

February 16, 2010

REINSTATE 2% LAND FUND

TO THE HAWAII COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Please reinstate the 2% Hawaii County Land Fund approved by over 60 percent of Hawaii County voters. If you want to ask the voters again, please do so. Please respect the will of the people. I want my county government to be open and transparent on this and all issues concerning the land and people of Hawaii County.

Following is a bit of essential 2% Land Fund history and proposed next steps for your/the County Commissioners' consideration. This is adapted from Debbie Hecht's recent report on the status of the Land Fund. Please register this message as a formal communication to the Hawaii County Commissioners and enter it as testimony to the Hawaii County Commissioners regarding the now mis-named (as the change was not ratified by the voters who voted for 2%) -- "1% Land Fund":

HOW DID THE COMMISSION ARRIVE AT THE 1% LAND FUND (\$2 million per year)?

Here's the evolution on the Land Fund charter amendments:

The Save Our Lands Citizen's committee submitted CA-15 the 2% Land Fund. This mirrored the 2% ordinance that is now part of the county code and is suspended for 2 years, until July 1, 2011. This ordinance was approved in 2006 by 63% of voters. Hawaii County is the only county that does not have a Land Fund section of the charter.

Finance Director Nancy Crawford submitted Communication 105, which was patterned after Maui County's land fund charter amendment. Then we submitted another compromise amendment, Communication 181, to the Finance Department's amendment, which included important provisions:

- a) The land fund account is interest bearing and is at 2%.
- b) The land fund not be used for maintenance or development.
- c) Any bonds floated to buy Land would have to be kept separate so citizens could "watchdog" the expenditures for the bond to be taken from the fund.

Commissioner Scott Unger introduced a floor amendment at 1% for the Land Fund, with some of the amendments that were included in Comm. 181. Because it was a floor amendment, the commission or public did not have a chance to review it prior to its appearance. Because it was a substantive amendment, the 1% Land Fund amendment will now be heard again for 2nd reading, next month.

The date of the next charter commission meeting is March 12th in Hilo, 1:30 pm.

At the charter commission meeting on Friday February 12th in Hilo, the amendments were heard for Bills at 2nd reading. The 1% Land Fund Bill will be held for a 2nd and 3rd reading because the Unger amendment was substantive.

HAWAII COUNTY COMMISSIONERS, PLEASE PUT IT ON THE BALLOT at 2% AND ONCE-AGAIN LET THE VOTERS DECIDE.

MISCONCEPTIONS:

Here are some of the misconceptions heard during the charter commission's *discussions*:

- a) That people voted for this in 2006, but because of the economic crisis people will not vote to set aside 2% now.

Answer: Let's see if they will. **PUT IT ON THE BALLOT AT 2% AND LET THE PEOPLE DECIDE.** In an economic downturn people use parks more, parks are free to get out of the house, away from the TV and spend time with family. **NOW** is the time to buy land, at the lowest price in years, to maximize our land for **COMM. 222**

b) Who does the commission represent, the Mayor, the Council or the People?

Answer: That is a good question. They are appointed by the Mayor and are approved by the council. I would hope that they represent "We the People".

c) Where is the trust in government when the Council and Mayor suspend funds to the Land fund that 63% of us voted for AND then a citizen's commission which is appointed by the Mayor decides that 2% is too much and 1% is the right amount?

Answer: It is difficult to trust government when it disrespects a mandate of 63% of the people. Commissioners: Please to put it back on the ballot at 2%.

d) If we have the 2% Fund services like fire and police could be cut.

Answer- the Kenoi administration has 370+ jobs in the budget that are funded but no one is hired to fill these jobs. 370 jobs at roughly \$40,000 per year is approximately \$14 million per year. There are plenty of places to cut the budget. The 2% Land Fund will NOT reduce core services, this is not an either or proposition for the budget.

e) The county still has the 2% ordinance so the council can decide to fund the land fund for 2% of our property taxes after deposits to the fund are reinstated in June of 2011.

Answer: The land fund ordinance will probably never be funded again.

The Kenoi administration brought forward the ordinance to stop deposits to the Land fund BEFORE the budget was even presented to the council. The land fund was the "low hanging fruit" the easiest thing to cut. The Kim administration did NOT want the land fund and tried to use the fund for maintenance.

f) If we buy the property and we can't develop it why should we buy it? OR We can't take care of the parks we have now, why should we buy more?

Answer: Now is the time to stay the course on land conservation as 63% of voters told us to do and take the long term view to save Hawaii County's treasured places for our children and grandchildren. NOW is the time to buy! Land is the least expensive it has been in years. The land does not need to be developed into a park right away, but can be "landbanked" and developed as funds become available. Some land purchases should not be developed at all, like buffers, sensitive cultural sites, endangered species critical habitat or watersheds.

g) Maui, Kauai and Oahu have Land fund set asides of ½% or 1% of their property taxes, why should we have 2%?

Answer: The other counties have more population and more properties to tax. Half percent of Oahu's taxes is \$4 million per year. In addition, most of the other counties are almost fully developed and have government land for open space.

FOR MORE INFORMATION - Please call or email Debbie Hecht- Campaign Coordinator, Save Our Land Citizen's Committee for 2% for the Land Fund: twopercentforthelandfund@gmail.com or telephone (808) 989-3222.

Please acknowledge receipt of this message.

Mahalo,
Peter

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