

Polk County Commission 2026

Candidate Questionnaire — Full Responses

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All 2026 Polk County Commission candidates were asked the same questions. Responses are presented as submitted, with minor punctuation edits only. Candidates are grouped by district, and then are listed in alphabetical order. We have also included their campaign website or email. Candidates without a response are identified.

The District 2 race is decided in the August 18 primary. Because both candidates are Republicans and no opposing party or write-in candidate qualified, that contest is open to every registered Polk County voter regardless of party affiliation. The District 4 race is decided in the November 3 general election. Commissioners must live in the district they represent but are elected countywide.

To navigate directly to responses for a candidate by name, please select below.

[Kelly Quinn, District 2](#)

[Omar Arroyo, District 4](#)

[Rick Wilson, District 2](#)

[Elisha Gresham, District 4](#)



District 2

Kelly Quinn — District 2 Candidate

<https://www.kellyforpolk.com/>

1. Why are you running for Polk County Commission, and what specific experience qualifies you for the role?

I am running because Polk County is changing faster than our planning, infrastructure, and water resources can responsibly support. I entered this race when I saw that an incumbent would otherwise go unchallenged, despite major decisions affecting residents for generations.

I am a third-generation Polk resident, small-business owner, artist, and conservation communicator. For more than a decade, I have translated complex scientific, planning, and environmental information into work the public can understand. Over the past year, I have participated extensively in Polk's Comprehensive Plan process, researched county budgets and infrastructure projects, drafted policy proposals, and spoken before local governments. That experience has taught me how to read technical documents, ask difficult questions, bring people together, and turn community concerns into practical policy. I am not a career politician; I am a prepared, independent advocate for the people who live here.

2. Which cities and communities fall within your district, and how are you currently involved in those communities outside of your campaign?

District 2 covers much of southern and southeastern Polk, including Lake Wales, Fort Meade, Frostproof, portions of Bartow, and rural communities such as Babson Park, Homeland, Highland Park, Crooked Lake Park, Bradley Junction, and the Lake Pierce area.

My involvement did not begin with this campaign. I have spent years working on conservation, water, and community education throughout Polk. Most recently, I have participated in the county's Comprehensive Plan update; advocated for rural landowners, wildlife corridors, aquifer-recharge areas, and stronger review of high-impact development; researched the Polk Regional Water Cooperative and major road projects; and spoken publicly about animal welfare and government transparency. I also work with residents, local advocates, researchers, and community organizations across the county. My approach is to listen locally, study the record, and help people understand how county decisions affect their homes and communities.

3. What do you see as the single biggest challenge facing Polk County residents right now, and what would you do about it?

The biggest challenge is high-impact growth moving faster than Polk's roads, water supply, fire and EMS capacity, and public services. Residents are paying through congestion, higher utility costs, flooding risks, declining service levels, and the loss of rural land—while too many developments are approved without their full long-term costs or footprints being addressed.

I would require infrastructure and resource capacity to be demonstrated before major approvals, strengthen impact fees so growth pays its fair share where impacts occur, and evaluate projects for their combined effects on water, transportation, emergency services, flooding, and taxpayers. I would also strengthen coordination with municipalities, protect rural and aquifer-recharge lands, and stop subsidizing projects that impose disproportionate costs on residents. The goal is not to stop all growth; it is to ensure development strengthens Polk rather than leaving existing communities to absorb the consequences.

4. Polk County is one of Florida's fastest-growing counties. How would you approach decisions about infrastructure, housing, and managing that growth responsibly?

I would begin with a simple principle: growth should pay for growth, and approvals should follow demonstrated capacity—not promises that taxpayers will fix problems later. Major projects should be evaluated against available water, roads, stormwater systems, fire and EMS coverage, and the cumulative impacts of nearby development.

For housing, I support more infill, redevelopment, mixed-income housing near jobs and future transit, and practical options for workers, seniors, and young families. In rural areas, I would support the "Rural by Design" method that accommodates limited housing while preserving farms, wetlands, wildlife corridors, and community character.

Transportation planning should include safer existing roads and genuine alternatives to endless widening, including commuter rail connecting eastern Polk with the Orlando employment area. I would also pursue stronger interlocal planning so county and city decisions do not shift infrastructure costs across jurisdictional lines. Responsible growth means connecting land use, housing, transportation, water, and public safety before approval.

5. Polk County's water supply is under increasing stress. How would you approach decisions related to the Upper Floridan Aquifer, the Polk Regional Water Cooperative, and large industrial water users such as data centers?

The Upper Floridan Aquifer is a public trust and Polk's primary drinking-water source. PRWC decisions must account for Florida's documented history of injected wastewater migrating upward through Floridan formations—not assume deep disposal is risk-free. Pumping the Lower Floridan also requires independent modeling and continuous monitoring because it can cause drawdown in the Upper Floridan, potentially affecting lakes, wetlands, and private wells.

I would require protections for existing well owners, transparent lifecycle costs, and fair allocation so current residents do not subsidize growth-driven demand. I would also establish a regional Water Stewardship Fund with neighboring counties, municipalities, water-management districts, and state and federal partners to protect aquifer-recharge areas.

Large industrial users, including data centers, should receive no permits or incentives without independently verified water impacts. Any claimed closed-loop cooling system must be proven through design and operation, with blowdown volumes, treatment, testing, reuse, and disposal disclosed and properly managed.

6. Do you support Amendment 3 as written? Does restricting how local governments spend locally collected revenue constitute sound fiscal policy or government overreach?

I do not support Amendment 3 as written. Floridians need meaningful property-tax relief, but this amendment combines that goal with a sweeping state mandate that could destabilize local budgets, shift costs to renters and businesses, increase fees, and force service cuts.

I also oppose Tallahassee constitutionally restricting how locally elected governments may use locally collected revenue. That crosses into government overreach and weakens the ability of communities to respond to their own needs. Lake Wales does not have the same fiscal conditions as Miami, and Haines City does not have the same priorities as Jacksonville.

I support targeted, transparent relief that protects homeowners—especially seniors, young working individuals and families, and residents on fixed incomes—without creating an unfunded mandate. Local governments should be required to justify spending, control waste, and keep taxes reasonable, but voters should hold their own elected officials accountable rather than surrendering local fiscal authority to the state.

7. Is there anything else Polk County voters should know about you before casting their ballot?

My campaign is grassroots because county government should answer to its residents—not the loudest or most connected interests.

I am running for the Polk County we can still choose to become: a place where families have reliable water, growth doesn't overwhelm our communities, rural lands and farms remain part of our future, and residents have a meaningful voice in local government.

As a third-generation Polk resident, I believe we can create opportunity and build the infrastructure we need without sacrificing the character, natural resources, and quality of life that make this county home. We can plan boldly, protect what cannot be replaced, and make decisions with future generations in mind.

This election belongs to everyone. The District 2 race is a universal primary, so every registered Polk County voter—regardless of party affiliation—may vote on August 18. I am asking voters to help choose a more thoughtful, transparent, and hopeful future for Polk County.

Rick Wilson — District 2 Candidate (Incumbent)

<https://www.facebook.com/Rick4Polk>

1. Why are you running for Polk County Commission, and what specific experience qualifies you for the role?

The why is because as a lifelong Polk County resident I love my county and want nothing more than for the citizens and businesses to thrive, to be safe and to love this county as much as I do. I want our citizens to be as proud to call Polk County home as I am.

During my eight years of serving as Polk County Commissioner I have gained immeasurable experience and knowledge in knowing how to get things accomplished. I am also well-versed in the fact that there are rules, regulations and state mandates that often complicate matters. And I know that simply having good intentions doesn't necessarily get the job done. I have, however, been able to cultivate the relationships with legislators and other the leaders that has helped me to accomplish quite a lot. My desire is to continue working to accomplish good things for Polk County.

2. Which cities and communities fall within your district, and how are you currently involved in those communities outside of your campaign?

Bartow (and adjacent Gordon Heights) Mulberry and (adjacent Bradley, Brewster, Chicora), Lake Wales, Dundee, Fort Meade, Frostproof, and Unincorporated small communities in southern Polk County.

I'm a Bartow Rotarian and a Bartow Chamber of Commerce member. I support many of our Youth in the Polk County Youth Fair by personally donating to support their projects.

In Bartow, I hold a well-attended annual "Keep Polk Beautiful" event at my place of business allowing individuals to legally discard old tires. I also attend several of the other clean up events that the program sponsors each year around the county.

My family and I participate in our church's Serve Day and choose the Lake Wales Care Center Thrift Store warehouse to volunteer at.

3. What do you see as the single biggest challenge facing Polk County residents right now, and what would you do about it?

Right now, the biggest challenge to residents' everyday life is the fast pace of growth the last several years and the traffic that many of us find ourselves dealing with as a result. The majority of this growth has most recently come from the municipalities annexation of land and approving homes and development. In fact, approximately 76% of new home permits were issued in the municipalities. However, this growth affects everyone in Polk County as we all travel on the roads. I will certainly continue to approve any and all new road improvements and adaptations that are possible in order to mitigate the traffic problems.

4. Polk County is one of Florida's fastest-growing counties. How would you approach decisions about infrastructure, housing, and managing that growth responsibly?

I will continue to look at each of those areas individually and take into consideration the recommendations of staff as we work to make decisions based on the significance of need at a given time and what can be done in an expedient amount of time and within the county's budget restraints.

5. Polk County's water supply is under increasing stress. How would you approach decisions related to the Upper Floridan Aquifer, the Polk Regional Water Cooperative, and large industrial water users such as data centers?

First of all, I would continue to work closely with our partners, Southwest Florida Water Management District, Department of Environmental Protection, Polk Regional Water Cooperative and all other partners to come to a consensus of which projects are acceptable and beneficial to our county. As far as Data Centers are concerned, Polk County does not currently have a Land Use designation to approve a Data Center. However, should that possibility present itself in the future, I would proceed with an abundance of caution and not vote for approval of a Data Center or any other industrial business that would negatively impact the future water supply for our county.

6. Do you support Amendment 3 as written? Does restricting how local governments spend locally collected revenue constitute sound fiscal policy or government overreach?

I have made it my policy to leave the question of supporting Amendment 3 or not up to the voters, so I will respectfully decline to answer that. I believe the taxpayers are the ones who have the right to make that decision. I do believe there is a tendency at the moment to erode Local Control and am adamantly opposed to giving up our local control. I would certainly do all I could in order to not lose local control.

7. Is there anything else Polk County voters should know about you before casting their ballot?

I am the best candidate for the job. I have the love and respect for this county that is required to do the job well. I have the knowledge and on-the-job training and experience to serve our citizens well. I have the endorsement of Sheriff Grady Judd, as well as, other community leaders. I have the trust and support as is evidenced in my campaign donors list of many citizens from various walks of life and industries including ranchers, citrus growers, law enforcement, educators, realtors and builders, health care workers and retirees. I am the candidate that will work tirelessly in order to keep Polk County a great place to live, work and play right now and in the future.

District 4

Omar Arroyo — District 4 Candidate

[PENDING — Omar Arroyo did not respond to The Citrus Tea questionnaire.]

<https://electomararroyo.com/>

Elisha Gresham — District 4 Candidate (Write-In)

[PENDING — Elisha Gresham did not respond to The Citrus Tea questionnaire.]

[CAMPAIGN WEBSITE OR EMAIL]

The Citrus Tea News does not endorse candidates. Every qualified candidate in these races received identical questions and identical deadlines. Responses are the candidates' own. Candidates who did not respond are identified above, and their responses will be added if received.