

# City Council Candidates Questionnaire – 2021

## Brenham (Washington County), Texas

### Keith Herring, Ward 1 Incumbent

- 1. Why have you decided to run for election at this time? Briefly outline the top 2 – 3 issues you feel will be of significant importance in the next four years.**

*I am honored to have served on the Brenham City Council for the past sixteen years. I am proud of the progress and many accomplishments of the City during this time. But there are many issues and projects facing our City and I have the experience, commitment and vision to help us accomplish our goals.*

*One of the immediate issues that we must address as a community is to help our businesses and community recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our retail businesses need a return to in-person shopping and dining, both from local and out of town residents. We need to help our schools return to their pre-COVID routines and activities. This will require flexibility and teamwork from all aspects of our community.*

*The upgraded 290/36 Cloverleaf Exchange has been preliminarily designed based on feedback from City and County representatives and members of the public. But there are many decisions still to be made on how to plan and execute the project with the best result and least disruption. I also believe that there is an opportunity to include Railroad overpasses on the 290 access roads in this project, which will reduce on/off traffic and potential accidents at key access points in our City.*

- 2. What key competencies do you feel you possess to be an elected official?**

*My experience on the Council has given me great familiarity with the City departments, functions and personnel. We have a tremendously talented and dedicated team at the City. My tenure has also provided a lot of exposure to how the City's budget and finances operate and how to adjust when conditions dictate. I currently serve on the Council subcommittees of Facilities, Economic Development, Tourism & Marketing. I am one of the City's two representatives on the Interlocal Agreement (ILA) Task Force with the County. I have previously served on the Audit, Utilities and Community Services Council subcommittees. Prior to joining the Council, I served on the Parks & Recreation Committee and was employed by the City as a 911 Dispatch Operator.*

*I have proven that I will make the time to be prepared for Council and all other meetings, frequently reaching out to the departments involved prior to the meeting if I have a question or concern. I regularly hear from people throughout the City when they have questions, comments or concerns and I work hard to return any phone calls or emails that I receive.*

*Councilman Clint Kolby and I worked with County Commissioners Candace Bullock and Kirk Hanath to redesign the Economic Development process to be more streamlined while involving the key stakeholders in our community. We worked together very cooperatively to resolve numerous conflicts within the prior process, and I think this bodes well for future joint opportunities.*

- 3. Briefly describe your background in areas such as financial management, ability to be an effective leader and communicator, understanding of labor and human resources issues, understanding of local economic issues, ability to contribute to strategic planning and initiatives.**

*My involvement with prior budget cycles and planning and my service on the Audit subcommittee have given me a very solid understanding of the City's budget, financial challenges and processes. I prefer to deal with issues as close to the source and as early in the process as possible. We were excited when my wife was selected as the President of Bank One (now Chase) and we moved to Brenham. We quickly realized that we wanted to make Brenham our home and immediately became involved in numerous aspects of our community. In addition to the recent work with the County on the Economic Development process, I am very proud of my involvement as Chair of the Library Advisory Board as we worked together to renovate and expand not just the facility but the scope of our local Library.*

- 4. What do you consider to be the top issue affecting local economic growth?**

*The most immediately pressing issue is to help our businesses and community recover and grow from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. On a longer horizon, we need to address the issues that impact our ability to attract and retain younger and mid-salary employees and families. Adequate and affordable housing is a major component of that effort. The BCDC has just authorized funds to complete a study of the housing inventory and needs in our community. This will be an important tool to keep our discussions focused on the facts and be less impacted by the emotions.*

- 5. What could you do as an elected official to help small businesses in the community?**

*We need to constantly evaluate and provide the environment that supports our existing businesses and makes Brenham an attractive place to work and live. This includes infrastructure, public safety, flexibility in developing codes and compliance, community services and the overall cost and ease of doing business in our community.*

*During the pandemic, the City established a fund to help the smallest businesses in our community meet lifeline needs like rent, and provided flexibility in paying utilities and other obligations. We deferred payment of obligations such as the Hotel Occupancy Tax to allow those impacted businesses to use that money for more immediate needs. The recently implemented TIRZ will create funds to support development in our business corridors. As a part of the cooperative effort to redesign the Economic Development process, the County agreed to provide funding which supports Economic Development staffing and programs that benefit existing and new business in our community.*

- 6. How important do you feel the relationship is between the City of Brenham and Washington County government? How could it be improved?**

*Some of my previous answers already identify how important it is for the City and County to work together to address mutual issues. This relationship has not always been strong. But recent efforts such as the Economic Development process have been successful. I am proud of my involvement with those efforts and believe that they can be a template for future opportunities and success. Regular ongoing conversation on mutual opportunities and challenges is the first step to an improved relationship and effectiveness.*

- 7. What project or issue would be of primary importance to you to work on if you are elected?**

*The upgraded Highway 290/36 Cloverleaf Exchange and Railroad Overpasses on the 290 Access Roads have to be an important focus due to the financial and long-term impact on our community. This*

*involves consistent contact and communication with TXDOT on the actual design, funding and timing of the project.*

*The Brenham Crossing Retail Center has broken ground after delays caused by the pandemic. This project is an important “gateway” into our community as well as being a source of property tax and sales tax revenue. I want to ensure that the commitments made are the commitments kept by both the City and the developer.*

**8. What would you do to help ensure that the local economy continues to grow and evolve?**

*We need to constantly evaluate and provide the environment that supports our businesses and makes Brenham an attractive place to work and live. This includes infrastructure, public safety, flexibility in developing codes and compliance, community services and the overall cost and ease of doing business in our community. Brenham is a community that thrives on coming together to solve problems and supporting each other. This is our “secret weapon” as we address current problems and face future challenges.*

**Are there any other comments you would like to make?**

*The best decisions are made when there is a diversity of voices, backgrounds and experience working toward a common goal. With the upcoming retirement of two Council members, Mayor Tate and I are the only two Council members with more than five years of City Council experience. I have established and continue to develop working relationships with Washington County officials, our business community and I know many of you from my involvement with Brenham ISD and youth sports. I am still an active high school baseball umpire, so it is easy to see that I am willing to take on difficult challenges and voice my opinions without worrying about my popularity.*

*While there are many great things about Brenham, we have a number of challenges ahead of us. I want to use my experience and commitment to serve and help our community grow and prosper. I need your support and vote so that I can continue serving as the Ward One representative on the Brenham City Council.*