

## [View Woodford County Magistrate Candidate Responses](#)

- 1. How long have you lived in your district? Please provide an example of one way that you have contributed to your community to date. Why are you the best candidate for the position you seek? (in order by District)**

**Liles Taylor-** Born and raised in Woodford County, I know how special it is to grow up in this community. That's why my wife, Robin, and I knew we wanted to raise their family in Woodford County. We have lived in Midway for 5 years.

I strive to make a difference in our community through my work as a member of the Versailles Kiwanis Club and advisor to the Woodford County High School Key Club, board member of Walter Bradley Park, and a Deacon at Midway Baptist Church.

I'm the proud product of Woodford County Public Schools, continuing my education at Asbury University, where I received a BA in media communications and a Masters in public administration from Morehead State University.

I have extensive governmental experience, climbing the ranks of state government and serving in multiple roles within Governor Steve Beshear's administration and gaining valuable legislative experience serving as Chief of Staff to the House Majority Whip. My work in the Executive Branch culminated with my service as Deputy Chief of Staff to then Lt. Governor, Crit Luallen.

I proudly now serve the working families of Kentucky as the Political Coordinator of the Kentucky State AFL-CIO.

**William Downey -** I am a life-long Woodford Countian and I moved into the 5<sup>th</sup> District on Stout Avenue in 1998 and have lived off and on in my district for 20 years. I currently live on Broadway Street in downtown Versailles. I have been fortunate to previously serve on the Planning and Zoning Commission and for the last two years been able to serve on the Economic Development Authority as a board member. I am a member of the Versailles Kiwanis Club and have participated in several service and philanthropic events such as our annual Pancake Breakfast, that helps raise money for scholarships to benefit graduating seniors from WCHS.

I believe I am the best candidate to serve as Magistrate on the Woodford County Fiscal Court because I will bring a new and fresh perspective to our local government. There is an entire generation of Woodford Countians that is currently not being represented on the Fiscal Court and I hope to provide a voice and a seat at the table as we make decisions that can have a 20-30 year impact on our community. I will work to ensure that we continue to move Woodford County forward in the right direction and not stand in the way of progress. We need new leadership in local government and as a first-time candidate running for office, I promise to bring an open mindset and a fierce determination to ensure that Woodford County becomes the best version of itself in the years to come.

**Mary Ann Gill-** I have lived in District 7 for about 15 years and in Woodford County since 1983. Bruce and I started our business here after college in 1981. We raised our five children in Versailles. From the beginning of our time here I have been involved in church, school, sports and civic activities. This year will complete my first term as Magistrate on the Woodford County Fiscal Court. My goal was to continue the good work that Bruce did on the Court, but to also bring more to Woodford County that I receive. I did that in my first year. The award for the Hunteartown Road Sidewalk Project is far more than I would earn in many terms on Fiscal Court. I am also the best value, as I do not accept the benefit package which can more than double the cost of a Magistrate. I have never missed a court meeting and come prepared, studying all issues and am receptive to the concerns of people in the community. In addition to the ongoing sidewalk project, I've identified needs and sought solutions like getting fire hydrants where there were none near gas stations at Hunteartown and Versailles Rd., and working to get a waterline on Shannon Run. I have also worked on the Hunteartown Community Park and preserving its history. I stay informed by attending meetings of the Versailles City Council, Planning and Zoning, Conservation District, School Board, Library, EDA, Health Dept. and others. I chair the Ordinance and Finance Committees and serve on the Personnel and Jail Committees.

**2. What is the biggest challenge, and biggest opportunity you see facing Woodford County and your district?**

**Liles Taylor-** The most important responsibility of the Fiscal Court is crafting a budget that meets our community's current needs, while investing in solutions for tomorrow. I will strive to set budget priorities that carefully balance vital investments in public safety, education (early childhood, K-12, & post secondary), infrastructure, senior services, public health, middle-income housing, parks and recreation, competitive wages for county employees, and economic development.

The greatest challenge facing Woodford County is likely the relative full-employment of our workforce, limiting the labor pool of new and growing economic investment.

The biggest opportunity facing Woodford County is likely Frontier Nursing University's new Versailles campus, coupled with a thriving Midway University and the KCTCS System Office. Such a significant higher education presence allows for a uniquely positioned Woodford County for research and innovation.

**William Downey-** I believe the biggest challenge facing Woodford County is the drug epidemic that has affected the lives of so many in our community. I do not have all the answers for how we begin to solve this problem but I do know that it will take a collaborative effort from every segment of our population: churches, government, civic and service groups, business and industry, schools, and at home in our families. I am of the belief that we must focus on prevention methods on the front end and rehabilitation efforts on the back end. We must give our schools and law enforcement the tools necessary to educate and protect our youth about the dangers of addiction.

As far as an opportunity goes, I believe we have an underutilized asset in Big Spring Park downtown Versailles. I will work with the city, county, and our parks department to create some investment that will help with the revitalization of our park to make it safer, more accessible, and a place for families to bring their children. Improvements have already begun but with a collaborative effort between local governments, there is opportunity to enhance our downtown park and return it to a focal point for our community.

**Mary Ann Gill-**The biggest challenge facing Woodford County is maintaining our revenue sources through agriculture and smart economic development to provide essential services and improve safety and quality of life, while preserving what makes this community special, namely our farmland, small towns and communities. Even though unemployment is low, our poverty rate is high. We need good paying jobs and available, affordable housing. Woodford County is perfectly situated for business and industry but an adequate workforce is lacking. District 7 consists mainly of farms and residential areas, where safe roads, routes for non-motorized transportation, water, emergency services, police and fire protection are important. Our biggest opportunity is our ability to come together as a community to find solutions to the problems we face.

**3. What do you believe are the main economic pillars in Woodford County, and what are some specific planning policies that you propose to further economic growth?**

**Liles Taylor-** My campaign is built on a motto of: “Proud of our Traditions, Excited for our Future.” I believe our traditions are also our signature industries, or main economic pillars. Our traditions are also our branding. And our traditions are largely agricultural.

These signature industries are some of our largest employers, our greatest source of tourism, and our identity. As the home of TWO—Triple Crown Winners, there is no disputing that we are the “Horse Capital of the World.”

Woodford County is also THE Brand Name in bourbon. Woodford Reserve is not only a top-shelf brand, but is the official bourbon of the Kentucky Derby and is now the presenting sponsor of the Derby. The recent ribbon cutting of a beautifully restored Castle & Key distillery will not only bring about the production of new spirits, but also another significant destination for our tourism industry. Woodford County also enjoys a burgeoning wine industry with 4 wineries, offering venues for concerts and special events, as well as their own products.

As previously mentioned, our three institutions of higher education: Midway University, Frontier Nursing University, and the KCTCS System office provide a pipeline of well-educated workforce participants and a pool of scholarly human capital for collaboration, research, and creativity.

**William Downey-** Our agriculture and farming industry has historically been and continues to be a driving force in Woodford County. Cattle, corn, soy beans, and other commodities, all play a pivotal role for our economy. The world class horse farms scattered throughout the county support the equine industry across Kentucky. Our school system provides many jobs for hundreds of Woodford Countians who go to work to educate our youth every single day. Locally

owned small businesses are also a key cog in the economic wheel that provide goods, services, jobs, and tax revenue to our community. Our bourbon and wine industries continues to grow and create tourist destination stops for people visiting our county. And our industries such as Ledvance, Quad Graphics, Ruggles Sign Company, and our new additions in Midway Station and More Than A Bakery in Versailles, employ thousands of people in our community and generate payroll tax revenue that helps operate our local governments.

I will work to help create an environment in Woodford County where we can incentivize our existing businesses and industries to stay, invest, and expand their companies in our community. We must continue to focus on workforce development to support our local businesses and expand our efforts with the school system that can provide the necessary training for our students to be able to enter the workforce and fill the needed job openings in our county.

**Mary Ann Gill**-I suppose the main “economic pillar” in Woodford County is EMPLOYMENT through business and industry, including agriculture. Good jobs are absolutely essential for a good quality of life. Roughly 40% of county government revenues come from occupational tax while only about 8% come from property tax. For years Woodford County has had excellent, dedicated Planning and Zoning Commissions who have worked tirelessly on the Comprehensive Plan and all plans related to development to control growth and to meet the needs of the community. I support their efforts and am disappointed by the seemingly endless lawsuits by those who want to stop all development and chip away at this “economic pillar”.

**4. Would you support a tax increase, such as Local Investment for Transformation (LIFT), a 1% local sales tax increase, for a specific project? Please explain what capital project(s) you might support as leveraged through additional taxation.**

**Liles Taylor** - I am very familiar with LIFT, as I had the opportunity to work for the serve as Chief of Staff to the State Representative who was the initial, primary sponsor of the LIFT legislation, Representative Tommy Thompson. I worked closely with advocates, bill drafters, and legislators for the drafting of the legislation. Although it is not likely to become an option for a local municipality for the foreseeable future, I support the idea of such a limited, short-term, project-specific revenue stream. There is nothing more democratic and self-governing than the ability for citizens to approve or reject such a project (and consequential sales tax levy).

LIFT would be just another tool in the toolbox for our communities, but with many Woodford County residents recently expressing their disapproval of an increase in more traditional revenue streams (real and personal property taxes), and the willingness of both sides (for and against) to participate in the electoral process of deciding such an issue; it should be considered for extraordinary circumstances.

However, given the more regressive nature of sales taxes, I would approach any such proposal for our community with careful consideration. At this time, I cannot think of any capital projects that I would currently support as leveraged through the levying of a local sales tax.

**William Downey**- I would not be able to support a hypothetical tax increase in the scenario described above. If a specific project were to present itself, I would be open to opportunities that

would improve our county. I would prefer to continue to expand our tax base and generate additional revenue through good paying jobs in the community.

Mary Ann Gill- The implementation of a LIFT tax would be determined by the voters to approve the tax for a specific project. I would support it if the majority of voters did as well.

**5. Do you support the study of a merger of the county government with one or more of the city governments?**

Liles Taylor- No. I do not believe there is enough serious public interest/support on the matter to even warrant the expense of such a study. I would, however, support the study of potential cost-saving measures concerning additional inter-local agreements for the sharing of services between Midway, Versailles, and Woodford County.

Furthermore, I would never support a merger. I believe that such a move would remove many of the checks and balances that currently exist in our form of government, and consolidate influence and authority amongst the highest concentration of voters, Versailles. Such a change would limit the identity and self-determination of smaller communities; including for the 1<sup>st</sup> Magisterial District both Midway and Pisgah.

William Downey- I would prefer to not spend tax payer dollars on a study for an outcome that is highly unlikely. I would however be in favor of a joint task force between the government entities to look at ways we can continue to create inter-local agreements and joint services with a goal of cost reduction and creating efficiencies.

Mary Ann Gill- I have no problem locally discussing merged county government but I would not support yet another expensive study that produces no results. We only have large metropolitan areas to compare, but it seems that there is really no cost saving. With centralized services and government there are fewer checks and balances to rein in costs. We have inter-local agreements in Woodford County to provide county wide services like Planning and Zoning, Parks and Rec., Police and Emergency Management. Coming to agreements may get heated but we end up with the most cost savings that way. I would not like to see Versailles and Midway cease to be.

**6. In your opinion, is our transportation and infrastructure adequate to support our community? If not, where would you like to see improvements made?**

Liles Taylor- We unfortunately face an aging infrastructure all over America, and Woodford County is not immune. As a consequence, much of our current roads, bridges, and waterlines need serious improvements or replacements. There isn't a better example of the need for investment (from all levels of government) than the shamefully slow replacement of Wiesenberger Mill Road Bridge; which also happens to be the issue I hear most about as I campaign door-to-door around our community. Currently, for the 1<sup>st</sup> Magisterial District, I would first like to see the state complete that bridge replacement project, followed by addressing the flooding on Williams Lane.

**William Downey**- Large trucks traveling through downtown Versailles and general traffic congestion continue to be issues that need to be addressed. I believe infrastructure investment should be a main priority for any local government. When you defer maintenance on roads and sidewalks, you create safety hazards that impact the general public. Good infrastructure is vital to creating a vibrant downtown that people can easily access. I will push for continued improvements in our sidewalks, county roads, and parks that impact all of Woodford County.

**Mary Ann Gill**- Our roads are some of the best in the state and our ability to get roads cleared during snow and storm events are the envy of other Counties, thanks to our Co. Road Dept. Going forward, keeping our state and county roads maintained will be a challenge with fewer State dollars available. I am very interested in pursuing safe roads and access for non-motorized transportation for health, recreation and necessary travel, such as sidewalks, trails and water access to the Kentucky River. Presently I am involved in that on several fronts. It is concerning that water lines in most of the county outside incorporated areas are only 4 inch, which will not support a fire hydrant. As a county we should work toward larger water lines and fewer houses, especially subdivisions, on septic systems. Adequate storm water control and detention basins are a pressing issue in several areas in my district. I very much support the KY WIRED project and would support anything that local government can do to provide high speed internet access in all areas of Woodford County.

**7. What role should regional land use planning play in our local planning & development moving forward?**

**Liles Taylor**- Northern Kentucky has seen very significant successes through their utilization of regional planning, and there certainly are opportunities for using regional planning in Central Kentucky as well. With that said, Woodford County is also unique from many of its neighbors, and much of that unique identity would likely be attributed to the differences in our local planning and development.

**William Downey**- We should strive to be a good neighbor to our surrounding counties and work together on planning and development that will benefit the region. But I believe we must first look after the best interest of Woodford County to ensure that decisions that are being made will be to benefit our county. When we make good use of our land, create good and fair zoning ordinances, and experience development in Woodford County, it is a benefit to the Central Kentucky region.

**Mary Ann Gill**- Regional planning is a good thing. I have been involved with the Bluegrass Trail Alliance, a multi-county plan for bike, hike, horseback and water trails. We have seen in neighboring counties what excessive and unfettered development looks like and I think we all agree that we don't want that in Woodford County. That being said, NO development is NOT an option. Land use planning is the job of Planning and Zoning along with the Economic Development Authority (which are partially funded by Fiscal Court) along with other community resources like CEDIK (Cooperative and Economic Development Initiative of KY), Ag Advisory Review Board and others. Fiscal Court can support their efforts and give input but should not micromanage what they do.



**8. What are your plans for improving the environmental sustainability of our county? How would you support investments in more renewable alternative energy development?**

**Liles Taylor-** I cannot say that I currently have any significant plans for improving the environmental sustainability of our county, but I would happily entertain any ideas presented to me and support any of those that are financially reasonable for our community.

**William Downey-** I would potentially support an environmental sustainability audit of our local governments depending on the time and cost. I believe looking within our government to see where we could find areas to improve the environmental impact in our county would be a worthwhile endeavor. It would allow us to focus on the areas that need to be addressed immediately and develop long term planning that focused on specific improvements. As we make upgrades and improvements in our buildings and operations, I believe we need to make every effort to become more energy efficient and invest the necessary resources that will have the longest lasting impact for our county.

**Mary Ann Gill-** We will always have to try to balance the demands placed on the environment with the need for people to live well. There is no oil, natural gas or coal in Woodford County. Everything we use is brought here. In some places, garbage is incinerated to produce electricity. My late husband Bruce wanted to look into possibly converting an old coal burning plant on the Kentucky River to such an incinerator. It is certainly something to think about. Fiscal Court can support proposals brought before them but it is not the job of Fiscal Court plan for investments in renewable energy.

**9. Agriculture is an annual \$565 million-dollar industry that supports 1 in 3 jobs (specifically 2,783 jobs) in Woodford County. Woodford County farmland also anchors a burgeoning travel and agri-tourism industry. To ensure continued viability of our agricultural industries and productive farmland, would you support an annual funding allocation to the Woodford Rural Land Board's Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program? Why, or why not?**

**Liles Taylor-** I would support an annual allocation of funds to the Purchase of Development Rights Program, particularly if it were a dedicated share of surplus funds and/or a dedicated revenue stream. Additionally, with any such allocation of taxpayer money, protections and oversight are necessary. Recently suggested changes to Lexington's programs should be considered, adopted, and possibly expounded upon in Woodford County, if they haven't already done so.

Agriculture, travel, and agri-tourism are truly some of our greatest traditions in Woodford County, and are undoubtedly an exciting part of our future. We must commit to making the necessary investments to secure that future.

**William Downey-** I would be open to the idea if I knew exactly where the money was going and how it was being used. I want to support our farmers, farmland, agri-tourism, and the agriculture industry as a whole in Woodford County. I also want to make the best use of our tax dollars to operate an efficient, service oriented local government that meets the needs of the people in the community. Any diversion of our budget would need to be justified and shown to be a benefit to the people of Woodford County.

**Mary Ann Gill-** I would support a PDR program as long as tax dollars were not used to pay for it. That would look too much like welfare for the rich and would be inappropriate in a county where the poverty rate is high 47% of students pre-k through 12th grade are on free or reduced lunch.

**10. What other ideas and specific policies do you have to ensure the continued growth and viability of our agriculture industry?**

**Liles Taylor-** I would like for the Fiscal Court to study the possibility of other/additional revenue streams, that allows for some real property tax relief for small, family farms. Too often, these family operations are just one or two bad years away from being forced to sell their farms. One potential option might be a small fee placed on ticket sales, recouping the additional costs associated with increased road maintenance and emergency response calls; shifting those costs to the actual consumers, and off everyday Woodford County citizens.

**William Downey-** An idea that has been tossed around before but is perhaps worth exploring again is the growth of the bourbon industry and the need for corn, barley, wheat, rye, etc. Woodford County could develop a type of agriculture co-operative that served the existing distilleries in Woodford County and the region. The distilleries would ensure they would always have their product and it would be sourced locally and our farmers would have an end user right in our backyard that would help create viability and reduce transportation and logistics costs of their operations.

Whatever the ideas, I am open and I want to see a strong, vibrant, agriculture industry in Woodford County for generations to come.

**Mary Ann Gill-** Local farmers have voiced interest in a grain elevator on the Edgewood Property. It is quite expensive for farmers to move their grain many miles after harvest. That would be a win for farmers and local business and industry, benefiting the economy in general. Unfortunately any further development of that property is tied up in a lawsuit, which has also stopped plans for a new hospital and new tax revenues that would make building a new high school possible. Supporting agriculture is alive and well in many areas of Woodford County including Fiscal Court, Planning and Zoning, Conservation District, Ag Extension, Ag Review Board, the Fair Board, Farm Bureau and others. I support their efforts.



