

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?

Just like many of the people in Avery County, I've spent the last few years paying close attention to what's happening in local, state, and national government. I often found myself thinking that someone should step up and do something. One day I realized that someone could be me.

My history from law school, to Juvenile Justice, to the Sheriff's Office gives me a unique perspective that I think would serve Avery County well. I know the needs and challenges of the county on a deeper level.

2. What are your top three priorities for Avery County in the next 4–6 years?

My top three priorities for the county would be:

1. Economic development: Making jobs and income the focus by bringing in employers, strengthening infrastructure, and working to raise wages.
2. Public Safety: Supporting our Law Enforcement, EMS, Firefighters, and health workers by making sure they are fully funded and have what they need to provide for our community.
3. Youth and Family Services: Expanding existing services including mental health and extra curricular activities, as well as making sure our children are receiving the best education we can provide them.

3. What's your long-term vision for Avery County's growth, and how will you balance development with preservation of local character?

Long term I would love to see manufacturing, industry or warehousing move to the county to provide jobs and grow our economy. While I would like to focus less on tourism, I also want to maintain our tourism industry in areas that are already dependant on tourist

dollars. I love our beautiful mountains so I want any changes we make to minimally impact our environment, balancing our economy with our history and tradition.

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?

Expanding broadband would be central to attracting employers to our area. As such I would look for opportunities to partner with existing providers and the state to expand our access.

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? For example, ensuring continuity of services for seniors, childcare or disability support programs.

I would support searching out new opportunities and providers for all of our residents. Current providers are overwhelmed and over capacity and this minimizes their effectiveness. There is a substantial lack of mental health services for our youth as well as a lack of choice in health care.

6. How should the county address affordable housing, homes for the unhoused or those in subpar shelters, domestic violence support and other human-services needs, including use of grant funding or inter-agency partnerships? This has been a discussion topic at recent county meetings.

The current plan for a domestic violence shelter is a great start to address some of these issues. Housing affordability can be best addressed by providing better employment options and higher wages. The county cannot control the housing market but we can work to make sure our citizens are not pushed out of their homes due to lack of jobs and resources.

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? This is a demographic that is especially impressionable and responsive to the environment.

The brain grows most rapidly from birth till age 5, benefiting from a nurturing, enriching environment. It

continues to have developmental needs through the early 20s.

This is a topic I am most familiar with. Our youth need extracurricular activities and access to public services to grow into healthy, well-balanced adults. One way we can improve is by expanding existing programs. We also need to work on educating the public of available services. There are some amazing opportunities such as Mountain Alliance, Avery Connect, YMCA programs, and many others.

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?

The answer to this is the same as some of the above. We need to attract employers, expand services, and focus on education. Heavy focus on tourism does not foster a bright future for many of the young people who live here. We need to shift to bringing in health care services, manufacturing, trade skills, or technology.

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)?

As a parent, I have struggled in recent years with the quality of education our children are receiving. We as a county have to shift our focus to our youth. We have lost many more services in our schools over the last couple of years than we have gained. And now we are facing other huge decisions that may greatly affect our children. This is unacceptable, and we need to immediately start focusing on how we can address this.

Budget, Taxes & Economic Policy

10. How would you approach the county budget to balance essential services with property tax-impacts on residents? How much should property tax revenue versus other revenue sources (grants, occupancy tax, tourism development) contribute to the budget?

As someone who believes that government involvement in individual lives should be minimal, I do not like even the idea of property taxes. However, the way all counties currently

function, property taxes are the most useful tool counties have to maximize contribution from its wealthier citizens while minimizing impact on low income families. I think we should inspect the budget to look for any waste and make it as small as possible while still providing top services to our residents. This will allow for keeping taxes as low as possible.

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? *The Board adopted room tax changes in recent years.*

I support the higher occupancy tax changes made in recent years, and I believe in keeping the occupancy tax as high as possible. This brings in income to our county without making our residents foot the bill.

12. What policies would you support to attract and retain local business, expand job opportunities and grow the tax base without overburdening existing residents?

See answers above.

Infrastructure, Safety & Environment

13. How should the county prioritize infrastructure needs (roads, bridges, debris removal, emergency preparedness)? *Given the ongoing recovery and disaster costs, what role should county resources play versus state/federal aid?*

I certainly believe the county should request all available state/federal funding to aid with recovery. Moving forward I would like to see the county strengthen our power grid, roads, bridges, and look at outfitting emergency services with whatever tools they may still be lacking in order to care for our residents.

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?

I think that the county should partner with existing regional entities along with current measures to ensure this gap in services is filled. This may look like partnering with the Humane Society like Watauga County (and many other counties) or with a non-profit like Mitchell County does.

15. What are your priorities for public safety — including EMS, fire services, law enforcement support and disaster response? How will you work with first responders and emergency management? At what level do you feel the county should invest budgetarily resources for these services?

Most of my work experience has been law enforcement adjacent. As such, I feel I have a good understanding of what these services need to be successful. I fully support keeping our public safety services fully funded, trained, and prepared.

16. What environmental or natural-resource policies are important to you — including wildfire management, land use and conservation? Wildfire management and forest health have been topics brought up in county settings.

I am not well versed in wildfire management or forest health, but as a child I spent the majority of my time in our woods. I would support any measures necessary to keep our forests healthy and beautiful.

Community Engagement & Governance

17. How will you ensure and promote transparency and responsiveness to citizens' concerns? What methods will you use to solicit community input before major decisions?

I think this has been a big issue as of late. The public deserves to be fully informed of all decisions made by the county. I believe that the county could do a better job of maintaining its website and utilizing traditional media and social media to keep the public well informed.

18. How do you view your role in regional collaboration — for example with neighboring counties, state representatives and regional authorities?

I hope to foster a spirit of cooperation and collaboration with all of our neighbors. Working closely with regional and state entities will only strengthen our county.

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?

I think that the board should use data driven analysis to track progress along with input from the public. Often times data doesn't align with public perception. I also think that making data available to the public and encouraging public comment and ideas would help to make the two more cohesive.

Values & Decision Making

20. How do you prioritize constituent interests when they conflict (e.g., economic development vs. environmental protection)? *What guiding principles shape your decision-making?*

I think that the ultimate way to balance interests, especially economic development vs environmental protection would be to focus on economic decisions that put more money in the pockets of our citizens. This will allow citizens to keep and buy their land. Keeping our land in the families that have owned them for generations is the best way to protect environmental interests as well. If we develop parts of our county suited for economic opportunities it will allow the other parts to remain untouched.

21. What's the most difficult decision you anticipate on the Board, and how would you tackle it?

For me, the most difficult decisions will be those that directly impact citizen's wallets or public services. I hope that I will be able to fairly weigh the pros and cons of each decision to come to a clear and confident decision. In the end, I hope that any choice the board makes, it does so with the interests of the people in mind.

22. If elected, how will you stay connected with everyday residents — not just stakeholders or special interest groups — throughout your term?

I plan to use social media to keep in contact with residents. I not only want to keep people informed, but I want to also use it to listen to concerns and opinions.