



February 2019

Candidate for Election: City of Gainesville District 4 Commissioner

Note: Responses Will be Made Public. Please limit your responses to 100 words (the published response will be cut off at the limit).

1. **Candidate's Name:** Robert Mounts
2. **Email Address:** robert.t.mounts@gmail.com
3. **Campaign Website:** robertmounts.com
4. **Education:** B.A. (Political Science) 1964; J.D. 1966, University of Florida
5. **Occupation:** Retired Military/Government Attorney and Policy Advisor (Lt Col, USAF (Ret); GS-15, DAC (Ret)
6. **Employer:** Retired
7. **Previous Employment:** Special Assistant to the Deputy Commander, US Forces Korea, for International Relations and Secretary to the US-Republic of Korea Status of Forces Agreement Joint Committee, Seoul, Korea
8. **Three Qualities Leaders Must Possess and Why:**
 1. **Integrity.** Without integrity and basic honesty, no one will trust your motives or judgment. Credibility is crucial for any leader, especially one in a profession that requires trust, such as my lifelong profession as an attorney. My wife says I am "honest to a fault". However, I have always tried to "speak truth to power" and to ensure the right policy decision is made, even at the cost of a promotion.
 2. **Competence.** A leader in any field must have a basic foundation of education, experience, and work ethic to succeed as a leader. For example, it is difficult to see how a person with only a bachelor's degree in art history could succeed as City Manager.

3. Empathy. For others to follow, a leader must be able to relate to those in need or needing their help. Rather than push one's own political or economic agenda, the first question should always be "what do you need" or "how can I help you succeed?" This calls for genuine and sincere public engagement, not superficial "drive bys". People want to know you care.

9. **Civic Involvement:** Since retiring from a 25 year career in the U.S. Air Force as a military lawyer (Judge Advocate) in 1994; 18 months during a break in service as Deputy General Counsel to former Florida Governor Reuben Askew; a year in private practice in California; and retiring again after an 18.5 year career in the Federal civil service overseas in South Korea, I have returned home to my native Gainesville and immediately immersed myself in my church (Holy Trinity Episcopal Church), my neighborhood and my community. The details follow below:

10. Board(s) I've Served and What Prompted Me to Serve on Them:

- a. **University Park Neighborhood Association (UPNA).** I offered my service as an attorney with 50 years of experience to my neighbors because they needed help understanding development and planning issues affecting their homes, schools, and neighborhood. In so doing, I became expert on the intricacies of the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code and ultimately helped shape policy that protected all Gainesville neighborhoods from unrestricted development and high-density infill (i.e. GNV R.I.S.E.). I also served as President for two years, stepping down this past October.
- b. **College Park University Heights Redevelopment Advisory Board (CPUH),** one of four under the City Commission sitting as the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA). Service on this board followed naturally as a result of my work with the Department of Doing and I currently serve as the Chair.
- c. **Florida Museum of Natural History.** I served on this board for three years, actively contributing financially to the great work being done there by Doug Jones, the Director and friends such as Charlie Covell. My realtor, Roslyn Levy, recruited me to serve at least one term.



d. **Matheson Museum of History.** I joined this board last year at the request of President Anita Spring, in part because the Museum needed to reestablish a relationship with a large donor, and in part because of my keen interest in Gainesville's history, spurred by the successful nomination of our home for the National Register of Historic Places.

11. **Have you ever served in elected public office?** If yes, how many years total have you served in elected public office? While I have never served in public office as an elected official, I have been an advisor to a governor and many three and four star generals during my career as a military officer and public servant.

12. **Why are you running for this office?** I am running for this office to put our residents and neighborhood interests above special interests. If elected, I will stand up to real estate speculators trying to rezone older working neighborhoods into high rent districts, catering to students. I will also protect GRU customers from rate increases and more costly decisions, such as the purchase of the biomass plant. I will also stop the plan to expand noise permit that impact residents where they live and work.

My "three-point plan" for reform includes (1) changing the culture of the city government; (2) ensuring fiscal responsibility as new projects are proposed, and (3) faithfully "protecting neighborhoods" from development decisions that would erode or destroy the character of the neighborhood. The details are set forth on my website at robertmounts.com.

Note: Responses Will be Made Public. Please limit your response to 100 words (the published response will be cut off at the limit).

13. What do you perceive are the three most important concerns facing the City of Gainesville and what would be your top priorities, if elected?

The overriding concern facing the City of Gainesville is the fiscal disaster occasioned by the 2017 acquisition of the biomass plant, a decision which increased GRU's debt to \$1.6 billion, of which about \$658 million is attributable to the purchase, a purchase that was rammed through by the incumbents running for reelection, against my strong advice. See second video on robertmounts.com, and three contemporary Op-Eds under the "Issues" tab. The Sun recently acknowledged that we must now either (1) raise taxes, (2) raise rates, or (3) cut services (at a time when we have a crisis in affordable housing, a need for bolstering basic services such as police protection, and real issues with our transportation infrastructure).

14. The recent racial inequity study documented significant achievement and opportunity gaps in our community. In your opinion, what are the top two factors that contribute to this gap and what steps would you take to address those?

In my opinion, the top two factors contributing to this gap are the City's failure for many years to address poverty in historically black or "working poor" communities close to downtown and on the east side, and the absence of adequate transportation, health care, including mental health services, assisted living services, basic grocery shopping, and equality in education. Vocational education needs to make a comeback and must be offered in areas closer to those who need it. Affordable housing is also in crisis. For my part, I urged the merger of the four CRA districts so that funds raised on the west side could be shifted to the east side, where they are urgently needed. I also support use of CRA funds as "seed money" for a Community Land Trust benefitting less affluent areas of town. Rather than an "event center" that won't succeed, the east side needs an urgent care center and an assisted living center.

15. Limited transportation options contribute to our well-documented equity gaps. What ideas do you have to help citizens get where they need to go?

I doubt that any idea I propose here would be original, as many ideas have been proposed, such as autonomous vehicles or small vans, a better staffed and paid RTS bus system, and the like. However, many such issues would be solved if people did not have to work two or three jobs to make ends meet, and if their rental and/or utility bills were lower. This means moving toward a "living wage", not just for City employees, but at the universities as well. Sadly, the current GRU debt may frustrate this effort.

16. What do you feel the City's economic development priorities should be over the next four years?

First, my vision for a "vibrant" arts and culture district downtown differs greatly from that of my opponent. Rather than Bourbon Street, I would work towards a downtown like Charleston, Savannah, or St. Augustine. Rather than more loud, amplified music events at our parks, I would strike a balance and encourage more first-class restaurants like those popping up in Ocala, more art galleries and venues for theater and arts education and performance, less pounding music that disrupts nearby neighborhoods.

Second, rather than an event center on the east side, which a consultant frankly said would not generate the economic development the incumbents expect as there is no major airport or highway nearby, I would work to meet the resident's basic needs for shopping, health care, and assisted living.

I would not approve more urban sprawl such as we have seen with Planned Developments like Butler Plaza and Butler Plaza North.

17. Discussions surrounding GRU dominated many conversations in the past year. What would you say are the most significant issues facing the utility today? What changes would you make?


First, I would work to convert the existing financing of GRU's enormous debt occasioned by the Asset Purchase Agreement of the biomass plant from variable interest rate loans, to fixed rate loans, while interest rates remain low. Second, I would work to move away from use of the biomass plant, which is not carbon neutral, and begin an aggressive solar renewable energy program, similar to that being pursued by Duke Energy and Florida Power and Light. I would also expect GRU to reduce the number of high-salaried executives and tighten its belt with other efficiencies so that utility rates may be at least be held steady, if not lowered. Other more radical options are out there, such as merging with another utility company in order to share the debt burden, or even to sell the utility. However, the preferred solution seems to be to persuade the UF to buy more power, an option the UF may well consider but must be skeptical of due to GRU's long-standing record of mismanagement by the City Commission.

18. Why should members of the business community support your candidacy?

That's an easy one. The members of the business community should support my candidacy because the incumbent commissioner, and for that matter, the current commission as a body, lack the legal, negotiating, or business experience and expertise that I have accumulated over a long 45-year professional career in public service. In my last job, I helped US Army engineers negotiate an extremely complex and politically sensitive \$11 billion dollar relocation and construction and engineering agreement for a new headquarters south of Seoul well outside of artillery range, mostly at South Korean government expense. It is now complete. When setting the goal over 25 years ago, deciding "what" we wanted to do was easy; the hard part, which consumed much of the next 20 years, was ensuring the US received what it was promised and that the end result would meet US standards and specifications for military construction. And then there were the many environmental issues, to boot.

I hereby certify to the veracity and completeness of the information herein and that no other party other than myself completed this questionnaire.

Original or Electronic Signature



24 Feb 2019