

Interview Report: My Interview with Commissioner Kenneth Edge

by

Jenna Shackelford

This year, I interviewed the vice chair of the Cumberland County Board of Commissioners, Kenneth Edge. My questions were focused on learning more about the job of a commissioner and common problems in my community; Mr. Edge explained his ideas for solutions to problems, as well as his opinions on different projects and advice for teenagers in the community.

The first question I asked Mr. Edge was “What made you decide to run for county commissioner?” Mr. Edge was the principal at Stedman Junior High School, Seventy First High School, and Sherwood Park High School, and while he served in the education system, he saw many different needs for changes in the community. In 2000, he made the decision to run for county commissioner and was elected.

Mr. Edge gave a cursory overview of the role of a county commissioner. Any county commissioner can add things to the agenda for the board of commissioners; commissioners can also be appointed to different committees, and can work on and propose amendments to the county budget. Commissioners can also put some practices into place. For example, Mr. Edge explained that he recently put a system in place to recognize people in the community for their 100th birthday, and their accomplishments throughout the years. The county commissioners have many different tasks and duties;

they are representatives for the people, and it is part of their job to insure that citizens are content and comfortable, and that each aspect of the county is functioning properly.

Next, I asked Mr. Edge what he sees as the biggest problems are on the county level. The first problem was something I had not heard much about, so I found it particularly interesting. Mr. Edge was incredibly concerned about the lack of safe, usable water in the county and it's dispersion. To counter the issue, the board of county commissioners came up with the solution of water and sewer districts to expand water and sewer services to areas of the county that do not have access to water and sewer services already. The board established the system, and works with The Cumberland County Department of Public Utilities, which plans and implements the system. The second biggest problem that Mr. Edge sees is the crime rate, which unfortunately continues to escalate. Many people associate the issue of crime with a lack of things to do in Fayetteville; Mr. Edge believes, however, that the crime rate correlates with the unemployment rate. The economy is difficult, and many people have needs that cannot be met without some means of income. One way that the crime rate could decrease is if there were more small businesses to provide employment opportunities within the county. Until that happens, Mr. Edge advises to be cautious, and make smart decisions about the situations you put yourself in.

I have noticed that many people struggle with debt, and as such, I thought it would be appropriate to ask Mr. Edge a question about money: "When you need money for a large project on the county level, do you think you should pay small amounts as you go from what you have, or do you think it is better to borrow the whole amount?" His answer was that it really depends on the project. Some factors that might determine how a

project is funded are the amount of money in the budget for the project and whether or not the bond rating will stay low if money is borrowed for the project. It also depends on how large the sum of money is that will be needed. The board of commissioners has done things both ways; what is most effective and best for the county is considered case-by-case.

One of the questions I asked Mr. Edge that was most important to me was “What advice do you have for teenagers who want to get involved in their community?” He strongly suggested learning more about the county and how different county jobs work. One way that this can be done is through Citizens Academy. Citizens Academy has had full classes with all very positive reviews, and is led by a public information officer. Currently, the board of commissioners is working on resuming a youth council, with the council tentatively launching in the fall. Lastly, Mr. Edge said to talk to local elected officials. They are there to represent us, so if we have problems, concerns, or questions about the community, it is helpful and necessary for citizens to be in communication with the elected officials. Teenagers are not too young to take action and get involved. Mr. Edge put it best when he said, “Everything we do affects not only people we serve today, but the future generation.”