

VOTING GUIDE – CLEARWATER CITY ELECTIONS

MARCH 17, 2020

Here are our recommendations for the upcoming Clearwater elections. As in past years, we met with nearly every candidate on this list and have a long-term relationship with many. We dig below the campaign rhetoric and look at past performance and activities to try to discern how each will govern. This election is non-partisan, meaning that a candidate's party affiliation is not shown on the ballot and more than one person from a party can run for the same office. School board members and judges are similarly elected.

The election will be on March 17, 2020.

Voter registration deadline & the deadline to change political party was February 18, 2020.

However, if you are already registered in Florida but moved to Clearwater or other parts of Tampa Bay, you can change your address after February 18 right up to election day.

If you need to update your address or register for future elections, the state of Florida has an online voter registration link: <https://registertovoteflorida.gov/en/Registration/Index>.

You can request a mail ballot from the Supervisor of Elections at MailBallot@VotePinellas.com or call (727) 464-VOTE (8683).

The deadline to request a ballot to be mailed is 5:00 p.m. March 7, 2020

You can vote early from March 7-15, 2020 at the Supervisor of Elections Office: County Courthouse - 315 Court St., Room 117, Clearwater, 33756 (Voter parking spots will be designated in Courthouse parking lots).

Monday-Friday 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Saturday-Sunday 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Polls are open from 7:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m. on Election Day, March 17.

As a matter of orientation, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution features prominently in our evaluation of the candidates. It reads as follows:

First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

It is long past due for this community to heal itself and reject divisions spawned by those with personal agendas.

We strongly encourage you to do your own research, but we hope you find our guide useful.

Attached is a summary of rationale for our recommendations.

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Mayor (Seat 1)	Frank Hibbard
Councilmember (Seat 2)	Eliseo Santana Jr.
Councilmember (Seat 3)	Kathleen Beckman
Referendums-	Yes to all

Mayor (Seat 1) Frank Hibbard

In this race, only Frank Hibbard and Bill Jonson have demonstrated the knowledge and skills to potentially serve as mayor. Mr. Hibbard is the better choice of the two. While Mr. Jonson knows the city and issues well, his strengths lie in evaluation and analysis, not action. We believe the city is poised for a renaissance, but it will require the next mayor to exert strong leadership to set and implement an agenda of forward progress. Mr. Hibbard’s platform of developing and following a strategic plan for the city is sensible. We make this recommendation with some reservation, however, because of Mr. Hibbard’s choice of campaign consultant who has used slanted promotional materials and misleading surveys to encourage anti-First Amendment divisions in the city. We are hopeful these misguided attempts at persuasion will end with the election.

Elizabeth "Sea Turtle" Drayer

Yes, you read that name correctly. Ms. Drayer is an environmental activist and retired attorney who began her campaign dressed in a sea turtle costume. Nothing more really needs to be said.

Bill Jonson

Mr. Jonson is a former member of the Clearwater city council where he served for fourteen years. He is also a retired accountant and project manager. Bill is collaborative and thoughtful and carried out his council duties diligently and with passion. He has been a champion of neighborhood causes and continues to advocate for stronger oversight and accountability of the city manager. We like Bill but feel the mayor’s job requires a different set of skills than Bill can provide.

Morton Myers

Mr. Myers is a small business owner who was born in Clearwater. While he is passionate about improving our community, we feel he is not adequately prepared or knowledgeable enough regarding city services or issues to fill the position of mayor.

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Councilmember (Seat 2) Eliseo Santana Jr.

Three of the candidates in this race have made statements ridiculing or criticizing the free practice of a religion of one's choice. The other two, Mr. Santana and Mr. Rector, have both acknowledged the importance of the first amendment to our way of life as a country.

In our opinion, both Rector and Santana are excellent choices for the city council but recommend Santana because of his ability and willingness to more aggressively defend constitutional liberties. Mr. Santana is a retired administrator from the Sheriff's Office and an Army veteran who has lived in Clearwater for nearly four decades. Unique among the candidates in this race, Santana has deep roots in minority neighborhoods. He is a staunch defender of first amendment freedoms and has openly rejected the assault on such from other candidates in his race. His platform focuses on the use of Opportunity Zones to encourage investment in distressed neighborhoods and formulating policies supportive of new affordable housing construction. We believe that Mr. Santana would be a fresh and thoughtful voice on the council free of personal bias and private agenda.

Mark Bunker

Bunker is an unemployed, former call center employee who declared bankruptcy last year and is a professional protestor against First Amendment freedoms.

Michael "Mike" Mannino

Mr. Mannino cites his long Clearwater roots as part of his qualifications for office. Like Mr. Hibbard, Mannino has hired a campaign consultant who advised him to adopt anti-First Amendment rhetoric which Mr. Mannino apparently did. During the campaign, Mr. Mannino stated that he is not biased against a religious group because, "I have a neighbor who is a Scientologist," then goes on to give statements in the media and on social media that are highly offensive. If Clearwater is to move forward and progress like its neighbors in St. Petersburg, Dunedin and Tampa, then it must leave such divisiveness in the past.

Bruce Rector

Mr. Rector is an attorney and businessman with expertise in public-private, economic development projects like what the city is proposing with Imagine Clearwater. He has lived in Clearwater long enough to know the community and its needs, but also brings a fresh perspective nurtured from an abundance of international travel. While serving as World President for the Junior Chamber International, he visited nearly fifty countries. Mr. Rector would make an excellent council member.

Lina Teixeira

Ms. Teixeira owns a wine bar in downtown Clearwater and has been active in the Downtown Merchants Association. In candidate forums and in her promotional material she has made inflammatory statements about the relationship between the City and the Church.

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Councilmember (Seat 3) Kathleen Beckman

We believe any of the four candidates in this race would serve competently on the council and there is a lot to like about each one. Refreshingly, and unlike some in the other two races, none of the candidates for Seat 3 have allowed themselves to be goaded into an anti-First Amendment stance. Like Mr. Santana in Seat 2, Ms. Beckman earned our recommendation because of her aggressive defense of constitutional liberties during the campaign.

Ms. Beckman is a retired schoolteacher who has been active in the community over the last four years since moving here. Both in her written response to the Tampa Bay Times and at the city-sponsored forum, she correctly differentiated between individual citizens who were members of the Church of Scientology and the Church itself. She also rightfully cautioned against the prejudiced and anti-First Amendment views promoted by the Times. While we have some reservations regarding her priorities, we believe she would be a commonsense voice on the council and a strong defender of First-Amendment freedoms.

Robert "Dr. Bob" Cundiff

Dr. Bob Cundiff is an incumbent completing his first term of office. He has shown both a willingness and high capacity to listen to and act on constituent needs. As a former professor at a religious university, he has supported the right of all Clearwater citizens to practice the religion of their choice. At a recent city sponsored forum, he even scoffed at the moderator's attempt to single out Scientologists on a question regarding government engagement. He said, "Al, I don't understand the question. Any voter who attends any church is free to run for office. Your question doesn't make any sense." Mr. Cundiff has done a good job representing the entire community during his first term and would likely do so again during a second term.

Bud Elias

Mr. Elias is a business owner and a veteran who has a long history of service to the community. He is approachable and well connected. Bud is running on a platform of fiscal responsibility and would very likely be a good steward of taxpayer dollars. We also believe he would willingly pursue the Urban Land Institute's recommendation to have the city be more collaborative in their interactions with downtown's largest taxpayer, the Church of Scientology. Mr. Elias is also well positioned to bring different factions of the community together for the betterment of all.

Scott R. Thomas

Mr. Thomas is a newcomer to the community and brings a fresh perspective. Professionally, he has excelled in his early career as a human resource manager for a healthcare company and campaigns on a platform of traditional conservative talking points. We like his view on fiscal responsibility. While Mr. Thomas has run a good campaign, we'd like to see more community involvement with a better understanding of local issues and a longer track record of service.