

Greater Pensacola Chamber 2020 Candidate Questionnaire

County Commission

Business Climate / Regulations Issues

1. Rate the regulatory climate for business in Escambia County. Is it Good/Fair/Bad? Explain your answer.

The current regulatory climate for business in Escambia County is good, but there is room for improvement. There are not a lot of restrictions other than land use/zoning. I would, however, prefer to see more coordination between County and City so that business owners are not having to research different rules depending on location.

2. Please provide any examples of how regulations have affected the life of county residents in a positive or negative way.

The purpose of regulation on the County level mostly involves the land use/zoning issue previously mentioned. When these regulations are made with input from – and thus, for the benefit of - residents, the affect is mostly positive. These regulations protect not only residential and historic areas, but also protect commercial development. If a business owner wants to expand, and they are within a commercial/industrial zone, then they can do so without concern. There are also processes in place through which stakeholders – either residents or businesses – can petition for a change of those regulations. On the other hand, much of the input I have received as a Commission Aid has been from citizens concerned about perceived nuisance situations with adjacent businesses. The matter is almost always resolved by pointing out the regulation that supports either side of the matter.

3. Name the top 3 specific county ordinances/regulations you would like to see eliminated. Explain why they should be eliminated.

There are currently no county ordinances/regulations that should be eliminated. These are typically in place to provide protections and clear guidance. For that reason, I would prefer to see the County and City merge

development considerations and provide a more cohesive, user-friendly experience. Examples that come immediately to mind are tree protection and historical area protection.

4. What is your strategy to leverage the county's interest in regards to state and federal funding opportunities?

Our county is not receiving the representation we deserve in regards to "bringing back" our tax dollars to our community. A big reason is that we do not have a strategic plan or vision for our community. Without a plan to work from, we deal with crisis management instead. As a Commissioner, I will work with my fellow commissioners to implement a strategic plan for the next 10 years that could be used as a baseline for goals within our community.

Operations / Infrastructure Issues

1. Do you see any overlap or duplication of services between the county and the city? If so, what services, and how could these services be consolidated?

There is a tremendous amount of overlap and duplication of services between the county and the city. In fact, a person would be hard pressed to find a service that was not duplicated or interpreted between the jurisdictions. For the purposes of this question, I will point out the most obvious: planning and zoning; tree ordinances, drainage, traffic. These are COUNTY wide problems and do not know CITY limits. Again, without a strategic plan, any move to eliminate or consolidate these services would only create more future problems than solutions.

2. There have been a number of joint government meetings over the past few years. What is your opinion of these meetings? What types of cooperative meetings would you like to see moving forward?

Meetings are only as good as the positive changes they create as a result. There are three (3) types of cooperative meetings that I would like to see moving forward, because I believe these would have the most positive results. First, the Commissioners should have at least two (2) meetings a

year with those appointed to the various volunteer boards (SRIA, Planning). Second, BOCC and City (Mayor and Council) should meet at least twice a year to discuss overall vision/issues/solutions for the community. Third, ALL elected officials for this community should meet a minimum of one (1) time per year to discuss vision, funding, strategy, solutions, and any other shared interest.

3. Do you believe the county allocates sufficient resources for infrastructure projects? How would you prioritize these projects and fund them?

Escambia County absolutely does NOT allocate sufficient resources for infrastructure projects. I see this every day in my current job, as well in as my daily life. In fact, this is one of the main reasons I am running for office. We allocate 1/5 of what we should per year just to stay current with our road resurfacing. The last audit for our roads resurfacing was completed in 2011. This audit should occur every 2 years. If we have a Natural Disaster, our baseline is calculated on 9 year old data. This leaves ZERO funding for growth so we are ALWAYS doing crisis management. Projects need to be prioritized based on the safety, health, and well being of the community. We **must** focus on the things we need to do instead of the things we want to do. Eliminate funding for outside agencies other than those mandated by the state, eliminate the discretionary spending accounts allocated to each district until we bring our infrastructure up to an acceptable level of service, and set metrics to measure our progress.

4. What is your opinion of the beach congestion plans that have been proposed? What is your vision for solving this problem?

Let's call it what it really is.....beach traffic management. Sun Pass was a good start even though it took much longer than necessary to implement. Coordinating traffic control with Gulf Breeze is important. Implementing an ATMS (Automated Traffic Management System) in conjunction with Gulf Breeze and Santa Rosa County will solve many of the traffic issues associated with the beach traffic. Again, this is about working with multiple jurisdictions, agencies, etc., in order to achieve a mutually beneficial goal.

5. There is a proposal for a new sports/meeting facility. Do you approve of this project and how would you propose to pay for this type of facility?

A new sports/meeting facility is not even on the “top 10” of what this community needs. Seeing how the Bay Center is **still** not self sufficient and draining just under \$2,000,000.00 from the citizens on an annual basis, the discussion of a new sports facility is a moot point if we expect the taxpayers to fund it. It would be irresponsible to expect the taxpayers – residents and businesses alike – to entrust us with yet another pet project while so many basic services go inadequately funded.

6. What would your Five Year Plan for Escambia County look like?

We need a real Strategic Plan, not just a set of agreeable points that get us through to the next election cycle, where we can again bolt on another set of agreeable points. We need a Strategic Plan that is responsible, accountable, and adaptable, with measurable and fundable goals. We must stop dreaming up “need” projects at the property owners' expense. These are really just “want” projects dressed up with happy language. Public Safety should **always** be our first priority and should be funded appropriately. Infrastructure needs to be funded appropriately. These are not just cheering points, they have very real reasons to be mentioned, and very real consequences when they are ignored. We must stop spending \$12,000,000.00 (twelve **million** dollars) a year on outside agencies. This are “wish lists” not “needs.”

7. Name the three top infrastructure needs in Escambia County or The City?

As a candidate for County Commissioner, I do not have a list of “infrastructure needs” for the City. However, for the County

1. Comprehensive storm water plan for urbanized area of Escambia County.
2. Adequately fund our failing bridges.
3. Resurfacing of our roads that are years into deferred maintenance.

8. What are your plans to increase affordable housing opportunities for county residents?

Affordable housing has many advocates both locally and on a state wide level. There are existing agencies that should be doing a better job of securing Housing Trust Fund dollars for local projects. Every citizen deserves a safe place to live but that does not mean everyone should have a

house instead of an apartment. The market will determine need as well as location for development. This is **not** an issue for County government.

Economic Development Issues

1. What role should county government take in attracting new businesses to the area? What types of jobs would you like to see growing in Escambia County? Be specific.

The County is responsible for making certain that planning, zoning, and land use is compatible with the need for Economic Development. Again, this is market driven and should not be financially subsidized by local tax dollars. OLF 8 should never be considered as a true commercial or industrial park. The Bluffs has been a total failure and waste of tax dollars and effort. Nearly every report on future economic growth for American communities such as ours says **not** to focus on manufacturing. We have huge potential for cyber growth and yet we are allowing that opportunity to simply die on the vine. We need to work with our military to protect their current and future missions and yet we allow development to encroach. Where are the Triumph dollars? There continues to be zero projects in our community to qualify.

2. What is your vision for the various commerce parks or potential sites throughout Escambia County?

We should play to our strengths and stop creating more weaknesses. We need to stop trying to bring large manufacturing companies to our county. We do not have the infrastructure to support this effort. OLF 8 has lost the ability to be a true commerce park as the residential development surrounding the area will no longer permit that type of growth. The Bluffs is not owned by the citizens and has been a huge waste of time and money. And now the “tech park” within City limits is for sale. Perhaps we should admit we fail at drawing in certain businesses and work harder to grow our educational opportunities (we have great universities here), our medical professions (we could support a medical school), our tourism, our historical aspects and, of course, our existing businesses and entrepreneurs.

3. What should the county do with excess properties that it owns? Be specific.

The list of excess properties that the county owns would take up far too much space, but the “specific” answer applies to them all: Sell them. The County should not be in the land ownership business.

4. Tourism is an integral part of Escambia County's economy. In what ways can the county commission rebuild tourism post COVID-19?

The county commission can help rebuild tourism by allowing the community to fully reopen. If people do not want to travel or go out to restaurants and shops, then they can stay home. The airline industry is literally waiting for communities like ours to reopen. The millions of lost tax dollars will never be regained. The challenge now is to mitigate that loss and allow those businesses that rely on the tourism industry a fighting chance.

5. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, what do you believe the county did well and what could they have done better? Please be specific.

Calm breeds calm. Fear breeds fear. Reacting to fear instead of facts was a failure. Not leading, but asking others to make the decisions, was a failure. We failed at providing complete and useful statistics from which sensible, rational decisions could be made. Test quantities, negatives results, recovery rates, hospitalization rates, are all just as important – maybe more so – than the number of positive case results. Recently, we have seen businesses make decisions that affect their business, and their community, without mandates from government. They have chosen to close, to open, to modify their offerings and hours to work toward the greater good of moving forward. We should give them the credit they deserve in making these decisions, and the ability to act on them.

6. What types of Triumph/RESTORE projects would you like to see funded? Be specific.

Triumph projects are based on job creation. Because our community thinks that means large manufacturing jobs, we are not working to fund any other projects. Existing businesses need to have the ability to access these funds if they have a plan for increasing jobs in our community. Those businesses have already made an investment into our economy and our community. They are the first affected during downturns, and the last to be assisted. This is a failed priority and should change.

Pensacola City Council

Business Climate / Regulations Issues

1. Rate the regulatory climate for business in Pensacola. Is it Good/Fair/Bad? Explain.
2. Provide any examples of how regulations have affected the life of city residents or businesses in a positive or negative way.
3. Name the top 3 specific city ordinances/regulations you would like to see eliminated. Explain why they should be eliminated.
5. What can the city do to facilitate a more livable downtown environment that also attracts and caters to the interests of visitors?
6. What is your strategy to leverage the county's interest in regards to state and federal funding opportunities?

Economic Development Issues

1. What role should city government take in attracting new businesses to the city?
2. Which industries should the City of Pensacola should concentrate its business development/growth efforts? Be specific.
3. What should the city do with excess properties that it owns? Which properties should take priority? Do you believe certain city parks could be considered excess property?

4. What is your vision for Pensacola's waterfront properties (i.e. Port of Pensacola, Community Maritime Park, Bruce Beach, Bayview Park)?
5. Tourism is an integral part of Pensacola's economy. What are the top 3 ways that the city can add value for the Pensacola business community with respect to rebuilding tourism and nurturing a positive tourist experience in Pensacola post COVID-19?
6. What is your vision for the various commerce parks or potential sites throughout our community?
7. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, what do you believe the city did well and what could they have done better? Please be specific.

Operations / Infrastructure Issues

1. What do you consider to be the number one infrastructure concern for the City of Pensacola going forward, and how do you propose to address that concern?
2. Do you believe the city allocates sufficient resources for infrastructure projects? How would you prioritize these projects and fund them?
3. Do you see any overlap or duplication of services between the county and the city? If so, what services, and how could these services be consolidated?

4. There have been a number of joint government meetings over the past few years. What is your opinion of these meetings? What types of cooperative meetings would you like to see moving forward?
5. What would you change about the relationship between the Mayor's Office and City Council (i.e. should the Mayor attend all city council meetings, etc.)?
6. What would your Five-Year Plan for the City of Pensacola look like?
7. What are your plans to increase affordable housing opportunities for city residents?

Sheriff's Race

1. What would you say is the biggest public safety concern in Escambia County?
2. Do you feel the crime rate has increased or decreased in Escambia County? Why or Why not?
3. What new safety measures could be implemented to make Escambia County a safer place to live? Be specific.

School Board

1. Do you feel the quality of education is increasing or decreasing in the Escambia County Public Schools? Why or Why Not?

2. Do you feel students have adequate access to resources and educational assistance in Escambia County? If no, what can be done to ensure they do?
3. What have we learned during the COVID-19 educational transition that we can take forward to provide high quality education from a distance?
4. What needs to be done to ensure every family is connected to their student's educational experience?
5. What do you consider to be the number one educational concern for the County going forward, and how do you propose to address that concern?
6. What are the top three or four qualities or characteristics you are looking for in the appointed superintendent?

ECUA

1. How would you rate the water quality in Escambia County?
Excellent | Good | Fair | Poor
2. What can be done to improve the water quality in Escambia County?
3. What is your vision for recycling?

Jonathan Owens, Candidate Escambia County Commission District 1