

2024 Lake Wales City Commissioner Candidates for Seat 2

1. Who are you? (background, family, beliefs, etc.)

Brandon Alvarado



My name is Brandon Alvarado and I'm a proud Lake Wales native. I've been involved in making Lake Wales "a bit better or more beautiful because you have lived in it" since I was the Drum Major of the Lake Wales High School Highlander Band and during my time as the Education Director for the Lake Wales Arts Council. I currently have the privilege of serving as the President of the Lake Wales History Museum and the Chairman of the Historic District Regulatory Board. This community shaped me into the man that I am today, and I am forever grateful for the experiences Lake Wales has given me.

Crystal Higbee



I am a person who was built by the many people who poured their wisdom and knowledge into me and the collective experiences I went through that have helped me grow into a caring advocate. I am a wife, mother, teacher, and above all else I am a Christian who loves all people as Christ loves me. I am someone who will give you the shirt off my back if you are cold and hand over my meal if you are hungry. I am also the person who will call you out on a lie and confront you if you are harming others. I have extensive life experiences that are key to understanding the perspective of others. My experiences have exposed me to people who look, speak, and live differently than I do, which has helped me to respect and see the beauty in different cultures. I will never be perfect, but I make sure that my actions and decisions are weighed against the principles I was raised with; There is nothing worse than a liar and a thief. Don't start a job that you will not give your 100% to. Treat others as you want to be treated and when in doubt, put yourself in their shoes to help gain their perspective. Give your best in all situations, and if you fall pull yourself back up by your bootstraps-keep on moving because you only truly fail when you give up. I come from a mixed and blended family. I am the daughter of a Marine and entrepreneur, mother of a sailor, a former military spouse, a mother of children with diverse lives and cultures. I have owned my own business, traveled, earned a college degree and several certifications. I am currently working towards a Psychology degree. I worked in the medical field, off and on, for 23 years. I have taken part in serving my community as a sitting member of the Zoning Appellate Board, as a Rotarian, volunteer for persons with disabilities, Sunday School teacher, and nursery worker. I am the person who will give everything within me to fight to right a wrong and advocate for someone at a disadvantage.

Daniel Williams*



I am a native of Lake Wales, FL; I graduated from Lake Wales High School in 1991 and from Austin Peay State University (Clarksville, TN) in 1996 with a double major in Political Science and African-American Studies. I have been married to Dezonnia Williams for 25 years and our family extends beyond our two biological children to include a cherished group of spiritually adopted children through our church's youth ministry and the foster care system. I have a servant's heart and have been working beside my father, Roscoe Williams, since my youth. I have been the Senior Pastor of The Family Church in Lake Wales for 6 years and prior to working full-time in ministry, I worked in child welfare for more than 26 years as a juvenile probation officer, the Independent Living Program Manager for Heartland for Children, and as an ESE teacher at Dundee Ridge Middle School.

* *Incumbent*

2. Why are you running for city commissioner at this time?

Brandon Alvarado



My life is forever in service to my community. That phrase and my deep desire to make Lake Wales a better place for all pushed me to run for this city commission seat. The recent disagreements and divisions in our city have made me realize that we need a city commissioner who can bring people together and find solutions. In this time of significant change, I am ready to be that voice of reason and common ground.

Crystal Higbee



There has been an unfortunate and unnecessary resegregation of certain areas of our city which the commissioners should take time to consider the root cause of so this can be corrected and reunite the residents as one beautiful diverse community. I want to build a bridge that extends from our city representatives into our community by making myself available for every resident and business owner. The city is growing rapidly, and I want to make sure that every resident is considered when devising city projects and activities. I want to help make sure that the city's plans to grow and their planning of projects which would manage the new growth are responsible and representative of all residents in Lake Wales. I want to advocate for all business owners who have run into compliance issues with the city to be able to have access to resources that will help them back into compliance. Fining businesses as they are actively working to resolve a compliance issue only increases the odds that the business will fail. I want to create a way that will increase the odds that the business will succeed, which is better for them and better for the city. There are great men who are sitting on the city commission who can only improve their service with the addition of a commissioner that brings the voice of city resident's and perspective that was created from diverse life experiences.

Daniel Williams*



I am running for city commissioner with the sincere goal of creating a positive and meaningful impact on the lives of the people I am committed to serving. My passion lies in dedicated service to the community, and I am particularly focused on advocating for and amplifying the voices of the underrepresented population.

* *Incumbent*

3. Why do you consider yourself the better/best candidate for this seat? What distinguishes you from your opponent(s) in this race?

Brandon Alvarado



Questions like these often make me uncomfortable because I'm not really one to sing my own praises. However, I am a unique candidate who prioritizes the well-being of all citizens of Lake Wales. I express my views independently and am not beholden to one group of people, party, or ideas. I am not afraid to stand up for my beliefs. Lake Wales is currently facing many challenges, and I am eager to serve my community to the best of my ability and knowledge.

Crystal Higbee



What sets me apart from my opponents is my background, service, and experience. It is difficult to serve and make decisions for a diverse group of people that you either have little or no experience in serving or knowing just as it is inadvisable to make decisions that affect a large group of people when you have little experience making your own life decisions. It is important that a commissioner understand the weight of their decisions and that their decisions will impact the livelihood, safety, environment, and freedoms of others. That is why it is important that the people sitting on the commission come from diverse backgrounds, be made up of men and women, and have served their community with experience being responsible for other people's livelihoods and wellbeing. I come from a mixed and blended family which helps me understand the unique perspective of different cultures. I have lived in a progressive state and have traveled across the country which has helped me see what harms a community and what grows a community. I am a woman who has had the responsibility of providing for a family as a single mother. This has helped me understand what areas a community can improve in. I have been a business owner which gave me the perspective of an entrepreneur sacrificing security to build something that will benefit my family. I have experience taking the public's opinion and combining it with my own experiences and ideas to improve business practices which ultimately improved the organization. I have also served my community for many years in areas that helped improve family wellbeing, environment health, and community growth. My opponents have limited experience in some of these areas and zero experience in others.

Daniel Williams*



I believe that care and compassion are vital traits for effective leaders in our community. While care involves providing essential services, compassion calls for comprehending the suffering of others. Unfortunately, many leaders possess only one of these qualities, leading to unnecessary hardships for our citizens. My diverse background has equipped me with a wealth of experience and an unwavering dedication to both caring for people and demonstrating compassion for their situations. This unique combination empowers me to provide essential services to the citizens of Lake Wales while simultaneously understanding and addressing their challenges.

** Incumbent*

4. What would be your top priorities for the city, should you be elected?

Brandon Alvarado



Fully implementing the "Lake Wales Connected" and "Lake Wales Envisioned" plan are my top priorities. Full implementation of these plans addresses achievable economic development, conservation of our natural spaces for future generations, connecting diverse communities, and the fear of overgrowth and sprawl here in Lake Wales. I'm ready to ask tough and insightful questions and hold myself and others accountable for the decisions made here.

Crystal Higbee



My top priorities would be addressing the small businesses being affected by the beautification project, finding a solution to the parking problem downtown, finding responsible ways to limit urban sprawl, creating a team to represent the elderly and disabled when planning activities and projects, creating ways for businesses to come back into compliance and get them operating again and generating revenue, and unifying the city by going into the community and listening to their needs and making a way for all residents to benefit from city activities together

Daniel Williams*



My focus areas are:

- Promoting positive economic development and current economic prosperity.
- Connecting community and cultures with vision and values.
- Embracing traditional neighborhood designs (TND) while supporting superior housing standards.

Ensuring our city is a bit better and more beautiful for all people.

* *Incumbent*

5. As an elected city official, would you fight for ALL citizens of the city to be heard and represented, or only those who agree with you and your agenda? Lake Wales contains a diverse group of people. A person who is a commissioner should see value in all the people who live here. How have you, and how will you listen and assist citizens in Lake Wales with whom you may disagree?

Brandon Alvarado



Fighting for all citizens of Lake Wales to be heard and represented is one of the basic responsibilities of a city commissioner and one that I would not take lightly. As a city commissioner, we should be open and receptive to all ideas and criticism. We shouldn't become defensive and attack the citizens for having a different opinion than us and we should make public comments during a meeting a place where all voices can be heard. Open forums and discussion are where ideas become better, and there's no reason why that shouldn't be a goal here in Lake Wales.

Crystal Higbee



I am a representative of Lake Wales. The residents of Lake Wales are my neighbors. I place no Democrat or Republican next to their name. We all want to live in a safe and maintained environment. We all want to feel accepted and important. You cannot put people in a box and think that you can operate fairly on everyone's behalf. I will serve everyone, regardless of political party. I will consider everyone as a human being who deserves to be heard and who deserves to be able to live in a city that cultivates an environment that every resident from every background, race, creed, sex, etc. can feel comfortable and succeed in.

Daniel Williams*



As an elected city official, I represent ALL citizens. My campaign in 2021 focused on listening, learning, loving, and then leading. This sequence was intentional to guarantee that I had the chance to attentively listen to and gain insights from citizens with differing perspectives. I welcome diverse point of views because without them I would lack the depth ok knowledge that is required to truly serve the entire community. Servanthood is not conditional, a person agreeing with my beliefs is not a prerequisite for me to assist them. I have always had an "open door" policy and I believe in addressing concerns directly so that even when we find ourselves in disagreement, our differences will be respected so that, as citizens of Lake Wales, we can move forward together, united in our shared commitment to the well-being of our community.

** Incumbent*

6. There are individuals being served by Lake Wales utilities that do not live inside the city limits. Would you support a Lake Wales commission seat being designated for those individuals' representation?

Brandon Alvarado



While I support every individual's right to representation, per my research there is no precedent in Polk County for a specific city commission or city council seat to be designated to individuals who live in a city's utility service area, but not the city limits. There is precedent for a utility service board to represent those individuals, and many of the current city boards do allow for one seat to be held by an individual that does not live within the city limits.

Crystal Higbee



I believe every resident of a city should be represented. This is no different than my belief about every citizen of our country having a voice by their vote. The city of Lake Wales is growing quickly. The areas that have not had a representative in the past now have enough people residing in them to warrant a representative. There are revenue generating opportunities in these areas. The ordinances of the city do affect these groups outside city limits. The traffic alone has impacted their roads, which have lacked proper maintenance.

Daniel Williams*



I would absolutely support a commission seat being designated to represent individuals who reside outside of the city limits. I was raised in Highland Park Manor where many of my family members and loved ones reside.

** Incumbent*

7. Our neighborhood is marked No Soliciting. What can be done about the daily knocks on our doors by Solar, Roofing and Window Replacement representatives.

Brandon Alvarado



I would recommend reaching out to your HOA and working on a neighborhood No Soliciting strategy. While it can be frustrating, solicitors are protected through their right of free speech for commercial purposes. Posting "No Trespassing" or "No Soliciting" signs might also help deter potential solicitors.

Crystal Higbee



I have had the “privilege” of being solicited for services I neither wanted nor needed. It is annoying and interrupts my day. The fact that these people ignore the posted signs should speak to the lack of them being held accountable for their actions. I would like the city to designate the duty to an existing department to receive complaints from homeowners and businesses and then have the city fine the businesses in violation of soliciting where there are clear posted signs stating, “No soliciting”. There should be a phone number distributed to city residents so that they are aware of who they can contact when solicitation occurs. There should also be a posted description of what soliciting is and the activities it encompasses in areas the solicitation is prohibited. There are some people who are ignorant of the fact that they are soliciting, and this type of sign would help. I believe that clear communication and holding the solicitors accountable is the key to stopping their behavior.

Daniel Williams*



Solicitors can be prohibited from knocking on your door if you post a no soliciting or no trespassing sign on your individual private property; please check with your HOA to see if you are allowed to post signs.

** Incumbent*

8. Do you think things should be done to SLOW the population growth in our area, rather than building more to accommodate the growth? Is there any cap on what seems to be uncontrolled growth in Lake Wales?

Brandon Alvarado



Any incumbent city commissioner or candidate to be city commissioner that says or claims that they know how or can slow/stop the population growth in the Lake Wales area is being incredibly untruthful. Our roadmap to being responsible in how we grow is the "Lake Wales Envisioned" plan. The city commission has the power to stand up to predatory developers and say no to their bad development designs and unsustainable infrastructure demands while offering solutions on how we can grow more responsibly and sustainably. The future of a better Lake Wales lies with city commissioners who are willing to enforce the ideals of "Lake Wales Envisioned" so we can pass down a version of Lake Wales that we're proud of to future generations.

Crystal Higbee



Growth is inevitable. Growth or death, such is life. What I believe should be happening is the proper maintenance of what we have already established. This would include making sure that our structures are sound, parking and roads are being built to handle not just our current population, but our future population. We should be repairing and building upon established parks and recreation taking into consideration the diverse groups that will utilize them instead of leaving them to decay and building new ones. We should be growing from what we already established, not around it. Building new businesses next to dilapidated downtown buildings is not cohesive. We are making extravagant roads downtown that butt- up to shuttered buildings and structures that are termite damaged with unkempt facades. What sense does it make to create roads to nowhere? We plant a few trees in our one and only disability inclusive playground when the equipment is breaking down and disgustingly dirty. We could either add inclusive equipment at a better kept playground or build up the existing playground to be one that is envied county-wide. We should grow, but we need to be responsible stewards of what we have already been given first.

Daniel Williams*



I am doubtful that anything can be done to slow down the population growth in our area. Presently, Polk County stands as the fastest growing county in the State of Florida and the 4th fastest growing Metropolitan Statistical Area in the nation. Lake Wales claims the title of the fastest growing city in Polk County. Given the data, the most prudent course of action is to adopt a proactive stance and prepare for the inevitable growth on the horizon.

** Incumbent*

9. What can the City of Lake Wales do to help remediate climate change?

Brandon Alvarado



We can update our building codes so that we can make our buildings more energy efficient. This is also a great way to help our citizens save money on utility costs. I would encourage those concerned with the major effects of climate change to contact their state representative or their congressman.

Crystal Higbee



It is our duty as the beneficiaries of natural resources that the earth provides to take care of and maintain our environment by living responsibly and reducing our footprint as much as we can. Not littering and recycling are a couple ways that we can do this. The city can help by posting “no littering” signs that warn residents if they throw garbage on the ground that they will be fined. Then enforcing the fines. This is part of being accountable for our actions. The city should also place recycling receptacles in public parks. The city can host workshops for residents to educate them on how to reduce their carbon footprint which would benefit the average family by reducing monthly household expenses.

Daniel Williams*



The City of Lake Wales is already taking steps to use energy efficient initiatives and programs. By reiterating the importance of renewable energy sources, expanding our public transportation, and simply educating the citizens of Lake Wales to raise awareness are small but impactful strategies that will play a role in remediating climate change. My goal is for the City of Lake Wales to assist in facilitating the installation of renewable energy systems for businesses and homes.

* *Incumbent*

10. Would you support significant investment by the City to expand our athletic facilities in an effort to begin drawing in sports tourism to LW, similar to what has been successfully done in WH and Auburndale?

Brandon Alvarado



In order to expand our athletic facilities, we first need to maintain and improve our current ones. It's very easy to open new facilities, but the hard work starts after the ribbon cutting and maintaining them at a high standard should be a top priority. Lake Wales is also blessed with amazing arts, historic, and cultural nonprofits, like Lake Wales Main Street, the Lake Wales Arts Council, Lake Wales History Museum, Lake Was Mardi Gras, Orange Blossom Revue, and more that bring in tens of thousands of people to their various events throughout the year. These organizations greatly stimulate our local economy and are worthy of significant investment by the City of Lake Wales so they can continue to improve and grow their successful programming and large-scale events.

Crystal Higbee



I am all for attracting tourism and business to Lake Wales. I do not think that Lake Wales should try to become Winter Haven. I think that there should be several meetings held with leaders involved who represent different sports to discuss what need is not yet being met as far as available facilities and space. One the need has been determined then the community should have a say in where these facilities and spaces would be built or available.

Daniel Williams*



I wholeheartedly would endorse the city investing in expanding our athletic facilities to initiate the attraction of sports tourism to Lake Wales. The expansion of these facilities would not only serve as a catalyst for drawing in sports enthusiasts but also contribute to cultivating a stronger sense of community for residents of all ages.

** Incumbent*

11. How have you built relationships or going to build relationships with the people of the Northwest Community after the election? When was the last time you were in the Northwest Community other than ribbon cuttings?

Brandon Alvarado



For too long the Northwest Community has been solicited for votes and then they rarely see their city commissioners until the next election. Attending local meetings and gatherings in our Northwest Community is one way I will stay involved and build relationships. My goal is to be engaged, present, and available to the needs and concerns of the Northwest Community. I've been in the Northwest Community recently for various private meetings, a few food distributions, and I plan to be at the B Street Center for the February 26th meeting of the Citizens & Police Community Relations Advisory Committee meeting.

Crystal Higbee



I do not like that the Northwest community is being singled out like it is an area to be afraid of that is less important than all the others. This area is home to a diverse group of people, some of whom need a little assistance from the government for housing. That does not make people from this area “less deserving” or “less than” anyone else. My children have lived in government assisted housing in the Northwest. I visited there regularly. I had no issues. As a matter of fact, I would take my grandchildren to play at the Northwest Park. Again, I had no issues except that my granddaughter did not want to leave her new friends. The park there was better kept than Barney’s Dreamland. That told me that the Northwest residents cared about their children playing in a clean and safe environment. I do not buy into the belief that one sect of people are better than another. I don’t believe that people are inherently “bad” because they reside in a specific location, so I am not hesitant to visit any specific area. The residents of Lake Wales who grew up in the Northwest have brought a beautiful culture to our diverse city. All neighborhoods should know that they are represented. I don’t believe anyone should be a commissioner who wouldn’t visit or do their best for every part of Lake Wales.

Daniel Williams*



I have built several relationships with numerous families in the Northwest Community, consistently delivering fresh fruit and water to them each month. Additionally, I actively engage in community service through the Lake Wales Care Center's Stay at Home Work Camp and Thanks-Living Camp, where we collaborate on home improvement tasks and provide food for families all over Lake Wales including the Northwest Community. On March 16, 2024, I will be sponsoring my inaugural “Lake Wales Connected: Connecting Our Community, One Neighborhood at a Time.” This event will be hosted at Frazier Field, in the Northwest Community, and aims to foster a stronger sense of community and connectivity among Lake Wales residents.

** Incumbent*