

**KALAMAZOO REGIONAL CHAMBER
POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE**

2010 Election Cycle

COUNTY COMMISSION CANDIDATE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE – ANN NIEUWENHUIS

Name: Ann Nieuwenhuis

Candidate for: County Commissioner **District:** 15

Resident Address: 5833 East HJ Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI 49048

Political Party: Republican **Age:** 57 **Occupation:** WMU Instructor

Please answer the following questions as completely as possible:

Regionalism and Development

Do you support putting the Arcadia Commons west project on the ballot in the future?

I support voter-driven government – representing the wishes of my district accurately and fairly has been a cornerstone of my first two years on the Kalamazoo County commission. My constituents and I agree that county government should not be in the business of owning or operating an arena/event center.

County government must be financially responsible in tough times and not place county general funds in jeopardy. Increasing taxes for an unproven venture is risky business. The constituents of district 15 and I are in support of redeveloping the proposed area but not at the expense of taxpayers. I discuss this issue on a regular basis with my constituents. I believe their voice is heard through my actions.

The residents of district 15 have not indicated any interest in pursuing this project. I see no reason at this time to place the arena/event center tax question on the ballot. I will continue to listen to my constituents to ensure that their voices are heard.

Regionalism and Development

Do you support consolidating county, township and municipal services? If so, which services would you recommend for (1) consolidation, (2) elimination or (3) privatization?

I believe the concept of Economies of Scale is the viable solution we should pursue rather than the specific outcome of consolidation, elimination or privatization. As a member of the Council of Governments (COG), I arranged for Dr. Lynn Harvey, MSU professor, to speak this past Monday August 30, 2010 and share his insights on this topic.

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Dr. Harvey emphasized that “Collaboration, contracting and consolidation” seem to be the current “buzz” words. We must remember that if given a choice, a local unit of government would prefer to be a self-producer and self-provider of community services. Whenever the option to contract, consolidate or eliminate is proposed, I believe we need to take a step back and make sure that the proposed re-organization fits the need.

Places to begin would be with smaller governmental units like the City of Galesburg, who struggle to meet new environmental requirements for storm water regulations. Water safety and usage has consequences far beyond the local district. Rather than each entity creating an individual plan, drafting and passing ordinances and then imposing additional taxes to cover the costs, dramatic efficiencies could be achieved with assistance and technical oversight from the County Drain Department.

Brownfield development, too, would benefit from County assistance. Portage and Kalamazoo City staff members focus on this important facet of economic development, but many times smaller units of government lose out on opportunities due to the lack of expertise, time, staffing, and funding. The County Planning Department could provide expertise and assistance while working with Portage and Kalamazoo to ensure appropriate, regional development.

What do you view as the biggest challenge affecting small business growth in the county? What role should the county play in addressing it?

The biggest challenge facing small business right now is finding the necessary capital to start, sustain or expand that business. Easy access to capital creates the foundation for a thriving small business sector.

In 2007 as a member of the County Economic Development fund committee, our recommendations broadened the scope of the fund and I was excited about the new opportunities. Unfortunately, the Economic Development fund was frozen and is undergoing review.

I support the Economic Development Advisory Board taking a pro-active role in local small business growth. A presentation in September will promote this new EDC role and I am hopeful that the Board of Commissioners will agree and approve their strategic planning process request.

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Regulations and Legislation

In your opinion, what steps should be taken at the county and local levels to improve economic growth in southwest Michigan?

County commissioners need to utilize their sphere of influence and positively affect the state's decisions by actively participating in the discussion stage with the Michigan Association of Counties. I have had first hand experience to see the difference a Commissioner's involvement can have in the state's decision process.

Three key areas local government should focus on include:

- a. Stabilize the funding of our vital infrastructure. This investment will create jobs, attract businesses, increase property values and save taxpayer dollars.
- b. Retain our current residents and attract new citizens who can incorporate knowledge, technology and innovation into regional products and services that will succeed in today's global economy.
- c. Strengthen the essential components of agricultural by supporting the agricultural processing industry, encourage partnerships to enhance environmental stewardship and invest in the development of new technologies.

Transportation

What do you see as the top regional infrastructure development priorities for the next 10 years? What are some barriers to the success of these projects? How would you overcome those barriers?

Infrastructure plays a key role in the production of goods and services, trade and investment commerce and regional cooperation.

Since interstate highways are the core of our transportation system; we must preserve and enhance the system's performance. As we expand capacity to meet future demand, we can also reduce our growth needs by expanding the capacity of transit and rail. We should explore toll-based funding and public-private ventures to help our state and local government entities fund their share of the increased interstate investments.

Transportation investments in alternative energy will decrease our reliance on fossil fuels and reduce pollution. Funding sustainable energy opportunities allows the introduction of less-polluting and more efficient technologies.

Creating walk-able communities is the cornerstone for efficient ground transportation. Walk-able communities improve social interaction, physical fitness, and diminish crime.

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Personal Attributes

What personal and political experiences have you had that prepare you for county service?

I take the time to connect people and resources with community needs and to monitor their progress. Citizens in District 15 share their appreciation for the stronger collaborative relationship with Comstock Township, City of Galesburg and Kalamazoo County that exists due to my regular attendance at their monthly meetings, community project involvement and frequent voter interaction. I look forward to strengthening the partnership.

Taxpayer dollars need to be protected. I continually question proposed financial investments such as the arena and the \$500,000 mobile dental unit. I pursued the county's reinvestment into Drug Court, initiated the jail garden, assisted Galesburg DDA, responded to constituents affected by the 2008 flood, monitored the Gilbert Drain improvements and have scrutinized the oil spill remediation. Hard work on the law enforcement and transit millage requests paid off and I am appreciative of the voter support.

I communicate regularly with state legislators on the need for elder abuse legislation, the danger of educational and law enforcement cuts, and the importance of reducing government costs. It is an honor to serve the people and I want to continue the work needed to sustain a vibrant Kalamazoo County.

Current Board Leadership Activities

- Member of the Michigan Association of Counties Agriculture and Tourism Committee
 - Kalamazoo County Commission Board vice-chair and board liaison to the Older Adult Services Advisory Committee
 - Vice-chair of Health and Community Services standing Committee
 - Council of Government liaison, assisted in restructuring of organization
 - Advocate for Agriculture
- * Agriculture and Tourism Committee is a new committee within the Michigan Association of Counties. The committee creates an avenue to focus on prominent issues in Agriculture and Tourism. The meetings provide educational information for County Commissioners and bring first-hand interaction and discussion with pertinent interest groups and state department staff.*

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Current Community Involvement

- Regular attendance at City of Galesburg and Comstock Township meetings
- Member of 2010 Greater Galesburg Day committee, volunteer 2008-09
- Volunteer and supporter for 2008, 2009 and 2010 Comstock Daze
- Member of Kalamazoo River Trail Way fundraising committee
- Member of Comstock Communities for all Ages Project, chaired survey project
- Volunteer for 2009-10 Senior Expo
- Volunteer for Burn Camp fundraiser: Apple Bee Pancake Breakfast
- Instructor for Michigan Association of Counties: “Running for Public Office”
- Volunteer for Galesburg 2010 Clean-up day

Professional Honors/Awards

- Michigan Farm Bureau County Agriculture Year Award (2009)
- Department of Natural Resources Partner Award (2009)