

**March 5, 2021 League of Women Voters Information Session
Running for and Serving in Office
Port Townsend City Council**

This is a lightly edited transcript of an Information Session recorded live on Zoom, March 5, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. Angela Gyurko of the League of Women Voters of Jefferson County interviewed Monica MickHager and David Faber of the Port Townsend City Council regarding their experiences and lessons learned while running for and serving in office in Jefferson County, Washington. The document has been edited for clarity and grammar, not the substance of the conversations.

AG: The recording of this meeting and a transcript of it will be available on our League of Women Voters website and YouTube channel within a week or so. Greetings everyone. My name is Angela Gyurko and I'd like to extend a welcome, on behalf of the Jefferson County League of Women Voters, to Monica MickHager and David Faber, two members of the Port Townsend City Council. Neither Monica nor David are running for election this year, which is why they are appearing here today for this election-focused information session. As part of the League's non-partisan policy, we cannot be seen as giving extra air time to candidates in an election year. But we want to talk about the election process. Monica, can you please start by sharing how many years you've served on City Council, and why you initially decided to run for office?

MM: Hello Angela and everyone. I have just finished my first year on City Council. I have a background of seventeen years on different advisory boards for the city, so I was very close to city government and I knew, not all that I needed to be on City Council, but it is why I decided to run. Because I wanted to see if I could do more for our community at the City Council level.

AG: Great, thank you. And David.

DF: Hi Angela. I just started my 6th year on City Council. And the other question?

AG: Why you initially decided to run for office.

DF: Initially why I decided to run for office, I'm something of a policy wonk, politics nerd and when I got back to Port Townsend after law school, I always thought that I probably would eventually run for City Council, but I was approached by Kris Nelson, who was our Deputy Mayor up through 2015. She was looking to roll off of Council and she asked me to run for her seat. I figured that was a great opportunity to run, a bit earlier than I was initially expecting to do it, but that was the kick to get me engaged quickly.

AG: The idea of running for office can seem daunting to many people. David, would you share your thoughts on campaigning? How did you initially plan to campaign, how did you actually end up campaigning, and how much money did it cost?

DF: I have a bit of a background in campaigning. I went to the Paul Wellstone School back about fifteen years ago, so I had a background knowledge in campaigning. I approached it in a more organic fashion. I was going to jump into the race and do things depending on the way the community responded to me. Initially I figured I would get some yard signs and make myself available for answering questions people might have of me, show up at various events and so forth, and that's exactly how it ended up working out. I had an opponent file against me at the last second of filing week, and that's the first time I knew I was even going to have an opponent. Prior to that point, I hadn't thought I was going to end up doing anything more substantial than making sure I was a smiling, waving face. But the end result was, I didn't end up doing much more than that. I ended up spending probably about \$300 total, which I raised from a variety of sources locally. That was my campaign experience.

AG: Thank you. And Monica. How did you approach your campaign and how much did you end up spending?

MM: Thanks for giving me those questions again. David, that's interesting. I've been working with you but I had no idea on your background on how you got into it. So this is turning out to be fun. You wanted to know about my campaign. David's story is very similar to mine. I decided to run. That's the first big step. Then I decided to see how it played out. How the community reacted, and that led me through all my campaign. I ran, as most people probably remember, against an incumbent, so early on, I talked to retired elected officials in our community, and friends and family, and it became pretty clear that running against an incumbent, I was going to have to doorbell. I didn't really change my plan, I added a bunch of stuff to it. But that was my main focus, doorbelling and reaching out for people to get to know me because I didn't have any public personae in this community. I'd just lived here a long time. As the campaign went on, things just morphed into it, the forums, the county fair was a big success. I didn't want to do it, but my campaign family, that kept morphing and growing, said, "You need to do it," and it was great way for me. As I heard from my community and got support, that energized me because by the time the ballots went out, I had doorbelled 3,000 houses, and that took quite a long time. Did that answer all your questions? Oh no, money. I had to write it down, I got it from my treasurer. We had a total of \$7,000 in in-kind and cash donations. \$5600 was cash. It generated from all supporters. It's kind of a small amount depending on the different elected positions one would run for. The county, it seems, costs a lot more money. You have a greater area to reach. Big ticket item was a mailer, and the rest as David said was yard signs, 3,000 slim-jims (those were my hand-outs at doors), small ads in the local newspaper as it got closer to election. It was kind of what I thought I was going to have to do, but it was a great way for me to meet my community.

AG: Thank you Monica. Turning to you again, Monica, can you give our viewers an idea of how much time you typically spend each week on City Council duties? And if you can, mention whether this is more or less time than you thought and comment on the duties that typically take the most time.

MM: I'll answer the questions out of order. I was not surprised at the amount of work, and I think that my years on the planning commission really helped me with that. It is much more work than our community members who sit on the planning commission do, but I wasn't surprised with the workload. Your first question was the time. I broke it up into two different sections. I spend approximately seven hours a week attending meetings. These meetings are all I know about City Council work, because I got sworn in January 2020, and we were shut down in March. To be prepared for those meetings, and to read the packet for the City Council meetings, it's approximately seven hours per week. Did I answer all the questions?

AG: Yes. David, what would you like to add regarding the amount of time you spend and comment on things that typically take the most time?

DF: Monica's numbers are probably pretty accurate I'd say, fifteen hours a week on average, across meetings and preparation and responding to emails and getting phone calls and so forth. I get stopped if I go out to the grocery store, which right now is not the ideal scenario, and it's hard to get a really solid estimate, but I'd say fifteen hours a week. And also, because I'm the Deputy Mayor currently, there's another hour a week, maybe a little more to do additional meetings. As far as if this is what I expected, I couldn't even tell you at this point because this is my sixth year. What past-David thought versus what I currently know is very hard to pull apart. The reality too, is while there's that average, we have weeks where there is a deluge of work, huge amounts of reading. I've had weeks where I've probably put in close to forty hours on Council, and there are the occasional weeks where we end up only having to put in a few hours. It varies wildly, which makes it hard to plan to always have a consistent schedule when you're on Council. That can be a challenge. Hopefully that answers the question.

MM: I agree with David. It changes every week. It's a challenge, with your whole life then. When you have a busy week, your family helps out, everyone gives you more time, so it's kind of organic.

AG: Now that we've talked about some of the struggles of the job, David, what is the most rewarding part of your job? Why do you love it?

DF: As I mentioned before, I'm a bit of a policy nerd. Politics is something I've been engaged in since before I was an adult even, in terms of local politics, so I enjoy engaging actively and putting some skin in the game in terms of the way policies are being crafted and pursued at the local level. One simple, casually rewarding thing is when I get someone coming up to me and thanking me for the time I spend on Council. That's just a wonderful feeling because a lot of the time you get yelled at by people, so it feels really good to get kudos directed your way. Other rewarding things are seeing results on the ground. A lot of what Council deals with is nuts-and-bolts stuff like infrastructure and with the Rainier Street Project, for instance, formerly the Howard Street Project, when I got onto Council, construction hadn't even begun yet on that. Going through that process, and I know Monica through the Planning Commission was engaged in that too very closely. Being able to basically observe that project, that you had your hands directly in, go from concept to actually built as part of the community is a pretty rewarding

thing. And then generally seeing the way we shape policy and seeing the way that affects other aspects of the community.

AG: Thank you. And Monica, what do you love about the time you've served on Port Townsend's City Council?

MM: Thanks Angela. Well David had the same answer I did about the reward. And I've only had a year of it, and I've had a year of people griping, because that is the duality of being an elected official. I have been delightfully surprised at how good it makes me feel when people stop me and thank me for my service. Not even my decisions, like, "I'm really glad you agreed and that was my vote," but they just thank me for doing the work. And that really makes it lovely to do this. I've only been on for a year, so I haven't seen the entire process, haven't gotten from the beginning of a lot of things the city does for all of us that live here. But when David said, "Rainier," I was, "Yes, I do get that." That was my entire eleven years on the Planning Commission. Rainier was called Howard Street, and we would jump in and jump out. We would work on it for a while, and it would come back, and that's what I'm seeing on City Council too. I was sworn in January 6, and the meetings immediately were dealing with the early days of the pandemic. By early March, we were all on Zoom. And our whole community was learning and getting used to it, and I remember how scared I was. I thought I was doing City Council work for policies and ordinances and listening to people, but being a leader for a pandemic? I didn't think I was cut out for this. And it was a great reward for me to work with the other six people on City Council for this year. We worked together. We all showed up. They weren't hard decisions, but there had to be discussions, which was good. We were supportive and continuing to put one foot in front of the other for this whole past year where things kept changing, and we were on it and we morphed and we tweaked, and John Mauro's famous word, he says, "Pivot," which is very true. And that was a great reward for me. Now we're in the vaccines and we all see a light at the end of the tunnel, though I'm certainly tired of being at home a lot, that was a great reward for me, to work with people I didn't know very well, to work well with them, and to feel they worked well with me. And we achieved something really important for our community, which was to be the strength that some people might have needed to see, and that we did that consistently, and it was great.

AG: Thank you Monica. And that's a great segue into the next question, which was, have either of you found times when the actual job differed from the job you thought you were running for? You have somewhat answered that, so I'll let David go first on unexpected duties that arose that caused you to shift the amount of time you devoted or the focus of your duties.

DF: This could be a hard one to answer without being duplicative with what I've said earlier on. There are weeks where you have to put in far more time as a Council member than others. When we were trying to recruit a new City Manager, for instance. When I first got on Council, there was always a reasonable possibility that would happen. I think at that time, David Timmons, our former City Manager, had suggested that he was heading towards retirement, and when that process actually kicked in and started, there were many more additional meetings than we normally would have had, a lot of executive sessions and additional

discussions that were necessary. So that's just one example of the additional workload that can come out of left field, the additional projects we have to deal with. I guess at the end of the day, when it comes to Council in a small community like this, we have to fill a lot of different roles, wear a lot of different hats. As I mentioned before, I have a lot of background in politics, so I knew what I was getting into, but if anyone who doesn't have that background and is thinking about running, you have to, as Monica said, pivot. You have to be flexible in your schedule a fair bit just to respond to the realities of the position. Hopefully that answers the question.

AG: Thank you, David. And now Monica, would you like to add anything to that, or should I go on to the next one.

MM: I'd just like to add one thing because David told a very good story about things that come before City Council that are greater in size and need much more in-depth research, like hiring a new City Manager, which is a long process over six months. Yes, that happens to us, and at the same time we have our weekly packets (we meet three weeks out of the month), and there are things the city needs to push forward, contracts to approve, and this and that. It was a great story of how it can be very demanding, at the same time, one can fit it in their lives if they have flexibility. Probably a really important thing, don't you think David, to take on this job? And then you have weeks, we have one this week, where it's a super small packet, so it will be a very easy Monday meeting, so this weekend I can go for a hike.

DF: Fingers crossed. You never know with Council. Sometimes these simple packets turn into the longest meetings and the other way around.

MM: It's true. You got to take the ride. But we live in a great community, and I think all of us on Council are doing this because we really care about our community. We are proud, and we all take the responsibility real clearly that we have to listen to the community and make the best decision we can for the most people, and for the most people that decision would affect. And I think I really do work with six other people who always have that in mind.

AG: Well this is great advice for someone considering running for office. What final advice do you both have for people considering running for office? What advice would you give them? And we'll start with you Monica.

MM: Well I thought about this when I was preparing for this, because I realized it just sounds like a lot of work, and I really want people in our community that are interested to seriously think about filing. Campaigning is different from the job you get but both are doable, so my only advice to someone who's listened to this and thought, "They know so much, and they understand what they're doing. I want to try this, but this seems scary." If you're really thinking about it, go ahead and file. It's a private journey you take and go ahead and do it. See what happens. If you win, if you lose, a whole new journey starts. That's all, just be brave.

AG: Great advice. David, what advice would you give to someone?

DF: That's great advice from Monica. I would give almost the inverted version of that, which is, remain humble going into this, knowing that when you get on Council, you can promise all kinds of things to constituents in the process of running, but you're one of seven, and if you're unable to make a compelling, argument might be too harsh of a word, but if you're unable to find a way to meld your way into the team, it can be very difficult to get anything achieved on Council. You have to get at least three other Council members to agree with you, and that's if it's something that doesn't require a supermajority for certain things. Other things to recommend, make sure you're able to absorb the financial realities of being on Council. Unfortunately, given how much time it takes, and comparatively how little the job pays (we're paid \$500 a month for the role), it can be difficult for some people to balance both full-time job, or multiple jobs, or family responsibilities. Keeping that in mind, making sure you're really cognizant of the true commitment you're taking on is important. And just a personal thing that sticks in my proverbial craw, with the way some people in the community might talk about politics, is making sure, and I don't think anyone on Council has had this issue, but if you're thinking of running for Council and some issue like housing affordability, for instance, making sure the things you're trying to promise or propose actually pass constitutional muster is a big one. So making sure you communicate with people in the know and be open to hearing the criticisms of your ideas so you can actually craft workable policy is key. Taking a further step back, when I was running for Council, the first thing I did before I even filed, I made a point of actually meeting as many Council members, City Managers, City Attorneys as I could. Everyone's happy to chat with you. If you reach out to me to have a conversation about running for Council, I'm happy to have a conversation with you to give you insight, and that's the biggest advice I'd give. If you're thinking about doing this, reach out to us. Reach out to the City Manager. I promise we're not scary. Each one of us is a nice, approachable person. I think I speak for everyone, and I know Monica would agree, that we're all happy to talk about the realities of the job. Hopefully that's good advice.

AG: I want to thank you both for taking time out of your busy days to share your expertise, and to be part of bringing the next generation of folks on to elected office here in Jefferson County. As reminder for everyone watching or listening, Jefferson County's 2021 candidate filing period opens May 17 at 8:30 a.m. and closes May 21 at 4:30 p.m. Complete information on filing as a candidate will be available on the Jefferson County Elections website: <https://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/1266/Elections>. And on behalf of the Jefferson County League of Women Voters, thank you so much for being here with us today.