

County Candidates Questionnaire – 2016

Joanne Doherty, Candidate for County Commissioner, Precinct 3 JoanneForWashingtonCounty.com

1. Why have you decided to run for election at this time?

I am running for County Commissioner in Precinct 3 because I want to serve the community I love by using the experience and knowledge I acquired in a successful business and legal career for the benefit of citizens of Washington County. Our changing economy challenges our local businesses and institutions in ways we never considered possible even a few years ago. Population and economic changes sweeping into Washington County demand that our elected officials prepare to meet new challenges with 21st century solutions or fall behind, and fail the citizens of the county. In many ways we are already behind in preparing to meet the challenges to come.

2. What key competencies do you feel you possess to be an elected official? Briefly describe your background in financial management, leadership, communications, understanding of labor/HR issues, understanding of local economic issues, ability to contribute to strategic planning and initiatives, etc.

I am well qualified to serve Washington County as a new commissioner with a firm background in business and public service. My first career was in retailing where I was a store manager and the first female Vice President, General Merchandise Manager of Joskes Houston. Both of those positions gave me experience in managing budgets and people. After receiving a law degree from the University of Houston, I began a practice of law in Houston in Banking Law at Bracewell & Patterson. Accepting an appointment as an Assistant United States Attorney, I then prosecuted white collar criminals in Federal Court.

Later I worked in a small law office where I advised owners of small business. I was selected as a delegate to the “White House Conference on Small Business.”

I have served on boards of charitable organizations where budgeting and personnel management were part of my duties.

3. If you are elected, what do you consider to be the top priorities to work on over the next four years?

The job of a County Commissioner is to turn our tax dollars into services. For example, good services means:

- (1) roads, bridges and county facilities that are well maintained, and built or repaired to withstand extreme weather;
- (2) a Sheriff’s Department and volunteer fire departments with the resources to keep us safe;
- (3) a well maintained courthouse with adequate space for our courts and records;
- (4) practical application of technology to keep local government responsive;

- (5) EMS with trained staff and up to date equipment; and
- (6) policies encouraging business growth, and protection of our environment.

Every area of county services should be scrutinized for the application of “best practices” to get the most for our tax dollars. I support an open budgeting process to get involvement from our citizens.

4. What do you consider to be the top issue affecting our local economic growth?

Locally owned firms are generally better for our economy than national chains. Local business needs public goods such as education, good infrastructure and job training. After the proper infrastructure and services are made available, the next step is setting policy that attracts the best type of growth for the county. There is still a problem for small business in getting credit. I support policies that encourage our legacy businesses to grow, and an increase in small business in such areas as retail, specialty foods, craft beer, wine, art galleries, agri- and eco- tourism. Washington County is uniquely positioned to attract tourists from the Houston, Bryan/College Station, and Austin areas.

5. What could you do as an elected official to help small businesses in the community?

The best way to look at the needs of local business is Michael Shuman’s six “Ps” of local economic development : Planning (understanding opportunities for local businesses to meet local needs); Purchasing (buy local); People (training local entrepreneurs and employees); Partnership (collaborations of local businesses); Purse (mobilizing local capital); and Public Policy (leveling the regulatory playing field for local businesses). *The Local Economy Solution* (Chelsea Green Publishing 2015).

We have a Small Business Development Center, and the A.A. Hodde, Jr. Technical Education Center here in Blinn College. I would work closely with those offices, local business and banks, and with the Washington County Chamber to be responsive in whatever way possible as opportunities arise. We can expect that the changing nature of our economy will require changes in institutions and infrastructure, and we should understand there will be new demands on county government, and limited funds to spend.

Here are some examples of things that can be done for small business: (1) Economic Gardening which is a low cost policy of growing local business through providing market information; and (2) maintaining a web site that matches older land owners with young farmers and ranchers who can make the land more productive.

Finally, local government officials should be cheerleaders for local businesses. Social media is an inexpensive way to do this. I regularly post information about our great local businesses on my Facebook page. Just as we have Blue Blazers who support local business openings, we could have Social Butterflies who post reviews and stories about local business on social media.

6. What is your opinion of offering economic development incentives to lure capital investment and jobs to the community?

The Texas Local Government Code authorizes both municipalities and counties to offer incentives that will promote economic development on items such as commercial and retail projects.

Some people look at a tax abatement agreement as a free pass for a business, but that is not the case. A judicious use of tax abatements can increase tax revenues over time. Each request for an abatement or partial abatement is different and requires study of various factors.

When the County Commissioners Court considers a tax abatement, it must evaluate what will be the amount of increased tax dollars the company will bring to the county, would the company go to another county if it did not receive the abatement, and how many new jobs will be created.

Most small businesses do not qualify for tax abatements. I support lowering the requirements in terms of number of employees and capital investment so that more small business will qualify for tax abatements. Smaller abatements among more businesses will spread the risk of these agreements failing, and encourage more local people with limited capital to start or expand a business. Local entrepreneurs are the key here, for they are more likely to stay and create stable jobs.

Although generally tax abatements are a useful for adding a final incentive to a company's decision to come to Washington County, there are some potential problems. A business may have great plans that do not come to fruition. A failed business development, such as a box store, offers an opportunity for other businesses in the area to demand a lower valuation of their property. Therefore, the bottom line is tax abatements are generally good and may be necessary, but proceed with caution.

7. How important do you feel the relationship is between Washington County government officials and City of Brenham officials, City of Burton officials and the unincorporated communities? How could these relationships be improved?

Because each of these entities have common goals and overlapping duties, the working relationships are most important. Wherever practical, inter-local and service agreements should be implemented to reduce redundancies in services. I would include the entire Brazos Valley Region as a network of important relationships. Professional behavior on the part of all parties should keep these relationships positive. As Harry S. Truman said, "It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit."

8. Do you support the Washington County Chamber's "Government Advocacy Policy Statements for 2017?" This will be a key document for our community's advocacy activities at the state level. Does it include any policy statements you do not agree with? Is there anything you would suggest adding to bring to the attention of state leaders during the upcoming legislative session?

Yes, I support the Policy Statements in full. Here are some additions for consideration:

- (1) Medicaid expansion would increase the number of citizens with health insurance, improve the health of the local population, and provide some relief to local medical care providers and the county's indigent care costs.
- (2) We lose several people every week to suicide in Washington County. I would support cost effective suicide prevention programs funded by the state.
- (3) Counties in Texas do not have general policing powers. This is a problem for counties who are attempting to grow an economy based on tourism. The Legislature can provide remedies that encourage growth. For example, the legislature can give Washington

County the power to pass noise ordinances, and to prohibit certain nuisances which hurt tourism.

**Return by Oct. 5, 2016 to:
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