

GUARDIAN

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For At-Large Seat 2 and Districts 2 & 3 – Election Day is March 17

HRCNCF Queries Candidates for Gainesville City Commission

The Human Rights Council of North Central Florida (HRCNCF) received responses to its candidate questionnaire for those candidates running for election in three Gainesville City Commission seats: At-Large Seat 2, and Districts 2 and 3. Election Day is Tuesday, March 17.

Verbatim responses to the candidate questionnaire are provided below.

“In their first terms in office, both incumbent Commissioners Ward (from District 2) and Arreola (from District 3) have proven to be outspoken champions of LGBTQ rights,” said HRCNCF President Flo Turcotte. “Both commissioners were consistently clear in their advocacy of the city's adoption of the conversion therapy ban ordinance,” she added. The conversion therapy ban ordinance passed in April 2018.

The ordinance prohibits state-licensed practitioners from performing conversion therapy on minors within Gainesville. Conversion therapy is counseling based on the erroneous assumption that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ) identities are mental disorders that can be cured through treatment. These discredited practices have long been rejected by the nation's leading medical and mental health organizations.

Ward is facing challenger David Walle, while Arreola faces challenger Jennifer Reid.

With Commissioner Helen Warren termed out after her second term in office, the At-Large Seat 2 race drew four candidates: Scherwin Henry, Gabe Kaimowitz, Paul Rhodenizer and Reina Saco.

Turcotte noted that Reina Saco provided excellent responses to the questionnaire, as well as having shown a demonstrated commitment locally to LGBTQ rights. As an attorney, she also has an extensive history of advocating for immigrants' and renters' rights, among others.

“Our board is confident that Reina Saco will be a steadfast voice for equal opportunity and human rights, not just for LGBTQ but also for immigrant persons,” said Turcotte.

Scherwin Henry is a former two-term city commissioner who was on the City Commission when public hearings were held to consider adding “gender identity” to Gainesville's antidiscrimination ordinance. He voted twice in support of the ordinance, but at the second and final public hearing, he switched to vote no.

The ordinance passed in January 2008 on a 4-3 vote.

All candidates except for Reid submitted written responses specific to each of the questions on the HRCNCF candidate questionnaire.

Because Gainesville city commission races are nonpartisan, all registered voters in Gainesville can vote in the At-Large race, while District 2 and 3 voters may also vote in their respective district races. Elections for party nominees for U.S. President will also appear on the ballot.

Three ways to vote:

Vote by Mail: Contact the Supervisor of Elections at 352-374-5252 or at www.VoteAlachua.com to have a ballot mailed to you.

Vote Early: Early voting runs from March 6-14 daily from 9 AM to 6 PM at the following locations: Alachua County Supervisor of Elections, 515 N. Main St., Millhopper Library, 3145 NW 43rd St., Tower Road Library, 3020 SW 75th St., Legacy Park Multipurpose Center, 15400 Peggy Road in Alachua, Orange Heights Baptist Church, 16700 NE State Road 26 in Hawthorne, and the University of Florida J. Wayne Reitz Union, 655 Reitz Union Drive.

Vote on Election Day: Vote in your own polling precinct from 7 AM to 7 PM on March 17.

HRCNCF 2020 Gainesville City Commission Candidate Questionnaire Responses

All candidates except for Jennifer Reid provided written responses to each of the questions.

- 1. The City Commission passed an ordinance which prohibits state-licensed practitioners from carrying out the practice of “conversion therapy” for minors within the city of Gainesville. Conversion therapy is counseling based on the erroneous assumption that LGBTQ identities are mental disorders that can be cured through treatment. Do you support or oppose Gainesville's conversion therapy ban ordinance?**

Gainesville City Commission At-Large Seat 2:

SCHERWIN HENRY: I support Gainesville's conversion therapy ban ordinance.

GABE KAIMOWITZ: “Innovative” Gainesville was the 35th city in states which do not ban conversion therapy and only the 20th in Florida to ban conversion therapy—**FOR MINORS ONLY!** I prefer New York City's total ban or other jurisdictions which at least include a ban for adults said to be mentally disabled. Further, the local law is deficient insofar as church groups are free to continue to impose such treatment if the minister, or advocate isn't a licensed therapist.

PAUL RHODENIZER: Psychotherapy is an important part of mental health programs. In my own life I have found psychotherapy to be quite helpful. I do have a problem with “conversion therapy” as described. I support Gainesville's conversion therapy ban ordinance.

REINA SACO: I fully support this ordinance and was present for the discussion of the county's version.

Conversion therapy is not medically sound nor actual therapy. When it comes to forcing minors into dangerous situations that would teach them to hate themselves, I can only agree with banning the practice. It serves no purpose beyond tormenting a child for being who they are.

Gainesville City Commission District 2:

DAVID WALLE: The real issue is that everybody ought to be treated with respect and decency. The Gainesville City Commission has offered the ordinance only as a token of support to our LGBTQ community knowing the city coffers aren't sufficiently funded to litigate the issue when defending it in court. They are pandering and dividing our community. Existing law provides protection against assault, battery and child abuse. And in Florida, those who turn 18 can and do sue their parents for horrific traumas.

HARVEY WARD: I believe conversion therapy is abuse. I support the ban and am proud to have voted for it.

Gainesville City Commission District 3:

DAVID ARREOLA: I proudly voted for and continue to support the City Commission's conversion therapy ban.

- 2. Do you support annual city proclamations recognizing Gainesville's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Pride Days?**

Gainesville City Commission At-Large Seat 2:

SCHERWIN HENRY: Yes, I do. I also believe that significant days or events should be recognized and proclaimed for all our citizens such as, Black History Month, Cinco de Mayo, Hanukkah, and the like. It is my belief and hope that the LGBTQ community would support other groups' special days, events, and holidays also.

GABE KAIMOWITZ: Mayor Lauren Poe is the only one who can decide to issue a proclamation in Gainesville.

For example, his extreme dislike of me has meant his unwillingness to proclaim Gainesville annually as the first Butterfly City. He recently proudly proclaimed the marvel of the contribution by him and his wife for Reichert House. The Gainesville City Commission thereafter allowed audiences to clap for proclamation recipients but for no one else. I oppose all Poe proclamations.

PAUL RHODENIZER: For as long as I can remember, Gainesville has supported the gay and lesbian community and has had advertised parades. I have no problem with parades. The role of the city, in my opinion, is to allow that parade and issue a permit. It is not the role of the city to announce any parades via a proclamation.

REINA SACO: I do. I think normalizing and celebrating the community helps bridge divides and shows solidarity.

Gainesville City Commission District 2:

DAVID WALLE: Absolutely.

HARVEY WARD: I do.

Gainesville City Commission District 3:

DAVID ARREOLA: I proudly support Gainesville's formal recognition of LGBT Pride Days.

- 3. The Florida Competitive Workforce Act (HB161, SB206) seeks to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity statewide in employment, housing and public accommodations. Would you support a city of Gainesville resolution that would urge the Florida Legislature to pass this bill?**

Gainesville City Commission At-Large Seat 2:

SCHERWIN HENRY: As a citizen and a person that has experienced lifelong discrimination, I would definitely support a City of Gainesville resolution that would urge the Florida Legislature to pass this bill.

GABE KAIMOWITZ: I would oppose Gainesville elected officials supporting or opposing any legislation being considered by the State, as a waste of time and money and insulting to perhaps a majority or more of local registered voters who would oppose any particular point of view. I personally support the proposed ban on discrimination.

PAUL RHODENIZER: As a former employer, one's sexuality has no bearing when determining where one is qualified to do a job. With 40 years of fashion retail experience, I've witnessed gay men and women function quite well in the workplace. I am in favor of equal rights for all and would support a resolution to the Florida legislature to pass a bill that includes sexual orientation specifically.

REINA SACO: I would. I am against discrimination in general, but especially in situations like this. A person cannot control who they are or whom they love and it should very well be illegal to fire or evict someone on that basis.

Gainesville City Commission District 2:

DAVID WALLE: I do fully support a City of Gainesville resolution to support proposed legislation designed to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity statewide in employment, housing and public accommodations among non-religious entities. Fortunately, we already have such protections here in Gainesville.

HARVEY WARD: Yes. More than ever, many of our residents can choose to live wherever they want - and if we don't offer the protections of basic human rights that are available in other cities, they can choose to live elsewhere. Conversely, we live in a time where it is more and more difficult for a rising segment of our population to make a choice of residence. This creates an added responsibility to protect their rights as well.

Gainesville City Commission District 3:

DAVID ARREOLA: I have proudly supported the Florida Competitive Workforce Act and continue to urge lawmakers to pass this legislation.

- In 2016, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued a rule as part of the Affordable Care Act that prohibits discrimination in health programs and activities that receive funding from HHS. Prior to the implementation of this rule most individual and group health plans excluded coverage for gender transition services. After January 1, 2017, fully insured individual and group policies that receive funding from HHS will**

include coverage for gender transition services. This rule applies differently to large employer plans that are "self-funded". A self-funded plan is one where the employer assumes the health plan liability and risk in exchange for more control over the plan's administration and funding levels. The city of Gainesville continues to support this coverage as a self-funded entity. Do you support the city of Gainesville including coverage for gender transition services for their employees?

Gainesville City Commission At-Large Seat 2:

SCHERWIN HENRY: I have no problem supporting it.

GABE KAIMOWITZ: I would oppose the City of Gainesville supporting financially gender transition services unless they and their identified practitioners can show that there is a medically or psychologically accepted form of such treatment, just as I oppose pseudo-scientific conversion therapy or any other "professional" manipulation of minds.

PAUL RHODENIZER: Yes, providing that the cost of such self insurance is not significant in the overall self insurance budget.

REINA SACO: I think the city's insurance plan as a whole needs to be updated or overhauled. It would be remiss of me to say that one service needs to be added without addressing all of the other services that aren't covered for city employees and their families. In general, I think we should work with our employees to find out the services that are needed and not being covered, and then move toward providing those services. In that case, I would support including transition services.

Gainesville City Commission District 2:

DAVID WALLE: This is another issue designed to divide us as a community. I question any decision based on dogma and knee-jerk reactions. The commission ought to fully consider the real-life impacts such decisions make on real people. Rather than promise the HRC what I know you'd rather hear, I can instead promise to consider the counsel of city staff, our new manager and city attorney lest I become just one more micromanager on the commission.

HARVEY WARD: Yes.

**HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
OF NORTH CENTRAL FLORIDA, INC.**

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THE NEXT MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
IS THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2020, AT 7:00 PM AT
PRIDE COMMUNITY CENTER OF NORTH CENTRAL
FLORIDA, 3131 NW 13TH ST, GAINESVILLE

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Gainesville City Commission District 3:

DAVID ARREOLA: I support Gainesville's employer based health care covering gender transition services for employees.

5. Do you support the city of Gainesville's recent installation of three rainbow crosswalks downtown? Why or why not?

Gainesville City Commission At-Large Seat 2:

SCHERWIN HENRY: Yes. It adds a nice visual to what can sometimes be a mundane in appearance for our roads. It is important that we live in a city that allows freedom of expression and promotes belonging and acceptance.

GABE KAIMOWITZ: *[Did not respond -Editor.]*

PAUL RHODENIZER: During the past few weeks I have noticed the rainbow crosswalks on the beautiful cobblestone/brick streets downtown Gainesville. I am opposed to painting the bricks any color... rainbow or not.

REINA SACO: I wholeheartedly supported this project. Beyond beautifying our downtown, I think the installations help show that the city as a whole is supporting the community. Making the community and its symbols regular fixtures are a step towards acceptance and mainstream culture.

Gainesville City Commission District 2:

DAVID WALLE: I like the rainbow crosswalks. But again, some people will find just about anything they can use to divide us. This is Gainesville and our community has a long, rich history as an inclusive community. It's my understanding that the sidewalks were paid for by a GOFundMe that was set up by The Pride Community Center of North Central Florida and I think that speaks volumes.

HARVEY WARD: Yes. There are no great cities that do not include great art. While the crosswalks may not rise to the level of "great," they are art nonetheless, and they are art that directly affirms our city as one that welcomes everyone. The city's art in crosswalks program is one that will grow in a variety of ways, and I'm pleased that the rainbows were the first manifestation of that program.

Gainesville City Commission District 3:

DAVID ARREOLA: I proudly voted for and support the rainbow crosswalks because they serve as a powerful symbol to our residents that Gainesville is home to the queer community.

6. Describe some efforts you have taken locally to support or advocate for LGBTQ rights.

Gainesville City Commission At-Large Seat 2:

SCHERWIN HENRY: During the time I served on the Gainesville City Commission, during public comment then candidate for Mayor Craig Lowe was being attacked by various citizens who didn't want him to run for the office of Mayor. There were other city commissioners

there at the meeting but I was the only city commissioner that took a stand on behalf of my colleague. I felt it was important to let those individuals who were attacking him know he (Craig Lowe) had a right to run for the office of mayor as much as any other citizen. Craig Lowe was being singled out and treated unfairly. I do support a person's right to be able to live their lives free from bigotry, discrimination, and physical threats. The boards, on which I serve as a member, serve all citizens no matter what their ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation.

GABE KAIMOWITZ: I have spoken whenever and wherever possible in favor of referring to my adult transgender grandchild or other adult or minor as "they" rather than "he" or "she." I have spoken whenever and wherever possible to members of historically white Trinity United Methodist Church or African-American churches to accept equal rights for the LBGTQ and C community regardless of the views of their ministers, pastors, preachers, rabbis or Pope, who oppose LBGTQ people being ministers or running for office. I generally have been unsuccessful.

PAUL RHODENIZER: I have taken no role in favoring special rates (or not), regarding activities of the LBGTQ community. I am not involved in that discussion as a private citizen.

REINA SACO: I was a donor for the installation of the rainbow sidewalks downtown. I have also participated in Pride events and fundraisers as an ally to the community here. I have also supported LGBTQA efforts put on by the Human Rights Coalition of Alachua County. Whenever I have been able to lend a hand, I have made an effort to be present and support with my time or funds.

Gainesville City Commission District 2:

DAVID WALLE: I personally support organizations and people of the LBGTQ community, in addition to other organizations that support and value inclusion. We face a lot of challenges in Gainesville where the leadership does not practice what they preach and I look forward to making a difference once elected.

HARVEY WARD: As a Gainesville City Commissioner I have enthusiastically supported the measures and programs mentioned above with my commission vote, and as a resident of our city I have for many years supported the Pride Community Center, Stonewall Democrats and Equality Florida financially and personally.

Gainesville City Commission District 3:

DAVID ARREOLA: I'm a proud ally of the LBGT community. I've supported policies like the conversion therapy ban and lobbied for the Florida Competitive Workforce Act. I've supported representation in celebrating Pride Days, supporting the rainbow crosswalks, and attending local events like Pride Awards Dinner, Equality Florida Gala, and our local drag queen shows. I'm grateful for the support I received in my last election and I hope to continue serving the LBGTQ community on the City Commission.