



FROM THE MANATEE COUNTY DEMOCRATIC PARTY

December 2023

Manatee Dems Choose Chris Wetherington as Party Chair

By Wil Clapper

The Manatee County Democratic Party welcomed a new chair to lead the party during a Democratic Executive Committee (DEC) special election, Tuesday, Dec. 5.



Chris Wetherington, of Parrish, accepted the gavel from outgoing chair Evelyn Almodóvar after nearly 40 DEC members unanimously voiced their acceptance of Wetherington as their leader.

“I’m excited and eager to get to work,” said Wetherington after the special election meeting. He acknowledged that he will be able to “hit the ground running” thanks to the strong committee and volunteer networks the Democrats have built the past few years.

Almodóvar served a year as party chair. She recently accepted a nonprofit professional opportunity that integrates the Hispanic community into civic engagement in Florida.

“As chair, I see myself as a successor to the great work that Evelyn has established,” Wetherington said. “I see two opportunities to begin with (as chair). First, continue to assist our precinct development committee recruitment efforts. Secondly, I will work with the leadership team and communications on a proactive messaging plan to articulate an effective alternative to the Republican narrative.”



Originally from Plant City, Wetherington was a precinct captain in the Plant City area.

While there, he worked on two commission candidate campaigns. “I have always found myself loving politics and the great debate,” said Wetherington. “My mother used to say that I could argue with the wall and win.”

Currently, Wetherington is in the healthcare field. “I learned how to build operations, create repeatable processes, lead teams and how to cultivate relationships through sales and marketing,” said Wetherington. “These are skills that I am confident will translate well to this role as chair of the Manatee Democrats. I want to energize everyone in the party.”

Manatee Dems Active During 12 Days of Service

By Wil Clapper

The Manatee County Democratic Party will close the year with 12 days of service by engaging in community service projects from Dec. 1 to Dec. 12.



Manatee Dems are actively committed to community service and have started a number of projects during the 12-day campaign.

Democratic headquarters is a collection center for Food Bank of Manatee nonperishable food items. The Dems’ office is also the site for Our Daily Bread nonfood items such as diapers, wipes, toys, toilet paper, health and beauty aids.

Beyond the 12 Days of Service, Manatee Dems will sort and pack food at the Manatee County Food Bank on Dec. 19.

Elsewhere, the Manatee Dems are encouraging volunteers to tutor adults for the Manatee Literacy Council. Training is provided. For more information [Contact the Manatee Literacy Council](#).

Democratic Party headquarters is located at 435 Cortez Road, Bradenton. Hours are Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from noon to 4 p.m. and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Legality of New Public Library Circulation Policy Questioned

By Kathern Groulx

At a recent Library Advisory Board meeting, school board member Mary Foreman, acting as a private citizen, questioned the new circulation policy approved by the Board of County Commissioners on Nov. 14.

The new policy restricts student access to only parents' choice. Foreman said the agreement conflicted with the May 25, 2021 agreement between the BOCC and the

school district to allow full access to library services with a public school student ID card. The stated reasoning was to allow all Manatee County public school students access to library services, “with the same rules as a regular library card.” That policy allowed students to check out materials and have access to the library’s resources.

The new policy replaces full access with a parents’ choice library card that limits the availability of materials into age brackets. Foreman noted a middle school student wishing to read and write a book report on “The Count of Monte Cristo” would not be able to access the book because it is not filed in the YA section.

Let your county commissioners know that they must not restrict access to learning. Leave a message at 941-745-3700 or email the commissioners individually:

- james.satcher@mymanatee.org
- amanda.ballard@mymanatee.org
- kevin.vanostenbridge@mymanatee.org
- mike.rahn@mymanatee.org
- raymond.turner@mymanatee.org
- jason.bearden@mymanatee.org
- george.kruse@mymanatee.org

You can also attend the Library Advisory Board meeting on Dec. 20th, at 9 a.m. in the Central Library conference room. There will be an opportunity to speak with a three-minute limit.

Citizen McClash Challenges the BOCC Wetlands Vote



By Diana Hines

In a direct challenge to the Manatee County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) vote to amend the Comprehensive Plan regulations protecting wetlands, Joe McClash, a former County Commissioner and *The Bradenton Times* publisher, has filed a petition with the Division of Administrative Hearings for a formal hearing on the vote.

The [DOAH](#) will hear McClash’s case, which asserts that the BOCC ignored overwhelming public and scientific testimony proving the wetlands protections must be maintained.

The BOCC reduced wetland buffers, on a 5-1 vote in October, in favor of less restrictive state minimums. Buffers between sensitive wetlands and new upland development are reduced from 50 feet to 25 feet. Buffers between outflowing wetlands and new upland development are reduced from 30 feet to 15 feet.

Environmentalists and concerned citizens believe the taking away of protections to the wetlands will adversely affect wildlife, water quality and increase the potential for flooding in former buffer zones.

In a statement to *The Bradenton Times*, McClash said, “Personally, I would rather not have to challenge a government for which I served 22 years as a county commissioner...However, the board failed to make those changes in the best interest of the public...and lacked any credible explanation or scientific justification.”

McClash explained, “the process of administrative hearings is designed for these specific instances where the county might take action without the proper process or information to substantiate or support the action.”

But he acknowledges that “there’s not a whole lot of people with experience in filing challenges to comp plan text amendments and environmental resource permits.”

The move by McClash to file a formal complaint against the county government raises an important question: How does the public step up and challenge these kinds of actions? And if the public understood the process, would they do more of this?

More information about the procedures and time frame for a citizen challenge to a Comprehensive Plan Amendment can be found at the Visit Florida Jobs website.

[Visit FloridaJobs.org Here](https://www.visitfloridajobs.org)

Volunteer for Advisory Board Positions **County Seeks Library Board Applicants**

Democrats can effect change in Manatee County government, schools and services by volunteering for openings on advisory boards. Residents who volunteer for these boards bring knowledge, expertise, and a fresh point of view and help balance representation of the boards.

To learn more about each of the county's advisory boards and qualifications for applicants, call 941-745-3700 or email advisoryboards@mymanatee.org or go to: www.mymanatee.org/government/advisory_boards.

Currently, there is one advisory board opening:

Public Library Advisory Board

Manatee County is accepting applications for five seats on the expanded Manatee County Library Advisory Board.

The board is responsible for creating and recommending policies for the operation of the library system to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). Successful applicants are appointed by the BOCC to four-year terms. Currently, the BOCC is seeking candidates who fulfill specific criteria:

- Applicant must be a resident of Anna Maria, Bradenton Beach, Holmes Beach or the Town of Longboat Key.
- A representative from Lakewood Ranch/Myakka City.
- A representative who is a librarian with a Master of Library Science (MLS).
- An applicant must have a child or children enrolled in the Manatee County schools.

- An applicant must be a parent/guardian of a homeschool child or children.

Each applicant must submit an [online application](#) by Dec. 20. For more information, contact Brooke Frasca, administrative specialist, at 941-748-5555 ext. 6389, or email brooke.frasca@mymanatee.org.

Online Application

For board or committee vacancies in Manatee County cities, go to their respective web pages for more information:

City of Bradenton: <https://cityofbradenton.com/boards>

City of Palmetto: <https://www.palmettofl.org/>

City of Anna Maria:

https://www.cityofannamaria.com/government/boards_and_committees/index.php

City of Holmes Beach: holmesbeachfl.org

City of Bradenton Beach: <https://www.cityofbradentonbeach.com/191/Advisory-Boards>

Town of Longboat Key: <https://www.longboatkey.org/town-government/boards-and-committees>

Black Caucus Celebrates Kwanzaa



Join the Manatee County Democratic Black Caucus for a Kwanzaa Celebration at Your Honeycomb, 426 9th Street East, Bradenton, Thursday, Dec. 28, 6 to 9 p.m.

Share the joy, unity and cultural pride. Immerse yourself in the rich traditions of the African diaspora as we honor the seven principles of Kwanzaa. Enjoy vibrant music, dance, storytelling and delicious food. Tickets are \$25:

**Get Yours
Here!**

Read On Manatee! Opposes School Book Bans

By Wil Clapper

Read On Manatee!, a grassroots movement opposed to banning books in public school libraries, is hosting a meeting on Thursday, Jan. 4, 6 p.m., at the Braden River public library.

Marie Masferrer, an educator for 26 years and a school librarian for 15 years, is a former Manatee County school librarian and one of the organizers of Read On Manatee! The group is for teachers, students, parents and librarians united to fight book bans in Manatee. The group also advocates holding school district officials accountable for properly following the law and other procedures.



Join Us!

We stand against the bans!

**6 PM
JAN. 4, 2024
BRADEN RIVER
PUBLIC LIBRARY**



“We need as many volunteers as possible for monthly meetings,” said Masferrer. “There are no challenges recorded, yet library shelves are empty.” According to The Florida Freedom to Read project, at least 76 titles have been removed from school shelves since August 2022. None of the challenges apparently have been considered by the school board.

Masferrer will also answer questions about the challenge process and status of the movement during the League of Women Voters’ Education Caucus, Dec. 19 via Zoom. For more information, visit the Read On Manatee! Facebook page or contact Masferrer at readonmanatee@gmail.com.

Visit their Facebook



The Manatee County Democratic Party is a **100% volunteer organization**. All contributions of any size are appreciated.

Get involved! Check out the many area Democratic clubs and caucuses. Meet like-minded people at fun events!


Receive our newsletter! Was this email forwarded to you? Would you like to keep hearing from us?

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Resource Links

Florida Democratic
Party

The Florida Channel

National Democratic
Party

Manatee County Board of
Commissioners

Headquarters Office

435 Cortez Road W, Bradenton, Florida
34207, United States

(941) 301-4336

info@manateecountydemocrats.com



Hours

Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays,
Noon to 4 p.m.

Saturdays 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Contact us to schedule a meeting

Visit our
Website

Manatee County Democratic Party | 435 Cortez Road W, Bradenton, FL 34207

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