

Dear Neighbors and Members of the Pine Ridge Property Owners Association,

I own Freedom Hill Trees, a wholesale landscape tree nursery here in Citrus County, field-grown stock, licensed across the Southeast. These days my son runs day-to-day operations. Before that I built an independent insurance agency from the ground up and sold it. So, I know what it costs to make payroll, what a regulation feels like from the receiving end, and what it takes to build something meant to outlast you.

That's the truth of our trade: we plant trees we will never sit under. You don't plant a tree for yourself; you plant it for the people who come after you. That's how I've tried to serve this county, and it's why I'm asking to keep serving.

I don't see getting elected as joining "the government." I see it the other way around. My job isn't to explain county administration to you, it's to hold county administration accountable *for* you. Every vote I cast comes out of conversations at kitchen tables, at church, in grocery store lines, and at meetings just like the ones you hold.

When I sit down with neighbors, the same things come up every time. Keep our families safe. Spend our tax dollars like they were hard-earned, because they were. And don't let the places that made us love this county lose what made them special. I take that last one personally. The established neighborhoods and deed-restricted communities that give Citrus County its character are worth protecting, and I try to govern like someone who understands that because I do.

Let me also be straight about the ground we're standing on. Roughly 80% of our tax base is residential. We have very little commercial or industrial base to lean on and one of the highest unemployment rates in Florida. That's the arithmetic behind every decision this board makes. There's no large commercial base to shift the load onto, and little cushion in our households to spare. Anyone who tells you the answers are easy hasn't looked at the numbers.

So I've spent my time in office doing the unglamorous work. We made growth pay its own way instead of sending you the bill by nearly doubling impact fees, ending the practice of taxpayers inheriting new subdivision roads, and strengthening our tree ordinance. We brought home historic outside funding rather than reaching deeper into your pocket. We put more deputies on the street, a third firefighter on every engine, and launched the largest road resurfacing investment in this county's history. You'll find the numbers behind every one of those in the answers that follow.

I won't always tell you what you want to hear. I'll tell you the truth, show you the numbers, and explain my reasoning including when we disagree. That's the only kind of representation worth having, and it's the only kind I know how to give.

I would be honored to earn your trust and your vote.

With respect,

Rebecca Bays, Citrus County Commissioner, District 4