

## **Judd McCormack Responses**

### **Why are you running for Pottawatomie County Commission?**

I want to make sure that residents of Pottawatomie County have a voice in the room when it comes to projects happening in our county regardless of the entity that is leading the meeting. As a member of the Saint George City Council, I started attending area meetings that I felt may have an impact on the people living in Saint George. I attended East Manhattan Gateway meetings to give input as well as multiple Safety Corridor meetings for Highway 24. I wanted to know what the state and local officials were planning for Highway 24 between Wamego and McCall Road in Manhattan. I originally was doing it to help inform our City Council and residents, but during these meetings I felt like there was little attendance from our County or State Representatives.

### **What do you consider the biggest challenge of the position you are running for?**

I think with any elected position or new job one of the biggest challenges is learning all the functioning roles and responsibilities of the position as well as learning all the current projects, goals, and plans. It is hard making informed decisions based on the facts and data that one has been presented without a working knowledge of all those factors. Having that knowledge and confidence in making those tough decisions that may not be popular and may not be what you personally or emotionally would like to make is already hard, but it is made easier if you understand the job, goals, objectives, and plans.

### **What areas of county government need improvement and why?**

The only area that I have noticed or have heard of during discussions with residents of the fourth district is the relationships with other municipalities or entities in the area that they should be working with. I am not sure they feel they have someone representing them or even following the guiding principles set forth in the 2040 comprehensive plan. I think this will be better in the future regardless of who represents them just based on the lower number of constituents that are represented by each commissioner.

### **How long have I been a part of the Pottawatomie County Community?**

I moved to Saint George in March of 2011 with the purpose of raising my daughters in a smaller community like the one I grew up in out in western Kansas. Prior to that my family lived on the east side of Manhattan from April of 2001 until our move to Saint George.

### **To what extent have you been a part of the local government in the county?**

I have been an elected member of the Saint George City Council since January of 2022. I am also an At-Large member of the Pottawatomie County Planning Commission, starting in November of 2023. Prior to that I was a board member on what was then called the Saint George Recreation Commission from 2012 until 2017.

### **Regarding your prospective position, what do you consider your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?**

#### **Strengths**

- Analytical, critical, and logical thinking, I come from a background of facts, data, and statistics. I am an Associate Director of Reporting for the Kansas Board of Regents and I use data every day to find patterns and trends to make the best-informed decision that I can. I feel that I have continued this same approach during my time in local government.
- Adaptability, I can be flexible and learn innovative approaches to changing circumstances. I know that I do not know everything, and I am willing to listen to experts, or more knowledgeable individuals.
- Problem Solving Skills, I often can look at a problem from various aspects and offer potential solutions. I enjoy trying to solve a puzzle or riddle that requires me to work outside of conventional thinking.

- Public Speaking and Interpersonal Communication skills, I have often had to emcee events or do presentations in front of large groups and conferences with the Board of Regents. I am also an on-air personality with Back Roads Broadcasting with well over one hundred hours of live interviews and commentary. I have also been able to build and maintain positive relationships with colleagues and other governing members even in times of differing points of view.
- Teamwork, this is important for the County Commissioners. Even though we are elected in certain districts our job is to do what is best for the county as a collective. We must work together toward a common goal. As a coach of many different sports in my life, this is something that I have always emphasized. We win as a team, and we lose as a team. I work closely with individuals as a team in all of my employment and civic positions.

#### **Weaknesses**

- Professional or formal writing, I struggle with finding the right words and context at times when writing formal documents and policies. I lean on others that are more familiar with formal, legal, or professional writing whenever I can.
- Experience, I do lack time and experience in the realm of local government. I know there are many moving parts and nuances to navigating through policies and procedures that I need to learn. I am willing and eager to absorb any training and information that can help me grow in this respect.

#### **What is Pottawatomie County's role in spurring job creation?**

The county's primary role is to work through a group that specializes in economic development like the Pottawatomie County Economic Development Corporation (PCEDC). Staying informed of feedback from business owners, entrepreneurs, municipalities, and other interested parties to identify gaps in the market and to find potential new products and services. Also working with local secondary and post-secondary institutions to identify potential skills gaps and establish the necessary trainings. A secondary role is to coordinate with the County Planning Commissions to make sure that there is zoning, ordinances, and preplanning in the proper places for these opportunities to establish themselves and be successful.

#### **Please describe how you intend to strike a balance and serve everyone in the county?**

Growing up in a farm community I understand and appreciate the idea of remaining a rural and agricultural-based community for parts of our county. I have also seen those counties in western Kansas have dwindling populations with no new job opportunities or growth in decades. We are perfectly positioned geographically to remain a balance of both. I think we can continue to focus most of the expansion and growth in the already established urban and suburban areas of the southern half of the county while still finding unique opportunities for targeted growth and job creation in the more rural areas without widespread loss of recreational and agricultural land.

#### **What should Pottawatomie County's relationship with other local governments (cities of Wamego, Onaga, Saint George, St. Marys, Westmorland, and School Boards) look like?**

Collaborative! It is incredibly important and one that has been overlooked with a few communities and school boards, I think. The county should be working with all municipalities to help identify areas where it can help municipalities be successful. Recognize areas within current municipalities for residential, industrial, and commercial growth, and be proactive on infrastructure needs to tie them into existing supply lines and roadways. I think the representative Commissioner should be in constant contact with at least one representative of the City Councils and School Boards within their districts. If elected I plan to be at Rock Creek School Board meetings as well as Saint George City Council meetings to have better understanding of their future and current needs. We need to work as a team to find joint solutions for the problems or changes that affect all of us in order to reduce the potential negative impacts on all.

**What are your plans for preserving farm ground while also creating development opportunities and jobs throughout the county?**

No one can preserve farmland better than the farmer/landowner. That is quite easy to say but not as easy to do in an ever-changing world in which we live in. The County's role starts with the planning commission and the zoning of the land. Zoning can limit activities on the land as well as the sale of property for non-agricultural uses. Pottawatomie County currently does a form of cluster zoning known as the quarter-quarter rule with the intent to help preserve farm ground from large developments of Residential. I am not sure there is data that proves or disproves using the quarter-quarter rule will preserve farmland. My belief is if the landowner or developer does not have the remaining land for agricultural use and just moves on to the next section to quarter-quarter it will just spread across a larger swath of the county. A better way may be less zoning and approval of estate and suburban development spreading in the county and more focused and diverse housing developments within Municipalities or approved areas of denser residential in the fast-growing southern half of the county. This could also lead to an increase in property tax revenue per square foot for the county with less impact on the amount of expenses for the county in maintenance and infrastructure and less needs for potential Impact Fees or Tax Specials. I would also encourage more industrial and commercial zoning along existing paved roads to limit residential development in these areas and help spread the potential for jobs throughout the whole county.

**Given Manhattan's continued expansion eastward, what should Pottawatomie County's relationship with the City of Manhattan look like?**

Mutually beneficial relationship. Manhattan has geographical limitations on where and how it can expand. Their best, and possibly only viable option is to the east into Pottawatomie County. There is truly little legally that Pottawatomie County can do to slow this expansion. What we can do though is be a part of the conversation when it comes to planning, and development. I stated in the first question of why I was running for County Commissioner "I want to make sure that residents of Pottawatomie County have a voice in the room when it comes to projects happening in our county regardless of the entity that is leading the meeting." I have already had conversations with Manhattan's new Mayor and Director of Community Development about a possible joint committee between the two governments for the East Manhattan Gateway Plan and what they call the Blue Township Urban Growth Plan. This does not mean that we will be satisfied with every outcome, but we should be collaborating with them not independently from them or against them when it comes to the planning and development within our county.

**How would you approach the potential decommissioning of Jeffrey Energy Center?**

I do not personally believe this is a potential anytime soon. Evergy is struggling to keep up with energy demands in the two fastest growing areas of the state both of which they supply electricity for. If it does happen though my first action would be to reach out to the authorities at Evergy about the reason they would be decommissioning the Energy Center. I know they are currently scheduled to decommission one of the units in 2030 to reduce carbon emissions. Which could get pushed back since they also planned to shut down their Lawrence coal plant this year but pushed it back to 2028. I believe they have recently made it known that they plan to convert the remaining two coal burning units to natural gas signaling the intent to keep Jeffrey open for some time to come. This falls in line with other announcements they have made, such as plans to reduce electricity from coal fired plants from 40% of the total output production to 6% of the total production of electricity by 2040. At the same time, they plan to increase gas and oil production of electricity from 23% to 26% and electricity from firm dispatchable resource from 0% to 19% by 2040. Firm dispatchable resource is coal, oil, gas, and nuclear producing electricity that is always available to supplement solar and wind.

I would push to keep some form of electricity production on that footprint of land even if its two units of gas production as part of the firm dispatchable resource production which can be converted to Hydrogen again in the future. At the very least using the power grid infrastructure in place for a new solar farm which has a planned expansion of energy production from 3% to 17% by 2040. It is important to keep this footprint for the tax revenue impact, according to ksrevenue.gov 47.4% of the 2023 property tax revenue for the County came from Public Utilities which is mostly Jeffrey Energy Center.

Beyond the attempt to keep a power production in place. The next move would be to work to expand Industrial and commercial properties to alleviate the loss in tax revenue as much as possible. Knowing a planned decommission could allow time for the county to work on potential budget impacts and balance expenditures with as minor impact to residential property taxes as possible while still fulfilling the obligations the Commissioners have to county services. Adjusted budgets allow informed decisions to potentially cut, reduce, adjust, complete, or even expedite planned project improvements while funds are still available within the decommission period.

**Please share your approach to crafting a budget for Pottawatomie County.**

Budgets are complex but in simplified terms my approach currently would start by getting previous years actual revenues to forecast the potential revenue for the upcoming year with the idea that all things will remain constant (Revenue Neutral Rate). I would then gather previous years expenditures for the same purpose of forecasting future expenditures as if they also stayed the same. After that, compile all the information on encumbrances so I could add it to the forecasted expenditures. This gives me a start on if we can cover existing expenditures and encumbrances with a basic 3% increase for inflation of cost versus the forecasted revenue built off previous year's actual revenue with no changes. Next would be to meet with the department leads and administrative staff on budgets changes they propose for new encumbrances, expenditures, and proposed projects. Lastly look at the County Comprehensive plan and see where these expenditures may best be served in reaching the goals set forth in that plan and to see if there is any remaining revenue to budget towards a planned project while still setting some aside for unforeseen expenditures in bonds or money market accounts.

**What are your takeaways from the Pottawatomie County 2040 Plan? What stands out to you?**

There is a vast amount of information in the comprehensive plan such as land use both for preservation and development, growth capacity management, transportation, and economic opportunities. Within all of that one take away for me was the four guiding principles (Quality-Focused, Collaborative, Transparent, and Adaptable) because they seemed remarkably similar with what I think my approach would be with working together with other entities in and around the county. Another is the idea of using the plan as a potential road map forward but not a specific locked Step-by-Step instruction. It is important to have a path and plan to help set and achieve short-term as well as long-term goals but to also acknowledge that it is not necessarily the perfect path and plan and to remember that things happen, and plans may have to change and adapt. The current plans stresses that outside factors and variables may change, and the plan should change accordingly. It emphasizes that the plan should be reviewed annually, and the ongoing public engagement be maintained.

**A two-day training session by the Kansas County Commissioners Association (KCCA) will take place in Topeka for newly elected county commissioner. What will you hope to accomplish at that training?**

I have already been to their website to take advantage of some of their resources like Role and Responsibilities of being a Kansas County Commissioner and Code of Ethics. My main hope beyond that is learning more about the expectations and procedures of this elected position. Another would be to meet other County Commissioners and contacts as a resource to get potential feedback from other counties that may have similar issues or have

taken on similar projects to get ideas of barriers and best practices for community engagement and project planning.

**What are your top priorities as County Commissioner?**

My top priority is to establish a working relationship with the other commissioners, county staff, and department heads that are already working on the county plans and projects. I want to learn what the current and long-term project plans are and see what impact it may have on the people living in my district to keep them informed.

My second big priority would be learning the traffic studies and potential plans for improvements to Flush Road from highway 24 all the way to Westmorland. I am concerned with the spread of housing developments along Flush Road as well as the growth of Rock Creeks enrollment and its move to a larger conference the amount of daily local traffic is only going to get heavier and younger in median age. There will also be an increase in traffic coming from outside of the community from the south but also from the north on Flush Road with school busses from Clay Center, Concordia, and Marysville schools now making more annual trips along with their fans and families. I believe this may be one of the most dangerous and heavily traveled county roads in our county and want to make sure it is safe for years to come. I do not want to see a preventable accident particularly one involving a school bus or young driver simply because we lacked the foresight and planning to make it safer.