

THE INSIGHTS

**PROPERTY APPRAISER
AYESHA SOLOMON**



PREFACE

The purpose of this document is to provide insight into the journey of the honorable Ayesha Solomon as the newly elected Property Appraiser. This piece will focus on her background, passions, challenges, and accomplishments. This will be centered around her first year in office and serves as a way for this office to remain transparent with the community it serves.

A SPECIAL MESSAGE

“I hope through sharing my journey, people will have a better understanding of who I am not just as an official, but as an individual. I share my growth, hopes, and ambitions with being in this role. Sharing this information has helped me reflect on the progress of this office and has inspired me to continue to move forward. This office strives to continue to remain transparent about both our internal and external initiatives.”

- Property Appraiser, Ayesha Solomon



AYESHA SOLOMON
ALACHUA COUNTY
PROPERTY APPRAISER
KNOWLEDGEABLE - COMMUNITY FOCUSED - COMMITTED

ALACHUA COUNTY PROPERTY APPRAISER'S OFFICE

THE BEGINNING

THE START OF A NEW JOURNEY



Mission Statement: To proudly provide quality services to our customers and ensure the equitable administration of the property taxation laws and best practices.

The Alachua County Property Appraiser's Office serves four major areas:

- Identifying and listing all the properties in Alachua County
- Valuating all Real and Tangible Personal Property
- Administering exemptions and classified (agricultural) properties
- Facilitating the Tax Process

Ayesha Solomon grew up in East Gainesville where she witnessed first-hand the disparities in the area as well as the true strength of the community.

Solomon's passion to assist the community served as a driving force for her involvement in nonprofit organizations. She was a leader behind the Avoiding Illegal Distractions (A.I.D.) program in Alachua County to mentor troubled teens and helped them get back on track.

Helping people in her community sparked her interest in ensuring everyone has access to basic services, such as the Alachua County Property Appraiser's Office. In June 2001, she

began her career at this office serving her first role as an entry-level customer service specialist. Over time she earned several promotions and began to learn various aspects of the office. She served the residential, commercial and tangible personal property departments before becoming the administrative manager for the organization.

During this time, she earned her Certified Florida Appraiser (CFA) designation, a Florida Real Estate license, a Bachelor of Science in Computer Information Systems from Saint Leo University, and a Master of Business Administration with a specialization in project management from Northcentral University.

FROM CAMPAIGN TO ELECTION

Solomon ran her campaign on several key promises. In her own words, she vowed to make any necessary changes to her office to help increase its effectiveness as a whole. This not only includes technological advances but increasing the involvement her team has in the community it serves. In August 2020, after all votes were considered, Solomon had more than 48% of the vote. On January 5, 2021, Solomon took part in her swearing in ceremony outside the County Courthouse in Gainesville Florida.



Image By: BRAD MCCLENNY/THE GAINESVILLE SUN

“Thank you for electing me. I am so overjoyed that you trust me to be the first African American woman in the state of Florida as Property Appraiser. I don’t take it lightly.”

-Solomon, 2021

HOW HAS THIS ROLE HELPED YOU GROW BOTH PERSONALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY?

Being an elected official has helped me become more of the person, I’ve admired. I’ve always been passionate about giving back and staying involved in our community. Now, I can initiate change, advocate for equity, and stand for what’s right more now than ever. The position has created a platform to become a true servant leader and I am grateful for the opportunity.

WHAT’S BEEN THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES WITH BECOMING PROPERTY APPRAISER?

My biggest challenge is managing the office with a bird’s eye view. Over two decades, I’ve been an active part of many projects and now I am overseeing them all. When we face challenges, naturally I want to be involved in all aspects of the process but that’s not always possible. I know that I have a staff who is knowledgeable and committed to serving the community and I trust them to do the work that represents excellence. I have also been forced to adopt new ways of thinking and challenge the old way of doing things; and so far, it’s extremely rewarding.

What was something that has surprised you the most about this role?

I was surprised by how strategic and vital it is to have a supportive leadership team in place before you begin. Although I've worked with the same managers for many years, they shared the vision of my predecessor.

While working at the Property Appraiser's office for many years and sitting at the conference room table where the executive decisions were made, I did not realize how drastic the organization would change internally by implementing my community-driven initiatives. It was the platform I ran my campaign on and a promise, I plan to keep.

I really get anxious when I have to speak in front of big crowds, and I thought that I would be used to it by now, but I am not. I figured the more I do it, the better I would become. Well, the public speaking fairy has not sprinkled her magic dust on me yet. Public speaking has now become a vital part of my job. It's easy to step up to the podium with confidence. I am not sure where the jitters come from, but it always starts in my voice. By this time next year, this will be one of my greatest accomplishments.

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EXECUTING THE VISION

PRIORITIZING COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The mission of the Alachua County Property Appraiser's Community Outreach team is to proudly educate the public about the responsibilities of this office through strategically hosting and attending events within the community. The activities of the group include but are not limited to, providing presentations, tabling events, introducing the office to relevant businesses, creating partnerships, and answering general inquiries.

Ongoing Community Outreach Initiatives

This office is often met with a wide variety of questions from the public. As a result, this team is constantly looking for ways to inform the public to help reduce the number of questions. A great way to do this is by informing various entities about this office. This approach has been taken with realtors in our community on a monthly basis. This is done through a presentation outlining homestead exemption, exemption capping, updated forms to give to clients, an explanation of why values change, and an overview of how new construction is taxed. The goal is to provide a seamless experience among the various entities buyers will inevitably contact throughout their journey as a new homeowner.

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Following the success of presenting to local relators, this team has expanded this approach to include title agencies in the area to further inform agents about the homestead exemption, ownership requirements, updated forms required by this office, required documents for applications, and an overview of residency.

In addition to engaging with agencies, this team has taken the steps to engage with new and prospective homebuyers directly through collaborating with the Neighborhood Housing and Development Corporation. This is done by providing a monthly presentation at their Homebuyers Education Seminar. This presentation includes an overview of valuation and homestead exemption. To learn more about the Neighborhood Housing and Development Corporation, please visit <https://gnhdc.org/>

Tangible Personal Property Ribbon Cutting Initiative

Tangible Personal Property is everything other than real estate that is used in a business or rental property. This property is subject to taxation at the same rate as Real Property after consideration of exemption value. As new businesses enter the community, many owners may not be familiar with the requirements of this office. To help ensure new owners are informed, outreach team members from this department have attended these ribbon cuttings to provide an introduction and a brief overview of this area.

What has been your biggest accomplishment within your first year?

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Additional Community Outreach Events

In addition to participating in ongoing monthly initiatives, this team has dedicated time and effort to gaining exposure to the community on a larger scale. This means participating in informal well-known celebrations. Participating in these kinds of events allows the team to showcase its integration and appreciation for the community.

Within the last year, this office has participated in the UF Gator Growl, the Alachua Christmas Parade, the High Springs 23rd Annual Twilight Christmas Parade, the Alachua County Main Street Festival, and the Micanopy Fall Festival. These celebrations helped expose this office to thousands of people in a more casual way by acknowledging these county traditions.

Apart from these events, this group has also been involved in more formal community celebrations over the last year. The first is the “Government Day” pop-up event hosted by the City of Alachua. This served as a way for residents in the area to conveniently meet with local government offices. This event consisted of several county entities providing relevant services. This opportunity was used to provide Homestead applications, and supplemental office information and to clarify any misconceptions the public may have had about this office.

My biggest accomplishment is still being developed. I am most proud of mobilizing the Property Appraiser’s office. We have participated in more community events than we’ve ever had. I love being involved in Real Estate office staff meetings, participating in ribbon cuttings for new businesses, and hosting Q & A Forums where our constituents can learn more about the Property Appraiser’s office.

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New Projects

While strategically attending local events in the area remains a top priority, being community-driven has encouraged this team to begin the process of creating in-house initiatives. This organization has begun to explore the best ways to be more accessible to the general public. This has led to hosting several Zoom webinars after hours for those who cannot make it to this office during standard business hours. These sessions are recorded and available on the Alachua County Property Appraiser's Office YouTube channel. To access this channel please visit <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCM8pbKEB232my8yNz1xIYIg>

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Each panelist discussed how their respective offices are directly impacted by the extensive probate process and how many individuals can opt to create estate plans that are aimed at allowing assets to pass outside of the probate process.

If you would like to learn more about this project, please visit www.acpafl.org to subscribe to receive updates from this office.

Probate and Estate Planning Initiative

Another project created by this team is the Alachua County Property Appraiser's Office Probate and Estate Planning Summit. This initiative was formulated through a dual data-driven approach that identified all the parcels that are classified as heirs' property throughout the county as well as parcels with only one remaining owner listed on the property suggesting a lack of proper estate planning. After successfully analyzing both data sets, two heat maps were created to showcase the "hot spot" areas in the county that are affected the most by these issues.

This event was hosted on February 24, 2022, at 6 p.m. at Mount Carmel Baptist Church T.A. Wright Family Life Center at 2505 NE Eighth Ave. This inaugural event featured an interactive panel discussion led by representatives from the City of Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area, the City of Gainesville Commissioner Harvey Ward, the Alachua County Clerk of Court, and the Alachua County Tax Collector, Alachua County Commissioner Anna Prizzia, and Three Rivers Legal Services Inc.

Property Watch

Most recently this office has developed a new software called Property Watch. Property owners can sign up for this service through our website. All owners who register must provide the following information: a name, a date of birth, a Florida Driver's License/ID number, a property parcel number, and an active email address. For those who are not aware of their parcel number, this information can also be found on our website.

After this registration process, owners can expect this service to continuously monitor their property. The areas that will be monitored for changes include the owner's name, the mailing address, any change in exemption or agricultural classification status, and splits and combines to parcels.

If you would like to learn more about this project or would like to register for this service, please visit www.acpafl.org.



The Community Outreach Team