Austin Daily Herald Candidate Questionnaire

Mower County Sheriff

Steven Sandvik

Background

I am seeking re-election as Mower County Sheriff because serving this community is more than a job to me; it is a commitment I have dedicated my career to fulfilling. With more than 28 years of law enforcement experience, over 25 years serving Mower County, and more than seven years as Sheriff, I bring the experience, leadership, and institutional knowledge necessary to continue providing effective public safety services while responsibly managing taxpayer resources.

My law enforcement career began with the Olmsted County Sheriff's Office, where I served from 1998 to 2001. I joined the Mower County Sheriff's Office in 2001 and have served in several capacities, including Court Security Deputy, Patrol Deputy, Patrol Sergeant, and Sergeant Investigator before being sworn in as Sheriff on January 7, 2019. Having worked my way through the ranks, I understand the responsibilities, challenges, and operational needs of the people who serve in every division of the Sheriff's Office.

Throughout my tenure as Sheriff, I have focused on making meaningful improvements that strengthen public safety, improve operational efficiency, and deliver measurable value to taxpayers. Accomplishments include improving jail efficiency and reducing annual costs by more than $1 million through operational changes achieved through normal attrition, without layoffs or reducing the facility's maximum housing capacity. Vendor negotiations have also reduced annual jail food-service costs by more than $100,000 while maintaining required standards of care. I have worked to improve patrol response and proactive enforcement by restructuring duty assignments and expanding take-home squad vehicles to every deputy. I have also supported investments in technology, employee wellness, court security, emergency management, and school safety. These initiatives reflect my belief that effective leadership means continually finding better ways to deliver services without compromising the safety of our residents or employees.

My commitment to professional development extends beyond my daily responsibilities. I was one of only 25 sheriffs nationwide selected to attend the National Sheriffs' Institute leadership program at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. I have continued pursuing executive, investigative, legal, and operational training throughout my career. I also serve in state and regional leadership roles, including Chairman of the Southeast Minnesota Violent Crimes Enforcement Team Board and participation in Minnesota Sheriffs' Association legislative initiatives and other public safety committees.

These positions give Mower County a voice in decisions affecting law enforcement and create opportunities to share resources, knowledge, and solutions.

I believe strong leadership requires listening, accountability, collaboration, and developing the next generation of public safety professionals. I benefited from mentorship throughout my career, and I am committed to providing

those same opportunities to others. I also value transparency, responsible communication, and compliance with Minnesota law and applicable public data requirements.

Every decision I make has been guided by my experience, compassion and commitment to improvement. I will continue working on strengthening partnerships, supporting our employees and making responsible use of the resources entrust to us. Serving as your Sheriff is one of the greatest honors of my life.

Platform/Goals

Every decision is guided by one fundamental question: Does it make Mower County safer?

My platform centers on keeping Mower County safe while making responsible use of taxpayer dollars. My priorities are to maintain effective public safety services, strengthen the people and resources responsible for delivering them, build strong partnerships, and continually look for opportunities to improve.

Public Safety and Emergency Response: I will ensure Mower County residents receive responsive, professional, and effective law enforcement and emergency services. This includes working to improve patrol coverage, response capabilities, proactive enforcement, criminal investigations, and coordination among law enforcement, fire, emergency medical services, and emergency management. I will also support effective school safety planning, crisis intervention, and partnerships with mental health and social service providers. Preventing crime and violence requires more than enforcement; it requires communication, education, early intervention, and cooperation throughout our communities.

Fiscal Responsibility and Operational Efficiency: Taxpayers deserve a Sheriff that carefully manages public resources and demonstrates measurable results. I will continue evaluating staffing, scheduling, contracts, technology, and daily operations to identify efficiencies without compromising public safety or required standards of care. My administration has already demonstrated that responsible management can produce meaningful savings, including more than $1 million annually through improved jail efficiency and more than $100,000 food service savings annually.

I will continue pursuing competitive contracts, grants, shared resources, and investments that provide lasting value. I will also prioritize sustainable technology planning and infrastructure improvements that meet evolving criminal justice information security requirements. My goal is to anticipate future needs, reduce unnecessary costs, and avoid sacrificing long-term effectiveness for short-term savings.

Strong Partnerships and Community Engagement: Public safety is a shared responsibility. I will continue strengthening working relationships with city and county agencies, neighboring law enforcement organizations, schools, healthcare providers, mental health professionals, and community organizations. Regional cooperation and mutual aid allow us to expand capabilities, share expertise, and respond more effectively when additional resources are needed. I remain committed to listening to residents, communicating openly about significant incidents and operational changes, and providing information consistent with Minnesota law and public data requirements. Community trust depends on accountability, accessibility, and respectful communication.

Experienced Leadership and Employee Development: The Sheriff's Office is only as strong as the people who serve in it. I will continue supporting professional development, leadership mentoring, employee wellness, and training that prepares staff for the changing demands of public safety. A healthy, capable, and professionally supported workforce is essential to recruitment, retention, sound decision making, and dependable service to the public.

Continuity, Innovation, and Accountability: I believe in building on proven results while remaining willing to question existing practices and consider better solutions. Public safety challenges, technology, staffing needs, and financial pressures continue to evolve. Effective leadership requires adapting responsibly while maintaining clear priorities and accountability.

My commitment is to protect the residents of Mower County, support the dedicated professionals who serve them, and ensure taxpayer dollars are used thoughtfully and responsibly. I will continue pursuing practical improvements, strong partnerships, and responsible leadership so Mower County remains a safe place to live, work, raise a family, and do business.