

ALACHUA COUNTY LABOR COALITION

2024 Alachua County Labor Coalition City Commission Candidate Questionnaire

INSTRUCTIONS:

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this questionnaire.

This questionnaire is divided into eight sections covering issues important to Alachua County Labor Coalition members and Alachua county's working class. Each section contains multiple questions (which are bulleted). Be sure to respond to each question, but please limit your responses in each section to 750 words (or less).

We will be hosting a public candidate forum to provide coalition members and the general public an opportunity to follow up on your responses. Separate forums will be held for commission and mayoral candidates.

The forum is scheduled for Thursday, August 1st at 6:00 PM (location TBD).

Candidates must return a completed questionnaire by Monday, July 22nd at 11:59 PM in order to receive an invitation to the forum.

Completed questionnaires should be returned to Coordinator@LaborCoalition.org.

NOTE: The Labor Coalition does not endorse any candidates, and the inclusion of these questionnaire responses to our website should not be taken as an endorsement.

Labor and Wages

- Federal and state laws give most workers the right to form and join unions. Do you support or oppose the right of all private and public sector workers to organize a union?
 - [I strongly support and encourage union organizing](#)
- Would you publicly support workers in our community who are seeking workplace rights, including a living wage and the right to union representation?
 - [I would and I have](#)
- The questions in this part relate to living wages, benefits, and economic inequality.

BACKGROUND: The Gainesville City Commission made [significant progress on providing living wages for municipal workers, including part-time, temporary, seasonal](#), and [contracted workers](#). This year, the state legislature passed, and the governor enacted [HB 433](#), which prohibits city and county governments requiring their contractors to pay workers a wage above the state's minimum wage after September 30th, 2026. Additionally, HB 433 prohibits local governments from requiring employers provide heat protections to their workers.

- How do you define a living wage?
 - There's a lot of different metrics and ways to measure it but I usually come back to the description by FDR as "by living wages I mean more than a bare subsistence level-I mean the wages of decent living." It is an embarrassment that people working full time jobs struggle with basic necessities.
- What do you think the City can do to decrease the gap between wages and the cost of living in Gainesville?
 - First off, the city can act as a model employer, which will both benefit our workforce and put upward pressure on other employers in the area. Second, working on lowering the cost of living for our residents with programs like weatherization and affordable housing.
- What do you envision as the role of other large local employers in Gainesville in helping to improve wages, worker benefits, workplace safety, and reduce inequalities?
 - Aside from local governments the largest employers in town are either UF related or large corporations that are not based here. We have little leverage with most of them on this front. We can and should encourage and support unionization efforts made by the employees of these corporations and institutions.

- How would you encourage local employers to address these issues, in light of the state’s recent preemption of local governments requiring contractors to pay their employees a living wage?
 - Any answer that works now will probably have to be adjusted after next legislative session. We will have to continue to find work arounds for state preemption that is constantly changing. I think that while we can’t require fair contracting practices for city work there is the possibility of requiring fair contracting practices in exchange for the density bonuses and fee waivers that developers often ask for.

Housing

- How can the City and/or its partners build significant new housing for our workforce?

There are a lot of possibilities.

- Working with affordable housing trusts
- Workforce housing requirements in new development
- Using city or county funds or a bond to support or build workforce housing

There is a ton of federal money coming out over the next few years as part of the American Rescue act designated to address affordable housing and homelessness. Making sure Gainesville takes advantage of these funds has the potential to bring a lot of resources here.

These are some immediate possibilities that I’m aware of. But at the end of the day I am not an expert on affordable housing. It is also going to be important to listen to advocacy groups like the ACLC as well as policy experts like the Shimberg center to get a better understanding of what decisions we can make to make affordable housing a long-term reality in our community.

- What partners do you envision the City working with on such an initiative?

- I am thrilled if we can get developers or organizations that want to build workforce housing and think we should do everything we can to work with and encourage those partners. At some point however, I think we need to take a serious look at building our own housing that addresses the needs of the community.

- How should the City balance the need for both workforce rental housing and workforce homeownership opportunities?

- We are severely lacking in both of these areas. I am less concerned with the exact proper balance between the two than I am in increasing the stock of both.

- The questions in this part relate to local-level renters’ rights protections.

BACKGROUND: The City of Gainesville created the [Residential Rental Unit Permit Program](#) a comprehensive rental housing ordinance in 2020 that required: landlords or property managers to inform

their tenants of their legal rights and responsibilities, universal health and safety inspections, and cost-saving energy and water efficiency standards. The City also passed a Fair Housing [ordinance—which prohibits landlords and property managers from discriminating against renters](#) on the basis of lawful source of income (e.g., Section 8 vouchers), citizenship status, domestic violence survivor status, gender identity, and more.

In 2023, the state legislature passed, and the Governor enacted [HB 1417](#), which preempts city and county governments from requiring many, but not all, of the protections in the Residential Rental Unit Program and Fair Housing ordinances. [View the legal analysis provided to the ACLC on options similar to those in the rental permit program still available to local governments here.](#)

- Do you support or oppose restoring protections formerly guaranteed by the City’s Residential Rental Unit Program, provided they are designed in a way that does not violate state law?
 - Absolutely support
- What options for protecting renters do you think are available to the City, **in light of HB 1417?**
 - Whatever we can do to make sure that people get treated fairly I am going to be in favor of. As I said in a few other answers, state rules change with the wind and we are going to have to be constantly adjusting our efforts on these issues.

While HB 1417 does not preempt local prohibitions on Fair Housing ordinances generally, it does make it difficult to enforce the requirement that landlords and property managers only consider “the portion of the rent that the voucher holder is required to pay out-of-pocket (as determined by the local housing authority issuing the voucher) in any rent-to-income financial qualification calculation.”

- What will you do to see that the City’s Fair Housing protections **for Section 8 voucher holders** are enforced, **in light of HB 1417?**
 - Enforcement of rules like this, and many anti-discrimination rules are always tricky. It is going to take good lines of communication with voucher holders and establishing patterns of abuse. It is going to take making sure that renters know their rights and landlords know their responsibilities.
- What will you do to see that the City’s Fair Housing protections **for survivors of domestic abuse, immigrants, trans people, and others** are enforced, **in light of HB 1417?**
 - Same as above

Transportation

- Do you support or oppose offering free RTS services for all Gainesville residents at the point of service? If so, how would you accomplish that? How can the City of Gainesville improve public transportation for people who rely on it but aren't affiliated with UF or Santa Fe?
 - I think eliminating fees is a good goal and I support it. Fees are such a small part of the budget I don't know that they are worth the hassle if there are other options. In light of the ongoing uncertainty of the UF and RTS contract I think it's probably a good time to do a deep evaluation of how we have been handling RTS and what we might want to do differently moving forward. There is a lot of ARA and Infrastructure Act money that will present us with a lot of opportunities over the next five or ten years and we need to make sure we are taking full advantage of it.
- What concrete steps would you take to improve traffic safety in our community?
 - Transportation is a tricky, multilayered, and complicated subject and far outside of my area of expertise. There is a danger of people who aren't familiar with complicated subjects trying to fix them with simple answers and often making them worse. Rather than try to come up with the best way to develop a safe, quality, multimodal transportation network I am going to have to lean pretty heavily on groups like the Sierra Club, GCAT, that have expertise in the area and advocacy groups like ACLC. The goal of a well-functioning safe transportation network with multiple options for many people is pretty easy to get behind, but I can't say I know the best way to get there.

Food

- What will you do about providing access to non-processed, real food options to neighborhoods that don't have access to it (i.e., food deserts)?
 - Access to quality food is an issue that is affected by a lot of other issues. Housing affects your access to food, for most of my life growing up we didn't have a functional oven. Only cooking with a microwave really limits your options. If you have to work multiple jobs you often don't have the time to cook quality food and have to rely on packaged, processed or fast food. Addressing living wages and affordable housing can go a long way to addressing food access. More directly, we can work to get a grocery store on the east side of town. We can identify other food deserts and work to get food options there. We can push the Zero Waste ordinance time frame up to divert food waste from grocery stores to hungry people.
 - What partners do you envision the City working with on such an initiative?
 - As to partners for supplying food, ordinances requiring usable food to be donated to feeding the hungry rather than thrown away can bring grocery stores into the equation. As for distribution, we need to work with local food banks and community leaders, who

are already doing this kind of work, to identify the best targets for and methods of getting food to hungry people.

Corporate responsibility

- What will you do to ensure UF is a better presence in Gainesville (e.g., union neutrality, living wages, payments in lieu of taxes, helping to ensure better access to quality housing, etc.)?
 - UF is of course a major presence in Gainesville, and I'm glad it's here. I can't imagine Gainesville without it. However, there is a lot of room for improvement as a neighbor. In a lot of ways UF is as good as it has to be. I think the effort it would take to make UF more union friendly or better paying would be better spent in backing unionizing efforts at UF (and Sante Fe). We may be able to work with them on some housing initiatives because they need them. Things like Payments in lieu of taxes I don't see changing without changing leadership at the university. which will take change at the board of governors, which will take change in Tallahassee.
- What levers does the City have to pressure UF into being a better presence?
 - Precious few. The city does have some leverage in land use and zoning changes that the university needs to be able to follow their plans in the city. We have some leverage on running utilities to outlying areas that they need in order to complete their plans there. We have some leverage in public pressure campaigns, but not much. We may have more leverage over time with better leadership in Tallahassee but that remains to be seen. It is important to remember that UF isn't always a monolith and we may be able to work better with some departments than others. There are some areas of common ground that we can work together on but ultimately, we don't have as much leverage as I'd like.
- How do you plan to balance the needs/desires of constituents and business interests, and in which areas and do you think they are most in conflict right now?
 - At the end of the day I am a realpolitik kinda guy. I like achievable goals and measurable results. Balancing the needs of constituents and business interests will always be judged on a "does this make Gainesville better" scale. Sometimes those two things will line up perfectly and we all get a win. Sometimes we will have to trade to let some things happen I am not a fan of so in exchange for support for good programs. My ultimate goal is to keep the ball moving forward to make this a better, more equitable, thriving town.

Criminal Justice

- Many residents are concerned about the usage of K9 dogs by the Gainesville Police Department, recent lawsuits have shown that racism has been a problem in that unit, and there have been numerous incidents of unnecessary bites, while police claim that the K9s are necessary for suspect apprehension and provide other useful skills to the police force.
 - What action would you take, if any, to alleviate public concerns about the K9 unit?
 - I also have concerns about the K9 unit. Ultimately, if you train and employ attack dogs they are going to attack people. I need some serious convincing that we need the K9 unit at all and certainly in its current form.

General Governance

- What is your position on the *Local Public Utilities* referendum, which would abolish the GRU Authority and return oversight to the City Commission?
 - 100% support
- As Gainesville continues to grow in population size, what actions or policies do you think that the city should pursue to accommodate newcomers and long-time Gainesville residents alike?
 - I think there is little difference between newcomers and long-time residents for the vast majority of city policies. Affordable housing, access to healthcare and decent food, freedom from discrimination, these are all pretty universal needs. The one area I can think of that there might be a significant difference between these two groups is the language barrier. We have a lot of residents from around the world that call Gainesville home and they need to be able to interact with their local government in a meaningful way. Making sure that we have options for our residents that struggle with English is an issue that probably effects Gainesville more than many other cities.
- What reforms would you like to see to our local governance structures that would improve local government's effectiveness while maintaining transparency and accountability?
 - I would like to see better collaboration between departments. I think there are some redundancies that don't need to be there, and a lack of communication that causes a lot of inefficiencies. Better customer service available by phone, especially for GRU
- What will you do to address the very high level of turnover in our City government?
 - It depends on what you mean by this question. If you mean the high turnover of upper level positions, I would normally say if there is that much turmoil at those positions then we need to take a look at the city manager, but I am not sure that's fair in this case. Since we just got a city manager a couple of years ago, and because these last couple of years

have been filled with turmoil in the city caused by Tallahassee I think we need some more time to let things settle and then reevaluate.

If you mean the high turnover of general government employees across the spectrum, there is a lot that needs to be addressed. We need to make improvements in our insurance programs. We need to revisit wage and benefit packages to make sure we are competitive with peer cities. The multiple open positions and high turnover does give us some opportunities to partner with local apprenticeship programs and to target communities in Gainesville that need a path to good careers.