



WINONA AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2022 CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

County Board

Ken Fritz - District 1 Candidate

1. What should the Winona County EDA (Economic Development Authority) be doing to support and increase private sector business development/job creation?

The Winona County Economic Development Authority (EDA) has limited resources, so without raising taxes or reallocating funds from other County programs their effectiveness is limited. However, that does not mean they can't be productive. The EDA maintains a revolving loan fund which has a \$1.2 million balance. Currently, businesses can apply for loans, typically as part of a package, including bank and private equity. However, the loan rules are highly restrictive. I suggested at the last EDA meeting that staff look into if the state legislature has ever allowed counties to deviate from these rules and use the loan funds for other economic development projects. If so, we should work with our legislators to free up a small portion of the funds for other initiatives.

2. How do you define the role of the County Board of Commissioners verses the role of paid County staff?

The County Board sets the priorities for the County through budget allocations, and adopts supporting policies, ordinances and resolutions to guide staff. Staff's job is to implement policies, notify the Board of issues, and provide expert analysis and recommendations. The County Board also acts in a quasi-judicial role in certain situations.

3. What should the County Board be doing to support and promote agribusiness in Winona County?

The County Board should support all types of agriculture. Specifically, the County Board should continue to support agriculture through its Extension Committee, land use policies, education and partnership with the Winona County Soil and Water District (WCSWCD). I believe the WCSWCD should be provided additional program funding through the County.

4. How should the County Board of Commissioners balance the rights of private property owners and current/future county regulations?

As either a business or an individual, we all need to be good neighbors. I support property rights, but recognize the need to balance those with the impact on neighbors. The County should facilitate a culture focused on how we can help businesses thrive. The entire process should embody how we can help businesses be successful and achieve their goals while protecting neighbors and public resources. Regulations should reflect this approach. The County should be seen first as a partner and only secondarily as a regulator.

Banning industries or business sectors categorically should be a last resort. We first need to discuss and build consensus on what the County believes is needed to mitigate any externalities and craft regulations mirroring those needs. We should then let the market decide if the business, when all is considered, is viable.

5. What should be the role of Winona County Government in working with townships and municipalities for growing private sector jobs?

Businesses do best in markets where there is a need for the product or services the business produces. Generally, I believe the Government should stay out of the way of business and rely on the creative and innovative abilities of our citizens. At the local level, we shouldn't take money from one business and reallocate it to another business. However, sometimes good business ideas need a little boost to get going. The County EDA could consider creating micro loans or grants with existing funds for these situations. For larger enterprises, the County EDA loan program is available. The County should seek out potential business opportunities and connect them with lenders and other grants. Providing education is something the County can do with little cost.

6. What do you see as the County's role in job creation and economic development?

The County should play a supportive and educational role in job creation. The County should continue to seek flexibility in using the existing revolving loan funds and possibly using just the interest from the principal for micro grants.

Right now the biggest issue is not creating jobs, but helping businesses find workers. The County is the overarching authority for the Winona County Workforce Development Board. The County could allow the agency the full administration allocation to fund its Executive Director position, which in turn supports the WDB to train more workers.

The County should use client contacts from other services in other areas, such as treatment court, the Winona County Reentry Program, Parent Support Outreach Program, Child Protection, the Prosecutor and Public Defender, the Community HUB, and the Department of Corrections to funnel people in need of jobs or job training to companies needing workers. The WDB can play a role in making the connection between County Programs and employers.

7. Where do you stand on possible future pandemic mitigations? How would you balance having a vibrant local economy while maintaining a safe community?

Currently the County Board serves as the Community Health Board. The County Board should create an advisory board to the community health board made up of health professionals, not staff. They should not rely solely on staff, the Minnesota Department of Health or outside media for advice. The County should also formally review and analyze the County's response to the COVID pandemic to inform future decisions. Lessons from the past should be used to develop future responses. County public health should focus on education, not mandates.

I believe the County should separate Public Health from the Health and Human Services (HHS) Department. They used to be separate departments. The span of control of the current HHS Director is too large, and public health is very different from social services.

8. The recent jail project is a significant expenditure for the County, what steps do you believe need to be done to ensure this ongoing debt will not be a detriment for business and economic development in Winona County?

Approximately \$1.5 million in annual bond payments are tied to the new jail. About \$650,000 in annual debt payments still needs to be covered. The difference was already included in the 2022 property tax levy. If the County Board gets permission from the legislature for a referendum in 2024, voters will be able to choose between a sales tax or a property tax increase. The County Board will decide this year how they will proceed. The County doesn't have any other options unless it is willing to eliminate non mandated programs. My preference for paying the 2023 and 2024 debt service is to use reserves, putting off any additional tax increase for the jail until 2025. Using reserves would also provide the time to discuss possibly eliminating non mandated programs.

9. Many communities across the state have seen many public safety officers leave or retire early from their positions. These same communities are having difficulty re-filling these positions due to negative public perceptions and lack of funding. What steps do you believe need to be taken to ensure that our community's law enforcement is adequately funded and supported so that our community remains safe and healthy?

Winona County's funding of public safety is healthy. A new jail, new 911 center, a new independent backup 911 center, a new emergency equipment storage facility, solid emergency management, and leasing of vehicles is providing the tools to fit their jobs. The County Board has and should continue to support public safety by educating the public of the good work they do, and defending them when they are unfairly characterized.

One related thing the County Board could do to help public safety, is to formally adopt a social and mental health support plan for the jail. The new jail was designed with support services in mind, but to date, the County Board has not addressed how or who will coordinate and provide those services. The County Board needs to plan for services with similar effort that has been taken to build the facility.