

Candidate Name: Teri Murrison Phone number: 208-258-4752

Website/Facebook Page Link: www.murrison4ada.com, www.facebook.com/Murrison4Ada

Best email to reach you: teri@murrison4ada.com

1. Please list your top three priorities if elected to the Ada County Commission.

1. Address high property tax assessments
2. Promote responsible growth
3. Keep public safety services strong

2. In your view, what are the top three challenges currently facing Ada County?

The three top challenges are also my top three priorities. Please note that the ability of one commissioner to accomplish any of the following by herself is impossible. What that means is the first challenge is in persuading the other two commissioners that these approaches have merit.

1. High Property Tax Assessments Taxpayers are protesting tax bills that have risen dramatically in recent years. In particular, people on fixed and low incomes are having difficulty paying their property taxes and staying in their homes. The blame is attributed by some to “greedy” local governments, however the reality is the blame is broader and more complicated. Among the issues contributing to higher assessments by the county are extensive growth, infrastructure and capital facility deficiencies, and the need to subsidize unfunded state responsibilities for education, highways, prisons, and more. The entire tax system needs to be examined and overhauled.

Meaningful tax reform will not be achieved by just setting new maximum percentage increase levels (or reducing them), capping local governments’ budgets, or fixing the homeowners’ exemption. Solving the problem of high property taxes without decimating local governments’ ability to fulfill their statutory responsibilities and provide services requires a comprehensive look at the entire state and local system.

Reining in spending will also be challenging given the fact that the development of county infrastructure (including operations, maintenance, and capital investments) has not kept pace with the tremendous growth here since the end of the recession. Local governments struggle to provide services, let alone increase them with population growth. At some point, the county will have to take deferred needs – especially capital infrastructure needs - into consideration. Due to COVID-19’s impacts on the economy, this year and next are likely not the times to do that.

2. Growth in Ada County’s cities and the unincorporated areas is outpacing development of necessary infrastructure and affordable housing

Growth has far surpassed Ada County’s ability to deal with it (the cities and ACHD’s too). Traffic is frequently cited as evidence that Ada County’s cities are growing too fast. Land use decisions haven’t always been well-coordinated due to a history of poor

intergovernmental relationships. Existing residents are paying for infrastructure improvements necessitated by growth.

Cities – urbanized areas – are the appropriate places for development. The unincorporated county area should not be utilized for development (except for Agricultural businesses and clustered housing that promote agri-tourism, viticulture, wineries, etc.), however this area should be retained in larger parcels for rural, Agricultural, and open space land uses. Urban areas are more likely to have ready access to the necessary infrastructure.

It will be challenging to negotiate agreements over where to grow, for example, annexation and area of impact expansion among cities. However, according to a study by BSU, the only way to slow the development of Agricultural lands is to increase density within the cities. Not all residents support higher density development.

Another challenge will be in understanding all of the interests of a wide variety of stakeholders. The Land Use Planning Act dictates that individual jurisdictions (cities and counties) each have their own Comprehensive Plans, which are adopted by the county. Insuring they all mesh well to meet shared goals is an ongoing challenge.

3. Keeping public safety services strong

As budgets get tighter in the wake of COVID-19, it will be necessary to begin making tough decisions. I was a county commissioner in 2007, the year the Great Recession began, and we had very difficult decisions to make. We had to decide how many deputies could we put in cars on each shift (never enough), and how many prisoners could the jail safely hold given reduced staffing? Should we close recreation facilities like swimming pools where children learn to swim, and not buy new ambulances? How important was it to have a well-staffed planning and building inspection department, and how long should it take to get a permit to build a house or subdivide a parcel? One of the more painful decisions we made was to close a much-loved community hospital with many employees. But had to be done. Decisions like these await in the wake of the virus' impacts on the economy.

Such decisions have real impacts on individuals and businesses, and negatively impact the quality of life in communities. As much as the Board will desire to maintain the same or better level of services, when budget cuts come down, everything but statutory mandates is on the chopping block.

Public safety is a county responsibility that must continue to be a top priority for funding. Ada County has among the safest streets in the nation, in part due to the fact that the Sheriff's Office (and city police departments), the Prosecutor's, and Public Defender's Offices, and support provided to the courts are well funded. As budget cuts come, it will be a challenge to continue funding public safety at the same levels.

3. What specific steps would you take as a Commissioner to address those issues?

Rein in property taxes and cut spending

- While it's not within the county's purview to change state tax law, it must make necessary spending cuts, reduce tax assessment rates and/or limit increases, and advocate for comprehensive and equitable property tax reform in the Idaho Legislature. While awaiting reforms, it's critical that the county prioritizes services and directs staff to make program and service reductions accordingly. The Commissioners should give departments direction on what budget requirements they will allow (% increase in total).
- Local governments must band together with voters and insist that comprehensive, systemic reform is undertaken in the Legislature. As a Commissioner, I will raise this and work with to educate Ada County residents.
- Property taxes can be better reined in and budgets reduced, at the beginning of the budgetary cycle, when Commissioners adopt an annual revenue forecast anticipated from property taxes (and other sources). This is a necessary first step, followed by Board direction to budget writers on acceptable budget requests, and setting property tax assessment levels accordingly.
- I would negotiate with colleagues and county departments to reduce spending in the current year, and propose reduced budget requests (2- 5% reduction, or more as necessary) in FY 2021 depending on COVID-19's impacts on revenues. I would also advocate to minimize or eliminate increases in county property tax assessments in FY 2021 and possibly 2022, and reassess it again the following year.
- I would prioritize mandated spending requirements first, then concentrate on county priorities (public safety, services that are beneficial to the economy like development services, evidence-based preventive programs and services that have been demonstrated to reduce costs) and unavoidable capital expenditures, then evaluate remaining discretionary (necessary vs. "nice") expenditures.

Promote responsible growth

- Identify growth's true cost and funding mechanisms for infrastructure to catch-up, and keep pace with development (new funding mechanisms will largely depend on state legislative action).
- Work with local and state jurisdictions to advance transportation options to reduce congestion on local roads and state highways, support cities' advocacy efforts with ACHD for their projects.
- Help develop a countywide shared vision where each jurisdiction is part of the solution to solving growth challenges: each is responsible for their own growth and development that builds toward the achievement of the larger shared vision.
- Build strong relationships with other decision makers in the cities, ACHD, and the state to breakdown pre-existing silos and encourage better-coordinated land use planning.
- Prioritize staffing in Development Services to both accelerate economic development and intergovernmental coordination, and insure growth is

responsible, and meets shared goals developed with the cities and ACHD. Review existing ordinances in the unincorporated areas to identify and remove unnecessary obstacles to Agricultural businesses. Form an Agricultural Advisory Committee to make recommendations to the Board on the proposed conversion of Agricultural lands and improving ordinances to encourage retention of Agriculture and development of Agricultural businesses in the unincorporated county.

- I would work to rebuild intergovernmental relationships for better coordinated growth, and develop a big picture vision for planning in which each jurisdiction in Ada County has its own part, voice and interests. In addition, I would advocate that countywide goals are established regarding growth, development of infrastructure and mechanisms to pay for that, etc. I would see the county's role as a facilitator in this effort, and each city's role as determining how they achieved their portion.
- I would also continue the public growth conversations with the county's municipalities and ACHD. These conversations helped to raise awareness about the true cost of growth.
- Finally, I would encourage the Legislature to permit cities, counties, and highway districts to apply the majority of development fees to projects that generate them, allowing for some apportionment to system-wide improvements.

Keep public safety strong

- I would prioritize spending for public safety services and support implementation of peer reviewed, evidence based alternative justice practices to rehabilitate offenders, reduce the number of incarcerated in the jails, and lower recidivism rates.
- I would support strong preventative programs focusing on trauma-informed treatment for children and adults engaged in the foster care and justice systems as a way to reduce the inflow of individuals dealing with the impacts of trauma, which include drug addition, alcoholism, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, homelessness, and more.

4. What separates you from the other candidates running for your district?

First and foremost, my significant experience and skillset sets me apart from the others. There is no other candidate running with the same experience or background. No other candidate has served before as a County Commissioner. Also setting me apart are:

- 9 years leading the Idaho State Soil and Water Conservation Commission, honing my conflict resolution, leadership, and management skills;
- 5 years on the Ada County Planning & Zoning Commission, working on the Comprehensive Plan and ordinances, making recommendations to the Board on policies and land use planning applications (including as elected Chair in 2016);
- 4 years as one of five county commissioners adopting county budgets over \$250 million, and making sound land use planning, transportation, public safety, ambulance, public health and emergency services decisions, and more;

- I worked 5 years as small business owner writing and administering federal and state grants to provide local government services, and dealing with regulations and taxes impacting me; and
- 8+ years as a public information and administrative services officer coordinating the transportation demands of six cities and a county.
- I have a Master's Degree in Negotiation, Conflict Resolution, and Peace-building.

5. What do you see as the most pressing needs for infrastructure or capital projects in the county?

County infrastructure/capital needs: Ada County encompasses 1,055 square miles and has a population of more than half a million people. Every county resident is a constituent, but the vast majority of them also live in one of six cities, including Meridian. There are 57 separate county buildings totaling more than 1.2 million gross square feet. Ada County's greatest infrastructure and capital needs spring from long-deferred expenditures to keep pace with growth and aging facilities.

An evaluation of facilities done in 2018 identified the need to renovate multiple facilities for physical condition and capacity issues, for example: replace/upgrade the Coroner's Office; expand jail space for additional detention capacity, and support space; add additional and administrative and parking capacity at the Courthouse; relocate the drug treatment clinic; expand the Juvenile Services facility at the Boise complex for support office and courts – not beds; expand the public safety building, and more.

Of most immediate need are to expand the Coroner's Office and the Jail. In addition, the courts and Ada County administration share the same facility, and as courts become busier, they need more courtrooms, and jurors need more parking. There is overflow parking under the Idaho Water Center, but it is frequently at capacity. Expanding the courts into current county administration and attached space, and adding parking for the courts are important needs, as is finding a place for centralized county administration (Administration, Development Services, HR, public meeting chamber, Assessors, Indigent Services, etc.). As stated above, public safety is a high priority for me. Related infrastructure and capital needs include the Coroner's office, jail, courts, juvenile, public safety building, etc.

Within the geographic area of the county, the greatest infrastructure/capital need is a huge investment roads and alternative transportation measures to address traffic congestion (which is not within the county's jurisdiction). However I would support city transportation infrastructure requests before ACHD as requested.

6. What is your experience with preparing or authorizing budgets?

I have significant experience in developing, managing, approving, and overseeing budgets. I have experience as an administrative officer for a regional transportation agency, as grant writer and administrator, as a county commissioner approving and overseeing budgets, and almost nine years spent as the administrator of a state agency where we annually submit a detailed budget request to the Governor and Legislature for consideration. In addition, in 2013, I graduated from the 2-year Idaho Certified Public Manager Program.

7. Do you feel property taxes are too high in Ada County? If your answer is yes, please explained what you can do as a Commissioner to reduce property taxes.

Yes. See item 3, above for things I would do to reduce them.

8. How do you propose to manage the growth that Ada County is experiencing?

See item 3, above, above for things I would do to reduce them.

9. With that growth comes challenges for our transportation infrastructure to keep pace, how do propose we approach the transportation issues in Ada County?

With significant turnover in elected officials in the last few years, there's an opportunity to rebuild intergovernmental relationships for better coordinated transportation planning in the light of growth. I'll help to develop an overall big picture vision for planning in which each jurisdiction in Ada County has its own part, voice and interests. In addition, I'll advocate that countywide goals are established regarding growth, payment for infrastructure including transportation, etc. Development of a shared coordinated vision and plan will promote greater interjurisdictional cooperation with individual city Comprehensive Plans. The county's role in this should be as a convener/facilitator.

A critical component of the solution is to relieve commuter congestion on I-84, Chinden, and State streets. Although the idea of utilizing the railroad tracks between Caldwell and Boise was rebuffed by the railroad several years ago, I believe we should revive the conversation, and consider right of way for one way traffic in and out of Boise (changing according to time of day and traffic flow). In addition, as land becomes scarcer, it will be necessary to seriously consider alternative demand management strategies that have, until now, been rejected in favor of the infrequent expansion of roadways.

These and other possible solutions will take strong cooperative relationships with the cities and ACHD. In addition, it will be necessary to take a serious look at impact fees as one way to insure growth pays for growth.

10. Would you support legislation to allow counties and cities to have local option taxing authority? If yes, for what purposes would you support it and what, if any, specific requirements do you feel should be in place? If no, why not?

I am a strong supporter of local control. Maintenance and operating costs are not well-provided for in Idaho statute. Financial control should be given back to the voters as to whether or not they see a need and benefit in assessing themselves. I support legislation to allow residents of local jurisdictions to decide for themselves whether or not to fund desired improvements and services. The authority of cities and counties to enact new assessments must be limited to putting measures on the ballot for the people to decide. Passage of these measures should require significant notice, outreach, and on the ballot - a high bar – a 2/3 vote.

11. How can Ada County help Meridian businesses recover from the damage caused by the coronavirus pandemic?

In the short term, the impacts of COVID-19, its effects on citizens' health and the healthcare system, as well as the economic recovery are our most important challenges. Determining a gradually phased approach to reopening Idaho businesses/economy is critical. Beyond that, I would propose to the Board that Ada County should work directly with constituents and with the City of Meridian on the following:

- Ada County can work with Meridian and Central Health District to create a credible, verifiable, voluntary "certified recovered from COVID-19" program using hospital records of positive tests and symptoms
- Funding permitting, partner with Meridian and other cities to provide incentives for economic recovery
- Ask public and businesses which policies and regulations apply to Meridian residents that are standing in the way of recovery, relax those we can
- Hold budget hearings in each city (including Meridian) in evenings so working people can attend and weigh in
- Expedite the land use planning and permitting processes, better coordinate county review of Meridian projects
- Consider waiving some property and business tax and late fee payments