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Responses to Questions for Butler County Commissioner Candidates

As a County Commissioner, what is your agenda for Butler County with regard to economic development?

Butler County government will be an active participant and aggressive advocate for economic development efforts driven by the private sector and built around three key elements:

- training, recruitment, and retention of a quality workforce through innovative collaborations between our educational institutions and the private sector;
- expansion of quality affordable housing and improvement in recreation and other aspects of our many diverse “communities” that will attract and keep talent;
- and most importantly support of infrastructure improvements including public utilities, water, and sewer, and transportation with a focus on commerce-essential access routes.

It is also important for us to align with regional workforce and economic development efforts as driven by the private sector through the Allegheny Conference and regional public sector entities such as the Southwest PA Commission.

I support an asset-based approach to developing our County. In dividing the County into geographic sections, primarily by school district, it is easy to define the assets within those regions and begin to engage in discussion on how to build upon those assets.

As Commissioner, I would do the following:

1. Provide a conduit and platform by which applicable county departments may provide full professional support to economic development agencies and projects and develop a better system of communication and record keeping between county departments and such agencies.
2. Allocate/reallocate resources to support economic development agencies and efforts.
 - a. Propose we begin by dedicating new income streams to development efforts such as savings in refinancing debt; new income from expiring tax abatements; shale impact fees, royalties and PHARE dollars. (NOTE NEW INCOME DOES NOT INCLUDE TAX INCREASES!)
 - b. Review the cost of government itself to determine where savings may occur that may be reallocated to development and quality of life efforts.
3. Develop a system of accountability and oversight for taxpayer dollars invested in development agencies and projects to avoid potential defaults and issues that we are currently experiencing within the appointed authorities. We especially need to address the TIF districts created in Pullman and Centre City, to learn from the challenges and failures, and to develop a plan to capture full potential of the investments made in those areas.



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4. Be a visible and vocal advocate and relationship builder both in the private sector and at state and federal levels for policy or funding needed to drive Butler County's development agenda forward.
5. Recognize that school districts and municipalities are key partners in economic development and support more engaging communication and planning efforts through whatever bodies or systems may be encouraged as a result of the study for a unified approach.

What are your thoughts on Keystone Opportunity Zones, LERTA, Tax Increment Financing Districts, and other tax incentives to attract business?

I believe that used in a well-thought out and studied fashion, these incentives have merit and have proven successful in most cases. However, use of the incentives should be part of an overall plan that encourages development in responsible fashion and doesn't place additional burden or risk on taxpayers. The KOZ has very clearly proven successful in Butler County in the Victory Road and Shearer Road developments as has the SDA in Cranberry. The use of the TIF has unfortunately at this point not yet proven itself and deserves greater study and review. It would appear that it is risky when used to develop retail/housing areas.

CDC is currently participating in a study led by BC3 to develop strategies to deliver economic development services via a unified approach; with various organizations, agencies, and authorities working toward common goals and specific priorities. What are your observations on the existing delivery and thoughts on developing a Unified Economic Development Plan for the County?

The existing system seems to lack coordination among various agencies, authorities, municipalities, etc., leading to inefficiencies, slow growth, a lack of confidence from private sector leaders and funders and even project failure. My experience with the United Way network had us moving toward a "Community Impact Model" in which all partners including investors and agencies were addressing agreed-upon community level issues in a coordinated fashion and all held accountable to defined outcomes. This model has proven itself across the country as a mechanism for real change.

Thus I support a Unified Plan and its merits and have defined above how I will support the plan. Identifying and capitalizing on the strengths of various agencies in a coordinated fashion is key to the plan's success. It will require a change in attitude, courageous leadership, and those willing to take a risk. In studying development efforts in other areas, I've come to believe success is the result of significant investment and leadership from the business and corporate community. While some leaders have continually been at the table, there are a number who are not yet engaged and the network should be strengthened to compete. Government and institutions serve only as conduits and resources. I would also like to see human services included as it is clear that "people" issues are affecting economic success and conversely the success reduces incidence of drug use, along with costly mental health and criminal justice issues. I participated in the survey and believe that our future is contingent upon successful and speedy implementation of this effort.