Cooper, John DeSoto, John Goody, Joe Lapilio, Tesha H. Malama, Janice Marsters, Richard Poirier, Chuck Prentiss, and George West. The voluntary members of the committee will provide advisory recommendations to the City concerning the selection of a future site for a landfill to accept MSW, ash and residue from the City's H-POWER waste-to-energy facility, and construction and demolition debris waste for the island of Oahu. The committee met for the first time this month and is expected to take approximately six months before making final recommendations.

Tim Steinberger, director of the city's Department of Environmental Services, reported to the Council committee that the advisory committee will necessarily have to consider WGSL in comparison to other locations in order to make its recommendations. The 2009 LUC order acknowledged it will take the City at least seven years to construct and open a new landfill, but required WGSL to no longer accept MSW as of July 2012. Therefore, the City will request an extension of the LUC deadline for acceptance of MSW at the landfill. The recent storms that closed WGSL emphasize the need for a landfill to accept MSW that cannot presently be reused, recycled or burned at H-POWER, such as certain bulky items, sewage sludge, medical waste and H-POWER residue. Completion of a third boiler at H-POWER is scheduled for mid-2012, which will substantially reduce the amount of waste disposal at WGSL.

Bills Clarify Property Tax on Historic Homes

Council Chair Nestor Garcia and Councilmembers Romy Cachola and Ikaika Anderson have all introduced bills—Bills 2, 3 and 4—to address the real property tax exemptions on historic homes. Both bills completely gut the exemption ordinance and add new language intended to facilitate enforcement of the exemption requirements.

Both bills propose clarifying amendments such as requiring that the property be placed on the Hawaii Register of Historic Places, reasonable visual access is available to the public, the property be in average condition and not dilapidated, and that a plaque be placed in proximity to the property properly identifying the historic nature of the home. Cachola's bill goes a little bit further by offering tax credits to incent property owners to rehabilitate and maintain historic residential properties.

With the pending budget deficit, the Council believes that all residents of the City should bear the burden for provision of city services. Recent media attention has focused on the fact that those who own historic real property, but only pay the $300 minimum tax, are not carrying their fair share of the tax burden to pay for city services. The proposed ordinance is intended to more critically apply the historic property exemption based on the spirit and intent of the law and eliminate potential loopholes.

Landfill Committee Selected

In a briefing before a joint City Council committee, City officials reported that the search is underway for possible landfill sites to supplement or replace Oahu’s only municipal solid waste (MSW) landfill, the Waimanalo Gulch Sanitary Landfill (WGSL). A Land Use Commission (LUC) order in 2009 required the City to begin the process of identifying one or more landfill sites to supplement or replace the WGSL. The City’s own Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan calls for the City to identify a new MSW landfill site by 2012 with the assistance of a panel of community members to advise the City.

According to the City, the 12 members of the landfill site selection committee were chosen based on multiple criteria including technical expertise and experience, community involvement and availability to serve. All committee meetings will be open to the public and to public comment. Mayor Peter Carlisle, who has inherited this very difficult challenge facing the island of Oahu, has said he is committed to a process that is open and transparent and is confidence that all committee members will conduct themselves with integrity and impartially in their deliberations.

The members of the Landfill Advisory Committee are: Bruce Anderson, Ph.D., David Arakawa, Thomas Arizumi, David Cooper, John DeSoto, John Goody, Joe Lapilio, Tesha H. Malama, Janice Marsters, Richard Poirier, Chuck Prentiss, and George West. The voluntary members of the committee will provide advisory recommendations to the City concerning the selection of a future site for a landfill to accept MSW, ash and residue from the City's H-POWER waste-to-energy facility, and construction and demolition debris waste for the island of Oahu. The committee met for the first time this month and is expected to take approximately six months before making final recommendations.

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Continues on back.
Low-Interest Home Repair Loans Available

Owners of homes damaged by recent rain storms, or otherwise needing repairs, may be eligible for low-interest loans from the City of up to $75,000. Qualified owner-occupants may receive loans for such work as reroofing, repainting, electrical and plumbing repairs, termite damage repairs, and accessibility improvements. The loans are available to homeowners who do not exceed gross annual income limits that range from $55,650 for a one-member household to $104,900 for an eight-member household. Other restrictions apply.

Loan interest rates range from 0 to 2 percent. Monthly loan payments are based on a 15-year maturity for loans under $60,000, and 20-year maturity for loans $60,000 and over. Loans will be secured by a mortgage on the property. For more information, or to obtain a loan application, go to http://www.honolulu.gov/dcs/housingloans.htm or call the City’s Honolulu Rehabilitation Loan Program at (808) 768-7076.

State Attempts to Borrow From Rail Transit Fund—Again

Facing a looming $100 million budget deficit, the State Senate has introduced a bill (SB 1426)—for the third year in a row—that would borrow money from the City’s rail transit fund. Although in the past, the State of Hawaii has displayed steady long-term fiscal planning, prudent past decision-making practices, relatively stable real property values, and relatively low unemployment rates, it has still been unable to avoid the negative effects of the struggling economy, and it needs to find innovative ways to balance its budget for the current fiscal biennium and beyond. Sizeable budget shortfalls for the current and upcoming fiscal years require immediate and decisive action and they are running out of options.

To meet the current and future financial needs of the State, the legislature believes that returning a portion of the moneys transferred to the City and County of Honolulu derived from the imposition of a county surcharge on state general excise and use taxes, is a reasonable means of achieving a balanced budget without adversely impacting the City’s fiscal status or resorting to a drastic reduction in state services or personnel. According to the Senate, the revenues already derived from the county surcharge and transferred to the City are largely unencumbered and will not be needed in the foreseeable future. The State believes that these moneys would be better utilized if applied to the immediate financial needs of the State which inevitably impact the city.

By borrowing not more than $200 million from the balance of the fund (currently estimated at over $500 million) and repaying the amount borrowed with revenues derived from the issuance of state general obligation bonds, the State can maintain current services and personnel until the state economy recovers. At the same time, by ensuring that the loan is repaid in a timely manner through revenues derived from state general obligation bonds, any detrimental financial effect to the city and county of Honolulu will be avoided. In addition, to help ameliorate any detrimental financial impact to the city and county of Honolulu, the bill would extend the lifespan of the surcharge on state general excise and use taxes for two additional years.

The bill has been scheduled for a hearing by Senator Will Espero, Chair of the Committee on Public Safety, Government Operations and Military Affairs on Saturday, February 12, at 9:00 a.m. in Room 229.