

2024 Board of County Commissioner Candidates for District 1

Questions were given to all candidates on May 18, 2024. All candidates were asked to respond no later than June 1, 2024. This document was produced June 14, 2024.

1. What is your background?

Henry Coker



I am a third generation Polk Countian. I am a small business owner. Husband to Amber and dad to Henry (6), Leo (4), and Claire (11 months). Currently I serve on the Board of Directors for Habitat for Humanity; Lakeland, am a member of the Lakeland Kiwanis Club and an active member of the Masonic lodge here in Lakeland.

Kay Klymko



I was raised in Michigan by diligent middle-class parents with Christian values. My husband and I moved to Florida in 2013 to Ormond Beach and then Lakeland to live near our daughter's family. I am a retired Professor and Director of the Adult-Gerontology Nurse Practitioner Program from Wayne State University and continue employment as a Nurse Practitioner. I have enjoyed my activities as a member of the First United Methodist Church in Lakeland, Polk Ecumenical Action Council for Empowerment (PEACE), Democratic Women's Club of Lakeland, Lakeland Democratic Club, Democratic Executive Committee of Polk County, Progressive Caucus of Polk County, Lakeland Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution, and Lakeland NAACP where I have had leadership positions in many of these organizations.

Judi New



My full name is Judi Mann New. I am a fourth-generation Polk Countian. I was born in Lakeland, Florida, and 1997 Lakeland High School graduate, Florida Southern College graduate, Duke Divinity School graduate, and Louisiana State University graduate. I have been married to Rev. Ed New and am a Mom of three children. My husband and I are both ordained United Methodist ministers, and I am currently the Director and Archivist for the Florida Annual United Methodist Church. I am a volunteer for Big Brothers Big Sisters, am on the Church Council of my home church, First United Methodist Church of Lakeland, and a member of the Florida Farm Bureau, and recently became a member of the Heritage Partner Committee, a sub-committee of the Polk County Historical Association.

Jennifer Price



As a lifelong resident of Polk County, I am a wife and mother who believes local leadership should listen to the voices of those they represent. I am a graduate of Polk County Public Schools and the University of Florida with a bachelor's degree in Criminology and Spanish. I have experience in non- profit, educational therapy, higher education, and currently serve as the VP of People and Talent for a mobile wound care company. I am grounded in conservative values and guided by faith. My family and I are active members of Family Worship Center in Lakeland, where we dedicate time to volunteering.

2. Why are you running for this position now?

Henry Coker



I studied Political Science at FSU and have always had an interest in local politics. My professional life has provided me the opportunity to serve our community and provided the time to devote to the campaign. I see a very clear need for common sense and a different perspective in our leadership today. Not only at the county level but throughout government as a whole.

Kay Klymko



My first reason is I care that all people are justly served to meet their basic needs. I have been a Nurse Practitioner most of my adult life and I have learned to care about and act on all factors that can affect a person or communities' ability to take care of basic needs. Important basic needs include physical and mental health, access to safe and affordable housing as well as food and water, and availability of jobs and transportation on safe and accessible roads.

My second reason for running is I care that we are managing our growth with optimal preservation of our beautiful Polk County environment. I have found that Polk County residents are voicing the growth rate and its impact on the environment and transportation as their number one concern. As a County Commissioner, I will be a strong voice in the commission to prioritize activities to manage growth and lessen the environmental impacts.

Judi New



I have always enjoyed watching politics and worked with Rep. Adam H. Putnam as his staff assistant after graduating from Florida Southern College worked as the Public Affairs Director for the Lakeland Area Chamber of Commerce, where much of my position was administering the Government Affairs Committee, BusinessVoice, Inc, and also was heavily involved in the County-wide campaign to change the Superintendent of the Polk County School Board to go from an elected position to an appointive system. I heard the call to run last fall after returning from the Library of Congress, where I was researching Florida Methodism. Our County is the fastest growing County in the nation; we need to manage this growth; remember that though we will be 1 million people by 2030, we need to balance and take manageable steps to ensure safe and proper growth within the 2,000 square miles of our County. I have driven over 13,000 miles since filing as a candidate for Polk County Commission, District 1. I see what needs to happen, I understand the issues, and I simply want to serve the people.

Jennifer Price



I believe elected leadership should prioritize listening to those they represent and make decisions that are in the best interest of all who call Polk County "home." Many, including myself, are increasingly frustrated with unrestrained development without necessary infrastructure as well as being dismissed when they raise concerns. I believe our county and its people will flourish when we listen to what they need – not what a handful of "experts" want for our county.

3. Why should citizens vote for you specifically instead of your opponents?

Henry Coker



First and foremost I am about as far from a politician as anyone in this race. My objectives are simple; Serve my community and guide it at a time of unprecedented growth with a fresh perspective and common sense. I have a genuinely vested interest in the future of Polk County now with raising my family and doing business here. As an entrepreneur and small businessman I believe I have a little more insight on building a business, making decisions that will impact people's lives and running an operation than any of my opponents.

Kay Klymko



I have a wealth of political experience through 40 + years in Hospital and University Administration, Community and Public Health, Education, Research, and as a small business owner. Being a commissioner is all about leadership and collaborating with a team to set policies and make decisions on priorities for budgeting resources that are limited. I have proven skill in synthesizing substantial amounts of data, creative problem-solving, and making evidence-based recommendations that I will bring to the table. Whether it is working with a hospital or university administrative team, or a county Board, the same principle should be in use, i.e., we exist to serve the people who have entrusted us with the position.

Judi New



I have been on the ground in almost every square mile of our County over these last seven months. I am not running for any other reason than I simply want to serve the people of our County and do it well. Yes, we are a huge County, and want us to be a strong, safe, caring County full of potential for growth, albeit safe and balanced growth. I am the candidate because I have no special interests behind me. I will always vote with my heart and knowledge of the issue at hand. Please take a moment to look on the Polk County Supervisor of Elections website, <https://www.polkelections.com/>, and look for the Candidates portion and read through the contributions of each candidate which shares a great deal of who is supporting them. People I meet with are often upset with the dynamics of politics in this day and age. I would like to return to that time of kindness, and although we may not agree on an issue, that does not make you my enemy.

Jennifer Price



I am an independent thinker and problem solver who is too stubborn to take the path of least resistance. I will partner with those who believe we can do better by raising our standards for development in Polk County. I will work for the people, and will strive to improve quality of life. Our first responders deserve a work-life balance. I will not yield to the interests of those who place personal gain over what's best for our people, nor will I automatically rubber stamp anything that comes before the commission.

4. What do you believe are the most important (not necessarily urgent) challenges/priorities facing Polk County and the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC)?

Henry Coker



Intelligent growth management with an focus on planning and implementing impactful infrastructure for the projected increases in the population over the next 25-50 years.

Kay Klymko



An important priority is that residential and commercial growth is in balance with supportive infrastructure and strategically placed to minimize environmental impacts. We must ensure clean potable water for now and in the future with a strong Polk County Regional Water Cooperative and knowledgeable commissioner liaison. Our strategic growth plans must preserve our upper Floridan aquifer and Lake Wales ridge recharge and scientific best evidence used in the experimental wells constructed to reach the deep Floridan aquifer.

Building our health care services to better meet the needs of the rapidly growing older adult population (50 years +) who comprise almost 40% of Polk County is a challenge. People want supportive home health care services at a reasonable cost that will permit our residents to stay in their homes as long as possible.

Planning for affordable housing availability is a priority that is safe with first responders prepared to practice just surveillance and rapidly respond to crisis situations within a reasonable period.

Judi New



Important challenges facing Polk County include balancing the opportunities that have resulted from massive growth due, in part, to business and developer-friendly policies approved by the Commission with the reality that our current Commission has continued to neglect the proper funding of our public infrastructure. It is their duty to balance this through careful, measured, and managed policies. We really need to see our roadways as a safety issue, especially with our County growing to 1 million people by 2030. We need to work hard now to make changes that will help future generations love Polk County for its uniqueness and beauty. I want my children to want to live here one day and not move somewhere that is easier to navigate. This is my mantra: “A society is made greater when people decide to plant trees in the shade that they know they will never sit.”

Jennifer Price



1. Elevate development standards to prioritize the well-being and individual property rights of citizens and local businesses.
2. Accelerate the development of an infrastructure plan that alleviates immediate needs while simultaneously planning for the future.
3. Develop strategic ways to attract a range of businesses to our county to promote business diversity and champion the growth of small businesses.
4. Create comprehensive solutions to attract and retain dedicated first responders, to ensure we retain our finest and not lose qualified and experienced team members to neighboring counties.
5. Preserve and maintain Polk’s natural resources such as clean water, green areas, and wildlife habitats.

5. Given Polk's recent record-breaking growth, what plan and what timeline should the BoCC follow in terms of impact fees and curbing growth in a way to allow planning experts to aid in distribution and placement of homes, citizens, and county facilities?

Henry Coker



Planning needs to begin now if not already in motion. Priorities, time lines and funding strategies need to align and grow with the expected needs.

Kay Klymko



Polk County applies impact fees received from developers to support related infrastructure needs with categories of Emergency Management Services, Transportation, Correctional facilities, Educational, Library, Parks and Recreational, Fire Rescue, and Law Enforcement infrastructure. Impact fee adjustments must be in accordance with the Florida Impact Fee Act (cited 163.31801; 2023 Florida Statutes) which has specific requirements such as the calculation of impact fee needs to be based on the most recent and localized data and fees may not be increased more than once in four years. As an example of these timelines, the PCBC raised new transportation impact fees for Polk County effective 07-01-23 with fees phased in annually over several years. For the category of a single family detached unit (per dwelling) located in Zone B (North-West Polk County), fees in phase one (2023) would be \$2,649, in phase two (2024) would be \$2,918, and in phase 3 (2025) would be \$3,187. Polk County's fee in this example would reach the median impact fee (\$2,764.50) of other Florida counties by the second year of its increase (Braverman, Samuel P., Florida County Impact Fee Study, January 2022). Using this example of timeline for impact fees adjustment, my approach would be to support an additional impact fee increase after 2027 when legally permissible and provided recent and localized data is supportive.

Judi New



Demand to live in the County has never been higher; however, the path that both the Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners have approved to supply that demand has been mismanaged. I believe this stems from a failed comprehensive infrastructure, utility, and public spaces plan with adequate public and private funding mechanisms. Planning experts are only effective when the Commission has a strong backbone to listen to the recommendations and properly weigh the costs and benefits to make the hard decisions. Moratoriums just buy time and are only a temporary bandage, which creates additional problems. Impact fees should actually be impactful to our future growth and not squandered or utilized in attempting to fix the sins of the past. The bigger issue is that Polk now has upwards of \$3 billion of unfunded transportation improvements, and with The Board of County Commissioners updating the County's Comprehensive Plan this year and I intend to be a part of the discussion on behalf of my future constituents to make sure that Polk County is the strong, beautiful, growing and wonderful place that we call home.

Jennifer Price



Horizontal development needs to be in place to support the growing community before vertical development takes place while we stabilize. Those driving sprawling residential growth should proportionally contribute to further infrastructure development. While unpopular with developers, impact fees should be increased at a consistent rate over the next few years to provide for the actual impact. Traffic congestion and accidents are a source of woe for nearly all residents, while our first responders are consistently working double shifts to accommodate this unrestrained growth. Planning experts should be from the area and familiar with the concerns/patterns rather than trying to convert Polk County into a larger municipality like Tampa or Orlando.

6. How can municipalities and city governments within Polk County work more effectively with the County Commission, and what are the best steps citizens can take to have their voices and concerns heard by the BoCC?

Henry Coker



Look at current trends and needs assessments, growth indicators and projections. Town Halls for community input. A planning board with membership representatives from all government sectors and the community at large.

Kay Klymko



Polk county has multiple incorporated municipalities, and unincorporated populated areas with Lakeland the largest city. The example of the Polk County Regional Water Cooperative with representatives from municipalities and a representative from the PCBC as formed surrounding a major issue can serve as the best example of how citizens may organize to have issues addressed. The PCBC can continue to facilitate this type of organizing of municipalities with more inclusion of other populated areas to assure county-wide inclusiveness.

Judi New



After driving over 13,000 miles around our County, I have been introduced to each municipality and I am building relationships with most of the City Managers and City Staff. Everyone I meet is incredibly good at what they do in their public service role, but they are looking for the County to set effective policy and stick to it. That requires input from our public servants and our citizens. One way that I believe citizens can have their voices heard is through social media. Through campaigning, social media has been an excellent way of communicating with people and I think this is the way of the future for citizens to interact with the Commissioners. It is so easy to message, email, and call.

Jennifer Price



We need to open the conduit for clear communication with municipalities and city governments. I want to shift at least one County Commission meeting per month to be held in the evening to afford those who work daytime hours to attend without having to take time off. I also feel strongly we need public communication that is in line with current technology of 2024. While a public notice in the newspaper is considered sufficient, social media must be leveraged as means to communicate and interact with our constituents. I would also push for regular town hall meetings for voters to meet with their elected officials.

7. Where can people go to get more information about you and/or your campaign?

Henry Coker 	https://www.facebook.com/henrycokerforpolk henrycokerforpolk.com electhenrycoker@gmail.com
Kay Klymko 	Address: PO Box 399, Highland City, Florida 33846 Website: kayklymko.com and select Facebook icon to follow. Facebook: kayforpolk Phone: 863-274-2492
Judi New 	I qualified as a write-in candidate. This is a beautiful blessing in many ways because I go straight to the General Election on November 5 and voters who support me need to “bubble in and then write-in my name JUDI NEW” when voting for Polk County Commission, District 1. In a day when social media is the outlet for many people to receive news, I am grateful that I can use social media to ask the voters of Polk County to please write in my name on November 5. Please go to my Facebook and Instagram pages: Facebook: Judi New Facebook: Vote Judi New Instagram: writeinJudiNew Please visit the campaign website: VoteJudiNew.com If you would like a yard sign, have a group I can visit and speak with, or have a question or concern, please email VoteJudiNew@gmail.com
Jennifer Price 	My website is www.priceforpolk.com and I can be found on Facebook at “ Elect Jennifer Price for Polk County Commission, District 1 ” I would welcome the opportunity to meet and speak with concerned citizens.

Note: Becky Troutman also qualified in this race but chose not to answer our questions. Information about her candidacy can be found at www.electbeckytroutman.com