

Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce 2020 Local official's Candidate Questionnaire

Commissioner Rillastine Wilkins Response:
Candidate for Re-election to the County Board of Commissioners; District 1

1. Have you ever been appointed or elected to public office?

I was elected to the Muskegon Heights City Council in 1974, and then elected as mayor in 1999. In 2010, I was elected to the County Board of Commissioners.

2. Have you ever owned a business or has someone in our family owned a business? If yes, please describe.

My husband and I owned Wilkins Realty in addition to Wilkins Bail Bond Company. I helped run our businesses after working full time as a GTE training instructor.

3. Briefly describe the qualifications and experience you possess that make you the best candidate for this office.

While working for GTE, I became the company's first African American Manager, so I have a solid understanding of business management and people. Additionally I have served as an elected official for 43 years. So much of being an effective public servant comes from learning from day to day interaction with citizens and businesses.

4. What do you believe should be the role of government in today's world?

Government plays many roles in all of our lives. The county should work arm in arm with municipalities to satisfy the needs of the people—especially children because they will become future workers, business owners and civic leaders. We must help create a good business environment based on sound development strategies.

There should be programs that engage the community in identifying and addressing the needs of 1) municipalities 2) students; and, 3) businesses—in the topics of recreation and tourism, education, and economic development. These we need to get our communities ready for the future.

5. What do you consider the top three (3) issues facing Muskegon County businesses today and how can the county government address them?

- Homelessness and lack of home-ownership
- Low graduation rates and student preparedness
- Lack of jobs for minority youth (e.g., collage or tech prep, confidence building, etc.)

Complicated issues can be addressed most effectively with coalitions among local units, the county, business community and civic/non-profit groups.

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

- Making tough decisions to balance the budget.
- A willingness for institutions to explore new options in creative problem solving.

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

Willingness to explore non-traditional options in service delivery and a good rapport with other elected officials.

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

To help showcase emerging or growing businesses regarding what the greater community has to offer.

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

- Adequate services for seniors and youth
- Employment opportunities for youth
- Attention and investment directed to commercial centers outside the county seat

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

Not at this time. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on important issues!