

# Joseph Di Bartolomeo For Manatee County Commission District 5



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## 1. What skills, qualifications, abilities do you possess that would make you an effective Commissioner?

As a small business owner for the last 25 years and an elected Manatee County CDD Supervisor for the last 6 years, my education, skills and experience provide the foundation to address many of Manatee County's financial, infrastructure, management and communication challenges. I am an 18-year homeowner in District 5 and have a personal and vested interest in the protection of District 5 decisions at the Commissioner level.

With a BA in Accounting from Rutgers University and a MBA in both Information Technology and Finance from Fairleigh Dickinson University, my formal education has created the knowledge required to understand the intricacies with budgetary responsibility. This is vital to the efficient and effective governing of our county.

Being employed for several years in banking, transportation, software and consumer goods, along with the last 25 years of being a small business owner, has provided me the hands-on experience to run organizations with financial responsibility and common-sense business practices, while honing my communication skills to set clear deliverables and expectations. This is vital to

common sense governing and effective bi-directional communication with fellow commissioners and constituents.

**2. There's been considerable controversy about Board decisions in the last two years. Which, if any, would you revisit if possible and why?**

The majority of Manatee County's revenue generation relies on Tourism and Agriculture. With this in mind, the reduction of the buffer between construction and wetlands from 50 ft to 25 ft is ultimately one of the worst decisions by the current BOCC.

The county's previous policy required buffers of at least 30 to 50 feet between development and wetlands. The new policy will revert Manatee County to the state's fewer protective rules. The state recommends minimum buffer widths of 15 feet with a 25-foot average, but developers can apply for exceptions to that rule. Buffer zones preserve our natural resources, help filter out sediment and pollutants before they reach lakes and streams, provide thoroughfares for species traveling from one wetland to another and protect existing homeowners from floods and resulting property damage.

Protecting our property owners' rights and investments, as well as respecting the already sensitive Eco balance of wildlife and natural resource availability, are enough reasons to revisit and reverse this policy.

**3. What do you see as the three most important issues facing Manatee County? Select one of these problems and explain how you would like to solve it.**

Of the dozen or more of issues that need immediate attention in Manatee County, I believe the three most important issues are Our Quality of Life, Our Property Rights and Our Environment.

How do I interpret “quality of life?” Over development (and thus the loss) of the County’s remaining natural land, which has led to excessive traffic, overcrowding in schools, basic infrastructure provision and improvements delay and availability of clean drinking water. All of this while exhibiting a complete lack of fiscal responsibility by our current BOCC. Everything is a feasibility decision and when interest rates are at 23-year highs, the last thing we want to do is take on more debt that will need to be serviced in the near future with higher tax bills for all property owners. We need to direct more funds towards priorities in the county and not “pet” projects. Most importantly we need to right-size “Impact fees” to match the cost of these incremental development projects, rather than the 60% we are currently collecting. This policy has effectively provided the development community with “economic welfare” to subsidize their profitable operations.

**4. How will you connect with the constituents you will serve in order to understand their views?**

Bi-directional communication through multiple media channels is of the utmost importance in setting expectations and receiving good information to develop policies that reflect the constituency you represent.

When I made the decision to run for the office of Manatee County Commissioner in District 5, I reached out to HOA, COA, CDD, education professionals, law-enforcement leaders, emergency management leaders and agriculture organizations to establish if my education, skills, experience and, most importantly, my priorities represented their needs. I received an overwhelming “yes”. I continue to reach out to any group or individual in District 5 that would like to share their issues, concerns and comments to make Manatee County a better place to live, raise a family and grow old.

Also, and one which I have found has done the most to educate myself and reinforce my priorities, is to utilize my role as Chairman of the Tara Preserve CDD. Besides being responsible for repayment of a multimillion-dollar bond issue and budgetary responsibility, I speak with community members from many different developments on a daily regular basis to understand issues “real-time” and support in any way I can. I have recently been a speaker at the BOCC zoning

meeting to fight the development of apartments on the corner of SR 70 and Tara Blvd.

Since I rely on subject matter experts to develop policies and positions, I would like to further this initiative by creating citizen sub-groups within our county to discuss and address challenges with Agriculture, Education, Infrastructure, Environment, Tourism, Small-Business and Development.

Lastly, whether you are red or blue, right or left, conservative or progressive, if elected I will represent everyone. As such, I will listen and hear everyone's point of view, but will not entertain or be involved with issues that are not Manatee County specific. Developing solutions to problems that do not exist only leads to our division and feeding into the destructive goals of the political fringe.