

St. Croix County Board of Supervisors – District 10
Election Candidate – Wayne Roen

0) 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?

My name is Wayne Roen, and I live in the City of River Falls in southern St. Croix County with my wife of 40 years. We raised our four daughters here in the Midwest, and today we're fortunate to have grandchildren nearby who we see regularly. Family and community have always been central to my life, and that sense of connection is a big part of why I decided to run for the County Board.

I grew up on a small family farm in North Dakota, where I learned the values of hard work, responsibility, and stewardship of the land. I continue to be an avid outdoorsman, enjoying camping, canoeing the Boundary Waters, kayaking the Kinni, ATV-ing the beautiful trails of Wisconsin, and snowmobiling (when the snow cooperates – which it didn't this year!).

I was the first of my family to attend college, eventually earning degrees in engineering and business and I spent more than 40 years in professional and executive roles in engineering, marketing, and business management. Along the way I developed environmental monitoring technology and hold several patents in that field. My career required careful analysis, collaborative problem-solving, and thoughtful decision-making—skills I believe are directly relevant to local government.

Looking ahead, I believe the County Board should focus on three key priorities. First, ensuring county government operates efficiently, transparently, and responsibly for all residents. Second, protecting the natural resources—especially land and water—that make St. Croix County such a special place to live. And third, strengthening community services and recreational opportunities, including parks and trails that support both quality of life and economic vitality.

- 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?*

Growing up on a small family farm in North Dakota, I understand both the importance of agriculture to our economy and the responsibility that comes with managing land and water carefully. Agriculture has always been central to rural communities like ours, and farmers deserve policies that are fair, predictable, and grounded in sound science. At the same time, we have an obligation to protect the natural resources that sustain both farming and our broader community.

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, like any large-scale industrial activity, can create real environmental risks and raise serious concerns if they are not carefully managed and appropriately limited. Nutrient runoff, groundwater contamination, and air quality impacts are legitimate concerns, particularly in a county like St. Croix where residents rely heavily on groundwater and where outdoor recreation and natural resources are major assets. My approach is guided by data and responsible stewardship.

Any CAFO proposal should undergo rigorous review by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and include strong protections for groundwater, surface water, and local quality of life. I believe CAFO proposals should be evaluated thoroughly under existing environmental regulations and best available science. When expansions are proposed and approved by the Wisconsin DNR, the county should work closely with the DNR to ensure that manure management plans, water protection measures, and monitoring requirements are strong and enforceable.

Agriculture and environmental protection do not have to be in conflict. My goal would be to support a balanced approach that respects farmers, protects neighbors, and safeguards the land and water we all depend on for the long term.

- 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?*

Water quality is one of the most important long-term issues facing rural communities, and nitrates in groundwater are a serious concern that deserves careful attention. As someone who grew up on a farm and later spent a career working in engineering and environmental monitoring, I strongly believe we should approach this issue using good science, accurate data, and practical collaboration with the agricultural community.

The first responsibility of the county is to ensure residents are informed and have access to reliable information about their water quality. That means expanding education programs through our land and water conservation staff, making well-testing programs affordable and accessible, and clearly communicating the health risks associated with elevated nitrate levels—especially for infants and vulnerable populations.

Second, the county should continue promoting agricultural practices that reduce nutrient runoff and groundwater contamination. These include improved manure management plans, nutrient management based on soil testing, cover crops, sensible crop rotation, buffer strips, and other conservation practices that protect both soil health and water quality. Many farmers already use these methods successfully, and the county can help expand their adoption through technical assistance and cost-share programs.

Finally, protecting farmland and protecting water quality should go hand in hand. Healthy soils, careful nutrient management, and long-term stewardship benefit farmers, neighbors, and future generations. My goal would be to work with farmers and residents to preserve both safe drinking water and a strong agricultural economy.

- 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?*

Housing is an issue affecting communities across the country, and St. Croix County is no exception. As our population demographic changes and our economy evolves, we need a wider range of housing options so that young families, working professionals, and seniors can all find places to live in the communities they care about. From my perspective, the County Board's role is not to dictate local development decisions, but to support municipalities with tools, coordination, and good information.

One of the most valuable things the county can do is provide strong planning support and data. Many smaller towns and villages have limited staff capacity, and county-level planning resources can help them better understand housing demand, demographic trends, and infrastructure needs. Good data allows local leaders to make informed decisions about zoning, density, and development patterns.

The county can also play a role in coordinating regional solutions. Housing markets do not stop at municipal boundaries, and regional collaboration can help communities share best practices and align infrastructure investments such as transportation, utilities, and broadband that support housing growth.

Finally, we should look at ways to encourage a mix of housing types—starter homes, workforce housing, townhomes, and senior housing—so residents can remain in their communities throughout different stages of life. Thoughtful planning today will help ensure St. Croix County remains a welcoming and economically vibrant place to live, no matter what phase of life you are in.

- 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?*

Large energy infrastructure projects like the proposed solar facility deserve thoughtful review because they can have long-term impacts on land use, agriculture, natural resources, and local communities. While projects of this scale fall under the jurisdiction of the Wisconsin Public Service Commission, the county still has an important role to play in representing the interests of local residents and ensuring that local concerns are clearly communicated in the decision-making process.

The county should act as a constructive participant by gathering input from affected landowners, neighboring residents, farmers, and local municipalities. Those perspectives should be formally communicated to state regulators so that the Public Service Commission has a clear understanding of local conditions and community priorities. Issues such as farmland preservation, drainage, wildlife habitat, visual impacts, and decommissioning plans should all be part of a careful review.

At the same time, we should recognize that energy systems are changing, and renewable energy will likely be part of our future. My approach would be pragmatic and balanced: evaluate the project based on sound information, consider the long-term impacts on natural resources, and ensure that any development includes strong protections for decommissioning, land restoration, responsible site construction, and fair treatment of neighboring property owners.

The county's responsibility is to ensure that local voices are heard and that any project reflects thoughtful stewardship of our land and community.

- 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 have real implications for how counties plan services, infrastructure, and long-term investments. For many years, St. Croix County experienced strong growth as people moved here for quality of life while working in the Twin Cities. If that growth begins to level off or decline, it changes the planning environment in several important ways.

First, slower growth can ease some of the pressures we have seen on housing, transportation, and land use. Rapid expansion often strains local infrastructure and public services, so a more stable population can allow communities to catch up on planning and ensure development is thoughtful and sustainable.

However, slower growth also creates financial and demographic challenges. Counties rely heavily on property taxes and economic activity to fund services such as public safety, health programs, and infrastructure maintenance. If population growth slows while service costs continue to rise, we will need to be especially careful in managing county budgets and prioritizing investments.

Another important factor is demographic change. As many long-time residents age, demand for services such as healthcare access, transportation options, and senior support will likely increase. My approach would focus on careful long-term planning—maintaining fiscal responsibility, supporting a healthy local economy, and ensuring that St. Croix County remains a place where people want to live, work, and raise families.

- 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?*

A proposed \$46 million jail and infrastructure expansion is a significant public investment, so it deserves careful analysis and transparent public discussion before a decision is made. The County Board's responsibility is to balance public safety needs, long-term infrastructure planning, and fiscal responsibility to taxpayers.

One important question is whether current jail capacity and facilities adequately meet operational, legal, and safety requirements. Counties across Wisconsin have faced increasing demands related to inmate healthcare, mental health services, and compliance with state standards. If existing facilities are outdated or insufficient, upgrades or expansion may be necessary to ensure safe and effective operations for both staff and detainees.

At the same time, borrowing through a bond issue commits taxpayers to long-term repayment, so the county should carefully evaluate costs, alternatives, and timing. This includes reviewing whether renovations, operational changes, diversion programs, or partnerships with other jurisdictions could reduce the need for additional capacity.

Infrastructure investments should also be evaluated within the county's broader capital planning process. Residents deserve a clear explanation of the need, the projected benefits, and the long-term financial impact.

Ultimately, the County Board's role is to ensure that any major capital project is supported by strong data, careful financial planning, and open communication with the public before moving forward.

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

Potential reductions in federal funding for health care and social services would create real challenges for counties, because local governments often deliver many of these programs directly to residents. In St. Croix County, services such as public health programs, mental health support, elder services, and assistance for vulnerable families depend in part on federal and state funding partnerships. If those resources decline, the County Board will need to respond thoughtfully and strategically.

The first step is to clearly understand where federal funds are supporting county services and what the potential impacts of reductions would be. Good data and transparent communication with the public will be essential so residents understand which programs may be affected and why.

Second, we should work closely with state agencies, neighboring counties, and local nonprofit organizations to look for collaborative solutions. Many health and social service challenges—such as mental health care, addiction treatment, and elder support—are best addressed through coordinated regional efforts rather than isolated programs.

Finally, we will need to prioritize services carefully. Counties have a responsibility to protect the most essential services that support public health, safety, and vulnerable residents. My approach would be pragmatic: evaluate the impacts honestly, seek efficiencies where possible, advocate for fair funding, and ensure that the county continues to provide critical services that help maintain a healthy and resilient community.