

August 20, 2025

Via email to ssmith@fkaa.com
City of Key West – Search Committee
Shawn D. Smith, Esquire
Florida Keys Aqueduct General Counsel


Dear Shawn:

Please consider this letter as a summary of how I might be able to help the City of Key West in a transitional role over the next year or so. I've enclosed a description of my experience in local government, quasi-government, bar and private practice. I don't know of anyone who has served longer as city attorney of a large city in Florida than I have, nor any public or private practitioner who has handled as many matters for government as I have. For 18 years, I've managed the legal matters for the City of Orlando, including bonds and public finance; negotiating our venues deals and TDT funds for Kia Center, Camping World Stadium and our performing art center; labor matters, including human resources, public safety discipline matters and employment law; land use zoning and permitting, risk management/litigation, and public works. I have also mentored and counseled many young lawyers, including our lawyers at the city, and the lawyers who have worked for me for many years, beginning as summer clerks and some now my law partners. In addition to managing legal affairs for the city, my partner Jeff Aaron and I handle legal matters for our aviation authority, at both the Orlando International Airport and our local executive airport. Our airport work includes many of the same subject matters as those we handle for the city, particularly including land use, zoning and permitting, litigation and regulatory matters (FAA-based, in the case of the airport work we do). Our lawyers at DownsAaron also handle a wide array of litigation and business dispute matters in the private sector.

I would be honored to have the opportunity to help the City of Key West. The work I do for local governments is the work I am most proud of and I am willing to extend to Key West a discounted rate of \$495.00/hour (my standard rate is \$825.00/hour). I propose to provide legal services for as long as the City desires, with my engagement agreement terminable at any time. I will bill monthly and that bill will include reasonable travel costs, although I anticipate most of my work can be done remotely.

In addition to the above summary, I've included a resume. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

With kindest regards, I am

Very truly yours,

Mayanne Downs

Mayanne Downs

Overview

Mayanne Downs is a distinguished attorney with over 35 years of legal experience in Florida, and with a wide range of practice areas and expertise. As the first woman City Attorney for Orlando—a position she has held since 2007—and former General Counsel and Managing Partner of Gray Robinson, a statewide law firm, Mayanne brings unparalleled expertise in municipal and government law, public administration and leadership, and in negotiating and managing legal matters. She specializes in Bet-the-Company litigation and other complex disputes, and also has substantial business experience, having run her own business before attending law school, managed an AmLaw 150 law firm, and recently starting her own firm, DownsAaron, PLLC.

Municipal Law Expertise and City Attorney Experience

Since her appointment by Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer in 2007, Mayanne has served as City Attorney for one of Florida's largest cities, overseeing the work of 25 lawyers and providing strategic legal counsel to the Mayor and City Commission. In this role, she has:

- **Managed and litigated numerous public records requests and matters, and provided guidance on Florida's open government laws, including elections, Sunshine meetings and organizations and public safety issues..**
- **Managed land use, zoning, condition uses, variance and procurement matters** for both the City of Orlando and the Greater Orlando Aviation Authority.
- **Advised on municipal governance** including City Council proceedings, public meetings, and governmental operations.
- **Negotiated and managed** inter governmental relationships and contracts.
- **Managed complex municipal litigation** involving eminent domain, class actions, and high-stakes public sector disputes.
- **Provided counsel on parliamentary procedure** and open meeting law compliance.
- **Overseen legal operations** for a major metropolitan government with diverse legal challenges.

"Mayanne is one of the best negotiators I have ever seen. She's able to put people at ease with her knowledge and expertise and take command of a situation to get things done — and in a responsible and reasonable manner." —**Buddy Dyer, Mayor, City of Orlando**

Legal Excellence and Leadership

Mayanne's distinguished career spans high-conflict, high-stakes matters across multiple practice areas directly relevant to municipal government:

Practice Areas

- Municipal law, government and quasi-governmental organizations
- Land use planning, zoning and permitting
- Public procurement and contracting
- Complex commercial litigation
- Eminent domain litigation and trials
- Class actions and appellate matters
- Business planning and dispute resolution
- Data breach and risk management
- Legal and accounting malpractice defense

Notable Achievements

- First woman managing partner of a major law firm in the Southeastern United States.
- Handled one of the largest divorce matters on record (over \$200 million).
- Represented clients in matters of first impression before state and federal appellate courts.
- Selected by the Judicial Nominating Commission for the Fifth District Court of Appeal for nomination to Governor Jeb Bush.

Academic Excellence and Professional Recognition

Mayanne graduated from the University of Florida Law School with highest honors.

Academic Distinctions:

- Graduated at the top of her class with Highest Honors
- Held two senior editorial positions at the University of Florida Law Review
- Chancellor of the Student Honor Court (position also held by former Florida Governor Bob Graham)
- Member of University of Florida Hall of Fame
- Inducted into Order of the Coif and Florida Blue Key
- Recipient of multiple American Jurisprudence Book Awards

Professional Recognition:

- Recognized by Florida Trend's Legal Elite, Florida Super Lawyers, Martindale-Hubbell, Best Lawyers in America, and Orlando Magazine's Best Lawyers
- Served on the Judicial Qualifications Commission for 12 years

Bar Leadership and Public Service

Mayanne's commitment to the legal profession and public service is evidenced by her unprecedented leadership roles:

- **61st President of The Florida Bar**
- President of the Orange County Bar Association
- President of the Legal Aid Society
- President of the Central Florida Association for Women Lawyers
- Member of The Florida Bar Board of Governors

As Bar President, Mayanne traveled thousands of miles, spoke over 30 times, made presentations to over 20 editorial boards, testified before the Florida Legislature, and instituted direct communication between bar leadership and members on legislative matters.

Strategic Legal Management

Mayanne's experience as General Counsel at Gray Robinson has equipped her with exceptional skills in:

- **Oversight of legal operations** across multiple practice areas.
- **Assignment and coordination of outside counsel** while maintaining cost-effective representation.
- **Risk management and litigation strategy** to minimize reputational and operational exposure.
- **Special projects and strategic initiatives** requiring high-level legal and operational coordination.

Florida Roots and Community Commitment

An Orlando native and part of the Central Florida business community for over 35 years, Mayanne is a 4th generation Central Floridian and single parent who has maintained deep community ties while building a distinguished legal career.