

Tuesday, September 17, 2019

MAUI COUNTY COUNCIL ENVIRONMENTAL, AGRICULTURAL AND  
CULTURAL PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

RE: EACP-26, ESTABLISHING AN AGENCY TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE,  
SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

Aloha kakou;

My name is Rob Parsons and I am a long-time Maui resident. I am grateful to Chair Sinenci and the members here today for your consideration of establishing an agency, department or office to directly address the urgency of climate action and sustainability. I urge you to take swift action to put forth a preferred option for directing county resources, staff and funding for this purpose.

This discussion is not new; I helped Mayor Arakawa draft a resolution for the 2011 Charter Commission to address Environmental Protection and Sustainability. Member Sugimura was one who considered that reso, which ultimately was passed on to the 2012 ballot, where 66% of voters supported it. However, the department tasked with addressing these issues dragged their feet and progress has been extremely slow.

With that in mind, I propose we drop the term "Climate Change." This is not a spectator sport where we read the headlines of hurricanes, heat waves and melting glaciers and throw up our arms in despair. Instead, let's embrace the term, "Climate Action." We need bold actions to counter the urgency at hand.

Take note of the Climate Strike actions happening this Friday, with a "Fridays For Future" student gathering here at Kalana O Maui, and a rally at UHMC in the afternoon, one of thousands happening around the globe. Next week the United Nations is conducting an Emergency Climate Summit.

Yesterday, the temperature at Kahului Airport tied an all-time record high of 97 degrees. The heat is on, and we need action.

I am happy to welcome my friend and colleague Josh Stanbro here today. As Chief Resilience Officer for the City and County's Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resilience, he has championed efforts, initiatives and outreach that helped Honolulu hit the ground running after their voters passed a ballot measure to create their office. We have a lot to learn from them, and don't need to reinvent the wheel.

With regards to the options before you on this agenda item, my personal experience is that one or two point persons in the Mayor's office addressing these issues and goals may be a good start, but is insufficient in the long-term. Case in point is Fort Collins, Colorado, with a similar population to Maui, with a Sustainability Services focus that has

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from Rob Parsons

upwards of 15 staff employees. The department head is Jackie Kozak-Thiel, who was  
Hawaii's first Sustainability Coordinator under Gov. Abercrombie, and led efforts  
through Hawaii Green Growth to establish the Aloha + Challenge.

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While there may be different opinions among committee members on how to expediently  
set and reach sustainability, resilience and climate action goals, I hope there will be no  
delay in sending forth a credible option to establish the structure for our County  
government to show leadership in this time of vital need.

Mahalo.

Rob Parsons  
3237 Luahine Place  
Haiku, HI 86708  
808-269-6842

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