

**2014 Beaches Watch
Jacksonville Beach Candidate Questions**

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When answering the questions, please provide specifics as well as supporting data and facts wherever possible.

1) District Issues:

- a. **In your opinion, what are the two most important issues for your district that you would address as a city councilor and how would you propose they be addressed?**

1. **Public safety:** This is the most important issue for my district as well as for all of Jacksonville Beach. We want a community in which people not only will **be** safe but also **feel** safe. The Downtown CAPE program in the redevelopment district has been successful in curbing crime. The recent decision by the city council to add four officers to the unit will result in a greater level of safety in the area. The CAPE program in the Pablo Beach, South neighborhood remains effective in reducing criminal activity and should be continued. Residents, businesses, and the police must work together to reduce opportunities for criminals to take advantage of law-abiding citizens.

As the council representative for District 1, I will fully support the police department's efforts to forge close ties with every neighborhood and every business to create the safe community we all desire.

2. **Promoting a family-friendly downtown:** The city council has a vision for the central business district that focuses on a diverse mix of businesses and venues. Consultants hired by the city have provided needed input and perspective into new ways to promote this diversity. Their expertise should be joined with that of residents, business leaders, city council members, and city staff to encourage and develop a central business district that offers entertainment, shopping, and dining choices to every segment of our community.

2) Crime/Public Safety:

- a. **In your opinion, what are the most important crime/public safety issues in Jacksonville Beach and what should be done to address them? Please be specific.**

Overall, Jacksonville Beach is a safe community. However, the city has its share of crimes, a large percentage of which are committed by non-residents. In the central business district, overconsumption of alcohol is a major issue, resulting in fights, assaults, DUIs, and more. The Downtown CAPE unit was approved by the

city council several years ago to increase safety and reduce the alcohol-fueled party atmosphere that tends to prevail late at night. As the District 1 representative, I will continue to support funding with downtown redevelopment monies for the Downtown CAPE unit. They are making a positive difference.

b. Are there other options besides hiring more police officers you would support to improve public safety in the downtown area?

Several years ago, security cameras purchased through a federal grant were installed in multiple locations downtown. The monitors are installed in the communications center in the police department, allowing communications officers (COs) to observe suspicious activities and dispatch police officers quickly. However, there are times when the COs are busy handling calls for service and are not able to monitor the cameras closely. Hiring part-time civilian employees for this task during peak times would increase overall public safety at a greatly-reduced cost. The expense could be covered through redevelopment monies without adversely impacting the police department's budget.

c. What specific concerns do you have regarding public safety outside the downtown area?

1. Safety in the Pablo Beach, South neighborhood has improved tremendously since I developed the CAPE program in 1991, which could not have been accomplished without the assistance of neighborhood leaders and the financial support of the city council. The CAPE officer works closely with fellow police officers, residents, the Mission House director, and Jacksonville HUD officials to ensure residents receive the support they need. While the neighborhood is much safer now, there are still public safety concerns which necessitate continued support for the program.
2. Traffic congestion and distracted/careless driving are persistent public safety issues. Northern St. Johns County continues to develop, as does the area west of the ICW. In Jacksonville Beach, the large apartment complex on Beach Blvd. and the new subdivision adjacent to J. Turner Butler Blvd. will add more vehicles to our roadways. As this congestion forces drivers to wait longer to enter or cross main-traveled roadways like Beach Blvd. and Third St., some will become impatient and take unnecessary chances, leading to increased traffic crashes. Drivers distracted by texting, sending emails, etc. result in traffic crashes, also.

After the two developments are completed, traffic patterns should be monitored to identify any need for additional traffic signals or changes to traffic patterns. Increased traffic enforcement will be necessary to ensure motor vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians can travel safely.

3) Alcohol ordinance:

a. What is your opinion of the alcohol ordinance requiring any business that sells alcohol to obtain a permit to sell alcohol after midnight?

As the former police chief, I was tasked by the city manager with creating the alcohol ordinance. Certain alcohol establishments had caused ongoing problems by continuing to serve customers who were already intoxicated. Some

establishments served alcohol to minors, and some allowed patrons to leave the premises with alcohol, resulting in arrests for drinking alcohol in public. The ordinance was drafted with the goal of creating greater compliance with laws governing the consumption of alcohol. The city council passed the ordinance after multiple public meetings that allowed owners of alcohol establishments as well as patrons and residents the opportunity to express their opinions and concerns. The ordinance has caused owners/managers of alcohol establishments to increase attention to the actions of their patrons. Fewer violations have been observed since its passage. The ordinance is working.

b. If elected, would you vote to repeal or modify this ordinance? If so, please be specific about any changes you would support.

I will not vote to repeal the ordinance; however, I will listen to business owners and residents who have suggestions for improvements to the ordinance. Ultimately, I will support reasonable modifications that the city attorney, city manager, and the police chief, after consideration of input from business owners and residents, recommend to make the ordinance more effective.

4) Parking:

a. What is your opinion on paid parking in the downtown business district? Please be specific.

Paid parking in the CBD was implemented in part due to safety concerns on city-owned parking lots. Members of the city council also discussed the value of generating revenue to help cover costs of the program. Since the parking program began, crime in the lots has been reduced significantly during those times paid parking is in effect. The five dollar parking fees have generated revenue that exceeds overhead costs for the private security and parking management companies as well as the police officer assigned to patrol the lots. Overall, the program is accomplishing its stated purposes and should be continued.

b. What changes would you like to see made to improve the parking situation in the downtown area?

The city owns property on 2nd Street, North between 2nd Avenue and 3rd Avenue. It is in the process of being developed into a surface parking lot that will provide approximately 90 public spaces. Parking fees are planned for the new lot, which should cover costs for ensuring safety and ongoing maintenance. The extra lot will help but not resolve the problem of a shortage of parking spaces available, especially during special events and festivals. Chapter 34 of the city ordinances could be amended to require new businesses to provide more onsite parking for their customers than is currently mandated.

5) Central Business District Vision:

a. What changes would you propose to accomplish the community's vision of a safe, walkable and family-friendly environment in the Central Business District?

On most days, from morning until late evening, the CBD offers a safe, walkable, and family-friendly environment. The evening crowd, many of whom have enjoyed a meal at one of the restaurants in the CBD and surrounding area, begins to leave

as it gets later, and the late-night bar crowd arrives. The small number of retail establishments close, as do the restaurants, leaving the CBD primarily an area of alcohol establishments.

The city has hired consultants to advise elected officials and staff on ways to encourage a diverse mix of development. While I support that decision, I also believe there should be a task force of business leaders and interested residents formed to offer input on ways to attract additional enterprises whose business model is not primarily the sale of alcohol.

b. What kinds of businesses and developments would you like to see in the Central Business District? Please be specific.

- Specialty coffee shops like Starbucks, Bold Bean Coffee, etc.;
- Restaurants catering to the breakfast and lunch crowd;
- A family entertainment venue similar to Adventure Landing or Dave & Buster's, although on a smaller scale, which might include a beach-themed miniature golf course overlooking the oceanfront; and
- A small- to medium-sized office building catering to professionals (advertising, real estate, physicians, etc.).

What, if anything, would you recommend be done to encourage those businesses to come to Jacksonville Beach?

The Community Redevelopment Agency, with the approval of the city council, could offer grants, loans, interest subsidies, and related incentives to attract new business development in the CBD.

c. What is your opinion of encouraging the Central Business District to become a hospitality zone as proposed by the City's consultant?

As I discussed in 5)a., there is value in trying to attract a broader mix of businesses to meet the needs and interests of different segments of the community. That broader mix could include entertainment venues, additional restaurants, and a variety of retail shopping choices to accompany existing establishments that focus on the sale and consumption of alcohol.

6) Sign Ordinance:

a. What is your opinion of the city's current sign ordinance? Please be specific and explain any changes you would like to see made to the sign ordinance.

The city's sign ordinance has received criticism from some business owners as being unduly restrictive. Efforts to improve the ordinance are ongoing; however, more work is needed. I support formation of a task force comprised of business owners and residents that would work with city staff on a comprehensive review of the sign ordinance. This would offer all stakeholders the opportunity to have input into a sign ordinance that would meet the needs of businesses while addressing aesthetical concerns of residents.

- b. Do you support the proposed sign ordinance change that would allow digital signs to change every 8 seconds? Please explain your answer.**

From a traffic safety viewpoint, I do not support an eight-second change. Since every business could have different timing for its message changes, the distraction of multiple signs changing so often could result in increased traffic crashes. I could support digital sign changes that occurred on a more infrequent basis; e.g., several times daily, or possibly once hourly. The ordinance also could require businesses in close proximity along the same stretch of roadway to coordinate timing of message changes.

7) Height Limit:

- a. Do you believe more highrise buildings that exceed the 35 foot height limit should be built in Jacksonville Beach? Yes or No.**

No. See b.

- b. Please explain your answer to (a).**

The voters expressed their will in 2004, and no structure may exceed the 35 foot height limit except for those properties that were grandfathered in prior to the charter change. Any attempt to prohibit those property owners from developing their properties as originally approved would potentially lead to expensive litigation which the city would likely lose.

- c. If elected, would you take any actions to change the height limit that was approved by 76% of the voters in 2004? If so, what would you change?**

No. The charter change was the result of a voter initiative. Any change to this section of the charter should come from the voters.

8) Communication:

- a. What would you propose be done to improve the city's communication with citizens?**

It is important that the city council and staff understand the issues and concerns of residents and businesses to ensure they are making informed decisions. Communications must flow both directions, from the city to the community, and from residents and businesses to the city. The city regularly posts information about meetings, services provided, and other issues on its website for those with Internet access. Information of a timely nature is forwarded to residents and businesses through the use of robo-calls. Citizens can also receive assistance or information by calling a city department directly. Services are readily available for those that need them.

- b. What would you do to promote communication with your constituents?**

As a councilmember, I will promptly respond to requests to meet with me or to speak via email or by phone. I can be contacted through the city's email system or

by cell phone at 904.923.2014. I will work hard to keep the residents and business owners of my district up-to-date on critical issues.

c. Are you in favor of making city council meetings available online? Please explain.

When I worked in Ohio, city council meetings were broadcast live through the local cable provider. The system worked well for residents who were unable to attend a council meeting. However, attendance at the meetings was typically light unless a person had a specific issue that he or she wished to bring before the council.

Contrary to our city's policy of allowing citizen comments at every council meeting, whether on an agenda item or another topic entirely, persons sitting at home cannot offer their opinions and input. This can result in decisions being made that do not take into account all sides of an issue. The lack of face-to-face interaction between citizens and members of the city council limits the ability to communicate fully.

d. What is your opinion of the public council briefings? Please explain.

It is my understanding that the "Government in the Sunshine" law authorizes individual discussions between one councilmember and the city manager about topics that may come before the council. While I would be comfortable discussing issues with the city manager on a one-to-one basis, I am not opposed to public council briefings. I also believe the many workshops and public meetings with the current council have been very productive.

e. Would you be in favor of adding a "City Council member discussion" agenda item for each Council meeting to encourage open public discussion among the council members on topics/issues not on the agenda?

Councilmembers currently have the ability to introduce topics or issues for discussion that are not part of the agenda. This is done under the Notifications section of the agenda. In addition, an individual councilmember can request that the city manager add an unscheduled item for discussion purposes to the agenda.

9) Public facilities: Do you have any concerns about the city's infrastructure, public facilities or essential services? If so, what do you propose be done to address these concerns?

The city has made outstanding improvements to the infrastructure in the central business district, primarily utilizing redevelopment monies. Those funds have also been used to improve blighted areas in the south end of the city. Maintenance of streets throughout the rest of the city has not kept pace, and more attention should be given to this issue in the budget process.

City staff has done an excellent job of keeping its buildings in good repair. The golf course and parks are maintained well, also. Renovations to the Paws Park facility have reportedly not held up as well as hoped and may need additional attention.

10) Events: Of the various Jacksonville Beach events, which ones would you support keeping and which ones would you support cutting, and why?

I support the current festivals/events presented or approved by the city.

11) Are there any other issues you would like to address if elected? Please explain.

None