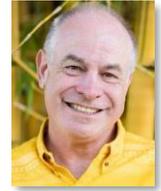




2020 Hawai'i Island Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Mitch Roth



Candidate Race: Hawai'i County Mayor

Candidate Website: www.mitchroth.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?

I plan to streamline the permitting process with set deadlines and implement a less restrictive, clear interpretation of the rules and codes. By making these changes the time required to review plans will be expedited and there will be less ambiguity and a more consistent interpretation of the rules and codes. A streamlined process and consistent interpretation will allow the community to economically prosper.

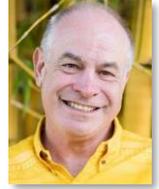
As with many of the planning rules and codes, Bill 108 has language that is vague and ambiguous, which leads to interpretations that can be changed from one planner to the next. For example, the planning director recently made a statement that "an STVR cannot take their hat off as a short-term vacation rental based on length of rental period or lease," thus prohibiting the best use of the property. This translation comes from language found in the section which states "Owners of short-term vacation rentals shall notify the director when a short-term vacation rental establishment **permanently** ceases to operate **for any reason** (emphasis added). A simpler understanding of the law only requires that an owner give notice when an STVR **permanently** ceases to operate. With COVID, it may be best to use these properties as long-term rentals and switch back after the emergency period. The director has focused on the term "for any reason" rather than the term "permanently." If the intent is for the STVR status to end at any use, then the way it is written is vague and ambiguous. This is just one of many codes that are written and/or interpreted in a vague or ambiguous manner. The director's interpretation is the most restrictive interpretation of the code. This restrictive interpretation impedes business and hampers the economy.

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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?

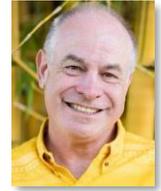
County real property taxes serve as the primary revenue source for the County government. In addition, RPT serves as a mechanism to encourage, incentivize, or discourage economic behaviors. In recent years, the solution to many of the government's shortfalls has been to make government bigger and increase taxes. This approach is not sustainable. The way we should be increasing our revenue is by helping businesses thrive and create meaningful jobs. A vibrant businesses community will result in a desire to invest in business opportunities and people building houses to live here. This will increase the revenue while improving the quality of lives for residents. With Covid-19, we now are faced with the opportunity to figure out how to make government cost less and help businesses succeed. We will do this by making strategic decisions on how we direct our resources. This is achieved by assessing what resources we need and making sure that our resources are being directed in the most efficient and productive manner possible.

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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?

While there are many possible solutions to this problem, the County has chosen to haul rubbish over the short term as it was the least expensive option at the time. However, for the long term this could be the most expensive option. Other known options for addressing the solid waste issue include waste-to-energy, digesters, sorting stations, shipping rubbish to Oahu H-Power, another landfill, or a combination of options. These options and others should all be on the table and considered as we move forward. I pledge to address this issue in my first 100 days of office.

Fixing our solid waste management issue is complicated and can't be solved overnight. However, what we can do immediately is convene a working group with a hard deadline for recommendations, vigorously promote recycling to reduce waste, and decrease the current number of trips to the West Hawai'i landfill. In 2012 -2015 the County priced various options to deal with this issue. As technology and pricing has changed, it is time to revisit these options as well as others to determine the best path forward. We should look at both short-term and long- term options.

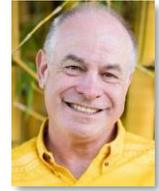
As Mayor I would also set the stage to host a sustainability summit within the first 100 days of my administration. This summit will bring bright minds together to develop actionable strategies that will help Hawai'i Island address the solid waste management issues, become more self-sustainable, provide opportunities for residents, and allow for alternative energy sources on this island.

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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?

My top actionable items to address affordable housing are to:

- 1) Streamline the permitting process. This will require a couple of fixes: a) put in place a time period for the county to approve or reject plans. As a prosecutor I have time limitations on all cases including murder. The County should have time limits to review permits. b) Implement a less restrictive and clear interpretation of the rules and codes policy. This will also put in place a more consistent interpretation of the codes by all county personnel as well as customers in the permitting process. This would require putting directors in place that are willing to take this approach.
- 2) Assemble a housing project team to assist development of larger affordable housing projects. This team will be made up of staff from key County departments (Housing, DEM, DPW, Planning, Water and Corporation Counsel) who can provide a project with the best chance of success. These staff members are experienced with the housing development process, which include financing, zoning, infrastructure, and various government planning and permitting processes.
- 3) Employ grant writers to seek out other sources of funding. This could include HUD Section 108 loan program funds which allow recipients to leverage CDBG program funds currently administered by the County. Part of this plan includes building partnerships and educating developers about existing financing tools provided by Federal, State and County agencies. We will also help direct resources to strategically encourage affordable housing development. This includes working with the Department of Water to develop additional water resources that could support affordable housing.
- 4) Allow Ohana housing and bar sinks to provide more affordable housing opportunities in appropriate areas.

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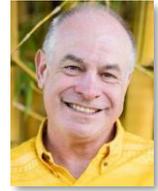


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5. The Hawai'i state legislature recently proposed legislation that would put the responsibility on the counties to research and provide data on topics such as energy, coastal zone/sea level rise, etc. as they relate to climate change, without addressing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

Among the solutions I would propose for Hawai'i County to address climate change are to:

- 1) Be the example for the rest of the world in renewable energy. This can be done by ensuring that there are as many opportunities for renewable energy possible and that our regulatory systems are allowing these types of systems to prosper.
- 2) Build partnerships with the University of Hawai'i system to assess where we are vulnerable and encourage that we are doing all we can to encourage responsible development.
- 3) Learn and adopt strategies from other areas that are successfully employing strategies to deal with this problem.

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?

I support expanding geothermal and other forms of renewable energy here. Hawai'i Island has the best opportunity in the world to move renewable energy forward. Solar, wind, geothermal, and other possibilities such as waste-to-energy all can be used to produce hydrogen cheaper than traditionally done through petroleum. Hydrogen is safer than petroleum and can be used in various ways to fuel equipment, private vehicles, and public vehicles such as buses. Hawai'i also has the ability to create micro-grids in communities that would share renewable electricity. As we move toward the future these things will become a reality, however, the County needs to take steps now to ensure that our codes are in place and that the County government is helping rather than obstructing progress.

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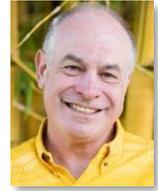


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7. What are two (2) things you like about the Community Development Plan (CDP) in your district that are working well? What are two (2) things in your district's CDP that are not working and why? How would you suggest those issues be addressed/fixes?

Community Development plans are important as they give the community a voice. CDPs have shown to be helpful in the development of the draft General Plan 2040, especially enabling an opportunity for needed community input. It is important that CDPs are aligned with the General Plan once it is approved. The Kona CDP had a great vision for development. However, it was a regulatory document containing "shall" language which ended up restricting development. However, that language was recently removed, turning the Kona CDP into the advisory and guidance document it should be.

It is difficult to talk about two things I like in the Hilo CDP as there has not been one since 1975. That said, it is imperative that a Hilo CDP be developed. The CDPs are advisory documents designed with the intent of guiding development for the future. This is a good thing. Some of the problems with the CDPs are that they have been interpreted to stifle development, including opportunities to develop affordable housing. Furthermore, the language has not been consistent between CDPs and has caused further confusion in the application of the CDPs.

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?

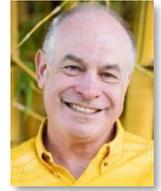
- 1) Get residents back to work. A majority of the unemployed people on our island have jobs related to tourism. We need to make sure that when the 14-day quarantine is lifted and the State is ready to welcome back visitors, the County government is doing what it can to help the tourism industry. Additionally, we can get our construction industry back to work by moving forward with shovel-ready jobs.
- 2) Meet the needs of the business community by finding out how county government can help or where county government can get out of the way to allow businesses to thrive.
- 3) Begin diversifying the economy through agriculture, astronomy, science and technology, renewable energy, and entrepreneurship opportunities.

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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?

Yes, now would be the time to expand a municipal bond issuance. However, given the uncertainty of the economy we need to be careful and thoughtful as it could end up costing the taxpayers in the end.

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