

San Juan County Council Residency District 1 (Nonpartisan) General Election: Nov. 3, 2020

Candidates for District Residency Position 1 were invited by *Salish Current* to answer questions on eight topics: coronavirus, county budget, the ferry system, housing, health care, climate, the economy and vacation rentals.

Christine Minney (Friday Harbor) chose not to submit responses to the questionnaire.



Responses **Ryan Palmeteer** (Friday Harbor) are found below.

Coronavirus. *Would you advocate in the future more than voluntary stay-at-home, masking and social distancing directives to contain the coronavirus pandemic?*

The health and safety of our residents, especially our most vulnerable residents, should be the primary concern of all of us. To date, San Juan County has done an excellent job of reducing the spread of coronavirus, making use of voluntary stay-at-home, masking and social distancing directives. I believe in science. I will listen to the recommendations of our public health experts. We cannot restore the local economy unless we have the pandemic under control.

Budget. *When you need to balance the budget, what would you specifically cut? What would you save? How would you raise revenue?*

The primary duty of government is to protect “the public health, safety and general welfare.” To fulfill that duty, we have to maintain essential services and the safety net that protects our at-risk population. Expenditures that don’t serve those purposes are the ones we need to be prepared to cut. Any proposals for new projects or new construction will likely need to be postponed. And, of course, we also need to look for and eliminate operational inefficiencies.

Ferries. *What, if anything, do you see as your role in ensuring adequate transportation service to and from the islands?*

The state rather than the county runs the ferry system, so we need a solid, positive working relationship with the ferry service. The county council needs to be the leading advocate for our residents. The ferry service needs to understand that the people who live and work out here need a reliable ferry service because all of our essential needs, particularly medical needs, cannot be met locally. I will be a strong advocate for a ferry service that meets the needs of the residents of San Juan County.

Health. *What specifically would you do to increase access to affordable health care?*

This is a place where the council needs to play a support role. The county board of health, the three hospital districts and the various senior centers know more about the specifics of health care issues and our residents' needs than the council does. That's their job and the council needs to let them do it. But the council needs to listen to them and work with them and assist them to make affordable health care available to all of our residents. Personally, I believe affordable health care is a right. I will bring that belief to the council.

Climate. *If you agree that forest fires, extreme weather and changing ocean conditions are caused by changing climate, what specifically can the county do to address climate change?*

Climate change is the existential threat of our modern world and it has never been as obvious or apparent as it has this year in our choking, smoke-filled air in the West and the multiple super-storms in other parts of the country. San Juan County can address climate change in a variety of ways. We need more renewable energy production on county buildings and fewer permitting impediments and more incentives for renewables on private residences to promote and expedite renewable energy production. Promoting greater efficiency in public and private structures will reduce our demand for energy, as well as save on energy costs. We can promote all electric transportation by making more electric vehicle charging stations available to the public. Among other things, the council should require that all county-owned vehicles must be replaced with all-electric equivalents when vehicles are retired from the fleet and promote all-electric public transportation options that will reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions. I will continue to investigate new methods of wildfire fire risk mitigation and to search out sustainable financial aid to help with the cost of forest management practices. I will also support expansion of high-speed internet access to promote telecommuting for jobs and on-line learning for students.

Economy. *If you think the county's economy should be more diversified, what specifically will you do to make that happen?*

The pandemic has taught us that reliance on tourist dollars puts our local economy at high risk for major disruptions. I will work with the Economic Development Council, the Agricultural Guild and the people working with our seniors to explore the best ways to develop more year-round jobs. The pandemic has also taught us that we need to improve our local food resilience, to become less reliant on mainland supplies. We need to produce more food here at home and partner with local food producers to develop food systems that support our local needs. I will use my relationships with the agricultural community to that end. Having witnessed the success of the San Juan Islands Food Hub, I will look for ways to help them achieve their mission of feeding the San Juans locally. I will also press for a more environmentally based approach to the way we promote tourism. I will also work with the San Juan Islands Makers guild to help develop local businesses that create their products here in the San Juans.

Vacation rentals. *Do you think vacation rentals are a community problem? If not, why not? If so, what would you do to address that problem?*

Peace and tranquility is part of what makes the San Juan Islands a desirable place to live. Vacation rentals, initially seen as a means to reduce large hotel development in the San Juans, has grown out of control due to a county council that was asleep at the switch when the VR ordinance was drafted and

later amended. I know personally how impossible it is to have any peace and tranquility when you have vacation rental party houses in your neighborhood. I will work closely with the Vacation Rental Working Group and other community groups to establish regulations that protect the rights of county residents from the negative impacts of vacation rentals.