

Trent Deckard, 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?**

The county is further along in the pandemic since the Chamber first asked this question in the primary. We have adapted to living, working, and learning in the pandemic. Unemployment rose dramatically in March from 3.1% to 10.1%, down now to its current rate of 6.8%. As our people suffer and feel the pinch, we do, too, and this may be evident in future years and most likely the 2022 budget because of the way that taxes are both collected and dispersed. Part of serving in local government, with serious constraints on all things fiduciary under Indiana law, is being keenly very aware of the limits placed on budgets, the need to be hyper-responsible with all dollars, and gauging future public needs that may require new or different levels of funding. Unlike the federal government, we cannot borrow indefinite amounts of money into perpetuity. The council is considering these eventualities and we've set aside approximately \$7.1 million dollars in rainy day funds to be used for future losses and community needs. As the county's fiscal body, it's our duty to diligently represent the public in budgeting, work with the expertise of our department heads if changes to spending need to be made and add surpluses to rainy day funds where possible.

- 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 don't believe that any proposed Local Income Tax (LIT) increase can be seriously considered when we have pandemic-level unemployment affecting residents, shuttered and affected businesses and non-profits, and families under burden with making difficult decisions about school, work, and their own health. There has also been no stable, consolidated plan on precisely how to move forward with any proposal and we would need serious public discussion, input, and buy-in under the most normal of times. I cannot in good conscious vote for a tax increase with no identifiable, stable plan and community members under this kind of duress. We do need a change in the way that the state has set up taxation for local governments. I believe in home rule for taxation: that local officials in each jurisdiction, like Bloomington or Ellettsville, set jurisdiction-specific rates for the constituents they serve and who elected them. This is a strong example of how state law has made things more difficult for localities and their constituents. If a jurisdiction wants to move forward with a decision on future revenues, the decision should only affect those individuals they were elected to represent.

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 process that discussed, weighed, and considered our Food & Beverage Tax took a considerable part of our last decade and beyond. Much like the convention center expansion discussion, it has been lengthy and contentious. The required legal steps towards collecting food and beverage revenues and plans for a new convention center show a commitment to strengthening our communities' core and as a result, the surrounding areas in the county. Although the pandemic may seem like it has been going on for a lifetime, I believe it wise to hold off on making a decision with long-term impact until we know more about the duration of COVID-19 and its affect on travel, tourism, and convention gathering. I also believe that we should not let differences of opinion between current elected leaders for the city and county shepherd us towards abandoning the project altogether. That would be shortsighted. Elections can change occupants of office and certainly community needs can change priorities. If we determine with more certainty in the future that social gathering changes would affect the need for a new convention center, we can certainly reevaluate planning and make adjustments.

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?

I believe there are no residents who want to feel unsafe in their community and I think we can start with this premise with policy as all county entities discuss public safety reform. We must ensure that we have a justice system that works for everyone and which promotes a culture where all community members believe they will be treated safely, fairly, and with dignity, regardless of their race, faith, gender and sexual orientation, or background. This requires action from every single individual in our county justice system, including the council, to be committed to equity while accounting for bias, wherever it may be found. We should also be diligent in dismantling barriers to public information which fosters mistrust and fear and may not tell our story. I support a community data portal filled with information that describes precisely what happens in our county justice system, where it happens, and who it affects. I support training that provides all county employees, not just law enforcement, with the sufficient knowledge and awareness to dismantle systemic racism as it may manifest in public interactions. I believe that reinforcing an environment that negates and actively combats racism creates a safer, more thriving place for all concerned.