



# The Power Source

## Igniting the Future of Florida



**August 2025**  
**Stephanie Madden**  
**Commissioner**  
*City of Lakeland*

**In your service as a City Commissioner, what is your role and oversight over Lakeland Electric?**

My role as an elected official in a city with a municipal electric utility, Lakeland Electric, is multifaceted and deeply rooted in local accountability and community benefit.

I serve as the direct link between the community and its electric utility. Specifically, I am responsible for local governance and oversight, setting policies, approving budgets, and making decisions on critical matters like rates, power supply choices, and infrastructure investments. My direct accountability to the voters, who are also the utility's ratepayers, ensures that the utility's operations and services are tailored to meet specific local needs and priorities, rather than external shareholder interests.

I see myself as an official champion of Lakeland Electric's contributions to the community, which extends beyond reliable and affordable electricity to include things like payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) and coordination with other municipal services during emergencies (mutual aid). My position ensures transparency, public participation in decision-making, and a vested interest in the utility's success as a community-owned asset.

**Lakeland Electric is a well-regarded utility in the state, as you reflect on the success of the utility and the services provided to your constituents, what do you see as the opportunities in the energy space?**

Lakeland Electric, as a community-owned municipal utility, possesses a unique agility and local focus that positions it to explore compelling opportunities within the evolving "energy space." By building upon its foundation of affordable, reliable service and direct community connection, Lakeland Electric can strategically engage with emerging technologies and customer needs.

During the last administration, there were many federal grants and tax credits to pilot emerging, "green energy" projects. At Lakeland Electric, we are careful to avoid the bleeding edge, because our number one goal is reliability and affordability, but we stay informed on emerging technologies. We decommissioned our coal unit, which was at the end of its lifecycle, reducing our emissions by half, and have begun to replace those megawatts. We entered into an agreement with a gas company to build a solar farm in our territory, investigated residential solar plus battery microgrids, and purchased six RICE engines which can



# The Power Source

## Igniting the Future of Florida

use a blend of natural gas and clean hydrogen, (if and when clean hydrogen becomes available and affordable). Under the new administration, hydrocarbons are king. In Florida, electric utilities are 75-85% natural gas dependent, but we are always looking at emerging technologies. Most “green energy” pilots have paused, but our RICE quick start engines work well with the solar we have. We do not intend to add more solar, because of solar’s intermittency and low efficiency rates; it is not a base-load solution. Green hydrogen received a lot of attention and funding, as an alternative to natural gas, however with the cuts to tax credits and the high costs associated with a renewable plus electrolysis production process, many of the green hydrogen projects across the country have been placed on hold. Now, we have our eyes on geologic hydrogen, to see how the drilling for this naturally occurring hydrogen might bring costs down significantly and add diversity of fuel to pipelines and gas turbines. The development and deployment of this hidden treasure, which bypasses the energy-intensive production processes of conventional hydrogen, represents a promising direction for future energy solutions.

It seems nuclear is experiencing a renaissance. At Lakeland Electric we are watching the Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) race to commercialization and while we are waiting, we are actively engaged in a grant-funded project through the APPA DEED program. This initiative focuses on researching low-cost or no-cost environmental preparations for SMR permitting, with the goal of developing a comprehensive guide for all municipal electric utilities. This research could lead to a partnership siting on our former coal plant.

**Congratulations on your appointment to lead the APPA’s Policy Makers Council. As you represent the City nationally, what do you hope to achieve during your term to advance the energy initiatives of Lakeland Electric?**

I am incredibly honored to step into the role of Chair for the American Public Power Association's (APPA) Policy Makers Council (PMC). This distinguished council, comprised of elected and appointed local officials from community-owned electric utilities across the U.S., serves as a crucial voice, advocating directly for public power's collective interests at the federal level.

During my term, my overarching goal is to strategically leverage this national platform to advance the specific energy initiatives that are paramount to Lakeland Electric's continued success and, by extension, to the sustained well-being and prosperity of our Lakeland community. Specifically, I am committed to the following:

- **Championing Advanced Energy Technologies:** I will actively advocate for federal policies, dedicated research funding, and streamlined regulatory processes that accelerate the development and deployment of cutting-edge energy solutions. This includes vigorously promoting Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) as a reliable, carbon-free baseload power option. I will specifically share the detailed findings and best practices from Lakeland Electric's ongoing APPA DEED grant project, which is meticulously researching low-cost or no-cost environmental preparations for SMR permitting. Furthermore, I intend to highlight the exciting potential of naturally occurring hydrogen, advocating for federal support in its exploration and the establishment of robust policy frameworks for its responsible integration as a viable, low-carbon energy source.



# The Power Source

## Igniting the Future of Florida

- **Enhancing Grid Resilience and Modernization:** Through collaborative efforts with my fellow municipal leaders on the PMC, I will push for targeted federal programs and flexible regulatory frameworks that empower utilities like Lakeland Electric to significantly strengthen our grid infrastructure. This includes advocating for increased funding for grid hardening projects, advanced cybersecurity measures to protect against physical and digital threats, and smart grid technologies that enhance operational efficiency and rapid recovery capabilities, thereby ensuring long-term reliability and security for our customers, particularly in the face of increasingly severe weather events.
- **Promoting Customer-Centric Energy Services and Engagement:** I plan to actively share Lakeland Electric's successful customer engagement strategies and learn from the best practices of other utilities. This involves exploring and advocating for federal initiatives that support innovative service models, such as personalized energy management tools and initiatives that empower residents and businesses to better manage their energy consumption, reduce costs, and actively participate in our collective energy future.
- **Securing Critical Federal Resources:** My position on the PMC provides a direct and influential channel to federal decision-makers. I will utilize this access to advocate vigorously for continued and expanded access to vital federal grants, tax incentives, and low-interest loan programs. These resources are essential for Lakeland Electric to invest in crucial infrastructure upgrades, explore and adopt new technologies, and ultimately maintain affordable and stable rates for our valued ratepayers, ensuring the utility's financial health and its ability to serve the community effectively.

*Ultimately, my objective is to ensure that Lakeland Electric, and other public power communities across the country, have the freedom and resources they need for innovative, operational excellence. I am an advocate for the myriad benefits public power provides its customers, my constituents, neighbors and friends. Its deep connection to the community it serves is a compelling model for providing power nationwide, and as I advocate, I hope to simultaneously bring back tangible benefits, valuable insights, and strategic opportunities that directly enhance our city's energy landscape and quality of life.*

**You are a City Commissioner, a business owner and entrepreneur, and a thought leader. For our next generation of leaders, what advice would you give to keep them engaged in Florida's future?**

To stay engaged in Florida's future, look for opportunities to serve. Say "yes" to volunteer opportunities that align with your interests. We all wake up every day, go to work and take care of our families, but where I have found the most profound inspiration and education is through the things I have signed up for that are outside the requirements of my job. As a past-president of the women's organization, Junior League, I learned valuable leadership skills and attended national conferences on recruitment, retention, board responsibilities, fundraising and event planning.

As a member of the O2 Committee for the Southeastern University's Leadership Forum, I was able to engage with nationally recognized authors and speakers and take back the valuable insights I learned, which greatly benefitted my business. Serving on the Lighthouse board, a homeless care center and transitional housing provider, I learned so much that has informed my policymaking as a city commissioner,



# **The Power Source**

## Igniting the Future of Florida

and even regularly going over financials for the other boards on which I serve, helps me understand how to effectively and frugally appropriate funds to the various departments in our city budget.

All the Parent-Teacher associations, Chamber functions, committees and non-profit boards gave me an array of soft-skills, as well as rich technical and leadership skills, that I would never have realized through my paid job. These enriching life experiences gave me the confidence to run for office, to become the liaison for Lakeland Electric and fill a seat on American Public Power Association's Policy Maker Council. Serving on a national board, advocating for public power at a time when energy is so dynamic and exciting, this would not have been possible without the other decisions along the way to serve my community. Each small assignment you take on to make your community a better place has a way of refueling and igniting your personal development, preparing you to more effectively engage and change the world.