



**2020 MUSKEGON COUNTY – LOCAL OFFICIALS  
CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: Christopher Kaijala Phone: 231-343-9432  
Office Sought: Muskegon County Commissioner, District 3 Party: Republican  
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1. Have you ever been appointed or elected to public office? **No.**  
If yes, what office?
2. Have you ever owned a business or has someone in your family owned a business? If yes, please describe.  
I started a DBA business in 2009 offering engineering services. The business was made into an LLC in 2018. I have travelled to other states and internationally for this work. I am also doing business as an independent contractor (handyman and property management work).  
My father owned his own business, providing boiler water treatment chemicals, and chemical cleaning services. As a middle-school boy, my father started to businesses for us (my sister and the three older brothers). Our first business was tending to 750 chickens, collecting their eggs in delivering them each Saturday. Then my father started a business to strip paint off of furniture and doors. From this we developed a refinishing business, and sold refinished furniture. After learning to cane chairs in Boy Scouts, I started caning chairs for work. I've completed over 150 chairs between high school and college years. I was making nearly twice the minimum wage. My three brothers now, all have their own businesses. One brother is a carpenter, one brother deals in antiques and has various other businesses, and one brother founded and operates a company that makes tradeshow exhibits, and kiosks.
3. Briefly describe the qualifications and experience you possess that make you the best candidate for this office.  
I have an engineering background with over 35 years' experience as a chemical process engineer, doing design, quality improvement and troubleshooting, project engineering, project management, high-level safety analysis, team building, and leadership. My experience in industry is developed by skills in working with others in teams, doing problem-solving, achieving consensus, and finding practical real-world solutions to complex problems. I have led large teams in design projects, and in problem-solving endeavors. One such team won our corporate quality award for impact and innovation. I led the team of eight professionals and supervisors from two different companies to develop solutions to solve a \$1 million yearly, recurring problem, which had plagued the company for nearly 10 years. I have been project manager on several occasions leading large teams to install multimillion dollar projects. I understand contracts schedules, and developing compromises and trade-offs to complete projects on schedule and on budget. Working with a large team to solve complex problems is a skill I have developed over many years through professional training and practical experience.
4. What do you believe should be the role of government in today's world?  
I believe that the role of government role is to provide essential services to the community to facilitate orderly, safe, clean operations of public ways and providing protective services such as police and fire services. I believe services should be limited to those that protect people's lives, dignity, liberty and property. Services to protect the vulnerable and those that are in extreme need are also good if approved by all the residents. Excessive regulations and continual growth of government is a long-term detriment to the community; especially to retired and poor residents. Nonresidents should not have the same access to services. Government policies should provide incentives for businesses to provide low cost options for housing to help those with small incomes. The cost of government should remain low, while providing essential services such as police, fire and good roads. I don't think that government should just enrich those who are in government, and their close friends.
5. What do you consider to be the top three (3) issues facing Muskegon County businesses today and how can the county government address them?
  1. Muskegon County businesses need active support from the county and township's to be able to operate and expand. I believe we need to focus County resources away from a government growth model to actively support small businesses, and large employers through infrastructure development, cleaning of

brown field and polluted sites, world-class training for business leaders and vocational training for all ages of workers. The strategic plan is needed to make these priorities for County government. These problems can be dealt with more effectively if there is job growth in the county increasing tax revenue. Increasing costs to businesses due to increasing government will slow business growth and prevent new businesses from starting or relocating in tort County.

2. Muskegon County businesses need to have the ability to plan for long-term growth. The county can support this by developing significant funding to support a serious long-term economic development group. This group will coordinate with regional economic development groups and develop a long-term effort to support and expand business in our county (more jobs, with better pay).
3. Government regulation and influence on business operations should be re-examined to minimize the impact for businesses operating in the county. Some things are essential, others are not. Businesses need a county government that is supportive and conducive to growth, and new startups. Regulations and requirements for small business should be clarified by the county directing the smaller townships and villages have a more consistent and evenhanded approach small business.

6. Name one thing that you think is going right in Muskegon County and one thing that you think could be changed right away.

There is an effort to transform the waterfront on Muskegon Lake to an active and thriving destination.

Frequently used roadways going to important destinations, such as the waterfront and parks, and roadways through important developed areas should immediately be repaired and improved to allow easier access to Muskegon, public parks, beaches, businesses and communities.

7. In what areas do you feel you can make the most difference as a local elected official?

As a chemical process engineer trained in design, quality, troubleshooting, teamwork, continuous improvement, hazard evaluation, project management; I've learned many skills that can help in the management of County services and infrastructure development. I have experience understanding environmental problems and how to form solutions to those problems. Superfund sites and other pollution problems should be prioritized and dealt with as soon as is reasonable. This will make us more attractive to large businesses. I also have many years' experience operating in teams and helping lead teams to solve problems and to develop continuous improvement plans. I'm capable of open discussion people of quite different opinions. I'm an active listener and try to develop understanding of the most important ideas that others are promoting. I would actively solicit comments from all residents (but especially in District 3 Muskegon Township), so that county government can work for them. I don't believe county government should continue to grow; if the community is not growing. I don't believe that county officials should continue to make more money when they're not improving the lives and the ecology of the community that they were elected to govern. I would not allow anyone to be silenced by changing the rules, and thereby disenfranchising all the residents of a different district. I believe that the county board should have open discussions in public meetings, and allow the public to influence over their direction.

8. How will you leverage and utilize the Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce as a resource should you be elected?

I would like to set up quarterly roundtable discussions with business leaders to develop a list of problems, and advantages that County government brings to different sectors of the economy in our county.

I would be open to suggestions from business leaders have County government can be greater help to support and expand local business. Move the county board to action on the most important items.

I would be interested in developing more programs through the chamber that help develop small business leaders, and help start businesses.

I would also ask the chamber to develop programs funded by County business to support work initiatives for the disabled and vulnerable, so we are not relying completely on state funds.

9. If elected, what are your top 3 priorities?

1. Create significant funding to support a serious long-term economic development group. This group will coordinate with regional economic development groups and develop a long-term effort to support and expand business in our county (more jobs, with better pay).

2. Focus County resources to support small businesses, and large employers through infrastructure development, cleaning of brown field and polluted sites, training for business leaders and vocational training for all ages of workers.
3. Focus County resources to bring stable work and learning opportunities to the disabled and disadvantaged.

10. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

My father grew up in the UP, and served on the original Mackinaw ice breaker as an officer and engineer. I moved here in 1995. My four boys all attended Mona Shores schools. Our second son was one of the top 800 m runners in West Michigan; several years ago. I love the Orchard view area; where I now live; but I've lost my job several times and had to move out of the state in order to maintain professional employment. The economic turn down in 2009, especially hurt our County and all of West Michigan, and many professionals had to move out of the state to maintain their professional jobs. I believe the county needs to promote, and support small and large businesses that bring many jobs, but also high paying jobs into the county. County government needs to support efforts to make this happen. Economic impact of these policies will help both are small businesses and our tourism industry.