

GO VOTE!

Primary Election
August 8
General Election
November 3

Ka'ū News is a neutral and non-partisan community news platform. We do not endorse candidates for public office. Any political advertisements, sponsored content, or campaign announcements are paid placements and do not constitute an endorsement by Ka'ū News.

Our platform, including these Q&A sections, are equally available to all qualified candidates and campaigns for the purpose of sharing to the public events, announcements and information so residents can learn more about the individuals seeking to represent our community.

The goal of the Ka'ū News is to provide fair and balanced access to local civic information for the people of Ka'ū so that they are fully informed at the time they cast their votes.

All candidates were given identical questions and a strict 60-word response limit per section. Where necessary, submissions were edited for length to ensure absolute fairness and equality. Candidates are listed alphabetically by last name. Mahalo!

Questions

Why did you decide to run for the District 6 County Council Seat?

What experience, skills, or community involvement best prepared you to serve Ka'ū on the County Council?

Beyond agriculture, what specific industries do you believe can be realistically expanded or created within Ka'ū to provide more permanent jobs with livable wages?

What are your solutions to the shortage of affordable housing in Ka'ū?

What realistic and achievable policies would you champion to improve healthcare access for Ka'ū residents?

What ideas do you have to ensure tourism dollars stay within the community instead of going to Kona or Hilo?

What is your opinion on development of the gas station/market/visitor's center at Pāhala?

Are there policies regarding indigenous Hawaiian rights not now in place that you believe are in need of implementation?

What are your top priorities for your first two years in office, and how would you measure success by the end of your term?

2026 Elections – District 6 County Council Candidates



Zed Aki

There are many reasons I decided to run, but it starts with wanting more for the community I call home. I want a safe place to raise my children, deeper roots in my ancestral homeland, and opportunities for our families to thrive. After 20 years in public policy, I decided that instead of hoping for change, I would help lead it myself.

To effectively represent Ka'ū and South Kona, you need both expertise and drive. I love this place. As a Native Hawaiian with deep roots here, I see this district as 'ohana place worth fighting for. For over 20 years, I've advocated for communities and helped shape public policy. If I've accomplished that without elected office, imagine what I can do with it.

The sky is the limit for Ka'ū and South Kona. With community will and smart investment, we can transform our district into a healthcare hub that trains, houses, and employs local healthcare professionals. By building workforce pipelines and expanding services, we can improve health outcomes, create permanent living-wage jobs, and attract new economic opportunities. This is just one example of what's possible.

The county must do better. Too many families, especially first-time homebuyers, face permitting delays and unnecessary red tape. We can streamline the process without sacrificing environmental and cultural protections. I'm also concerned about kūpuna on fixed incomes facing rising costs and property taxes. We should explore tax relief and affordable housing solutions that help our elders remain in the communities they helped build.

As Executive Director of Lepo 'Ula, I've partnered with the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center to address health disparities in Ka'ū. As a Native Hawaiian and father of two children on the autism spectrum, healthcare is deeply personal. I support practical solutions like mobile clinics, transportation services, and benefit-navigation assistance to help residents access the care and support they need.

Community Benefit Agreements can ensure more revenue generated in our district stays in our district. We should explore returning a greater share of taxes from vacation rentals and tourism-related businesses directly to community priorities. I also support stronger county investment in small businesses, entrepreneurs, and local markets, helping them grow, attract customers, and create economic opportunities for our residents.

I don't live in Pāhala, so my opinion should carry less weight than those who do. I recognize the development's potential economic benefits as well as concerns about tourism impacts. My approach is to maximize benefits while mitigating harms. Before taking a position, I want to listen, learn, and ensure the voices of Pāhala residents guide the conversation.

With a degree in Hawaiian Studies, a legal focus on Native Hawaiian rights, and a lifetime of advocacy, I remain committed to strengthening Native Hawaiian self-determination. Key priorities include protecting access rights, conserving natural and cultural resources, and creating cultural centers where practitioners can perpetuate traditions, educate future generations, and celebrate the unique history and significance of place.

I will make Ka'ū and South Kona a priority. Two years isn't enough to solve every challenge, but it is enough to create a long-term community-driven plan that outlasts any one elected official. Together, we'll address immediate needs, reduce the cost of rural living, strengthen economic opportunities, and ensure our communities are no longer overlooked by county and state decision-makers.



Justin Canelas

After seven years in Ka'ū, I've fallen in love with this place and its people. When I learned Councilmember Galimba wasn't running, several kupuna and community members I deeply respect encouraged me to step forward – and I felt compelled to answer that call. With my background in public policy, grassroots advocacy, and securing resources for our community, I believe I have the qualifications and integrity to serve.

Throughout my time here, I have dedicated myself to the Ka'ū community – securing \$1.5M for the KHPES REO program, creating local jobs and empowering our 'ōpio as community leaders. As District 6's Environmental Management Commissioner, I've built relationships with public officials that will help me get things done. My decade in the philanthropic world means I know how to help local and mission-driven organizations secure grant funding and grow their capacity and impact.

My vision for Ka'ū's economic future is building a circular economy where resources and dollars cycle back into our community. Beyond agriculture, I see real opportunity in agro-tourism, commercial composting, renewable energy, and reuse and repair hubs. Investing in healthcare, childcare, and education jobs will create lasting employment because they'll always be needed. These aren't just jobs – they reflect our values and strengthen our community.

Affordable housing in Ka'ū isn't a one-size-fits-all problem – each community has unique barriers. Nā'ālehu needs water infrastructure investment, while Ocean View struggles with insurance access blocking traditional lending. District-wide, I'd incentivize ADUs for long-term rentals over vacation rentals, streamline permitting for water catchment and pre-fab housing, and create county-backed low-interest capital funds to help local residents build. Any land subdivision must preserve agricultural designations.

Ka'ū faces serious healthcare gaps – our kūpuna drive hours for dialysis, physical therapy is scarce, and primary care wait times are too long. I'll support local organizations to expand services while looking at ways we can bring in like-minded providers and develop partnerships. My decade in community development has given me the knowledge and tools to help secure grants that will fund real, lasting healthcare solutions for our community.

Too many tourism dollars pass through Ka'ū on the way to Kona and Hilo. I'd push for a comprehensive visitor guide showcasing local businesses and cultural experiences, create vendor opportunities at tourist hot spots, and implement out-of-state paid parking at county beaches to generate local revenue and control congestion. Investing in a shared ag-processing facility would give local producers shelf-stable products to sell visitors at a premium.

I support this project – our kūpuna and 'ōpio support it, and having personally had to double back to Nā'ālehu for gas, I understand the practical and safety need, but what excites me most is its potential beyond a simple gas station. Our youth envision it as a hub for local vendors, waste diversion and composting – a true community anchor that reflects Ka'ū's values and circular economy vision.

Supporting Kānaka Maoli is at the heart of this campaign. As someone not from here, it's my duty to be part of the solution. I'll work with DHHL to get Hawaiian lands back into Hawaiian hands and support Hawaiian sovereignty movements. Guided by I ka wā ma mua, I ka wā ma hope, I believe Hawaiian ancestral wisdom in land and resource stewardship must inform our policies today.

My first two years will be defined by tangible, visible progress – things Ka'ū residents can see and feel. I'll prioritize establishing a food hub and ag-processing facility, getting commercial composting operational, securing funding for local healthcare and cultural organizations, and expanding childcare options. Success means more families thriving, more youth building careers here at home, and a circular economy taking root in our community.

Candidate Marie Burns did not respond to our invitation to participate in this survey.

2026 Elections – District 6 County Council Candidates



Guy Enriques

I believe we need strong leadership that addresses the needs and concerns of the people of District 6.

Former Councilman 2008, Build Ka'ū Shelter & Gym: Owner/Director largest team camp in Northwest for 40 years and counting; Oregon State DI Women's Volleyball coach, top 25 ranking, PAC 10 Coach of the Year; Founder Hawai'i Island Labor Day Classic to boost economy through Sports tourism; Teacher 10 years; Cofounder/1st President OKK; Founder/Host/OKK Keiki Fishing tournament 13 years.

Push for the support and completion of the Pāhala Visitor Center along Highway 11.

Research budget source through the government. Select buildable lands in an appropriate area, identify local builders to build affordable homes.

Create a Dialysis Center in Ka'ū. Start by identifying barriers, then bringing together care providers, insurers, community leaders and explore mobile and permanent dialysis treatment options in Ka'ū.

Build the Pāhala Visitor Center – tap into the money that drives past Pāhala every day.

I am in support of the fueling station, market place and visitor center.

Consider policies that assist our local Hawaiian population in getting the lands from DHHL that they have been waiting for years. Deny Geothermal drilling on DHHL.

My top priority is to get 75-80% of my project list that comes directly from the community either completed or moving forward.



Kyle Jones

I am running for Hawai'i County Council because I feel that the District 6 area, a vast geographic area from Teshima's to Volcano Village, has a number of pressing needs and has often been marginalized by the county. I identify as a "pothole politician," which means I want to start by going back to basics and focusing on direct quality-of-life improvements for residents. I also have some innovative ideas that will help residents benefit financially from the tourist industry.

I was born in Kealahou and I've lived in District 6 my entire life. I attended UH Hilo and received my bachelors in Political Science in 2017. I was employed as a congressional intern for Senator Brian Schatz in Washington D.C. I would be an effective representative for District 6 because I understand the issues plaguing this side of the island very well, including the homeowner insurance crisis in Lava Zones 1 and 2, and the lack of reliable infrastructure. I would be an unflinching advocate for District 6 residents.

Ka'ū has a serious lack of good paying jobs that can keep people in the area. I want to promote small businesses like grocers, barbers and restaurants so we can revitalize our small towns and breathe new life into them. One major obstacle that keeps people from starting new businesses in District 6 is the incredibly high commercial rents on the island. We need to get business rents under control so people have the freedom to take risks and succeed. The county should be lifting people up, not only restricting them.

Affordable housing is scarce throughout District 6, compounding with a lack of good-paying jobs. I will focus on two priorities: first, amending zoning codes to allow second kitchens in legal ohana/ADU units, easing restrictive county barriers. Second, expanding county programs like the affordable housing facility on Hinalani Street into District 6. Finally, I support all state Hawaiian Home Lands development efforts.

I have long supported universal single-payer healthcare and state or federal efforts to improve District 6 medical facilities. I was pleased Ka'ū Hospital received state funds to modernize in 2024; these efforts must continue. I oppose moving facilities to Hilo or Kona and strongly support the county's medical transit efforts and the work of the Office of Aging.

I hope to establish the "Hawai'i County Tourism Trust," to seed a portion of tourism-associated revenue into a sovereign wealth fund that invests in stable financial markets. Similar to the Alaska Permanent Fund, this trust would issue annual dividends to every man, woman, and child on the Island, creating a stake in the tourism industry for generations to come.

I support developing the Pāhala Visitor Center/Gas Station. While we shouldn't rush projects or become O'ahu, this project is appropriately sized to revitalize our community with an affordable grocery store. I also strongly support county-community partnerships like the Ocean View Skate Park grassroots effort and the successful local organization collaboration for the oversight of Ho'okena Beach Park.

I would work with the state to finish building Hawaiian Homeland homes faster and get people off the waiting list. One of the major slowdowns is the lack of infrastructure to a lot of the HHL land. The county could help work with the state to build some of the infrastructure needed. I'm also a strong supporter of Native Hawaiian fishing and gathering rights and will always defend them.

My top two priorities for my council term would be repairing the dilapidated county roads in District 6 that are in dire need of repair and fixing the mortgage insurance crisis in Lava Zones 1 and 2. Both of these issues have a very direct negative impact on everyone living in District 6. I want to do everything in the county's power to fix it and improve life for all of us.



Jason Masters

I am running because I believe District 6 deserves a stronger voice in the County government. Too often, countywide decisions do not reflect the unique needs of our communities. I want to advocate for practical, place-based solutions that support local families, businesses, agriculture, increased healthcare access, improved infrastructure, new economic opportunities and the long-term sustainability of District 6.

My experience comes from being actively involved in the Ka'ū community and listening to and working with residents, farmers, business owners, and families. Those conversations have helped me understand local challenges and opportunities. I believe effective leadership means listening, being accessible, and working collaboratively to find solutions that reflect the needs of the community.

Agriculture remains the backbone of Ka'ū's economy. I support expanding economic opportunities by increasing value-added product industries, local food accessibility, and processing opportunities. We should support small business creation and consider sustainable, locally-operated eco-tourism that respects cultural and environmental resources. Our goal should be greater self-sufficiency by creating opportunities that benefit local families while not becoming overly dependent on tourism.

Affordable housing requires place-based solutions. Too often, countywide policies don't reflect the realities of Ka'ū and District 6. We should identify appropriate housing opportunities, increase incentives for, and encourage public-private partnerships through alternative financing mechanisms, and ensure development remains consistent with the Ka'ū Community Development Plan. The goal is to create housing opportunities for local residents while preserving community character.

In the short term, I support increased transportation options and mobile healthcare services that help residents access care both close to home as well as in Hilo and Kona. Long term, as infrastructure improvements such as wastewater upgrades move forward, we should explore opportunities for additional healthcare services in Ka'ū, like dialysis where feasible, reducing the burden of long-distance travel.

We should support local businesses, farms, food vendors, restaurants, and other community-based enterprises that already attract visitors to Ka'ū. I support sustainable, culturally respectful eco-tourism operated by local residents. At the same time, we should strengthen agriculture and other local industries to help District 6 become more resilient, self-sufficient and not overly dependent on traditional tourism-related activities.

I support development that provides needed services while remaining consistent with county regulations and the Ka'ū Community Development Plan. We should focus on improving existing services, such as renovation of the current gas station, ensuring first that future projects benefit residents, reflect community priorities, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of Pāhala and the diverse communities of District 6.

Many commitments to Native Hawaiian communities already exist but have not been fully implemented. Before creating new policies, we must focus on fulfilling existing responsibilities related to housing, infrastructure, and access to resources. The Council must serve as an advocate on behalf of our Native Hawaiian communities to work with state agencies to address longstanding issues and improve outcomes.

My priorities are improving infrastructure, expanding healthcare access, supporting affordable housing opportunities, and strengthening local industries. Success means making measurable progress on community priorities, ensuring development aligns with both the Ka'ū and Kona Community Development Plans, supporting greater self-sufficiency, and giving District 6 a stronger voice in County decisions that affect our communities.