

Rotary Minutes 6 October

**Rotary Club of Honolulu
Zoom Meeting**

PRESIDING: PRESIDENT Rich Proctor

The inspiration was given by **Jessica Rich**, who spoke on “Courage” relating it to the speaker Mayoral candidate Rick Blangiardi who has placed service above self. She quoted Nelson Mandela as having said “Courage doesn’t mean you are never afraid. Courage means you don’t let fear stop you.” The Pledge of Allegiance was led by **Kevin Hall**. The singing of “The National Anthem” was led by **Kent Reinker**. **President Rich** introduced our visitors who included: Hideo Yamanaka from the Kyoto Club, which today celebrates its 75th Rotary Anniversary, Pili Valderama, Robert Comper, Amanda Kelly, PDG Del Green, Kimmerie Jones (**Brian Dunkel’s** wife), Funda Kelsay from Oregon, former members Paddy Griggs and Byron Eliashof, and Funda Kelsay from Oregon.

Birthdays this week included:

Ananda Ferreira, Ann Stamp Miller, and Phil Wright (TODAY 6 October), **Susan Robinson** on 9 Oct, and **Carolann Biederman** on 12 Oct.

Club Anniversaries:

Jennifer Oyer (Sponsor **Alice Tucker**)

Announcements:

Rotarian of the Month Award: Reese Liggett for his magnificent coordination of our Centennial Park Waikiki Project volunteer day.

Bob Sumpf described the Centennial Park Project. Sat 10 Oct will be last near term opportunity to volunteer at the park to spread mulch.

Breakout Discussion:

Club members and guests participated in breakout room discussion with the question: “Who was your first Crush and when did it happen?”

Program:

Beth-Ann Kozlovich introduced Mayoral Candidate **Rick Blangiardi** Rick grew up in Cambridge MA and is a former media executive, GM of Hawaii News Now, He’s been a had broadcasting roles in NY, Seattle and LA and San Francisco. Served in the U.S. Navy Reserve , Associate Head Football coach for UH. He served as President of the Board of Hawaii’s Boy Scouts of Hawaii. Chair of Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii, President of the UH Booster Club, Served on the boards of the American Red Cross, Hawaii Foodbank, and YMCA. Distinguished Alumnus of UH, Inductee into the Hawaii Sports Circle of Honor. He holds Masters of Arts in Education from UH a BS from Springfield College. He is married to wife Karen and has 3 adult children- Matt, Ryan and Laura.

Beth-Ann posed the following questions:

Q. Hawaii's economic recovery and its effective public health response to COVID-19 are inextricably linked. According to UHERO, it may not be until 2023 that Oahu's unemployment rate approaches a pre-pandemic level. Among the variables are another surge, the success of the pre-travel testing protocol and the substantial return of visitors - and whether remaining businesses can last until then. Given these and other variables, **what would you do for Oahu's health and economic welfare in moving through the pandemic?**

A. Trying to juggle public health with economic recovery is very daunting task. I have been disappointed in the rulemaking that allowed the ruin of so many small businesses that were deemed non-essential that are essential and could have been opened a lot sooner. The incredible damage has not yet been calculated. The already significant stresses that have resulted in negative population growth are only going to be worsened by COVID effects. For perspective, 2008 brought us to our knees in a way I had not seen. 1600 businesses (5%) were lost. We didn't recover by most economists' judgment until 2015. This set of circumstances will redefine Mayoral responsibilities toward redeveloping our economy. Classic Mayoral issues like homelessness, rail, infrastructure safety issues, elder care have been pushed to the subordinate place after getting our economy back on track post COVID. Things are so fluid. Waited till now for roadmap for recovery even though other candidates criticized. Flexibility will be necessary given the changing circumstances, needs and resources available to take them on.

Q. Before the era of COVID -19, our high cost of living and housing kept many individuals and families living paycheck to paycheck. With the pandemic job and business losses, many people are now well behind in rent. At some future point, the state moratorium on eviction will end, opening the floodgates for displacement and homelessness. **What would you do** to keep this from happening on Oahu, both to meet the immediate need and in longer term **to create truly affordable housing?**

A. Pre COVID at least 50% of employed population are paycheck to paycheck. Now that figure could be as much as 70%. Getting money in the hands of people not just from CARES Act but even more Federal money is even more will be necessary. Need to be careful approach to minimum wage. Even though a state issue, this needs to be left to employer and employee as to what they can afford. We need more affordable rental units. Projections are that by 2025 we will need 65000 homes of which have been earmarked 22500 affordable rentals. . Housing shortage is not a single plan but a multipronged thing. I like Marshal Hung one of Hawaii's best developers. Bill 7 later Bill 60 approved 5 year test to allow redevelopment of urban core perhaps as low as for \$250 per square foot to create true affordable units. Need different kind of construction that can use the advantages of the bill. Affordability has lost its meaning if we don't construct to a level that is affordable.

Q. There are people who are homeless for other than economic reasons and who need different types of help. Added to the current need for social services, mental health professionals expect we will experience a mental health wave that may continue for years as we really don't know the prolonged effect of pandemic isolation and loss plus remote work or school on adults and children. How would you work with the state to plan for expanded mental health and social services before the wave hits? **What specifically are you going to do to address the homeless problem in Honolulu?** Your answer should identify what resources will be

put into place and what you will do to introduce local ordinances to require psychiatric/ substance abuse treatment.

A. When people go through the trauma of losing perhaps a multigenerational family business it is really debilitating. I have talked with folks like Nanci Kreidman of the Domestic Violence Action Center who have related that domestic violence is up, divorce is up, and depression for folks forced to capitulate and lose their businesses is a big problem. So we know we are going to have psychological impacts that are already evident and predictable with COVID. In homelessness the theory has been that if we better educate the public on these topics that it would empower politicians to address it. It never really worked. Witness when we had to break up the camp in Kakaako. Of course the term homelessness encompasses many different types.: Homeless and Houseless; Sheltered and un Sheltered; At-risk homeless (which is a big topic right now); and Chronic homeless. Even though the Point-in-Time (PIT) count has remained the same for 5 years I don't believe it's as low as counted nor do any of the homeless providers. The Kathleen Matayoshi before she left the DOE said they have 4500 homeless kids alone in the school system. I think the number is even 3 times the PIT count. Likely 10-15k on Oahu. I have worked with Art Usijima, Josh Green, and others on such things as the H4 (Hygiene, Healthcare, Housing and Humanitarian Services) project. We need to have places to place these people. I wished I hadn't used the term "Tough love" because it has been misconstrued to only mean tough but we need both tough and love. We know "Compassionate Disruption" doesn't work. We have to address the chronic folks not by just moving them around but by dealing with their problems comprehensively we have to be able to take them somewhere and give them treatment. We need to have more capability like Habilitat as well as the Sand Island Treatment Center. These could take a big bite out of the chronic homeless. Meanwhile tremendous folks like in Partners in Care, IHS, Aloha United Way are important partners to provide shelter for those families that need it. Compassion Disruption doesn't work. We need comprehensive approach and to pragmatically spend more money in a time money will be scarce.

Q. Rail costs continue to escalate. If we are beyond the point of no return, how would you complete the project without raising taxes and with 100% accountability?

A. We don't really know the costs of the last 4 miles. Likely to be enormously more than currently budgeted. I will not raise property taxes. GET extended to 2030. Local people have already put in a disproportionate amount of money. Original model of 70/30 Local/Fed split has migrated to about 95/5. \$400-600mil shortfall is where we stand now just for construction not counting operations and maintenance costs. It's hard to imagine this not being a big mess. I have been a proponent of the rail project for lots of good reasons but what I stand to inherit as Mayor is very uncertain as lots of change will happen just in the next 2 months. What do we need to build trust in FTA (Federal Transit Administration) to raise more federal funds. We have to raise billions to get to Ala Moana. If the money doesn't make sense the strategy doesn't make sense. If we had to stop we need to get at least to Aala Park or Aloha Tower. I will do everything possible to get the money but at this point in time I can't get real data from HART as a Mayoral candidate and from what Mayor Caldwell has said he can't even get timely accurate costing data. That is an unacceptable circumstance if the Mayor and HART are not aligned.

Q. DPP is a woefully broken department What will you do to fix it

A. Widely known by everyone on this call that DPP is broken and has been broken. In 2019 the City did an audit, the findings of which were presented in January this year that revealed as much. COVID response has probably slowed any real response to those findings. The findings showed long waits, leadership issues, staffing issues, modernization issues. One issue has been that DPP has not only been charged with Permitting but also monitoring illegal vacation rentals and even “monster” homes which has overwhelmed them. DPP is going to be in the top of my priorities list. Not an easy fix but I will not be sitting in my office. We are in the middle of a pandemic. We can’t have DPP creating long delays to get reconstruction underway because that will be key to our recovery. I will do everything I can but it isn’t going to be overnight.

Q. Since 2016, the Rotary Club of Honolulu has been engaged in a public-private partnership to create a neighborhood park from a once empty lot in the heart of Waikiki. The club has raised over half a million and put in countless hours of sweat equity to bring **Centennial Park** closer to completion. **What will you do to continue the commitment to this project and the City’s support for our efforts?**

A. Maybe I will sign up for a thousand hours to work as a volunteer. This is a great Public Private Partnership. I can’t throw a kiss and make it happen but I will do all I can to support it. It is reflective of the thinking we need in the future for many City initiatives

The main meeting ended at this point. President Rich announced that next week meeting by Zoom will feature Mayoral Candidate Keith Amemiya who will answer the same questions posed to Rick today. The following questions were asked after the formal close of the meeting with the singing of Aloha Oe.

Rick Blangiardi expressed his deep appreciation for the long format and ability to address complex issues in more than sound bite level detail so he could demonstrate his appreciation of the complex issues facing the City

Q. Oahu continues to feel the effects of climate change. **How specifically would you align all stakeholders to use best practices in managing climate change and preventing or mitigating future impacts?**

A. Kirk deserves real credit to establish Climate panels. Raised \$750K at Hawaii News Now for Climate Initiative education through documentaries. We should be talking about Climate Change. We are very vulnerable to Climate exacerbated. Large Military presence allows getting federal moneys and we should exploit those opportunities. It is real. It has started. Some of the green stuff goes astray, but our children are the reason we have to invest in and pay attention to climate change.

Q. Would you support greater limitations on super PAC and union participation in political campaigns for City government?

I have not been a beneficiary of any of this. Wise people have always advised in politics “Self Fund.” Even so I don’t think this external money will have great effect. I don’t believe this should be a partisan race. The Mayor role has been expressly non-partisan throughout its history and I am disappointed my opponent has chosen to ignore the good reasons why this is so.

Q. We continue to hear the words accountability and transparency applied to the fix list for controversial issues. What do those words specifically mean to you

I have always been accountability to stakeholders, owners, employees, players, I have to live up to expectations as father husband. The buck stops with me, I own it. Transparent means you bring public along with you even as the circumstances change. It means that I hold myself and all who work with me accountable. My life has been being transparent and accountable.

Q. What will be your intended legacy?

Inherit fear and uncertainty and leave with instantiated hope and confidence. Fix DPP. A City Hall that works well. We need to modernize the way government services are provided. Foster vs stifle innovation. Risk takers, decision makers, progressive, and innovative

Respectfully submitted, David M Shanahan, Scribe