

Natalie Ratha

**ST CLOUD AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
MODERATOR REMARKS FOR OCTOBER 8, 2020
8:00 – 9:00 am
ST. CLOUD CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES**

QUESTION #1 (2 min): We'd like to hear a little about each of you – who you are and why you are running for city council.

My name is Natalie Ratha and I have called St. Cloud home for the past 16 years. My background includes: nine years of public service with Milwaukee County Parks, directing a non-profit arts organization in St. Cloud, a master's degree in public administration with a concentration in local government from St. Cloud State University, and have served our families through school bus driving for the past seven years. I am a mother of two daughters that inspire me daily and have been married to a wonderful man and economist for the past 18 years. I have decided to run for a seat on the council because I want to bring a fresh perspective given my background and experiences to help St. Cloud be a vibrant economy with clean and well-maintained infrastructure enriched by public arts initiatives.

QUESTION #2 (2 min): With recent events, public safety is on the top of everyone's mind. What's your view of St. Cloud's Fire and Police Departments and what's your approach to appropriately funding these important city departments in the future?

Our brave firefighters and police officers are our heroes. When people are asked what they look for from their city, feeling safe is very important. The city of St. Cloud has responded to this and funded public safety well with a 3% increase on the next budget. I believe on continuing to fund St. Cloud Fire Department and Police Department and am proud to read about our innovative programs such as the COP house, the CAPS program and the Co-Response team.

QUESTION #3 (2 min) The city of St. Cloud's sales tax, food and beverage tax and lodging taxes have all taken big hits during COVID. As many of you know, the Chamber contracts with the city to run the Convention and Visitor's Bureau with a portion of the lodging tax, so it's important to us, too. How do you propose to manage the big hits to these important taxes and continue the services that are funded by them? Will you increase property taxes?

There was a \$10 million tax revenue lost due to COVID. The community is struggling to maintain what was and make sure that their basic needs are met. I see it as a temporary pause to the tourism revenue and we must continue messaging to shop local. I would not increase property taxes rather prioritize spending to focus on the delivery of public

services as we navigate through this crisis. Also, these are unique times, everywhere deficits are the new, although unexpected norm, but we are resilient to bounce back.

QUESTION #4 (2 min): Downtown St. Cloud has recently taken hits because of businesses closing due to COVID and the Press Bar fire, which left a hole on 5th Avenue South. What are your ideas for how the City of St. Cloud should be involved in downtown revitalization?

I am an advocate for public art as a means to revitalize our city, build connections and a sense of place while encouraging tourism and supporting our local businesses and artists. I see potential in downtown St. Cloud with empty storefront windows and the Press Bar corner void. We can create art on the windows, paint a mural on the brick wall at Press Bar until that space is redeveloped and even create a mural on the fence surrounding it like the Seberger Fence Mural Project that I was involved with.

QUESTION #5 (2 min): What will be your top priority city issue if you are elected to City Council and why should people vote for you?

With school and work going online, internet is a new necessity. I want to help ensure that everyone has access to the internet. We work hard and make an honest living. We need leaders who are willing to do the homework and not be complacent. I am an artist and think creatively on complex issues as well as a working mother that makes sure everyone needs are met. I will add the much-needed diverse perspective by representing a mixed race family, generation x, the blue collar worker, and a woman's voice.