2017 Beaches Watch

Atlantic Beach Commission 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?**
      i. The first major issue for the west side of Atlantic Beach is future development and changes to the Mayport Corridor. As a neighborhood, we have a lot of potential with our mix of commercial and residential land use and there are many voices vying to make changes. However, the current proposed solutions lack long term vision and do not consider potential negative side effects. We need to bring residents and businesses together in a committee or charet. Working together with input from these stakeholders we can create a long-term vision for Marshside that supports our local businesses but also protects residents' quality of life.

         Learn More:
         What is a Charrette: http://www.tndtownpaper.com/what_is_charrette.htm
         The Charrette & Community Engagement:
         http://www.dpz.com/Charrettes/About

      ii. A second concern for those living west of Mayport Road is the thoroughfare itself. Unfortunately the ease of the flyover and current speed limit make Mayport more like a racetrack than a state road. This road has effectively and dangerously divided our city in two. The commission should begin petitioning DOT, the city of Jacksonville, and Naval Station Mayport to consider changes to the roadway. From lowering speed limits, elevating intersections, to implementing a road diet, there are many opportunities for us to make Mayport Road a safer experience for drivers and pedestrians alike. Plus, streets that are walking friendly help boost the local economy and slower speeds allow drivers the opportunity to see what's along the roadside.

         Learn More:
         Speed management in Helsinki:
         http://www.trafikdage.dk/td/papers/papers04/Trafikdage-2004-339.pdf
         The Need for (Safe) Speed: 4 Surprising Ways Slower Driving Creates Better

Cities: http://www.wri.org/blog/2017/05/need-safe-speed-4-surprising-ways-slower-driving-creates-better-cities
Good for Business:
https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/Good-for-business.pdf

b. I**n your opinion, what is the most important issue that should be addressed for the entire community of Atlantic Beach? What action would you propose?**
The root of many of our town's issues can be found at city hall. The last few administrations have fired, scared away, and whittled down city staff leaving behind understaffed and overworked departments. A healthy city requires more than a skeleton crew. We need to hire to our weaknesses. For example, a properly staffed planning department might have stopped the rash of tree removals throughout old Atlantic Beach.

I'm not suggesting that we hire hundreds of people but rather that we check in with city staff to see what could benefit their departments and also serve our citizens. Some ideas include the position of a business liaison in the planning department. They could serve to attract and support local businesses, educate them on city rules and regulations, and more. An in-house grant writer could actively review and seek outside monetary support for city projects on a regular basis. Hiring a city engineer to oversee and properly execute infrastructure projects and free up the public works director to manage that large department.

Hires such as these would save us all stress and money down the road.

2. **Zoning codes: What aspects of Atlantic Beach zoning codes are not functioning and what would you do about it?**
The current code doesn't account for updates in technology and industry changes. Some businesses, such as drone repair, don't fit under the commercial general label and therefore get pushed to light industrial definitions which disqualifies them from occupying space along Mayport or Levy Road. We need to update zoning ordnances to be easier to understand and account for the new types of businesses that exist.

Again though I must stress that updates should be made following the creation of a committee that allows stakeholders along the corridor (business and residents alike) to share vision for the area's future.

3. **Citizen participation: Citizen participation in the government process is key to good government. What would you do to increase citizen participation in Atlantic Beach government?**
This is an issue close to my heart. As a private citizen I organized a nonpartisan activist group at the end of 2016 in order to bring folks closer to their local governments. We did everything from hosting educational events to teaching attendees about the city charter to challenging participants to attend commission and council meetings across Duval.

I would argue that we just recently invited ALL of our citizens to engage in 2009 when residential requirements were placed on incoming commissioners. There is work to be done. Ideas include updating the type of content in the brochure sent out with the monthly utility bill. We should use that space to address major issues for Atlantic Beach and upcoming city meetings. Along with the monthly newsletter, we should offer signup for a regular city email newsletter. Citizens can provide an email address and get current information delivered to their inbox.

We need to regularly update social media accounts for the city to notify citizens of workshops, events, and more. The city website needs to be updated to be easy to use and mobile friendly. It should also meet standards put forward by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) to allow for access by our citizens with a wide range of hearing, movement, sight, and cognitive abilities.

We also need to involve our youth in government participation. I think the reestablishment of the Teen Council could go a long way in attracting younger folks to city hall.

4. **City staffing: Staffing has been an issue recently. What would you suggest to improve the process of attracting, hiring and retention of quality city staff?**
   I speak to this in my answer for question 1B, but to expound upon what's been said, we need to offer people what they're worth. If we want high-quality candidates, we need to pay them salaries that match their level of education and experience. We should also offer and create opportunities for growth for current staff. From customer service training to more specialized options depending on the department, we can create an environment at city hall where promoting from within to replace outgoing staff is easy because we have invested in and built up those who work for the city.

5. **Seminole Road South Gate: Should the city open the Seminole Road south gate into Hanna Park? Please explain your answer.**
   I think it's an idea worthy of further exploration. A path limited to pedestrians and cyclists could make for a unique experience for our residents in exploring the coastline. If we did open it to vehicular traffic, I wonder if access to the parking lots in the southeast corner of Kathryn Abbey Hanna Park might alleviate the demand for parking at beach access points along Seminole road.

   However, without significant demand by the majority of citizens, it's not a project I would pursue.

6. **Mayport Road Corridor: What would you like to see happen in the Mayport Road Corridor?**
   The Mayport Corridor is in need of strategic planning. The hands-off organic approach has led us to the current situation where use-by-exceptions are facing fines and residents aren't excited about our commercial corridors.

   Please see my answer to question 1A for more thoughts on the corridor, but we are in need of a committee or charet established by the city that includes residents, businesses, a commissioner, city planner, and architect. The goal of this group would be to determine a long-term vision for the corridor that takes into account mixed-use development, restaurants, business with naval contracts and more. Little things like an official color palette and landscaping style would elevate the look and feel of the community without significant burden to businesses or government. Establishing a look and feel for the area is essential as well and would be beneficial with new developments. From placing parking in the back of new buildings to establishing

sidewalks on city right-of-ways, we can make the transition from residential to business far less stark.

To lessen the burden on current businesses, we could look to find middle ground. Perhaps they need an increase in parking for commercial vehicles. Consensus could be made if spots are clearly outlined in an ordered fashion and use permeable pavers. But from the start, there needs to be clear consensus not just on improving zoning ordinances but also on how we want to support future development patterns.

And the city could play a much more proactive role in reaching out to new businesses and providing insight to city rules and regulations. A business liaison in the planning department could sit down with owners and walk them through the processes of setting up shop in our city; everything from certificate of occupation to sign regulations and fencing permits.

7. **Parking: How would you address the parking problems at the Town Center and the beach accesses?**
For parking near the Beaches Town Center, we need to involve the City of Neptune Beach. There could be opportunity to place a multi-storey car park on an area currently occupied by regular street level parking.

For beach access points, we need to explore the possibility of changing two-way streets into one-ways with a lane dedicated to parking. We could also utilize limited traffic zones to change certain streets into one-way roads with parking available during certain hours. For example, during peak season for the beach, certain roads would be one-way from 9AM to 6PM to allow for extra parking. During off peak season, especially on weekdays, these spots might not be necessary and so the two-lane option for the road could be maintained.

Learn More:
Limited Traffic Zone: https://www.visitflorence.com/tourist-info/driving-in-florence-ztl-zone.html

8. **Budget: The Homestead exemption on the November ballot may result in reduced revenues for Atlantic Beach. How would you propose the city economize or raise revenue to cover the shortfall if the Homestead exemption is approved?**
We're currently seeing a steady increase in home values, so the budget shortfall should be minimal if the exemption is approved. That being said, if this exemption passes the city of Atlantic Beach should not reduce the current millage rate. We should also consider increasing fines such as for parking violations or off-leash pets. Perhaps we implement metered parking at major beach access points. This could allow the city to benefit from increased traffic to the beach and also encourage folks to walk or bike instead.

9. **Quality of life: What do you think is the most important quality of life issue for Atlantic Beach at this time? Please explain.**
Please see the answer provided in 1B. Without a fully staffed city, the basic amenities we expect as citizens are at risk.

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