

Candidate Information

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Please list the LGBTQ+ organizations you are affiliated with and any donations you have given.

Member of Equality Florida, and a donation has been given in my name

Affirming Leaders Network member

Please summarize your history of community involvement. This may include city boards, civic associations, non-profits, etc.

Chair, Orange County Local Mitigation Strategy Working Group (current)

Chair, City of Orlando Grants Oversight Committee (current)

Clerk, Quakers of Orlando (current)

Member, Quaker United Nations Committee (current)

Corporation Member, American Friends Service Committee (current)

Central Florida Grant Professionals Association (Former President)

Board Member, American Friends Service Committee
Clerk, Standing Nominating Committee of the American Friends Service Committee
Member, Nobel Peace Prize Nominating Committee, AFSC
Southeastern Yearly Meeting Youth Committee (Former Clerk)
Orange County Disability Advisory Board
Orange County Community Action Board
Privacy Rights Education Project Board of Directors (now known as PROMO Missouri)
Volunteer, Prisoner Visitation and Support
Volunteer, Sexual Assault Response Team

Please summarize the work you have performed in the past five years to further LGBTQ+ rights.

- I have advocated for protections based on sexual orientation at least since 1998, when I served on the board of the Privacy Rights Education Project (now known as PROMO Missouri).
- I worked to enforce fair housing protections including by taking the first complaint nationally of discrimination based on an expanded definition of “sex” to include same sex couples in federally backed mortgages. A lesbian couple was denied an FHA mortgage by Bank of America. As the Fair Lending Manager at Community Legal Services of Mid Florida, I worked with HUD to file an administrative complaint. HUD settled the case to the benefit of the couple.
- As a library manager, I was part of the team that hosted the very popular Drag Queen Story Hour.
- I am part of the Affirming Leaders Network (though I’m unable to attend meetings due to scheduling conflict with work) of welcoming faith communities in Orlando
- I have volunteered with Equality Florida.
- As the City of Orlando’s Grants Manager, I have been slightly involved in seeking grant funding for Pulse Memorial.

Please list other endorsements you have received.

Democratic Municipal Officials
Progressives for Democracy in America - Florida
Candidates for Common Good
Ruth’s List Florida
Representative Dr. Anna V. Eskamani (District 42)
Mayor Angie Gardner (Eatonville)
Supervisor Matthew Grocholske (Orange County Soil & Water)
Supervisor Dr. Jim Moyer (Orange County Soil & Water)
Orange County Tax Collector Scott Randolph
Senator Carlos Guillermo Smith (District 17)

Public Defender Melissa Vickers
State Attorney Monique Worrell

About Your Campaign and LGBTQ Issues

What motivated you to run for this position?

Having served as the City of Orlando's Grants Manager for the past 6-½ years, I understand city government well and have earned the respect of those with whom I'll be working as an elected official. I believe that the most important function of a city council member is to build trust in local government, by being responsive, accessible, effective, fiscally responsible and by serving with the highest level of integrity. As a lifelong advocate and a faith leader, I want to make sure that City Hall works for everyone.

Orlando has set ambitious climate goals, but is falling behind in realizing these goals when it comes to transportation because electric vehicles have been prioritized over public transit. We have an opportunity to make land use decisions that create more walkable, bikeable and transit-friendly communities by identifying dedicated sources of funding for public transit that allow us to expand bus coverage and SunRail service. As a bus rider, I understand how public transit needs to be improved so it is not just the system of last resort, but a viable option for more people.

Housing prices have increased markedly in Orlando, leading to a significant increase in homelessness and an affordability crisis for renters. I will bring creative solutions to tackle this challenge, including [land recycling](#), reducing or eliminating minimum parking requirements, and expanding transit oriented development. I will bring new processes that will help combat NIMBYism including using Citizens Assemblies and creating a "Homeless City Council" to lift up the voices of people experiencing homelessness.

What does being an ally or advocate for the LGBTQ+ community mean to you?

As an open member of the LGBTQ+ community here in Orlando, I know that it's critical to be honest and transparent about my identity - to show that in our City, there are opportunities for all, regardless of who you love. Being an advocate also means ensuring that my office is a place where every constituent feels welcome to show up as themselves fully - respecting names and pronouns, ensuring accessibility in bathrooms and treating everyone with respect.

Have you attended an LGBTQ+ Pride Month celebration or Orlando's Come Out With Pride?

Yes

No

Have you attended or supported a drag show or drag performance in our community?

Yes

No

How would you ensure that your office acknowledges and celebrates the LGBTQ+ community?

I will continue to champion gender-inclusive spaces at the City of Orlando. I will work to ensure that the City of Orlando continues its long-running record of having a perfect 100 score on the Municipal Equality Index. As a City Commissioner, I will vote to recognize Pride Month and to allocate funding for inclusive and affirming city programming.

Will you ensure that you and your staff receive competency training on the LGBTQ+ community, emphasizing unconscious bias?

Yes

No

Would you condemn instances of hate speech in your organization and the community at large?

Yes

Legislation from Tallahassee has caused a sharp increase in discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ+ community in Orange County. How would you go about reducing discrimination in your District or local community?

The City of Orlando (still) prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and I will work to educate residents on their rights and encourage them to file complaints and seek redress for discrimination they have endured. I have worked closely with the Office of Human Relations at the City of Orlando, and I will continue to advocate for their important role in city government.

There is a lack of knowledge when it comes to the transgender community. Sometimes, the services offered in public offices are often unfamiliar with the needs of the transgender community. What actions would you take to ensure that the services your office provides will be cognizant of the needs of the transgender community?

As the clerk of Quakers of Orlando, an affirming congregation in District 3, I have worked to educate myself on the trans community, since it represents a significant part of our congregation. As a Commissioner, I would seek guidance from trans leadership in the Orlando community to ensure that the services my office offers meet the needs of all of our community members, including transgender, nonbinary, gender fluid and other queer folk. I will also ensure that my team and I are available in spaces where elected leadership has often not been present - drag shows, LGBTQ-led community events, protest spaces, etc.

During a town hall in your District, a constituent describes being gay or transgender disparagingly. How would you constructively respond in this situation?

Often, I find that it's helpful to repeat what someone says but insert a positive word for the disparaging word that has been said, and then move on. Repeating someone is a way of indicating to them that you are listening, and by replacing the disparaging word with a positive one, it is also a gentle way of correcting someone without setting up a conflict situation.

How would you respond to a person intentionally misgendering a transgender or non-binary person?

As a Commissioner, as a community leader, and as a Quaker, I think it's our responsibility to assume the best intent of the people around us. I would gently correct the person actively misgendering once or twice. How I proceeded past this might depend on whether the person being misgendered was part of our conversation or not. If so, I might help ease that person out of the conversation if they seemed uncomfortable or upset. If not, I might share a story of how I was able to suddenly change my perspective on pronouns: I was drafting changes to the city's Grants Policies and Procedures, which referred to a number of positions, like the Grants Manager. When I initially started making changes, I was using "she/he" to refer to the Grants Manager, and it sounded unwieldy and awkward. At some point, I changed the pronoun to "they" and realized how much better it flowed. As someone who has been a stickler for grammar, it was initially difficult for me to get used to referring to one person as "they" until this "Aha!" moment. I might listen for a while to the person's perspective and also relate it to how it's important to call people by their preferred name, and how sometimes when people have pronounced my name incorrectly for years—despite being corrected—it feels to me like they don't really care enough to learn my name.

Orange County continues to embrace urban sprawl despite a plethora of data that links urban sprawl to severe strains on our housing, employment, healthcare, and public transit systems (to name a few). What are your thoughts on Orange County's growth?

I appreciate that Orange County continues to be seen as a city of opportunity for individuals and businesses alike, but I believe that this growth should be pursued responsibly. I support efforts to change our state law to allow local governments to invest tourist development dollars into transportation, expanding public transit to support higher density development in the urban core, making it more walkable, bikeable and transit friendly, while maintaining our natural areas. As a Lynx bus rider, I am passionate about increasing investment in public transit.

To expand upon the prior statement, what could Orange County do regarding development that would better serve the communities in your District?

Orange County can and should prioritize public transit as a key component of any and all growth plans. We need to expand the number of Lynx routes, expand the frequency of service and make the system more appealing. We need to expand SunRail's hours and expand to the airport and up the 441 corridor. We need to prioritize transit-oriented development by reducing parking minimums which can create more affordable housing. Safe and accessible bus and train stops are critical for neighborhood development and for making the jobs that come with this kind of continued expansion available to those in need of employment.

Elected Office Position Selection

Upon answering below, you will be presented with a unique set of questions related to the position in question.

Please choose the position you are running for.

Orange County Sheriff
Orange County Supervisor of Elections
Orange County Tax Collector
Orange County Property Appraiser Questions
Orange County Clerk of Courts & Comptroller
City of Orlando Commissioner
Orange County Commissioner
Orange County School Board
Orange County Soil & Water
Orange County State Attorney
Orange County Circuit Court Judge
State House
State Senate

City of Orlando Commissioner Questions

What steps will you take to increase your office's visibility with the LGBTQ+ community, including encouraging voting participation?

I will attend events sponsored by the LGBTQ+ community. I will send out information to constituents about the importance of registering to vote, registering for vote by mail ballots and by exercising one's civil responsibility to vote.

As a City of Orlando Commissioner, how would you support creating an LGBTQ+ Advisory Board that would directly link the City of Orlando and the LGBTQ+ community?

I am open to the concept if LGBTQ+ community members and organizations feel that this would be helpful and not take energy away from established LGBTQ+ and civil rights organizations.

According to research, 40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ+ (Source True Colors United). What immediate actions would you take as a City of Orlando Commissioner to reduce and prevent homelessness amongst LGBTQ+ youth?

I was part of a multi-departmental team at City of Orlando that studied the issue of youth homelessness over a period of 10 months, using principles of Human Centered Design. One of the concepts that came out of the initiative was the idea for a young adult transitional housing community called College of Life. The research we conducted during those 10 months also helped HSN land the Youth Demonstration Homeless Prevention grant, which has funded the HSN Brighter Days Initiative. I would meet with Zebra Coalition and the Brighter Days Initiative team to discuss prevention and services for the populations they serve. As commissioner, I would be interested in implementing the College of Life concept either in downtown Orlando or on the Valencia campus.

Where do you believe the focus should be for Orlando in preparing for and preventing the damaging effects of climate change?

The City of Orlando has ambitious climate goals, but we are not on track to meet them currently, especially in the area of transportation, which comprises 40% of our GHG emissions. By prioritizing public transit and safe streets for pedestrians and bikers, I will help get us back on track to reduce emissions in an equitable manner.

As the climate crisis worsens, Orlando will need to improve climate adaptation planning to make our community more resilient to natural disasters.

Some ways I will address this challenge:

- I will prioritize nature-based solutions to climate change. (As Grants Manager, I secured a \$500,000 planning grant which will identify NBS projects). As commissioner, I will work to ensure these projects get funded and implemented since most of our mitigation efforts are centered around increasing stormwater infrastructure, which uses a great deal of embodied carbon by adding more concrete. Adding constructed wetlands, stormwater parks, tree canopy, rainwater harvesting, rain gardens and permeable pavement can help reduce the overall load to our grey stormwater infrastructure.
- I will work to create and coordinate community-based resilience hubs that work with our emergency operations to ensure that neighborhoods have ways to feed people in natural disasters, to power medical equipment and communications equipment, and to ensure public safety.
- I will work on planning for an influx of climate migrants by identifying places they can be sheltered and housed.

A 2021 study found that the Orlando metropolitan area has the 8th highest wage gap in the nation. The estimated hourly wage is \$12.94, but the wage required to afford a one-bedroom apartment in Orlando before the COVID-19 Pandemic is \$23.60. What

actions would you take as City of Orlando Commissioner to decrease this wage gap and promote affordable living in Orlando?

One opportunity that the City Council has to decrease the wage gap is to follow in the lead of Miami-Dade and look into a wage theft ordinance. The goal of this would be to help prevent or fully eliminate the underpayment or nonpayment of wages earned by Floridians. Additionally, I would increase the number of affordable housing units by reducing parking minimum requirements; look into options for land recycling (restoring Brownfields), and expand public-private partnerships for financing Accessory Dwelling Units.

As a City of Orlando Commissioner, what actions would you take to help struggling parent(s) and make Orange County an affordable place for families?

We need more housing of all types within the urban core and transit-oriented development to increase housing affordability. By investing in public transit, we can help families reduce their second largest expense every month—transportation. By expanding the energy burden pilot that I helped obtain grant funding for, we can also help decrease utility costs for struggling families. Right now, funding for city-sponsored afterschool programs is in jeopardy, with the cutting of federal programs like the 21st Century Community Learning Centers under the Trump administration. I will look for replacement funding for these critical programs and lobby elected leadership in DC to restore or maintain funding for afterschool programs.

Despite mental illness among adults and children being at an all-time high, Florida ranks next to last on per capita spending on mental health programs. What are your immediate and long-term plans for addressing this epidemic in Orange County?

I support sensible and compassionate responses to individuals in a mental health crisis, including the expansion of the City of Orlando program to send trained intervention specialists to emergency calls when appropriate, as opposed to a universal armed police officer response. Currently, OPD can only respond to about 1600 of the annual 20,000 mental health-related service calls. I worked with people who had severe and persistent mental illnesses in my 20s. I also grew up in a family that was torn apart by mental illness. Although mental health treatment is under the county's jurisdiction, there are ways that the City can help address the epidemic. For our children and teens, creating more opportunities to spend time in nature and to form strong connections is vital. I would continue to invest in our Sustainability Adventures Program and look at the feasibility of starting a Nature School at Bill Frederick Park. As a community, providing opportunities for social interaction through public transit, creative placemaking, investing in parks and recreation, will all help make us healthier.

The Florida Republican Party is passing legislation that strips away LGBTQ+ rights, starting with our children. These shamelessly discriminatory bills force LGBTQ+ families

to reconsider their future in Florida. What would you tell the parents of LGBTQ+ children in your District who feel they must leave Florida to protect their children?

I will always support a parent in a responsible decision they make to keep their family safe, as much as it breaks my heart that a parent may not feel they are able to raise their children in the same community where I raised my own kids.

The Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth Mental Health found that 45% of LGBTQ+ students seriously considered suicide, and 1-in-5 LGBTQ+ attempted it. How would you lead on this issue and work to decrease these statistics during your term in office?

By providing safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth (see above answer to youth homelessness), supporting mentorship programs and programs that build community and connection among youth like the Sustainability Adventures Program, MBK and Orlando Kidz Zones.

What are the top environmental concerns you are seeing in your District, and what solutions do you plan to bring forward if you were elected?

As a public transit user, one especially prominent environmental concern is the impact of negative weather conditions (heat, storms, etc) on access to transit. Our City's stations and stops are not optimized for inclement weather, which will continue to worsen as climate change rampages unchecked. For additional information, please see my response to Question 29. There are also concerns about water quality in Lake Orlando and the Chain of Lakes. The City of Orlando needs to continue to fund emergency generators for all lift stations to prevent sewage spills. I will also work to ensure that the City of Orlando continues to apply for grants to convert septic systems to public sewer, like the two grants I have won in this area.

Additional Questions

Is there anything else you want us to know about why the Rainbow Democrats should support your candidacy?

While my work as a civil rights professional for over a decade demonstrates my commitment to and success in working to advance equality, my faith community is a key part of who I am. I serve as the clerk of Quakers of Orlando. We are an open and affirming faith community in downtown Orlando. Quakers have played a key role in gay liberation, establishing the first gay social service organization in the US and issuing the first religious statements in favor of the dignity and rights of LGBTQ+ people. I'm proud of being part of a tradition that values that of God/ the light/ the divine in every person and that has been on the front lines of making sure that we all enjoy equal rights and can have the opportunity to thrive as our authentic selves.