

## 2024 Laramie County Commissioner Candidate Forum Questions

1. What do you see as the county's budget priorities in the coming years and how does the library fit into those priorities?

**With property taxes decreasing, the county's priority will be to provide funding for services required by state statutes. These include the courthouse, public library, setting the county budget, and, through Public works, the construction, and maintenance of county roads.**

**Other services, such as senior citizen services and centers, animal control, and parks and recreation, are some examples of county functions that have expanded to serve the demands of county residents.**

**The library is a valuable resource and an equalizer in our community. It ensures that citizens of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds can access reading materials and programming at little to no cost. This is a crucial aspect of our community that we must all support.**

**Currently, the library receives two mills to fund operations and 5th penny general purpose tax funds approved by Laramie County voters.**

2. Concerning property taxes, how do you balance the sentiment that property taxes should be reduced with the priority and obligation of county government to maintain vital community resources that provide amenities and resources we expect to maintain or improve our quality of life in Laramie County?

**We need to do a better job of educating the public on exactly how the local government uses its property taxes. When I spoke to people pushing to decrease property taxes drastically, most were unaware that doing so would negatively impact road maintenance, emergency services, and community services like the library.**

**There needs to be more awareness of the fact that the state only collects the portion that supports school funds which is distributed to the school districts statewide. The remaining revenues stay local. The county receives a maximum of 12 mills set by the legislature; 10 mills fund the county's general budget and 2 mills fund the library. The legislature caps other mills for special districts.**

3. What is your understanding of the county funds provided for the library's operation budget and would you plan on making any changes to this funding over the next four years?

**Since the late 1970's the library has been funded by 2 mills, and 10% of the 5th penny tax. The library also receives funds from generous donors, and grants. The state provides funds for 60% of the integrated library system, WYLD system and all of the databases from the State Library. Future funding is dependent on property tax revenue and the voters' renewal of the 5th penny tax. I do not plan on making any changes to funding.**

4. What education and/or career experience do you have that qualifies you to perform the job of County Commissioner?

**During my 27-year career with the Laramie County Sheriff's Office, 15 in leadership positions, as the Jail Captain, I was entrusted with managing the 14 million jail budget and supervising nearly 80 sworn and civilian staff. I have developed working relationships with City, County, and State elected officials, including the current commissioners, department heads, community members, and business leaders. My keen understanding of county government operations, gained through years of service, positions me well for the role of Laramie County Commissioner.**

**My commitment to community service extends beyond my professional career. I have volunteered for various worthy organizations such as Wyoming Special Olympics and Special Friends, served on the boards**

**of community service organizations like Safe Harbor Children's Justice Center and Kiwanis, and currently serve as an Elder at my church. This diverse range of experiences, both in my career in public safety and my involvement and volunteerism in community-based organizations makes me a very well-rounded candidate for the position of Laramie County Commissioner.**

5. By Wyoming State Statute, the County Commissioners appoint the five members of the governing board for the Library.

i. How would you ensure that the appointed citizens will enhance and advance the strength of the Library?

**Board appointees are considered by their qualifications. However they do not need to have a library background. A wide range of experience is valuable on any board, variety only strengthens it.**

ii. What is your perception of the type of oversight and authority county commissioners should have over these board members once they are appointed?

**Per state statute, the library board of directors are responsible for setting all library policies. Prospective board members are recommended to the board of commissioners by the library director and current library board. The staff and board know the needs of the library; the commissioners should not micromanage the library board but serve as liaisons and advisors. This role however should include continual evaluation of the boards ability to function as a cohesive group, ensuring the needs of the community are met.**

iii. What additional responsibilities, if any, do County Commissioners have in relationship to the operation and administration of the Library?

**Per state statute, the library board, through the library director, has complete control over the library's function. County commissioners can offer budget guidance and long-range planning and act as a liaison to the board.**

6. What do you see as the role and purpose of the library for the citizens of Laramie County? Please include in your answer any services you have noticed or used as a member of the public.

**Public libraries are an equalizer; no other institution has such a broad social and economic impact on the communities they serve. They ensure that the underserved have the same access to materials, services, and meeting spaces as those more financially secure. They also benefit the community by promoting literacy and education through programs like the summer reading program and cultural events, offering the underserved access to technology through the computer center, genealogy materials, and numerous other benefits to the community. The library provides lifelong learning for people aged 0 to 100+ and is an irreplaceable cornerstone in the community.**

**With my wife working at the library, raising my children, and now our grandchildren, I have experienced many, if not all, of the library's wonderful services.**

7. What is your stance on intellectual freedom and the role of libraries in ensuring access to diverse viewpoints and information, particularly on controversial topics? Do you approach this differently for youth versus adult materials?

**First, there is a difference between access to materials in a school library setting and a public library. In a school library, the parent should have the final word on what books their child can access based on their beliefs. The materials should be age-appropriate at each level of education: grade school, junior high, and high school. This is not feasible in a public library setting; however, materials are separated into children's, youth, and adult sections. In a perfect world, a parent would visit the library with their child and oversee what materials they view, but this is seldom the case. A public**

**library must have material that represents every person in the community, and it is the parent's responsibility to ensure that what is being accessed by their child fits within their family's values. The library allows parents to determine what materials their child can check out but left unsupervised; a child can browse any materials within the library's collection. It is not the library's function or responsibility to monitor what each child is accessing.**

8. Have you visited the library branches or bookmobile? Please include in your answer your thoughts on what services we offer the rural patrons of Laramie County.

**I am very familiar with the rural branches of the library and the bookmobile. My wife, Sue, was the IT Manager for over 20 years. I volunteered for her at the branches when she worked on technology issues, from terminating cable in the Burns Library when it was moved to its current location to cleaning PCs in the Pine Bluffs Library. The services the branch libraries provide to the rural community cannot be understated; these resources offer not only books and AV material but also provide a place for meetings, internet services, and programs that would not otherwise be available to area citizens.**

9. What can the county commissioners do to ensure healthy communication and cooperation with other governmental entities such as city councils, town councils, mayors, and state government?

**The commissioners have good working relationships with the mayors and town councils. These relationships are maintained and strengthened through quarterly dinners, discussing day-to-day issues, including possible legislation changes. The Wyoming County Commissioners Association lobbies as a group on legislation that affects county interests across the state.**