

## Preserve Flagler Beach and Bulow Creek (PFFBC) - Candidate Questions

### Corinne Hermle, Democratic Candidate for Flagler County Commission, District 1

#### 1. Share your accomplishments or experiences that indicate your commitment to advancing a pro-environment agenda. These experiences may be professional or personal.

Currently employed as the Water Management District liaison for the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (FDACS), Office of Agricultural Water Policy (OAWP), addressing water quality and water conservation issues for the agricultural industry.

Previously I worked for the Florida Forest Service's Land Planning & Acquisition section, which developed land management plans for Florida's state forests, and land acquisitions as part of Florida Forever and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program. I saw the importance and myriad benefits of land conservation.

I was the FDACS representative for 1000 Friends of Florida's [Florida 2070 and Water 2070](#) reports. I urge everyone to take a look at those two reports, because they are a preview of Florida's possible future if nothing changes.

#### 2. The following is a hypothetical scenario:

##### a. The BOCC is considering a proposal to develop a vacant parcel of forested land.

##### i. How would you weigh environmental concerns versus the developer's?

By asking the following questions:

What is the location of the parcel? Does it abut or is it near existing conserved lands? Is it part of a wildlife corridor? Are there significant environmental resources on the property, such as confirmed endangered species on the property, is the property part of a significant water recharge area, etc.

Is a zoning change needed to develop the property? Has the property already been identified in a local comprehensive plan, and zoned for development, e.g. is the zoning request consistent with the comprehensive plan? Is the developer just requesting a zoning change or are they also requesting an amendment to the comprehensive plan? (As an aside, I don't like piecemeal amendments. I believe it weakens the original document and fragments the original growth plan.) How will the rezoning request impact adjacent areas and neighborhoods? Would a rezoning be consistent with the make up of the area or not? Is there unutilized land elsewhere already zoned for development?

What governmental infrastructure is already located in the area? Is there minimal infrastructure located near the parcel, but existing infrastructure and unutilized land is available elsewhere?

##### ii. Do you assume that all development is beneficial in terms of increased tax revenue?

No. Quality of life impacts should be considered as well. We must to balance the short term benefit of additional tax revenue against the long term costs of infrastructure improvements.

##### iii. Do you place a value on preserving open undeveloped land?

Yes. Open undeveloped land has a myriad of benefits, ranging from habitat for species, water recharge, and even the psychological benefits of 'green space'.

##### iv. How do you decide which project to approve? Why?

I would want to know if the project currently allowable under the current comprehensive plan. Does the parcel currently zoned for the proposed usage or is an amendment needed? Is the proposed land usage/zoning amendment align with existing neighborhoods that abut the proposed development, or does it markedly stray? (Again, I want to stress my objection to piecemeal plan amendments and zoning amendments.)

I would want to know what the existing and local infrastructure (roads, sewer, water, etc) looks like, ie. can it handle the proposed development? If no, can the existing infrastructure be easily upgraded/expanded to meet the anticipated needs? How is the developer proposing to assist with those infrastructure improvements?

Are there natural resources in the proposed area that could be negatively impacted by the proposed development? Is the developer proposing ways to offset that impact, and are the proposed offsets commensurate to what would be lost due to development?

#### 3. How would do the following issues factor into your decisions to approve?

##### I. Impact of traffic based on current density in area.

Increased badly managed traffic negatively impacts quality of life for existing residents. I'd need to know if there were plans in place to adequately address increased traffic due to additional development, and what steps can the developer themselves take to help address increased traffic patterns.

##### II. Importance of maintaining neighborhood continuity: do high rises belong next to large single-family homes on large parcels?

It all depends on the location. Ideally, high rises would not be allowed to be developed next to single-family homes on large parcels due to the possible impact on existing home values and quality of life of that neighborhood.

However, sustainable development would have us look at the proposed location and its proximity to urban areas, existing infrastructure, and how environmentally sensitive the lands are. Compact development (going up, and not sprawling out) on suitable, non-environmentally sensitive lands, would allow for lands elsewhere to not be developed in order to reach the same capacity. But I want to stress that again - more intensive development, as is usually seen with compact development, needs to occur on suitable lands, ideally with existing infrastructure that hand handle the increased demands put upon it.

**III. Do you support the County's current FLUM and Comprehensive Use Plan? Please explain your position.**

I believe improvements could be made to the current plan. At a minimum, I wish the plan would be updated on a more frequent schedule. Since the plan is outdated, it seems to make it more palatable for administrations to approve plan amendments and zoning changes without adequately factoring in how those amendments and changes may impact the overall plan as a whole. I would also like to see more elements of sustainable development included in the plan(s).

**IV. Do you support restoration of the county's full impact fees?**

Yes

**4. Do you think the County should undergo a current analysis of available water supplies and undertake a projection of future water needs?**

No, because such a study was already undertaken as part of St. Johns River Water Management District's [North Florida Regional Water Supply Plan](#). The 2017 water supply plan covers a 20-year planning period, and is developed from years of data, research and intensive groundwater and surface water modeling efforts. This plan already shows groundwater alone will not be enough to meet the region's growing demands over the next 20 year planning period, and that Flagler County's public supply wells are already showing increasing chlorides (in other words, the wells are becoming more brackish over time).

This plan is statutorily scheduled to be updated every five years; both the St. Johns River Water Management District and the Suwannee River Water Management District are beginning their data analysis and modeling efforts as part of that five-year update.

If the County underwent its own analysis, it would have to heavily rely on Water Management District data and utilize the District's water models, which would be a duplication of effort already completed by the District.

**5. How do you approach development in an area designated as a high coastal flood zone? Most of eastern Flagler County falls into this category.**

Development in high coastal flood areas has a high risk of incurring flood and storm damage, which is costly to homeowners and taxpayers. Depending on the flood designation and anticipated severity of damage, it may be fiscally prudent to limit development for some areas. However property rights need to be respected.

If the land is currently zoned for development and is so noted in the comprehensive plan, there are limited options available to halt development in specifically targeted areas. The county/local governing body can choose to purchase the undeveloped parcels and put conservation easements on them so they can never be developed. The county/local governing body could opt to waive a portion of impact fees if the developer agrees to not develop a predetermined portion of the property. The county/local governing body can propose local technical amendment(s) to the Florida Building Code, putting in place stricter building codes with the goal of strengthening structures to better withstand storms and flood conditions. (However such technical amendment(s) would need to be strongly backed up by data in order to be approved by the state.) Additionally all proposed regulations need to weigh whether they will be unduly burdensome, significantly increasing the odds of a legal challenge, with the potential to be overturned and not allowed.

**6. How do you protect County assets and homes threatened by rising sea levels? Do you favor requiring building codes to put critical systems on higher floors? And what about existing buildings? Anything else you think the city should be doing about rising seas?**

As I stated above, it is well within a local government's authority to propose more stringent building codes for coastal areas. However, this will only impact new development or buildings undergoing repair (in some instances). Existing buildings are typically 'grandfathered in' to older building code requirements, and local governments are somewhat limited in available options to bring those existing buildings up to current, more restrictive, building codes. The most commonly used option for local governments are local grants or funds to assist owners of existing buildings to try and 'harden' the building to withstand storms and storm surge better. Unfortunately, as can be seen from [Hurricane Michael in Mexico Beach](#), the upgrades needed may be too cost prohibitive for existing buildings to implement. Fort Lauderdale and Miami are [currently experiencing](#) the effects of sea level rise on their existing wastewater/stormwater infrastructure. Local governments should be planning or actively taking steps to adapt their existing infrastructure to handle the impacts from saltwater intrusion, and would need to plan to switch from relying on gravity to move water and wastewater to more active pumping.

**Please rank from 1-5 (1 being the highest level) of the following topics and explain your reasoning. If applicable, add you recent personal and professional activity in relationship to them.**

Resiliency, Sustainable Development and purchasing of Environmentally Sensitive Lands all tend to go together in my opinion. All three are needed in some capacity in order to ensure the success of the others.

- **Resiliency (Roads, buildings, water supply, etc)**  
This is incredibly important because this will be a long-term impact that will increase in severity over time. It needs to be planned for now, so the costs can be broken out over time.
- **Sustainable Development**  
Sustainable development focuses on what can the region and land handle, and that development patterns can be modified and altered in order to increase resiliency to climate impacts, while also improving quality of life for local citizens.
- **Increased Funding for Environmental-Sensitive Land Acquisition**  
Acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands is necessary in order to preserve open spaces, increase resiliency by having undeveloped areas that can be utilized for stormwater infiltration, and maintain quality of life for local citizens. That acquisition should be in the form of outright purchasing of the property or by buying conservation easements.
- **Traffic Management**  
Ideally, funds should have already been set aside and plans put in place to address increased traffic and road usage due to increased development in the county. However, this does not appear to have occurred, and traffic management is already a common complaint amongst Flagler County citizens. Traffic problems impact quality of life, and at the extreme, can even constrain evacuation plans.
- **Impact on school capacity**  
Ideally, while working on sustainable development plans, school capacity would be a key factor in those plans. From the International Institute for Sustainable Development: [“sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”](#)