

Safarik proposes preservation fund

Property taxes are money source for land program

By **TIFFANY EDWARDS**
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HILO — A Puna Councilman is proposing a charter amendment for 1 percent of the county's real property tax collections to go

into a Public Access, Open Space and Natural Resources Preservation Fund.

Gary Safarik said he has brought forth Bill 270, which suggests the preservation fund, after the Trust for Public Lands made the pitch

to him a year ago. He said similar funds exist on Maui and Kauai, but he has suggested 1 percent, not 2 percent, like the other counties have.

If council members approve Bill 270, voters will be asked on the November ballot whether they want 1 percent of their real property tax to be set aside for "purchasing or otherwise

acquiring lands or property entitlements and improvements in the County of Hawaii."

The objectives for the land acquisition and improvements would be:

— "public outdoor recreation and education, including access to beaches and moun-

See FUND: Page 6A

► Fund: Charter amendment needed

From Page 1A
tains

- preservation of historic or culturally important land areas and sites
 - protection of significant habitats or ecosystems, including buffer zones
 - preserving forests, beaches, coastal areas and agricultural lands
 - protecting watershed lands to preserve water quality and water supply
 - conserving land in order to reduce erosion, floods, landslides and runoff
 - improving disabled and public access to, and enjoyment of, public land, and open space
 - acquiring disabled and public access to public land and open space."
- Safarik said those were "all great

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Gary Safarik, Puna councilman

things we need to focus on," and noted there are provisions to fund mass transit and American with Disabilities Act projects, which the county has already spent and plans to spend millions of dollars.

The fund will be included in the county's budget every year, but the mayor and the County Council will

have the option of not putting money toward it, Safarik said.

"Every year it will be automatically funded, unless we bring forth a reason not to fund it, and that will spur public debate," he said. "This will encourage communities to work with the government to develop a plan that will address each of these points."

"It's going to be an interesting debate, but I don't know how anybody can be against it," Safarik said.

Bill 270 comes after Safarik described himself as "one of the most environmentally conscious" council members currently serving, as he sparred with an environmental activist accusing him of the opposite during testimony at a council meeting last Wednesday.