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Be an informed voter on candidates, ballot measures

By Lynn Frazier Guest columnist

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As a citizen, it is both a privilege and an obligation to vote. The League of Women Voters strives to assist citizens in becoming informed voters.

Join us Sunday, Oct. 4 for a virtual candidate forum. Candidates for Alachua County Commission districts 1 and 3, Florida House District 20 and U.S. House District 3 have been invited to participate.

The forum will be live-streamed at <http://bit.ly/alachuacountycandidateforum>. The forum also will be available for post-event viewing, on both the Alachua County League's Facebook page and YouTube channel.

There is a lot on this year's ballot. The Florida League of Women Voters reviews and makes recommendations on the six constitutional amendments on the ballot in a nonpartisan voter guide: <http://bit.ly/FloridaLeaguevoterguide2020>

The Alachua County League has developed a local voter guide with information on judges and county and city ballot questions: <http://bit.ly/AlachuaCountyLeaguevoterguide2020>

The following is our pro/con review of the ballot questions:

Renewal of the Existing One Mill Ad Valorem Tax for School District Operating Expenses

PRO:

- The property tax revenue would yield nearly \$17 million a year. This could offset anticipated losses of up to \$16 million in funding due to the impact of COVID-19.
- Independent citizen committee ensures accountability for how revenues are spent.
- Funding supports school nurses; music, art and drama programs; school library programs, school counseling programs; band and chorus programs; academic magnets; career and technical programs; and updated classroom technology.

CON:

- Public school financing should not rely only on property tax revenues.
- Funding education is the state's responsibility, as clearly stated in the Florida Constitution. Counties should not have to fund public school education.

NOTE: The League supports the existing One Mill tax because we believe that each school district should have the authority to tax itself to supplement the state program.

County Charter Amendment Establishing County Growth Management Area

PRO:

- Provides for consistent comprehensive planning and land development regulations across the county (within the Growth Management Area).
- Provides for growth areas (unincorporated areas) surrounding existing municipalities that can be annexed and not subject to the GMA.
- Allows for the County Commission to remove property from the GMA by a supermajority vote.

CON:

- Takes away municipal control over land development in the GMA.
- Potential loss of future tax base for municipalities.

Relationship Between County and Municipal Ordinances for Protection of Certain Natural Resources

PRO:

- Provides the highest protection for key natural resources and special ecosystems.
- Provides uniform environmental protection for all habitats in Alachua County.

CON:

- Forbids smaller municipalities within Alachua County from adopting less, but not more, stringent standards than the county.

Identification and Elimination of Racial and Gender Bias in Alachua County Policies

PRO:

- Requires county commissioners to annually review policies for racial and gender bias.

- Could help eliminate systematic racial and gender bias not previously addressed.

CON:

- No implementation or standards specified.

County Charter Amendment Establishing Alachua County Affordable Housing Trust Fund

PRO:

- Creates a mechanism for local funding of affordable housing.
- Could increase the supply of affordable housing if funding is directed toward affordable housing.
- Does not create or authorize any new taxes or fees.

CON:

- Would require time and costs for administrative overhead.
- External costs for audits may be incurred.
- No significant actions toward affordable housing may result unless the commission itself acts by funding the trust fund following passage.

County Charter Amendment Concerning Candidate Treasurer Report Requirements

PRO:

- Modernizes the Alachua County campaign finance disclosure process (this change was suggested by the supervisor of elections).
- Saves time for candidates.
- Saves paper and natural resources.
- Paper copies can be generated as required.

CON:

- None

County Charter Cleanup Amendment Removing Unconstitutional Provisions

PRO:

- Removes unconstitutional provisions and clutter from existing County Charter.

CON:

- None

**City of Gainesville Charter Amendment Changing the Name of the Charter Officer
“Clerk of The Commission” to “City Clerk”**

PRO:

- More accurately represents the professional title of municipal clerk.

CON:

- None

**City of Gainesville Charter Amendment Eliminating Restrictions on Construction of
Paved Surfaces on City-Owned Land**

PRO:

- Would allow the city to pave a trail and provide Americans with Disabilities Act access to natural areas in the Hogtown Creek watershed.
- Would increase environmental maintenance.
- Would increase public access to parks within the watershed area.

CON:

- Impervious paved surfaces could increase stormwater runoff.

**City of Gainesville Charter Amendment Limiting Commission Authority to Dispose of
Certain Utility Systems**

PRO:

- Protects Gainesville Regional Utilities’ natural gas, wastewater and telecommunications services from being sold without a majority vote of Gainesville citizens.

CON:

- None

City of Gainesville Charter Amendment Creating a Preamble to the Charter

PRO:

- Provides a philosophical context for city government by which the citizens and the city commission can evaluate specific policies.

CON:

- None

— *Lynn Frazier is president of the Alachua County League of Women Voters.*