

Dani Erickson – District 2

My name is Dani Erickson, and I live just north of Somerset in the township. As a small business owner, school board member, and mom of four, I've seen firsthand how local government decisions affect families, schools, and businesses in our community.

I have a degree in Political Science and Economics, and that interest in public policy led me to serve on the Somerset School Board. School boards are responsible for policy, finance, and hiring and evaluating the superintendent—responsibilities that are actually very similar to the role of a county board supervisor.

I enjoy understanding how local government works and how policy decisions affect our communities. On the school board, I've worked to make sure we stay informed about legislation that impacts our district so we can make thoughtful decisions, have hired a new superintendent and have asked many finance questions for taxpayer transparency.

Looking ahead, my top three priorities for the County Board would be:

First, working collaboratively with other supervisors to keep St. Croix County an affordable place to live, work, and raise a family. That starts with responsible budgeting and keeping taxes as low as possible.

Second, ensuring we have thoughtful local discussions about major developments like solar farms, data centers, and CAFOs. These decisions have long-term impacts on our communities, and I strongly believe local voices and local control should guide those conversations.

Third, making sure county government respects and protects the constitutional rights of the people it serves. Counties operate under state authority, but they still have a responsibility to uphold the constitutional protections that affect everyday interactions with local government.

Ultimately, I believe good local government comes down to responsible budgeting, thoughtful planning, and protecting the rights of the people we serve.

1. There are several Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) in St. Croix County. Many have applied to expand the number of livestock with the DNR. What is your position with regard to CAFOs?

My position on this issue is that CAFO's should have as much local control as possible. I appreciated Sue Curtis's public comment on this issue during the Community Development meeting on February 19 and following Supervisor Kerri Reis suggesting that a resolution to lobby Wisconsin legislators be brought back to the local level.

I prefer that CAFO'S have a limit of 1800 animals. Large CAFO's can draw water from people's wells, they could encourage disease. Water is our most precious resource and we have to protect that. Storage of manure in concrete containers can leak into the ground water.

We can support agriculture in our county while also protecting our water, our neighbors, and the long-term health of our rural communities.

2. The land and water conservation staff have identified the primary source of contamination of ground and surface waters as excessive nitrates found in manure and chemicals used on cropland. What measures should the county take to inform and protect residents from the harmful effects of excessive nitrates? How would you encourage preservation of individuals' safe well water and farmland for agricultural use in this County?

This is an important question, and I believe there needs to be a thoughtful balance between supporting our local farmers and agricultural economy while also protecting the safe drinking water that St. Croix County residents rely on.

Protecting groundwater is critical because for many residents in rural areas, private wells are their primary source of drinking water. Nitrates can come from several sources, including manure and fertilizer applied to cropland, but also from lawn fertilizers and other residential uses.

As a county board, I believe our role should focus on education, monitoring, and partnerships that help residents and farmers protect water quality while maintaining a strong agricultural community.

First, the county can continue expanding public education efforts about groundwater protection. Working with the St. Croix County Public Health Department, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, and local farm organizations, we can promote community education programs about fertilizer use, well safety, and groundwater protection.

Second, I strongly support groundwater testing programs. The county already provides testing through its drinking water programs, and continuing to promote well testing helps residents understand and monitor the quality of their water.

Third, we should strengthen partnerships with conservation organizations like the Natural Resources Conservation Service to help farmers access funding for conservation practices such as improved nutrient management, cover crops, and waterway protections.

Finally, I support farmer-led conservation initiatives that encourage voluntary adoption of sustainable farming practices. Farmers are some of the best stewards of the land, and collaborative solutions often produce the best long-term results.

At the end of the day, clean water and a strong agricultural economy are both essential to St. Croix County. By focusing on education, science, and cooperation, the county can help protect safe drinking water while also supporting the farmers who are vital to our community.

3. What can the County Board do to assist local town and village boards and city councils as they seek to provide not only affordable housing, but also a variety of housing options in their municipalities?

Across St. Croix County, many people aren't looking for luxury housing—they're simply looking for a home they can afford in the community where they work and raise their families.

One of the most important things the County Board can do is avoid adding unnecessary regulatory costs that make housing more expensive to build. Every delay, permit, or zoning barrier increases construction costs, and those costs are passed directly on to renters and homebuyers.

At the same time, county zoning plays an important role in making sure infrastructure and services—like water systems, EMS, and law enforcement—can support new development.

The county should work with local municipalities to encourage smart growth and a variety of housing options, so young families, workers, and seniors all have a place in our communities.

At the end of the day, strong communities depend on people being able to afford to live where they work.

“If the people who work in our communities can’t afford to live in them, then we need to rethink the barriers we’re putting in the way of housing.”

4. Xcel Energy has proposed a large solar facility on nearly 3,000 acres in central St. Croix County. Projects of this size are under the jurisdiction of the Public Utility Commission of Wisconsin. What role do you feel the county should play in this project?

This is a topic I’m very passionate about. Over the past year I’ve closely followed the discussion surrounding the proposed Xcel Energy solar project by watching County Board meetings and listening to the thoughtful and well-researched concerns of residents who would be directly affected by this project and by the leasing of farmland for this development.

I strongly believe in private property rights. At the same time, I believe we must carefully consider the long-term impacts large industrial energy projects have on surrounding property owners and on the character of rural communities. Many residents have expressed concerns about noise, land use changes, and the loss of the rural landscape that drew them to this area in the first place.

I also believe we must be realistic about reliable energy sources in the Midwest. Energy policy should prioritize reliability and affordability for families and businesses.

While projects of this size ultimately fall under the authority of the Public Service Commission (at this point, but I would love see more local control) the county still has an important role to play. County leaders should advocate strongly for local residents, ensure their voices are heard, and work closely with our townships that have already stepped up to represent the concerns of their communities.

At the end of the day, I believe we must defend the constitutional rights of property owners while also respecting the rights of neighboring residents to enjoy their homes, their peace, and the rural beauty of St. Croix County. As a county board supervisor, I would be a strong advocate for residents and make sure their concerns are taken seriously in this process.

5. St. Croix County has grown in population in recent decades, driven in large part by our proximity to the Twin Cities. Over the next decade, growth is expected to flatten and potentially decline. What are the impacts of this shift in population as it relates to the county?

Population trends matter because they directly affect how counties plan services, infrastructure, and budgets. St. Croix County has experienced strong growth for decades, largely because of our proximity to the Twin Cities. But projections suggest that growth may level off in the coming years, and responsible leaders need to plan accordingly.

One of the most important things we can do is rely on good data and population projections when making long-term decisions. Agencies like the Wisconsin Department of Administration regularly publish population

projections for counties across the state, and those projections should inform how we plan infrastructure and county services.

When growth slows or stabilizes, the biggest risk is overbuilding. If the county expands facilities, departments, or infrastructure faster than the tax base grows, taxpayers can end up carrying the burden of higher costs on a smaller population. That's why careful, responsible planning is essential.

I believe the county should focus on smart growth strategies—planning infrastructure and services that can scale responsibly over time. That means investing where growth truly supports it, but also maintaining flexibility so taxpayers are not locked into long-term costs that outpace revenue.

Good governance is about balance. We want to support economic opportunity and maintain the high quality of life that attracts people to St. Croix County, while also protecting taxpayers by making fiscally responsible decisions that reflect realistic population trends.

6. In the next year, the County will consider expansion of the jail and other infrastructure projects, expected at a cost of \$46 million. If passed, this would result in a bond issue to the taxpayers. What is your position on the proposed expansion of the jail and infrastructure improvements?

I think we need to take a careful look before committing taxpayers to a \$46 million expansion. That's a major investment, and we should fully understand what's driving the need for additional jail space before moving forward.

I'd like to see a clearer breakdown of the jail population—particularly how many arrests are related to mental health issues. If a significant portion of inmates are struggling with mental health challenges, jail may not be the most effective solution.

One option worth exploring would be working with neighboring counties to develop a regional mental health facility that could provide treatment and support.

Before doubling the size of the jail, we should make sure we're addressing the root causes and using taxpayer dollars in the most responsible and effective way possible.

Before doubling the size of the jail, we owe it to taxpayers to make sure we're solving the right problem and spending their money wisely.

7. How would you address potential cuts to federal funding for health care and social services?

Potential cuts to federal funding are a real concern for programs like BadgerCare Plus and many of the health and human services programs that families in our county rely on.

If those cuts happen, I believe our approach needs to focus on three things: advocacy, responsible budgeting, and community partnerships.

First, advocacy. The county should work with organizations like the Wisconsin Counties Association and partner with neighboring counties to make sure our state and federal representatives understand how funding cuts would affect rural communities like St. Croix County.

Second, fiscal responsibility. We should regularly review our budgets to find efficiencies and make sure we're using resources wisely. That could include expanding lower-cost options like telehealth, which has become common in many healthcare systems and employer health plans. We should also continue pursuing state resources and Department of Health Services grants to help offset potential losses.

Finally, community collaboration. We need to keep residents informed about available programs and options through outreach and education, and work with local organizations, nonprofits, and healthcare providers to help fill gaps where possible.