

OUR VIEW

CITY DUMP

Expanding Kapolei dump tough choice

Honolulu is so often “stuck” when it comes to major projects or needs: accepting voters’ will and getting rail done; addressing gridlock in Ewa and Waianae; figuring out what to do with the city’s garbage so that the Waimanalo Gulch Sanitary Landfill in Kapolei can be closed.

And we really need to figure out what to do with this garbage.

There’s no use arguing that “government” is to blame: Honolulu County voters are the government, insofar as we choose our county and state representatives. It certainly is a failure that we’re unable to get to common ground on issues such as where to site Hawaii’s biggest pipeline of garbage. However, that’s not so much the fault of specific public servants as it is of the Rube Goldberg system of “checks and balances” common to most municipalities — regulations, protections, provisions for public input, legal rights to challenge, etc., which can leave major decisions tied in knots.

“Down in the dumps,” for real. Sadly, that’s where we are in the tortured saga of the Waimanalo Gulch Sanitary Landfill (WGSL). A state order requires the city close it, and Mayor Rick Blangiardi pledged repeatedly to use all tools at his disposal to make it happen. But Honolulu has twice been blocked by state law from

choosing certain promising sites, and there's nowhere to go. The city now says it has no other alternative than to continue taking the city's garbage to an expanded WGSL.

Sites had been considered that would meet physical requirements, with stable land, and accepted, tested environmental protections available for use, but all have been forcefully opposed by neighbors who live (even somewhat) nearby. That's been translated into state law barring otherwise-suitable sites within half a mile of residences, such as the proposed Ameron landfill in Kaneohe, from consideration.

In the past year, state legislators sprang into action to bar a last-ditch city choice of a site west of Kamehameha Highway and 2.5 miles from Whitmore Village. That site, where pineapples are grown by the Dole company, is now off-limits because it is viable for agriculture, and because it's over an aquifer.

The stalemate between city and state puts Honolulu in a no-win position. As Blangiardi has telegraphed, rejection of the Dole property leaves the city with no other choice than extending use of the Waimanalo Gulch landfill.

High-tech alternatives may be plausible, but they are not likely financially feasible at this time. And shipping Oahu's garbage elsewhere should flatly be dismissed — it's our garbage, and it's our problem to deal with.

For the immediate future, the city must find a way to continue trash disposal at WGSL — which will likely involve contentious pushback before community acceptance comes, in exchange for other considerable benefits for that area.

Various methods of compensating the community and mitigating the affront might be considered: road improvements to eliminate slowdowns and dangerous gridlock in commuting from the Waianae Coast, as garbage trucks contribute to this problem; compensatory public works in the vicinity, such as expanded parks and improved infrastructure; additional screening and mitigation of the surrounding area so that the proximity to a dump is not as visually offensive.

Long-suffering West Oahu residents might also argue that since they bear the community cost of siting the dump, they should be compensated directly. The city has tried repeatedly to inaugurate a monthly fee for trash collection; should this occur, it seems reasonable that communities benefiting from a more-remote landfill participate, with revenues going to compensate WGSL neighbors and to research alternative means of handling this waste.