

2018 Candidate questions

Whitman County Commissioner

1. What education and experience has prepared you to be Commissioner?

I was raised, went to school, lived, and have worked in Whitman County for most of my life. My mother's side of the family, the Robinsons, homesteaded in the Oakesdale area in 1884, and we have been in Whitman County for 5 generations. As a child I was often in the care of my grandmother, Alice Robinson, and my great-aunts and uncle- Caroline Haire, and Fred and Martha Rohrbach of Oakesdale. At a young age, they instilled in me a love of the land, and the value and ethics of hard work and a job well done.

I started my education in Oakesdale, attended L.M. Jennings Elementary in Colfax, Sunnyside Elementary and Lincoln Middle School in Pullman, and I'm a graduate of Pullman High School. I briefly moved to the west side of the state to attend National Broadcasting School in Seattle, where I graduated with Honors and made the Dean's List. I have managed local retail stores, radio stations, and my own audio production / voice-over company for many years, serving clients up and down the west coast.

For the past six years, I have served on the Board of Directors for the Whitman County Humane Society. My wife and I are also members of the Whitman County Historical Society, and members of the McCoy Valley Museum / Oakesdale Historical Society. Suffice it to say, I am no stranger to the area and I understand the unique qualities of living on the Palouse, and specifically Whitman County.

Regarding experience- I find this question to be intriguing, as per my conversations with the many past Whitman County Commissioners and Commissioners from other counties with whom I have had the pleasure of discussing the office and its requirements, there is one thing I have found we have in common, and presumably also have in common with the incumbent Commissioners as well- every single one of us started with absolutely no specific personal experience regarding how to be a County Commissioner.

While we all bring varied and unique backgrounds and talents to the table, there is no official "Commissioner school", save the "Newly Elected Officials training" run by the Washington State Association of Counties which winning candidates are invited to attend as a first requirement towards becoming a Certified Public Official.

Personal steps I have taken in order to prepare myself include studying months of meeting minutes from Whitman County and surrounding counties and spoken with many past commissioners, as mentioned previously. I am confident with this knowledge I have the tools necessary to transition into public service and be a successful part of a governing body.

2. What three key things would you like to accomplish as Commissioner?

First and foremost, I plan to once again treat the office for what it is- a full-time position. In past management positions, when I have hired a person for a full-time job, I expect them to put in full-time hours. The county deserves a commissioner who will deliver as promised. I will be present, available and approachable, easily accessible with an open-door policy and regular office hours.

I would also like to bring a new level of transparency and accountability to the county, specifically starting with financials. Publishing the numbers- income from taxes and fees, plus the expenditures for infrastructure improvements, payroll, and similar expenses for anyone to view quickly and easily online. I would like this information updated weekly at a minimum, preferably daily, and possibly hourly.

Lastly, I want to improve the way all other county information is shared with the public. I will work to ensure the online publication of agendas and meeting minutes in a timely manner, and the easing and enhancing of a sometimes convoluted and confusing communication process between the county and residents by implementing an easy to use two-way portal system, which has already shown to be effective in other municipalities around the country.

3. One of the duties of County Commissioner is to levy taxes to operate the county and adopt a balanced budget for each calendar year. What skills do you have that make you especially prepared to accomplish a balanced budget?

Admittedly, I haven't worked with a budget in the billions of dollars, but I have experience running retail stores with a budget in the hundreds of thousands, and a group of radio stations with budget in the millions of dollars. When it comes down to it, balancing a budget is not a simple task, no matter how much money has been allocated- even setting a household budget can become a daunting task.

There is a finite amount of funding available, so a first priority is identifying critical needs- public safety services, including law enforcement and the health department must be funded. From there, it becomes a matter of prioritizing monies for the other departments, such as Auditor, Assessor, and Treasurer, public works, internal infrastructure and maintenance, and the county payroll to name a few. Fortunately, most of those needs can be fairly predictable which ultimately makes them easier to fit in the puzzle.

My involvement working with non-profits has given me new understanding of "stretching a dollar" to get the most value for the money. Working with WCHS I helped create several new sources of income, using non-traditional methods of fundraising. Creativity and thinking outside the box can often be the biggest difference between simply "making a budget", and "making a budget work".

4. What are your specific plans pertaining to handling traffic growth in the county?

One of the biggest difficulties of traffic planning is the need for inter-agency cooperation. While the county has roads it is directly responsible for, there are also city and state roads that directly impact traffic flow in the county proper. In most cases, the biggest traffic problems occur on roads owned and maintained by other agencies, or near where they transition from one authority to another.

That said, working directly with those agencies to find the potential rise of future growth-related traffic problems, such as bottlenecks and other dangers in these referenced areas is an absolute must. Keeping an open running dialogue with the cities, towns, and state and federal agencies who oversee these roads so that we may work together to find solutions to these problems before they become unmanageable is the easiest way to address these potential problems proactively.