

Corinne Pierog: Candidate profile



Corinne Pierog, Democratic candidate for Kane County Board Chairman

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Bio

Party: Democrat

City: Batavia

Office sought: Kane County Board Chairman

Age: 68

Family: Married, three grown children, four grandchildren.

Occupation: Owner of Sustainable Leadership Solutions, a consulting company supporting nonprofit organizations.

Education: MBA, Roosevelt University; doctoral studies, The Graduate School of City University of New York; MA, San Francisco State University; BA; University of California, Irvine.

Civic involvement: Board member and finance chair of Age Guide (Northeastern Illinois Agency on Aging); Commissioner, St. Charles Housing Commission; 1st vice-chair, Kane County Democrats; founding chair, Kane County Democratic Women, second term; former candidate, IL State Senate, 25th District.

Previous elected offices held: Two terms on the D303 Board of Education, St. Charles.

Incumbent? No.

If yes, when were you first elected? N/A

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Questions and Answers

1. Why are you running for this office, whether for reelection or election for the first time? Is there a particular issue that motivates you? If so, what?

I have been a resident of Kane County for the past 20 years. To many of us, the county government seemed to be on autopilot. But during the last eight years I have noticed not only a decrease in services provided by the county, but also an increasing sense of frustration within the county due to poor and divisive management and financial duress. I was considering another run for office, and instead of returning to my previous candidacy for state senate, I wanted to look local.

I was asked to consider a run for Kane County Board Chairman. After vetting my qualifications with trusted allies and several local mayors, also conferring with my family, I decided to throw my hat, soul, and all of my efforts into the ring.

I am looking forward to a campaign of integrity, based on the issues that face Kane County for we can no longer afford to look at the past and be mired in the present. Kane County's leadership must begin to make substantive plans to address the its future.

2. If you are an incumbent, describe your main contributions. Tell us of any important initiatives you've led. If you are a challenger, what would you bring to the board and what would your priority be?

My resume and community experiences have led me to this opportunity to be Kane County's next board chairman. From my volunteer efforts serving on community and civic boards, such as the St. Charles Board of Education, the St. Charles Housing Commission, and Age Guide, United Way, to being the founding chair of the Kane County Democratic

Women, my knowledge of and relationships within Kane County has provided me with a context from which to govern.

I stand with an independent voice, whose support comes from the community, not solely from labor unions, or the endorsement of an incumbent. I am interested in governing, by reaching across party lines and working toward collaboration, not in winning arguments.

3. Describe your position regarding the balance between county spending and revenues as it exists today, then describe the chief threats you see looming in the future and how the county should deal with them.

Kane County's budget is a planning tool to assess goals, measure services, and account for spending and revenue. The chairman has the responsibility to develop a financial plan, and once approved it becomes the responsibility of each elected department head to manage their budget. This is where the dilemma lies.

For the past eight years, it has been the political philosophy of the chairman to approach the budgeting process through the lens of austerity. In reality this restricted budget is beginning to show cracks. For example, the coroner's office does not have a locker room or a shower for its staff; the sheriff's department was asked to cut another \$1.2 million from its budget; and the public defender's office encourages its clients to take a plea deal because there are not enough attorneys to manage a growing caseload. And the list can go on.

I believe that budget management should not be governed by political philosophy, which is why I support hiring a county manager. Under the guidance of a professional county manager, the responsibilities of the

chairman and elected treasurer would change to that of policy and advocacy. This would provide a structural change and rebalance the county's fiscal integrity.

4. For a long time the county board and chairman have pushed to have a frozen property tax levy. Do you support a totally frozen levy? If so, how do you balance that against rising salary costs, union contracts and public safety programs (such as the electronic home monitoring program that was a budget cut a couple years ago)?

Fiscal prudence and discipline are expectations of Kane County taxpayers. The chairman has the responsibility for creating the annual budget and levy of county's property taxes. This is no small task, for the county's tax levy is under the jurisdiction of the PTEL Law, which limits the increase of a local government's tax levy by 5.0% or the rate of inflation. The rate of inflation from 2010 to 2019 has ranged from 3.0% to its current 2.3%. Kane County's levy of 4.3% has remained flat since 2010.

This may be welcoming news to taxpayers, but wages, contracts, insurance, and pension obligations continue to challenge the county. A need for services within limited budgets, has forced departmental heads to either eliminate non-mandated services or make cuts in other areas.

A 2017 commissioned study on mandated services, overwhelmingly indicated that Kane County's departmental budgets cannot absorb any further cuts without compromising essential services. Full efficiency has been achieved. But at what point does ensuring that necessary services are provided to the county's citizens outweigh the austerity of an eight-

year property tax freeze. This decision will set the agenda of the next chairman, that decision will be a challenging and necessary one.

5. The county board recently voted to ban the sale of recreational marijuana in unincorporated Kane County, but it approved a county tax on sales in local municipalities. Do you support the ban and the tax?

In November 2019, the board banned any cannabis businesses in unincorporated Kane County. This ban includes all cannabis-related businesses such as cultivation centers, craft growers, processing or transportation companies. The rationale for this decision was due to concerns over projected crime putting a strain on the sheriff's Department. The vote also included a reduction of a sales tax on cannabis related businesses from 3.75% to 3.25%. The board did approve a 2.5% tax, lower than the allowed 3.0% tax, on the recreational cannabis sales occurring in municipalities, further reducing any potential tax revenue.

The demand for legal cannabis sales in Illinois is exceeding the available supply; in the first week alone sales reached over \$11 million. North Aurora, with a single dispensary, is anticipating \$600,000 of additional annual tax revenue. Oakton Community College, recognizing the need for trained specialist has opened up a certificate program to provide training for those interested in the cannabis industry; 400 students are already on the waitlist. Kane County's budget is continuing to be challenged and is faced with a growing need for services. This legal means of procuring revenue and growing the county's business portfolio should be discussed and supported.

6. The Longmeadow Parkway project has widespread support by other local government leaders but was

opposed by many residents in the immediate vicinity of the parkway and toll bridge. Do you support the project? And, as chairman, how will you balance out the opinions of fellow local leaders versus constituents affected by county projects?

According to KDOT, the bridge was needed to mitigate traffic congestion along the county's northern corridor. The extensive nature of this 5.6-mile roadway has truly impacted several of Kane County's communities. The beloved, though somewhat well used Raging Buffalo snowboard park was closed and replaced with a sledding hill. Property values of homes located by the new bridge have been impacted, and residents are worried about noise pollution. The village of Algonquin has rezoned land around the bridge from single family to commercial and high-density housing. Forest preserves and wildlife have also been impacted; to remedy the changed environment 17.13 acres of wetlands will be created to lessen impact upon the wetlands. 11,530 native trees will also be planted to replace those being cut down. Communities are adjusting to what will soon be a new reality

And there is a lingering issue of the \$28 million bond, and the related toll. I cannot be a Monday quarterback and judge the value of the bridge, but what I can do as chairman is to try to alleviate any future impact caused by the disruption on the forest preserves, and tolls by advocating firsthand

for state funding, something the current Chairman has not done.

7. How do you rate the county government on transparency and the public's access to records? If you consider it adequate, please explain why. If you

think improvements are needed, please describe them and why they are important.

In a 2012 audit by the Illinois Policy Institute (IPI) of 26 northern Illinois county governments, only six governments received passing grades. Kane County received a grade of A+. Under the leadership of former Kane County Board Chairman Karen McConnaughay, the County encouraged transparency so that its citizens could expect an open and transparent government. An effective website was implemented, and IPI's recommended 10-point audit requirements were incorporated: contact information, public meetings, public information, budgets, audits, expenditures, compensation, contracts, lobbying and taxes. Kane County's current website satisfies these 10 bullet points. The website should annually be reviewed for contemporary practices such as easy navigation and accessibility options.

However, while the website provides a valuable resource, the county board meetings continue to meet during a time when most citizens are at work or school. For government to be truly transparent, meetings should occur when the citizens are available to attend. More recently audio recordings of committee meetings are being streamed. Instead of having to listen at the clerk's office the audio files are now available on the county's website. This is a good start, and one which needs to be supported and continued.

8. What, if anything, should be done to improve automation and customer service in county offices? What steps should be taken to make that happen?

Central to any successful customer-experience program is a focus on identifying, understanding and improving the citizen's end-to-end experience. This past summer, I wanted to use a facility managed by

Kane County. In my journey to obtain the proper approvals, I had to travel to three different locations, speak with four different clerks, who had to confer with their supervisors, before I was given the correct department and paperwork. If I had not had a car or the resolve to use this particular venue, I would have given up. At each encounter, each clerk did their best, but felt as frustrated as I was that they could not provide me with the correct form. Best practices indicate that having adequate training, cross-connectivity between departmental computer systems, and a user-based citizen friendly work procedure leads to staff satisfaction, greater productivity, less absenteeism and turnover, and reduced retention costs.

Improvements to citizen experience need not come at a heavy cost, but by moving toward a coordination of services and removing the silos between departments could be an effective start. When customer-experience programs are executed systematically, these systems will either be cost neutral or reduce expenses, while improving citizens' outcomes and user experience.

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