

Neptune Beach Candidates

Written Questions

1. What is your long-term and short-term visions for Neptune Beach?

Neptune Beach has some amazing opportunities going into the future. I believe our unique charm can be further enhanced by upgrading our sidewalks and bicycle paths, to become a more pedestrian-friendly community. These improvements are part of a broader vision of smart development that will make us a better connected and safer city.

We will be looking at future plans for the redevelopment of K-mart. As someone who helped guard our community from an out-of-scale apartment complex, I'd like to see a beautiful, mixed-use development, with shops and restaurants that are complimented by a usable courtyard and green space, and (potentially) condominiums where owner-residents would have a stake in our community. Let's create something that can be part of the fabric of our city instead of its own isolated island.

We also have the Jarboe Park community Master Plan (phase 1) currently undergoing design engineering, which will bring: Updated playground equipment with shade sails; A green events lawn surrounded by trees; Updated ball courts for pickleball, tennis, and volleyball, with properly shielded lighting. And with the addition of the new community building, which was funded by a grant that Mayor Elaine Brown and I helped facilitate, I foresee the park becoming more accessible and usable by our residents.

Infrastructure improvements to our water, sewer and storm water systems will be extremely important, especially given the increase in storm events. When looking at these projects and the cost implications, we can see potential savings based on the size of the project and starting as soon as possible in order to lock in current rates. To fund these projects, partnering with available county, state and federal support will be vital. Utilizing our current lobbying efforts, and expanding our grant writing activities will help.

Finally, I feel that the PUD and other related codes should be revised, so we can better protect the character of the Neptune Beach we love. We need to make the requirements clearer and more explicit to developers/business owners that want to invest in our community, so they have a clear path forward. In addition, our city needs to move to a more resident-friendly process that removes obstacles and encourages personal property improvements.

2. Please explain what personal and/or professional community service experience has prepared you to serve as an elected official for the citizens of Neptune Beach?

After graduating from Stetson University in DeLand, FL, I worked extensively as a Project Manager and Consultant living and working in Africa to support clean water and sanitation/healthcare projects, along with community micro-loan services. Our goal was to teach the amazing people of Ethiopia how to become self-sufficient, as the adage goes: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Since moving to Neptune Beach I have been very active in our community to strengthen and better our quality of life.

As a member and President of the Ish Brandt Beautification Committee, I worked collaboratively to bring Welcome Signs to Neptune Beach, coordinated the planting of 98 sabal palms to restore 1st Street's beauty, extended the annual Christmas lights to 3rd Street, led the Jarboe Park Revitalization and Master Plan project, and worked with Mayor Elaine Brown and COJ to secure a \$160k grant. In addition, I worked with the Beaches Town Center Agency, City of Neptune Beach, City of Atlantic Beach, and private donors to help revitalize the grounds at The Corner. Working with other IBBC members, I also co-founded annual graffiti clean-ups around Neptune Beach.

As a member and President of the Friends of the Beaches Branch Library Board, I helped lead efforts to improve our funding and facilities. The Friends of the Beaches Branch Library currently funds all the summer reading programs, children's reading programs, and teen activities like Comic-Con, and we have been able to increase this year-to-year. We have been able to fund and establish a community gallery space within the previously unused library atrium. When faced with the removal of our old trees by COJ, we were able to bring in beautiful new landscaping, including trees and thousands of square feet of new green space, due to our fundraising efforts (worth \$25k) and working partnerships with, the COJ, JPL, Councilman Bill Gulliford, and Mayor Elaine Brown. Finally, I am working with our Friends of the Beaches Branch board and the Jacksonville Public Library system to pioneer a public Virtual Reality Lab within our Beaches Branch.

3. What solution(s) can you suggest regarding the parking challenges at the Beaches Town Center that would be fair to the residents of Neptune Beach since their tax dollars already pay to maintain the public rights-of-way?

With Pay-for-Parking being implemented, I believe it's important that Neptune Beach residents be given a combination of free parking and discounted rates because we're already shouldering the costs of implementation, staffing, and maintenance. While visitors would pay full price, Neptune Beach Residents should be able to register their vehicle and obtain a decal for a small administrative fee that would allow for dedicated parking and free/discounted rates across the Neptune Beach parking system.

In the future, it would be good for the Town Center businesses to look at additional options like a parking garage, or other parking solutions, because we will continue to see an increase of visitors to our city.

4. How will you address the budgetary shortfalls caused by the loss of the Better Jacksonville Plan, as well as the proposed amendments that change property tax exemptions? What is your plan to preserve the levels-of-service for Neptune Beach residents?

I believe there will be a number of solutions to preserving and expanding Neptune Beach services. In discussions with City Manager Andy Hyatt, budgetary shortfalls, such as those from the additional homestead property tax exemptions, should be ameliorated through smart, fiscally conservative budgeting practices. Another revenue source would be the pay-for-parking program mentioned above that would place the financial burden on increasing visitor demand. However, adding a grant writer to staff, and solid support from our county and state officials, will be critical for the necessary infrastructure upgrades we need, as well as to procure resources to enhance services.

5. Please describe the difference between a mixed-use development and a planned unit development and whether you favor one over the other and why?

A mixed-use development is a type of urban design that blends residential, commercial, institutional, or entertainment uses, where those functions are completely integrated and provide true pedestrian connectivity.

A PUD is a zoning tool created by many municipalities to allow and govern a development in a way that standard zoning measures cannot.

In the case of Neptune Beach, mixed-use (residential/commercial integration), is only available through the use of a PUD (as per Chapter 27 of the city code). I feel that the PUD and other related codes should be revised, so we can better protect the character of the Neptune Beach we love. We need to make the requirements clearer and more explicit to developers/business owners that want to invest in our community, so they have a clear path forward.

6. In your opinion, what actions should the city take to mitigate sea level rise and storm water runoff?

Neptune Beach needs to aggressively pursue funding from the Federal, State and County governments. Duval County plays a critical role in our dune re-nourishment programs, which is Neptune Beach's first line of defense against our increasingly frequent major storm events. This costly program, and the other upgrades that are needed to bring Neptune Beach up-to-date, will require collaboration with Duval County and a greater level of lobbying and grant writing by the City of Neptune Beach.

We also need to look at our code, and at incentivizing Neptune Beach citizens to replace current concrete on their properties with permeable options or green space. This not only helps with storm water runoff, but property values and quality of life.

7. Do you support moving city hall to another location? Why or why not?

A number of items need to be considered before a decision can be made to move City Hall. First, what would be the value of the potential sale? Would the city sell the property outright, hold a lease, or a long term land lease in order to bring consistent long term revenue into the city? We would need to determine other available locations, and what the costs would be for either renovation or new construction. Finally, staff has noted the building was designed to have a 2nd floor, but we would have to determine the cost of adding it.

All these financial considerations are vital to making a sound, fiscally conservative call on potentially moving the City Hall from the heart of our downtown. That said, without these answers, I cannot support moving our City Hall at this time.

8. Do you support changing the five way stop into a round-about? Why or why not? If you support it, where will Neptune Beach's portion of the cost come from?

According to conversations with Neptune Beach Police Chief Pike & City Manager Andy Hyatt, the five-way is one of the most dangerous intersections in our city for pedestrians and needs signal/safety upgrades. With Neptune Beach Elementary located just up the road, pedestrian safety is my paramount concern. The initial roundabout study stated that under optimal conditions the change could increase traffic flow, but did not completely address pedestrian safety to my satisfaction. Additionally, we need to look at how a roundabout would affect the homes and neighborhoods on Penman, Florida, and Forest.

While the engineers are going back to the drawing board to look at these concerns, I cannot support a roundabout at this time without having detailed solutions addressing pedestrian safety.

As for cost, it's a County road, and therefore the County should pay for improvements to this intersection.