

February 12, 2010

Do Not Support 2% Land Fund Set-Aside as a Charter Amendment

Dear Charter Commission Members,

We are prompted to write this email by a letter to the West Hawaii Today from Debbie Hecht, Land Fund Campaign Coordinator, published February 10, 2010. While we support the need to protect Hawaii lands through public ownership, we must recognize that the 2% open space purchase vote was passed when economic times were much better. In today's time of budget shortfalls and threatened public safety cutbacks, tax increases, and utility rate hikes, we simply cannot afford it.

We do not support a County Charter amendment to enforce the 2% set-aside which will tie the hands of the County government to manage the budget. While the half-percent set-aside may be reasonable compromise, please consider that these tough economic times may continue for some time and possibly get worse before they get better. Once the economy improves and tourism revenues pick up, the County will be better positioned to reinstate the full 2% and execute land purchases without increasing budget deficits, impacting essential services, and/or raising taxes. In the meantime, we believe that highly valued and vulnerable open spaces can be effectively protected via zoning and smart development planning.

Thank you.

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