

2023 Lake Wales City Commissioner Candidates

Each of the candidates were given the same eight questions and responded between February 14th and February 26th. All candidates responded independently.

Seat 3	Keith Thompson	Michelle Threatt
Who are you? (background, family, beliefs, etc.)	<p>My name is Keith Thompson and I've called Lake Wales home for 55 years. My family has lived here since the late 1960's and I was raised in a typical two-parent blue collar household. My wife and I moved back to Lake Wales in 1998 and we raised our only daughter, Abigail, here. She is now married and starting a family of her own with her husband Nick Kemick, in Parrish, FL. They have one daughter, Elliot Faye.</p> <p>I've had a life-long walk of faith with Jesus Christ that has deepened and enriched every part of who I am and hope to be. This walk has shaped every ethic, value, and belief that I have about the role of government, responsibility of citizenship and the natural rights of all people.</p>	<p>My name is Michelle Threatt, mother of 2 sons and 4 grandchildren. I am the owner of Topsy's Food Truck, author of <i>Life Moments to Inspire, Laugh & Pray</i>, and community involved citizen who cares about people.</p>
Why are you running for city commissioner at this time?	<p>My hope is to inspire and elevate a better conversation about the issues we face. There is a wasted energy and bandwidth in negativity and divisive dialogue, it rarely ever changes minds and hearts. I feel I have unique experiences and skills that allow me to communicate effectively and empathetically with people, and I'm ready to embrace the responsibility of using these gifts by serving my community.</p>	<p>I am running for city commissioner at this time because I've been on the outside involved helping my community and city for the last 4 years. It is now time to be on the inside to help even more and to know about changes and be a part of the change and helping the people.</p>
Why do you consider yourself the better candidate for this seat? What distinguishes you from your opponent in this race?	<p>I'm not certain about the idea of "better", so I would categorize myself as "different". I know who I am, what I believe and I'm comfortable in my own skin. I'm neither naive nor cynical about the challenges that face our community, and I genuinely have no personal agendas that I'm advocating for. I just want to serve the community, that has given me access to runways of growth and development, with dignity, decorum, and optimism.</p>	<p>I have served my community and county in law enforcement for 15 years until my retirement in 2017. I have been involved consistently in our city and community and have received numerous awards & news recognition for my community work that began 4 years ago. I have attended city commission meetings consistently for the last 4 years unless I was working. I am currently a board commissioner for the Lake Wales Housing Authority and have had to discuss and vote on decisions for the betterment for the housing authority and residents. I spend time with the residents and listen to their issues and get the answers for them and help resolve their issues.</p>
What would be your top priorities for the city, should you be elected?	<p>Managing and mitigating the impacts of rapid growth and development, while being mindful and attentive to the quality of the conversation we're having about "the issues". Whatever the matter before the commission, asking tough, fair, and curious questions is critical to a successful pathway forward. Inspiring the conversation towards good-faith and goodwill is a priority for me.</p>	<p>Accountability and transparency as an elected official, growth of our city, listening to the issues and concerns of people.</p>

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<p>Considering the rapid growth in the LW area, especially growth of non-LW-owned businesses, what do you think the commission must do to support local businesses?</p>	<p>We exist in a financial eco-system that requires balance and fine tuning, particularly at the city level. Large retail chains (big box stores, restaurants, etc.) consume large spaces and require lots of infrastructure development. But they also bring name recognition, smaller retail space development and their presence is largely tied to residential density. This can allow small, locally owned businesses to prosper in their “shadow”. I believe elected officials, working with City Staff can promote business friendly policies and incentives working through our CRA’s to get creative and imaginative. There’s a lot to cover here in just a few sentences, but the first step is to create better conversations about what local business owners need from its City Government to flourish.</p>	<p>I think that the commission should have programs available to help local businesses and new businesses. Owning and operating a business is a lot and you need guidance and help at times. Possibly having funds available for established businesses to help them grow if a certain criteria is met.</p>
<p>Lake Wales contains a diverse group of people. A person who is a commissioner should see value in <u>all</u> the people who live here. How have you, and how will you listen and assist citizens in Lake Wales with whom you may disagree?</p>	<p>There was a time when I felt compelled to argue people into my point of view or opinion. It never worked. So I learned a different way. People want to be genuinely seen and heard by others, especially their elected officials. They should be given access to their government, regardless of how they avail themselves of it. I have spent the last ten years being a balanced voice in some very heated and divisive circumstances. I have disciplined myself in the skills of listening and paying attention and will continue.</p>	<p>I've listened and assisted citizens the last 4 years. Everyone is not always going to agree but we can respect each other's thoughts and opinions. We should all be treated fairly no matter our gender, race, beliefs, sexual preference, rich or poor. We all have work to do and that starts by listening to one another.</p>
<p>What is your plan to increase lighting in all areas of Lake Wales?</p>	<p>The events that unfolded a few weeks ago where a middle schooler was tragically killed at a bus stop, was devastating and heartbreaking. So, the need to update lighting and make the city a brighter & safer, as well as improve visibility for its citizens, city workers and first responders is vital. The city is currently in a process with Duke Energy updating lighting to brighter LED lights. This should be completed within 8-10 months, depending on the current condition of the lighting structures and what needs to be done to make them functional. The city is also conducting a joint effort with Polk County Schools and Lake Wales Charter Schools to identify bus stops within the city limits so that lighting assessments can be done, and proper lighting installed. As a City Commissioner, my role will be to make sure the projects are funded and carried out efficiently and effectively, in a timely manner. I think another role would be to inform and educate the citizens as to the process and give updates along the way through social media and email.</p>	<p>At this current time, I'm only aware of a few locations that needs more lighting and I have already spoken with the streets department about those areas that I am aware of, especially our alley ways.</p>
<p>Where can people find more information about your campaign?</p>	<p>www.inspireandelevate.org Facebook Page: Keith Thompson for Lake Wales City Commission Seat 3 Instagram: keith_thompson1986; Twitter: @kthompson33853 LinkedIn: Keith Thompson</p>	<p>Information can be found on social media on my campaign page: Michelle Threatt for Lake Wales City Commissioner, Seat 3. I also share some things on my personal page. I am willing to speak with anyone one on one if you do not have social media about your questions and concerns.</p>



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Seat 5	Danielle Pride Gibson	Robin Gibson
Who are you? (background, family, beliefs, etc.)	My name is Danielle Pride Gibson born and raised in the City of Lake Wales. Alumni of class of 2005 LWHS. I am the mother of 5 children married to previous city commissioner Curtis Gibson. I am a Retention Specialist and Licensed Insurance Agent with 16 years of experience.	I am Robin Gibson, Lake Wales City Commissioner running for reelection. I have been married to Jean for 61 years, we have four children and six grandchildren. I believe in the Bok ethic: "Make you the world [Lake Wales] a bit better or more beautiful because you have lived in it."
Why are you running for city commissioner at this time?	I chose to run for city commission because I have heart of service and not afraid of hard work. I am new to the political world but with my experience I believe it will be beneficial to have a different perspective and bringing new ideas to our city commission.	My fellow city commissioners know of my commitment to community redevelopment and have annually elected me Deputy Mayor, automatically making me the Chair of the Lake Wales Community Redevelopment Agency. During the seven years I have been chair, we have taken the CRA from zero redevelopment to a range of major redevelopment activity, including the recent \$18.5 million bond issue containing the \$12.7 million "Lake Wales Connected" project (linking Downtown with the Northwest Neighborhood) which will break ground next month. Having been a part of bringing these projects to fruition, I very badly want to apply my knowledge and experience to make sure these projects are successful.
Why do you consider yourself the better candidate for this seat? What distinguishes you from your opponent in this race?	Along with being diverse, which is a very important quality to have, I would also consider myself to be cultured and open-minded individual. I have a strong ability to relate to everyone around me and I believe that will work in my favor in terms of being a successful city commissioner.	Tooting my own horn makes me uncomfortable. I will leave it to others to compare knowledge and experience and make the decision about the better candidate.
What would be your top priorities for the city, should you be elected?	My top priorities would be the city's growth, recreation (quality of life), community engagement	Helping mobilize the strengths of the Lake Wales Community Redevelopment Agency, City Commission, Lake Wales Main Street., Lake Wales Heritage, Lake Wales Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Council, and a list of community civic clubs and nonprofit corporations to 1) Bring to fruition the "Lake Wales Connected" plan, and 2) Support Dover Kohl & Partners' efforts to guide growth and conservation in the surrounding utility service area according to the "Lake Wales Envisioned" concepts.

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<p>Considering the rapid growth in the LW area, especially growth of non-LW-owned businesses, what do you think the commission must do to support local businesses?</p>	<p>I believe that the commission should support all businesses local or non-locally providing them with equal opportunity and benefits, none greater than the other.</p>	<p>The strategy for enhancement of local businesses is to make Lake Wales a "destination" for commercial traffic in competition with other towns in the area. The carefully planned implementation is coming to fruition: ground will be broken next month on the \$12.7 million downtown segment of the state-awarded "Lake Wales Connected" plan. The growth we are experiencing to our area will be managed in a well-planned market expansion within the concepts of the "Lake Wales Envisioned" project which is spelled out at lakewalesenvisioned.com and available beginning March 20 for public participation by all concerned.</p>
<p>Lake Wales contains a diverse group of people. A person who is a commissioner should see value in <u>all</u> the people who live here. How have you, and how will you listen and assist citizens in Lake Wales with whom you may disagree?</p>	<p>Listen, Learn, and then Lead is my slogan. I never want to pass judgment on any of our citizens but to fairly look at all sides of the situation and to make sure I am being fair and provide the best solution even if there is a disagreement.</p>	<p>Frankly, I get a lot out of the public comments, particularly the ones that challenge what we are doing. As you may recall from several meetings ago, I voted to open up the public comments on a vote that did not pass, and when the question came before us again, I voted with my fellow city commissioners to open the public comments to any member of the public who signed up and wished to speak. As a lawyer with 60 years experience in the adversarial system, I have no trouble listening to citizen comments, seriously considering differing views, and coming up with what I view to be the best result.</p>
<p>What is your plan to increase lighting in all areas of Lake Wales?</p>	<p>I have already been scouting out my district and taking note of areas that are dark and need lighting. I would work closely with the other commissioners and the city manager so that we can build a model and work with Duke Energy to ensure all areas have properly lighting. I don't want lighting to be an excuse for impairment in our city.</p>	<p>Commissioner Terrye Howell has led the call to improve the City's inadequate street lighting, causing the City and Duke Energy to be engaged in an effort for improvement. The first phase to retrofit existing lighting with LED lights was underway when [a middle school student] was tragically killed at an unlit school bus stop. I support the steps taken since to 1) finish the work with the schools to properly light all school bus stops, and 2) obtain estimates for a budget amendment to enable the City to alleviate all the low-light areas in town.</p>
<p>Where can people find more information about your campaign?</p>	<p>I have a Facebook page Danielle Pride Gibson for City Commissioner Seat 5</p>	<p>Contact either my office manager, Colleen Curchy at 727-543-1784, or myself at 863-632-9000.</p>