



HAWAII LODGING & TOURISM
ASSOCIATION

HOTELPAC – 2020 Candidate Questionnaire (County)

Answers from Mitch Roth -Candidate for Hawaii County Mayor

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?

Tourism is and will continue to be one of Hawai'i's top economic drivers. Because tourism is so ubiquitous in our state, any efforts to diversify the local economy should support and be complementary to the tourism industry. Hawai'i County has incredible opportunities to diversify its economy through agriculture, science & technology, renewable energy, and entrepreneurial opportunities. I see great possibilities to support the tourism economy through these sectors. For example, by supporting our farmers and bolstering our agriculture industry we not only supply quality local foods to hotels and restaurants frequented by visitors, but we can also further promote our Made in Hawai'i products, farm and culinary tours, and unique food culture. My priority as Mayor would not be to replace jobs in tourism, but further develop quality jobs for our Hawai'i Island residents, so that residents and future generations can comfortably live, work, and play on our island.

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?

I support user fees where necessary and appropriate. Hawai'i island already has these fees for places like Volcanoes National Park and Akaka Falls State Park. Other ways we can promote quality tourism is by further promoting and creating additional cultural attractions unique to Hawai'i Island, such eco tours, culinary and agriculture tours, Hawaiian cultural tours and more.

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?

I am opposed to increasing property taxes for our county. For too long, Hawai'i County has been relying on property taxes to generate revenue, and our residents can't handle more increases. As Mayor, I will strengthen the County of Hawai'i's capacity to identify and secure additional financial resources by:

- Assembling a team of grant writers and development professionals from within the county and community.
- Employing strategies such as Energy Saving Performance Contracts (ESPCs) and Public-Private Partnerships where applicable.
- Working with State Legislators to secure maximum funding for Hawai'i County.

Additionally, Hawai'i County has a major problem with a lengthy and cumbersome permitting process that prohibits business owners, developers, contractors, and even local families from thriving. Time is money, and the cost of doing business in Hawai'i County can be significantly reduced by streamlining the permitting process. This is one of my first priorities as Mayor.

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?

I support measures to increase enforcement on reining in illegal properties. That being said, Hawai'i County's TVR laws are poorly written and are currently being interpreted in a way that is restrictive and unclear to many TVR owners. We need to improve the law and have clearer, black and white interpretations of our current laws and their enforcement so that all TVR owners are following the same playbook. Once we get that straightened out, additional laws to increase enforcement should be considered.

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.

While the official "Point in Time" count indicates a 21% decrease in homeless populations on Hawai'i Island over the past two years, the "visual evidence" of the chronic homeless problem confronts the community on a daily basis. In looking at successful plans from around the country we know that Housing First is an initiative that works. Hawai'i County has been working on the Housing First initiative, and as Mayor I will work to continue this initiative and prioritize developing more supportive housing options for those with special needs such as mental health and substance abuse. I also plan to work collaboratively with our non-profit organizations and

expand “one-stop shop” locations that address these homeless issues. Additionally, I have been supportive of the initiatives HLTA has made in the past to help address homelessness on our island and intend to help facilitate partnerships with our local non-profit organizations to encourage collaboration and support of future efforts.

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?

In all honesty, I’m not sure what government incentives the County Government can provide. However, I will work to protect the key assets (the environment, and those things that bring visitors here to Hawaii), thus enhancing the visitor experience.

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.

Yes. Our state should be united in our commitment to health and safety.

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?

Yes. As a career prosecutor, my purpose in life is to ensure the safety and health of my community. In fact, as the Prosecuting Attorney I was working with Mr. Hanneman on a 2020 Visitor Public Safety Conference in Hilo. Unfortunately, because of Covid-19 that conference did not go forward. Some of the topics that we discussed were Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), Community Problem Solving and working with the Visitors Aloha Society of Hawaii (VASH)

- 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.

In order to make significant change within the county, we need to fundamentally change the culture of county government from one that simply permits people to exist to one that helps our communities thrive. This means having a government that is focused on the needs of the people, is small business friendly, and doesn't get in the way of its own efficiency with red tape and obstacles. My priorities as Mayor to accomplish this within the first year of my administration include:

- Having physical representation of the Mayor and cabinet members across the island.
- Encouraging teamwork and collaboration among departments, rather than having people work in silos.
- Being an accessible, collaborative leader who is engaged and transparent with the people.
- Supporting and rebuilding our local economy by streamlining the permitting process and reducing government red tape.
- Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of government by talking to county workers within all levels of government and making cuts where they are actually needed.
- Moving earmarked Capital Improvement Projects (CIPs) forward.
- Securing revenue sources outside of taxes.
- Addressing critical infrastructure issues, such as waste water, landfill and recycling.
- Hosting a sustainability summit to develop actionable strategies that will help Hawai'i Island become more self-sustainable, provide opportunities for residents, and allow for alternative energy sources on this island.

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

I moved to Hawai'i at 17 years old as a high school dropout and got my GED from Kaimuki High School. I was later admitted to UH Manoa on academic probation and graduated on academic scholarships.