

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CANDIDATES FOR MUNICIPAL ELECTED OFFICE

PRESENTED BY RESTORE THE BALANCE, DELTA COUNTY
a nonpartisan, nonprofit, organization

PLEASE RETURN YOUR RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE NOT LATER
THAN 5:00 P.M. ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2024, BY EMAIL TO:
rtbdeltacounty@gmail.com

To: Kathryn Swartz

Candidates for Municipal Office Town of Paonia, Colorado

1. *What qualifications do you have that can give voters confidence that you should be a member of the Paonia Board of Trustees? Please be specific.*

I moved to Paonia in 2006 and since that time, I have been actively involved in the community and have extensive business experience. I was the Executive Director of Solar Energy International for nine years. During my tenure, over six hundred students, instructors, and guests came to Paonia on an annual basis; collectively trained over 30,000 of the international solar workforce; increased revenues by 150%; grew reserves by 500% to over \$1 million; and secured over \$3 million in federal, state, and foundation grants. We also opened campuses in Oman and Costa Rica, with Paonia as our international headquarters.

I left in 2021 for a sabbatical to pursue other interests (i.e. food) and worked at Twisted Root Farm and at several of our incredible local eating establishments. From March through August 2023, I served as the Interim Executive Director at Western Slope Conservation Center and while in this role, we raised almost \$40k for the Paonia River Park after severe flooding damaged the trails. I currently serve on the boards of Solar Energy International and Western Slope Conservation Center and am employed as a Senior Project Analyst for the solar branch at Bowman, a publicly traded engineering firm.

I was appointed to be a Trustee in September of 2023 following the resignation of Trustee Markle and have served since. I am deeply committed to and have great love for Paonia and the people who are the heart of our community.

2. *By now, upon reading and considering the seven political principles we feel should guide political conduct in Western Colorado.*
 - *Do you endorse each of the seven principles restore the balance feel should guide political conduct in Western Colorado?*

100% yes.

- *If you endorse them all, please explain how you will work to execute these principles.*

Anyone who knows me knows that I am deeply committed to public service and consensus building, that I'm not afraid to make hard decisions (even if unpopular), value differing viewpoints, and strive to acknowledge the positive. In Trustee meetings, I actively listen to the folks who take their time to present or comment before the Board, offer thanks to staff and the public for their good work, and do my homework so that I am prepared to engage in meaningful and productive discussions.

- *If there are any principles you do not endorse, please identify them and explain why.*

Not applicable

3. *It is important to let people know that you put the public interest first. In looking back over the past year or two, are there any decisions of the Paonia Board of Trustees that you do not agree with? If yes, how would you change them?*

Yes, and the decision was made because of the inconsistency in our codes. The Town recently obtained a grant to help rewrite and standardize our codes, which will go a long way in ensuring that codes are applied equally to everyone and not left up to interpretation.

4. *In the aftermath of recent political events, some security experts cite increased risks to local governments from extremist groups which pose a threat to the right to peacefully assemble and to the proper functioning of government.*
- *How would you define "extremist" activity and do you view it as a threat to the proper function of municipal government?*

Extremist activity would include intentionally damaging our public infrastructure, impeding the ability of all eligible residents to vote, and actively preventing public discourse.

I have not experienced extremist activity at the municipal level.

- *What, if anything, should be done to protect elected officials and the public from those using harassment to stop civil engagement in the exercise of democratic processes?*

Civil service is the heart and the backbone of our democratic country and harassment has no place in this.

Social media platforms like Facebook often impede civil engagement in the democratic process and breed tolerance for harassing comments. (See my response to #7 for more information on positive steps Town is taking—vs relying on social media—to engage residents in the exercise of democratic processes.)

I very much appreciate Town Administrator Wynn's stance on bullying or harassing comments that come in via email. He has a no tolerance approach, immediately calls it for what it is, and shuts it down. He stands up for staff when harassing comments are made.

Town has put procedures in place to give people an opportunity to speak, while also moving the agenda forward while trying to keep the meetings at a reasonable length. In my experience, it's incredibly important that we give people an opportunity to be heard, especially with differing opinions. It's also important that everyone participating in the meetings follow the established rules. And most importantly: Be Kind. Be Civil. Be Fair.

5. *Our county allows the use of mail-in ballots. Do you feel this method serves the public interest?*

Mail-in ballots serve the public interest because it engages more people in voting by removing barriers, including lack of transportation, a work or family schedule that doesn't make it easy to vote, illness, or mobility issues. Our Board of Elections works hard to ensure that we have proper checks and balances in place to prevent fraud.

6. *Do you feel municipal government in your Delta County community in the recent past has been moving in the correct direction?*

I am very optimistic and excited by the direction that Paonia is now moving. We have a professional, experienced, and dedicated staff that are working together for the progress of town. I had the opportunity to go through the FY2024 budget process and as a taxpayer myself and a steward of taxpayer money, I am fully supportive of how the funds are being invested—for both our present and future needs.

We still have a bit of catch-up from the transition, but once the FY2022 audit and a few other lingering issues are completed, we will be able to invest all of our energies into moving forward, including implementing the Capital Improvements Plan.

- *What additional steps would you promote to maximize serving the interests of your community in an efficient and cost-effective manner?*

During Mayor Bachran's tenure, she has gone above and beyond by writing millions of dollars in grants for the Town. (Did you know that the Mayor is paid \$200/month and Trustees are paid \$100/month?) With her term ending, it'll be critical that Town

continues to apply for federal and state grants for projects. We also need to revisit staffing as we are understaffed.

7. *What do you feel are three important issues and/or concerns facing the municipality in which you are seeking elected office and what solutions do you have in mind?*

1.) Infrastructure, especially for domestic water and sewer, improvements are the biggest issues that we face as the Town of Paonia. We have an aging domestic water system, combined with dwindling precipitation due to climate change. We must protect and improve our raw water collections, treatment, and distribution system. Thanks to the incredible work done by Town Administrator Wynn and approval from the Board, Town is now part of Colorado's Drinking Water Revolving Loan Fund which provides us with the necessary capital to begin the repairs. While there is a chance that a portion of the principal will be forgiven, the State required us to raise water rates for the next twenty years. Additionally, we have applied for millions of dollars in infrastructure grants to help offset some of these expenses. Before the Trustees voted to approve the rate increases, we had a long discussion about the how we can minimize the impact of the increases to our lower income residents. We discussed ideas including voluntary rounding up on town bills (similar to what DMEA does) and working with the State to open utility fund assistance to municipalities for water and sewer bills.

Similarly, our sewer system is aging and may soon be out of federal and state compliance if additional requirements are passed. We are actively planning for this, and there is still a lot of work to be done.

2.) Getting information out to residents and finding ways to meaningfully engage the community: Have you ever read something on a community message board or a local newspaper and thought, "What the heck is happening in Paonia?" Misinformation breeds misinformation.

However, Town has taken some proactive steps forward to engage residents in the exercise of democratic processes.

I'm very encouraged by the recent investments in and utilization of software:

- Caselle Government Accounts Software is awesome! We are fully transparent about our financials and capital improvements plan.
- Textmygov is a game-changer. This allows Town to inform residents via text about what's happening in the community (from flushing hydrants to water leaks to public hearings) and a means for the public to inform town about potholes, leaks, etc. If you haven't signed up yet, go to Town website to learn how.

I encourage folks to attend, either in-person or via Zoom, or listen to the recordings. They are neither scary nor boring (well sometimes they can be), but always informative. There are public comments periods at the beginning of every meeting and after after topic on the agenda.

The Town is also undergoing its Master Planning process, to be released this summer. There are a number of focused sessions to engage the public, beginning on March 3rd. We encourage everyone to attend to have your voice be heard.

As Town continues to improve our systems, we have to do a better job of updating the website and make it easier for people to find what they are looking for. We will get there.

3.) Like so many places across Colorado, affordable housing is an issue. Whether young or old, single or with a family, everyone needs access to affordable housing. The consulting firm of Urban Rural Continuum recently completed a well-done Housing Needs Assessment and Action Plan that clearly outlines the next steps Town needs to take. These action steps will soon be coming before Town Council and we have the opportunity to make meaningful changes both in the immediate 1-2 years, and beyond. (You can find the full report at <https://townofpaonia.colorado.gov>)

Thanks for reading and please vote!

Kathryn Swartz

Thanks for your help in encouraging public participation in our election process.

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