



2020 Neptune Beach Candidate Written Questions

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1. What qualifications in terms of education, experience, and prior community service do you bring to your candidacy for public office? Please explain what motivates you to run for office at this time?

Answer:

I bring a unique combination of skills and experience to this office. I have an undergraduate degree from Cornell University and a Masters in Architecture from Columbia University. Currently, I am a software developer for CGI Federal, an IT company providing mission-critical solutions for defense, healthcare, homeland security, and more.

My public service includes 18 years of volunteering for community non-profit organizations, and over 15 years of service on municipal boards for the city of Neptune Beach. Through my volunteering for non-profits like Beaches Watch, the Save the Ferry Taskforce, the Ish Brant Beautification Committee, and the Beaches Town Center Agency, I supported programs that benefitted both residents and local merchants.

Through my service on the Planning Board and the Community Development Board, I learned the intricacies of the city code, and gained an appreciation for the balance needed in making decisions that will affect the future of Neptune Beach. And as the current office-holder for Council Seat 3, I have built valuable working relationships with my fellow Councilmembers and our City Staff and Police Department, as well as elected officials in our neighboring Beaches cities.

I seek to retain my office simply to continue serving my community. I do not aspire to higher office.

2. K-Mart Property: What would you like to see happen to the old K-Mart property?

Answer:

With the continuing construction of nearby apartment complexes, including the one immediately across the Intracoastal Bridge and the one up on Mayport Road, we will be faced with increased population pressures in Neptune Beach. These pressures will impact our roads and facilities as well as the Beaches Town Center; therefore, having a low-key "town center" development that fits our character could actually be a viable solution for meeting increased demands on our city. Personally, I have expressed to Ron Oehl (TLM) that I would love to see a piazza-style option with public amenities and ample green space, something that gives back to our community.

3. Vision Plan: What is your opinion of the Dover-Kohl strategic planning process? What elements of the Dover-Kohl draft vision plan do you like most? Is there anything you want to change? Please explain.

Answer:

I believe the core mission of the Vision Plan project has merit, as it offers our citizens the ability to guide the future vision of our community. Originally, there would be in-person workshops where residents could drop-in and provide immediate and direct feedback. Unfortunately, this project is one of many that the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted.

On the plus side: Of great importance to me are the options to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety, including the new street profiles for our major roadways as well as expansion of our trailways throughout the city. Too often, I see parents pushing strollers in the middle of a street because there are no sidewalks. Also, people are unable to safely cross our major roads because of inadequate crossings. I look forward to the plans that address these issues.

On the minus side: I am against suggestions to include commercial nodes within our existing residential areas. While I have seen successful examples in many cities, those were often very urban areas. Neptune Beach is built-out and hemmed in by three other cities without any "release valves", and this would be inappropriate in our neighborhoods.

4. Crime/Public Safety: What are the most important crime/public safety issues in Neptune Beach and what should be done to address them? Please be specific. Are there proposals for police reform that you would support for NBPD?

Answer:

In Neptune Beach, we have been fortunate to see reductions in crime rates over the past few years. We've supported our Police Department's budgetary and equipment needs, as well as their commendable community outreach programs, and I feel we are headed in the right direction. I do not believe the NBPD needs reform. That being said, there is value in exploring additional ways of operating. For example, in Eugene, OR, the police work in tandem with social workers to send the most appropriate personnel to each service call. While we may not have the funding for such a program, it is a model worth looking at, to understand how government can provide the best and most holistic services to the community.

5. Paid Parking: What is your opinion of the paid parking program at the Beaches Town Center? How should the paid parking revenues be allocated? What, if anything, would you do to improve the parking in the Beaches Town Center?

Answer:

Admittedly, the parking program had a rough start due to a number of factors, but with our new City Manager keeping a tight rein on its roll-out, the program is on-track for success. To put it in perspective, the program was first proposed by the Beaches Town Center merchants to address the lack of parking available for residents because too many spots were taken by employees, beachgoers, and One Ocean guests avoiding the resort fees. With the increasing influx of visitors, the program will bring much needed revenue for our Cities to manage the impact on our Town Center infrastructure. Moving forward, as population pressures grow, I foresee we will need to consider options like a parking garage.

6. Budget: How will you address the budgetary shortfalls caused by the COVID crisis? What specific items in the budget would you recommend adjusting? What specific strategies would you suggest to raise additional funds?

Answer:

Neptune Beach already runs a pretty tight ship, and there are few things that could actually be cut without affecting services. Currently, the greatest shortfall caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is in our water/garbage revenue. We are asking our impacted residents to reach out to the City to discuss their situations. I co-sponsored the “Neptune in Need” ordinance, which establishes a program whereby residents can pay extra on their bills towards a fund that can help those less fortunate. Right now, our new Finance Director is examining the best way to implement it.

And both the Finance Director and our Grant Administrator are tasked with hunting down grants and alternative funding sources for our much-needed projects. In addition, the output of the Vision Plan has the potential to improve our position with Federal and State agencies (like FDOT) to address coastal resiliency, transportation, and infrastructure.

Finally, COVID-19 has shown us the importance and necessity of high-speed Internet access when it forced all our children to switch to online schooling. It might be worth looking into creating a revenue-generating municipal broadband service, as cities like Chattanooga and Palm Coast have.

7. Comprehensive Plan: While you are in office, Neptune Beach will be updating the Comprehensive Plan and land use regulations. What are the most critical elements in each that need to be addressed? Please be specific.

Answer:

As the Atlantic Beach resiliency evaluation reported, sea-level rise is happening right here and now, evidenced by the NOAA measurements taken at Mayport over the last 90 years. It is critical we as a community look at what changes must be made to mitigate the threat. In 2015, the Florida Legislature passed the “Peril of Flood” act, which specifies new requirements for the coastal management element of our Comp Plan, to address coastal flooding and the related impacts of sea level rise. Part of the Vision Plan rewrite will address these issues.

In addition to addressing sea-level rise, I hope to also remove inconsistencies and loopholes, and tighten up and streamline our zoning codes, to improve the development process for our residents and business owners. A home owner shouldn’t have to look through several sections of code to decipher what they can do with their property.

8. Penman Road: What improvements, if any, would you support for Penman Road?

Answer:

Penman Road is a key arterial that runs through North Jacksonville Beach and the entirety of Neptune Beach. There are a mix of businesses and lots of residential, with Seagate Avenue in the middle carrying many students to both Fletcher Middle and High School. Therefore, I support improvements that enhance pedestrian and bicycle safety, and am very interested in seeing new street profiles with enhanced lanes for pedestrians and bicycle riders. I would also like to see more crosswalks with pedestrian-activated lights, to enable safe passage across our major roadways. And depending on the space available, adding more trees would both restore our canopy and help shade our pathways.

9. Coastal Resiliency: Going forward, what actions does Neptune Beach need to take to mitigate flooding vulnerability and sea level rise?

Answer:

In order to gather the best practices available, we will get the input of experts in the field as well as monitor the steps taken by other Florida municipalities faced with the same issues. At the Florida League of Cities convention last year, I attended a few presentations from cities in South Florida who were beginning to tackle the problem. There were no easy one-size-fits-all solutions, but together, I believe we in Florida can find mitigation strategies that will help against sea-level rise.

Fortunately, Neptune Beach has already taken the initiative to shore up our coastal dunes – one of our most important protections – and we continue to coordinate with the County and Federal authorities to keep them built-up. And we can't talk about the dunes without giving thanks to Kevin Brown and his Marine Science students for their continuous work planting hundreds of thousands of sea oats to strengthen and stabilize the dunes.

Neptune Beach has also started projects to upgrade stormwater systems and address aging sewer infrastructure, but we will need to aggressively pursue funding from the Federal, State and County governments. Looking ahead, some other immediate strategies may include raising the base elevation level for our homes to meet future flood projections, shoring up our marsh waterways to fight the increasing tidal infiltration, and encouraging more green space and pervious paving materials to alleviate local flooding.

10. Campaign Pledge: Will you make a pledge to carry out a campaign based on issues and facts and renounce the use of name-calling and inuendo? What will you do if such literature (for instance by mass mailings) is distributed?

Answer:

Yes, I can agree to that pledge. I would address outright lies and direct attacks, but always based on facts.

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

Answer:

The erosion of local Home Rule by the State Legislature is a major issue facing all municipalities. For example: The State has taken away our cities' rights to control where and how 5G cell towers are installed; they have taken away our rights to preserve and protect our tree canopies; and they have taken away our rights to regulate short-term rentals like AirBnB.

These are all things that can adversely affect your quality of life and your property values. I have seen beautiful trees taken down without mitigation or permits. I just recently watched a cell tower erected not 20 feet from a home. I have heard residents' horror stories about living right by a short-term rental.

I pledge to continue opposing State legislation that takes away our ability to protect our character and quality of life.