

Candidate Responses – Orange County Board of Supervisors

Ryan K. Soon

Question 1: Position Seeking:

RS: Board of Supervisors- District 4

Question 2: Have You Previously Held this Position?

RS: No

Question 3: Will you be attending the August 23, 2023, Orange County Candidate Showcase?

RS: Yes

Question 4: What is your plan for fostering business growth in the community for the next 5 years?

RS: I have a five-step plan for fostering business growth in the community. First, is to review the Orange County 2013 Comprehensive Plan and the 2015 Germana-Wilderness Area Plan, to explore areas of those plans that need updating to reflect changes in the community. Second, is to engage in revitalization efforts of current local businesses through County sponsored events and communications. Third, is to explore cooperative business solutions between neighboring and/or nearby counties. Finally, using the updated Comprehensive and Area plans, to move forward with community development that provides for new clientele while preserving the spirit of Orange.

Question 5: According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, Orange County has nearly 100,000 acres of farmland, and is home to approximately 417 farms of all sizes and types. How do you envision your role can best support all types of agricultural operations?

RS: First and foremost, no matter the size of the farm, we need to ensure that our infrastructure can support a water supply to these farms. Although the current water supply may be sufficient in some areas, it is important that rezoning applications consider additional water usage and account for its impact. On the topic of rezoning, as we are seeing, more developers are looking at Orange County to rezone agricultural lands for commercial use or residential developments. The Board of Supervisors can best serve these farmlands by being selective on which agricultural lands are rezoned, and ensure that we are reaching out to the landowners and neighboring landowners to inform them of the application and opportunity to speak on the matter.

Question 6: What specific steps do you believe could be taken by the Board of Supervisors, other county officials, or others in the county to help the county attract businesses that will improve the economic well-being of the county without a negative impact upon the quality of life for the county citizens?

RS: The most important step that we can take to attract new businesses is to continue to build our infrastructure to provide the utilities that businesses rely on. However, in doing so, we must be mindful of costs and the impact on taxes. The Board of Supervisors and other county staff should apply for and take advantage of all available grants for economic development to avoid any increase in taxes. Additionally, the Board of Supervisors can implement zoning

rights that favor a mix of small and large commercial spaces in pedestrian-oriented clusters. This plan will allow for multiple smaller businesses to be co-located in a hallmark-town type configuration. This type of configuration has been found to stimulate economic growth by engaging in customer-sharing while preserving the historical value of a location.

Question 7: What steps do you think are most important to support existing businesses and encourage healthy growth?

RS: One of the four pillars of economic development is labor. Having a trained, competitive, and accessible work force is crucial to sustaining existing businesses. To that end, we can engage with our Department of Social Services, schools, business leaders, and other community organizations to develop training workshops that train the next and improve the current workforce. In addition to workforce development, employees must be accessible. Establishing a public transportation system that connects the major business hubs throughout the county will increase employees' accessibility while reducing traffic.

Question 8: How do agriculture and forestry contribute to your vision for economic growth and development within the County?

RS: Agriculture and forestry play a major part in my vision for the development of bigger commercial properties. Many of the concerns I heard from residents across the county included some aspects of managed growth and losing the rural character of Orange. However, many support such development because it means more jobs from construction to production. I do not believe it has to be one or the other. In developing large commercial properties, the Board of Supervisors has the authority to impose conditions on developers that could require certain aesthetic elements such as tree lines, minimum lot sizes, etc. I would propose that those larger commercial or residential developments include such conditions so that the end product is a street view of rural Orange, with all the convenience and benefits of the new development just up the road.

Question 9: How do you define "social justice" and, from your perspective, how can the BOS ensure fairness for all Orange County residents?

RS: Social justice provides all people with the same opportunity to engage in the same economic, political, and social opportunities. So often, social justice is used to improperly and unjustly provide additional opportunities to a group of people under the guise of balancing the scales. That is not what it is or should be. Social justice must be a neutral avenue that all citizens can use to participate in the same opportunities. To this end, the most important contribution the Board of Supervisors can make to ensuring fairness for all Orange County residents is to keep them informed of the opportunities available to them. This means a completely new mechanism to supplement current public notices.
