



2020 Hawai'i Island Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Tim Richards



Candidate Race: Hawai'i County Council – District 9

Candidate Website: www.votetimrichards.com

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?

Short term vacation rentals in Hawaii County right now are regulated by a 2018 ordinance. This only applies currently to unhosted vacation rentals. I was a sitting Council member when this past and from my observation and experience much of the concern revolved around a “bad neighbor“ policy where hosts did not have a strong oversight of people on vacation disrupting neighborhoods. The ordinance is not perfect. Trying to strike a balance between economic return for owners of STVR's versus impact to a community was difficult. This bill was the first attempt to get our arms around it. What did come out of this was to assure that there was some structure governing vacation rentals thus some oversight concerning taxes that need to be paid. I think in this COVID-19 recovery phase, as we try to open up, being able to have a list of accommodations will be very important for tracking guests. (I think this is one of the unintended benefits of having the requirements for unhosted vacation rentals.) Next, hosted vacation rentals may be on the horizon for registration as well. The challenge will again be striking the balance of not affecting a community while allowing people to generate income on their assets. Obviously more conversations going forward are needed.

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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?

This is an interesting question that I've already been working on. Approximately 2/3 of the county's income stream comes from real property tax. A tax working group was put together several years ago to come up with recommendations on how to handle the different categories of taxing and how things are assessed. My concern has revolved around agriculture and for a long time, I know families who owned homes and maybe second homes at the beach that they have had for generations. I have always marveled at the term “highest and best use” as that seems to be an undefinable term. On the one hand, closing the loop for people claiming agriculture yet not doing agriculture was one of the intense. One goat on an acre of land is not agriculture. Conversely, if someone is doing high-intensity greenhouse agriculture on that 1 acre I believe we have a metric to make the accommodation. My greater concern is a farmer who has a farm for a long time and as they come out of production the tax structure for their land is changed because they are not actively farming anymore; they are retired. I'm working on trying to sort this out. Additionally, second homeowners that have been here for generations I do not think should be caught up in the two tier text structure that recently passed. I am working on some ideas to have this addressed and thereby corrected for our local people. Finally, local families, who've had homes in areas for decades I've seen their property value those taxes increase and when the current generation is gone, their descendants may not be able to afford to hold that home especially if it is a “second home”. I am working on an idea there that might resolve that. As to increasing revenues generally, I am not a proponent for raising tax rates. Tourism compromise is 40% of the big island economy. The 0.5% GE tax increase authorized to Hawaii county based upon Projections would have been half paid by the visitor industry. Nobody likes more taxes but I thought that was one way we might cover more costs. (We're talking about the budget here and before talking about just revenue the conversation also must revolve around controlling expenses as well.)

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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'uana'hulu. 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?

50% of our solid waste is biological meaning truly does not need to go into the landfill. If we can remove the green waste and compost it that already cut our landfill "liability" in half. That's the start. On the heels of that, we have to be creative going forward. Last fall, I authored and got passed a Resolution giving environmental management and the commission "their head" to be creative and start with a blank piece of paper to come up with new ideas. There are some great minds on the Environmental Management Commission and I look forward to that report.

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?

To have affordable housing we must have inventory. In order to have inventory, we must build it. In order to build it, we must have good public policy combined with political will and a builder. This is where we run into trouble. In district 9 I currently have at least six projects in various stages seeking approval. The largest obstruction to building affordable housing is infrastructure cost and land. Under 201H, a state law allowing some accommodations for building, we can get this done. The community must be supportive of this going forward. Our planning department must recognize that they do not have jurisdiction over the 201H process. Accordingly, we have the metrics that would allow us to move forward, we even have builders that are willing to go through the arduous task of approval. We as politicians must be supportive to get these projects finished. We have a need for approximately 20,000 by 2025. Lucky if we are building several hundred a year when realistically we need to be building thousands each year.

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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?

Unfunded mandates are always problematic. That being said our planning department is already evaluating setbacks when it comes to new construction. We as a county as a whole also must be mindful of the nearshore properties that are just above sea level. Being Hawaii island is relatively Young, our geography is steeper than most of the other islands that sea-level rise won't move inland near as far as some of the other islands. That being said as we go forward with planning we need to be mindful of the projections. To fund this? I do not believe we need to create any new departments but make this part of the considerations in coastline construction going forward. Accordingly, I don't believe the funding needs would be too excessive this covered by department funding. To address climate change specifically, I believe we need to just stay the course; continue expanding our renewable energy generation thus reducing carbon emissions, strive towards zero emissions mass transit, and take measures to deal with our biological solid waste in perhaps anaerobic digester's.

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 believe renewable energy generation in storage is part of the big island's future for addressing climate change and our needs. The big island has a vast portfolio of renewable energy potential including geothermal. I am supportive of geothermal redevelopment is my understanding of the newer technologies are even more efficient. As two are being on track with the state mandate, Hawaii county is ahead of the rest of the state with our Renewable generation already in the 40% region. I also believe that using these forms of renewable energy, we may be able to harvest and harnessed hydrogen as a fuel of the future that could even become an export commodity for us. Additionally, this falls into an initiative I have put forth that ties in with agriculture and food security. For more information please go to my website and look for "Agriculture, Water, and Energy; A Food Nexus"

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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?

The CDP process in communities is helpful from the perspective that they give some insight into the communities direction. They are a forum for people to express ideas and concerns I'm going forward. The concerns I have are that some believe the CDP action groups regulatory when in fact they are just advisory. I think this has created some problems as though their input is invaluable, they are advisory and help the planning department with input but many do not understand they are not regulatory. To fix this comes to the education of both members of the CDP action committees and the public. We have the process in place through the planning department and the planning commissions. CPS our advisory a little closer to home to get that input. I believe ongoing education would help solve a good portion of this.

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?

Rough numbers our county economy was approximately \$8.5 billion GDP. Reliable sources have put tourism at approximately \$3 billion GDP or approximately 40% of our economy. I have long been a proponent of agriculture increasing as part of our economy. This brings several benefits, diversified income streams, reduce reliance on tourism, an increase in food self-reliance, and growth in the job sector to address expanding agriculture and associated value-added processing. To get this started is actually a misnomer as actions are already in place to keep this running. What we have to do next is expand it. Approximately two months ago I put forth an agriculture support program called "BRIDGES" that kept the agriculture economy functioning while seeking food for our community. This program is running exceedingly well. The next step is to expand these programs. Again, this ties back to my "Agriculture, Water, and Energy; A Food Nexus" initiative. We also have an opportunity to redefine our economy and tourism, how they interact with each other, and I am working on tying tourism more to agriculture so they become symbiotic of each other; a true "farm to plate" experience. Again, more information can be found on my website.

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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?

I was part of the council that moved the bond initiative forward you exactly what is described here, build the infrastructure we need. At the historically low-interest rates this makes all the sense in the world. The debt service is reasonable under the current tax structure and we can get a lot of bang for our buck by doing this. I am supportive of exploring more while paying attention to our debt to income ratio. I also believe in this time of post-Covid-19 recovery we will be seeing some public works projects reminiscent of the Civilian Conservation Corps or "CCC" of the 1930s. Regardless, by building the infrastructure we set our county and thereby our community's future in the right direction to expand our capabilities Helping things like agriculture that long-term support economic development.

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