



**Candidate Questionnaire for Monroe County
Treasurer's Race**

About DFMC

Democracy for Monroe County (DFMC) is a political action committee dedicated to recruiting, training, and supporting fiscally responsible and socially progressive candidates at the local and state levels. DFMC is part of a nationwide coalition of grassroots groups allied with Democracy for America, the political action committee inspired by the presidential campaign of Howard Dean. We meet every first Thursday of the month. For more information about our organization, visit our website at www.democracyformonroecounty.org.

DFMC: Building and training the progressive grassroots.

Please return this questionnaire to chair@democracyformonroecounty.org by Monday, March 21 either in written form at our forum on that date or send to robertdeppert@gmail.com.

About You

Name: **James Hans Huffman**

Preferred email address: **hans4treasurer@gmail.com**

Website (if available): **hans4treasurer.com**

List of your support or campaign committee members: I spoke with numerous Elected Officials, Past supporters, family and friends before deciding to run. There are many who are helping with VAN lists, canvassing, phone banking, fundraising, website maintenance and proving advice. However, I don't list a committee.

Question 1

Why are you running for office?

I believe Monroe County deserves a Treasurer with experience in financial management and who is able to meet any challenges the offices faces. I love my job and the Staff that I have helped assemble. I enjoy assisting Taxpayers and advocating for them in the Statehouse through my involvement with the Treasurer's Association. I have helped implement the current Treasurer's ideas for improving the office. We have improved efficiency, eliminated long lines and cut costs. I want an opportunity to build on these successes. I believe we can do more to increase investment income and help alleviate the strains on the County budget. I want to actively engage the community and take better advantage of online communication to improve transparency, share information and reduce costs. I want to work to be as paper free an office as is possible. I want to work with the next Auditor to improve communication between our offices and help restore the public's trust.

Question 2

List your political experience (here and elsewhere), including any grassroots activity in which you participated or led.

I began as a volunteer for the Monroe County Democrats while in junior high, handing out literature at polls on election day. In High School I volunteered for the McCloskey for Congress Campaign making phone calls and registering voters. I went door to door handing out flyers for City Council member Pam Service. I attended a small Christian liberal arts college in a heavily republican County and was one of a handful of college democrats and few Democratic candidates to help. After returning to Bloomington, Sophia Travis reintroduced me to local politics. I began by helping place yard signs for Judge Haughton and eventually joined the MCDP events committee. After that, I was elected MCDP Treasurer, serving for 6 years. Since stepping down from that position, I have worked with many local candidates, fundraising, placing yard signs, phone banking and canvassing. While National Politics get the spotlight, I believe that local politics have the most profound impact on our lives and are where the next State and National candidates come from. For these reasons, my future involvement will continue to be primarily at the local level.

Question 3

In what way(s) do you consider yourself socially progressive?

Our Country was founded on the principals of liberty, justice and equality for all. This Country continues to fall short in all these areas. Throughout history, groups have been singled out, discriminated against and denied the same rights as others. I was taught that I have a responsibility to stand up for people who can't stand up for themselves. When we join as a collective, change comes. First it was Women, then African American's, now Gays and Lesbians are fighting for their rights. I believe that everyone is entitled to equal rights. Low income

groups are also being attacked. Corporations are being given unfettered access to the political process while obstacles are being put up to make it more difficult for the poor and minorities to vote. The only way to enact change is to be involved and I have a long history of being involved. Whether volunteering for a political campaign, advocating on behalf of the homeless or working with troubled youths, I have always been active in trying to effect change. I am also pro-choice, pro-gun control, pro-union, strongly favor insuring the separation of church and state, believe that everyone should have access to quality health care and I don't believe that corporations are people.

Question 4

Describe your ideas for engaging citizens in more active participation in our community and our government.

Keeping open channels of communication is the first requirement. Information needs to flow both ways, between elected officials and the people they serve. One thing that I have tried to do during my time in government, is make information more easily accessible. The electronic age has brought a great opportunity for communication and a more immediate back and forth. As Treasurer, I plan to reach out more within the community, online and in person. I think it's important to talk face to face with tax payers and let them know that I am interested in their concerns and suggestions and that I'm accessible. The current Treasurer started holding informational meetings during tax time to let property owners ask questions and get a better understanding of how their taxes are calculated. I would like to go further and attend neighborhood association meetings to keep taxpayers informed and give them an opportunity to ask questions and have direct contact with their elected official. I love hearing suggestions for improvement. Knowing what citizens needs or expectations are, allows me an opportunity to meet or exceed them. Feeling like their concerns and suggestions are taken seriously is the best way to keep citizens engaged in the process.

Question 5

Do you pledge to publicly support all Democratic Party nominees, including your primary opponent(s), should he/she prevail in the May Primary Election?

Yes, as stated previously, I have been working to get elect Democrats since Junior High. In 2012, despite losing in the primary for Auditor, I continued to be active and helped Democrats, including my primary opponent, get elected in the Fall. This year will be no different. I believe that a Democrat is better than any Republican alternative.

Question 6

Do you support the policies of the prior treasurer that allowed payment plans to catch up property tax payments that were in arrears?

Not only do I support it, I encouraged it. Offering payment plans to taxpayers whose properties are eligible for tax sale is not a policy put forth by the current Treasurer. It is a tool that has been given to Treasurers, by the State legislature, and is used throughout the State, to help keep residents from losing their homes. No one takes exception to residents asking for an extension

on their income taxes. Payment plans do not absolve taxpayers from paying any of the taxes owed nor does it prevent penalties from accruing. It simply gives them more time to get caught up. Prior to 2011 when this law went into effect, I had to stand across the counter from people who were embarrassed to have gotten behind and frightened that they were going to lose something that they had worked their whole lives to pay and tell them that there was nothing I could do to prevent it. Many struggled because the economy collapsed and they had been laid off or they had suffered a catastrophic illness and gotten behind on taxes. In many situations it was a temporary set back that was going to have a permanent consequence. The State Legislature gave Treasurer's an important tool to help taxpayers in arrears get caught up and keep their homes. As the person who sets up the agreements, I have a unique insight into the process and the situations people find themselves in. The Treasurer typically extends a payment plan to 20-25 taxpayers a year. I sit down with each one personally to learn the circumstances that put them in arrears. Health issues are the number one reason that people get behind. When signing an agreement, I require the taxpayer make a payment as a show of good faith. I carefully explain the terms of the agreement and answer any questions they may have. In most cases, the agreement is followed, the taxpayer gets caught up and doesn't have any more issues. In any case when the agreement is not met, the property goes through the tax sale process the following year.

Question 7

There have been questions raised about the software compatibility between the Auditors office and the Treasurer's office, do you have any thoughts or ideas on changes that could help?

There are two sets of software that are used by the Treasurer and Auditor. Taxation software from Low Associates and Financial software from Harris. The first issue is that these systems aren't compatible so they don't communicate with each other. Information from the tax system and the financial system have to be compiled on the cashbook manually. Manual entry always creates the possibility of human error. The second issue is the financial software itself. It is difficult to learn and to navigate. The Auditor and Treasurer modules have difficulty transferring information properly. Transactions get "hung up" continually so the transaction will show on the Auditors side, but wont import into the Treasurers side. It's rare for a week to pass without need to contact the vendor for support or to resolve an issue. When the Auditor proposed changing the taxation software to Low, I wasn't in favor because the system we had worked well, but agree to support the change if the financial package was included. After the taxation software change was approved, the Auditor took the financial package off the table. I believe that we need to convert to Low financials as well. The amount of time saved on redundant data entry and the ease of use will cut down on human error and will save time. When you throw in the reduced yearly maintenance fees, it makes no sense not to make a change. The only sticking point is the up from purchase of the software and the cost of converting. The yearly maintenance savings will recoup this cost and will save much more in the long run.

Question 8

Over the last few years the resources given to this office to do the work of the Treasurer's office has been cut, do you think the office as of today is adequately funded to accomplish the tasks it is charged with?

Yes, since we have been able to accomplish our tasks with our current resources. Sometimes it is challenging, though. We've been given many new tasks over the last few years, but have the same staff size. During budget hearings, we always ask to have the position that was eliminated

in 2014 restored, but we understand the position the Council is in and don't expect it to be restored. I imagine there are many departments who feel shorthanded. Rather than worry about what we don't have, we work together to take full advantage of the resources we do have to meet our responsibilities. We continually look for ways to improve efficiency and avoid errors. We try to anticipate needs and avoid issues rather than having to spend more time fixing a problem. We save an amazing amount of staff time and energy by using a little foresight. I am very proud of the Staff and I feel like we have a great balance of skills and personalities. If I'm elected Treasurer, keeping this team intact and working to meet our responsibilities will be a priority of mine.