

HOTELPAC – 2020 Candidate Questionnaire (County)
AUGIE TULBA, Candidate, Honolulu City Council, District 9
Responses – August 25, 2020

1) The future of tourism in Hawai'i

Despite tourism's status as one of our state's top economic drivers, the COVID-19 pandemic has led some to call for our economy to diversify away from tourism. HLTA's longstanding position has been that our economy should look to diversify within tourism, i.e., develop and expand industries that complement tourism. Would you support this policy given the challenge of identifying industries that could immediately replace the number of jobs and revenue tourism generates for our state's economy? If not, what are your proposals for diversification?

AT Response...

Common sense dictates that the first step of the COVID-19 economic recovery is to restart our tourism industry. There is no alternative to replace tourism currently that would put our people back to work and cause our economy to revive.

I concur that diversification within the tourism model is the most efficient manner to expand our economy in the short term. A key metric for me would be employee earnings in such an expansion. Hawaii's wages for the private sector are near the nation's lowest and we need to ensure that the jobs we create improve, not merely sustain, the quality of life of our work force.

2) Tourism Management

HLTA has long maintained that we believe in the “quality” tourism model rather than the “quantity” tourism model. Effective execution of this responsible management model takes many forms, one being the establishment of user impact fees at popular visitor attractions such as O’ahu’s Hanauma Bay. Do you support user impact fees? Do you have other ideas that would embrace this model?

AT Response...

Yes, I support user impact fees. As our residential and visitor populations grow it is only responsible that the users of a resource pay a portion of the direct cost to maintain the resource.

However, my model would be funded ultimately by an endowed special fund that would be funded over a period of years from a portion of the user fees received.

The idea being that at a future date the complete cost of maintaining the resource annually would be paid from the earnings of the Endowed Fund and not the hard earned money of our residents and visitors.

The Endowed Funding approach may require a Commission to oversee and maintain the resources much like Presidio Trust Board does for the Golden Gate Bridge.

3) Real Property Tax

Hotels and lodgings historically have been among the highest real property taxpayers in all counties, paying from \$10.70 to \$13.90 per \$1,000 of assessed value. In FY2019-2020 alone, hotels were seven of the top ten taxpayers based on the amount of taxes levied. Due to the COVID-19

pandemic, hotels have already come due on one installment of real property taxes, even though many of them have not generated revenue since March. As our industry looks to recover from the pandemic, will you oppose any increase in real property taxes over the next three years? Five years?

AT Response...

The City and County real property tax base revenue decline will lag that of the State of Hawaii. It may be up to two budget year cycles before the City and County feel the full force of revenue reduction do to COVID-19. We will experience a reduction in property values and as a result our tax revenue will decrease.

I will work diligently to eliminate wasteful spending within the City and County as well as make the hard decisions of reducing agency allocations to balance the City and County budget. As a Council over the next two fiscal years we must learn to do more with less in anticipation of reduced revenues.

I will oppose any property tax increase for the first two fiscal year budgets.

4.) Transient Vacation Rentals

HLTA's position has always been one of fairness, i.e., legal TVRs such as those on AirBnB or VRBO should be allowed to operate in areas that have been zoned for resorts so long as the property owner pays the real property taxes associated with a resort property, as well as the GET and TAT. Where do you stand on this issue? Would you support a measure to increase enforcement to rein in the proliferation of properties that are operating illegally? Moreover, would you support an increase in the amount of the fine assessed to illegal operators?

AT Response...

We must follow the law - it is that simple. I do not foresee the City and County being able to add human resources for enforcement over the next two fiscal year budgets. However, I would like to see if we are sharing information adequately between departments that may enhance enforcement.

Increasing fines is a tool that should be used to discourage illegal operators and I would support doing so.

5) Homelessness Solutions

In recent years, HLTA has dedicated significant time and resources to address homelessness in our community. In addition to funds generated through our Visitor Industry Charity Walk, we secured \$1 million in State matching funds that we used to subsidize the efforts of homeless service providers around the state. Please provide a detailed description of an initiative that you would implement to address homelessness in your county.

AT Response...

I am a supporter of creating "tiny house" communities for the working homeless as a temporary housing solution until permanent housing can be secured. The community would also maintain a resource center to provide the needed services beyond shelter.

6) Sustainability in the Visitor Industry

Hawai'i's visitor industry has gone to great lengths to make its businesses more "green" and eco-friendly. What government incentives would you propose or support to help our industry bolster these initiatives?

AT Response

I am a supporter of HAWAII ENERGY and their use of State funded business incentives to encourage all businesses to embrace more energy efficient infrastructure equipment as well as the planning of their building spaces. The visitor industry has and will continue to benefit from this private/public partnership.

7) Visitor Industry Health, Safety & Security Standards

As the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread throughout our state, it became clear that establishing health and hygiene standards would be critical to restoring trust in our industry. As such, we developed the HLTA Health, Safety & Security Standards. These were created after reviewing the latest information from the CDC, WHO, and EPA, as well as input from industry stakeholders. Our standards were submitted to the State Department of Health for its review. After receiving DOH approval, we shared our standards with the governor, HI-EMA, State Attorney General, and all the mayors. Please answer yes or no: Would you support the adoption of our standards as statewide policy for lodging properties? If not, please explain.

AT Responses: Yes

8) Public Safety

To date, HLTA has held two highly successful Visitor Public Safety Conferences on O'ahu. These conferences have brought together hotel management, security professionals, lawmakers, law enforcement, social

service providers, and other stakeholders to discuss possible solutions to issues such as late-night cabarets and the need for more security cameras throughout Waikiki, the homeless population in Chinatown, and a spike in shoplifting around the island. Each conference led to significant progress in addressing these community issues.

Neighbor Island Candidates Only: Would you support HLTA in convening a Visitor Public Safety Conference in your county in 2021? If so, what specific public health and safety issues would you like to see discussed?

O'ahu Candidates Only: For O'ahu's third Visitor Public Safety Conference, to be held in 2021, what specific public health and safety issues would you like to see discussed?

AT Response

First, to continue to focus on homelessness in Waikiki in hopes of bringing new tools and solutions to the issue. Secondly to support the Honolulu Police Department to increase the number of Police Beats in select Police Districts to combat increased crimes of opportunity. And finally to explore new creative retention solutions to stop the drain of our officers moving to the mainland. Turnover at HPD is a loss for all of us.

9) If elected, what do you hope to accomplish during your first year in office, which will undoubtedly be one of the most challenging and difficult times the state and counties have ever faced.

AT Response

a.) I will establish an office in District to have the absolute best opportunity to serve my constituents.

b.) I want to sell all City and County real property that is currently idle and redeploy the resources received to a higher and better use.

c.) I will bring a "can do" attitude to the Council. I have a desire to bring fresh ideas and new solutions to not only circumstances surrounding COVID-19, but to systemic problems we have faced for years.

10) Please share with us one fun fact about yourself.

AT Response...

In another life I was known as a pretty good comedian in Hawaii Nei.