

Stop the Outer Loop Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name

George Wathen

The Outer Loop has been tabled for now. What is your stance on the Outer Loop proposal and any future bypass that may be proposed?

As I stated early on, I am not for the outer loop. The state should focus on fixing problems they have with the state roads. I want to note here that for the last 11 years we, the Daviess County Government, have resurfaced an average of 33 miles of County roads per year. So we have done what we should have done.

What is your stance on Highway 56 improvements and what do you propose?

There are at least three places where drainage has been a problem on HWY 56. There is also some problems with the asphalt. I have contacted the State Highway department on multiple occasions. I will continue to follow up on these problems.

As county lands continue to be developed, what is your stand on future annexations of county lands into the city of Owensboro?

First, I want to mention a few of the laws pertaining to annexation. First the city can not annex a county residential property unless the owner of the property gives consent. So if the resident does not want to be annexed, then it can not happen.

The exceptions are school properties, commercial properties and industrial properties. The reason is because an individual does not actually own the property and with no actual resident there is no one that can legally turn it down. Therefore, if the city wants to annex one of these properties, no one can stop them.

I am not in favor of the continued annexations of the county properties I am very frustrated with these rules pertaining to non residential properties and we have discussed with our state legislature in an attempt to get this changed.

Do you think that Daviess County government should provide or pay for ditch cleaning of major waterways on private property?

Ten years ago we set up a Drainage Committee. The Drainage Committee, which I am a member, set up nine major ditches that are maintained by Daviess County Government. There is also specific criteria that is used to determine if maintenance is needed. Panther Creek is inspected, via helicopter, twice a year. Concerning the other major creeks, the government waits for a report of blockage by the local farmers or the members of the Road Department.

There is currently a plan to do major maintenance on Panther Creek. We are hoping to get it done in in the spring. If not we will have to wait until the fall.

Last, but not least, I want to mention a state law that is very frustrating for everyone. In fact I am going to say that it is one of the most frustrating things that a County Commissioner has to deal with. The law is that the county can not clean a ditch that goes through a farmer's field. It is considered to be the same if the county put asphalt on a farmer's driveway. Both are private property owned by the farmer. We can only clean road side ditches.

What are some areas of the current county budget that could be cut to lower taxes?

The lowering of debt is one of the biggest things we can do to help lower taxes. We have paid down debt in a major way. In 2010 the County's debt was \$46.4 mil and in 2021 it was \$14.2 mil. As you can see, that is a reduction of \$32.2 mil in debt. My goal is to continue this reduction, and get as close to zero as possible.

We have operated the government like a business. Reorganizing departments, reduced staff, spread out our purchase of capital equipment, reduced accidents and many other things that a business person would while operating their business

Do you see our Planning and Zoning process as an impediment to business growth? How could it work better?

Most of the laws that Planning and Zoning enforces are state requirements. I believe that a lot of the problems that occur could be avoided. I have advocated for many years that we should have a client advocate at Planning and Zoning. That person's only job would be to work for the client to navigate the process and help them achieve their goals. They could and should also point out any old laws that should be removed.

Serious crime seems to be way up in Daviess County. How will you work toward protecting residents and their properties?

This is a major problem. There are many theories concerning this issue. For example, increased fentanyl from the Mexican boarder, kids that are disconnected because of covid lockdowns, unfilled positions on the police force, a disconnection of parents, and a refusal of our judges to put people in jail when they commit crimes. There needs to be a joint effort to define the causes and then develop solutions.

Do you agree with the current occupational tax structure? Do you think current tax rates are fair? If not, how would you work to change it?

The current system places more of the burden on people who own and spend more. The more property you own and the higher your income, the more taxes you will pay. That part of our tax system is good.

Any time a tax is placed on a community it creates problems for some of the citizens. After going 10 years without raising any tax rates, last year DCFC had to raise occupational taxes for individuals who work outside the city. The county radio system used by the Sherriff Department, Fire Department and the first responders was too old to continue its use. In fact the company who sold the system said that they could no longer guarantee that they could provide replacement parts. It was time to move quickly to replace the system. The new system is \$6 mil. It should give coverage to 95% of the county, with many other benefits that should help make the county safer.

Our State Legislature is currently trying to reduce our income tax and increase the sales tax. I believe that this would make us more

competitive with our neighboring states.