

Cheryl Munson, Democratic Candidate for Monroe County Council At-Large
Responses to questions from the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce
For the Nov. 3, 2020 General Election

- 1. Monroe County government will be significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. What will be your funding priorities for the county? With the expectation of decreased revenues in the coming years, what projects or departmental budgets, if any, do you expect will see funding cuts?**

My budget priorities are to sustain County services in their present form and to fully fund the new needs of the County Health Department and Emergency Management, which have taken on increased work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I also support the Prosecutor's request for an additional Victim's Assistant, whose salary is partly covered by a grant.

Declining revenue projections mean that the 2021 budget should not be expanded for new projects that will need continued financial support from Property Tax or Income Tax funds in the next several years. In future budgets I expect to continue to make data-based decisions, using information on anticipated revenue shortfalls to identify what level of funding is available to support County services. Any trimming or tightening of County services to meet new fiscal constraints will require Council members to have in-depth discussions with County departments. I would recommend that the Council appoint specific working groups that are tasked to study service/funding alternatives for groups of related departments and to make recommendations to the Council for decisions.

Nearly all of what County government funds is required by statute as a necessary public service. I do not favor asking government departments to make arbitrary across the board cuts. That simply doesn't make sense because we have some very large and very small departments. Reducing spending may require adjusting maintenance schedules, delaying equipment purchases and software updates, forgoing travel to meetings and conferences, and more.

- 2. Mayor John Hamilton has proposed an 0.25% increase in the Local Income Tax (LIT). The Monroe County Council will be among the entities that must vote to approve or reject the proposal. What is your position on a LIT increase?**

If the County Council is given the opportunity to vote after the City Council approves the proposed income tax increase, I will vote no.

I've heard more from my constituents throughout the city and county about this topic than any other. Raising the LIT is not publicly supported at present, and economically we are not in a position to raise taxes for any purpose, given the financial impact of the pandemic on our residents, businesses and local governments.

In future years when government funding is more predictable and our residents and business have recovered from the pandemic downturn, I would consider supporting a tax increase for climate change or equity issues as long as there is a detailed cost-benefit analysis for specific proposals and a data-driven plan to measure success. Social equity and environmental resilience

should be considered as linked issues, and both should be prioritized in local government initiatives to the extent that revenue streams allow.

3. The Monroe County Council has the authority to enact or repeal the Food & Beverage Tax, which is intended to fund the expansion of the Convention Center. What is your position on the future of that tax and the expansion project?

The Monroe County Council and the City Council have utilized income from the Food & Beverage Tax to provide much-needed grants and loans to local restaurants and other businesses. I expect this financial support to continue, to help us return as quickly as possible to our pre-pandemic economy.

Will organizations and businesses return to face-to-face events and meetings that our Convention Center hosted in the pre-pandemic economy? That remains to be determined. Reconsideration of the Convention Center expansion should occur only when the economy has become stable and we have data about how people will want to “convene” in future years.

Until a decision is made about the expansion, Food & Beverage Tax revenue should continue to support the attractions and amenities that bring visitors to our community. Visitors contribute greatly to our economy and can help us return to the vibrant pre-pandemic conditions that made Bloomington and Monroe County a great place to live and work.

4. This summer, the Monroe County Council held a special public forum on the future of law enforcement funding. What’s your position on law enforcement funding, both in terms of the sheriff’s budget and the overall needs of our local criminal justice system?

Remediation programs and mental health services in the County Jail are substantially underfunded. These and other mental health services help people with substance abuse problems and mental illness avoid unnecessary incarceration. – before they are involved with the judicial system. The new Stride Center is an excellent example of partnering to support our criminal justice system (and its budget) with mental health supports, but more is needed to bolster programs that reduce recidivism and help inmates to return to productive lives.

For the Sheriff’s budget, I will not support decreasing funding for personnel. Having an adequate number of deputies to cover on a 24/7 basis over 900 miles of county roads and highways and serve the 54,324 people who reside outside city and town limits has taken years of gradual increases. Sufficient staffing in this Department has been a priority of mine since I first ran for County Council. I believe our current staffing levels for deputies meet the community’s needs, but I would support a modest increase in staff in the Sheriff’s Department for managing data to improve transparency and for enhanced training of officers.

I would also support creation of an independent County Public Safety Review Board that would be outside the Sheriff’s Department, Jail, or County Fire Department. The citizens on this Board would be an independent body to examine complaints of residents and businesses about public safety issues. The Board should also regularly convey information to the public on public safety services and needs.