



## CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE 2018 GENERAL ELECTION

Position: Franklin County Commissioner District 3

Candidate: Zahra Roach

### *Biographical Information:*

- Education/Past & Present Employment/Business Experience

CBC Associates of Arts, WSU-TC Bachelors in English, Simmons College Masters of Art in Teaching, taught at South Boston High School, New Horizons High School and Pasco High School

- Past & Present Community Involvement

I currently serve on the Children's Developmental Center Board (3 years), Children's Developmental Center Foundation Board (3 years), and City of Pasco Planning Commission (7 years). I previously founded the Every 15 Minutes program at New Horizons High School. Teacher of the Year at NHHS in 2009.

### *Candidate Questionnaire:*

- Why are you running for office?

I am running for Franklin County Commissioner because I believe that after growing up in this community, seven years of civic service on the Pasco Planning Commission, and years spent teaching special needs as well as at-risk youth, I have a lot to offer my community. Fellow board members and community members that I serve with have shared their impressions of my leadership style as one that would make a good civic leader - my willingness to listen, fostering communication, consistency, transparency, commitment. I am answering a call I have heard from them and others in Franklin County.

- What have you done to prepare for this position?

I have spent my entire professional life serving the most vulnerable people of my community. I have appointed experience as a City Planning Commissioner and made it a priority to educate myself on both municipal and county government, to be a better advocate for those I hope to serve. On the Children's

Developmental Center Board, I help oversee the budget that operates in approximately \$250,000 a month, evaluate programs within the Center as well as the Executive Director. As secretary of both the Board & Foundation, I accurately document the minutes of each meeting and make sure that they are sent to the E.D. and Board in a timely manner. I think that this has been an excellent practice of transparency so that when information about budgets or programs need to be retrieved, that information is easily discernible through those meeting minutes. This transparency is something I am hoping to bring to the Franklin County Board meetings. On the Pasco Planning Commission, I have served as Vice Chair and am currently the Chair. I hold public hearings in which the public and city staff share their testimony before deliberating on land use and zoning matters within the city limits. I have a strong knowledge of city infrastructure, comprehensive plans, municipal codes, and land use that I will bring to the role of County Commissioner.

- What are three actions you would support to strengthen small business and entrepreneurship?
  1. Public-Private Partnerships designed to bring more consumers into our area and to bring more attention to businesses operating in Franklin County. Events like Pasco's Fiery Foods Festival and Connell's Fall Festival are prime examples of this approach.
  2. Mentorship Programs: Another initiative I would support is a mentorship program pairing new and younger entrepreneurs with more experienced business owners so that they can receive guidance on how to develop strong business plans, help with taxes, and guidance on applying for and securing small business loans. My husband is a member at Fuse and has taken his startup through their entire Launch series of programs which was enormously helpful. The success of these and similar programs demonstrate a demand in our community, which can be facilitated and championed by elected officials.
  3. Public/Private Grants: I would work with the Regional Chamber of Commerce and other business resource organizations to devise specialized grants that would give small business owners a shot in the arm while they are establishing themselves. Because a great deal of Franklin County's tax revenue comes from our businesses, we as a county need to do more to cultivate them. These grants would allow businesses a better environment in which to operate and symbolize our community's belief in free enterprise. The Tri-Cities Research district has had great successes in this area which I would love to draw from and support wherever Franklin County can participate.
  
- What do you believe is the greatest economic challenge facing our region and what would be your approach to address it?

I believe that the greatest economic challenge facing Franklin County and the larger Tri-Cities area is sustainment - how do we absorb the tremendous growth we've had and set it on a path to continue, ven while the demographics and industrial base shift around it. This is obviously both a challenge and a huge opportunity.

The largest economic driver we have in Franklin County is Agriculture. Agriculture is the life blood of Franklin County and in addition to serving as our largest employment driver, and emphasizing this strength is a huge part of our future - further expansion in proven areas like food production for export, food processing and wineries, as well as adjacent opportunities that are opened up by the presence of these core businesses - fine dining, tourism, and the like.

Beyond agriculture, though, I am convinced that the Tri-Cities has an opportunity to become a technology hub, and I would love to see Franklin County become a major player in that conversation. Tri-Cities Regional Chamber, TRIDEC, Fuse, TCVCB, PNNL, the Tri-Cities Research District, CBC, and the Pasco Chamber are all organizations that have demonstrated commitment to evolving our community identity in this way, which will both *attract* new tech business to settle here and *enable* homegrown tech business to thrive. As Commissioner I will have the opportunity to encourage collaboration across these organizations, which is very exciting from a community and business development perspective.

- If elected, what will be your top two priority issues and how will you facilitate these changes and/or ideas?

One of the first things I hope to achieve if elected is to make the county commission more accountable to voters. At present, the county commission holds meetings on Tuesday morning, a time when most Franklin County residents are either working or caring for their children. County Commission meetings are also unrecorded (only audio available), meaning that most Franklin County residents and businesses are often unable to participate in meetings beyond a review of the summary of minutes. I believe that the county commission needs to be more open to the public, and more willing to communicate directly to them. In a democracy like ours, effective communication between elected officials and stakeholders is essential both for crafting meaningful policy, and for maintaining public trust in our democratic systems. Implementing these improvements will create much healthier interface for collaboration between the Commission and community stakeholders focuses on business development.

The second great thing I hope to achieve for Franklin County is to enact a set of comprehensive policies that better address the intersection of mental health and incarceration. There are strong correlations between mental illness, homelessness, substance abuse, and criminal activity. If elected, I will encourage the further adoption or introduction of programs and best practices designed to reduce the usage of our jail to house the acutely mentally ill and to instead provide them appropriate, compassionate care through our community partnerships. This will reduce the cost and use of the most expensive services of law enforcement, emergency room, and crisis response.

- Over 4500 Tri-Citians have already participated in the MyTri2030 Regional Vision project by helping to identify big opportunities that will benefit the entire region. In principle, do you support this community-driven effort? And as goals emerge, would you be interested in working together to advance regional initiatives?

I absolutely support programs and initiatives such as the MyTri2030 Regional Vision project, and I have completed the survey. Two of the hallmarks of my platform are encouraging public participation and improving bi-county relationships across our region. I view programs like the MyTri2030 Regional Vision project as powerful tools in achieving these goals. I would view policy ideas emerging from such programs as an expression of the will of voters and would take them very seriously. I would also support regional initiatives if I felt they would benefit both Franklin County and the Mid Columbia as a whole.

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***\*Please attach a headshot photo with your submission\****

A one-minute (max) campaign video may be submitted with questionnaire responses

**Please return all responses by Wednesday, September 26th**

Via e-mail to: [stephanie.swanberg@tricityregionalchamber.com](mailto:stephanie.swanberg@tricityregionalchamber.com)

Via fax: (509) 783-1733

Via mail: 7130 W. Grandridge Blvd., Suite C | Kennewick, WA 99336

***Thank you for completing the questionnaire!***