

Geoff McKim, 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?**

Our priorities should be (1) the maintenance of essential services; and (2) ensuring that we are prepared for the next pandemic. The County has little slack in our budget; most of our budget provides basic, essential services to residents. We also need to ensure that we are prepared for the next pandemic, which means additional expenditures on public health and on information technology (to better support remote work and delivery of services).

We will undoubtedly see a substantial decrease in Local Income Taxes in 2022 and likely 2023 (covering income earned in 2020 and 2021), which will also lower the growth rate of property taxes for 6+ years (due to the Maximum Levy Growth Quotient formula). However, Monroe County also has over \$9M in reserves and thus is in a very strong fiscal position entering this recession. I expect to see a balanced budget in 2020, which will maintain, or even increase reserves. We will likely need to spend down some or much of these reserves in order to maintain essential services and maintain employment and wages of county employees, but at this point I believe we have the resources to survive this pandemic and ensuing recession.

- 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?**

I am against this proposal for an increase in the LIT and will cast my vote on the Monroe County Income Tax Council as *no*. I am not anti-tax and have proudly voted for tax increases in the past (for expanded youth services, for example) – but this increase is at the wrong time and the purposes and need for which are too poorly defined. In the future I would like to see a small income tax increase considered to better fund public transit across the County; however, now is not the right time, amid so much economic uncertainty.

In addition, the new fast-tracked schedule for the increase will provide too little time for public consideration and input on such a major increase. I will continue to advocate for the legislature to adopt a tax structure that will allow the County Council to adopt county-wide tax rates, and the City Council to adopt additional income tax rates that apply to City residents.

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?

I am one of the two remaining County Councilors who voted to enact this tax. I believed in the project at the time and still do. It is clear from travel patterns nationally and locally that people are still eager to travel and want to visit places like Bloomington, for work and pleasure. However, the timing of any expansion will be driven by the virus. I think it would be foolish to make any major decision on the Convention Center project until the pandemic has been resolved and we have a clearer picture of its long-term economic impacts. The food and beverage tax revenues, although of course down from the previous year, have proven to be remarkably resilient, indicating that the tax remains an appropriate revenue source for future expansion. The hotel bed tax, needed for operations, has seen a greater hit, and more time is needed to see how it rebounds. In any case, I support holding off on any decisions on the Convention Center for at least a year, depending on the progress of the pandemic and economy.

I also need to point out that the existing F&B collections proved to be a vitally important source of reserves in the economic response to the pandemic. Both the county (with grants) and the city (with loans) were able to deploy this money quickly to provide rescue funds for locally owned businesses and nonprofits that are essential to our tourism industry.

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?

First, I do not support defunding the Monroe County Sheriff's Department. The current level of staffing allows for only approximately 5-6 road deputies on duty at any time, to cover almost 400 square miles of land. In addition, it has become clear that Monroe County deputies (as well as City of Bloomington police) are underpaid, and we have been seeing more vacancies in positions as deputies choose to work in neighboring jurisdictions. I would like to see the upcoming Sheriff's deputy contract include increased compensation, especially for college degrees and for training activities.

But the Sheriff's budget is only one part of the needs of our local justice system. While I had hoped that we would have the results of the County's comprehensive justice system study in hand in time for this year's budget process in order to help structure additional investment in the justice system, it is clear that we will need to make additional investments, in order to continue current efforts to keep nonviolent offenders out of jail, as well as prioritize treatment over incarceration. I would particularly like to build on the services of the Stride Center, and partner with Centerstone to provide additional treatment options and services.