

2016 Beaches Watch Jacksonville Beach Candidate Questions

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

1) Crime/Public Safety:

- a. In your opinion, what are the most important crime/public safety issues in Jacksonville Beach and what should be done to address them? Please be specific.

Thankfully violent crime is down over the past few years, however, we have seen an increase in non-violent offenses. There is a theory that the police department, due to the increase in CAPE officers are actually to catch more people "in the act" than before and this may be accurate to a certain degree. Nevertheless, I believe that a large percentage of our crime is committed by non-beach residents who, during peak season migrate into the residential areas in search of parking and opportunities to misbehave. Therefore, the obvious answer would be to increase the number of officers in the department.

- b. Some candidates have said Jacksonville Beach needs more police officers and the police officer salaries should be increased. Do you agree or disagree? Please explain.

We are currently six to ten fully-trained officers short in our Department. Obviously pay, working conditions and quality of life determine whether or not an experienced officer would want to consider applying to work in our City. In recent times we have lost some of our younger recruits due to a mismatch between workload and pay. Training officers straight out of the academy costs the City a tremendous amount of money and it is a shame when we lose our "investments" to other forces who are more competitive than we are.

- c. If you support hiring more police officers and/or increasing police officer pay, how would you propose the City pay for these costs?

In order to increase the pay for our police officers we could easily expand the CAPE program which is funded by the Community Redevelopment Funds or look to other sources of income to off-set the costs. We have such unfulfilled potential here in Jacksonville Beach and every opportunity to raise revenues and lower taxes, only if City officials are willing to put the work in and plan for the future diligently.

2) Parking:

- a. What is your opinion on paid parking in the downtown business district? Please be specific.

Paid parking for non-JB residents has been a success, however, due to the relatively small area covered by the paid parking program, there has been a detrimental impact into the residential neighborhoods.

- b. What changes would you like to see made to improve the parking situation in the downtown area?

This is quite simple and has been recommended by every consultant employed by our City since the 1990's. The solution; parking garages. Not only will these generate a return on investment from day one but they will help centralize our visitors and lessen the need for people parking in our residential areas. By using CRA funds we can solve the parking issues, reduce crime and generate revenue to pay for extra policing etc. in a relatively short period of time. There will also be a residual benefit to the downtown businesses and perhaps attract different types of new business and visitors.

3) Central Business District:

- a. What changes would you support to achieve a safe, walkable and family-friendly environment in the Central Business District?

The CBD is and has been for a long time, a nighttime destination. Obviously an increased community based policing strategy would help with the safety aspect. However, much of the downtown especially after dark is poorly lit and avoided by most families. The lack of retail stores and non-alcohol focused eateries also adds to the current theme of the CBD. On many weekends the boardwalk becomes a veritable no-go area for many residents. Nevertheless, I believe, due to the efforts of the CAPE officers in particular that this trend has steadily changed for the better over the past few years.

- b. What kinds of businesses and developments you would like to see in the Central Business District? What, if anything, would you recommend be done to encourage those businesses to come to Jacksonville Beach? Please be specific.

One major drawback to encouraging new businesses coming to the CBD are the parking per square foot building codes. Indeed, a few years ago a company was willing to invest around six million dollars developing a surfing complex on the lot just north of Casa Marina. The City's strict parking requirement and lack of opportunity to apply for a variance ultimately sealed the fate of this project. We should look into modifying the parking ratio for retail, hotels and other non-bar/restaurant businesses to help encourage investment in our City.

4) Sign Ordinance:

- a. What is your opinion of the city's current sign ordinance? Please be specific and explain any changes you would like to see made to the sign ordinance.

There are far too many exceptions, oversights and a lack of uniformity to many aspects of our sign ordinance. This has led to numerous lawsuits, to the detriment of the tax payer, and could have been easily avoided by uniformity in enforcement. Furthermore, I am particularly concerned with the growth of digital or high resolution LED signs and pray that someday A1A does not look akin to Las Vegas Blvd with each business attempting to outdo their competitors by implementing bigger and brighter signs.

5) Height Limit:

- a. Do you believe more highrise buildings (buildings that exceed the 35 foot height limit) should be allowed to be built in Jacksonville Beach? Yes or No.

No

- b. Please explain your answer to (a).

- c. If elected, would you take any actions to change the height limit that was approved by 76% of the voters in 2004? If so, what would you change?

Our residents gave a clear message back in 2004 by voicing their opinion on this matter democratically. As far as I am concerned we, as a City, have managed to adapt to this height limit and therefore I see no need to attempt to modify or change the results of this referendum even if it was possible.

- 6) Events: What is your opinion of the current special events policy and are there any changes you think should be made? Please explain.

With adequate staffing our current special events policy is, in essence, pretty well rounded. We have a mixture of cultural, musical and "family friendly" events with less than one major festival a month over the calendar year. Indeed, I believe it is acceptable for the City to provide some financial assistance to events such as the Moonlight Movies as these are relatively inexpensive to facilitate. Nevertheless, it now appears that the events in the slower months are attracting more attention than those throughout spring and summer. There is much inaccurate rhetoric, rumor and polemical, politically motivated falsehoods surrounding events which, up until May of this year, were encouraged by many. Indeed, I have first-hand knowledge of what it takes to produce a quality event. With the Jacksonville Celtic Festival, I worked closely with many local fellow Celts and created a unique experience here in our own back yard. Unfortunately, and contradictory to what some people have been spoon fed to believe, this event was not economically viable to sustain. Nevertheless, even though spending more money than logic dictated, I was determined to continue with this project until it became self-supporting. Alas, four months into the planning of the 2016 festival I was informed that my date was to be changed and as the tide would not be in our favor for the games portion on the beach, I reluctantly cancelled the event. This has disappointed many who enjoy the Festival over the years so one change I would make to the policy is that staff actually involve the promoter of an event when making scheduling decisions. Special events, if operated correctly can be an asset to our community. Not only do they generate revenue for the City but they provide free entertainment to our residents and residual business to our hotels and surrounding businesses. I would also encourage more private enterprise with regards to events as it is not the tax-payers' duty to subsidize entertainment.

- 7) Outdoor music: Do you support changing the ban on amplified outdoor music and sound at businesses? Please explain your position.

Whilst I do like the idea of having ambient music at public places like the boardwalk and some public spaces, I must admit that until we have a solid formula of being able to regulate amplified outdoor music then I am not a big fan of changing the ban for businesses. Unfortunately, there is always the chance that some people may take advantage of this and therefore, it is unfair to the residents who have to put up with this inconvenience until it is brought under control. I believe a public workshop on this issue would go a long way to finding an amicable solution.

- 8) Since Jacksonville Beach is built out, do you support or oppose increasing the number of town houses and multifamily housing units in traditional single housing unit neighborhoods? Please explain.

I see the main cause of this recent phenomenon is the lack of clarity in our residential setbacks. I believe that people have a right to develop their property but only if it does not negatively impact the quality of life for their neighbors. Until we amend the current construction codes I see this being a very contentious issue.

- 9) Jacksonville Beach Fire Department: Do you support the Jacksonville Fire Rescue Department (JFRD) taking over the Jacksonville Beach Fire Department? Please explain.

Quite frankly, our Fire Department is currently understaffed with the majority of medical emergencies being covered by crews based in Jacksonville. Indeed, our ladder trucks are often undermanned thus rendering them dangerous to operate. Subsequently, morale has been negatively affected by those who work long hours in conditions which are not adequate. Now that the pension crisis in Jacksonville has been averted I believe that with certain guarantees (for example keeping both our stations fully operational) that we may be actually better off consolidating with JFRD. I am not suggesting that we put our citizens in harm's way just to save money, I believe that we owe our current fire fighters and our residents the best possible working environment and highest service standards achievable.

- 10) Communication:

- a. What could the city do to improve communication with the citizens of Jacksonville Beach?

We could and should live stream our meetings so that our citizens have the opportunity to experience, first hand, what their council is doing. I also believe that we should form committees on certain important topics to encourage interaction with our constituents.

- b. What would you do to promote communication with your constituents?

I would like to dedicate one day a week where I am available for an informal drop-in meeting to discuss any concerns a citizen may have. I am also a believer in using email, text and phone conversations between my constituents and myself and would set deadlines for investigating concerns and issues.

- c. There used to be public council briefings prior to the City Council meetings. Public Council briefings are no longer being held. Do you support resuming this practice? Why or why not?

Looking back over the past four years, I believe that this has been, for me, one of the most frustrating and unnecessary procedural changes to our Council. I believe in full transparency and I see no logical reason for us as a collective group being denied this opportunity to have the public sit in on what matters may come before the Council. It also stifles creativity and new ideas by using the City Manager as a "middle-man" when attempting to communicate with my colleagues. This has to change!

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

Yes, Paws Park is in terrible shape again and needs a permanent fix to its perpetual turf issues. I would also like to have lights there so that dogs can go early in the morning or late at night when it is cooler.

I would also like to bring the golf course up to par (no pun intended) At a meeting I had with the City Manager, the Director of Parks and Rec and the Pro of the course I was flabbergasted to be informed that it would take up to 3 years to repair the course. This is unacceptable. We have gone from a facility which used to be profitable to one which is currently hemorrhaging money.

Given the privilege of another term, I would love to improve pay and conditions for all City employees. General, Fire and Police. Currently morale is low and I fear we will lose some of our best employees unless we start improving their work environment.