

QUESTIONS FOR COUNTY BOARD CANDIDATES

The moderator will invite each candidate to offer a personal introduction Tell us a little bit about yourself – your name, where you live, what you are passionate about and what experiences or skills you have that would enhance your position as a Supervisor on the County Board) **and answer:** What are your top **three priorities** for the County Board to focus on in the next two years? (two minutes)

Hi everyone. I'm Danielle McIntosh. My husband and I moved to District 13 ten years ago and have called it home ever since.

I'm a physical therapist so my day job is literally to help my neighbors and greater community members feel better, move better, and function better. It also means that I can bring that compassion, creativity, and critical thinking to the County Board.

My top three priorities are continuing to provide strong Community Services in St Croix County. To me, this means things like making sure that we can continue to fund the Health Care Campus in New Richmond and the ADRC (Aging and Disability Resource Center), which has been an awesome resource to me as a physical therapist to refer my patients to when they're navigating difficult times. Also things like the Behavioral Health Emergency Services that accompany law enforcement when people are in crisis.

Preserving our natural resources. I love gardening and my passion project has been restoring our backhill to more of a native prairie land to prevent erosion along the creek. I'm also passionate about protecting our drinking water and we're going to talk a lot more about that tonight, I'm sure.

Finally, I think fiscal responsibility is important. No one likes paying taxes but they do provide a lot of really important services and resources. I believe in finding the balance and ensuring we're spending tax dollars on things that really matter to our community.

The questions will be drawn at random for each candidate. Each candidate will have a chance to answer three different questions. Below are the seven possible questions for the March 10th "Meet and Greet".

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? (two minutes)

This is a very complex topic with stakeholders at multiple levels of government, the community, and private companies. It pulls at the tension between the heritage of our state, what modern farming looks like, and the increasing urbanization of St Croix County. Manure storage and spreading is something to be concerned about and aware of when talking about CAFOs. The county has data that identifies ground water nitrate contamination from agriculture, including spreading manure, and differentiates it from other sources of contamination. To the county board's credit, they did recently amend an ordinance to require written consent from landowners before spreading manure, increasing transparency about what is happening on rented farm land.

I am far from an expert and have only mentioned ground water contamination as the most relevant CAFO controversy in St. Croix County at this time. I do think it's important to consider how many animals, how much waste, and by what methods, that the different regions of our county can realistically accommodate. And then work towards a solution that continues to support our agricultural industry , while also protecting the health of our community.

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? (two minutes)

I applaud the county for the initiative already in place, providing Well Water Nitrate Screening Clinics to test well water and educate residents. 50% of St Croix County relies on private wells with 12% of studied wells testing at unsafe levels of nitrate. Yesterday (10/9) the Land and Water Conservation Administrator presented the results of their 2025 data. They estimate over 2,600 wells, serving almost 7,000 residents, have water with greater than 10 mg/L of nitrate that is unsafe to drink.

That 10mg/L is the long-established cut-off associated with increased risk of a serious, potentially deadly, condition (methemoglobinemia) in newborn babies that use well water in their formula. It's also been associated with birth defects and cancer rates. More recent research is beginning to indicate that prolonged exposure to nitrate contamination at 5 mg per liter or even down to 3 mg per liter can be associated with adverse health effects, which would be closer to half of the private wells in St Croix County, if not more.

Continued awareness of the nitrate screening clinics is definitely a step in the right direction to educate our community. I had to do math to find the statistics that I provided tonight, the presentation yesterday just confirmed them with more precise numbers. I would like to see this data more readily accessible, possibly just with recording of the presentation, to help our community members better understand this issue.

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? (two minutes)

This is a(nother) extremely complex topic that I am not qualified to speak in-depth about. However, the St Croix Economic Development Corporation did complete an in-depth study about the current status and gaps in our housing market. The biggest takeaway I had from that study was the answer is multi-factorial involving many different stakeholders and different solutions will work better for different regions.

Given the enormity and complexity of housing affordability, I think the County's role is to provide support, as much as possible, to local municipalities as they tackle solutions for their unique needs. Another common theme in the study was the need for straight forward building code and efficient permit processes. That does seem like an area that the county would be able to provide guidance, and probably already does.

One piece that I found particularly interesting was the "missing middle housing", buildings with 2-16 units that more easily blend into single family neighborhoods, which might help combat the NIMBY, or "not in my backyard" attitude of existing residents.

And I'll tell 'ya, I liked living in a walkable neighborhood. I love my house and I love my neighborhood, but the convenience of living within walking distance of everything I needed when I lived in Madison was amazing. New Richmond, District 13, will never be like Madison. And many of our residents would say that's a good thing. But there is still the opportunity to create a walkable community if enough stakeholders decide to work together and make it happen.

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? (two minutes)

I attended a really interesting and informational meeting about the solar project and solar projects in general hosted by the Wisconsin Farmers Union last night. I learned a lot at that meeting and I've learned a lot from watching past County board meetings. We should also clarify that this is not a question of whether I think the

solar field is a good idea or a bad idea and if the county should be for or against it. That decision lies with the public service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC).

The role of the county is always to protect the safety, health and well-being of the community. In this particular case there are two actual roles in which the county can participate, and they are not mutually exclusive.

The county can be an intervener, which gives the county a seat at the table with the PSC and Xcel to bring attention to certain topics in the PSC's approval process (i.e. ground water testing or fire suppression plans).

The county can also enter into a joint development agreement (JDA) with Xcel that makes the county a party in the development of the project and makes it easier to hold Xcel accountable if they are not living up to their end. This was a really interesting part of the meeting last night, learning about how rural communities can set up long-term funding through the joint development agreement and provide more resources for the areas affected by the solar project.

The county has an attorney that Recommended the county participates in both of these roles and is working on a joint decision agreement for us. The county got the first draft, heard public comment, and is going back to the attorney to make a stronger JDA, and I think this is really the best approach that we can have at this time.

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? (two minutes)

Like all of these questions, this is an extremely complicated question. The county has staff and partnerships with the community to investigate these problems and

identify areas of concern. I would be inclined to listen to the experts that spend their entire careers trying to tackle issues like this. From what I understand, growth in St. Croix County is increasing in part because of older adults moving into our county. This means that we have a larger and larger population living on a fixed income and increasing health needs.

I'm a physical therapist. The first thing that I think about is the education and resources that need to be available for our community members to gracefully age in place, if that is what they choose to do. I also think about the increased demand on our healthcare systems and the importance of protecting the Health Care Campus in New Richmond as a county-owned and operated facility. I only hear good things about the care provided at the health center and it is an invaluable resource to our community.

The other thing that I think of is: how do we draw younger families into our area? Living in New Richmond, it does seem like everybody is moving here, not just the older generation. Investing in kids, investing in the schools and investing in affordable, quality childcare seems like another direction we should be looking at all levels. The county, local government, and community partnerships, in order to have a strong community across the population.

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? (two minutes)

I found this one particularly difficult to find information. I did find the July meeting of the whole from the County Board in which the Sheriff's Office explained the need for the jail expansion.

Most of the inmates at the St. Croix County Jail are there for less than 4 days. Part of the expansion is to build a separate holding area to house these people during that brief time. I am pro anything that helps with efficiency to keep non-violent, low-risk people out of our jail and at work to afford rent (and pay their taxes). Another factor in this project is a response to increased regulations by the state to protect inmates, and it sounds like it's currently a complex game of Tetris for the staff at the jail.

I am pro-human. So I'm Pro basic living conditions and safety in the jail, which means that these are all things that we need to take into account and it sounds like there is some expansion that needs to happen with the jail, given that the population of inmates is rising and is approaching maximum capacity

HOWEVER, I do think it's concerning that we have about the same number of people in jail in St Croix County as Washington County does on the other side of the river when their population is almost three times ours in St Croix County. As the sheriff pointed out in the meeting it's not his decision to decide who goes to jail he just has to house them, but I do think that we need to continue to look at why we have so many people in jail when our neighboring County (relatively) does not. Because building a new jail costs taxpayer money that may be better spent keeping people out of jail.

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

Man this is a really brutal question for somebody that works in healthcare and already sees the failures of these systems. And then to consider that we may lose even more funding. And what that would mean for us... Oof.

I don't know how to address Federal funding cuts, but if elected I will certainly work to figure it out

What I am going to do today is tell you about some of those Healthcare and Social Services that I really appreciate in St. Croix County.

The first is the healthcare campus in New Richmond specifically the Skilled Nursing Facility, although they offer numerous other levels of care. As a physical therapist, it's my job to determine whether patients in the hospital are safe enough to go home, whether they can move throughout their houses safely. A lot of times, once they're medically cleared to go home, they still aren't safe to go home and then they go to places like the St Croix County Health Center in order to get stronger, safer, and get back in their homes.

Second is the ADRC, Aging and Disability Resource Center. I've referred patients there to navigate Medicare changes. I've referred patients there for help finding someone to install grab bars in their house. I've referred patients there to consider the day away program for individuals with dementia. I just saw that they're starting a connection cafe for individuals with dementia and their caregivers can go and find local support. They also do things like nutrition at the senior center, delivering meals, transportation, and so much more

Then there is the Behavioral Health Emergency Services the is now able to respond to people in crisis and potentially diffuse the situation without having to make an arrest and send someone else to jail.

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