

## 2014 Beaches Watch Neptune Beach Candidate Questions

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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.

### **Home Improvements and the Municipal Code:**

I believe that your home is yours to improve. For the past seven months, I have walked every street in Neptune Beach and listened to and heard the concerns of more than a thousand residents. The limited ability of a Neptune Beach resident to improve their property and the impact of an outdated municipal code are both amongst the most pressing issues facing our community.

Many families' efforts to improve their homes are impeded. Our ability to replace dilapidated fences and porches, add rooms to accommodate growing families, and update and repair aging homes is obstructed by an outdated Municipal Code. This forces the City to deny improvements that would increase our property values and make our community a better place to live.

As an attorney serving on the council, I would lead an effort to simplify and modernize our Municipal Code without the cost to the City of hiring additional legal aid. These services would not just merely be free to the City and allow residents to improve their homes, but the effects of a revised code would increase property values and revenues.

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

I strongly believe our current millage rate of 3.3756 is high enough, and it should not be raised. With this rate, our City has sufficient funds to cover essential services and protect (and even increase) our emergency reserves.

Currently, Neptune Beach begins the budgeting process by taking the prior year's budget and determining whether spending on various items ought to be increased or decreased from the previous year. To decrease our budget, I believe Neptune Beach ought to employ zero-based budgeting and begin each budgeting cycle with the number Zero. This will increase budgeting accountability on a line-by-line basis.

Neptune Beach could increase revenues without raising taxes in two ways. First, the City could and should apply for more local, state, and federal grants. Even small grants of \$10,000-\$20,000 could be transformative. Second, Neptune Beach must update its Municipal Code to allow residents to improve their homes. This will increase property values and revenues.

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?**

I live on the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> and Davis Streets, and I walk up and down 1<sup>st</sup> Street everyday. It is clear to me that Neptune Beach has a problem with beach blight, abandoned homes, and dilapidated rentals. There are at least two ways we can address this problem (and we should use both):

- (1) **Make it easier to convert multi-family homes into single-family homes.** If Neptune Beach eases the process by which a family can buy a dilapidated duplex and turn it into a beautiful single-family home, we will have a much better community.
- (2) **Enforce the Municipal Code against absent landlords.** Many of the abandoned or rundown rentals in Neptune Beach are rife with code violations. Neptune Beach must pursue code enforcement violations against absent landlords ranging from noise violations and unkempt laws to unsafe living conditions. Moreover, if a structure (or units therein) is abandoned, our code no longer allows it to be "grandfathered." Thus, abandoned structures need to be monitored and, when abandoned required to come into full conformance with the current code (for example, a property with 6 units could only have 2 units if it is abandoned) and, therefore, encourage new ownership.

#### 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?
- b. What other public safety issues would you like to address if elected?

As a former federal prosecutor, I take public safety and crime very seriously. As a resident of 1<sup>st</sup> Street, I have witnessed many out-of-control crowds on our busy summer weekends. While, we must recognize that Neptune Beach is a beach community with a well-earned reputation for being friendly and fun, we must balance that spirit against our resident's safety and security. Allowing these weekends to become dangerous (such as Memorial Day weekend in Jacksonville Beach in 2013) is unacceptable. Common-sense solutions such as community policing, traffic control (especially for after the fire-works), crowd control, and education campaigns are the key to securing Neptune Beach residents' safety and security during holiday weekends.

In addition, we must be constantly vigilant in protecting the security of our neighborhoods. If I were elected, I would focus on ensuring that drug dealers and non-resident gangs never take root in Neptune Beach.

#### 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?

As a former federal prosecutor and a current corporate litigation attorney, I am prepared to stand up and fight for our City in its dispute with the City of Jacksonville over the Inter-Local Agreement. Our City should not pay one more cent to Jacksonville than is legally required—because the more our City pays, the more taxes our citizens pay.

The Inter-Local Agreement is a straight forward contract. Under that contract, Jacksonville promises to treat Neptune Beach, Atlantic Beach, Jacksonville Beach and Baldwin equally. However, by attempting to require Neptune Beach to pay “tipping fees” for use of the landfill, Jacksonville is breaching the agreement. Moreover, Jacksonville is required to pay for our animal control, and they are not.

As an attorney, I can say with confidence that Neptune Beach has a strong legal position, and I disagree with those that believe Neptune Beach should compromise and pay more of our citizens' hard earned money to Jacksonville.

6. Neighborhood issues: In your neighborhood walks, what issues have you observed that exist:
  - a. East of 3<sup>rd</sup> St.?
  - b. West of 3<sup>rd</sup> St.?
  - c. What should be done to address them?

As I live east of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, I know first hand the challenges of all of our homes being much closer together and our streets more frequented by out of town visitors and tourists. Privacy, home renovations and construction, noise, traffic, parking, and safety are all more challenging in this part of our community. Many of these problems could be alleviated by fully embracing a plan (and associated Municipal Code revisions) to transform the multi-family housing east of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street into single-family housing. Moreover, policing east of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street needs to be constant to ensure that crime from other areas at the beaches does not wash into Neptune.

The neighborhoods west of Third Street are all unique and spectacular. Certain neighborhoods (like Bal Harbor) require increased infrastructure investment to alleviate flooding. Other neighborhoods (like Summer Sands) need more representation at City Hall so that their individual issues ranging from access to playgrounds to traffic can be addressed.

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?

I believe the entire Chapter 27 of our Municipal Code needs to be re-written. As an attorney, I want to lead the effort to re-write it. In particular, Chapter 27 makes it difficult to repair non-conforming structures (like an old deck that was built too big or an old fence built too high back in the 1950's). Instead of being able to tear down a fence or a deck and replace it, our code requires homeowners to replace it piece-by-piece. This defies commonsense and is unnecessarily expensive to the homeowner. Moreover, our code does not give our code enforcement officers much, if any, flexibility to work with homeowners. I believe we should give Code Enforcement a 10% "wobble room" to okay improvements that are almost, but not quite perfectly to code. Finally, I think we need to streamline the process by which a multi-family home can be transformed into a single-family home.

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

As I've noted before, I have spoken with more than a thousand Neptune residents during the course of this campaign. A good City Councilor needs to be in constant contact with residents and easy for the residents to contact. In this campaign, I have a "24 Hour Rule," which means I respond to a voter's question, concern, email, facebook message, or text within 24 hours. If it is good for the campaign, it is good for service in office. I will keep that rule.

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.

Neptune Beach has not always been business friendly. We need to be. A strong business center provides jobs to Neptune residents, increases our property values and tax revenues, and gives residents places to eat and shop. Business shouldn't run our town and first consideration should be given to our residents' quality of life in every major question, but promoting a strong small business sector in Neptune Beach makes sense. We can do that by making the approval and permitting process easier for new and growing businesses.

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

[Beaches Watch Note: candidate did not provide response.]