

The Garden Island

In our opinion

Caught in the political current

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We may no longer be surprised when elected officials prioritize political gains over public service, but that won't stop us from at least illuminating the continuing improprieties for the community to decide.

Under the broken leadership of Chair Bill "Kaipo" Asing, the Kaua'i County Council this week deferred for six months a resolution to establish a policy for facilitating open governance and Internet access to public documents.

What should have been a quick around-the-table approval instead sadly slipped into an inexcusable delay of an overdue prescription to improve the county's level of openness. Conveniently, the council will reconsider the resolution in December — after the election.

We can certainly appreciate how hard it would be to campaign on something as controversial as making it easier for community members to access a diverse array of public records by posting the documents online and making them searchable by text.

We can also sympathize with how difficult of a sell this would be to constituents. "Yes, if we implement these practices you'll be able to stay more informed about the legislation we're considering that affects your life. Yes, in a democracy the people are vested with the ultimate decision-making power. Yes, we believe an informed, aware and engaged electorate is an important component of good governance. And yes, moving in this direction will boost the county's overall efficiency and save taxpayer dollars."

But no, Asing deftly thwarted the resolution, stifling any real discussion. How the chair already knew he had the votes to defer the agenda item gives pause for concern too, but that's another issue altogether.

So as it stands, Councilman Tim Bynum's practical proposed policy — similar versions long ago put in place in communities elsewhere throughout the country — will apparently not be going into effect here anytime soon. (We also applaud Councilwoman Lani Kawahara for joining Bynum as the only other member to vote against the motion to defer.)

The curious half-year delay causes us to speculate that Asing must simply be banking on Bynum not being reelected in November to another two-year term.

We call on the council to set aside personality conflicts and political motivations for the benefit of the public. This basic policy for improved government transparency and access to open records should be passed without further delay.