

# 2026 Avery County Candidates Forum

## Questions for the Board of Commissioners

### Candidates Vision & Priorities

1.Why are you running for Avery County Board of Commissioners, and what experiences prepare you for this role? I have owned and operated local businesses for the past 30 years. I have been a county commissioner for the past three years. Through daily management of finances and employees, this gives me personal insight on what it takes to manage while keeping budgets inline.

2.What are your top three priorities for Avery County in the next 4–6 years? As demonstrated in the past three years as a commissioner, I will always make the elderly and children my top priority. I will continue to get input from the citizens of the county before deciding how to vote to ensure I am best representing their interest. To be honest these two sum up my priorities as it's difficult or impossible to list all the things that would be listed in the top three as it is ever changing daily.

3.What's your long-term vision for Avery County's growth, and how will you balance development with preservation of local character? It's extremely important when looking at this to balance the growth along with trying to ensure the best outcome for the local citizens. Maximizing local job opportunities that come with growth and development while still ensuring local history, culture, and heritage.

### Community Needs & Service Delivery

4.Broadband internet access continues to exist as a significant local issue. If elected, how would you move forward on broadband expansion and public wi-fi access, ensuring sustainable funding and accountability? If you look at what we have been able to accomplish over the past three years with the “Great Cab” and “Cab Grant”. I feel that we have taken a major issue and accomplished a tremendous amount of progress. Even with the setbacks of Hurricane Helene, we are still moving forward to provide internet to ALL our citizens. We are still in the process of filing for the two final grants “Bead” and “Last Mile Grant”. With these two final grants that should give access to everyone.

5.What strategies do you support to improve access to health, senior, childcare and social services in the county — particularly in light of recent challenges for these community support systems following Helene? **As mentioned in a previous question, it is making sure that as a county, we are doing everything in our power to provide services to take care of the elderly and children as well as other citizens in need. I will do everything in my power in my position to meet these goals.**

6. How should the county address affordable housing, homes for the unhoused or those in subpar shelters, domestic violence support and other human-service's needs, including use of grant funding or inter-agency partnerships? **I recognize that affordable housing is a problem in Avery County. However, this is not only a local but a state and national issue as well. We have secured a grant to help build a domestic violence home. These are all issues that we are currently working on and will continue to work on.**

7. How should the county improve child- and youth-oriented public services and spaces to protect and enrich the health, well-being and flourishing of children and teens in Avery County? **We have had great discussions and continue to look at the feasibility and cost of building a new recreation center to help with this issue. As stated previously, anything that benefits the children in this county is my top priority.**

8.How should the county help make this area more hospitable to youth and workforce ages so it can retain residents who strengthen the local economy and infrastructure? **Trying to work with the local school system to encourage students to enroll in the CTE programs which promote local trades and give our children the ability to go straight into the workforce. Through this program we hope to change the mindset of the students and help them to see that they have good job opportunities right here in Avery County without them having to move away.**

9.Regarding schooling, how should the county bridge student performance gaps among various areas of the counties, helping at-risk populations thrive through equity measures (i.e. Help that is tailored to the unique needs of each group)? **In my opinion, it's the county's responsibility to ensure that we make every attempt to provide and fund each individual school to the best of our ability. I feel that**

this is best addressed with each community having different obstacles and listening to each school's needs independently.

## Budget, Taxes & Economic Policy

10.How would you approach the county budget to balance essential services with property tax impacts on residents? Instead of raising taxes, we have previously used money from the “Fund Balance”. We will continue to do this as long as we can.

11.What is your position on the county's *Occupancy Tax* (room tax) and its use for tourism, economic development and services? Should it be expanded or adjusted?

I think the occupancy tax is a great thing and allows the opportunity to promote the county without costing the taxpayers any money.

12.What policies would you support to attract and retain local business, expand job opportunities and grow the tax base without overburdening existing residents? I don't think there is a specific policy. I think this comes from listening to the communities and local businesses and taking that information and seeing how we can help each area.

## Infrastructure, Safety & Environment

13.How should the county prioritize infrastructure needs (roads, bridges, debris removal, emergency preparedness)? I think you must look at each area individually to see which one poses an immediate concern for life or safety.

14.Avery County stands as the lone county within the state without a dedicated and separate animal control services department. What is your stance regarding the issue of humane animal control services for Avery County and investing in those services? Should the county raise the means, allocate the budget and partner with regional entities to safely collect, care for and rehome strays, especially those wandering in high-traffic areas, as well as enforce universal animal welfare standards to protect local animals from neglect, abuse and rampant breeding? If so, how should this be accomplished? In my opinion, we already have a grant with Mitchell County that I think needs to be split between the two counties. This would allow us to build our own animal control facility in Avery County. I think we should talk with people that would be interested in being on a board to help

ensure we are doing the right thing for animal control.

15.What are your priorities for public safety — including EMS, fire services, law enforcement support and disaster response? **I feel that if there is anything they need, we should find the money to support them. I currently have a great relationship with all these public service resources and want to support them anyway I can. Saving lives and their personal safety is a top concern of mine.**

16.What environmental or natural-resource policies are important to you — including wildfire management, land use and conservation? **All these services areas are very important to me, and I think you must take them on a case-to-case basis.**

## Community Engagement & Governance

17.How will you ensure and promote transparency and responsiveness to citizens' concerns? **I have always had an open-door policy to talk with any of our citizens. If I don't have the answer, I will make sure I find it out for you. I believe it is important to be open and transparent not only to our citizens but other board members as well.**

18.How do you view your role in regional collaboration — for example with neighboring counties, state representatives and regional authorities? **I enjoy working with other regional authorities. However, I will ALWAYS have Every County in its best interest.**

19.What key performance measures should the Board of Commissioners use to assess county progress on its goals — and how will you make those public? **We have board workshops on a routine basis to set our goals. These goals are measured and discussed in these board workshops. We have minutes on these workshops which are available for public review.**

## Values & Decision Making

20.How do you prioritize constituent interests when they conflict (e.g., economic development vs. environmental protection)? **This is another example**

of looking at each situation and then deciding in each case based on what I feel has the best long-term interest in mind for the citizens while seeking community input before making the decision.

21.What's the most difficult decision you anticipate on the Board, and how would you tackle it? There is no way to pick just one. As in each meeting there are multiple decisions that must be made, and I consider each one to be difficult / important. I don't think that you can put one above the other. To that point you must tackle each one individually and make the best decision given the information we have.

22.If elected, how will you stay connected with everyday residents — not just stakeholders or special interest groups — throughout your term? As I have done for the past three years, my door is always open, and I love the opportunity to discuss any county matter at any given time. If re elected not only this question but all the above, I will always do what I feel is morally right for the citizens of Avery County.