

LWV Forum

INTRO

Thank you to LWV and DA Kemp for tonight's forum.

I'm Fran Duncanson, the incumbent seeking a third term Polk County Supervisor for District 12, which includes the City of Amery. I grew up on a dairy farm in Barron County, been married 32 years, hold a technical college degree in accounting, and attended UW -Green Bay to obtain Master Municipal Clerk certification. My municipal career began in 1995; I retired in 2023 after 32 years of public service in both employment and elected office. I proudly consider myself a local government nerd.

I'm a proven leader dedicated to effective, responsible governance and fiscal conservancy. My leadership is plainspoken, respectful, and grounded in integrity, transparency, and open communication. I serve non-partisanly, make decisions based on merit not who is presenting them, and do not accept contributions or endorsements from political groups so my focus remains solely on the people of Amery and Polk County.

1. Maintain a Stable Tax Rate While Funding Core Services

- Keep the tax rate within levy limits
- Protect funding for public safety, public health, and roads/infrastructure
- Use bonding only for capital projects, not operational expenses

Measurable Outcomes:

- Tax rate remains stable or decreases year-over-year
- No reductions in essential services
- Successful completion of capital projects funded through bonding rather than operational funds

2. Strengthen Collaboration and Legislative Advocacy

- Work closely with state legislators to advance county priorities
- Support initiatives like the Crisis Task Force
- Advocate for additional judicial resources, including securing a third judge for Polk County

Measurable Outcomes:

- Formal legislative partnerships established and maintained
- Crisis Task Force actions implemented with documented progress
- State approval and placement of a third Polk County judge

3. Improve Outcomes for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders

- Enhance access to treatment and prevention services
- Reduce strain on the criminal justice system

Measurable Outcomes:

- Decrease in the number of individuals entering services for mental health or substance use disorders
- Reduction in offenders in the court system related to mental health or substance use
- Increased program completion rates and improved long-term recovery outcomes

(2 minutes)

1. Rising Costs vs Levy Limits

With inflation driving up costs for roads, public safety, and human services — and Wisconsin levy limits restricting revenue growth — what specific services would you prioritize if forced to choose, and where would you look for efficiencies?

Public Safety-Law Enforcement & Court System

Public Health-disease, child protection, mental health & addiction recovery

Public Works-Roads and infrastructure, parks

The best way to maintain and improve efficiencies in all departments is having a well-trained staff & workforce, providing them with continuing education, and retaining them by having a competitive wage and benefit package. In addition elected officials should seminars and events to stay up to date on issues and changes facing counties.

2. Tax Burden vs Service Levels

Property taxpayers are feeling pressure. Do you believe service reductions are preferable to tax increases? How would you make that decision?

Service reduction, but we must be mindful of that we cut don't cut services that lessen mandated services. One thing that we should support and strive for supporting economic development and increasing the tax base. This helps to lower the tax rate for everyone. As the County Rep to the WI DWD and a newly elected Director of the Amery Economic Development Corporation I'm familiar with the tools available.

In my experience the public want services, (such as when are you going to fix my road and the like) but may not have a full understanding of the costs to bring them those services. Intergovernmental cooperation is a key way to bring costs down by sharing services, equipment, etc.

3. Broadband Expansion and Equity

Access to reliable high-speed internet is no longer optional. What is the County's role in expanding broadband to underserved rural areas? Should the county step in more directly? How aggressive should Polk County be in pursuing grants or public-private partnerships?

Polk County is Broadband Forward (streamline local permitting and zoning) and Telecommuter (supports and expedites needed infrastructure) certified. Maps have been developed to identify underserved areas. Polk County is working to build public-private partnerships with as NW Communications, Lakeland Communications, and Next Gen to support applications for state and federal funding, including the federal BEAD (Broadband-Equity-Access-Deployment) program (Wisconsin has \$1 billion in federal dollars) administered by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, in addition to working with West Central Regional Planning Commission.

4. Transparency in Decision-Making

Some residents feel major decisions are made before the public hears about them. What specific steps would you take to improve transparency beyond what is legally required?

I have heard this concern from citizens over the years and understand their perspective. First, let me be clear: after more than 30 years working with Wisconsin's open meetings statutes, I take these laws very seriously. I do not collaborate with other Board members on County matters outside of properly noticed meetings, and I carefully review agendas. If I feel an agenda item is not specific enough to reasonably inform the public about what will be discussed, I question it.

As the Chair of the HHS Committee, I also work to ensure discussions stay within the topics listed on the agenda. If conversation begins to move into areas that are not properly noticed, I guide the committee back on track so the public is not left out of the discussion. I'm not a person who looks the other way.

Just as important, I make myself accessible to constituents. People regularly reach out to me by phone or email, or speak with me at church, local businesses, or community events. I am always willing to answer questions, and if I do not know the answer, I make it a priority to find it.

There are also legal considerations when going beyond what is required by law. Public officials must be careful not to create the appearance of bias, favoritism, or partisanship by selectively notifying certain individuals about issues they may find of interest. Questions can quickly arise about why one person was contacted while another was not. State statutes already require specific notice in certain cases—such as notifying property owners within a defined distance of a rezoning request—and any broader changes to open meetings requirements would ultimately need to come from the Wisconsin Legislature.

5. Illicit Drugs

Increased use and distribution of illicit drugs continue in our communities. What role do you believe the County Board has in addressing these issues?

I attended the WI Dept. of Health summit in 2024 on behalf of Polk County where I learned a lot about these issues from people who have dedicated their lives to studying them. It is a balance among several depts, law enforcement if crimes are committed, Human services to support recovery efforts. We are not going to be able to arrest our way out of it, or harm reduction our way out of it. We all have to work together. Stop addict shaming, support harm reduction, education, and prevention. Something we need to talk about more is underage drinking and alcohol being a gateway drug.

Human Services provides comprehensive addiction recovery support through evidence-based outpatient treatment, including behavioral therapy, substance abuse counseling, and dual diagnosis treatment for co-occurring mental health issues. They offer 24/7 emergency mental health/substance use crisis intervention, assessments, specialized case management (Comprehensive Community Services), and community support programs for long-term recovery.

As the Polk Co. Board rep to the CJCC I am a big fan and would like to commend their efforts to reduce crime, recidivism, and jail populations by using evidence-based practices and diversion programs. It coordinates treatment and supervision for high-risk, nonviolent offenders through specialized courts that address substance abuse and mental health issues. Treatment courts help break the cycle of addiction and mental illness, diversion programs for first-time nonviolent offenders, substance diversion for felony methamphetamine possession, and restorative justice through community service. The CJCC also improves coordination among criminal justice agencies to increase efficiency, manage budgets, and ensure compliance with state programs—enhancing public safety while reducing costs to taxpayers.

6. Housing

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?

Everyone needs someplace to live and the main role of the County is through support and advocacy. The County offers housing assistance through the West CAP emergency assistance and Section 8 Voucher program (currently waitlisted), , and the Polk County Housing Authority for elderly/disabled residents. The Municipal Housing Partnership Program (MHPP) for developers has provide the City of Amery with \$70,000 to assist in new home construction development currently in progress. Local resources include Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for home repairs that often helps the elderly stay in their homes. As the County rep to the regional CDBG Committee there are changes coming to the program that could potentially benefit municipalities around the County.

7. Protection of our Water Resources

More and more people are seeking a scenic-water lifestyle in Polk County. With this increase in population, would you be supportive of ordinance or zoning changes that would increase protection of our rivers, lake and groundwater? Why or why not?

Water quality is important for health, environmental, and even economic reasons. Being on Board of the Amery Lakes District and Apple River Protection and Rehab districts we work with County departments to make decisions to improve water quality by weed harvesting, addressing toxic algae blooms, and controlling invasive plant species such as milfoil and zebra mussels.

As to the zoning issues the County is currently working hard with the DNR and other stakeholders to update zoning to be compliant with state statues while allowing property owners to pursue improvements and utilize their property as they wish. There is the potential for ligation on these issues, so as a sitting supervisor I am limiting my comments.

To conclude the Q & A, the Moderator will invite each candidate to answer this question:

Looking ahead 10 years, what should Polk County look like – economically, fiscally, and in quality of life – and what decisions must we make now to get there? (1 minute)

To maintain our quality of life and character we need a stable tax rate by being fiscally conservative, planned growth, and maintaining infrastructure, services and natural resources, and recreational opportunities for all.