

2025 CALIFORNIA LAND RECYCLING CONFERENCE
TRANSFORMING LAND, EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

Reviving 'Āina: Community-Driven, Culturally Aligned Collaboration in the Maui Brownfields Project

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OFFICE OF BROWNFIELDS
Department of Toxic Substances Control - Cleanup In Vulnerable Communities Initiative



**CENTER FOR CREATIVE
LAND RECYCLING**
RECLAIM. CONNECT. TRANSFORM.

Reviving ‘Āina

*Community-Driven, Culturally Aligned Collaboration in the
Maui Brownfields Project*

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CALRC 2025 | Sept 17 | 11:45am – 12:45pm

ENVIRONMENTAL RECOVERY INITIATIVE



Maui
UNITED WAY



Hā Sustainability
Empower. Innovate. Thrive.



2023:

The Maui Wildfires

In August 2023, wildfires caused widespread destruction in Lāhainā and the surrounding areas of Maui, displacing residents, damaging homes, businesses, and cultural sites.

As the community recovers, there are important land use questions ahead; how to rebuild in ways that are safe, equitable, and rooted in the local host culture of Native Hawaiians.





The fires destroyed more than 2,200 structures—including homes, businesses, and cultural spaces—caused roughly \$5.5 billion in damages, and took the lives of 102 of our beloved community members... friends, neighbors, aunties and uncles.

Post-Wildfire Needs



Communities need more than just cleanup.

They need:

- Safe, affordable, attainable housing (to own and rent)
- Restorative public spaces
- Cultural and historical healing
- Resilient, safely managed infrastructure
- Land management for wildfire mitigation and forest restoration, food sustainability
- Transparent and inclusive land reuse planning

Why us?

Why MUW took the lead

From day one of the fires, Maui United Way was embedded in wildfire recovery.

As a trusted local nonprofit with a mission and board to serve Maui Nui, MUW:

- Responded quickly to community need
- Applied for the EPA grant to keep equity at the center of our response
- Formed a team grounded in cultural context and public trust



A First for Hawai'i



This is a nonprofit-led EPA Brownfields Assessment in Hawai'i

A model centered on:

- Local leadership
- Community-driven priorities
- Culturally aligned place-based redevelopment that focuses on supporting our residents

Our Community First Philosophy

- Every brownfield is more than a parcel of land, it's part of a living community
- Land use affects every part of our wellbeing, mental, physical, and emotional
- In order to maximize public good, decisions must be authentically co-created, not imposed
- Understanding and acknowledging the history of a brownfield and the community it occupies is crucial
- We must recognize and value local and indigenous knowledge
- Equity, healing, and trust are central to successful outcomes

“We don’t speak for the community. We create spaces so they can speak for themselves.”

Rethinking the Process



Traditional Model:

- Consultant led
- Identify sites
- Minimal community engagement
- Conduct assessments
- Top down reuse planning

VS

Our Model:

- Community led, culturally aligned
- Co-identify and prioritize sites with community members
- Assess with intention
- Participatory reuse planning
- Rebuild for long-term impact

Community at the Center

Our team began with listening:

- Community co-design meetings
- Stakeholder meetings
- Surveys and story sharing
- Partner input from intergenerational stakeholders (kupuna to keiki), Lahaina Strong, Mālama Maui Nui, as well as other nonprofits and cultural groups



Prioritizing Community-Identified Sites

Instead of choosing sites based on convenience or developer interest, we're working with communities to identify sites to prioritize by asking questions in meetings with the public.

- What sites in particular carry historical or sentimental significance on a community level?
- What criteria are most important to the community when choosing a site to prioritize?
- What kinds of uses or spaces would they most like to see?



A Vision for Reuse

A Community Vision for Reuse

We will continue to hold meetings with the community to assess what is wanted and what is needed in places of revisioning.

Depending on what people want out of brownfield cleanup and reuse in their communities, we will adjust our focus to prioritize:

- Affordable housing
- A cleaner, healthier environment
- Jobs & economic opportunities
- Green or open space
- Safer neighborhoods
- Better transportation access
- Preserving culture & history



Climate Resilience & Adaptation

Maui increasingly faces threats from wildfires, hurricanes, tsunamis, sea-level rise, and erosion as a result of climate change.

Redevelopment will incorporate resilient site design to better withstand climate impacts.



**Lahaina,
Kahului, &
Wailuku**



Lahaina as a Focal Point

Our work in Lahaina will be focused on the cleanup and reuse of brownfields created by the devastating fires in an effort to reimagine, then build a more resilient community for the many Lahaina residents who have had to move to temporary housing waiting for Lahaina to be rebuilt.



Kahului Target Area



The Kahului Target Area is a designated disadvantaged community and the island's commercial and industrial center. The area faces significant environmental and health burdens, ranking in the 94th percentile for toxic air releases and high in cancer and heart disease rates. EPA funding will support revitalizing vacant lots and aging commercial corridors, with potential for new multi-family housing. This project aims to improve economic and health outcomes for residents.

Wailuku Target Area

The Wailuku Target Area is also considered a disadvantaged community and is just west of Kahului. Wailuku serves as Maui's civic, financial, and cultural center. The area ranks in the 78th percentile for lead-based paint exposure and 96th for lower life expectancy.

Brownfields in Wailuku include vacant lots and underused commercial sites, with strong potential for revitalization to benefit the community.



The background consists of two large, overlapping curved shapes. The shape on the left is a bright yellow semi-circle. The shape on the right is a slightly darker orange semi-circle, overlapping the yellow one.

Brownfields



Brownfields in a New Context

Many fire-impacted sites now meet the definition of brownfields:

Potentially contaminated, underused, and uncertain in terms of redevelopment.

We see these sites as an opportunity for healing and community empowerment. A new vision for a brighter, more resilient future.

The Process

Phase 1: Site Inventory & Prioritization (Jun–Nov 2025)

- Stakeholder meeting
- Community surveys (online & paper)
- Interactive co-design workshops: nominate & map sites

Phase 2: Site Assessments (Dec 2025–Oct 2026)

- Public info meetings & communications to explain environmental assessment processes and timelines.
- Updates via website,
- Fact sheets, infographics, and community meetings on assessment results

Phase 3: Reuse Planning (Nov 2026–Feb 2027)

- Visioning workshops with community input
- Stakeholder work sessions for alignment
- Public presentation of reuse plan & next steps



Community events

We had a community co-design event last Friday identifying sites and prioritization criteria for Brownfields selection and redevelopment. Here, we used sticky notes to put on both previously identified, and newly identified sites and notes from community members about each. We also asked them to add the factors most important to them when deciding which sites to prioritize in cleanup and reuse.



Early Results from Round One

- Community is excited about this project!
- New sites identified by community
- Themes from reuse visioning (e.g., affordable housing, preserving culture, green space)
- How input will shape next steps



Looking Ahead

Community Events Looking Forward

- **Site Assessments:**

Public meetings and updates to inform the community about assessment activities and results.

- **Reuse Planning:**

Visioning workshops to collaboratively explore redevelopment opportunities



Refining & Prioritizing Sites

November / December Workshops

Share updated site inventory with community

- **Star Voting Activity:** rank top sites for cleanup/assessment
- **Small Group Discussions:** why these sites matter, what benefits they bring
- **Survey:** extend participation beyond the room
- **Output:** a clear community-informed priority list



Assessments Guided by Community Input

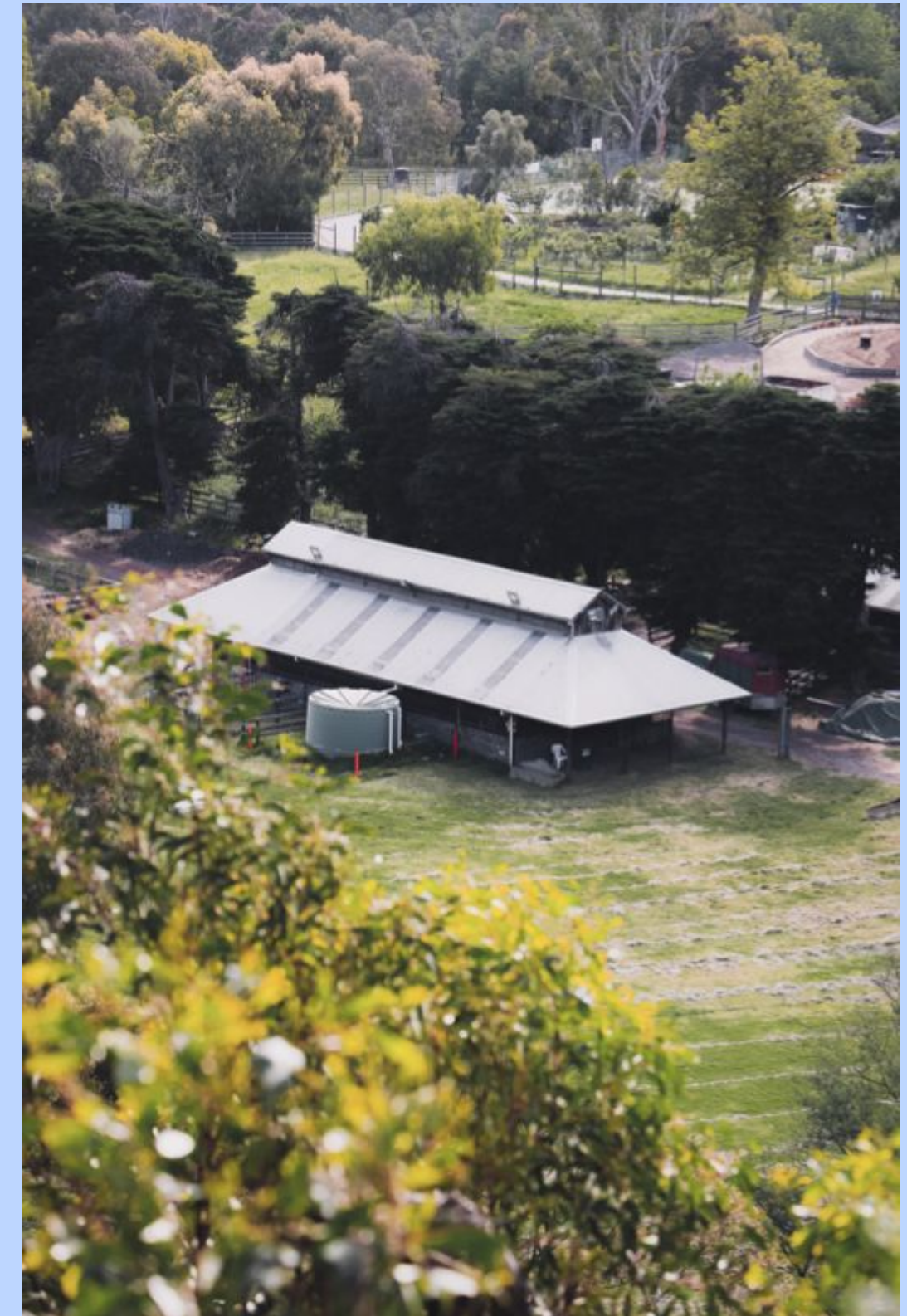


- Phase I & II assessments will focus on sites prioritized by residents
- Technical sampling and evaluation paired with ongoing public updates
- Ensures **equity and transparency**: assessments are not developer-driven, but community-directed

Spring Reuse Visioning Workshops

Co-Designing the Future with CCLR

- Partnering with **Center for Creative Land Recycling (CCLR)** to host reuse workshops
- Explore community visions for reuse: housing, parks, cultural spaces, resilience hubs
- Translate technical findings into **locally aligned redevelopment concepts**
- Build capacity for long-term planning rooted in community priorities



How MUW and Hā Ensure Accessibility and Inclusion



- Scheduling meetings at convenient times and locations



- Food is provided at community events



- Providing a keiki corner or child care support during community meetings to enable greater participation by families



- Holding events in familiar spaces to foster trust and comfort.

Challenges, Values, and Goals

Challenges We Navigate



- Community burnout post-disaster
- Land ownership and lease complexity
- Environmental unknowns
- Balancing the pressure to move quickly vs. the necessity of moving meaningfully
- Rebuilding trust in systems

Our Core Values

We are grounded in and committed to:

- Community-first processes
- Cultural humility and Indigenous knowledge
- Equity in environmental decision-making
- Collaboration across sectors
- Transparent, replicable models



Transforming Land, Empowering Communities

This project shows what's possible
when:

- The community leads
- The process centers the local culture
- MUW was intentional with choosing local partners to do this work



Mahalo & Discussion

We'd love to hear from you:

What's happening in your community?

What challenges do you face in centering equity and culture?

How might this model support your work?

Contact Us: Hannah@hasustainability.com

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