



## **ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE 2022**

**Kelly Jean Semrad**

**Running for  
Orange County Mayor**

## Candidate Information

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### 1. What motivated you to run for this position?

I was motivated to run for Orange County Mayor because I am ready for an administration that is about action for the people and the environment. The pillars of my campaign are quality of life, equity, and the environment. I am done with elected officials that represent big money and special interests. What I have learned in my efforts to advocate for people and the environment is that there are two means to be effective: legal or political. It is time for the people of Orange County to have a mayor that sits before the people advocating for their quality of life, equity for all, and who will take a firm stand on environmental protection.

Unfortunately, Mayor Demings has done me in with his deliberate disregard for the will of the voters. Pursuing a public office was not something that I thought I would be doing. I cannot stand by and watch the blatant disregard for the will of voters, the environment, and Mayor Demings' continued support for big money and special interests. For years, I have been going to BCC, DRC, RAC, P&Z, LPA, and community meetings to advocate for people on issues pertaining to quality of life, equity, sustainable development, and the environment. I have finally accepted that my pleas have fallen on deaf ears and that it is time to step up and run for the mayor's seat to best advocate for OC residents' quality of life, equity for all, and the environment.

I am motivated to explore countywide elections for all district commissioner races. The basis of my motivation is that if all district commissioners get to vote on what occurs in your district, then why do we not get to vote on who sits in all of the district chairs? Further, I am motivated to eliminate the mayor strong position in Orange County. It is not appropriate for the mayor to be a sitting member on the Board of County Commissioners. This system does not allow for a checks and balances system. I am motivated to hold public meetings (including BCC meetings) during the time of day when most people can attend meetings, which is after work. Additionally, it is time for our public meetings to be conducted in multiple modalities to ensure equitable participation for all residents.

### 2. What does being an ally or advocate for the LGBTQ+ community mean to you?

Being an ally or advocate for the LGBTQ+ community means to me that I embrace and support people. It does not matter what an individual's sexual orientation is or who they chose to love. I support and fight for equal civil rights. I support and fight for gender equality. I support and fight for LGBTQ+ movements. I identify, I validate, and I say that it is

wrong that the LGBTQ+ community must face challenges in our society because of the community they are a part. To me, being an advocate for this community is an important step towards unity in our society.

**3. Please summarize your history of community involvement. This may include city boards, civic associations, non-profits, etc.**

A brief history of my community involvement includes: serving on Save Orange County, Inc.'s Board of Directors since 2013. I have served as vice-chair since 2017-present. I am the co-chair for the District 5 Neighborhood Advisory Council. I served on the 2021 Orange County Redistricting Committee. In 2021, I received an Orange County District 5 citizen of the year award. In 2019, I received a Sierra Club citizen advocacy award. I have been an active proponent of higher education curriculum reform and served as a degree underwriter for both the University of Florida and the University of Central Florida. I volunteer for Florida Prison Education Program (FPEP) where I will develop and teach hospitality service courses to incarcerated individuals to decrease recidivism. I have served on 1000 Friends of Florida invited guest panels. I am an elected UCF Senator since 2018 and serve as a senior ranking UCF senate member on the UCF Steering Committee. Beyond our immediate Orange County community, I have served on teams that have focused on enhancing the quality of life of residents residing within constrained developing economies such as: Curacao, Bonaire, Aruba, Grenada, Saba, Ecuador, Armenia, and Turkey. In general, I am a community activist for the equal rights of people and the environment.

**4. Please summarize any work you have performed in the past five years to further LGBTQ+ rights. This may include paid positions, volunteer work, and donations.**

During the last five years I have conducted extensive research on the LGBTQ+ community in tourism. I co-authored several published international conference proceedings and have a forthcoming journal article on the value and the need to advocate for the LGBTQ+ community in tourism destinations.

Within the Caribbean region, I have been a part of research teams that advocate for and provide recommendations for policies for marriage equality (gay marriage). I attend Pride Events and rallies to advocate for the virtues that I believe must be embraced in Orange County = kindness, peace, equality and equity, love, inclusion, hope and diversity.

## Questions

- 5. The rise in anti-LGBTQ+ legislation barreling down from Tallahassee has caused a sharp increase in discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ+ community in Orange County. How would you go about reducing discrimination in your district or local community? How would you measure your progress?**

I believe that to help stop LGBTQ+ discrimination in Orange County we must demand that our elected officials validate that the discrimination actually occurs. Too often our elected officials in Orange County have denied or willfully ignored even acknowledging that discrimination exists. This is wrong. We need a mayor that stands up and says, "We have a problem in OC regarding discrimination against numerous communities including the LGBTQ+ community."

We then need to generate solutions to combat discrimination that begin within our elementary schools and transcend all the way through higher education. In Orange County, we need continued visibility of the LGBTQ+ community members. Our local government must facilitate active involvement and commitment with local businesses to help prevent employment discrimination against LGBTQ+. It is the job of elected officials to rise up our LGBTQ+ community's voice. People need to tell their stories, share their thoughts, and help set the agenda for ending this discrimination. Elected officials must help provide the platform for oppressed people's voices and for marginalized communities. LGBTQ+ people face real dangers for displaying their sexual orientation. We need action orientated solutions to ensure that Orange County is a safe zone for all our people.

- 6. Elected officials and office staff are still woefully under-educated on the transgender community. This means that the services their offices provide are often ignorant of the needs of the transgender community. What actions would you take to ensure that the services your office will provide will be educated on and cognizant of the needs of the transgender community?**

I believe that most elected officials do not understand the transgender community. Most elected officials do not understand the diversity of the transgender population. Education is a critical element that must occur within our community at large regarding the LGBTQ+ community. I do not think that elected officials understand the challenges that trans people face. Trans people lack legal protection. Many live in poverty that is caused by a lifetime of stigmas, harassment, and discrimination.

The initial actions that I will take to ensure that my office will properly understand the needs of trans people will begin with a bottom-up research approach. I will launch focus groups, survey instruments, and conduct extensive research to unveil the major challenges that trans people in Orange County face. Once a solid understanding is formed of the challenges that are faced we can begin to discuss short and long term action orientated solutions that can help alleviate these challenges. My office will aim specifically for a diverse and inclusive

portfolio of services to represent the needs of all our constituents, particularly of those that are oppressed and discriminated against.

- 7. The Florida Republican Party is leading the country in stripping away LGBTQ+ rights, starting with our children. Students are having their lives and livelihoods placed at risk by laws such as the Transgender Sports Ban, the so-called Parental Bill of Rights, and now Don't Say Gay. These shamelessly discriminatory bills are forcing LGBTQ+ families to reconsider their future in Florida. What would you tell the parents of LGBTQ+ children in your district who feel they need to leave Florida in order to protect their children?**

What would I say to the parents of LGBTQ+ children in Orange County who feel that they need to leave Florida to protect their children? This is a hard question - I am a mom. My children are young (5 and 2 years). I am thinking what I would want to hear from an elected official if I were in the shoes of one of those parents. I would want to hear that they were sorry. I would want to hear that the system is wrong. I would want to hear that the people who discriminate are wrong and should be ashamed of themselves. I would want to hear them acknowledge that they have failed my child and my family. But, these statements would not ease my pain for my child. I would want to hear that the mayor was going to demand justice for my child. Justice for my family. Further, I would want to hear that what they were telling me were not just words. That what they were telling me, they were going to find actions to solve this awful circumstance that FL is in because of some of legislatures. I would echo these sentiments to parents that are essentially fleeing FL to escape bigotry that has been legalized in our legislative system.

As mayor of Orange County, I would say to the families who feel that they need to flee FL from "hate bills" that I am sorry that we failed as a society but that I am going to fight like hell to make sure that all people are accepted in Orange County with the exception of those who discriminate. I would tell parents to trust their parental instinct but to know that there are advocates of the LGBTQ+ community who are fighting. I would tell them that I am going to fight to help remove legislatures who support hate bills.

This past weekend, I attended a gun safety reform rally and walked Lake Eola chanting for gun reform. To the best of my knowledge, I was the only candidate for mayor attending. I didn't attend because I am running for mayor. I didn't hand out brochures. I did not wear a campaign t-shirt. I did not tell anyone there that I was running for any office. I attended, I chanted, I walked because of the atrocity that happened at Pulse night club. I attended because it's time for action. It is time for people to rise up and say "enough is enough." It is time for political reform for many issues in our society - among the top is policy reform for the LGBTQ+ community.

- 8. The Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that 45% of LGBTQ+ students seriously considered attempting suicide and 1-in-5 LGBTQ+ attempt it. How**

**would you lead on this issue and work to decrease these statistics over the course of your term in office?**

I would lead on this issue to help prevent LGBTQ+ youth from committing suicide by first being an adult who accepts and loves the LGBTQ+ community. If there is just one adult that can reach these individuals it can make a difference. The County can provide services to connect our LGBTQ+ youth and adults who accept them. We can connect adults who care about our youth for who they are not who they love.

The County must also provide mental health support services for our youth as well as for their families. Family acceptance is a critical key to help prevent suicide in our LGBTQ+ youth. Part of acceptance begins with education and mental health support services. I believe that we can provide these services to help families. Additionally, our schools must be a safe zone for our LGBTQ+ youth. There must be zero tolerance for discrimination and bullying in the schools. Zero tolerance must be enforced. Communication and education throughout our community is necessary to be effective for our LGBTQ+ youth community. The County should facilitate these services and outreach. Further, the County must evaluate these services overtime to learn how the services and programs need to be changed, improved, and sustained.

**9. The same survey by The Trevor Project found that nearly all transgender and non-binary students have had to worry about their access to gender-affirming healthcare, bathrooms, and sports teams being taken away from them. How would you work to take this fear off their shoulders so that they can go back to just being kids?**

Unfortunately, in our state (under its current administration and legislation) our local ability to ensure that policies are in place to guarantee the safety and acceptance of the transgender and non-binary students has been increasingly preempted by the state. Our local government's ability to enact protective measures or policies that would guarantee equal rights and protections for our transgender and non-binary students has become more difficult to ensure. Every child deserves an opportunity to thrive in school! Every child has the right to feel safe and to learn in an environment that accepts each person the same. As mayor, I will work with our local legislative delegation to promote policy and policy reform that provides equal rights and protections to all our students.

At a local level, as mayor, I will reference Title IX as an act that prohibits gender-based harassment, which under my administration will continue to extend to the transgender and non-binary student population. Further, The FL Department of Education's Code of Ethics and Principles of Professional Conduct stresses the worth and dignity of every student thus prohibiting the discrimination based on transgender or non-binary identification. As mayor, I will demand that our schools abide by such policy. Names and pronouns that the child chooses to be addressed by will be used to help promote a safe and supportive school environment. Zero tolerance will be permitted with bullying and harassing of any and all students. I will request that Orange County Public Schools develop and implement a transgender and non-binary student policy that will be referenced by teachers,

administrators, parents, students, and other stakeholders to ensure that the students' rights are recognized and protected to the best of our ability.

**10. Far-right groups are pushing to ban books on any topic they find disagreeable, such as books on Black history and experiences, immigration, the LGBTQ+ community, climate change, etc. Do you support these book bans? If not, what is your plan to counter them and ensure students have access to a full array of age-appropriate knowledge and experiences?**

I absolutely do not support these book bans. It is unfortunate to be in a situation where we need to find a creative means of thinking how we can overcome censorship in the year of 2022.

Again, our current state administration is preempting the rights of our local government and county schools. In review of the books banned by Orange County Public Schools, it appears that thus far one book, "Gender Queer: A memoir" by Maia Kobabe has been banned. An option for books that are banned from the public schools is to provide a public list of the banned books and then make these books available at our local libraries.

**11. During a town hall in your district, a constituent describes being gay or transgender as a "lifestyle choice." What is incorrect about their description? How would you constructively respond in this situation?**

The use of the word "lifestyle choice" to describe a constituent who is gay or transgender is not an accurate means of describing this individual. A person who is straight does not make a "lifestyle choice" to be straight. Vice versa, a person does not make a "lifestyle choice" to be gay or transgender. Sexual orientation and gender identity both help to describe that LGBTQ+ people are different, but not through "choice." The use of the words "lifestyle" and "choice" are wrongfully used and offensive to describe what LGBTQ+ people inherently are.

I would constructively respond to the constituent's use of "lifestyle choice" by stating the following, "Let us all be mindful and considerate of each other when speaking during public comment. Unless an individual's comment constructively enhances and directly advances our discussion during this townhall let us not introduce topics that are not relevant to the issue at hand. If this topic is relevant, let us be reminded that sexual orientation and gender identity are not lifestyle choices. Let us be considerate and respectful of all. Thank you."

**12. During a board meeting, the board chair purposely refers to a transgender woman as "he" and "him" as the woman attempts to give her public comment. The woman corrects the board chair each time, insisting that her pronouns are "she" and "her." The board chair continues to misgender the woman until she eventually leaves the chamber in tears. How would you respond in this situation?**

I would state to the chair and the board that, "Excuse me Mr. or Madame Chair, you are misgendering our constituent. She has corrected you numerous times. Your continued use of the wrong gender is a form of harassment and discrimination. This behavior is offensive and unethical. To ensure that our constituents feel comfortable to actively participate in their local government and to ensure that our local government actively represents all of our constituents, I will be filing a compliance and ethics grievance against your behavior.

I would then state to the board that I would like to hear from the woman (without her being interrupted) to learn what she would like to share during public comment.

**13. A parent approaches you at an event, insisting that her son's teachers have "groomed" him into liking boys. Her son is at her side when she says this. How do respond to the parent's statement such that the young boy leaves feeling better about himself?**

I would respond to a parent that approaches me claiming that her son's teacher has "groomed" him into liking boys by first looking at the boy and saying, "This is a safe place. What is your name? What school do you go to?" I would then turn to the parent and ask her for her name and the teacher's name. Then, I would state the following, "Your son is standing at your side. Your son is listening to everything you say right now. You can choose your words. You can choose words that support him or that shame him. Your son, like everyone else, does not have the opportunity to choose who they "like." You cannot be "groomed" to like a gender. Do you know how long the feeling of shame can last? It can last a lifetime. Shame can kill. I am grateful that if your son has a teacher that encourages students to live the life that is right for them that he has this teacher in his life. All of our youth need to feel accepted. Right now, that teacher plays a critical role of acceptance for your son. I'd like to give you my contact information. I'd like to set a meeting up with your family to further discuss how important it is for your son to be accepted by his family. Can we discuss this further?" I would also give the son my contact information and encourage him to contact me. Having received the name of the parent, son, teacher, and school - I would follow up with the school's administration and counselor to ensure the safety of the child.

**14. Orange County continues to embrace urban sprawl, despite a plethora of data that links urban sprawl to severe strains on our housing, employment, healthcare, and public transit systems (to name a few). What are your thoughts on Orange County's growth? What could Orange County in terms of development that would better serve the communities in your district?**

My thoughts on Orange County's growth is that it is unmeasured. Our growth is not sustainable. Our County is (sadly) a perfect example of urban sprawl. We continuously hear developers and builders stating the exorbitant amount of people that moving to Florida each week. Well, guess what? This doesn't mean that we need to keep building homes for the people that are coming. We need to be focusing on sustainable development and quality of life strategies for the current residents of Orange County.

In 2016, I sued Orange County for urban sprawl with five other residents. We raised money for the legal fees by selling corn dogs, boiled peanuts, and water bottles at local festivals, doing fairy hair fundraisers, community donations and personal donations. I got a second job to help pay the legal bills. I removed my name from the deed of our family home so the developer (intervenor) could not come after our home if we lost. The people won-We won our case in court.

The judge found that Orange County was violating our Comprehensive Land Use Plan by promoting growth patterns of urban sprawl. The judge made a recommended order for Orange County to rescind their vote to expand urban development into the rural service area. Orange County did not follow the judge's order. Instead, Orange County filed an appeal along with the developers at the state level and the judge's recommended order was denied and overturned by the governor and his cabinet. As mayor, here is what I will implement within the first 2.5 years of my service:

1. I will require that urban development be defined within our Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP)
2. I will require that rural development be defined within our CLUP
3. I will require that an Urban Service Area boundary be drawn and included within our Future Land Use Map (FLUM) and CLUP
4. I will require that a Rural Service Area boundary be drawn and included within our FLUM and CLUP
5. All forthcoming development applications will then be required to "fit" the designated definitions of urban vs rural development for their proposed locations
6. I will instruct staff that rural settlements and rural enclaves are not to be considered for increased density and intensity
7. I will propose aggressive policy reform for the County's wetland mitigation policy. These reforms will include eliminating the ability for developers and builders to infill Class I and Class II wetlands.
8. I will propose a rural boundary referendum for our County Charter. This rural boundary would be used as a cost saving mechanism for all of Orange County residents to concentrate growth and the services required to support the population towards the inner core of the County.
9. I will develop an incentive based program to build up as opposed to out
10. I will develop an incentive based program for repurposing land within the urban service boundary

11. I will meticulously review and have the VISION 2050 and Orange Code reviewed by unbiased experts and then adjusted in order to promote sustainable development - not growth. Orange County has not developed its infrastructure commensurate with its rapid growth. Therefore, during my administration we will centrally focus on smart development that promotes increased quality of life.

12. I will rescind the Split Oak Forest mayor's vote. According to Robert's Rules of Order, the "seat" not the "individual" can rescind a vote if on the prevailing side of a vote.

13. I will forward new policies for wildlife corridors

14. I will always put people who currently live in Orange County and the environment first. Developers and builders will need to take a back seat during my time in office.

Additional, policy and policy reform will develop as time permits.

**15. Do you support the idea of constructing more multi-family homes in neighborhoods traditionally zoned for single-family homes? What impact would this have on your district?**

Yes, I support the idea of more multi-family homes in neighborhoods. I will speak to the entirety of the County as opposed to a single District. Orange County has an affordable housing emergency. The average rent has gone up 30% in the last year. The research firm that was hired by Orange County found that we have an affordable housing "crisis." A 30% increase in rent is not a crisis. It is an emergency. The mayor has the ability (per state statute) to determine that we have an affordable housing emergency in order to issue a rent ordinance for a confined amount of time. As mayor, I will call the emergency to issue the ordinance. During that time, we will need to generate short and long term strategies to solve our affordable housing crisis.

**16. Homeowner Associations often prevent homeowners from transitioning their lawns away from non-functional grasses such as turf and towards sustainable options such as native Florida plants and edible landscapes. HOAs insist that moving away from the traditional pristine green lawn would lower housing prices. What is your opinion on this issue?**

I do not agree with the position that moving away from traditional pristine green lawns will lower housing prices. To the contrary, I believe that promoting native plants and trees will increase our home values. In my opinion, the most worthless crop in Orange County is residential grass. Residential grass requires significant amounts of water during our drought season to stay green. Residential grass requires pesticides and fertilizers that runoff and pollute our lakes and rivers. I will bring before the BCC, ordinances to replace residential grass turfs with pollenating non-traditional turf alternatives as well ordinances that increase the number of trees that builders must replace on residential lots. Additionally, I will forward policy reform for mass grading. There is no need to clear cut land for development.

Clear cutting is a cost reduction strategy that developers and builders use. However, clear cutting is not necessary to develop. It is important to preserve the native trees and plants that are on a development site.

**17. What are the top environmental concerns you are seeing in your District and what are the solutions you plan to bring forward if you were elected?**

The top environmental concerns that I am seeing across Orange County are:

1. Climate crisis - Addressing the climate crisis requires that the state administration would work towards policy that require aggressive changes (e.g., new vehicles having zero net emissions by a specified time). At the County level, I will develop and implement programs that reduce our carbon footprint.

2. Environmental racism - There are higher levels of pollution in lower-income minority neighborhoods. There are environmental issues such as decreased air and water quality, lack of open space, and higher pollution burdens on disadvantaged communities in Orange County. As mayor, my administration must educate the residents of OC that this issue exists. We must develop an outreach program to inform individuals living within these communities that this is a legit issue. I will enable methods, policies and ordinances to ensure environmental justice for marginalized communities.

3. Clean water and aquifer recharge - We (as a County) will develop and adopt frameworks to implement the will of 89% of OC voters who voted for the right to clean water in 2020. We need to ensure our aquifer is recharged with the use of permeable surfaces and aggressive wetland mitigation reform. Class I and Class II wetlands will not be infilled and mitigated. The mitigation program does not work and will be reformed.

4. Clean air - We will use air quality information and emissions data to guide planning decisions in ways that will reduce residents' exposure to air pollution. I have attended 100's of meetings pertaining to development in Orange County. I have never once heard staff reference data regarding air quality in their determination to recommend or deny a development. Why?

5. Loss of green space - Simply put - we will stop paving over our green space. In 2021, it had been 11 years since Orange County bought an acre of environmentally sensitive land under its Green Place initiative. I will recall the vote to put a toll road through Split Oak Forest. The Forest was a green space that was left in perpetuity to the residents and wildlife due to growth within the region. I will propose a voter referendum to establish a permanent funding source to buy environmentally sensitive land. Orlando, FL is the number one tourism destination in the country. It cannot be that we continue to allow tourists to frequent our area and use our infrastructure and natural resources without installing a funding mechanism to replenish and protect those resources.

6. Soil contamination - Soil pollution is a severe environmental threat. We need continued ordinances that address and reduce the impacts of pesticides, fertilizers, sewage sludge, industrial waste, insecticides, herbicides, dumping, deforestation, etc.

7. Loss of wildlife habitat - Simply put, we can rubber stamp Conservation Area Impacts and environmental studies for developments. We can not permit mass gradings and clear cuts. We must reserve land for wildlife. Wildlife is an important part of our ecological system. In addition, to eliminating clear cuts we need to improve wildlife corridor policies.

8. Faulty recycling program - Orange County has an 85% rejection rate of our recyclables. This is unacceptable. Again, we need aggressive policy reform and educational outreach programs to reduce the rejection rate of recyclables.

**18. Contributions are typically linked to poor environmental policies being passed. Are you pledging to stay away from any particular contributions?**

Yes, I am pledging to deny contributions from developers and builders. I am pledging to deny contributions from big money organizations and special interests.

**19. Understanding our economic position, how do you plan to localize and strengthen our food system?**

It is necessary for us (Orange County) to localize our food supply chain. I plan to strengthen our food system by establishing food security for our community, The Big Ag industry has made our food sources unsustainable. The way that food is grown, processed, packaged, and distributed has resulted in immense pollution. Fertilizers have created dead zones and have polluted our water bodies. Pesticides and herbicides have polluted our air and water. The pandemic gave us a glimpse of the dangers of long food supply chains. We must focus on policies, ordinances, and educational programs that promote locally grown food. We must find means and methods to become more resilient and develop a sustainable food network within Orange County and partner with our surrounding counties in the Central Florida Region. We must conserve and preserve rural communities and agricultural land.