



## Ottawa County Commissioner Candidate Questionnaire

### District #10 (Please insert your district number)

Name: Douglas VanBennekom

Employer: Meijer

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*\*Please note this is a fillable word document for your convenience.*

1. Why are you running for office?

I am running for office because I would like to do more to help my community and I believe the County Commission could be more effective.

2. Have you ever run for political office before? If yes, please explain.

No.

3. What qualifications/experience do you feel you possess that will enable you to fulfill the responsibilities of the elected office you are seeking?

I have a bachelor's degree in History and Criminal Justice from Grand Valley State University. I believe that my experience working in a customer facing job has shown me the importance of a spirit of service that I would like to bring to public office.

4. If elected, what would be your top priorities and why?

My top priorities would be housing, infrastructure, and the environment. I believe housing is an important issue because high housing costs drive up the costs for working class families and make it harder for our communities to retain young people. By expanding the housing stock and making more affordable options available we can help bring relief to the people of Ottawa County.

Infrastructure is important because it helps residents and businesses by making travel safer and more convenient. We need to both invest in maintaining our current infrastructure and look at where investments in new infrastructure would make sense. It is important to make sure that spending in this area is serving the best interests of our community.

The threats to our environment are of vital concern because it plays a critical role in many of our local industries and in our lives. The beauty of Lake Michigan, the Grand River, the beaches, and forests helps draw in tourists and it enriches our lives, so I would take steps to protect and maintain this natural beauty. Over the long term flooding and changes to weather patterns could endanger our community, so the Commission should consider long term plans of how to protect Ottawa County.

5. Ottawa is blessed with diverse economic sectors: agriculture, tourism, industrial and commercial. For each of these, what do you think are the issues they will encounter in the next 2 years? If elected, how will you support each of these sectors?

One major issue for our Agriculture is the growing costs of food due to disruptions in the global supply network. Part of this is the many products that farms need are more expensive or unavailable. It will

be important to find ways to make the supply chain more durable in the future. As a member of the County Commission I would see if there are ways for the county government to help farmers acquire what they need to be successful.

One of the issues that the tourism industry faces is the aftereffects of the coronavirus pandemic making people afraid to travel. I would work to help support new efforts to better draw in tourists, such as developing the waterfront and expanding outdoor dining. We also need to invest in the county health department so that we can better deal with future health crises.

One of the problems that local industry has is the difficulty of getting properly trained workers. Many employers are unable to find workers with correct certifications and training to meet their specialized needs. I would try to improve connections between our county and local partners, such as schools, business, and unions, to find the best way to make apprenticeships and certifications more available and easy to acquire.

One issue that the commercial industry has is the growing costs of buildings and rentals. Many small businesses have suffered increasing losses trying to keep up with growing rents. As a member of the county commission, I would try to remove unnecessary and burdensome regulations, making it easier to build new commercial properties which would help drive down these costs.

6. Safety for all citizens is a protection we expect. If elected, how will you ensure that the Ottawa County Sherriff's Department, Ottawa County Health Department and Ottawa County Court system equally and fairly provides safety to all residents?

I would meet with community stakeholders to see what areas of concern there are about fair treatment. I would work with county organizations to see how they could best meet these concerns, and try to facilitate meetings between the two sides to see what can be done. It is important to try to see issues from each side and be open to new and creative ideas.

7. Ottawa County is financially more secure than many other Michigan counties. This is due to previous boards and administrations wisely spending and saving revenues. If elected, what will be your spending priorities for county dollars?

I would focus on trying to understand the long term consequences and opportunities that our spending can bring to the county. Infrastructure should be a top priority as it can help lay the groundwork for continuing our growth and success, and smart spending can make a big difference. We should also invest in services such as health care and law enforcement, that can help improve the lives of our residents.

8. Ottawa County is one of the fastest growing counties in Michigan, attracting people from many cultures, ethnicities, and lifestyles to support the growth of businesses throughout the county, if elected, how will you support diversity, inclusion and equity at the county level.

I believe we should embrace diversity and make sure that people feel accepted in Ottawa County, and that minimize discrimination. One important way to help with inclusion is to be engaged with the community, and I would hold town hall meetings throughout the district to hear from different groups. I believe that it is important for elected officials to focus on finding ways to bring the community together. We live in a very divisive time where people are in conflict over deeply held beliefs, and this conflict can lead to social strife. So I believe that our elected officials should help us find a way to live together so that we can continue to be a community.

If you have any endorsements, current or past community or business affiliations that you would like to share, please note below.

I am a member of the local 951 UFCW and I am endorsed by the Ottawa County Democratic Party and I am also endorsed by Douglas Zlystra, 3rd District Ottawa County Commissioner.

