

MICHEL KERWOOD 4TH DISTRICT COUNTY COMMISSIONER

Why are you running for Pottawatomie County Commissioner?

Safety of the county and drive positive change and I think all County commissioners should spend 10 to 50% in the field
County commissioners have a direct impact on residents' lives and employee's

I feel that our emergency services are on top of this, which have 30 full time employees

We have five stations located throughout the county. The Wamego Station is the headquarters for the Director and Assistant Director. The other four stations St. Mary's, Westmoreland, Onaga, and the Blue Township area east of Manhattan. We currently operate with 5 first out ambulances with reserves stationed in Wamego and Onaga.

Tax money spent properly

We need to be prepared if the Federal Government gives the state money for schools

They address issues such as regional planning, infrastructure development, and public health initiatives across the county
Highway 24 was started 2009 about 15 years ago this should be updated (5 years) and nothing is in the plans yet putting up traffic lights will make more problems and accidents

We need to improving public transportation

Fix the county roads to standard and install ditches

Power grid (Power Plant Shut down)

I have been going to the commissioner's meetings that helps me understand what they do and some problems that could affect the county

There is always people wanting donations so they do the best they can

Commissioners manage county operations, oversee budgets, make policy decisions, and maintain infrastructure. It's a chance to contribute to effective governance and represent constituents.

Becoming a commissioner provides an opportunity to work within a government entity, gain experience, and develop knowledge about local governance and constituency needs.

I fell that I would be the best asset to the people of Pottawatomie
What do you consider the biggest challenge of the position you are running for? What areas of county government need improvement and why?

The first thing is always the safety of our people of the county
How to come up with job loss at Caterpillar
Manhattan East Gateway the Commissioners need to get involved in this A.S.A.P. it is supposed be finalized in first quarter of 2025

This where the city of Manhattan wants to expand from Walker Road on the North and Hopkins Creek Rd. (13 SQ. MILES)
We need to look at building a bypass around Manhattan to take pressure from 24 & Road safety

Taxes are spent properly

Power grid (Power Plant Shut down)

The Jeffrey Energy Center, located in Pottawatomie County, Kansas, generates substantial revenue for the area.

The center's operation supports jobs, local spending, and economic activity, indirectly benefiting the county's tax base.

Residents of Pottawatomie County are paying, on average, 11.04% less per kilowatt hour at home than the nationwide average price, at 14.30 cents per kilowatt hour compared to 16.07 cents per kilowatt hour

Natural Gas is going up 7 to 15 dollars a month

The average residential electricity rate in Kansas is 14 ¢/kWh, which is 19% lower than the national average rate of 18 ¢/kWh.

Work on the Manhattan East Gateway which we as a commission need to look at, looks good on paper (50) Mill levy Pottawatomie is (29.88) MILL LEVY

How long have you been a part of the Pottawatomie County community? (10 Years)

To what extent have you been a part of local government in the county?

Started going to the county commissioners' meetings the last 5 or 6 months

Started highway 24 project in 2009 and nothing has been done with traffic around 24,000 vehicles per day

Bridge on highway 24 between Flush and Rockingham took over a year they have companies do it in a week

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

No.1 is the safety of the public and employees in the county

Very good with computer skills

When I worked on the program side I manage the day-to-day operations, I built the budgets for 15+ gangs which was 8-to-10-million-dollar O.E. (Operating Expenses) and 40-to-60-million-dollar projects which we called P.I. (Property Improvement)

budgets and worked with a lot of cities,

I worked for a director, and I was the one that did the budgets, investigations (like a trial), inspected the projects, made sure the men were working safely, when we had a injury paper work had to be filed within 24 hours to the F.R.A.

Leader had 26 supervisors and 950 men that I coordinated that they got their track time to work daily

People I can talk to just about everyone

Worked with construction from building track, setting grade, precast bridges which is prepped and put it in 6 to 12 hours and running trains

Worked with Humen Resources in hiring employees (Oakland 1 in about 100+people interviewed)

When I start something, I'll make sure it is finished and done right

Weakness is being a perfectionist

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

I would work with all the different diversities in the county the same. It's also diversified in its businesses and industry, with an active Economic Development Program. I would focus on maintaining a solid tax base while providing first-rate public services. Additionally, it would boast excellent school systems and natural attractions like state lakes and Tuttle Creek

Reservoir which is about 70% full of silt

One thing we need to look at is setting a property tax that stays

the same for the people on a fixed income (I have had many elderly citizens come up to me and asked if could do anything which I have to get in first)

The diveristy of household income are

\$85,241 ± \$4,211 Median household income in Pottawatomie County

\$68,925 ± \$1,152 Median household income in Kansas

Population estimates, 28000

Hispanic or Latino, percent 5.8%

Caucasians' percent 89%

Other nationalities 5.2

Persons in poverty percent 7.4% 3581 (we need to look at welfare system to make sure it is run right)

Persons without health insurance, under age 65 years, percent 8.3%

What are your top priorities as County Commissioner?

Public Safety: Collaborating with law enforcement and emergency services to enhance safety.

Manhattan East Gateway my opinion is that Manhattan is doing what they want to do on the annexation to Hopkins Creek Road, which should be stopped A.S.A.P. (13 square miles) a lot revenue

Jeffrey Energy Center this would be a big devastation to this county which we need to look at

Highway 24 putting up traffic lights will cause more accidents problems (there is around 2,300 2013 to 1st quarter 2024)

I would look at building a bypass around Manhattan to take pressure off of 24 & Road safety

Well-Being: Ensuring access to quality healthcare, education, and social services for all residents.

Economic Development: Fostering job growth, supporting local businesses, and attracting new investments.

Infrastructure: Maintaining and improving roads, bridges, utilities, and public facilities.

5. Environmental Stewardship: Protecting natural resources and promoting sustainable practices.

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

Health care and educational services are the largest industries in the county, employing a significant portion of the population. Additionally, many residents commute to nearby cities like Manhattan or Topeka for work.

County commissioners must strike a balance between preserving farmland and creating development opportunities. Their decisions impact job prospects and economic growth throughout the county.

Commissioners need to maintain positive relationships with other local governments, including cities like Wamego, Onaga, St. George, and Westmoreland, as well as school boards.

Coordinated efforts can lead to job-friendly policies and infrastructure development.

The potential decommissioning of the Jeffrey Energy Center requires thoughtful planning. Commissioners must consider its impact on jobs and the local economy.

In summary, Pottawatomie County's role involves fostering economic development, supporting existing industries, and making strategic decisions to create job opportunities for its residents

What should Pottawatomie County's relationship with other local governments (cities of Wamego, Onaga, St. George, Westmoreland, school boards) look like?

First thing is if there are safety issues that needs to be addressed A.S.A.P.

The smaller towns pretty much have their own council to handle with in the city limits, outside the county handle the roads.

In a emergency like the tornado in Westmoreland everybody came together and worked as a big family

Regular communication and coordination among local governments are essential work together to address common challenges such as infrastructure development, emergency services, and economic growth.

Meeting with the city's planning ensures that land use, transportation, and other policies align across jurisdictions. Joint planning commissions or committees can facilitate this process. Sharing resources (such as equipment, personnel, or expertise)

can lead to cost savings and improved services. For instance, joint fire departments or emergency response teams benefit all communities.

The relationship with school boards is crucial. County officials should engage with school districts to support education, address funding needs, and promote student success.

Cooperation on economic development initiatives can attract businesses, create jobs, and enhance the overall quality of life for residents.

When conflicts arise (e.g., over zoning, taxation, or services), open dialogue and mediation are essential. Resolving disputes peaceably benefits everyone.

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

Land Use and Development: The plan outlines different land use categories, including agricultural, residential, commercial, and industrial zones. By strategically designating areas for development while preserving farmland, the county aims to create a harmonious balance.

Preservation and Open Space: The plan emphasizes the importance of preserving open spaces, natural resources, and agricultural land. It encourages the use of conservation easements, greenbelts, and other tools to protect farmland.

Economic Opportunity: While promoting economic growth, the plan recognizes the need to create jobs. It encourages smart development that doesn't compromise the county's agricultural heritage.

Transportation and Mobility: The plan addresses transportation infrastructure, ensuring efficient connectivity while minimizing the impact on farmland.

Given Manhattan's continued expansion eastward, what should Pottawatomie County's

relationship with the City of Manhattan look like?

MANHATTAN IS IN MAJOR FINANCIAL PROBLEMS THEY SHOULD WORRY ABOUT THE EMPLOYEE'S AND WHO CARES ABOUT A WATER PARK AND OTHER PARKS AND WHY SHOULD WE THE PUBLIC PAY FOR THE CITIES MISTAKE BY RAISING TAXES 1 CENT LOOKS IN THE NEXT ELECTION

My opinion is that Manhattan is doing what they want to do on

the annexation to Hopkins Creek Road

Sometimes the cost of expanding services will be greater than the additional tax revenue.

Pottawatomie County and Manhattan should coordinate infrastructure projects, such as roads, utilities, and public transportation. Ensuring efficient services benefits both residents and businesses.

The county and city can work together to attract businesses, create jobs, and promote economic growth. Joint efforts in marketing, incentives, and workforce development can enhance the region's prosperity.

As Manhattan expands, thoughtful land use planning is crucial. The county and city should align zoning regulations, green spaces, and development guidelines to maintain a balanced and sustainable environment.

Pottawatomie County and Manhattan should coordinate infrastructure projects. What I have read is that Manhattan does what they want and we as a county are not included in most of the plans. So, if Manhattan want to do anything they need to plan a meeting with the county commissioners instead of letting them do what they want

IF THE STATE DOESN'T WANT TO HELP WITH A BYPASS, THEN WE NEED TO GO TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WHICH CONTACTING WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (24,000 cars a day)

WE NEED TO LOOK AT PREFAB BRIDGES SOME COMPANIES CAN PUT A 100' BRIDGE IN 2 WEEKS IN STEAD OF A YEAR OR MORE

The total general obligation indebtedness of the City of Manhattan, Kansas, varies based on the year. Here are some figures from recent years:

As of April 29, 2021, the total general obligation indebtedness was \$240,200,000¹.

As of April 28, 2022, it increased to \$278,940,000 (excluding temporary notes)².

And as of April 27, 2023, it further increased to \$325,970,000 (excluding General Obligation Temporary Notes)³.

Reducing the City of Manhattan's indebtedness is a complex

challenge, but there are strategies that can be explored. Here are a few potential approaches:

1. **Fiscal Responsibility:** The city can focus on prudent financial management, ensuring that budgets are balanced, expenses are controlled, and revenues are maximized. This includes evaluating spending priorities, reducing unnecessary costs, and exploring revenue-generating opportunities.
2. **Debt Refinancing:** The city could consider refinancing existing debt to take advantage of lower interest rates. By doing so, they may reduce the overall interest payments and potentially shorten the repayment period.
3. **Economic Growth:** Encouraging economic development can lead to increased tax revenues, which can help offset debt. Attracting businesses, promoting tourism, and investing in infrastructure can contribute to economic growth.
4. **Asset Management:** The city can assess its assets (such as land, buildings, and utilities) and explore opportunities to leverage them for revenue. Selling surplus properties or entering public-private partnerships could generate funds.
5. **Strategic Investments:** Prioritizing capital projects that have a positive impact on the community while minimizing debt issuance is crucial. The city should carefully evaluate the necessity and long-term benefits of each project.

Plans to avoid city budget crisis include possibility of employee layoffs Updated Jun 28, 2024

Manhattan city commissioners are talking about laying off as many as 70 city employees as they consider cost-cutting measures to avert what they say is a potential budget crisis. City officials during Tuesday's meeting weighed options to avoid depleting general fund reserves. The fund's cash balance is expected to drop from \$11 million to \$6 million by the end of 2024. Officials have said they like to keep the cash reserve above \$10 million.

City officials suggested possible plans with a combination of cost reductions and tax increases. Personnel makes up around 70% of the general funds' expenses. Commissioners are looking at cutting 35-70 staff, with limits of 36-32 (a lot of places when they

cut hours, they will also cut benefits) a week for remaining staff. This is predicted to save between \$1 million-\$4 million a year. The city employs 335 regulars full- and part-time employees. City officials also suggested that putting a 1% sales tax increase on the November ballot to fund a proposed indoor aquatics project would free up money in the general fund. That proposal calls for putting the sales tax money into a separate fund for parks and rec.

The tax would be for 20 years, and if passed would be a net .75% increase after the city ended the current .25% tax, which would free up \$5 million-\$6 million in the general fund. City officials said they believe the parks and rec department would also accumulate cash over time and eventually operate like an enterprise fund.

A 1% sales tax would generate about \$15 million annually, according to city documents, and a .75% tax would generate \$11.25. Officials want the first year's money to go toward CiCo Park updates. The city has proposed putting \$5.5 million per year to indoor aquatics construction, which could cost between \$40 million and \$60 million.

Another option is dipping into \$4 million in city American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. The city also plans to halt replacing vehicles and equipment through the end of 2025. It may also halt capital improvements, filling vacancies and pay increases.

Interim city manager Jason Hilgers proposed a multi-pronged approach that involves cutting \$2 million in expenses: laying off 47 employees and reducing 75% of the general fund work force to 36 hours per week; "recapturing growth" from last year's mill levy; and putting the indoor aquatics sales tax on the ballot.

Commissioner Peter Oppelt said the commission should consider setting a policy on cash balance. He said he might support a minimum of about \$8 million to balance other cuts.

"We're talking about it affecting our neighbors directly," he said. "I would really like to avoid negatively affecting pay to our staff."

Commissioner Karen McCulloh pointed out that the cash balance affects things like the city's bond rating and ability to finance projects.

Minton said she wanted to move the \$4 million ARPA funds to the general fund for the cash balance. Commissioner John Matta and Oppelt agreed with that, making it likely to happen. Commissioners were four hours into the meeting by the time they reached this topic, so they tabled the issue for a future meeting.

Mayor Susan Adamchak asked for a draft policy resolution on the cash balance.

Stewart mentioned the possibility of additional or alternative amenities. The funding for additional amenities would come either through cost savings during initial construction or the leveraging of up to \$665,000 from transient guest tax.

The city is considering an extension of a quality-of-life sales tax to help fund any potential project, which Stewart estimates would be roughly between \$40 and \$60 million.

East Manhattan Gateway Plan Area



WHY WOULD MANHATTAN WANT TO TAKE THIS OVER WHEN THEY ARE IN DEBT.

Manhattan takes care of Manhattan they built up the dike to force the water to the east side of the river so that shows that they don't care if it floods out everyone to the east

So, I think we should take over thing east of the river sence Manhattan doesn't care about the people that will be flooded out and all they want the exetra taxes. We should get rid of the East Manhattan Gateway Plan which doesn't help Pottawatomie County at all

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

I wouldn't. because it not only affects the power plant it also shuts down the mines and rail traffic. (people don't realize what this effects)

Jeffrey EC is jointly owned by Westar Energy and Aquila Corp., both now wholly owned subsidiaries of Evergy, Inc.

This would be a big devastation to this county

Loss of employee's jobs (370)

The center's operation supports jobs, local spending, and economic activity, indirectly benefiting the county's tax base.

Taxes would go up to where people would be lucky to make it with a fixed income

We have not had many problems with our electricity, yet we lose the energy center, possible we will have blackouts

The commissioners need to meet with Energy and see if they could extend the deadline and see what their plans are?

Please share your approach to crafting a budget for Pottawatomie County. BY A.I. IT SHOWS THAT POTTAWATOMIE COUNTY IS THE BEST COUNTY TO LIVE IN OUT OF 105 COUNTIES

Look at first if there are any safety concerns that need to to be addressed

Need to know the revenue coming in taxes

1. Assess Revenue Sources:

Identify all revenue streams available to the county, such as property taxes, grants, fees, and state/federal funding.

Consider historical revenue trends and any anticipated changes.

2. Estimate Expenditures:

Categorize expenses into key areas (e.g., public safety, infrastructure, administration).

Review existing programs and services, including personnel costs, maintenance, and capital projects.

Account for inflation, contractual obligations, and any planned expansions.

3. Prioritize Spending:

Allocate resources based on priorities and community needs.

Consider essential services (e.g., law enforcement, emergency response) and long-term investments.

4. Involve Stakeholders:

Engage with county officials, department heads, and community members.

Hold public hearings to gather input and address concerns.

5. Set the Mill Levy:

The mill levy determines property tax rates.

Calculate the total assessed property value within the county.

Divide the desired budget by the assessed value to determine the mill levy rate.

6. Monitor and Adjust:

Regularly review budget performance throughout the fiscal year.

Make adjustments as needed based on actual revenue and expenditure data.

Keep in mind that each county's budget process may vary, but these general steps provide a framework for crafting an effective budget. If you need more specific details or have additional questions, feel free to ask the commissioners

When I worked for the U.P.R.R. on the program side I manage the day-to-day operations, I built the budgets for 15+ gangs which was 8-to-10-million-dollar O.E. (Operating Expenses) and 40-to-60-million-dollar projects which we called P.I. (Property Improvement) budgets and worked with a lot of cities, Total above is about the budget of Pottawatomie county's budget

I worked for a director, and I was the one that did the budgets, investigations (like a trial), inspected the projects, made sure the men were working safely, when we had a injury paper work had to be filed within 24 hours to the F.R.A.

Priority is safety for of the people in the county and what their needs are

Safety for employees

Employees needs

Benefits (medical, health insurance)

Go over the current budget and look at the county needs

Need to look at the programs and classes that the employee's need (OSHA)

Schools

Equipment

Equipment Repairs

Vehicles

Vehicle repairs

Tools for employees

Roads and bridges

Transportation

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

The Plan Pottawatomie 2040 is a comprehensive plan for Pottawatomie County, Kansas. It was an 18-month effort to create the County's first new plan since 1994. The plan covers the unincorporated areas of the County and includes chapters on land use, growth, and transportation¹. If you'd like to

explore specific sections, here they are:

Should be updated every (5) years

Discusses how land is utilized and developed within the county.

Addresses transportation infrastructure and connectivity.

Focuses on sustainable growth strategies.

Explores economic development prospects.

Considers conservation and open space planning.

Outlines steps to achieve the plan's goals.

The plan includes future land use maps and detailed insets for various zones (e.g., agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial).

The plan outlines zoning regulations and land allocation strategies. It identifies areas for residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural use. Balancing growth with preservation is a key consideration.

Encouraging mixed-use developments that integrate residential, commercial, and recreational spaces. This promotes walkability, reduces traffic, and enhances community vibrancy.

Defining urban growth boundaries to manage expansion. These boundaries help maintain open space, protect natural resources, and guide development toward existing infrastructure.

Addressing infrastructure needs (roads, utilities, parks) to support development. The plan considers efficient transportation networks and utility services.

Transportation and Mobility:

The plan addresses road infrastructure, including maintenance, expansion, and connectivity. It considers both local roads and major highways.

Encouraging public transit options to reduce reliance on personal vehicles. This includes bus routes, park-and-ride facilities, and coordination with neighboring cities.

Promoting walking and cycling infrastructure. Sidewalks, bike lanes, and multi-use trails enhance mobility and improve health.

Addressing safety concerns, such as intersections, pedestrian crossings, and traffic calming measures. Safety audits and data-driven decisions play a role.

Ensuring efficient freight transportation for economic development. This involves truck routes, rail access, and logistics planning.

Exploring technology solutions like traffic signal coordination, real-time information, and smart parking systems.

Growth Capacity and Management

The plan focuses on managing growth to ensure it aligns with available resources, infrastructure, and community needs. Balancing development with preservation is essential.

Addressing the capacity of utilities (water, sewer, electricity) to accommodate growth. This includes evaluating existing systems and

planning for expansions.

Implementing policies that guide growth in a sustainable manner. This involves zoning regulations, density limits, and incentives for responsible development.

Encouraging growth in key sectors while preserving the county's character. Strategies may include attracting businesses, supporting local entrepreneurs, and diversifying the economy.

Involving residents, businesses, and stakeholders in growth decisions. Public input ensures that growth management reflects community values.

Balancing growth with the need to protect agricultural land. Strategies may include conservation easements, agricultural zoning, and incentives for farmers.

Economic Opportunity:

Encouraging new businesses and supporting existing ones. This includes providing resources, incentives, and infrastructure to attract investment.

Enhancing education and training programs to create a skilled workforce. Collaboration with local schools, colleges, and vocational centers is crucial.

Leveraging natural assets and cultural heritage to promote tourism. This can boost local businesses and create jobs.

Exploring diverse industries beyond agriculture. This resilience helps during economic fluctuations.

Supporting startups and small businesses. Incubators, mentorship, and networking opportunities play a role.

Ensuring reliable utilities, transportation, and broadband access. Infrastructure attracts businesses and supports growth.

Preservation and Open Space

Identifying and preserving ecologically sensitive areas, such as wetlands, forests, and wildlife habitats. These spaces contribute to biodiversity and recreational opportunities.

Developing multi-use trails for walking, cycling, and outdoor enjoyment. These trails connect communities, promote health, and provide access to nature.

Enhancing existing parks and creating new ones. Parks offer recreational facilities, picnic areas, and green spaces for residents and visitors.

Designating scenic routes that showcase natural beauty. These byways enhance tourism and encourage appreciation of the landscape.

Balancing development with the need to protect agricultural land. Strategies may include conservation easements and incentives for farmers.

Involving residents in decisions related to open space and preservation. Public input ensures that community values are considered.

Implementation

Breaking down the plan into manageable phases. Prioritize actions based on urgency, feasibility, and impact.

Engaging local government, community organizations, and residents. Implementation requires collective effort.

Identifying funding sources (grants, bonds, public-private partnerships). Financial planning is crucial.

Regularly assessing progress and adjusting strategies as needed. Flexibility ensures success.

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?

1. **Policy Understanding:** Commissioners can gain insights into local government policies, regulations, and best practices. Understanding their roles and responsibilities is crucial.

2. **Networking:** Building connections with other commissioners, local officials, and experts. Networking fosters collaboration and knowledge sharing.

3. **Leadership Skills:** Enhancing leadership abilities, decision-making, and conflict resolution skills. Effective leadership is essential for successful governance.

4. **Financial Literacy:** Learning about budgeting, fiscal management, and funding sources. Commissioners oversee public funds, so financial literacy is vital.

5. **Community Engagement:** Exploring strategies to engage with constituents, address community needs, and promote transparency.

6. **Legal and Ethical Awareness:** Understanding legal constraints, ethics, and avoiding conflicts of interest.