

2014 Beaches Watch Neptune Beach Candidate Questions

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

- 1. What do you feel are the two most important issues facing Neptune Beach and what would you do to address them? In your response, please include how you would ensure adequate funding to address these issues.**

One of the most important issues that Neptune Beach citizens will face over the next few years is the dispute with Jacksonville over imposed solid waste fees. The Interlocal Agreement states that the trigger for Neptune Beach to pay the “tipping fee” into the Trail Ridge landfill occurs when there is a uniform waste disposal fee across the county, not when Jacksonville has budget shortfalls. Neptune Beach citizens already pay 86 cents of every tax dollar to Duval County. If we paid any more, we would be subsidizing the use of the landfill by other municipalities within Duval County that do not pay anything. I will continue to fight for an equitable return of services for the taxes we already pay to Duval County. And I will always defend our sovereignty and financial independence.

The second important issue facing Neptune Beach is our aging infrastructure, most of which is 50- to 60-years old and far past its life expectancy. With such increasing age, the likelihood of a catastrophic failure of enormous cost to our citizens also increases. If we do not address this in a systematic way, we will be forced to reduce other levels of service, thus impacting the quality of life in Neptune Beach. During my term in office, we helped rebuild the city’s Reserve Fund, enabling us to start addressing these issues, like the Bal Harbour neighborhood project for example. And over the next 4 years our City Council will continue to seek innovative solutions and provide direction on how to allocate our limited resources to continue upgrading and improving our city’s aging infrastructure. As a native resident of the Beaches, local small business owner in Neptune Beach, 6-year veteran of the Planning Board, 4-year City Councilor, and new father, I will work to ensure we maintain a low cost of living while preserving the city’s character and quality of life.

- 2. Budget: Since Neptune Beach only receives 14% of property tax monies, Neptune Beach continues to struggle to balance its budget and maintain essential services.**
 - A. What, if anything, would you propose be done to reduce the budget?**

During the past 4 years, we have already reduced the budget through employee attrition, consolidation of staff duties, acquisition of grant monies, and thanks to staff cooperation, we were able to keep payroll costs to a minimum. At the same time we provided a

quality level of service to our citizens. The 2015 budget is almost \$300,000 less than the 2006 budget, and accounts for 15 fewer full-time employees. One of Neptune Beach's great accomplishments is the addition of solar power to City Hall, which operates 100% on solar. While we have already been through many belt-tightening sessions, I would propose we invest further in technology efficiencies, re-bid our trash services with an eye towards adopting semi-automated collection, continue to evaluate staff efficiencies, as well as review the sale of unutilized city equipment.

B. What, if anything, would you propose be done to increase revenues to support projects that are not currently funded?

Water Quality Credit Trading Program -- Our newly efficient water treatment plant operates below the threshold required by EPA, so we continue to create Nitrogen green credits that we should consider selling in the Water Quality Credit Trading Program. Our current margin in Nitrogen green credits could generate hundreds of thousands of dollars. Until 2013 water quality credit trading in Florida was limited to the Lower St. Johns River Basin pilot project. Florida recently joined several other states and regions that have water quality credit trading programs in place, including Oregon, Colorado, and Connecticut.

Water Treatment Reuse Project -- From our water treatment facility, we are capable of piping out re-use water to adjacent neighborhoods (like Indian Woods) for landscape irrigation. Via irrigation meters, current homeowners who use potable water for irrigation would switch to the re-use water, thus further reducing Nitrogen in our plant, a win-win for everyone.

Last year, when Nextel was combined with Sprint, we lost a vendor's leasing space on our water tower, resulting in a \$15,000 revenue loss to the city. We need to actively pursue another cellular vendor to rent our water tower space to reclaim this revenue.

In my own business, I have leased and managed commercial office space along A1A. We need to continue to actively address our 13 % commercial vacancy rate , because the lower the vacancies in our commercial districts, the more revenue the city will see as a result of user consumption and local employment.

For example: (1) Kmart Shopping Center area and outparcels; (2) Atlantic & Florida Blvd Corridor; (3) New Winn Dixie improved area and outparcels; (4) Vacant units for lease along Atlantic and A1A.

3. Property Management: How would you propose the City deal with rental property owners or property management companies that let their properties become vacant, dilapidated, or allow tenants to disrupt the community?

In regards to dilapidated properties, there should be no distinction in code enforcement with owner-occupied homes and tenant-occupied properties, and all city ordinances should be enforced in a fair and consistent manner. Under our current process, upon a complaint filed with the city to take action, it can be days or weeks before the violation is cited in the field. And the current system allows for "reasonable time to correct" a code violation, in some instances (depending on the violation), 21 to 30 days from first notice. Adjacent cities have a

much shorter timeframe for the time allowed to correct a violation. We need to reduce our times to 14 days.

Parking laws, trash and recycling schedule, noise ordinance, pet leash and clean-up laws, are just an example of a few of the most commonly violated ordinances. The City should not be solely responsible for addressing issues with problem tenants; absentee landlords are also culpable when dealing with disruptive tenants. The system now in place penalizes both tenants and property owners after a set number of notices (depending on the violation); however, there is often a lack of initial education on the codes to new tenants. It should not be the job of neighbors to inform new tenants of the laws of Neptune Beach. I propose we provide new tenants and residents with a simple summary of the most often violated city codes when they initiate utility service at City Hall. We should also develop a new resident e-mail package, and when service is initiated, the packet is sent out.

If a home is abandoned and a lot left to grow wild, it can take banks years to sort out the title process, meanwhile the home deteriorates and brings down values in the surrounding area. I will ensure the city takes a more active role in citing code violations, like abandoned cars, trash, and overgrown lawns. I believe filing liens on these properties would help to ensure banks are ultimately paying for the lack of maintenance on their assets.

4. Crime & Public Safety:

A. What would you recommend be done to maintain crowd control and out-of-control drinking to ensure Neptune Beach is safer on July 4th?

The Neptune Beach Police Department has done an outstanding job even as Duval County has offered declining assistance during the Fourth of July holidays. Neptune Beach has been forced to spend extra funds to maintain public safety, close to \$20,000 more in this past year alone. A good portion of these holiday visitors come from outside of Neptune Beach, and adequate police preparation during these events requires additional support from Duval County. I support a process by which we are able to expand our force by temporarily contracting with JSO officers to adequately staff our security during these large events, as was done this past year. I believe we need to establish a consistent yearly transfer substation in Jacksonville Beach during these events, so our officers will not be required to drive offenders downtown for processing, which would take officers away for 4 to 6 hours. I have enjoyed the Fourth of July here since I was a child through my high school days watching on the beach, to celebrating in my yard while renting east of 3rd, to now biking on 1st with my family and toddler in the rear bike seat. I want everyone to continue to enjoy the Fourth as we have our entire lives.

B. What other public safety issues would you like to address if elected?

Fortunately for Neptune Beach, our police force is one of the most dedicated and professional organizations in North Florida. Domestic Violence is down 29.6% 2012 to 2013 data. The average response time to a call in Neptune Beach is under 3 minutes. The most common offenses are petty thefts of bicycles and unlocked cars broken into. As our city

continues to grow and traffic continues to increase, we will have to make sure we can maintain a pedestrian-friendly city. Not only will parking and car traffic in the Central Business District become a growth-inhibiting factor, it will also become a safety issue for pedestrians and bicyclists. We will have to take the proper long-term growth-management steps now to ensure the safety of future generations. I would also encourage better-lit walkways as well as improved pedestrian and bicycle logistics in Town Center and on First Street.

Resources that Neptune Beach residents may not be aware of include a Neighborhood Watch Program and a Courtesy House Check Program. Any interested citizen may establish a Neighborhood Watch Program on his/her street. A Neptune Beach Police Officer will attend the initial meeting to help organize and explain the program, and the Police Dept. will provide continued free advice. In the Courtesy House Check Program, the Police Dept. will monitor and check your home while you're away.

5. In your opinion, do you think Neptune Beach is receiving its fair share of county services as stated in the Interlocal agreement? If not, what would you propose be done to resolve the issues?

I have met with the original drafters of the last amendment (ca. 1995) of the Interlocal Agreement and have confirmed that the conditions for Neptune Beach to pay the tipping fee have not been met. There are a number of issues in the Interlocal Agreement, including the stipulation that Jacksonville will provide animal control services, which they have not met. Animal Control has cost Neptune Beach over \$60,000 per year. As part of Council, I will continue to press Jacksonville to meet its obligations while we carry on our discussions with them. I also believe that the county should reimburse our city for the additional security expense for the July Fourth events since many Jacksonville residents choose to celebrate the holiday in our city. This past year alone equated to more than \$20,000.

6. Neighborhood issues: In your neighborhood walks, what issues have you observed that exist:

A. East of 3rd St.?

- Dilapidated rental units.
- Discontent with variance and code enforcement process.
- Frustration with home improvement permitting process for non-conforming properties.
- Storm water drainage issues.
- Traffic issues, including: Driving the wrong way on Strand & Ocean; Bicyclists and motorists competing block-by-block to pass each other; Bicyclists riding in the wrong lanes.
- Density complications, including: Parking, Noise, Trashcans left out continuously at curbside.

B. West of 3rd St.?

- Storm water drainage issues.
- Vacant bank-owned homes, with overgrown lawns and abandoned appearance.
- Road surfaces past their life expectancy.
- Aging water main connections.

- Traffic issues, including: Running stop signs; Speeding.

C. What should be done to address them?

East of 3rd St.?

- Dilapidated rental units - Common sense code enforcement to address structural safety and clear the issues that devalue the surrounding area.
- Discontent with variance and code enforcement process & frustration with home improvement permit process for non-conforming properties -- Top two categories are 50% impervious surface coverage area and non-conforming setbacks: (1) Define and establish an approved 100% pervious paver installation process not requiring homeowners to contract a third party civil engineer; (2) Establish definitive guidelines and calculations for this emerging building product.
- Storm water drainage issues -- Complete a map of the city and a 25-year maintenance plan. Initiate regular street sweeping to clear street debris from flowing into the storm waters.
- Traffic issues: (1) Driving wrong way on Strand & Ocean -- Paint directional arrows on high traffic turn lanes connecting to one lane traffic streets; (2) Bicyclists and motorist competing block by block to pass each other -- Paint clearly defined lanes all along 1st street, especially a stripe along the centerline.
- Density complications -- Streamline the Code Enforcement door hanger program to identify, warn, and eventually fine repeat offenders.

West of 3rd St.?

- Storm water drainage issues, road surfaces past their life expectancy, aging water main connections -- Resume regularly scheduled storm water improvements. We should have a complete map of our city and a 25-year maintenance plan, showing the citizens when their area was last improved, where the city is working now, and how long it will be before the city makes it back around to their neighborhood. Initiate regular street sweeping to clear street debris from flowing into the storm sewers.
- Traffic issues, running stop signs, and speeding -- Review and update the citizen-initiated road hump request process.

7. What issues exist in Chapter 27 of the land use code that you believe are impacting quality of life in Neptune Beach? What changes would you support?

The Land Use Code is a living document that is in a constant state of review and amendment. During my 6 years on the Planning Board, I became very familiar with Chapter 27 as we regularly examined its contents and made recommendations to Council regarding possible changes that would better serve our city. While on Council, I have voted to improve the code in response to the needs of the citizens, and over the next four years I intend to do the same.

As a sustainable gardener myself and supporter of beautifying Neptune Beach, I support changes to the code that allow someone to landscape and beautify the rights-of-way connected to their properties. As long as view sightlines for others are not inhibited and subterranean utilities are not disturbed, I believe if a citizen has the passion to improve these areas, it should

be encouraged. However, in saying this I am well aware that our code has limitations. Due to various frivolous lawsuits over the years, the language has become increasingly restrictive with regard to what and where you can plant. Moving forward I hope to be able to work with citizens who aim to beautify our city.

Many homes in Neptune Beach were constructed before the city's modern codes were adopted, and are thus non-conforming. Homeowners often overpay to repair an issue in their homes instead of making a less expensive replacement for fear of triggering a non-conformity problem. Unfortunately, there are also many owners of dilapidated multi-unit rental properties that are unwilling to spend the capital to fix their property; meanwhile, there are buyers willing to invest, but who are reluctant to face all of the variances and limitations to rehabilitate what is currently there. This dilemma results in dragging down the surrounding property values, which ultimately hurts us all. There should be relief for these older properties so they can be maintained, updated, and thus improve the surrounding neighborhoods. To help resolve this, one possibility is to implement an overlay district East of 3rd, so that older non-conforming homes have a less prohibitive and expensive process for repairs or upgrades. And further clarity on what constitutes a repair versus a replacement would help homeowners who are trying to fix up their older homes.

In our higher density areas, many variance requests are related to homeowners going over their lot coverage. Keeping the amount of impervious surface as low as possible is a good idea in a flood-prone area like ours. I would propose that the city help bring together the engineering specifications of pervious paving materials, so each homeowner doesn't have to incur the cost of hiring an engineer. This would greatly benefit the homeowner.

We need to take the steps today in our codes and ordinances to allow for the future growth of tomorrow. I believe we should promote mixed-use development in our commercial areas, allowing for residential, retail, and commercial development orders to create more pedestrian-friendly communities.

8. Communication: What will be your policy to promote and encourage communication with the residents of Neptune Beach?

I initiated a Citizens Portal for our website, which provides our residents an organized and structured way to send comments and concerns to the city. In the past, unless someone came to a Council meeting or emailed staff directly, Councilors often remained unaware of daily issues that were cropping up. With this portal, citizens will have a direct voice to their City Council. I would also propose a new layout for our city's Website, to make it easier for citizens to find the information they are looking for.

Although the Cast A line Newsletter is no longer included with utility bills for economic reasons, it's a good way for the citizens of Neptune Beach to stay connected with current city affairs and events. The newsletter is now posted on the Neptune Beach Website, but I believe there should be a more active way for the citizens to receive updates from their municipality. I would support a simple system by which the citizens of Neptune Beach could submit their e-

mail addresses to receive the Newsletter via e-mail, as well as any other current events that are relevant to us. E-mail addresses can also be collected when new residents sign up for services.

9. Business Development: What, if anything, do you think should be done to support the current businesses and/or promote new business in Neptune Beach? Please explain.

I encourage continued communication between the city and our local businesses. We have been fortunate to have the Town Center Agency and the Beaches Merchants Association in our Central Business District. By supporting these agencies and their fundraising efforts like the Full Moon Party and Dancing in the Streets, we are investing right back into our Town Center. I have been volunteering for over 10 years at every Dancing in the Streets event.

Since a majority of the city is built-out with little vacant land to develop, moving forward we will be looking at new redevelopment orders of existing commercial and residential land. The city should move towards mixed-use developments to reduce the parking issues and increase pedestrian traffic. The city already has a policy allowing half the required parking for businesses located in the Central Business District. Even with this policy in place, parking continues to be a limiting factor to new businesses. We need to streamline and support the valet initiative in Town Center that reduces parking close to the Central Business District.

For 6 years on the Planning Board, I worked with many business owners and developers in Neptune Beach to research various variance requests and make recommendations to City Council, as well as reviewing all commercial developments and amendments to the city's Comprehensive Plan. As a small business owner located in Neptune Beach, I understand the perspectives of business owners in Neptune Beach and the challenges that all small businesses face. We should make it a priority to encourage filling vacant commercial centers. Over the past 10 years, we have seen a tremendous improvement in Town Center, even more so since my childhood days riding through on my bike. As your City Councilor and former Chair of the Planning Board, it is important to make sure we attract the right businesses to Neptune Beach that will improve the quality of life for all citizens, like the new Publix shopping center.

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

A few more initiatives not mentioned above that I will accomplish in the next 4 years include:

- Initiate commercial recycling in the Central Business District.
- Streamline the valet parking process in Central Business District.
- Encourage more pedestrian, bicycle, and low-speed electric-vehicle-friendly logistics in our Central Business District.
- Work with the two strip mall owners to connect the Publix and Kmart shopping centers for vehicle and pedestrian traffic.
- Replace the dead or dying palm trees along 1st Street.
- Document a master landscape map for Jarboe Park, as well as improve landscaping in the Green Market area.

Your elected City Councilor represents the citizens and businesses in our city, interprets the will of the community, and amends the governing ordinances. I believe my local knowledge and history here gives me the right perspective to fulfill these responsibilities. Growing up 20 blocks from City Hall; working in Town Center in high school; returning to Neptune Beach as a seasoned professional; becoming a volunteer for the city a decade ago; starting a small business; renting East of 3rd, purchasing my 1st home West of 3rd, and becoming a landlord in Neptune Beach; getting married and starting a new family with a daughter in school here; and serving as your City Councilor for the past 4 years – these are all the experiences I bring to my public service. We will continue to confront issues and challenges in our city, and I will continue to utilize my knowledge and dedication to improve our great city. I have the experience and proven leadership you know and can trust. Thank you for your support, and I ask again for your vote!

