

2017 Beaches Watch

Atlantic Beach Mayor 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: In your opinion, what are the three most important issues for the entire community of Atlantic Beach that should be addressed? How would you propose they be addressed?
 - **Put residents and local stakeholders first in all city-decision making.** Many residents do not feel they have been heard in the last 18 months. For example, I have heard from residents in Salt Air about their lack of input on permitting for the Gate Station, residents in Aquatic Gardens about concessions for the Cottage at North Beach, and residents in The Cloisters about the use of their south gate to address congestion. I have heard from residents near Mayport Road who are concerned about drug trafficking and prostitution. I have heard from people all over the city who are upset that the city did little to nothing to protect our tree canopy until citizen watchdogs forced them to pay attention. If elected, I will work with residents and stakeholders to find solutions that benefit the people who are most affected.
 - **Restore stability, accountability, effectiveness, and transparency to city management.** My efforts will include building a cohesive leadership team, strict adherence to the City Charter, greater fiscal responsibility, better management of our reserves, more efficient meetings, and staffing of key service areas.
 - **Make strategic planning a priority.** My long range planning efforts will include protecting our neighborhood character and our environmental assets, better prioritization of public works projects, infrastructure upgrades, and emergency management. We need to rely on our comprehensive plan and build consensus to find the best solutions for managed growth.
2. Zoning codes: What aspects of Atlantic Beach zoning codes are not functioning and what would you do about it?
 - Zoning and codes are interrelated functions, and we need a complete review of both!

- Right now, we are seeing how zoning is failing with some Mayport businesses. Our city leaders have been reactive, not proactive. Business owners in Section H of the Mayport Road Corridor have voiced concerns that the current zoning districts are not serving their needs and are outdated. They have proposed a Mayport Business Overlay District and are working with residents to assure that the proposed overlay does not have a negative impact on them. This group formed because the city was not helping business owners to solve their problems. Their concerns were being ignored and they felt underrepresented.
 - If elected, I will be more proactive in identifying issues before problems like these arise. The issues along the Mayport Road Corridor are not new ones. City leaders just attached no urgency to them.
 - I plan to create a city advisory task force of business owners, residents, and professionals (not costly consultants) who can make recommendations and work with staff to identify creative ways to encourage mixed-use growth and formulate a more diverse overlay to our current zoning map.
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?
- Atlantic Beach has countless assets, but our human capital is perhaps our greatest asset! If elected, I will pay special attention to communication, accessibility, and transparency. I will make special efforts to attract and engage our seniors, our young people, and our disenfranchised in city programs.
 - One plan I have is to reinstitute the Teen Council and to mentor high school students who want to be involved in city government and community activities.
 - Over the last 18 months, I would describe Commission meetings as extremely long, cumbersome, and inefficient. This discourages participation! We need to do a better job of making these meetings more resident-friendly. I have years of experience in managing meetings and building consensus.
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?
- Our staffing in leadership positions and in key service areas has been extremely lacking over the last 18 months. We simply do not have a cohesive management team. This chaos indicates to me that we have a real problem and we need new leadership.
 - Retention of key managers has been an issue under our current mayor. The last City Manager was fired (presumably) over a variance. The last Planning Director resigned citing “bullying.” The last Public Works Director was abruptly fired. Our last Police Chief

resigned, and we were without a Police Chief for a year. Our last City Attorney resigned after a private meeting with our mayor.

- By the time this is posted, a new City Manager might be named, but the lengthy, clumsy process was a great example of how not to hire effectively or efficiently.
- I have leadership and management experience and know how to build consensus and work in collaborative settings. I am a big proponent of following best practices in all personnel matters. I am confident that we can create a positive workplace that will attract highly qualified employees and keep them here.
- I plan to work closely with our next City Manager to rebuild our city's management team using the skills I have acquired through my training, education, and experience. I will also ask the City Manager conduct a survey of city employees in order to better understand pay and promotions issues. I also plan to convene a panel to address perceptions of racial disharmony in our workforce.

5. Seminole Road South Gate: Should the city open the Seminole Road south gate into Hanna Park? Please explain your answer.

- While I love biking and I love living in a city with so many bicycles, pedestrians, and motorized conveyances, I do not support having an opening between Seminole Road and Hanna Park. My reasons related to congestion, expense, safety, and enforcement.
- While many of us were talking about this in Atlantic Beach, the matter was recently addressed quietly in Jacksonville. City Council Member Bill Gulliford introduced an ordinance, enacted in May, that granted a conservation easement in that area. The easement will be maintained by the Atlantic Beach Preservation and Conservation, Inc., which is a group of private citizens. From what I am told, this effectively shuts down any potential opening.
- While I am okay with the outcome, I believe this process lacked transparency in the sense that most stakeholders had no idea it was happening.

6. Mayport Road Corridor: What would you like to see happen in the Mayport Road Corridor?

- Revitalizing the Mayport Road Corridor has been discussed for decades but no significant action has been taken beyond the upgrade of Mayport Road many years ago. If elected, I will work to engage of residents in Marshside (West Atlantic Beach), will help oversee a complete overhaul of codes and zoning (as stated in Item 2), will address pressing infrastructure needs, and will work to acquire Johnson Island.
- In this effort, I will revisit the feasibility of creating a Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) along Mayport Road to create opportunities for economic growth and to increase residential property values. Our current mayor and Commission have failed to make a decision on this. Again, this demonstrates a lack of urgency. CRAs are not new and have worked in many places. Designed properly and under our control, a CRA would allow us to reinvest the tax dollars from this area in this area to improve the infrastructure,

facilities and recreational opportunities in this area. It is funded through existing tax dollars, not new taxes!

- Finally, I am a proponent of reducing speed in Atlantic Beach on Mayport Road. Understanding the FDOT will make this decision, I believe we need to frame our argument as an urgent safety issue.

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

- We have made little progress in addressing parking issues since the last election. This is another example of a lack of urgency to address known problems. Just last month, and as a direct result of one commissioner's efforts, the commission finally acted to form an advisory committee that will look at parking and pedestrian safety issues throughout our city. I support that effort.
- Town Center is a fabulous destination for Atlantic Beach residents and countless others who flock here to visit. It is booming but it is crowded. I am concerned by the congestion from both parking and safety standpoints. We missed a big opportunity last year when a residential property in a key location was for sale and the city did not buy it. If elected, I will take advantage of similar opportunities!
- If elected, I will partner with Neptune Beach to examine parking solutions for Town Center. I have been listening to stakeholders with ideas on parking enforcement, shuttles, and use of nearby areas that could offer additional parking. I will also do my utmost to capitalize on opportunities with private stakeholders and the City of Jacksonville.
- With respect to beach access, we need to examine the best ways to park vehicles and reduce danger to pedestrians, while still making our beautiful beaches accessible to the public. We don't need to hire consultants to tell us what we already know. One example is a public shower that is not on the beach side where beachgoers and children are regularly clumped with all their gear in the middle of the street. This is a pedestrian safety issue with a relatively easy fix.

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?

- If this passes, the impact will be very tough for all Florida cities to absorb. It is not surprising that most cities are opposed to it. Homeowners will benefit from the increase of the homestead exemption from \$50,000 to \$75,000, but many cities may be forced to respond with higher millage rates. If passed, Atlantic Beach will have to cover approximately \$250,000 in lost tax revenue.
- This initiative comes at a time when beach cities are considering increasing police pay to be competitive with the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office. We must consider pay raises if we

are going to keep our level of services and retain officers. We are also faced with critical decisions on paying the increasing pension fund debt.

- I believe that the willingness of the state legislature to move this along is indicative of a disconnect between our city government and the State Legislature. I support home rule and will advocate against the State deciding what is best for cities like ours.
- If this passes, I will look at ways that other cities economize or raise revenue and will make every effort to not pass the burden on to our residents.

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

- Protect and preserve the character of Atlantic Beach for our kids and grandkids! This requires strategic planning, a plan for managed growth, support of small businesses, and protection of our public spaces and tree canopy.
- In particular, we have a great opportunity to create a shared vision for communities like Royal Palms and Marshside where young families are starting to build or renovate their dream homes. This kind of dynamic growth will help us to have a more inclusive city for all our residents.

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

- Need to have better plan to manage our reserves. The League of Cities recommends 25% yet we have over 50%. It makes sense to carry a higher surplus given the weather, wind, and water challenges that coastal cities face, but our surplus fund is still bloated. I have some ideas on how to better manage this, if elected.
- Under our mayor, there have been several instances where the City Charter was not followed. One involved the firing of our last City Manager. Another involved the hiring of our Deputy City Manager. In each case, I felt that transparency was lacking and the process was flawed.
- I am very concerned with the high legal fees we are paying. In the last year, our city has been involved in very expensive litigation involving our own residents.