

## Shawnee Mission Post Questions - Shirley Allenbrand

**Q1: Property Values:** Sharply increasing property values and associated taxes are a major concern for many of our readers. One sent us the following: “My biggest concern is how the ever increasing value of my home has caused my property taxes to go up so much. I have a small house in Prairie Village. We are retired and our property taxes have more than doubled in five years. This is a big financial burden for us... It’s great that my home value has increased, but I would like the candidates to discuss what they would do to help with property tax relief for existing homeowners. Or perhaps some relief for elderly or lower income residents.” How would you respond to this reader?

Two years ago, when I ran for the county commission, one of my priorities was to work with the state to support a cap on seniors’ property taxes except for inflation. There has been some progress in that area. Effective July 1 the Homestead Property Tax Refund Claims went into effect for homeowners over 65 or disabled veterans. It provides for refund claims to be paid for the amount by which the residential property tax exceeds the amount of the property tax in the base year. In addition, I voted for a mill levy roll back last year although Chairman Eilert and I advocated for more than actually passed. This year I will support a one mill property tax roll back. Our ability to roll back more is dependent on several parts to our budgeting and taxing processes. First, we must maintain the AAA bond ratings as they allow us to borrow money at the lowest interest rate to save the taxpayers money. Second, shortly after being elected I worked for six months to consolidate two fire districts and put Med Act in fire stations. Those two efficiencies saved the county money. Third, the county was able to save \$28M on the recent Turkey Creek expansion. So, we have to attack this issue on several fronts.

**Q2: Attainable housing:** Another reader asks the following: “Housing costs in once very affordable neighborhoods are escalating beyond reason, and we have 'luxury' apartments going up everywhere that don't help the situation at all. What do you plan to do?” How would you address these concerns? What can Johnson County do to ensure people who don’t have high household incomes can afford to live here?

This issue will require several different groups to begin to address this issue. Fortunately, or unfortunately our apartments both old and new, inexpensive and more expensive are full and there is still a demand for that kind of housing primarily of the significant baby boomer retirement group who want to stay here. The county has a housing task force and I serve on it. We have several initiatives going already and more to come. Workforce housing is our largest issue, and it will involve working with education for training and transit for transportation to really address this issue. Our task force is open to innovative ideas that might be working in other communities.

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**Q3: Pandemic management:** The county commission oversees the county health department, which provided management of the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been more than 150,000 cases and 1,200 deaths recorded in Johnson County to date. Would you support a formal review of pandemic management with a focus on whether the number of cases or deaths could have been reduced? In the event we have another public health crisis, do you believe the county should take a more assertive role in orders on masking, closing/opening facilities, schools, etc...?

The response to the pandemic by the county was guided by science and guidance from public health experts at the Department of Health and Environment, our health systems and other medical professionals. They provided the necessary data and information that guided decisions by the Board of County Commissioners. I believe that Johnson County having the highest level of vaccination in Kansas is because of these expertise, science-based decisions and collaboration. We were quick to provide the needed education, testing and vaccination resources to our residents which collectively minimized the negative impacts of the pandemic. We worked with our hospitals to make decisions when the healthcare resources were overwhelmed. The collaborative efforts helped in quickly reversing the trend. Without these efforts, we would have ended up with more hospitalizations and deaths from the virus. Our overwhelmed hospital resources would have had other serious consequences. Our efforts in skilled nursing facilities, independent living facilities, long term care facilities were very critical in protecting our most vulnerable populations. The efforts with our schools were important in keeping schools open and children safe.

I am aware that the county has started an After Action Review/Improvement plan process to evaluate what worked well and identify opportunities for improvement. I think this is a very important step. I expect that we will address opportunities for improvement that are identified in the process. Moving forward, we will continue to rely on the recommendations of public health experts to ensure we protect Johnson County residents from the negative impacts of any public health crisis. I believe any decisions on masking, closing or opening facilities should include considerations of public health, economic impacts, social and emotional wellbeing of residents, and what our residents want and are willing to accept.

**Q4: Climate Change:** Climate change remains the most-asked-about topic by our readers. What role should the county be playing to improve climate resiliency here in Johnson County? How big a priority is mitigation of climate change in your vision for the county?

The county works on this issue in several ways. First our actual county government has implemented measures to lessen the government's footprint. Second, in my district we have gone through a complicated and divisive process to allow solar farms in our county, which I strongly supported. I am an advocate of measured steps to continue to do more for climate change. However, I believe it will take all governments, the citizens, and the business community to move this forward.

**Q5: Aging population:** In the coming years, Johnson County will continue to see more and more of its residents aging into their 60s, 70s, 80s and beyond. What's your view on how the county should address this wave of aging residents? What services should the county be looking to provide for seniors, and how should those services be paid for?

Johnson County currently addresses the needs of our aging population in many ways including:

Food and nutrition services

In home care

Services for family caregivers

Health and wellness services

Housing services

These vital services need to continue - and expand - to address our growing aging population. This will require investments on the part of all levels of government, as well as the non-profit and business communities. I was proud to assist the County health department to make sure our homebound seniors received the early COVID vaccine. One of my priorities in the 2020 election to the commission was to work with the state to support a cap on seniors' property taxes except inflation. Some progress has been made there. Our lobbying with legislators is crucial along with balanced budget.