

2020 County Board Election Questions

On behalf of the McLean County Chamber of Commerce Political Action Committee (PAC) thank you for your interest in elected leadership serving constituents in the communities of McLean County.

Please find our candidate survey attached to this email for the November 3, 2020 general election. Answers must be complete and submitted no later than Friday, July 10, 2020 by 4:00 PM to be eligible for candidate interviews slated for late July and early August. Responses from the survey and interview will be considered by the full PAC Board when endorsing candidates and/or providing a financial contribution.

We look forward to getting to know you as a candidate. If you have any questions about the PAC or our endorsement process for this general election, please call Charlie Moore at 309-829-6344.

Best regards,

Meghan O'Neal-Rogozinski
Chairman

Candidate Name

Jacob Beard

County Board District

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1. What are your top three priorities if you are elected to the McLean County Board?

- 1) The management of, and response to, Covid-19.
- 2) Continued progress on mental and behavioral health initiatives.
- 3) Identifying opportunities to gain efficiencies and reduce duplicate governmental functions.

2. What is the greatest challenge(s) the County faces? How do you propose to address said challenge(s)?

In 2021, the residual impact of Covid-19 will be the largest issue facing the County. If a vaccine is not available, the County Government in coordination with the McLean County Health Department will need to continue to work to ensure widespread testing remains available and contract tracing is in place, which will help keep the positivity rate low and minimize the loss of life.

Beyond the medical outlook, the economic response will have to be monitored. The County will need to maintain its partnership with local partners (COC, EDC, BNACVB, SBDC, etc) to minimize job losses that result from the shut-down. Similar to the economic crisis of 2008 or the Budget impasse of 2015-17, there will be budgetary pressure on the County. This will be seen through a likely reduction in tax revenue and potential reduction in funds received from the State. Competent and reasoned budgetary management will be necessary to avoid tax increases, which would be inappropriate during this time. We need to also continue to push for improvements in the Restore Illinois plan. Phase 1 and 2 specifically can be improved to not penalize small-business or other activities (ex. outdoor activities) that have since been shown to not increase the spread of Covid-19.

A separate item that deserves note is the McLean County Nursing Home. The County Board has put significant time and investment into stabilizing the finances and improving the level of care at the MCNH. With uncertainty around what long term care facilities will look like following Covid-19, and the slow depletion of the Home's Enterprise Fund, the current state of the Nursing Home is not sustainable. The next 12-48 months will be crucial in developing and maintaining a sustainable model for the MCNH, or determining appropriate alternatives.

3. If elected to the County Board, how would you work with the municipalities to enhance and ensure regional collaboration?

I have developed relationships with elected officials from numerous local governing bodies, as well as McLean County's representatives in Springfield. I was supportive of efforts that brought Rivian to Normal, as well as the EDC's work to standardize and increase the transparency of incentive packages. Collaboration is crucial and we should view success as being shared between the cities and towns of McLean County.

4. How do you plan to make yourself available to not only your immediate constituents but to business, civic, and non-profit organizations, and rural community leaders?

I believe I do this today. I post regular updates of County Business and meetings on Facebook, a practice that was not widespread prior to my first term. My cell phone number is available online and I believe I've answered every call from constituents. I try to answer every non-spam e-mail. I have attended and spoke at multiple public forums and local gatherings. As a life long resident of Bloomington, I am fortunate to know a wide variety of people within the County so I can bounce ideas off of people who are rural residents, small business owners, retirees, parents, and friends who have a variety of perspectives. This feedback helps me think through issues facing the County.

5. Do you consider McLean County to be encouraging of business growth, expansion, and attraction? Please explain.

Overall, yes. McLean County is well situated for sustainable growth. There is a great mix of jobs, access to higher education, ease of transportation, quality K-12 schools, a vibrant civic culture, a family-friendly environment and affordable housing. In the past, where we have fallen short is when our cities compete over retail storefronts, provide excess tax incentives for businesses such as hotels or restaurants, fail to provide transparency regarding incentive packages, and show more interest in attracting new businesses rather than support existing business growth. I believe enough local leaders are onboard with improving on these issues, and my hope is we can move away from crutches such as TIF districts and specialized, one-off incentive packages, and toward accessible business development support models that benefit local and small-to-medium size businesses. This will help better diversify our economy and lower the barrier to entrepreneurship.

6. What role does County government have in economic development?

I am supportive of the County's current stances with economic development, which includes working with the Economic Development Council and avoiding the creation of a stand-alone economic development agency. On a practical level, we should view growth and development anywhere in the County as beneficial to all of the County. From a strategic perspective, as mentioned above, McLean County has a lot to offer to both residents and businesses who want their employees to enjoy a peaceful and friendly community. By working with the EDC we are best able to coordinate efforts with other governing bodies and create a more unified story of what we have to offer. I will also add that in general it is preferable to create fairer and easier access to business growth, then to create an environment that is complex and requires "insider" know-how, but comes with economic incentives. In this sense my preference is to look at low tax rates, simplified zoning, and reduced business fees and regulations.

7. How would you advocate the County overcome difficulties presented by the unstable financial situation in the State of Illinois?

The County needs to continue to advocate for itself with our elected Statehouse leaders, as well as partner with similar counties on shared priorities. Ultimately long-term budget mismanagement at the state level has and will continue to impact McLean County residents and local governments through increased surcharges, tax rates, and reduced services. For this reason, beyond advocacy, the best tactic the County can employ is conservative budgeting and expense management.

8. Are there any government services you feel are missing from the County? Alternatively, are there any that you view as non-essential and could be eliminated?

At this point in time, I do not believe there are additional areas the County needs to be involved in. The County's recent entrance into the behavioral health space was significant and is an area we can continue to mature.

In terms of non-essential, following the resolution of the Covid-19 virus, the County should re-evaluate and consider retiring the targeted loan program. In normal circumstances I do not believe the County should serve as a small business equity lender.

Also of note, I am still interested in revisiting a consolidation of Bloomington Electoral Commission, and I believe it is time to investigate consolidating Metcom and the Bloomington 911 operations. These are the types of consolidations and reorganization that can reduce taxpayer expense while maintaining or improving services.

9. Do local government(s) have a role to play in COVID-19 recovery efforts?

Yes. First and foremost, the County Government, through the work of the Health Department, has a crucial role to play in addressing the continuing medical impact of Covid-19.

From an economic recovery standpoint, the County can work with other local entities in ways described in some of my prior responses: working through the EDC, and continuing to increase the transparency of economic development incentives. We should also look at opportunities to remove financial barriers for residents and businesses many of who have suffered a significant economic impact because of Covid-19.

An example of this kind of work includes the extended deadline and fee reduction for property taxes.

From a mental health and well-being standpoint, the County should continue to support and allocate funding for the work of The Behavioral Health Coordinating Council, the recently opened County Triage Center, PATH, County Coroner Kathy Yoder's work on Suicide Prevention, and the problem solving courts. Social isolation and job loss can take a significant toll on people, and as we hopefully return to 'normal' following Covid-19, work in this space will be important and something the County is equipped to address.

The McLean County Chamber of Commerce works with the Political Action Committee to help its membership understand who you are as a candidate and what your policies will be if elected. We achieve this by sharing your responses with the membership to help increase the turnout of educated voters. I agree that the McLean County Chamber of Commerce may share and publish my responses as submitted and as presented, on the McLean County Chamber of Commerce website www.mcleancochamber.org.

☒ Yes

☐ No

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