

From: The Oconee Enterprise

Heimel faces Thomas for BOC

By [Michael Prochaska](#) | March 27, 2024 | [0](#)



Suzannah Heimel, program chair for the Conservatives of Northeast Georgia, is challenging Mark Thomas for Post 1 on the Oconee Board of Commissioners.

Heimel is running as a Democrat, so both candidates are unopposed in the May 21 Primary and will face off in the Nov. 5 General Election.

A graduate of the University of Georgia with a degree in interior design, Heimel has done design work for Barnsley Gardens in Adairsville, was the manager of the showroom at Atlanta Decorative Arts Center and has worked in retail management and property management.

Heimel and her husband have three children—one who has graduated from college and two teenagers. They moved here four years ago Lilburn.

“To me, the things that drew me here are the things that feel like they are changing rapidly,” she said, using commercial development infringing on residential areas as one example. Last year, the BOC accepted a settlement and approved a large commercial complex next to the Oconee Crossing subdivision despite significant opposition from its residents. The approved rezone in 2021 for the land surrounding the former location of the Stone Store off Macon Highway also received significant resistance from Chaddwyck subdivision and surrounding neighborhoods.

“I feel like growth is out of control,” she said, “especially in the northern part of the county.”

The BOC should approach rezoning thoughtfully by keeping commercial around commercial and residential around residential, she said.

Heimel said the BOC has also approved too many storage unit developments, a concern that many citizens have shared in public forums and on Oconee-specific Facebook pages.

Another concern of hers is overspending, of which the Administrative Building is an example, she noted. Since it is already built, Heimel suggested that the BOC allow some of the larger rooms to be rented out to private groups.

Heimel said she wants the BOC to rein in spending.

“Before I buy anything, I say, ‘Do I need this?’ And that’s what we need to do at a local level,” she said.

Heimel said she’d like to see budgetary information presented during at least one BOC meeting per month with more documents available for public view online and at meetings.

She has previously asked the BOC to ensure that library books be labeled or shelved appropriately, and if the material is sexually graphic, to move it away from the children’s and young adult sections.

“Not every parent wants their kid to have sexual material,” she said, explaining that this issue is broader than LGBTQ books.

Heimel said parents should be given tools to help monitor the content their children consume.

Similar to a ratings system for movies and explicit warnings on CDs, one solution she suggested is to place a sticker label on books with mature or graphic content. She also suggested that the Regional Library System allow for more than five reconsiderations of book placement per quarter.

“We need more parental involvement,” she said. “Libraries should reflect the communities.”

Regarding her decision to run as a Democrat, Heimel described herself as a true conservative but that she doesn’t presently identify with the Republican Party.

“We have gotten to a point where it’s so far left and so far right in the news,” she said. “What happened to everybody in the middle? I feel like there are a lot of people who are in the middle, and we need to bring the moderate back into the Democratic Party.”

Heimel said that although she and the Oconee Democratic Party don’t align on the issue of divisive library books, there are things she has in common with the local party. She mentioned specifically a statement of beliefs from the party on which she agrees.

“All people are created equal, and that this is America’s fundamental idea,” the statement reads. “The duty of government is to strive to make the ideals of freedom, justice and opportunity a reality for all. The purpose of government is to protect our nation, defend our democracy and promote the welfare of each and every one of us.”

Heimel emphasized that citizens in the county want to be heard, and that if elected, she would listen to their needs. She also believes that the qualifying fee for BOC should be lowered so that the positions can be more attainable.

“If that means reducing the salaries, that needs to happen,” she said.

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