

# **KIRK HANATH**

## **County Commissioner**

### **Precinct 3**

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## **Chamber of Commerce**

### **Response to Candidate Questionnaire**

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

As a lifelong resident of Washington County I have had the privilege to experience the evolution of our growing community. When looking back one can find many examples of just how our community has changed from a very rural to a more urban/rural area. One of the most obvious changes is the number of large to midsize farms, which have been sold for development. As our county continues to grow we will experience further changes to the social and economic landscape of our community moving us even closer to a more urban area. Of course some will argue that the county is not evolving fast enough and others will say it is moving too quickly. Regardless of where your opinion falls in this continual challenge it is important to remember we will need leaders in our county government that understand our past so that they can make sound decisions for our future. This is the essence of why I have decided to seek re-election to this very important office of county government.

#### **2. What key competencies do you feel you possess to be an elected official?**

Prior to being elected county commissioner of precinct 3 I was involved in the management of the family business. Managing the business required me to take part in a variety of aspects associated with the business: the finances, the handling of labor challenges, making leadership decisions, purchasing, and planning for the future changes of the industry. At the time I did not realize how very essential these acquired skills were, nor how they would benefit me in my ability to perform the the job of county commissioner. After becoming an elected official, my job duties in the public sector enabled me to enhance these skills and broaden my scope of understanding of our local economic issues as well as contribute to the strategic planning process of our county. So, as I answer this questionnaire today and reflect on my background, it is abundantly clear to me that these leadership experiences and acquired skills have only improved my ability to perform the required duties of an elected official. I am so thankful for the knowledge I have gained in the private as well as the public sector and can only express my deepest gratitude to this community for affording me the opportunity to serve.

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

There are some big changes and some challenges that have taken place in our county government over recent years that the court will need to address in the near future. Two of the most apparent changes include taking over the communications center from the city and creating an IT department. Now that the county has completed the take over of communications and created a county network the leadership will need to make it a priority to maintain and enhance these vital departments.

The May 26<sup>th</sup> flood has helped the county identify some of the vulnerabilities within the county road system. The repairs and improvements will require time, effort and planning to bring the damaged areas back to the pre-flood levels and to enhance other areas for the future.

These are definitely issues that require a high level of priority, however the top priority remains the management of our county's services due to the continued growth. When determining how to accomplish this the court will need to adopt a balanced approach so that services can be incrementally increased with little to no burden to the taxpayers. We all know that with growth there are essential services provided by the county that will have to be evaluated and expanded based on the strain of those services by the growth. Of course, this can only be accomplished by careful data collection. Many of the offices in county government do a really good job of providing this data to the commissioners court. It will be the job of our court leadership to utilize this data in making the appropriate decisions on the implementation of the changes needed to our county services.

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

Very simply put property values and taxes. As leaders we must be continually cognizant of the potentially negative impact high property values and taxes have on start-up businesses, businesses that want to locate to our community, our current businesses and the individual home owner. We must also remain conservative when considering the property tax rate so that there is not an excessive burden placed on business owners and the labor force they employ. As new businesses locate to our community and current businesses expand in our community the labor force will grow and there will be a greater need for affordable housing. The leadership's challenge will be providing the appropriate services for this expansion without over burdening the businesses and the individuals they hire. With conservative tax policies, put in place by the leadership, our community has the increased potential for steady economic growth.

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

As stated above leaders will need to remain conservative as it relates to the tax rate. I believe that a conservative policy on taxes that does not over burden our businesses allows these businesses to reinvest in our local economy increasing the potential for economic growth and self sustainability.

Washington County is fortunate to have organizations with leaders that take a great interest in our business community. The organizations that come to mind are the Economic Development Foundation (EDF), The Washington County Chamber of Commerce, Blinn College, and others. The work these groups perform is invaluable to our local businesses. As leaders of this community I believe we should support their efforts whenever possible, not duplicate them.

The last thing we can all do to help small business in our community is to support them by trading with them.

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

As a former business owner, taxpayer and elected official I recognize just how valuable maintaining current businesses as well as attracting new businesses are to our community. These businesses help insure our economic prosperity and provide a quality of life that makes Washington County a great place to live. In order to maintain and expand on the job opportunities in our county it is important to provide incentives. However, those incentives must be offered in a manner in which the leadership does not place an undue burden on our current taxpayers. The leadership should also be prepared to hold those receiving the incentives accountable when they do not comply with the incentive guidelines.

Once again, I applaud the work of the Economic Development Foundation (EDF) and The Washington County Chamber of Commerce for all of the work they do in seeking new business opportunities for our community. Without the hard work of these organizations, providing these economic incentives would be much more difficult for the leadership.

**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?**

I have always believed that the public sector as a whole has the potential to be much more effective when the entities work together. While cities and counties have separate responsibilities and provide different services there are areas that services can be shared in an effort to reduce duplication and cost. Anytime the public sector can share services, the leadership on both sides should weigh the options carefully to secure a potentially advantageous opportunity for all.

These relationships, like any other relationship, can always be improved. As to the best way to improve current relationships it is important to note that all sides should strive to keep the big picture in mind. The big picture being, what is best for the community as a whole not what is politically expedient. Leaders always make the best decisions for their community once they have removed their personal agendas from the decision making process. Washington county has been fortunate in that the taxing entities in our community have been willing to work together for the greater good of our constituencies not for any individual agendas.

**8. Do you support the Washington County Chamber's "Government Advocacy Policy Statements for 2017?"**

These policy statements could be a useful tool in providing legislative direction to the local, state and federal leaders in terms of the economic needs of our community. I support the initiatives set forth in the Government Advocacy Policy Statements for 2017 and thank all of the dedicated members of the Chamber who have worked to put these policy statements together. I feel the broad nature and scope of the statement removes the need to add anything at this time.

A special thanks to the Washington County Chamber of Commerce and its members for affording me the opportunity to take part in this questionnaire.

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