

Merle Page Responses

Why are you running for Pottawatomie County Commission?

My career has been in public service, of which thirty plus years have been in local government. Coupled with my experience in healthcare finance and operations in public transportation (aTaBus), I want to use my experience to serve the constituents of Pottawatomie County.

What do you consider the biggest challenge of the position you are running for? What areas of county government need improvement and why?

Controlled, planned growth is vital in my mind to assure growth happens in areas that make the most sense. Avoiding "sprawl" in the county is important. It does two things in my opinion. One, it allows growth to match appropriate infrastructure. Two, by controlled, planned growth, it lends itself well to preserving agricultural ground that is a very important economic driver in our County.

I have no preconceived thoughts about what areas of county government need improvement. If elected to serve, I will evaluate the overall aspects of governance, and assess what needs to change or improve.

How long have you been a part of the Pottawatomie County community? To what extent have you been a part of local government in the county?

My wife, son and I have been residents of Pottawatomie County for twenty-eight years.

Of those twenty-eight (28) years, I served as City Manager for the City of Wamego for a little over twenty-three (23) years.

Regarding your prospective position, what do you consider your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?

I view my strengths are leadership, government finance and common sense. Some people consider this a weakness, but I'm not a "techy" person. I don't do Facebook, X (formally Twitter), Snap Chat, Instagram, Tik Tok, etc. I use email and texting but prefer direct interaction either by phone or in person.

What is Pottawatomie County's role in spurring job creation?

I believe the County should be at the table when economic growth presents itself and determine what role we have in that process. Job creation is the lifeline for county and cities. We should try to position ourselves in an enabling role, not as a hinderance or deterrent.

It's no secret that Pottawatomie County has broad and diverse demographics and cultures. Please describe how you intend to strike a balance and serve everyone in the county.

I'm a firm believer that all parts of the County are important in their own right. I would assume my making sound, well informed decisions at the County Commission level serves all of Pottawatomie County. Some of that may be direct benefit, while providing indirect benefits and opportunities throughout the County.

What should Pottawatomie County's relationship with other local governments look like?

County government should have a collaborative role with other units of government throughout the County. By understanding their goals and/or challenges enables the County to identify areas that may fall within their purview. The County's role may range from being supportive in nature to identifying impacts that may result in infrastructure challenges directly affecting the county in general.

What are your plans for preserving farm ground while also creating development opportunities and jobs throughout the county?

As mentioned earlier, by ensuring that growth happens in the areas that make the most sense is critical. By doing so, it lends itself very well to preserving farm ground throughout the county, as well as provide economic growth within the County. If memory serves, the 2040 plan calls out "urban growth boundaries" for incorporated cities in the county. By using that model further assures preservation of land for agricultural use.

Given Manhattan's continued expansion eastward, what should Pottawatomie County's relationship with the City of Manhattan look like?

As mentioned previously, it should be one of collaboration. Based on previous history, it's no secret that moving eastward is probably on their radar screen. Pottawatomie County must be at the table when those sights are focused in our county. Development in the western part of the county is probably inevitable, so we must make sure that if, and when, that occurs it's a win-win situation.

How would you approach the potential decommissioning of Jeffrey Energy Center (JEC)?

Based on the current energy environment and barring some catastrophic event, it is very unlikely that it would be decommissioned any time soon. It's my understanding that the Southwest Power Pool (SPP) needs to maintain "baseload" generation to meet the demands within its operational footprint. With that said, I would assume other units less economical would be decommissioned first. That in my mind would be the first domino to fall. That is why the County must be in the information pipeline related to this issue. There are two cities (St. Marys and Wamego) that most likely would have advance awareness since they operate electric utilities. Both belong to separate joint action agencies that monitor these types of changes in the energy arena. In addition, it is imperative that we are talking to our federal and state congressional delegates on the impact of shutting down JEC would have in our County, the State and SPP. Losing that "baseload" capacity would be devastating.

Please share your approach to crafting a budget for Pottawatomie County.

It will be the same approach I've had for over thirty (30) years. Tell me what you need, not what you want. The bottom line is that we are accountable to the taxpayer, period. We need to be good stewards of their tax dollars.

What are your takeaways from the Pottawatomie County 2040 Plan? What stands out to you?

I think the plan is very well done. I think its content is sound and logical. It needs to be a tool in the toolbox for the County to use when looking at growth within the County. What stands out to me, is the flexibility to adjust when the need arises. It appears to be a living document that allows it to evolve when conditions change. I'm a firm believer that it needs to be reviewed, modified if necessary, every 3 to 5 years. Using it as a guide helps make good long range decisions for our County.

A two-day training session by the Kansas County Commissioners Association (KCCA) will take place in Topeka for newly elected county commissioners. What will you hope to accomplish at that training?

There are two things I hope to accomplish at that training if elected. Even though I've had over thirty (30) years of experience in local government, I'm certain there are nuances that are specific to county commissioners and their obligations while serving in that capacity. I would hope to identify those in order to better serve the constituents in Pottawatomie County. The other, assuming I'm not a class of one, would be to network with other elected commissioners throughout the state. I've learned over the years that others have often experienced issues similar to what we might face and use them as a sounding board to get a better insight into those issues.

What are your top priorities as County Commissioner?

My priorities would be simple. Serve to the best of my ability, be open minded and to make sure we have the best interests of our citizens in Pottawatomie County in mind.