



2020 Hawai'i Island Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Ikaika Marzo
Candidate Race: Hawai'i County Mayor
Candidate Website: www.ikaikamarzo.org



1. In 2018, the Hawaii County Council passed Bill 108 (now Ordinance 2018-114), which regulates un-hosted short-term vacation rentals (STVRs) in Hawaii County. What policies would you implement to further regulate or deregulate short-term vacation rentals on Hawaii Island, whether hosted or un-hosted, and what will be the economic impact(s) of those policies?

The county seemed to rush the decision on STVRs without properly assessing its economic impact, and was unreasonable and uncompassionate with the time-line for their registration -- especially for those that lost vacation rentals in the 2018 eruption who wish to rebuild and be registered, but have been hampered by the delays in re-establishing county access. With the economy on the brink of depression, we must re-examine some of the policies and established rules that prevent un-hosted vacation rentals from prospering, while still ensuring that STVRs are taxed and regulated. A clear process is needed both for the residents to file complaints and for the county to respond appropriately. We want to help our residents that supplement their incomes through neighborly, respectful STVRs that operate with aloha.

2. In 2019, the Real Property Tax Office implemented policies to assess properties at their "highest and best use". This changed the real property tax classifications for many residents, mainly those on agricultural-zoned parcels smaller than one-acre in size, increasing their real property tax bill. What are your thoughts on the County real property tax and how revenue may be increased without negative impacts for residents?

It's alarming that our island pays the highest property tax relative to income in the state, which makes housing unaffordable. I just put out a press release with details on property taxes in the county (found on ikaikamarzo.org), but to make housing affordable we need to stop raising property taxes and find ways to cut them for the most vulnerable families in our community. The policies implemented at the tax office added revenue for the county's budget, yet Maui county pays less on average in property taxes and has more to show for it.

New revenue is tricky, because we just can't raise property taxes any more. We need to strengthen our economy to get more out of the GET, but also, we need new ideas like "sustainable tourism green fees" which have helped in similar small regions like Venice, Bali, Galapagos and Cancun. Those funds could maintain our tourist areas as well as improve environmental conservation, leaving more of our tax revenues for our residents' needs. I've worked in tourism over a decade and shared this idea with thousands of visitors from all over the world. Their feedback is positive because this improves visitor experience, too.

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3. Hawai'i County residents generate over 200,000 tons of solid waste each year. In 2019, the County closed the Hilo landfill and is now hauling solid waste across the island to a landfill in Pu'uuanahulu. Additionally, due to significant decreases in the global market for recyclables, the County of Hawai'i is no longer accepting some of the types of materials collected at the County recycling & transfer stations. What solutions would you propose to resolve the County's solid waste dilemma?

The bottom line is that we need to invest in a long term, great solution, and include top solid waste technology experts and our everyday community members in the conversation because whatever decision we make we must do the proper research to make the right one for our people and land. We need to advocate for funding at the state and federal levels as any long-term solution will be an investment. I am interested in exploring options where our waste is generated to produce energy, as that is another challenge Hawai'i faces. One example of a solution is Waste to Energy which is successful in Sweden through which 99% of their waste is recycled and only 1% ends up in a landfill. After processing and sorting, garbage is put into furnaces to produce electricity. The recycled waste is used as a resource, instead of piling up.

In the meantime, we can enable our community to implement local grass-roots recycling and reuse options, like what's happening at Puna Precious Plastics. If we can turn these materials into a resource, less of them will end up in our landfill, extending its life; and less of them will end up in the outdoors and in the ocean, protecting our most valued ecosystems and resources.

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4. Median home prices in Hawaii County continue to rise with shrinking inventory and increasing demand. Since 2011, the median sales price for a residential home in Hawaii County has increased, year to year, by as little as 0.38% (2015-2016) up to 13.46% (2012-2013) per year. What are your top three (3) actionable items to address housing affordability?

Housing is a significant concern driven by the lack of available and affordable units island wide. As housing affordability drops, we can expect homelessness to rise, making this an important problem for our community to focus on.

- 1. Reduce Burden of the Permitting Process:** The permitting process has been a broken system for a long time. It's a system that has been working against our construction industry instead of working with them. While other industries have had impacts from the global pandemic, construction has been steady. We need to streamline the permitting process to be quicker and more efficient. The more permits go out, the more jobs we will have in our community, and the more affordable housing units will be available.
- 2. Section 8 Housing:** We need to secure more funding through grant writing for Section 8 (County Housing) to help more low-income families get into homes and more healthy, stable situations. Separately addressing the housing needs of the most vulnerable demographics will also reduce the strain on other County services like policing and Parks and Rec. and possibly reduce the homeless population.
- 3. Advocate for Awarding of Hawaiian Homelands:** Our local leaders can be much more vocal at the state level to make sure that our indigenous kupuna are not dying on the waiting list for long-promised housing. This is important for our local communities because it also would increase our housing inventory, buffer the increase in home sale prices, and drive our real estate market.

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5. The Hawai'i state legislature recently proposed legislation that would put the responsibility on the counties to research and provide data on topics such as energy, coastal zone/sea level rise, etc. as they relate to climate change, without addressing funding for any related expenses. What three (3) specific solutions would you propose to address climate change, and how would these proposals be funded?

Hawai'i County and our community is just completing their review of our 2020 Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan which already includes a mitigation action plan against climate change and its effects. With climate change, we can expect more storms, more flooding, and more potential to disrupt our island's imports and its crops. We take on the effects of climate change by improving our island's infrastructure and resilience as well as our emergency response.

- 1. Incentives to boost local and novel agriculture and reduce our reliance on fossil-fuel driven imports and petroleum products.** We have so much potential to expand our local food production with farming and aquaculture, plus new opportunities to produce substitutes such as bioplastics, textiles, insulation, lumber and paint from novel crops like hemp. We can do this if our government enables our communities, removes legal barriers and offers tax incentives to new growers, a plan that needs minimal initial funding.
- 2. Incentives for local energy sustainability.** While our county is already a national leader in energy sustainability, we're not even half-way to where we want to be. We can offer financial incentives to locals to use greener energy, combined with offering incentives to global energy leaders to collaborate with our county, make the best and most Pono use of its globally unique natural energy resources.
- 3. Proactively improve our emergency response** to deal with more frequent, concurrent disasters following the 2020 Multi-Hazard Mitigation plan and using FEMA programs and funding to the largest possible extent.

We need to be resilient in an increasingly unstable world, and that means investing in self-sustaining food production like farming, hunting and fishing as well as local processing, modernizing our Civil Defense to deal with simultaneous and long-lasting challenges, and making sure that our renewable energy investments are well-managed and pono within their local communities. Fixing our recycling and waste management program is a big priority so we don't contribute to the problem and set a good example for our keiki. Finally, we need to protect our oceans and reefs and fight opportunistic invasive species, which contribute to localized climate change. Only by being proactive on all these fronts can we best protect ourselves against the effects of climate change.

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6. In 2015, the state legislature adopted a renewable portfolio standard (RPS) of 100 percent by the year 2045, positioning Hawai'i to become the first U.S. state to produce all its electricity from local renewable energy sources and establishing interim targets of 30 percent by 2020, 40 percent by 2030, and 70 percent by 2040. What is your position on expanding geothermal and/or other forms of renewable energy on Hawai'i Island?

Our county needs to be energy sustainable by 2045 and I support taking ethical steps to get us closer to that goal.

I am excited to push towards clean energy and make a mindful shift from our dependency on fossil fuels to green renewable energy to conserve Hawai'i's natural resources. We must consult with our community and experts in Hawai'i and worldwide and consider the best forms of renewable energy for our unique island. When bringing new renewable energy to Hawai'i county, the whole picture must be considered such as the potential impact to our own environment (like native bird fly paths) as well as ethical global sourcing of all the rare metals used to create this technology. There can be hidden issues such as impacts on human health, culture and threatened biodiversity caused by the manufacturing. We must bring more renewable energy here in the smartest, most well-planned and ethical forms possible, whether it be wind, ocean like OTEC, solar, geothermal or even bio energy.

Now on PGV, I grew up near PGV in Pāhoa and I remember as a young kid in school practicing geothermal drills (fire drills) at school. I remember the blowouts that PGV had in the early 90s. They have been a bad neighbor and what I mean by that, their management has not been transparent with our community. PGV can be a safe energy source, especially if they take the chance to upgrade to being more efficient, safer, and cleaner technology, but there are so many unknowns because of the lack of communication. I support Green Energy and Energy that is sustainable IF it's done the right way with cultural and environmental impacts to Hawai'i Island. Iceland has accomplished this, and so can we. Last but not least, we have to take into consideration the health and well-being of our island, that we all live on an island and we are all one 'ohana.

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7. What are two (2) things you like about the Community Development Plan (CDP) in your district that are working well? What are two (2) things in your district's CDP that are not working and why? How would you suggest those issues be addressed/fixed?

GOOD:

1) Accurate compiling of data: The Puna CDP did a great job in compiling and providing helpful data to figure out the dynamics at play in my district's community. It's easy to reference it for various topics and their connected action plans, which allows for more flexibility and understanding when making policy decisions.

2) Promotion of Agriculture in Puna: I agree with the recommendations and push towards agriculture in the CDP, especially considering the added challenges of COVID-19. Ongoing vegetation mapping projects, creating a GIS database of archaeological and historical sites, diversifying agriculture in Puna, and other bold ideas are needed to add resiliency and sustainability to Hawai'i.

BAD:

1) Actions stop short on pushing for alternative routes in Puna for transportation:

A major alternate route into Lower Puna is needed, as currently only Hwy 130 exists linking Hilo to Pāhoā. In addition, the 2018 eruption removed many miles of connecting roads in Lower Puna that have not been restored, and some with no plans to be restored by the County. We need to carefully reconsider those plans, since we need those connections for our communities, especially when disaster evacuations are needed. We already improved Railroad and Beach Roads during the 2014 Pāhoā lava flow as emergency escape routes, and they are already historic travel routes in our community, which makes them natural candidates for connection routes into Hilo.

2) Recommendations for an alternative boat ramp at Cape Kumukahi:

As a local fisherman working with DOBAR and the state legislature on planning an alternative boat ramp for the now closed Pohoiki Boat Ramp, we already have surveyed Cape Kumukahi with sea engineers from the ground, air, and sea. The ocean conditions of this location do not merit the use of this location for a boat ramp or marina. In the long term, I support pursuing a new boat ramp right next to Pohoiki on the new lava, especially if it's possible to use FEMA funds and speed up their timeline. In the short term, I support any temporary measures to restore the existing Pohoiki boat ramp, such as removing some of the sand and collaborating with the USGS to study how it settles over time.

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8. The appearance of COVID-19 has brought the world economy to a halt and has exposed major faults in local government's blatant reliance on tourism for revenue. What are your plans to jump start and/or diversify the island's economy?

Let's take a step back for a second, COVID-19 represents the most serious threat to Hawai'i island in generations. There is no practical way to separate the health and well-being of our community with our economic well-being. The impacts of a likely depression are far reaching. We must find ways to diversify the economy rapidly while being able to sustain ourselves during the transition period. Innovative ideas and leadership are the key. We've seen that relying on a single industry causes problems, whether it's tourism or sugar cane. We still need tourism, the way our economy is built today, to get as many people back to work as quickly as possible. Nearly 37% of our people have filed unemployment. While many want to take this opportunity to transition away from tourism, which is needed, we still need to be able to make that transition. The existing tourism industry could help with economic pressures, but only if it is done safely and sustainably. We shouldn't expect tourism to return to normal pre-COVID levels of operations, but perhaps enough to maintain its operations and staff until better times.

We also need incentives for visitors to come back. One example is promoting our island within "COVID-19 GREEN ZONES" made up of "travel bubbles" of states and countries doing well against the pandemic. New Zealand, Australia, South Korea, Taiwan, Iceland and Japan have proven themselves successful, reducing the risk of back and forth travel with our island. I would also investigate incentives to expand our local health care and senior living. We know the most at-risk populations to COVID-19 are our kupuna, and those in our community with pre-existing conditions. By encouraging and supporting the expansion of health and human services, particularly senior care, we could create an economic driver while also making our island's medical system more robust. We cannot let financial hardships of the pandemic threaten our access to healthcare.

Finally, and most obvious, is expanding our local agriculture, promoting local markets, and supporting local fishermen. We need local processing of dairy & livestock, and to consider starting new innovative farms, like local hemp that could be made into textiles and biodegradable plastics, or entrepreneurship in aquaculture. Local aquaculture can help address our reliance on food imports, since over 88% of Hawai'i's food is imported, including 49% seafood. Segments of our very own population are food insecure or vulnerable to poor diet. Existing permitting and complex regulation challenges stand in the way, yet we can overcome them with proper government support and reform to grow this proven economically successful, culturally and environmentally sustainable industry.

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9. Many municipalities across the country are exploring bond sales to raise capital for improvements to infrastructure, like road and wastewater improvements as an example; things that are sorely in need of attention on Hawaii Island. The County Council just this year advanced a \$103 million bond issue for road projects with Bill 145. What is your view on expanding municipal bond issuance to finance infrastructure while interest rates are historically low?

While interest rates are at historic lows, the global economy is in turmoil and higher inflation is possible in the markets. The economic hardships are coupled with the uncertainty of federal stimulus packages and actions by the Federal Reserve. We should only borrow so much based on our revenues, which we know will be significantly lower this year. But at the same time, we need urgent improvement to our infrastructure, and our people can't afford any higher taxes. There is always a financial risk, but this is as good of chance as we'll get in the near future to expand our municipal bonds and reduce the possibly greater risk of the failure of our critical infrastructure, like wells and sewage treatment plants. With the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, it is more important than ever that we carefully plot our way forward with our much-needed capital improvement projects.

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