

2015 Beaches Watch

Atlantic Beach Candidate Questions

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

1. Important Issues:

- a. What are the two most important issues for your district that you would address as a City Commissioner? **Two most important issues are: 1) *revitalizing and redevelopment for the Mayport Road corridor, which bifurcates my district.* 2) *Pedestrian and bike safety.***

- b. How would you propose they be addressed? ***To address this, I spearheaded creating a community redevelopment area (CRA) which is now moving forward through the commission. The CRA creates a funding mechanism where tax revenue increases will be reinvested in the CRA – this will aid in bringing the projects identified by the residents and businesses to fruition, as well as improving the quality of life for our residents who live within the CRA boundary. I believe the CRA will be a major mechanism for uniting the east and west sides of Mayport Road. Regarding increasing biking and pedestrian safety, we need to work with the Florida Dept of Transportation, our local Transportation Planning Organization, our citizens and other agencies to come up with a master plan of creating safe biking and pedestrian pathways, creating safe connectivity throughout Atlantic Beach.***

- c. For the whole of Atlantic Beach, in your opinion, what is the main issue that should be addressed? ***Striking a balance between our residential and commercial development and keeping our small town, beachside community atmosphere. While we need to continue to respect and embrace development and re-development, we also need to ensure that quality of life remains intact for all of our citizens.***

What action would you propose? ***We need to review and modify, if necessary, our zoning codes, including our land development regulations. We need to address those areas where commercial and industrial zoning impacts our residential zoning so both can co-exist.***

2. There are a number of Charter amendments on the ballot. Do you support the recommended changes? Please explain why or why not. ***We had a citizen committee who invested a lot of time and energy in reviewing our charter – it had not been reviewed for quite a while and they did an excellent job and proposed very thoughtful changes. We supported moving the committee’s proposed changes (with some slight changes) forward for the voters to make the ultimate decisions. As a commissioner, I do not think it would be appropriate for me to state my position on any of the proposed charter amendments.***

3. There is a proposal on the ballot to change the election of district commissioners from at-large to election by those living in the district. Do you support the proposal? Please explain why or why not. ***I have not decided one way or the other. Ideally, if the district proposition passes, I would hope each commissioner would represent his/her district as designated by our charter, but also realize that 99% of the decisions made as an elected official will more likely affect all of the Atlantic Beach community.***

4. Seaside Community Council: What is your opinion of the Seaside Community Council? Please be specific regarding the reasons why you support or oppose this council. ***As a community bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and the Intracoastal Waterway, given the environmental challenges we are facing now and in the future, the Seaside Community Council is a critical advisory council that will be an asset for this commission (and hopefully future commissions) to make recommendations so the commission will have the necessary information from which thoughtful and prudent decisions can be made when it comes to keeping our community, our citizens and our natural resources safe and resilient.***

5. East Coast Greenway Bike Path: A representative of the East Coast Greenway has said that Mayport Road is the weakest link in the East Coast Greenway. How would you propose to connect the greenway from Mayport to Neptune Beach? ***There are many factors to consider regarding this connectivity. We have a great opportunity with the Mayport Village Community Redevelopment Area and our Mayport Road Corridor Community Redevelopment Area sharing the boundary of Dutton Island Road to work with the FDOT, the Office of Greenways & Trails and the East Coast Greenway to craft a safe connection down Mayport Road to Neptune Beach. Bike and pedestrian safety is one of our major priorities for Atlantic Beach and Mayport Road corridor is one of our “hot spots” when it comes to safety.***

6. Mayport Corridor CRA: What would you like to see happen in the Mayport Road Corridor as a result of the Mayport Road Corridor CRA? ***Residents and businesses will drive what they want to see happen within the CRA boundary. This is an organic process, which means it will be driven by residents and businesses, not the elected officials. My role will help facilitate the process, ensuring the voices of our residents and businesses are heard, their ideas incorporated into the plan and establishing the structure of the CRA. Ideally, I would want to bring in the types of businesses that support the residents who live along the Mayport Road corridor (and our entire community) and help the residents make their desired improvements on their property. It’s all about improving the quality of life for all – as it’s been said, “a rising tide lifts all boats.”***

7. Parking: How would you address the parking problems at the Town Center and beach accesses? ***Parking is definitely an issue at the Town Center with no easy solution. We will need to create public-private partnerships with businesses like One Ocean, landowners and other businesses (even from outside of the Town Center central core) to come up with a master parking plan. I also think that we, as elected officials, should pass a moratorium on approving parking variances, until a viable solution is created.***
8. Budget: In the coming years, balancing the city's budget will continue to be an issue due to continued revenue shortfalls and demands to maintain infrastructure and essential services. What, if anything, would you propose be done to reduce the budget and/or increase revenues? ***Fortunately, due to proper long-term planning and being fiscally conservative, Atlantic Beach's finances remain stable. However, we need to continue to be fiscally conservative, continue to implement long-term planning and maintain our reserve levels. We are fortunate to be able to annex the Atlantic Beach Country Club residential development, which will bring additional ad valorem taxes. The Habitat development at the corner of Atlantic Blvd. and Mayport Road is in full construction mode, which will also bring additional ad valorem taxes. The housing market, in general, is making a resurgence. We need to remain vigilant in keeping our expenses in check and continuing to maintain our long-term planning, particularly when it comes to capital projects, infrastructure and maintenance.***
9. Quality of life: What do you think is the most important quality of life issue for Atlantic Beach at this time? Please explain. ***Ensuring that all of our citizens share the same sentiment: "Atlantic Beach is where I choose to call home."***
10. Are there any other issues you would like to address? Please explain. ***As the incumbent, I would like to share some reflections of what we, as a commission, have accomplished. After all, it takes a team working together to get things done. No one who sits on the commission can claim a sole accomplishment.***
- 1) *Made government open and transparent*** – all commission meetings and other meetings/workshops are video-streamed and available on the city's website. While there are some who have said that I did not support adding videotaping, the record will show what I didn't support was purchasing the "Cadillac" version of a three-camera system at \$35,000 and paying someone in Texas to be the camera operator at a recurring cost of \$12,000 a year (that was for a minimum of two meetings/month/2 hours long). I did support trying one camera first to see what the demand would be from the community.
- 2) *Citizen Engagement*** – We changed the format of our meetings from two commission meetings to one workshop and one commission meeting. The workshop allowed the citizens to have ample time to review the agenda and contact the commissioners with any questions, concerns or suggestions. This also allowed the commissioners more time to review and openly discuss the upcoming items before having to make any decisions. Currently, we changed back to the regular two commission meetings; however, the agenda now comes out approx. ten days before the scheduled commission meeting and before any action is taken on any item, it is discussed and through consensus, moved to the next meeting for action. This gives both citizens and commission ample time to review items before final action is taken.

- 3) **Police Building** – *This commission finally approved plans for moving forward on expanding and improving the police building on its existing site, without park encroachment and within budget. Recent news regarding foundation deficiencies may slightly increase the cost of construction, but that is being further discussed and investigated. There has been some discussion that I was not supportive of keeping the police building at its current site. My idea was if the police station could have been relocated on Mayport Road, the current building could have been converted into a community center to include meeting space, senior citizen activities and other public amenities for our citizens. But, I also said if the consultants determined that the expansion and remodeling of the existing police station could be done on-site, I would support that – and I did.*

- 4) **Preserving and Protecting Tree Canopy** – *Responding to our citizens’ concern regarding the loss of our tree canopy, the commission just recently passed a strengthened tree ordinance. Additionally, we just received a grant that will help us create a master tree plan, which will give us a blueprint with regard to tree placement and re-placement for those water oaks that are reaching their maturity.*

- 5) **Atlantic Beach Country Club (ABCC)** – *As the commission liaison, I worked with the city manager, city staff, and the board and developers of the Atlantic Beach Country Club to work out a plan for building a re-use water facility for the golf course, club and residents of the country club. As part of our negotiations, ABCC agreed to a recreation/greenspace conservation easement over the golf course/housing development to ensure that no more development (residential or commercial) would be allowed. This conservation easement remains in perpetuity. We are now in the process of annexing the golf course/residential development into Atlantic Beach city limits, which will boost our ad valorem tax base.*

- 6) **Strengthened protections for all Atlantic Beach citizens** – *Through expanding our Fair Housing ordinance, we extended protections to include our LGBT citizens and visitors. Atlantic Beach is the first city in Northeast Florida to have passed such an ordinance and I am proud of our commission for their courage and resolve in doing so.*