

# City Council

## Candidate Questions - 2022

Name: Rachel Keesling Date: 07/14/2022

### **Why are you the right choice for City Council?**

I am the right choice because I am devoted to the City of Punta Gorda, care deeply about the city organization and our community. I have been living in the city for more than 30 years and have developed a true sense of belonging here. For four terms, I served as a dedicated public servant in my role with City Council and as a member I was appointed by my peers to Vice-Mayor and Mayor several times. My focus will be on communication and collaboration within city government and beyond.

Currently, I am serving as Executive Director of Southwest Florida League of Cities. Through my position, I have strengthened relationships with regional elected officials, State and National Representatives and the business community. This position requires collaboration and consensus from city leaders from 4 counties. I have extended the reach of the organization and have learned so much from our neighboring communities. Our members share information, discuss local initiatives, and engage citizens on the importance of local self-government. We also work tirelessly during session with the legislature to craft laws that enhance our quality of life here in Southwest Florida.

My experience gained during my tenure at Southwest Florida League of Cities, and my service as a council member, have allowed me to develop a unique perspective. I am truly dedicated, and I possess the knowledge and communication skills that will be necessary to enhance and preserve our hometown feel.

### **What role should the City have in economic development? Please be specific.**

The City of Punta Gorda does not stand on its own when it comes to economic development. We must commit to strong relationships with our government partners and our business community. We must keep lines of communication open and be willing to be a part of what is happening in and around the city. I have done this in the past and I will continue to do this in the future.

The City also needs to craft ordinances and other policies that support economic development and commercial tax base growth. The city is very lopsided in the commercial versus residential tax base, this has been an ongoing struggle. Our commercial tax base lags at 10.5%, this means that 89.5% of property taxes are funded by our homeowners. The addition of compatible commercial projects and expansions of existing businesses can help the city stay financially sound into the future. We need to support good projects that preserve the charm and feel of our city. I agree that consensus of council is important when it comes to "change" but change is going to happen and we are in charge of managing the change to benefit the city

**Please outline your business background.**

I have worked in many capacities in Punta Gorda, Charlotte County, and the Southwest Florida region. I was on city council for 8 years, dedicated my time to the city and served on many committees such as: 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, 2012 1% Sales Tax Project Committee, Tourist Development Council, Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council and more. All these committees, groups and events are important because they support the community and bring business into the city. They bring revenue to the hotels, restaurants, and other attractions and showcase our community to future residents.

Many of my favorite events that I chaired, such as the Tree Lighting and downtown Halloween at City Hall, continue to bring charm and vibrancy into the city. This synergy is what I was committed to in the past and I will continue to foster that type of energy that attracts residents and visitors to our area.

Another example of my commitment to the business community was my service to the 1% tax committee. This work was vital to our county because it brings in funding for projects for the entire community, including the business community. The committee is tasked with vetting projects for the good of the entire citizenry so that they support the referendum. I served on that committee in 2012 and the extension was approved. Projects in the areas of infrastructure, public safety, water quality, parks, sidewalks, etc are included in the referendums, ultimately making our county a desirable place to live and do business.

Personally, I am very "pro-business". I have seen that a healthy city/community means a healthy business environment. My father-in-law opened his business here in 1972 and mother-in-law has had a small business here for over 40 years, they are both still going strong and employing local residents. I will dedicate myself to protecting and enhancing the business environment in our community.



**Charlotte County  
Chamber of Commerce**