



**Candidate Questionnaire - County Commissioner
August 2022 Primary Election**

Your name: Michelle McLeod, MBA
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Your phone number: 239-216-0403
Your age: 58
Today's date: 5/16/2022

What year did you move to Southwest Florida, and where were you living previously?

I have been in Southwest Florida since the year I was born in 1963.

What is your educational background and work experience?

Education:

- Master of Business Administration with a concentration in Finance from Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU)
- Bachelor of Arts from Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana
- Graduate of Fort Myers High School

Business Experience:

- 23 years in hotel management. My most recent job in the industry was Director of Sales at the Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club
- 6 years in banking. My most recent job in banking was Vice President of First Citizens Bank
- 4 years in public office as a Naples City Council member

Describe a time in the last ten years when you led an effort to bring about change in our community. Was your effort a success? Why or why not?

On the Naples City Council, I helped lead the efforts of three significant landmark projects:

1. Design and construction of Baker Park
2. Design and reconstruction of the Naples City Dock
3. Design and construction of the City's Emergency Operations Center

All three of these projects were started and completed within my four-year term, all under budget. To accomplish not one but three landmark projects under 4 years and under budget in government is a tremendous feat. This is a testament to my leadership

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skills in working well on a board to reach consensus to accomplish top community priorities.

In addition to these landmark projects, while on the Naples City Council, I personally introduced an organic, all-natural fertilizer in 2018 which has since been used in parks and medians in the city ever since.

I am also helping to bring about change in our community with regards to mental health.

Unfortunately, mental illness and substance use disorders affect us all in one way or another whether it is in caring for a loved one struggling with these illnesses or it is our own struggles with these illnesses.

In 2018, Collier County residents voted on the 1 cent sales surtax intended to raise \$490 million in 7 years and thankfully a portion of these funds have been dedicated to address mental health concerns in our county.

That same year the surtax was passed, a Collier County Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders Ad Hoc committee was formed, of which I was a part of. In that committee, we created the first-ever five-year strategic plan to address these life-threatening illnesses. In the strategic plan we identified six priorities, the first utilizing \$25 million of the tax revenue to construct a centralized receiving center for those in our community who are in a mental health crisis.

We are well on our way to achieving this goal as well as making great strides with the other five priorities.

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Describe a recent County Commission decision with which you disagreed. Why did you disagree and what should have been done differently?

I disagree with excessive spending on projects like the Paradise Coast Sports Complex which is currently \$67 million dollars over budget. Projects should remain in the established budget just like the three landmark projects I oversaw while on the Naples City Council.

As seen with my efforts with Baker Park, I support community parks and outdoor green spaces. In fact, during my tenure on the Tourism Development Council, I voted to increase the bed tax to fund the sports complex. However, this overspending is a failure to properly manage tax dollars. As a county commissioner, I will bring my budget and program management skills to the table to avoid these things from happening in the future.

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I disagree with subsidizing companies that bring low wage jobs to our area as was seen when the county approved giving \$15 million to the Great Wolf Lodge.

As a former hotelier and proponent of free enterprise, I encourage the Great Wolf Lodge to come to Collier County but not at the expense of tax dollars.

This subsidy not only creates a competitive disadvantage to other hotels in the county, but it also exacerbates our affordable housing problems. If we are to incentivize companies to come to Collier County, we want to attract companies like Arthrex which brings diversity to the community, high wage jobs, and direct benefits for our community residents.

Unfortunately, Collier County does not have a well-defined economic plan. As a county commissioner, I will lead the charge to developing an economic plan that enriches our community with diversity and financial sustainability.

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I disagree with reallocating Conservation Collier dollars intended for the maintenance of conservation lands. Although there is \$33 million in reserves for this program, using these dollars to buy more land at today's prices will deplete these funds quickly. This approach will drain the funds necessary to maintain the taxpayer purchased lands and goes against the Conservation Collier's mission:

“To acquire, preserve, restore and maintain vital and significant threatened natural lands, forest, upland and wetland communities located in Collier County, for the benefit of present and future generations.”

As a county commissioner, I will ensure these taxpayer dollars are used for their intended purposes.

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What is your top priority in terms of Collier County's environment? What county government solutions do you propose to address it?

There are many priorities necessary to adequately address Collier County's environmental issues. One of these top priorities is stormwater management. As a county commissioner, I plan to help lead the progression of the Belle Mead project.

For years, the county has had access to \$18 million from the BP oil spill to advance this project. However due to poor planning, this project has been delayed for years. This is particularly disappointing given the Belle Meade project is an important water quality improvement project that redirects fresh water coming from the Golden Gate Canals away from the Gordon River and Naples Bay waterways where fresh water dilutes the salinity levels needed for the health of its marine life. Instead, the fresh water is

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redirected to the much-needed areas of the Ten Thousand Islands and to the dying mangroves in the Everglades.

The Belle Meade project is expected to cost \$35 million total, of which funding can come from the BP oil spill settlement, DEP grants, and the Gulf of Mexico Consortium Fund. As a county commissioner, I will help advance these efforts to improve the health of such environmentally sensitive areas.

What is your top priority in terms of Collier County's infrastructure? What county government solutions do you propose to address it?

I have been walking door-to-door across District 4's diverse communities almost every weekend for the last 12 months. Most of the concerns I have heard from residents at their front doorstep are related to growth, traffic, and stormwater. Each of these concerns needs to be prioritized, properly addressed, and managed by county government. In terms of ranking these priorities, I believe water supply, treatment, storage, and flood prevention are the most pressing issues facing our community.

My recommendations to address our water infrastructure needs are the following measures:

- Modify the Land Development Code in the Golden Gate Estates to hold more water on land. This would cause the water to be filtered and go into aquifers instead of going unfiltered through swales, canals and eventually to our waterways
- Advance and fund septic-to-sewer conversion projects
- Advance and fund stormwater improvement projects
- Lobby the state for water quality and septic conversion grants
- Advance the Belle Mead project intended to significantly improve the health of the Gordon River, Naples Bay, and Rookery Bay

As a county commissioner, these are the measures I would spearhead to address our county's water infrastructure needs.

What is your top priority in terms of the growth and development of eastern Collier County? What county government solutions do you propose to address it?

My top priority for eastern Collier County is to support smart growth policies. Over 75% of Collier County is protected as conservation lands, in perpetuity. That means less than 25% of Collier County will be developed based on property rights. And we are about halfway there now. Our current population is reaching 400,000 people and the expected built out population for Collier County is projected to be between 800,000 to 1 million people expected to be reached in the years 2060 to 2080. That means that Collier County is expected to be built out in the next forty to sixty years. Therefore, it is critically important that we carefully manage the balance of what is to be developed in the county to avoid further urban sprawl and negative impacts to the environment.

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I like what Eric Eikenberg, CEO of the Everglades Foundation says, “unlike development practices of 100 years ago, development today can happen in an environmentally sensitive way. Development and the environment can coexist.”

As county commissioner, I will support smart growth policies that manage development in a way that harmoniously coexists and is sensitive to the environment.

What is your top priority in terms of redevelopment in coastal Collier County? What county government solutions do you propose to address it?

In looking at Collier County’s coastal areas as a whole, I would say the biggest opportunity is in its future redevelopment. If properly managed, this could be the most exciting moment of its history.

As a native of Southwest Florida, I have seen the evolution of these areas over the decades. Additionally, as a former Naples City Council member, I have extensive experience of taking a community and transforming it into one of the most desirable places to enjoy life.

While on the Naples City Council, I supported policies that helped move Naples from 73rd in the nation the year before I began my term on council to Gallup’s #1 Healthiest and Happiest community. Naples maintained this designation all four years I was on council.

One of the biggest reasons I believe we were seen as the healthiest and happiest community was due to the community design components my council and I helped to advance.

These are the same successful concepts I would focus on in addressing the further redevelopment of our coastal areas. These design components would include:

- Careful consideration of critical metrics including carrying capacity, growth projections, traffic flows, density, and intensity levels before approving projects
- Careful consideration of the right mix of land use to provide residents the opportunity to conveniently walk to places like grocery stores, community parks, neighborhood coffee shops and restaurants
- Advancement of an active and healthy lifestyle for all residents through the “complete streets” model that provides safe access for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists in addition to incorporating streetscapes with sidewalk and bike path connectivity, shade trees, seating, and other sociability elements
- Protection and preservation of our most valuable resources – our waterways and our beaches - through fast tracking stormwater and septic-to-sewer projects

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- Recognition of the individuality of each neighborhood while comprehensively considering how each neighborhood contributes to the whole

These types of concepts are important to growing a strong, sustainable, happy, and healthy community. I have the background, knowledge, and experience to set us on a course that will serve us well in the redevelopment of our coastal areas and as a county commissioner, I will help lead these efforts.

What is your top priority in terms of affordable housing in Collier County? What county government solutions do you propose to address it?

Housing needs in our county range from our homeless population to low-income families, seniors, veterans and service workers. I serve on three different boards addressing these needs - the Women's Foundation, the Collier Coalition for Health Minds, and the Collier County Community Land Trust. We are successfully addressing these needs from philanthropic means to public / private partnerships to lobbying for changes to land development codes.

I am happy to report that through the Land Trust Board that I serve on, there were groundbreaking events this past March for two senior affordable housing communities at Hacienda Lakes (just past 951) and a workforce housing community on Santa Barbara Boulevard.

I am also happy to report that through the Women's Foundation, using philanthropic funds, we were able to house 13 senior women who were living in their cars last year.

Also, through the Coalition for Health Minds, we are successfully addressing housing needs by:

- Educating the community of these needs through our outreach presentations
- Advocating the county commissioners for assistance on our housing priorities laid out in our five-year strategic plan.
- Proving humanitarian housing solutions in collaboration with our problem-solving courts

As a county commissioner, I will continue to make housing solutions a top priority to address all our housing needs, now and into the future.

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