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Energy firms get new friend in permitting

Pacific Business News (Honolulu) - by [Nanea Kalani](#) Pacific Business News

All eyes were on Joshua Strickler as he introduced himself to a roomful of Hawaii investors and entrepreneurs at the **Hawaii Venture Capital Association's** monthly gathering last week.

The group's meeting was focused on renewable energy projects in Hawaii, and attendees looked to Strickler as a potential savior from what they say is one of the biggest challenges — the state's permitting process.

Strickler, 35, was recently named to a new post in the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism's energy branch with the title of renewable energy facilitator. The Legislature passed a law earlier this year creating his position with the aim of fast-tracking approval for clean-energy facilities.

Those looking to build and run renewable energy projects in the state are faced with multiple permits at the county and state levels, including zoning and building permits and environmental assessments. They apply to projects such as windmills, solar farms and geothermal and biodiesel plants, and investors are often deterred by the state's lengthy approval process.

"I'm the permitting piece of the puzzle," Strickler said. "Right now the permitting process comes across as just a bunch of acronyms and requirements. My job is to help talk businesses back from the edge and help them navigate through the process."

In creating the position, lawmakers appropriated \$112,000 for salary and benefits.

Strickler said his new role will not eliminate any required permits. He will meet with project developers in the planning stages to identify necessary permits and help them complete requirements before approaching various state and county agencies.

"My job is a lot of communication," he said. "In a way, I'll be acting as a screen to help vet the projects before they move on. There's a lot of work that can be done up front and, by being prepared, projects can work through the process more quickly."

The number of required permits varies depending on a project's size and location, Strickler said. He cited as an example the Kaheawa Wind Farm on Maui, a 20-turbine farm that supplies 30 megawatts of power to **Maui Electric Co.** The project required 30 county and state permits before going online in 2006.



Christina Failma, PBN

Joshua Strickler, the state's new renewable energy facilitator, hopes to accelerate projects such as wind farms by making the permitting process faster and easier for energy firms.

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Strickler, a licensed engineer and attorney, says his skills as a problem solver and project manager will help him in his new role, as well as land-use and environmental law courses he completed during law school.

A native of Nellysford, Va., Strickler earned his mechanical engineering degree from **Virginia Military Institute** and law degree from the **University of Hawaii's** William S. Richardson School of Law.

Before moving to Hawaii in 2003, he worked in various roles managing utility and energy facilities, including running the power plant and electrical grid as station engineer at the Admundsen-Scott South Pole Station in Antarctica.

He most recently was an attorney with Honolulu firm Kobayashi Sugita & Goda, where he worked on construction litigation.

Ted Peck, who heads DBEDT's Energy Planning and Policy branch, said his office, on average, sees three to five renewable energy projects a week.

"With Josh on board, we'll be creating a body of knowledge and develop sort of an FAQ [list of frequently asked questions] for folks who want to do renewable energy projects in the state," Peck said. "We want to remove unnecessary barriers, while being guardians of the limited resources of the state. We want to make this as easy as possible."

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