

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? How would you propose they be addressed?

First, I have reviewed Atlantic Beach's Emergency Management Plan. In my opinion, it is severely lacking. Concerns such as the lack of contingency planning for emergencies other than hurricanes, the lack of training for incident commanders and other City officials and the removal of tabletop exercises from the plan are not addressed. Furthermore, communication of the plan and how it is applicable to residents is almost non-existent. The best emergency management originates from informed participants who may be affected by the emergency that initiates the plan into action.

Second, Atlantic Beach has access to some good education opportunities for children. The schools that serve residents of Atlantic Beach need assistance. I propose that our City begin the discussions with our Duval County School Board representative and the principals of the schools serving our community. These discussions need to be regular, and the routine purpose would be to identify ways our City might support these schools with resources, finances or other assets. The benefit to such synergy for the local schools would be the ability to attract and retain the highest quality of educators. The benefit to our citizens would be the best-educated children who one day will be making the decisions related to our quality of life.

- b. For the whole of Atlantic Beach, in your opinion, what is the main issue that should be addressed? What action would you propose?

In 2010, Atlantic Beach pension funds had an approximate \$2,000,000 un-funded liability. Since that time, this liability has grown to almost \$9,000,000. And, this liability uses erroneous assumptions for return on investments. If historical return rates are applied to the liability, the actual amount could be closer to 12,000,000. And, if left unaddressed another five years, and using historical performance data, the un-funded liability could approach \$25,000,000. This debt level would cost our 12,500 citizens around \$2,000 each and the problem would still exist.

All businesses and most governing bodies who have successfully addressed this issue realize there are limited options for a solution. Businesses in particular, for decades have moved away from

defined benefit plans and endorsed more sustainable options like a 401k. While progress has been made towards controlling pension costs, they are still a significant problem and need more attention. Think about a city, our City in the not too distant future, where the benefit programs are bankrupt and the resulting impossible task of retention of quality employees when a city can't meet its obligations.

2. There are a number of Charter amendments on the ballot. Do you support the recommended changes? Please explain why or why not.

Since your question #3 is specific to one of the amendments, I will confine my comments here to the other proposed amendment. I support lowering of the percentage of voter signatures required to place a referendum on a ballot. The current requirement for the number of signatures necessary to place an issue on a ballot nears or exceeds the number of voters who routinely turn out to cast their vote in most elections. This makes it quite impossible for citizens to exercise their constitutional duty to provide oversight of government when elected officials perhaps disregard the will of the public and the collective majority.

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 support the proposal. First, it is my understanding that the Charter Review Committee made up of a cross-section of residents were unanimous in their recommendation of such a change. Second, the Charter Review Committee hosted many open meetings to gather resident input to any recommended changes. To my knowledge, there has been little opposition to this recommendation. Thus it is my belief that residents generally support this change and it is their voice that is most important in any such a matter. And, Atlantic Beach has established precincts. Last, one might wonder about any candidate incapable of winning the precinct of their residence and the accompanying lack of support from those closest to the candidate.

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.

I believe there is no purpose to the Seaside Community Council as proposed. This concept was presented to the Commission recommending that the Council's focus would be on increasing storm intensity, rising sea levels and other issues commonly associated with climate change. I do not believe that Atlantic Beach has the capabilities to identify solutions to these issues. Furthermore, I believe Atlantic Beach has many talented people with a vested interest in our City, that should we convene a council with a more directed focus, our talented resource of residents would be adequate to address any issue considered.

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 is good reason the representative makes such a comment. However, I don't agree with the implied reason for such a comment. The weak link can be tied directly to the sporadically funded Mayport Ferry. If the East Coast Greenway is to cross the river via the ferry, then funding for that link must be consistent and secure in the future. Otherwise, all the funding spent to research and plan the Greenway will have been a total waste. The optimum route from the Ferry to Neptune Beach is tied to that need for continuous future Ferry funding. There are multiple routes under consideration but one option that should not be pursued any further is the proposed opening at the north end of Seminole Road into Hanna Park. And, the federal study should recognize the sovereignty of the boundaries of the City of Atlantic Beach.

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?

The utilization of tax revenue to support rejuvenation of the Mayport Corridor would certainly be a welcome resource. However, I believe the stakeholders with the best insight into corridor improvement are local businesses and perhaps residents located within close proximity to Mayport Road. In my opinion, the City should create and support an Industrial Development group consisting of these stakeholders, then step aside and allow this group to present concepts and recommendations to the City for approval, much like the protocol used for the recent Charter Review. Offering general guidelines on what is possible and what the City believes residents would prefer developmentally, a talented group of business owners and other stakeholders would lead to the best compromise and solution possible.

7. Parking: How would you address the parking problems at the Town Center and beach accesses?

Immediate benefits would be realized by implementing metered and time-limited parking at Town Center. Although parking around our Town Center on public roads is time-limited, it does not seem to be enforced. Long term solutions, such as offsite parking with perhaps electric shuttles, needs to be considered. And, consistency between Atlantic Beach and Neptune Beach in time limits and enforcement call for a joint session of both City Commissions.

Parking away from Town Center at areas like our beach accesses can be solved simply and quickly. Atlantic Beach needs to implement a parking permit program whereby residents, businesses and perhaps utility customers are awarded an annual parking pass (es). Those who do not meet these criteria would be required to purchase a permit from the City at a nominal fee to be allowed to park at areas such as a beach access. The revenue generated from such a program should be used to offset costs incurred to maintain our beaches. I do not believe Atlantic Beach residents should bear the burden of all costs associated with enjoying our beaches, etc. If I were to choose to visit Hanna Park or to park in downtown Jacksonville, I would have to pay a fee for entrance or for parking. This program would be no different than those "use" based fees.

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?

Our City spends vast sums of tax dollars on consultant studies and designs that when implemented are found to be lacking. An example is the excessive half-million dollars (plus) that was spent on the

new police building design alone. Now, City officials state that the project will require an additional approximately four hundred thousand dollars due to poor planning by the design team. No reasonable person can claim that this project will now be completed under budget. And, tax payers need to understand that even the use of grant enticements routinely end up costing the city more than the original grant (such as the SWAT unit, mobile command post or marsh path projects). Projects and expenditures such as these should be more carefully considered from a long term operational standpoint. And let us not forget the stormwater treatment plant that was supposed to reduce the need for personnel, has yet to be realize those savings.

Finally, all long term contracts the City has awarded need more scrutiny. Examples are the long standing beach cleaning contracts and the vehicle maintenance contracts which apparently have loopholes which eliminate any competition and cost efficiencies, all at the expense of resident tax payers. I propose a thorough evaluation of city bid and award processes.

9. Quality of life: What do you think is the most important quality of life issue for Atlantic Beach at this time? Please explain.

In my opinion, the most important quality of life issue is preserving our neighborly, family feel that personifies the quality of life we experience today in this city. Our City Commission should confine its focus to issues that affect us within our sovereign boundaries and for which we have the resources and jurisdiction to address. Rather than focus on issues such as storm intensity, flood frequency, storm surge heights, erosion or rising sea levels, our Commission should address things like improving its ability to weather storms (such as burying power lines), its ability to preserve the values of homes (effective codes and density regulations), or improve drainage and the cost effective provision of other important services. This city has many resources other cities may envy, such as citizens who wish to be involved and care about what happens in their home town. I hope to tap into that desire to help from our citizens and make Atlantic Beach the best it can be, now and in the future.

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

Our Commission rarely follows Robert Rules of Order for an entire session of a meeting. Agenda items are taken out of order without a motion, those who have been granted the floor are often interrupted for no reason, speakers are often allowed more than one opportunity to speak on a particular issue, etc. Furthermore, some of our Commissioners are demonstrably disrespectful with facial expressions, comments and lack of decorum. If the rules governing conduct are not defined and subject to application only when favorable to some, then citizens become disenfranchised and weary of trying to engage in our local government. Roberts Rules of Order must be the standard by which we govern public forums and Commission adherence to these rules is a must.