**Greater Pensacola Chamber**

**2020 Candidate Questionnaire**

**ECUA**

1. **How would you rate the water quality in Escambia County?**

**Excellent | Good | Fair | Poor**

I WOULD RATE OUR WATER QUALITY GOOD BUT PART OF ECUA’S JOB IS TO KEEP IT THAT WAY.

DRINKING WATER:

Our potable water supply comes from the high-quality Sand and Gravel Aquifer. So luckily, we have an abundance of water but the aquifer does not have a confining layer above it, so everything we put in the ground has a potential to affect the quality of our water supply. We are working well with the County and the City on Wellhead Protection Ordinances.

BODIES OF WATER:

One of the things that makes Northwest Florida the greatest place in the US to live, work and raise a family is our QUALITY of life. A huge part of that quality of life is outside recreation and our many different types of water for recreation. We have the Gulf of Mexico, Bays, Rivers, Streams, Lakes and Ponds for all ages to enjoy.

Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSO’s), leaking septic tanks and again anything poured into the ground can affect those waterways and that lifestyle that is so important to our citizens. Many people didn’t realize that the ECUA was under a DEP consent Order to address the issue of SSO’s caused by Inflow and Infiltration of Stormwater into the sewer. Escambia County has the second highest average amount of rainfall per year in the United States. Second only to Mobile, Alabama who shares our tropical climate. This water quality is also now good but we MUST work hard to keep it that way.

1. **What can be done to improve the water quality in Escambia County?**

DRINKING WATER:

I’ve spent a lot of time working on education of consumers by speaking to large groups a small portion of our budget is now dedicated to education of consumers. I pushed hard for our live green website where consumers can find more about water treatment, testing, regulations and where to dispose of hazardous waste in a responsible manner. Here they can find out what not to pour down the drain or flush down their toilets. We must continue to test our water and monitor for contaminants on a routine basis and continue to protect our water wells.

If re-elected I will continue to work with other government agencies to protect our wellheads and I will continue to educate consumers on how to better protect our drinking water.

BODIES OF WATER:

I promised an Improved sewer system to address that DEP Consent Order and lower the number of SSO’s. My first year on the board we approved a 16-year plan of reparation, reducing Sanitary Overflows and we have continued aggressive Inflow & Infiltration work. If you laid the pipes end to end in Escambia County, they would reach all the way to Canada. This project will be complete in 2028. Many municipalities have not been as successful addressing their DEP consent orders. This is what the Capital Improvement Fee is on your bill now and it will end in 2028. I also pushed for more Cooking Oil and Grease Disposal Stations throughout the County. I also pushed for education of issues with Flushable Wipes which are wreaking havoc on sewer systems all over the United States.

If re-elected I will continue to seek sources of revenue for septic to sewer conversion, continue to use education to teach our citizens how to better care for our system and continue to work hard to keep our most precious resource, clean water safe!

1. **What is your vision for recycling?**

I promised Expanded Recycling & Waste to Energy – During my two terms we added CNG Sanitation Fleet in 2013; In 2015 we opened a Regional Composting Facility and with the full cooperation of Escambia County we broke ground on a Regional Material Recycle Facility January 2016 and it is now fully functional. Composting and Recycle are truly regional facility serving NW Florida, AL and Ms. All three of these items will move us closer to the State of Florida's 2020 goal of 75% recycling. We are currently at 73%, far ahead of many Florida Counties. And all three of these ideas have saved our ratepayers and Escambia County Taxpayers money. They are all cost avoidance measures. The county also has a methane gas recapture program with Gulf Power Company that is working well and adds to our recycle credit with the state.

The ECUA only has the rights to collect the trash. The County has the rights of disposal. They receive a huge portion of their revenue from the landfill but Robert Bender and I have agreed to start discussing where we go from here on waste to energy.

The next step might be some type of Waste to Energy Plant (WTE) but first, we never want to discourage recycle, renew or reuse because it is the BEST way forward. Reuse is better on our pocket books and the environment. There are currently only 71 WTE Plants in the United States.

A WTE Plant burns municipal solid waste and some burn industrial waste or hazardous waste. The more modern plants can co-exist with recycling and they are similar in their design and equipment with other steam-electric power plants.

The typical plant with capacity of 400GWH energy production annually costs about 440 million dollars to build. I visited the one in Palm Beach County and it had a sticker price of over 600 million. But Escambia County would be the operator not the ECUA. With such a large sticker price like our recycle facility, it would only make sense if it was a regional facility. I am happy to join the talks and work on this project with the County but again it would be a County, not an ECUA facility.

1. **How would I plan for improved sanitation in light of the tremendous growth** **in Escambia County?**

I started this quest in 2019 – I would not vote on the sanitation budget because it didn’t have a driver incentive mechanism built in. Google Commercial Drivers Licensed (CDL) drivers in the United States and you will see there is a national shortage. We need good drivers and we need to keep them. We need to educate the public on this important issue. PSC has started a CDL course. The board and staff are currently working on other measures to incentivize and keep CDL drivers in our county and at the ECUA.

Next, we MUST build a transfer station in 2021. We have trucks sitting in traffic on Pine Forest, Nine Mile Road and Beulah road in route to the landfill and when they reach the landfill, they are being sent out on a tipping floor that is not only unsafe for the drivers but costly for the consumer if the truck tips over. Four trucks have tipped over in the last year. The cost of a truck is $300,000. With a transfer station the trucks would empty at a centrally located station into an 18-wheeler with a push arm. That truck would then travel to the landfill, back up with only the back end over the tipping floor and simply push the trash out. The garbage trucks could then get back to the task of picking up garbage. The county has ONE transfer station that is at capacity by 3pm daily and at full capacity by Wednesday each week. The county and ECUA have agreed this project’s a priority for 2020. We need to finalize plans and location as soon as possible.

Last but not least under the direction of the current board the ECUA is doing a complete overhaul of the computer technology at the Utility. It is so outdated we could not continue and consumers should be able to pay your bill, report a missed sanitation pick up and get Boil Water Notice on your cell phone! Thankfully, you will see this project completed in late 2021.

1. **How can the ECUA assist in keeping affordable housing in Escambia County?**

With all the jobs coming to Escambia County, we need affordable workforce housing. We want quality standards but we can’t make our standards so high that we drive the price of housing to “unaffordable”. Our new administrator Bruce Woody was a city manager in Missouri so he had experience as both an engineer and managing a city in need of workforce housing. I talked with all of the administrator candidates about this issue and I think Bruce is the right man for the job to help us keep ECUA standards high but understanding how those standards will affect the rising cost of housing.

1. **Will you fight unnecessary government regulations?**

We can and should push back on any government regulations that are unnecessary and costly to the consumer. I pushed back on backflow preventers on irrigation systems with no cross connection as well as mouse tunnels under Perdido Key Drive. I want to keep the consumer safe but I have and will continue to fight unnecessary regulations that burdens the ratepayers pocket books.

1. **How will you keep rates affordable?**

Good drinking water is important. Equally important but very difficult is keeping the rates manageable while upgrading and maintaining the infrastructure. Important things like GAC Filters for your water are not cheap and a healthy workforce is a must but being a business owner and understanding small things like how to push those employees to a healthier lifestyle to keep their insurance rates lower is important and will help me to keep your rates lower. The four years before I came on the board water and sewer rate hikes were out of control but during my time on the board, we have kept rate hikes near or under the Consumer Price Index. If you take out Sewer Improvement fee which was to move that treatment plant from downtown and the Capital Improvement fee to address the consent order our rates are comparable and both of those fees will end in this decade! Our rate hike this year in water and sewer will be “ZERO”.