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MANATEE COUNTY COMMISSION QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Sari Lindroos-Valimaki

Age:

57

Current occupation:

Subject matter expert in IT and Cybersecurity. Nearly 30 years of experience as a Systems/Network Engineer and Security Consultant.

How long have you been a resident of Manatee County?

Since 2018. Resident of Florida since 1983 and a citizen since 1992.

What are the three top priorities/issues facing the county, and how should the commission address them?

1. Environmental Protection

Issue: Protecting and restoring the environment is crucial to ensuring the health and well-being of our residents and preserving our natural resources for future generations.

Solution:

- **Restore Wetland Protections:** Reinstate and strengthen wetland protections to safeguard these critical ecosystems, which play a vital role in water filtration, flood control, and providing wildlife habitats.
- **Tackle Contaminations:** Implement comprehensive programs to identify, clean up, and prevent environmental contaminations.
- **Clean Water for Everyone:** Invest in modernizing water treatment facilities and infrastructure. We need to ensure that our industrial control systems (ICS) are hardened against potential tampering.

2. Sustainable Growth

Issue: Managing growth in a way that supports economic development while preserving the character and sustainability of our community.

Solution:

- **Smart Traffic Management Technology:** Invest in advanced traffic management systems to reduce congestion and improve traffic flow. This includes synchronized traffic signals, real-time monitoring, and adaptive signal control.
- **Infrastructure Investment:** Enhance both physical and digital infrastructure to support growth. This includes improving road networks, public transportation, and utilities, while expanding broadband access to all areas of the county.

- **Balanced Development:** Encourage mixed-use, walkable communities and implement zoning policies that support higher density in appropriate areas while preserving open spaces and green belts.

3. Transparent Governance

Issue: Emphasis needs to be on the importance of community trust and ethical behavior.

Solution:

- **Demand Accountability:** Establish clear standards and procedures for accountability within the county government. Regular audits and performance reviews can help ensure that public funds are used effectively and ethically.
- **Model Integrity:** Set a high standard for ethical behavior and decision-making within the commission. Lead by example to foster a culture of integrity and trustworthiness.
- **Build Community Trust:** Enhance public engagement by providing accessible and transparent information about government operations. Hold regular town hall meetings, solicit feedback, and ensure that community input is reflected in policy decisions. Make meetings available virtually so everyone has the opportunity to participate.
- **Conclusion**

By focusing on these top priorities—environmental protection, sustainable growth, and transparent governance—the County Commission can address the most pressing issues facing Manatee County. This approach will ensure that we protect our

natural resources, manage growth responsibly, and build a government that residents can trust and rely on.

Why are you running for office?

My decision to run for office was sparked by the Piney Point incident, which deeply concerned me when our community was evacuated. The subsequent decision by the Board of County Commissioners to roll back wetland protections further motivated me. These events highlighted the urgent need for leadership that prioritizes the environment and community well-being. I am committed to addressing current issues while respecting our environment and community well-being. I will serve with integrity and transparency.

What makes you more qualified than your opponents for this office?

My strong bond with Manatee County, combined with my extensive professional experience, makes me a uniquely qualified candidate. I hold an undergraduate degree in Political Science and a Master's in Business Administration, supplemented by extensive education in Information Technology. This background equips me with exceptional problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. Having led teams of engineers and managed large IT budgets, I understand the importance of fiscal responsibility and strategic resource allocation. I recognize that diverse thinking leads to the most innovative solutions, so including the community in the dialogue is essential.

Since moving to Manatee County in 2018, I have witnessed firsthand the changes and challenges we face. With three decades of experience in IT and Cybersecurity, I possess the

skills to address complex issues and plan critically for our future. My professional background provides me with a unique perspective crucial for effective governance, making me the best candidate for this position. I am committed to serving our community with integrity and transparency and ensuring the voices of our residents are heard.

Affordable housing — what can the Manatee County Commission do to increase the supply of workforce housing?

Manatee County has made efforts to address the need for affordable housing with initiatives like the Livable Manatee Incentive Program, which offers density bonuses and financial incentives. However, we need to improve to meet the growing demand for affordable housing better.

- Inclusionary Zoning Policies: Implement mandatory inclusionary zoning policies to increase the supply of affordable housing .
- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs): Ease restrictions and offer incentives for ADUs.
- Financial Incentives: Expand subsidies, grants, and offer comprehensive tax abatements to attract more developers to invest in affordable housing projects.
- Streamline Approvals: Further streamline the approval processes and enhance fee waivers to reduce delays and costs, making it more feasible for developers to undertake these projects.
- Innovative Housing Solutions: Promote modular, prefabricated homes and tiny homes where feasible to reduce construction costs and time.

- **Funding Sources:** Expand the local housing trust fund and seek additional funding sources, such as municipal bonds.
- **Community Engagement:** Increase public awareness and community engagement through comprehensive public awareness campaigns and active stakeholder engagement to build strong support and reduce opposition.

By focusing on these improvements, we can ensure all residents have access to safe, affordable, and stable housing, ultimately strengthening our community and economy.

If elected, you likely are going to be asked many times to allow changes to the county zoning code for certain projects. What is your philosophy toward zoning?

My zoning philosophy centers on balancing growth with community needs, sustainability, and long-term planning.

Here are the key principles that will guide my approach:

- **Community-Centered Decision Making:** Zoning changes should reflect the needs and values of our residents. Engaging with the community and ensuring that their voices are heard in the decision-making process is essential.
- **Sustainable Development:** Zoning decisions should promote sustainable development practices that protect our natural resources and environment, including encouraging green building practices and protecting open spaces.
- **Economic Vitality:** Thoughtful zoning can stimulate economic growth by attracting businesses, creating jobs, and encouraging investment in our community.

- Affordable Housing: I support zoning changes that facilitate the development of affordable housing, such as density bonuses, inclusionary zoning, and incentives for ADUs.
- Infrastructure and Services: Zoning changes must consider the capacity of our existing infrastructure and services to prevent overburdening our community.
- Smart Growth Principles: I advocate for smart growth principles that encourage mixed-use developments, walkable communities, and efficient land use.
- Flexibility and Innovation: While maintaining a structured approach to zoning, I recognize the need for flexibility to accommodate innovative and beneficial projects.

Building up where feasible can significantly optimize land use, accommodate growing populations, and reduce urban sprawl. By constructing multi-story buildings in appropriate areas, we can preserve green spaces, enhance infrastructure efficiency, and create vibrant, walkable communities.

In summary, my philosophy toward zoning is to foster a balanced, inclusive, and forward-thinking approach that prioritizes community input, sustainable development, economic vitality, and the creation of affordable housing.

What is your position on the Future Development Area Boundary — keep it; abide by it; eliminate it? Why?

The Future Development Area Boundary is crucial for managing growth, preserving the environment and ensuring sustainable development. Therefore I believe in keeping and abiding by it.

- **Environmental Protection:** The boundary helps protect our natural resources, including wetlands, forests, and wildlife habitats.
- **Sustainable Growth:** It ensures development is concentrated in areas that can support it, promoting efficient use of land and infrastructure.
- **Infrastructure and Services:** Limiting development to designated areas allows better planning and management of infrastructure and public services.
- **Agricultural Preservation:** The boundary protects valuable agricultural land, supporting our farmers and maintaining the rural character of parts of our county.
- **Quality of Life:** Maintaining the boundary helps ensure a high quality of life by preventing overcrowding and preserving the character of our communities.
- **Economic Stability:** Concentrated development within the boundary can lead to more efficient public spending and a more stable economic environment.

In summary, my position is to keep and abide by the Future Development Area Boundary. This approach supports environmental stewardship, sustainable growth, and the preservation of our community's quality of life.

Growth — What is your philosophy on how population growth should be addressed in Manatee County?

As Manatee County continues to grow, it's crucial to manage this growth in a way that balances economic development, environmental sustainability, and quality of life for all residents.

- Smart Growth Principles: Promote mixed-use development, higher densities in appropriate areas, and walkable, transit-oriented communities.
- Infrastructure Investment: Proactively invest in infrastructure to support population growth, including transportation networks, utilities, and public services.
- Environmental Stewardship: Protect our natural environment and promote green building standards.
- Affordable Housing: Ensure housing remains accessible to all income levels by supporting policies like inclusionary zoning and incentives for ADUs.
- Community Engagement: Engage with the community in transparent, participatory planning processes.
- Economic Development: Support local businesses, attract new industries, and create job opportunities.
- Preservation of Character: Preserve the unique character and heritage of our communities through thoughtful planning and design

Roads/Transportation — What should the County Commission's strategy be to address the county's increased road needs?

As Manatee County continues to grow, addressing the increased demands on our roadways and transportation infrastructure is critical. A comprehensive and forward-thinking strategy is essential to ensure our roads are safe, efficient, and capable of supporting the community's needs.

- Infrastructure Investment: Prioritize and secure funding for road maintenance and expansion

projects. This includes repairing and upgrading existing roads, building new roadways where needed, and ensuring all infrastructure projects are completed to high standards.

- **Traffic Management and Technology:** Implement advanced traffic management systems to improve traffic flow and reduce congestion. This can include synchronized traffic signals, real-time traffic monitoring, and adaptive signal control technologies that adjust to traffic conditions dynamically.
- **Public Transportation:** Expand and enhance public transportation options to reduce the number of cars on the road. This includes increasing the frequency and coverage of bus services, developing rapid transit options, and creating park-and-ride facilities to encourage the use of public transit.
- **Multimodal Transportation:** Promote and invest in multimodal transportation solutions, such as bike lanes, pedestrian pathways, and shared mobility options like bike-share and scooter programs. Ensuring safe and accessible routes for cyclists and pedestrians can reduce vehicle traffic and promote healthier lifestyles.
- **Long-Term Planning:** Integrate transportation planning with land use and development planning to ensure new developments are well-connected to the existing transportation network. Adopting a comprehensive transportation master plan that anticipates future growth and infrastructure needs is essential.

- **Environmental Sustainability:** Incorporate environmentally sustainable practices into transportation projects. This includes using green construction techniques, reducing vehicle emissions through electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure, and promoting the use of public transit and non-motorized transportation.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage with residents and stakeholders to gather input on transportation needs and priorities. Transparent and inclusive decision-making processes can help build public support for transportation initiatives and ensure they reflect the community's needs.
- **Collaboration with Regional Partners:** Work closely with neighboring counties, regional planning organizations, and state agencies to develop coordinated transportation strategies. Regional collaboration can lead to more effective solutions for issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- **Funding and Grants:** Actively seek out state and federal grants, as well as public-private partnerships, to fund transportation projects. Leveraging diverse funding sources can help accelerate project timelines and reduce the financial burden on the county.
- **Safety Improvements:** Focus on enhancing road safety through better design, improved signage, and targeted interventions in high-accident areas. Implementing traffic calming measures and ensuring roads are safe for all users, including pedestrians and cyclists, is critical.

By following this multifaceted strategy, the County Commission can effectively address the increased road and transportation needs in Manatee County. This approach will ensure that our infrastructure supports growth, enhances mobility, and improves the quality of life for all residents.

What is your position on impact fees?

Impact fees are essential for ensuring new development contribute fairly to the infrastructure and services required to support them.

My position on impact fees is as follows:

- **Equitable Contribution:** Impact fees ensure that the costs associated with new development, such as roads, schools, parks, and public safety services, are fairly distributed. This prevents existing residents from shouldering the financial burden of infrastructure expansion necessitated by growth.
- **Growth Management:** Properly structured impact fees can help manage growth by encouraging responsible development. They incentivize developers to consider the full costs of their projects, promoting more thoughtful and sustainable planning.
- **Infrastructure Funding:** Impact fees provide a crucial funding source for infrastructure improvements and expansions. This is vital for maintaining and

enhancing the quality of public services and infrastructure as the county grows.

- **Economic Balance:** While impact fees are necessary, they must be balanced to ensure they do not stifle development. Fees should be set at a level that covers infrastructure costs without discouraging investment and economic growth.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** The process for calculating and implementing impact fees should be transparent, ensuring that developers and the public understand how fees are determined and used. Regular reviews and adjustments should be made to reflect changes in infrastructure needs and costs.
- **Targeted Use:** Impact fees should be specifically allocated to projects directly related to the developments that generate them. This ensures that the fees effectively address the increased demand on infrastructure and services in the areas experiencing growth.
- **Regular Adjustments:** Impact fees for developers, which were lowered during COVID-19, have not been adequately raised despite the current pace of building. Addressing this issue is essential for maintaining our infrastructure and supporting community growth.

In summary, I support the use of impact fees as a fair and necessary means of funding the infrastructure and services needed to accommodate growth in Manatee County. By ensuring

these fees are equitable, transparent, and appropriately balanced, we can promote responsible development while maintaining the high quality of life for all residents.

What is your position on land acquisition for conservation and preservation?

Land acquisition for conservation protects ecosystems, supports public health, and enhances our community's resilience to climate change.

I strongly support this as it is crucial for protecting our natural resources, maintaining biodiversity, and ensuring a high quality of life for future generations. Here's my detailed position:

- **Environmental Protection:** Acquiring land for conservation helps protect vital ecosystems, including wetlands, forests, and wildlife habitats. Preserving these areas is essential for maintaining biodiversity and supporting the health of our environment.
- **Sustainability:** Land preservation is a key component of sustainable development. By setting aside natural areas, we can ensure that growth does not come at the expense of our environment. This helps balance development with the need to protect our natural resources.
- **Public Health and Recreation:** Conserved lands provide valuable recreational opportunities for residents, such as parks, trails, and nature preserves. These spaces promote physical activity,

mental well-being, and a connection to nature, enhancing the overall quality of life in our community.

- **Water Quality and Flood Control:** Protecting natural landscapes helps maintain water quality by filtering pollutants and reducing runoff. Conserved lands also play a critical role in flood control by absorbing excess rainwater and reducing the risk of flooding in developed areas.
- **Climate Resilience:** Conserving land helps mitigate the effects of climate change by preserving carbon sinks, such as forests and wetlands, which absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. These areas also provide natural buffers against extreme weather events.
- **Economic Benefits:** Preserved lands can boost local economies by attracting tourists, supporting outdoor recreation industries, and increasing property values in nearby areas. Investing in conservation is an investment in the long-term economic health of our county.
- **Community Support:** There is often strong public support for conservation efforts. By prioritizing land acquisition for preservation, we can respond to community values and demonstrate a commitment to protecting our natural heritage.
- **Strategic Planning:** Land acquisition should be guided by strategic planning and scientific data to ensure that the most ecologically valuable and vulnerable areas are prioritized. This ensures that conservation efforts are efficient and effective.

In summary, I am committed to supporting land acquisition for conservation and preservation. This approach is essential for protecting our environment, enhancing public health and recreation, ensuring sustainability, and promoting climate resilience. By prioritizing strategic land preservation, we can safeguard the natural beauty and ecological health of Manatee County for future generations.

What grade would you give the County Commission on managing the county's tax dollars? What needs to be changed in the county fiscal management?

I would give the County Commission a C on managing Manatee County's tax dollars. While there have been some positive efforts in fiscal management, several areas need improvement to enhance transparency, efficiency, and accountability. Here are the key changes needed:

- **Enhanced Transparency:** There is a need for greater transparency in the county's fiscal management. Providing detailed, accessible reports on how tax dollars are spent, including budget allocations and outcomes, can help build public trust and ensure accountability.
- **Performance-Based Budgeting:** Implementing performance-based budgeting can ensure that funds are allocated based on the effectiveness of programs and initiatives. This approach focuses on outcomes

and results, promoting efficiency and better use of resources.

- **Public Engagement:** Increasing opportunities for public engagement in the budgeting process can ensure that community priorities are reflected in fiscal decisions. Regular town hall meetings, surveys, and public forums can provide valuable input and foster a sense of shared responsibility.
- **Cost Efficiency Measures:** Identifying and implementing cost-saving measures without compromising the quality of services is crucial. This includes regular audits and reviews of departmental expenditures to find areas where efficiency can be improved.
- **Long-Term Financial Planning:** Developing a comprehensive long-term financial plan can help manage future fiscal challenges and opportunities. This includes setting aside reserves for emergencies, planning for infrastructure investments, and anticipating changes in revenue and expenses.
- **Technology and Innovation:** Investing in modern financial management technologies can streamline processes, reduce errors, and improve overall efficiency. Utilizing data analytics can also provide better insights into spending patterns and areas for improvement.
- **Equitable Resource Allocation:** Ensuring that tax dollars are allocated equitably across the county is essential. This includes addressing disparities in

funding for different regions and communities to ensure all residents benefit from public investments.

- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Strengthening collaboration with state and federal agencies, as well as private and nonprofit sectors, can leverage additional funding and resources. Public-private partnerships can also bring innovative solutions to fiscal management challenges.

In summary, while the County Commission has done an acceptable job in managing tax dollars, there is room for improvement in transparency, public engagement, efficiency, long-term planning, and equitable resource allocation. By addressing these areas, we can ensure that Manatee County's fiscal management is more effective, accountable, and responsive to the needs of our community.

Can you identify any area where you think the county's spending should be cut, or any area where more needs to be spent?

Areas for Spending Cuts:

- **Administrative Overhead:** Reducing administrative overhead by streamlining operations and eliminating redundant positions or processes can lead to significant savings. Efficiency audits can help identify areas where administrative costs can be reduced without affecting service delivery.

- **Non-Essential Programs:** Evaluating all county programs to determine their effectiveness and necessity is crucial. Programs that do not deliver significant benefits or are underutilized should be restructured or phased out. This can free up resources for more impactful initiatives.
- **Consultant Fees:** Reducing reliance on external consultants by building internal expertise can lower costs. Investing in staff training and development can enhance internal capabilities, reducing the need for costly outside consultants.
- **Energy and Resource Use:** Implementing energy-saving measures and reducing resource consumption in county buildings and operations can lead to long-term cost savings. This includes investing in energy-efficient technologies and sustainable practices.

Areas for Increased Investment:

- **Affordable Housing:** Increasing investment in affordable housing initiatives is critical to address the growing housing crisis. This includes funding for new affordable housing projects, subsidies for low-income families, and incentives for developers to include affordable units in their projects.
- **Infrastructure:** Enhanced investment in infrastructure, such as roads, public transportation, and utilities, is essential to support growth and improve the quality of life. Prioritizing repairs and upgrades can prevent

costly future repairs and ensure the county's infrastructure meets current and future demands.

- **Public Safety:** Ensuring that law enforcement, fire departments, and emergency services have adequate resources is vital for community safety. This includes investing in personnel, training, equipment, and technology to enhance their effectiveness and response times.
- **Education and Workforce Development:** Increasing funding for education and workforce development programs can strengthen the local economy. This includes supporting public schools, vocational training, and adult education programs to ensure residents have the skills needed for well-paying jobs.
- **Environmental Conservation:** Investing more in land acquisition for conservation, sustainable development practices, and environmental protection initiatives can safeguard natural resources and enhance the quality of life. This includes funding for parks, green spaces, and water quality projects.
- **Health and Human Services:** Increasing support for health and human services, including mental health programs, substance abuse treatment, and services for the elderly and vulnerable populations, can improve overall community well-being and reduce long-term social costs.
- **Cybersecurity:** Fortifying cybersecurity is critical in today's digital age, especially with the increasing threat of cyber attacks from nation-states. Investing in advanced cybersecurity infrastructure, regular

security audits, and staff training can protect our vital services and infrastructure. Imagine the devastating impact of no water when you turn on the tap or no electricity when you flip the switch. Ensuring our systems are resilient against such attacks is essential for maintaining public safety and trust.

By carefully evaluating spending priorities and reallocating resources to areas that provide the most significant benefits, Manatee County can enhance its fiscal management and better serve its residents. Balancing cuts in less impactful areas with increased investment in critical services, infrastructure, and cybersecurity will ensure sustainable growth and a high quality of life for all.

What is your position on the county's current millage rate — is it satisfactory? Too high? Too low?

The current millage rate in Manatee County is 6.2326 mills. This rate is considered moderate and reflects efforts by the County Commission to balance the need for revenue with the economic realities faced by residents. Recently, the commission has reduced the millage rate to help alleviate financial pressure on homeowners. Regular reviews of the fiscal impact can adjust the millage rate transparently to ensure it supports critical services without overburdening taxpayers.

Is the Millage Rate Satisfactory?

I believe the current millage rate is satisfactory but could be fine-tuned. While the recent reduction is beneficial, it is crucial to ensure that this does not compromise essential services and infrastructure development. Here are some areas where adjustments might be beneficial:

- **Reviewing Fiscal Impact:** Regularly reviewing the fiscal impact of the current rate can ensure that we are meeting budgetary needs without overburdening taxpayers.
- **Balancing Revenue and Services:** Maintaining a millage rate that supports critical services, such as public safety, education, and infrastructure, is essential. Ensuring these services are well-funded while keeping taxes reasonable is a delicate balance.
- **Transparent Adjustments:** Any adjustments to the millage rate should be made transparently, with input from residents and stakeholders to reflect the community's needs and priorities.

By carefully managing the millage rate and ensuring it aligns with the county's financial health and residents' well-being, we can maintain a fair and effective tax system.

Many residents feel that despite paying property taxes, which include allocations for transportation, they do not see adequate

transportation services in return. As a candidate for county commissioner, I am committed to ensuring that these funds are used effectively to improve our transportation system. Here's how I plan to address this issue:

- **Transparency and Accountability:** I will ensure that the use of millage funds is transparent, with detailed reports on how the money is being spent on transportation projects.
- **Efficient Use of Funds:** I will advocate for prioritizing transportation projects that have the most significant impact on our community, ensuring that our tax dollars are used effectively.
- **Public Involvement:** I will engage residents in the budgeting process, allowing them to have a say in how transportation funds are allocated and spent.
- **Regular Audits:** I will support regular audits of transportation spending to ensure accountability and identify areas for improvement.

How would you describe your philosophy on the role of government and on taxation?

My philosophy on the role of government and taxation is shaped by a balance between providing essential public services and ensuring economic efficiency. Drawing from both my experience in Finland and my understanding of local needs in Manatee County, I believe in a model that emphasizes both the

responsibilities of government and the benefits of a well-structured taxation system.

Role of Government:

- **Provision of Public Goods and Services:** The government plays a crucial role in providing services that are essential for the well-being of its citizens, such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and public safety. These services form the backbone of a prosperous and equitable society.
- **Social Equity and Support:** The government should ensure that all members of society have access to basic needs and opportunities. This includes supporting vulnerable populations and reducing economic disparities through targeted programs and social safety nets.
- **Economic Stability and Growth:** The government should create an environment conducive to economic growth by investing in infrastructure, fostering innovation, and supporting businesses. This includes strategic planning and regulation to ensure sustainable development.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** The government has a responsibility to protect natural resources and promote sustainable practices. This includes implementing policies that safeguard the environment for future generations.

Philosophy on Taxation:

By balancing the provision of essential public services with efficient and fair taxation, we can create a thriving community that benefits all residents.

- **Fair and Progressive Taxation:** Taxation should be fair and progressive, ensuring that those with higher incomes contribute a larger share. This helps to reduce income inequality and fund essential services that benefit the entire community.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Taxpayers deserve to know how their money is being spent. Transparent budgeting processes and clear communication about public expenditures build trust and accountability in government.
- **Efficient Use of Resources:** Government should strive for efficiency in using tax revenues. This means prioritizing spending on programs that provide the highest public benefit and eliminating wasteful expenditures.
- **Investment in Public Services:** Higher tax rates can be justified when they result in high-quality public services that enhance the quality of life. Investing in education, healthcare, and infrastructure creates a strong foundation for long-term societal benefits.
- **Community Engagement:** Tax policies should be developed with input from the community. Engaging residents in discussions about taxation and public

spending ensures that policies reflect the values and priorities of the people.

Integration of Finnish Insights:

From my experience in Finland, I have seen the benefits of a well-funded public sector. High tax rates there support comprehensive healthcare, excellent education, and robust social services, contributing to high living standards and social stability. While the context and needs in Manatee County differ, the principle that well-structured taxation can significantly enhance public services remains relevant.

In summary, my philosophy on the role of government and taxation is to balance the provision of essential public services with the efficient and fair use of tax revenues. By ensuring transparency, promoting social equity, and making strategic investments, we can create a thriving community that benefits all residents.