

## POLITICS

# Candidate Q&A: Honolulu Mayor — Ernest Carvalho

“What city runs a rail from the outside in without the infrastructure of other modes of public transportation?”

JULY 12, 2016 · By Civil Beat  

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**Editor’s note:** *For Hawaii’s Aug. 13 primary election, Civil Beat asked candidates to answer some questions.*

*The following came from Ernest Carvalho, one of 11 candidates for Honolulu mayor. The other candidates are Kurt Baker, Zachary Burd, Peter Carlisle, [Charles Djou](#), [Kirk Caldwell](#), Lawrence Friedman, Timothy Garry, [Ronald Hochuli](#), Lillian Hong and Mike Powers.*

*Go to Civil Beat’s [Elections Guide](#) for general information, and check out other candidates on the [Primary Election Ballot](#).*

**Name:** Ernest Carvalho

**Office seeking:** Honolulu mayor

**Occupation:** Health care

**Age as of Aug. 13, 2016:** 55

**Place of residence:** Kapolei



*Ernest Carvalho*

**Campaign website:** [www.ernestcarvalho.com](http://www.ernestcarvalho.com)

**1. Which is closest to your choice for Honolulu rail: Kill the project? Modify the route? Find the additional money to build the project as planned? Explain your choice and what you would do to accomplish that.**

The rail project must come to a halt, with Middle Street being its last stop. The bleeding of taxpayer money must stop. Its conception has been a failure from the start; Going from the inside out, and expanding outward as ridership and revenue grew, would have made more sense to me. We are now left to staunch the financial impact to our city as we already struggle to meet the needs of our people.

As mayor, I would allocate necessary resources to look to the Bus Rapid Transit models that Australia, Brazil and Bogota have adopted successfully. It could be integrated with the rail as we also looked to developing green spaces, bike transit paths and feeder systems into the existing bus system.

I believe with models to follow such as BRT, it is possible to find more effective and less expensive ways to meet the needs for public transportation in our city.

**2. Is Honolulu growing in the right direction? What would you do to make it more livable?**

Honolulu is growing, but I do not believe it is in the right direction for the majority of our people. Our city's statistics contribute largely to those of our state: 52 percent of public school students are economically disadvantaged, and we have the second-highest rate of income tax on poor families. Our cost of living is unacceptable, and our people are disenfranchised as they see luxury towers built all over town, and are working three jobs to live in a tiny home, or no home at all.

We need to get to the heart of these issues while also alleviating the symptoms. Clearly, more effective programs for the working poor and homeless are of no avail until we do something about the income vs. cost of living gap. I advocate for better jobs and better training for people to fill them. Courting tech companies for remote staffing here is a very real possibility. We must close loopholes in laws governing the percentage of affordable units for each new development so that they are really available. We can grant tax breaks for landlords who maintain and rent out affordable units. We can work with the private sector to make this

happen.

**3. This year has seen an outsized influence from people who want big changes in how government is run. What would you do to change how the Mayor's Office is run?**

If there is one thing we do well in Honolulu, and all over Hawaii Nei, it's gather. I want more gatherings between the Mayor's Office and the people; that's what we know how to do! Regular kanikapila, potluck picnics and other events should be sponsored. It doesn't have to be expensive – we all know how to bring the potato-mac salad and come and get together.

If we look to our kupuna – our elders – generations back, we know our traditions. We know how the deposed monarchy spent time and energy connecting with people. I want to bring that back. I want to spend time talking and listening to people and hearing their ideas, and then facilitating action and involvement. How many people are sitting in their homes right now with the next big idea that is going to fix a part of our city, but have no voice? How many people are waiting to be called into action with their talents, only nobody has an outlet to sound the call?

I want open forums in every community. I want to take topics of interest to our city and hold town hall meetings that find answers. I want the people engaged.

**4. Hawaii has long been dominated by the Democratic Party establishment. Should this change, and if so, how?**

Regardless of the party, our status quo of Hawaiian politics needs to change. Somewhere along the line, especially in Honolulu, we have lost sight of the idea that elected positions are positions of service, not power. When a political party becomes a machine for an agenda that does not have the best interest of the people, the environment, or our culture at heart, it must change.

Believe me when I tell you that as a non-affiliated candidate with no big budget, no PAC sponsorship, and no party connections, breaking past that and getting serious consideration for my candidacy is a huge challenge. For all of the people who care and aren't in a position to run for public office, we need to give them candidates to support. Listen to anyone talking at the saimin stand, the bus stop, the family gathering – many people are unhappy with how things are run, but they don't have the empowerment to change it. What if there were candidates whose only interest was making things better for our communities? What if there were people running with no intent on making their position a lifelong career? Regardless of

party, candidates like that are what we need.

**5. What specific steps would you take to strengthen Hawaii's lax lobbying, ethics and financial disclosure laws?**

I will specifically hold regular public forums with representatives from our nonprofit watchdog groups so that I and the people of our communities are informed of challenges and upcoming legislation as a start. As this news outlet has reported many times, groups such as the League of Women Voters and Common Cause Hawaii have tirelessly advocated for lobbying reform; I will consult with them and other groups like them. I will make sure that any project, proposal or idea tied to the city and county of Honolulu was fully disclosed to the public.

I will make sure that our Ethics Commission and how it is managed is reformed, period. It is no secret that the independence of the commission has been hampered, and investigations of public officials quelled or completely railroaded. Even the perception of impropriety is unacceptable, and the notion that the one with the most money or power is the one who runs the show must stop. I have no delusions that as mayor, I can singlehandedly fix this, but I can certainly incorporate cooperation to clean house.

**6. Would you support eliminating Honolulu's high fees for access to public records when the request is in the public interest?**

There is a vast difference between reasonable administrative costs to pull information and stonewalling the release of that information with ridiculous fees. If past justifications are to be believed, then these fees are a reflection of poor record keeping and disorganized information storage. Not only do I support eliminating prohibitive fees for public information, I will also initiate more tech-friendly record storage going forward. Anything that is deemed public knowledge under the law should be readily accessible online.

If we maintain it as we go, then there would be no need for someone seeking information to pay \$10 an hour for an administrative assistant to go through, say, travel records of the mayor, black out any credit card data or other private information not included under the law, print out a copy, certify it and mail it. Having a transparent office means making the accommodations for public information sharing. In this day and age, there is no reason to continue with archaic methods of record keeping when technology affords us fast, easy and cheap ways to keep records.

## **7. Voters complain their elected officials don't listen to them. What would you do to improve communication?**

In my personal life, on any given day, there are a minimum of eight ways to get in touch with me across multiple devices and platforms. Many of our elected officials have Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, email, website forms, addresses, phone numbers, ad nauseum. As I follow those social media outlets, I see comment after comment asking real questions and wanting real answers, only to be ignored or glossed over. Previously, I referenced public meetings on a regular basis.

It would be idealistic to think that as mayor, I could personally answer every inquiry across every platform. Realistically though, it would not be difficult to have groupings of questions and issues that could get real answers, and generate topics for public meetings. For example, if I were mayor and had an official Facebook page, and 100 people left me comments about a specific policy, then our next public gathering should address that policy. My official comments across outlets should address that policy. And those addresses would be with real answers and honest considerations of what people are telling me, rather than a repeat of the same phrases and words used to justify the position taken with no room for discussion.

## **8. What do you see as the most pressing issue facing your district? What will you do about it?**

The Hoopili Project recently brought more attention to my district's long-standing problem with overdevelopment. Taking agricultural and green space land and turning it into more tract homes and shopping centers is devastating to the people in my area. Destroying areas of cultural significance as defined by our local people, not just official government departments, has got to stop. Destroying agricultural land so that we continue to rely on imported food contributes to our outrageous cost of living.

No space for our young people to gather and participate in programs that offer them a constructive use of their time leaves them with nothing to do but get into trouble. I want to stop the development and concur with the Sierra Club's suggestion to move to the vacant land near Kapolei Hale and use that to create a downtown area. I want to work with our cultural, environmental, and social reform groups in conjunction with developers and urban planners. Not everyone can get their way 100 percent of the time, but it seems to me that we should be able to find ways that take care of our land and people as well as offer growth and

opportunity economically.

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**Sharon Willeford**

11 hours ago

Solid platform. What are your stands on water quality / aquafirs / Ocean / RIMPAC Bombing / GMO's / tons of pesticides applied around our keiki's schools and homes, Geothermal? , Overdevelopment moratorium until we figure out how to mend our current infrastructure/ road improvement/ waster water treatment, TPP/ TMT/ Haleakala, Hawaiian's on the list for homes ( some 30+ years SHAME! ) . That will be a good start of what 'the people' care about. Mahalo 🌺 Anyone may use this to question their representatives and please add your interests.

**Joan Parsons**

*27 minutes ago*

I like what I am hearing! What are your positions on the homeless, and other political hot potato items? Being open to the public, and ending the musical chairs and cradle to grave job security for those in power is music to my ears. It seems that technology drives access to everything BUT politicians, who in Hawaii continue on as if only they exist - with no accountability.

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