

Thurston County Commissioner Candidate Questionnaire Rory Summerson

1. **What skills and experience do you bring to this office?**

I have a degree in Automotive Technology from SPSCC and am working towards a degree in business while simultaneously working full time, I believe this gives me experience as a diagnostician and deep understanding of technical materials and procedure. I have been a blue-collar service manager for the last 9 years here in Thurston County, serving residents and businesses alike. I have had the privilege of being able to hear directly from the constituents these last many years what concerns are present in the community (often in the comfort of their homes where the conversation is much more honest and heartfelt). In my line of work Customer Service has been a guiding principle and is why I feel so strongly about putting people first. As management I have been a Project Manager over a large section of the business meaning that I have long term experience in Bids and Contracts as well as legal and compliance matters. I deal with OSHA and L & I, as well as in person service. I have experience as elected leadership in a multitude of collegiate and professional skills training settings. I have lead seminars, and provided training as well as education on business needs, as well as diversity and equity. While not always considered in terms of experience for work, I believe it is also reasonable to say that as a blue collar worker, renter, and someone who's lived most of my life around the poverty level, I think I have experienced many of the struggles that people in our community that are less advantaged experience every day. It is my goal to bring that representation to our Commission.

2. **What is your vision for Thurston county?**

My vision is simple, if not long term. I envision a thriving community that stands by its members and looks to address the systemic inequality we see in housing and access to critical services. I envision balanced budgets with resources available to overcome challenges like those we face today. And I envision Thurston County being a leader in green jobs and innovation as we push to conserve the green spaces we have while promoting restoration of our environment.

3. **What do you consider to be the most pressing issues facing the county in the next few years? How would you address these issues?**

The 3 largest and most pressing issues we face are access to affordable housing, access to mental health providers, and budgetary concerns.

In terms of housing I believe our County has some onus on providing for the

needs of our community by dramatically increasing the amount of housing that is available to people of all income levels and would seek out avenues to provide said housing, we can utilize existing resources and additional grants to directly address these issues. 2 examples of this would be increased subsidized housing and finalizing discussion and planning on allowing ADU's (Backyard cottages and the like) in unincorporated rural areas of the County.

In terms of access to mental health providers and as a Commissioner I would seek to promote new and additional providers coming to our County. Means by which we can attain greater access would include things such as reducing financial barriers for newly graduated providers and those moving to the area. We also need to be looking at better methods to connect people to these resources by expanding public transport options throughout the County.

In terms of our Budgets, I believe we have a lot of work to be done to provide greater citizens oversight by means of negotiated rule making and creating more accountability through public involvement in the budgetary process. I also believe need to ensure we have a streamlined reporting process for the various departments and agencies that rely on our tax dollars to function.

As an aside I believe each of these issues intersect with our need to forefront climate change and the environment. We need holistic approaches that consider all areas of impact.

4. What are your county budget priorities?

As mentioned above one of my largest priorities in the budget would be ensuring citizens involvement. Beyond that I believe we should be redirecting resources to services most in need. It is a given that going over budgets is concerning to all residents, and so I believe we need to forefront a method by which all departments are held to the same budgetary standards. In terms of long term planning I believe we need to finalize planning to regenerate a "rainy day" fund that is separate and apart from our general fund. Additionally, providing for the needs of our Environment will be frame of reference for every budgetary vote I cast.

5. The rainy day fund has been greatly diminished. How would you go about addressing this?

I believe it is reasonable to say that in our personal lives, and in business we expect that savings accounts or "rainy day" funds are essential. To that, I say we need to be leaning out our processes and seeing where we can save money through reducing waste and overages that drain our resources. I also believe that all budgetary requests need stronger

evidence points to determine need. Creating new standards by which reporting is done will help to ensure this occurs. We can review what IS working and what is NOT working in our budgets and use that as a starting point.

6. What is your plan for the growing problem of homelessness in Thurston county?

It is really 2 parts. Our point in time census shows that the 2 leading causes of homelessness in Thurston are access to mental health services and lack of affordable housing. These 2 issues are the main focus of my People First pillar and need to be the area's we focus on the most. Ensuring that we increase the amount of both affordable housing and mental health will not solve the problem alone though. We need to use the information we have to create or expand programs that address these needs. We also need to provide immediate housing and stabilizing services to unhoused individuals. While our budgets may be tight, we also need to consider that human lives take priority. I seek to address these issues within the first year.

7. What is your position on County policies where growth and the environment seem opposed?

I believe by sourcing new green technologies and innovation we can provide for a situation by which growth and environment do not always need to be opposed. We also can ensure fair requirements for offsets and a push for collaborative approaches in our various industrial and business sectors. One example of this is 3d printed housing from renewables. We can invite and promote green tech and become a regional leader with majority votes on the Commission centered on our environmental needs.

8. What is your position on the Rocky Prairie Development Logistics Center?

I have opposed the Development since its proposal. Rocky Prairie being one of the last Rocky out washes in the world, we have a duty to protect it. By disallowing the development, we also promote the health and well being of the communities most directly impacted.

9. The County Commissioners sit as a quasi-judicial body. What background do you have you for making decisions of a legal nature?

Most of the experience I have in this area is centered on business compliance. I would think as a basis legal compliance is the determining factor in a quasi-judicial body. I do have a lot of experience and familiarity with Code and Ordinance compliance and a procedural mindset that allows me to quickly digest requirements and provide accountability. That said I also base many of

my decisions in fairness, and so when there is some question about the legality of an issue – that would be my foundation.

10. What is your position on the current system of cash bail?

I fiercely oppose the cash bail system, I believe it flies in the face of equity and fairness when people are jailed simply because they do not have the same financial resources as others. We know these concerns impact the impoverished and marginalized communities most grievously. We should eradicate the cash bail system and find a better solution.

11. Did you support the proposal to move the county courthouse to downtown Olympia?

Yes, in terms of better access and the ability to provide a better coordinated approach to law and justice in our community. I did however have many concerns about the process that lead to the plan proposed.

12. What are your thoughts on immigration and federal enforcement of deportation of undocumented immigrants within Thurston County?

I believe in Sanctuary Cities and Counties. I believe we need major reforms in our immigration system that recognizes the vital role immigrants play in our economy and community. I abhor the idea that ICE would come to our County to remove our residents and guests especially given their recent track record. Much needs to be done to protect these contributors to our society in a way that provides for fair and equitable justice.

13. Mental health services are currently inadequate to address mental health issues in Thurston County. What do you recommend to solve this problem?

One solution to help address this, is increasing the amount of providers in our County. We can do this by removing or reducing financial barriers to providers that ensure care is provided to those less financially able to obtain services in our current for-profit healthcare system. This also means looking about subsidizing financial requirements for care where applicable for patients. We also need to ensure we are appropriately assessing options for individuals whose mental health is a primary factor in detention and homelessness. Increased beds alone does not provide increased access, we must also ensure we have providers ready to address long term stabilization needs – which requires not only available providers but also access to medicines and travel to appointments, and increased ability to remain in contact with care.

14. Do support an initiative to provide public power to Thurston County?

Absolutely.

The candidate assumes full responsibility for all answers to this questionnaire.

Your responses to this questionnaire should be considered public knowledge as we cannot assure confidentiality when making the questionnaire available to our membership.