



For Hollywood's future, Catherine "Cat" Uden for mayor | Endorsement



Catherine "Cat" Uden is a candidate for Hollywood mayor. (courtesy, Catherine "Cat" Uden)

By [Sun Sentinel Editorial Board](#) | Sun Sentinel

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Hollywood voters will elect a mayor on Nov. 5. The Sun Sentinel Editorial Board recommends Catherine "Cat" Uden, an energetic candidate with strong convictions on development and resiliency and a campaign platform that's well-engineered for the city's future.

An environmental expert and former elementary school teacher, Uden, 48, is one of four candidates in this nonpartisan, citywide race.

The others are Joshua "Josh" Levy, 46, who has been mayor for the past eight years; Eduardo Flores, 29, a web application developer; and Peter Hanna, 50, a consultant for "green" businesses in Europe.

The mayor is this city's only elected official chosen by all voters and will serve a four-year term at a salary of \$53,276 a year.

A refreshing change

Levy, a lawyer who has been general counsel for his family's car dealership, has done a creditable job as mayor, but after eight years, Uden's leadership would be a refreshing change. She brings a sense of urgency to the growing challenge of sea-level rise.

Flores and Hanna are both unprepared for the rigors of this leadership post.

All four candidates submitted detailed questionnaires and took part in an hour-long candidate interview.

Uden's body of work stands out for its level of detail and close attention to issues that will dominate the future of Hollywood: flooding and sea-level rise, sustainability, the risks of overdevelopment, and the need for greater attention to the city's west side.

"Some redevelopment is needed," Uden writes, "but it has to be done with proper planning, resiliency and flooding in mind, infrastructure improvements, and more public input."

Listening to the people

Uden is a populist candidate who promises to be a voice for "the people," whose voices she finds are marginalized at City Hall. If elected, she promises more city meetings after 5 p.m. for the benefit of working people, and for giving them more speaking opportunities.

Uden contends that Hollywood is too lax in allowing buildings to exceed reasonable height limits, and that builders cite one exception to justify the next one, and the one after that.

She has a proven track record of fighting for residents and has been a consistent voice against the development of high-rise condos, especially on public lands.

Levy has been a supporter of many new projects, including unsolicited public-private partnerships or P3s that too often are driven by private developers' demands — not the public's.

Uden was highly critical of the city's recent approval of a hotel and high-rise condos on the site of the Orangebrook golf course by adding hotels and motels to the zoning definition of "community recreation," a decision she calls a "complete betrayal."

The mayor has displayed a lack of civility more than once. He lost his composure and publicly insulted constituents for "slanted advocacy" at a 2022 meeting as they rallied against a proposed 30-story high-rise condo tower on a publicly owned stretch of city beachfront — a project Levy supported and Uden opposed.

Uden worries that Hollywood, especially its tightly compressed downtown core, is hurtling toward an overdeveloped future — "that we will turn into Miami or Fort Lauderdale."

Indeed, Hollywood's small-town feel in the midst of South Florida's megalopolis remains one of its great assets.

Joseph Young's vision

Once known as "Hollywood-by-the-Sea," the city was founded a century ago by developer Joseph Young, a pioneer who envisioned a "dream city," an east-coast version of Hollywood, Calif.

Levy argues forcefully that Hollywood has been faithful to Young's vision by implementing a long-range downtown master plan, with mixed-use developments, expanded outdoor dining and sidewalks, with colorful murals and vintage street lighting.

In our online interview, Flores and Hanna provided rambling and unfocused answers to the many challenges facing this flood-prone city.

As mayor, Flores promised to hire 100 needed police officers, without offering any coherent explanation of paying for them. Hanna is a 30-year resident, but his questionnaire was long on platitudes and short on concrete ideas.

A passion for the ocean

Uden's hobbies include stand-up paddle-boarding, and she works as a policy advisor for Oceana, a coastal conversation group (she will resign from that post if elected mayor).

Her campaign platform of "smart, sustainable development" seems neatly tailored to the times in which we live, with the rapid intensification of weather disasters.

"Development," her campaign website says, "should take into account flood zones, mandatory hurricane evacuation zones, sea-level rise and climate change, schools, traffic, proximity to grocery stores, east-west public transportation, mass transit, hospitals, emergency response times, sustainability and green protected spaces."

In Hollywood, as in Fort Lauderdale, development is the central issue, and a mayoral field crowded by marginal candidates could work to the incumbent's advantage by splitting anti-incumbent sentiment. That would be a shame.

Hollywood will celebrate its 100th birthday next year, and the next mayor will guide this historic city through its centennial, and well beyond. The Sun Sentinel Editorial Board recommends Catherine "Cat" Uden for mayor.

The Sun Sentinel Editorial Board consists of Opinion Editor Steve Bousquet, Deputy Opinion Editor Dan Sweeney, editorial writers Pat Beall and Martin Dyckman, and Editor-in-Chief Julie Anderson. To contact us, email at letters@sun-sentinel.com.