

DFA / FAIR! Questions for written responses:

Italics: Questions.

Bold: Candidate

Normal: Candidate's answer. The answers are the words of the candidates as sent to DFA/FAIR!.

No edits for grammar, punctuation or spelling were made.

For fairness, the answers are presented in random order.

- 1) *Johnson County has a shortage of affordable housing. What can the Board of Supervisors do to address this issue?*

Sally Stutsman:

I feel there needs to be a communitywide effort to address this issue. What the board can do is take a leadership role and work with the Housing Trust Fund of Johnson County (HTFJC) to educate the community about affordable housing in Johnson County and to work toward finding solutions to the problem. The Board has provided funding for the HTFJC and should continue to provide funding.

We need to also be looking for grant opportunities, providing match when grants are available, and work with the business community since this is an economic development issue.

The Board also needs to work with Iowa legislators to encourage the establishment of a dedicated source of funding for housing trust funds. One way to accomplish this would be if individual counties were allowed to allocate monies from the local real estate transfer taxes to be put in a fund to address the local affordable housing needs. If Johnson County were allowed to do this it would mean approximately \$30,000 per year that could go into the HTFJC from real estate transfer taxes.

Some additional things that could be done would be to encourage the community to look at inclusionary zoning, encouraging banks to offer low-interest loans for home buyers who qualify for affordable housing and programs to educate first time home buyers.

Larry Meyers:

Because the County has not had much, if any, involvement in this area in the past it will need to start slowly. Two areas that can be focused on would be additional Section 8 housing vouchers and a stronger position on infill development that would ease the costs of scattered rural development. By focusing on an elusive return on investment with scattered rural development we may be diverting resources that can be put to better use.

John Schneider:

I believe the first six questions all come down to the state limits on property tax

Mike Lehman:

Johnson County is a very active member of the Housing Trust Fund of Johnson County. Currently our Planning and Zoning Administrator, one Board member (Rod Sullivan) and the County Assessor serve on this committee. Also one Board member sits on its Advisory Board (Sally Stutsman). They are responsible for distributing financial assistance for low income housing improvements to existing structures. They are also responsible for dispersing local and State funds for new residences with similar low income guidelines.

We can continue to encourage municipalities to offer incentives to developers to aid in construction of lower cost housing. We can also continue to encourage local lending institutions to cooperate in providing low interest capital to builders and low interest loans to home buyers to make homes more affordable to those in the lower income range.

2) *The Council of Religious Communities has declared a crisis regarding homelessness in Johnson County. What can or should be done by the Board of Supervisors to address this issue?*

Mike Lehman:

The Board of Supervisors is supporting the Homeless Shelter by funding the Star Program that offers skill development and counseling for individuals to aid in employment potential. After touring the Homeless Shelter House on April 10th, the site is obviously overcrowded and out of date concerning sleeping accommodations, bathrooms, kitchen and laundry facilities. It is also inconceivable that small children should be subjected to these conditions. I support the need for a location to expand services and some transportation system to help with employment opportunities.

Sally Stutsman:

I would propose the Board of Supervisors work with the Council of Religious Communities, Housing Trust Fund of Johnson County, Shelter House, Chamber of Commerce and other elected officials to address this issue. This is a communitywide problem that needs to have everyone working together to come up with solutions for homelessness in our community..

Larry Meyers:

See answer #1. Other issues involved with homelessness/affordable housing also include basic needs such as food and medical care. The county should at least maintain if not increase current funding for facilities such as the Free Med Clinic. We have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in discretionary funds recently to pay teams of engineers to design an unwanted North Corridor road system. Surely we can find discretionary funds for basic human needs.

John Schneider:

I believe the first six questions all come down to the state limits on property tax

3) *How should the Board of Supervisors address the needs of the 15% of persons and 5.2% of families in Johnson County who are living below the national poverty level?*

Sally Stutsman:

Assure that no county tax dollar incentives for businesses are given unless the business provides jobs that pay a living wage and provide benefits.

Making sure there is adequate, affordable and available child care in Johnson County so mothers and fathers can go to work and be confident that their children are well cared for and safe.

Continue to provide funding for the many human service agencies that provide services to low income families in Johnson County. These agencies include the Crisis Center, Neighborhood Centers of Johnson County, and the ICCSD Family Resource Centers. Continue to provide county funding and support for Empowerment and Decategorization programs that address poverty issues in the community. Work with the new County Human Service Coordinator to look for solutions to poverty in Johnson County.

Be at the table and an active participant in finding solutions to poverty in Johnson County.

John Schneider:

I believe the first six questions all come down to the state limits on property tax

Mike Lehman:

The recently created position of Social Services Director was intended to help focus on the need for recognizing and recommending funding direction for these individuals and families. Our Director Amy Correa is working closely with the many agencies such as those supported by United Way and Johnson County Community Block Grants for such purposes. The Johnson County General Assistance offers assistance for rent, utilities, and food. I am involved with Johnson County Empowerment which is concerned with policies and funding the education and wellness of children ages 0-5. The Johnson County Board of Health with some funding from the Supervisors offers the WIC program and others to low income families. I have been involved with HACAP which has promoted low income housing purchasing and utilities subsidies through LIHEAP.

Larry Meyers:

See #1 and #2. The county could also be looking at requiring that persons or businesses doing business with the county pay a livable wage to employees.

- 4) *Senior Services are important in our county. 7.4% of Johnson County residents are over 65 years of age and 23% of those elderly residents live in poverty. What can or should be done by the county to support the elderly?*

John Schneider:

I believe the first six questions all come down to the state limits on property tax

Sally Stutsman:

The County already provides funding and support for several agencies that serve the elderly – the Senior Center, Visiting Nurse Association, Free Medical Clinic, Crisis Center, and Elder Services. The County Health Department also offers programs directed at senior citizens. We need to continue to provide monies to these agencies. The county operated SEATS program could expand its transit services so that the elders living in the unincorporated areas can have access to transit services on a daily basis instead of two or three days a week.

We have worked with AARP and provided funding for a booklet that outlines community services and resources for the elderly. We need to make sure the booklet remains up to date and available to seniors.

We need to help provide resources that would allow the elderly to live independently and in their own homes as long as possible.

I would like the County to begin thinking about providing satellite senior centers in Johnson County communities outside of Iowa City and Coralville. The school resource centers that the County funds in Hills and North Liberty could be a great model. It would be good for all involved if the school resource centers could offer activities and services that are intergenerational.

Mike Lehman:

The County supports the Senior Center by funding \$75,000 per year. Seats Paratransit offers transportation to those that qualify within cities as well as all residents in the rural area. I am involved with the Task Force on Aging as a representative from the Board of Supervisors. The Board of Supervisors offer a public venue to the Task Force on Aging and as well as AARP on our agendas for our televised Board meetings. Representatives from the Senior Center Commission and United Way agencies give regular public update reports to the Board of Supervisors as to their activities and involvement for seniors. We recruit and rely on seniors as volunteers for many of our boards and commissions drawing upon their experience and knowledge to help and give guidance in their areas of expertise. The Board of Supervisors recently provided \$500 towards the publication of a booklet promoting senior activities in the community. The Board has approved contracts between Seats Paratransit and the cities of Solon and Lone Tree to provide rides to senior dining locations.

Larry Meyers:

Some of these elderly are homeowners on a fixed income. The county should be very careful when considering any property tax increase. We could also be looking into the possibility of a program to access medications directly from pharmaceutical companies. Possibly increase funding to programs such as Elderly Services.

5) *Johnson County has had to cut funding for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities. What can be done to adequately fund services in the county?*

John Schneider:

I believe the first six questions all come down to the state limits on property tax for MHDD we have to live with those requirements at this time. I think the state will have to look at those being unreasonable for our larger counties and maybe regionalizing counties for funding MHDD for more efficiently run services. There will be training seminars in this area for community based boards and faith based boards sponsored by Compassion Iowa. I believe this county has always had a lot of fabulous volunteers and would benefit greatly from this program.

Sally Stutsman:

The Mental Health Budget is a separate fund with a capped budget. There is no flexibility to fund services for persons with disabilities outside of this fund which is currently capped at the 1996 level. We need to work with the legislature to remove the cap and allow counties to levy a few cents more in order to meet the rising need and costs for providing these services.

We need to also continually monitor these services and look for efficiencies in providing services and be creative in our approach to services.

Larry Meyers:

How money and budget are managed in the Dep't of MH/DD should be examined closely. Too much money is being held as a cash reserve. The State will accept a reserve of up to 15% at the end of the year. Reserves beyond this can result in a cutback from the state in the following year. Management of money in this department has cost us several hundred thousands of dollars in the past few years.

Mike Lehman:

Monitoring monthly expense to see where the projected balance is one way to see if our level of funding is too low or too high. The Board of Supervisors recently approved a 4% increase to providers to help ensure the quality of services to consumers. We continue to educate State Legislators as to our needs and limitations due to current restraints per Iowa code. With more Counties experiencing the same problem I believe we have their attention and need to continue to suggest solutions to them that they control through legislation and State Allocations.

6) *How can Johnson County maintain or strengthen services needed by its residents given the state formula for taxation?*

Mike Lehman:

Levies for many services such as those provided by the General Fund and MH/DD are limited by State Code. As we are currently at the maximum for both of those levies, one way to increase funding is to promote growth in all sectors: residential, commercial and industrial. Commercial development will aid in jobs creation. Employment will help those that struggle with income problems. We have communicated to State Legislators the need to either increase levy limits or in the case of MH/DD the State should provide more funding and/or increase the levy limits. Administrative exceptions have been made in some cases of MH/DD but this puts pressure to review ever more and more cases when consumers or family members expect special consideration.

Larry Meyers:

See answer #5. How we manage our departments can have a significant effect on the amount of services that we provide. Johnson County has a growing tax base that should allow for at least modest increases in services. A more aggressive infill policy would help hold back the burden of providing costly infrastructure for scattered rural development.

Sally Stutsman:

Maintaining or strengthening services is becoming more and more difficult to do with the current state tax formula. The state has given counties very few taxing options to raise the needed revenues to meet the service needs of the county. The Local Option Sales Tax is the only additional revenue source the legislature has allowed counties and cities to utilize to raise additional revenues. About the only other thing counties can do is to continually look for efficiencies in how we provide services and to maximize other sources of revenue outside of taxes. Charging fees for government services is one way to bring in additional revenues. Another thing counties could do is to provide only mandated services and eliminate discretionary spending.

Johnson County has been very fortunate to have a growing tax base. We need to make sure that the tax base remains strong.

John Schneider:

I believe the first six questions all come down to the state limits on property tax

- 7) *Do you support prioritizing funding for bicycle routes and trails, light rail and mass transportation?
What is your vision for a comprehensive transit plan for Johnson County?*

Larry Meyers:

I favor alternative methods of transportation, including a trail system and a Corridor transit system. A Corridor transit system needs to be a cooperative effort between Linn and Johnson counties and the other entities along the route. I prefer a seperated trail system wherever feasible. An attached shoulder/trail system has the potential to create hazardous situations for the bikers and pedestrians who use them.

Mike Lehman:

The Johnson County Council of Government has helped plan and prioritize bicycle routes and trails. Trails within cities are in competition with each other for limited funds. The board of Supervisors recently discussed the Johnson county Trails Plan with the intent to form a advisory group to help in the development of trails. The needs to consider trails for multi-use for all types of users have been emphasized during public discussion. Condemnation of agricultural land for separated trails is prohibited by State law and this complicates trail planning in the unincorporated areas. There has been discussion of encouraging or asking for trials within newly proposed subdivisions. Light rail and mass transit is being explored in the Corridor between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City for employment, entertainment and education destinations. Often plans look better on paper than in practice. People usually indicate an intention to use many such venues but in reality the interest sometimes wane after implemtation. As many of these systems are subsidized by ownership it is important that in depth study be done before committing resources. A regional ownership and management situation would be good idea but funding equality and contracting would be necessary.

Sally Stutsman:

With limited resources we do need to prioritize funding for all forms of transportation.

My vision for a comprehensive transit plan for Johnson County is to move to a countywide system that provides access to mass transit to all citizens of Johnson County. I envision a light rail system between Johnson and Linn County. An extensive bike trail system should be developed that would serve commuters as well as recreational bikers. Johnson County needs to also do more with the concept of park and ride and van pools.

John Schneider:

I would support trails and bicycle routs for there recreation benefit but believe transportation services must be self supporting.

8) *Before the most recent budget was approved, the budget was not available to the public until the day it was presented for public discussion. What will you do to make public documents available on a timelier basis?*

Larry Meyers:

Many times public documents and agendas for public meetings are not made available in a timely fashion. Certain items come to the County calendar on an annual basis. The minimum requirement is 24 hours. I see no reason why most business can't be scheduled with a three to seven day advance notice, along with accompanying documents.

John Schneider:

I believe budget must be available with plenty of opportunity for the public to review before it is adopted.

Mike Lehman:

The proposed budget was published per State Code not more than 20 days and not less than 10 days before the scheduled Public Hearing for the budget in the county's official newspapers as required. The draft budget was made available to the media and public after each work session.

Sally Stutsman:

The County currently makes every effort to have public documents available to the public on a timely basis. Part of the issue with timeliness with the budget is that the budget is a very fluid document right up to the time it is ready for publication. The County has been hesitant to put out information that may be changed and is not the final document. This budget year we were still working on draft budgets right up to the publication deadline. Our concern has always been that people have the final version and not preliminary drafts that are still being revised. Our budget coordinator was new this year and not totally familiar with the entire budget process. Next year, with one budget cycle under his belt, we will do a better job of starting the budget process earlier and providing more time between the final draft and the public hearing. I plan to make every effort to see that the public has access to this information in a timelier manner.

- 9) *Tax Incremental Financing is a popular method for attracting economic development. However, as witnessed by the Rudy's Organic Bakery deal and the overuse by Coralville, this type of incentive can be abused. If you were advising the Legislature on ways to change TIF in order to mitigate its negative impacts, what advice would you give?*

Sally Stutsman:

I would advise them to change the current rules which allow TIF districts to continue or expand after the original project has been completed and bonds paid off. I would also tell legislators that TIFs should be utilized for economic development projects and not for residential projects unless they are for what was originally intended which was housing in blighted areas. High-end housing on a golf course should not be eligible for TIF funding. TIFs are a useful tool for communities if used appropriately. The TIF rules need to be reviewed on a periodic basis to assure that their intent is still being followed.

John Schneider:

No response.

Larry Meyers:

TIFs were intended to aid in the redevelopment of blighted areas. There may need to be a higher burden of proof that an area would not be redeveloped without the benefit of a TIF. The lifespan of a TIF should be examined as some run 20+ years. All involved parties such as the County and the local school board should be represented in the TIF decision.

Mike Lehman:

I would like to see the regulations regarding TIF reviewed. The length of the TIF and the primary use of the TIF need to be scrutinized. Coralville has recently offered to release TIF money to help construct a Seats Paratransit Facility for Johnson County at our Secondary Roads location. The percentage of property under TIF in municipalities could also be looked at as is the case of Tiffin where a large percentage of the residential development is under TIF. The TIF regulations have not been reviewed since they were instituted and similar to loop holes in IRS guidelines, they will continue to be used unless changed. I fully realize that tax increment financing is a competitive tool used by communities to increase their tax base to benefit everyone as a final product but enough time has elapsed since its origination that the overall process should be reviewed.

10) Describe your priorities with regard to law enforcement needs.

- a) Do you support a new jail? Why?
- b) Should jail alternatives be co-located with the jail or should they be in a separate facility?
- c) Do you support a shared emergency communications system with Iowa City, Coralville, etc.?

Mike Lehman:

a) I feel a new jail is needed in the foreseeable future. By incorporating a jail into a Criminal Justice Center many efficiencies can be realized. Transportation and manpower in moving prisoners to Linn County would be one such positive. Adequate separation of certain types of prisoners would be possible. Alternatives and programs could be offered with an adequate exercise area and library incorporated into a new facility.

b) The criminal justice process starts in the jail. Those incarcerated with more severe charges might be better suited to services offered under the same roof. Others with minor violation might be released but required to attend programs that could be housed offsite.

c) The recent emergency of the tornadoes last week emphasized that there were some deficiencies in radio communication between emergency agencies. It was overcome to some degree with cell phones on an individual basis but it is not adequate for large scale communication broadcasts. Relay of information is untimely and in the case of a life threatening situation unacceptable. I support a county wide system to include all fire and rescue, law enforcement, and medical personnel. A shared system or backup arrangement should also be investigated with Linn County and other adjoining counties.

John Schneider:

I believe the time is near for a new jail. When the study was done for the last proposed jail the breakeven was \$500,000 dollars and we have reached that point. I also believe we need to have one communication center for the whole county for the safety of our citizens and our employees.

Larry Meyers:

I think at some point, as Johnson County continues to grow, we will probably be faced with the inevitability of building a new jail. However, all alternatives, such as diversion programs, should be exhausted first. This has been clearly decided by the electorate in recent years. Alternative programs can probably not be housed in the current facility, but this could be an option should a new jail be constructed. A joint communication center is necessary and overdue, particularly in light of recent events.

Sally Stutsman:

a) All information indicates that at some point in the future the County will need to build a new jail. The current jail no longer meets the needs of the county. At some point the costs of transporting prisoners to facilities outside of Johnson County will outweigh the costs of building a new facility. Because of overcrowding at the jail, space for recreation, client-lawyer consultation, and library services have been limited or eliminated.

b) This depends on the alternative and severity of the offense. Many alternatives can be located in a separate facility from the jail.

c) I do support a shared emergency communications system with Iowa City, Coralville, etc.

11) *The Johnson County Board of Supervisor's instructed current County Attorney Pat White to draft a sensitive areas ordinance for the County. To date, no ordinance has been presented to the Board of Supervisors. What do you think the Board of Supervisor's should do about this?*

Sally Stutsman:

Pat White was not instructed by the Board to draft the Sensitive Areas Ordinance. The Ordinance was drafted by a committee that worked on the project for two years. County Attorney Pat White was asked to review the draft. When an ordinance or contract is proposed for Board action it is a standard practice for the County Attorney to review the document since the County Attorney is the legal counsel for the County and is charged with representing the county in court if the ordinance or contract is challenged. Pat has agreed to have the sensitive areas ordinance reviewed and to the Board of Supervisor's for final consideration before he leaves office. I am confident that Pat will fulfill his promise to the Board.

Larry Meyers:

The BOS should move forward with a Sensitive Areas Ordinance.

John Schneider:

No response.

Mike Lehman:

One of the goals of the 1998 Land Use Plan was to adopt a Sensitive Areas Ordinance. A proposed ordinance drafted by a citizen committee, not Pat White has been partially reviewed by the County Attorney. Pat White has promised to finish his recommendation of any changes before the end of the year.

12) *Water quality concerns exist in the county. What can be done to protect the water supply and address watershed issues?*

John Schneider:

No response.

Mike Lehman:

A USGS study of the Silurian-Devonian Aquifer which was jointly funded by Johnson County, Iowa City and Coralville was recently completed and reported there was adequate supply of water to meet future needs from the area. A volunteer group under the guidance of the Soil and Water District has been sampling water in the Clear Creek Watershed for almost two years. There has also been an ongoing study of the McBride Watershed. The 1998 Land Use Plan while described as a guide has had a tremendous impact since its passage in December of 1998. New members of the Board of Supervisors since its adoption have helped formulate and implement a new mind set to offer more protection to the environment. The criteria considered when addressing changes in requests for land uses are much more of a factor than ever before. The Board of Supervisors financially supports an employee at the Johnson County Soil and Water Conservation District that has responsibilities to review and recommend remedies during our review process for subdivision applications, site plan applications and conditional use permits. The Board and our staff rely on the expertise of the Soil and Water District to minimize the negative impacts that may be caused by non-agricultural development. Educating residents of Johnson County about what we currently have, and how the review process for development requests are made is of the utmost importance to me and the rest of the Board.

Sally Stutsman:

We need to make every effort to control erosion in the county. The Board of Supervisors has provided funding to the soil and water conservation district to hire an individual to review site plans and assure that an erosion control plan is in place. The County also needs to do a better job educating people on maintenance of septic systems in the unincorporated areas of the County.

Larry Meyers:

If rural development continues it will further tax our water resources. Septic systems may become a concern as to their effect on our fresh water supply. This could lead to the need for a public rural water system, which in turn could lead to an even poorer return on our property tax dollar.

13) *Johnson County government has been looking at options to consolidate its campus. Do you support these efforts? Why?*

Mike Lehman:

I support a Central Campus concept to help meet the growing needs and access to County services by the public. By consolidating these services at one location many individuals can do their county business with less transportation needed and time save. As the County currently rents space for MH/DD at North Governor Street and Income Maintenance and some Human Service space at Eastdale Mall this rental expense will be transferred to for our own building needs. The current Board of Health Building may be sold or used for another purpose. This requires financial planning and land acquisition along with building and space studies by consulting with department heads, staff and architects. The building is expected to be designed to LEEDS specifications.

Sally Stutsman:

I support the efforts to consolidate the county campus. It makes sense economically. Instead of having locations all over Johnson County, each with their own receptionist, phone and computer systems, janitorial services, parking lots, copy machines, etc., it would make sense to consolidate and minimize duplication. In addition, consolidation would be an added convenience to county residents accessing services.

John Schneider:

No response.

Larry Meyers:

The County campus plan is an idea that looks good on paper. However it has resulted in the closing of a number of businesses in the block north of the current Administration building. The county needs to do a better job of involving the public in this project by gathering public input, explaining the need, and spelling out how it will be financed.

14) Consider the current controversy about the use and abuse of eminent domain. What is your position on the use of it by the county?

Larry Meyers:

Eminent domain should only be used in a case of overwhelming public need. The burden of proof should be on the 'taker'. In general, I would be opposed to its use as a method for commercial or economic development. It puts the government in the position of deciding whose plans and dreams have more value. That should not be a government function.

Sally Stutsman:

Eminent domain should be used only as stated in the current law – for the common good. I do not agree that it should be used for economic development.

Mike Lehman:

The County has had a history of only using land or property that is needed and justified after much public discussion. The publicized case on the East coast was a taking of land by a government body and reselling it to a private entity for a higher valued use.

John Schneider:

No response.

15) *Why do you support or not support a local option sales tax? What are the positive benefits, what are the consequences?*

John Schneider:

I believe we need to support a local option tax because our schools are at their taxable limits and will need the funding for our young people.

Mike Lehman:

I would support a local option sales tax as a way of funding projects that would be limited to their specific purpose. While considered regressive to those of lower income I believe they may be the ones to benefit the most if improvements for educational endeavors are the intended result. The large portion of a lower income family is spent on food which is not taxed. If rent is an issue, rent levels usually are a reflection of some real estate taxation which carries the heavy load for much of the services offered by government agencies.

Larry Meyers:

I would lean towards opposing a local option sales tax, because of the disproportionate burden on lower incomes, but I would not rule it out. Johnson County has a higher than normal amount of purchasing by out-of-county persons because of Coral Ridge Mall, sporting events, tourism and traffic off I-80. We may be overlooking a potential source of revenue. We cannot continue to go to the property tax well whenever we need additional funds. That also has an effect on people with fixed incomes.

Sally Stutsman:

I always like to consider all the options. In the current taxing environment our options are very limited in adding new revenues to pay for the services the public demands and expects from its government. With that said, I would like the taxpayers of Johnson County to decide if they think the local option sales tax is necessary. The positive benefits are additional revenue for services while not having to raise property taxes. The consequences are the added burden of low income families of having to pay a large portion of their income for sales taxes.

16) *What should the role of the Board of Supervisors be to assure that fair elections are being conducted in our county?*

- a) *Electronic voting machines are known to be fallible; do you support having voting machines with verifiable paper trails?*
- b) *Do you support instant registration?*

Larry Meyers:

I support having verifiable paper trails in elections. I have concerns about instant registration because I believe an informed citizenry should be aware of upcoming elections and issues, and be a regular voter, which would negate the need for them to register. However, it appears that same day registration increases voter turnout and allows for persons to vote who, for whatever reason, have not kept up their registration. Any action that would increase the participation in democratic activities should be encouraged, and for that reason I would support it.

Mike Lehman:

Elections should offer equal opportunity to all whom are eligible to be able to vote.

- a) Yes. At this time the state has not certified the use of a paper trail for our new machines.
- b) No. There should be a short waiting period to avoid the opportunity of voter fraud.

John Schneider:

No response.

Sally Stutsman:

- a) I definitely support voting machines with verifiable paper trails. The County has already purchased machines with this capability but has not yet received the certification from the State due to the overwhelming number of new voter machines that need to be certified.. .
- b) Yes, as long as the system is set up to handle instant registration so no fraud can occur.