Officer position. She stated that paperwork was being processed through DBEDT to request that the position be filled, adding that approval rested with the Director, although the timeline remained uncertain.

Chair McCully asked Ms. Anderson to report this information at the Advisory Board meeting the following week.

Referring to the annual report, Ms. Anderson stated that Ms. Hagihara-Loo had sent it to Board members on January 9, 2026.

Chair McCully noted that no roll-call vote was required for this item, as it was for discussion only, and reminded members that, in the future, the reports specified in the document would be submitted to Advisory Board meetings on a recurring basis.

The Chair informed members that they were now moving to Agenda Item No. 7, and that the discussion would take place in Executive Session.

In response to an inquiry from the Chair about AG Cole, Ms. Anderson replied that he was not available and stated that the purpose of the Executive Session was to address personnel matters. She informed members that the Zoom link for the Executive Session would be sent to all members.

The committee members left the public meeting at 1:58 p.m. to join the executive session.

7. Discussion and/or Action on the HTA President and CEO Search***

[Executive Session]

8. Adjournment

The committee members returned to the public session at 2:49 p.m.

Chair McCully reported that during the executive session, the committee members discussed the HTA President and CEO search, which was to be an agenda item at the January 29, 2026, HTA Advisory Board meeting. The Advisory Board would discuss the CEO's roles and responsibilities in light of recent amendments to the legislation.

Chair McCully adjourned the meeting at 2:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Sheillane Reyes
Recorder