

**Esther Kia'āina for Honolulu City Council District 3
HOTELPAC – 2020 Candidate Questionnaire**

1. The Future of Tourism in Hawaii

Tourism will always be part of our overall economy. But first, we should acknowledge that the pre-pandemic numbers of tourists arriving in Hawaii was not sustainable and next, we have to explore how to have our tourism industry recover with the right balance while doing all that we can to TRULY diversify our economy.

Creating a new model of sustainable tourism that balances economic, environmental and Native Hawaiian and local interests will be our greatest challenge, but I believe we can do it.

Economic diversification will require a mix of supporting current industries (tourism, construction, DOD/federal) and helping core industries that are economically hurting (agriculture, restaurants, small businesses). To stimulate diversification, we must also be supporting new sectors like technology, green and energy-efficient industries, and aquaculture with the necessary policies and funding to make a difference effectively. National intelligence and cybersecurity industries should also continue to be strengthened.

Creating an economically viable and sustainable visitor industry can be accomplished by working with HLTA and other partners to develop goals and principles for our 'aina aloha future, which will help share Native Hawaiian values and practices with visitors, increase energy efficiencies and reduce water and waste in hotels and visitor accommodations, access locally sourced food, products and services and transition to renewable energy.

2. Tourism Management

I support HLTA's approach that we should be focused on "quality" tourism rather than "quantity" tourism to balance our economic and ecological interests and to preserve our indigenous and local culture.

Impact fees should be levied for public parks and other outdoor attractions to regulate usage and preserve them for future generations. Impact fees are not unique. Federal parks, multiple states and municipalities charge entrance fees and/or parking fees for users to help pay for their operation and maintenance. Hanauma Bay has been a model of how we can better manage the impact of tourism to balance economic, environmental, visitor and local interests. Impact fees can and should be used to help maintain natural visitor attractions, provide interpretive information, better manage parking and transit resources, which all provide for an improved user experience.

3. Real Property Tax

At a time of great crisis and change, proven leadership will be critical to secure economic recovery with investments in infrastructure, education, training and diversifying the workforce and our local economy. I am known to be an effective advocate who gets things done by working with people at all levels. I will work to see that county operations are more efficient, focus on essential county services, and preserve affordability for Oahu residents and businesses.

While we work to safely emerge from this pandemic and reopen the economy, I will work to see that county operations are focused on delivering essential services, streamlining costs and restoring economic viability for Windward residents and businesses and for our state.

Yes, this will mean holding back increases to Oahu's real property tax rates.

While Oahu's real property tax (RPT) rates are among the lowest in the nation, median property valuations are among the highest. As a percentage, RPT rates for hotels and lodgings are substantially higher than residential RPT rates, and account for an estimated 18 percent from Hotel/Resort and Tourism related real property tax collections according to a [2017 DBEDT report on Real Property Tax in Hawaii](#).

UHERO projects very deep and lingering impact of COVID-19 pandemic on our economy. The economic recession is expected to have a negative effect on property valuations for years to come.

As a councilmember, I will work to rebuild our economy better, leverage county infrastructure, restore housing affordability and keep our islands sustainable for future generations.

4. Transient Vacation Rentals

The City recently passed laws that limit and restrict transient accommodations in residential areas. It will take time to see if these laws are properly administered and effective. However, I am not against amending the transient accommodations in residential areas if the laws do not work, and the communities impacted want further restrictions. I would support increasing fines and exploring other policy solutions if the current policies are not effective.

5. Homelessness Solutions

The sit-lie ban does not solve our problems. It only highlights a larger symptom which is homelessness, a lack of affordable housing and living wage jobs, and lack of health care and human services. Solving the larger problem requires a more holistic approach

and coordinated effort among local, state and federal governments, in addition to participation and support by businesses and not for profits like HLTA.

Providing more wrap around services is critical which is why the Kaneohe Joint Outreach Center is welcomed and I should be replicated in other communities.

The City has a strong role to play in connecting homeless to job opportunities, shelters and affordable housing. In addition to the wrap-around services needed, increasing our temporary and permanent housing units has to be part of the solution. The City can prioritize affordable housing through zoning, streamlining planning and permitting policies and developing incentives to make housing more affordable for local residents.

As a Councilmember, I would introduce policies that improve the use of City properties to add on affordable housing units if appropriate, leverage federal and state funding and work to develop a comprehensive program to improve our aging infrastructure (water, wastewater, municipal roads), and consider other incentives to increase affordable housing and access to jobs, and health and human services.

6. Sustainability in the Visitor Industry

Building back better must be the focus of how we work to restore the visitor industry to be a leader in the world for sustainable tourism. The City recently updated the county's building code to promote greater energy efficiency and the adoption of photovoltaics and renewable energy. The City must also review current policies and create other incentives to transition businesses and residents to adopt green energy and eco-friendly solutions.

The metrics for tourism must also evolve from measuring the increase of visitors and revenue generated each year to sharing its success in the reduction carbon dioxide emissions, increase of locally sourced products and services, lessening of waste and improvements to health of our local communities and the environment.

7. Visitor Industry Health, Safety & Security Standards

Public Health and Safety is my highest priority for our families, first responders, for health workers, for those working in tourism and air travel, retail and food workers, and all businesses in Hawaii.

CDC and other federal agencies have provided detailed guidance and best practices for returning food and beverage and resort workers. I support the adoption of HLTA's Health, Safety & Security Standards, which are in line with federal guidance and best practices, by all hotel and visitor lodging operators and appropriate training of all workers at all levels.

As we strive again to flatten the curve of COVID-19 infections and deaths by restricting gatherings, requiring 14-day quarantine for travelers, and taking other precautions, we

must also strive to ensure that reliable COVID-19 testing is available to pre-boarding travelers. Additionally, when it is safe, we can plan for travel bubbles with those countries that are deemed safe and strict health, testing and tracking measures in place for outbound travelers.

8. Public Safety

For Oahu's 2021 Visitor Public Safety Conference, I recommend focusing on COVID-19 testing and tracing; experiences with travel/resort bubbles and visitor-community safety.

9. First Year Goal

Public Health and Safety is my highest priority for our families, first responders, for health workers, for those working in tourism and air travel, retail and food workers, and all businesses in Hawaii. I believe my extensive federal experience will help as the county leverages resources with the state and federal governments, and works with non-profits, the private sector, and communities on Oahu to safeguard our families' public health and safety.

10. Fun Fact About Me

Challenged the Gates Foundation, National College Board, and United Negro College Fund, to gain eligibility for Asian and Pacific Islander Students who were originally deemed ineligible to qualify for the Gates Millennium Scholars Program, which sought to provide financial assistance for low-income minority students. This successful effort led to the eligibility for these communities across the states, territories, and Freely Associated States of Micronesia, and the eventual establishment of a national Asian and Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund.