



DEREK S.K. KAWAKAMI, MAYOR
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News Release

For Immediate Release: October 18, 2022

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Mayor Kawakami signs Bill No. 2879 relating to sea level rise construction regulations

LĪHU'E – Mayor Derek S. K. Kawakami signed Bill No. 2879, on Friday, Oct. 14, amending construction design standards to incorporate sea level rise impacts – making Kaua'i one of the first counties in the nation to enact regulation based on sea level rise modeling projections.

“Today is truly a historic day as I sign this bill into law,” said Mayor Derek S. K. Kawakami. “We are grateful to our Planning Department and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's Climate Resilience Collaborative for their collective work on this progressive measure. Kaua'i is no stranger to the impacts of climate change, as we've seen in the floods of 2018 and the recent historic south swell and king tides in July which resulted in significant infrastructure damage. This new ordinance ensures that the inevitable effects of coastal erosion and flooding are determining factors in the future growth and development of our island.”

Bill No. 2879 was passed unanimously by the Kaua'i County Council on October 5, 2022. A bill-signing ceremony was held Friday at the Līhu'e Civic Center's Mo'ikeha Rotunda, with over 25 representatives from various agencies and organizations involved in the creation and passing of the bill attending the event.

“I want to thank the Planning Department and its leadership for this first-of-its-kind landmark policy that will also help other municipalities as a model to better prepare for our future,” said Council Vice Chair Mason Chock, who also serves as chairperson for the Council's Planning Committee.

“Government is often known to be reactive, so it’s nice to see a proactive approach from Kaua’i County.”

The signed ordinance creates an updated Constraint Sea Level Rise District in the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance to address sea level rise impacts on annual high wave run up and passive flooding that’s projected to occur within this century. The ordinance requires the lowest floor of all new residential construction, and substantial residential construction improvements, to be elevated two feet above the highest sea level rise flood elevation. It also requires all new non-residential construction, and substantial non-residential improvements, to be elevated at least one foot above the highest sea level rise flood elevation.

“Living on a small island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, there’s no ignoring the threat of climate change on our natural and built environments,” said Ka’āina Hull, County of Kaua’i’s planning director. “This bill is a result of years of hard work and collaboration and sets a new standard for planning policies which previously have been based solely on historical data and events. We’re incredibly grateful to all involved in this groundbreaking effort that will propel Kaua’i toward a more secure and resilient future.”

In collaboration with the Planning Department, the UH Mānoa Climate Resilience Collaborative (formerly the Coastal Geology Group) helped draft Bill No. 2879 to incorporate its innovative computer model projections. The modeling shows areas across the Hawaiian Islands where chronic coastal flooding and erosion are expected to occur as sea level rises in the coming decades. These projections are reflected in an online atlas called the [County of Kaua’i Sea Level Rise Constraint District Viewer](#). Elevation design standards outlined in the new ordinance are based on annual high wave run up and passive flooding hazards obtained from the viewer.

“The Climate Resilience Collaborative has worked closely with the Kaua’i County Planning Department to fine-tune the data to ensure the highest quality and create a stand-alone viewer that can be used as a planning tool,” said Chip Fletcher, *interim* Dean of the UH Mānoa School of Ocean and

Earth Science and Technology (SOEST) and director of the Collaborative. “The latest IPCC reports tell us with high confidence that sea level rise will persist for ‘centuries to millennia’ due to ongoing warming of the oceans and melting of the ice sheets. There is nothing we can do to stop sea level rise. This measure will minimize the threat to public health and safety, promote resilient planning and design and minimize the expenditure of public money for costly flood control projects necessitated by accelerating sea level rise. Kaua’i is providing an example for coastal communities around the nation of the next right step in building community resiliency to climate change impacts.”

Other partners involved in the drafting of Bill No. 2879 include Hawai’i Sea Grant, Department of Land and Natural Resources, the Pacific Islands Ocean Observing System, SSFM International, and Sea Engineering, Inc.

The ordinance took effect upon Mayor Kawakami’s approval and signature on October 14, 2022.

Ordinance No. 1134 (Bill No. 2879), will be available to view at

www.kauai.gov/Council/Ordinances.





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