



2020 Jacksonville Beach COUNCIL Candidate Written Questions

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1. **Qualifications and Motivation:** 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?

My educational degrees include a Bachelor of Human Resource Management from Hood College in Maryland, and Master's of Business Administration from Jacksonville University. I am a 36 year CSX career railroader, beginning my career as rail yard clerk, and rising up the ranks within the organization, spending 25 years in various management and director positions. My career success was primarily achieved by creating plans, developing realistic timelines, taking action, monitoring and following progress, and expecting myself, and others within my team(s), to achieve results. I want to bring this type of structure and accountability to city hall.

After retirement in 2009, I began to attend city council meetings. Becoming a regular attendee, I can proudly say that I have been to over 100 city meetings and briefings as a citizen- advocating, encouraging, informing, and advancing the need for council considerations on key issues. In 2017, as a result of seeing the continued decay of our downtown area, I decided that I would form a local coalition of followers to help educate and accelerate executing the 2007 Downtown Vision Plan. As a result, our citizens are beginning to see a greater sense of urgency that our elected officials act on the transformation of our downtown. You can see the history of the coalition on Facebook (search- Jacksonville Beach Downtown Vision Coalition).

I believe very strongly in the phrase "Say what you will do, and do what you say". This is the type of rigor I will employ, should I be elected to council. After observing and interacting with council over these 9 years, I see a call for action. We need to get things done at a quicker pace and not kick the can down the road. Plans get made and do not get executed. Discussions take place and fall down the rabbit hole. There is opportunity cost when we delay. The issues in our world, including our community, are happening at an accelerated rate and we must increase the speed at which problems are solved. Candidates often use the term "passion for the city" as a reason to run. This begs the question- "How do you measure passion?" For the voters, I hope that my past nine years as a citizen advocate is representative of my commitment and passion for our city.

2. **Priorities:** What is your number one priority to address during your tenure on the City Council. Why is this your number one priority? Please be specific.

Community safety is without a doubt the number one priority. The foundation of any good community is that its citizens feel secure and free from harm within their neighborhoods. But, here in Jax Beach, our community safety is very much linked with my second priority- the foundation of transforming our downtown. The majority of our community crime is due to our downtown being a magnet that draws criminal elements outside our community into our neighborhoods. Our residents simply do not feel safe going downtown. Since 2013, for our downtown alone, we have doubled the police from 5 to 11 and doubled our budget from \$550K to \$1.2M. And yet, crime and homelessness have increased. Last year we had over 700 arrests, which included 620 misdemeanors and 80 felonies. Our police department does one heck of a job trying to control the chaos, keeping the crime contained, and defending us from the harm, but we are making it hard for them. City Hall must do more to help and assist our police department. They can accomplish this by offering the residents, and guests, a safer downtown. Since 1987, there have been several plans, and various workshops, to change our downtown into a vibrant area that offers a variety of restaurants and shops, where our residents and guests can feel safe to walk and browse. But these plans have mostly been left unaccomplished. We CANNOT AFFORD TO DELAY any longer. We have several hotels opening and NOW is the time to leverage the hotels and get the kind of downtown that our citizens have

wanted for 30 years.

3. **Budget:** In the event of a budget shortfall, would you consider a millage increase to maintain levels of service? If not, what specific items in the budget would you recommend adjusting? What specific strategies would you suggest to raise additional funds? Please be specific.

The city is already positioning itself, to some degree, that revenue will decrease due to lack of overall state sales revenue caused by the COVID recession. It is still too early to assess the full impact of this revenue shortfall. Regardless, the next council will certainly be faced with some budget decisions that we have not seen since 2008. In my previous corporate CSX career, (which at the time was a \$9 billion Fortune 500 company) my responsibility included creating, managing, and adjusting plans within the framework of multi-million dollar budgets, so I am prepared for the challenge ahead. Often we are too quick to talk about the need to raise funds and it is premature to talk about a millage increase. Sometimes the answer is not getting more money, but how to use money more efficiently. Our primary emphasis should be addressing our avenues of waste, rather than simply taxing our citizens more. 20th century solutions are being used to address 21st century problems. We can be working smarter-not harder, and it is not always about spending more money. We must look at best practices and efficiencies of other cities and apply where needed. We should be reviewing and adopting technology solutions, applying them where it fits, ultimately saving us money. My last ten years with CSX Corporation was spent looking at the ways we were operating, creating efficiencies, and reducing waste. As a result, my teams were able to reduce the expense of multi-millions of dollars, while at the same time achieving greater levels of service.

For those that are not aware, only 20% of our property tax dollars goes to the Jacksonville Beach budget. The biggest chunk of tax dollars goes to the school board (35%) and City of Jacksonville (42%). I believe that the last time we had a hard review of the benefits of the interlocal agreement was in 1996. I am not implying there are any inequities that exist today, however after 24 years I think there may be opportunity, and value, in clearly understanding the accounting of the interlocal agreement and the benefits that the citizens are getting for their money.

Rather than addressing specific budget adjustments, I will address my approach to budget issues. I believe a good council member should listen, be thoughtful, and not have an ego so big that there is the misguided sense of "knowing it all". Council needs to create the environment that leadership teams, within city staff, can freely discuss and assess the critical needs of our community. Council should challenge the team when necessary, and collectively decide the best strategy going forward. But when we talk about budget cuts, we must also not forget the impact that this has on the needs of our citizens. Our local government must be truthful, and transparent, on potential budget cuts. Let's not even think about cutting funds for such things as the maintenance of our parks and recreation areas, roads and sidewalk, signage, and landscaping, and hope that the public won't notice. Part of my platform includes the need to do a better job letting the citizens know why, where, and how their monies are spent.

4. **Charter Amendments:** What is your position on the following proposed Jacksonville Beach charter amendments that will be on the General Election ballot?

- a. **Amendment 1:** A super majority vote is required to remove the City Manager.
- b. **Amendment 2:** A super majority vote is required to remove the City Attorney.

I will address item 1 and 2 together, as they are related. My position is that the supermajority vote for removal of these key positions is an added layer that should not be needed in a perfect world. Unfortunately it is needed because of this current environment of creating political alliances, in order to dictate or sway policy decisions. Citizens should expect that their local government has an exemplary performance evaluation system; that the individuals employed as city manager or city attorney, can be evaluated based on facts, less on subjectivity, and occurring in a non-partisan environment. Sadly, because I have witnessed so many council meetings, we do not live in this perfect world. The intent of the supermajority is to remove some of the political gamesmanship that might be played on the dais and therefore I support these amendments.

This city deserves the best possible candidates for the jobs of city manager, and city attorney. A good city manager and city attorney should not have to worry about his/her job every election cycle, just because the mix of council changes. The current holders of these jobs, and future candidates, have the right to know, and feel secure, that the paycheck they earn is based on their own performance and not some external political pressure.

c. **Amendment 3:** A voter referendum is required to eliminate Beaches Energy or Police Department.

Keeping or eliminating our Police and/or Energy Departments, and having direct management and budgetary control over both, is so critical that the key decision makers should be our citizens. I was a part of all the meetings where we lost the management of our fire department to the city of Jacksonville. There was a tremendous outpouring of concerns from both sides on this issue. Citizens shared their voice in person, on petitions, on speaker cards, emails, and yet we have no exactness as to numbers either way. A decision was made but no one can factually claim whether our citizens' voices were heard. Our community should be confident that we have control over the destiny of these critical services. The referendum is the proper way to ensure that there is exactness to the numbers, regardless of how the decision goes.

d. **Amendment 4:** Clarifies that, except for purposes of inquiry, no City Council member or appointed board member can interfere with the performance of the duties of a City employee who is under the direct or indirect supervision of the City Manager.

Council's job is to hire the best qualified city manager to manage the day to day tasks of staff in order to achieve the departmental objectives. In no way, should Council interfere with the performance of staff duties. It is an absolute distraction, an affront to the role of the city manager, and totally disregards our organizational chart.

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

To the credit of current and past council members, we have several storm management projects going on within the city. We have the approximate \$25million FDOT channel project going on in the north edge of town, the downtown infrastructure project occurring in the south end of town bordered- by 4th St and 11th and 13 Ave. South, and the drainage improvement in the south end CRA district. So this is all good news. There are three areas we need to focus on going forward. First, is to ensure that basins and drainage are functioning properly, which includes sediment and debris removal, and that we are proactive with maintenance. Second- we need to introduce flood risk management, and mitigation, into our development codes. Third- let's be smart and ensure we have sufficient future green space and coastal area protections (dunes, and marshland) as natural barriers to flooding. Preserving these areas is much cheaper, and a more effective strategy than trying to build barriers and walls around the city

6. **Growth Management:** While you are in office, Jacksonville Beach will be updating the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code.

a. What specific changes do you want to see made to the Comprehensive Plan? Please explain your proposed changes and why you recommend these changes.

In some respects we are getting ahead of ourselves talking about changes to the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code before we have any idea of how our citizens see this community in the future. The city just completed a Community Vision meeting with the end product essentially providing that look to the future. Once the vision plan is complete (which will also include our downtown area) it is essential, for the sake of consistency, that the land development code aligns with the Comprehensive Plan, which also aligns with the Vision Plan.

Once that Vision Plan is finished I know that two specific areas will need to be changed versus where we are today. First- we need to incorporate a viable mobility plan for this community. The last traffic count that is part of our current Comp Plan was done in 2007 and our world has changed from those post-recession days. Moving forward we need an update on the density of our main traffic arteries and how growth fits into our overall community vision. Our plan must take into consideration the flow of bikes and pedestrian traffic moving all around our city. We are truly a bicycle active community and we should have the proper mix of trails and paths to reflect that. We also have some segments of 3rd St where we have 3/4 mile between lights, and no crosswalk, so we have some areas where we need to improve pedestrian flow. As we progress our growth strategy we must ensure that our limited north/south arteries are not clogged with bumper to bumper traffic. I am pro growth- but only to the extent that it does not in any way negatively impact our current quality of life. Second- we must incorporate a flood risk mitigation strategy (as I mentioned earlier). We should grow and expand but, at the same time understand and incorporate a strategy to prevent the future flooding of our community.

- b. What specific changes do you want to see made to the Land Development Code? Please explain what specific aspects of the Land Development Code are not functioning and what would you do about them.

As mentioned above, the land development code must support the overall vision plan for both the community at large and our downtown area. I can speak from first hand experience that we need to have a thorough review of our zoning districts, and how the quality of life of our neighborhoods is being impacted in respect to traffic and parking. I live in an RM2 multiple dwelling zone area where we are seeing single family homes being taken down and replaced by townhomes which has created both traffic and parking issues. So we have pockets of our city which need to be reviewed and zoned appropriately, so the quality of life in existing neighborhoods is not compromised.

7. **Crime & Public Safety:** What are the most important crime & public safety issues in Jacksonville Beach and what should be done to address them and fund them? Please be specific.

Statistically, our downtown draws in the crime element. I am passionate we need to transform the culture of our downtown in a way that discourages crime and homelessness, making it a place where residents and guests feel welcome, and safe, to walk and visit the downtown businesses.

However, the proper way to address funding for our overall crime and public safety issues is to be better partners with our Police Department. Chief Smith and his teams are the subject matter experts on crime. Out of respect for his leadership, and the role that all officers have in our community, I have no desire to play "Monday morning quarterback". Council's role is to ensure we have the right people, in the right jobs, who are properly trained, and who can make the right decisions, at the right moment. If Council does its job right, it has an obligation to rely on the expertise and experience of its members, be informed on an ongoing basis what problems there are, and determine the resources that are needed to keep our community protected. It is also up to Council to assess if we are losing safety credibility with our community, and make adjustments accordingly.

8. **Downtown:**

- a. What do you propose be done to promote and encourage new business and redevelopment in the downtown to achieve the community's vision for a safe, walkable, and family-friendly area?

We absolutely must take action with a sense of urgency, and stop kicking these Vision Plans down the road. Our downtown situation is going to be talked about by every candidate, as it has been for the 9 years I have been following council. We must stop talking and start holding our leaders accountable to making change. The community had a first vision plan in 1987, then amended it in 2007. Both plans were mostly left unaccomplished. As mentioned earlier, I am in this race because there is a need to get things done. I want to make sure this latest plan is our last. Once we (citizens and business leaders alike) agree on the FINAL vision, I intend to hold myself, the rest of council, CRA and staff accountable to create short term strategies, develop realistic timelines, take action, and make sure we communicate back to all those stakeholders as to what is getting done. This has been the formula for how downtown areas across this country have achieved success and transformed themselves. In order to be successful we must also get the downtown business leaders involved in the conversation. They are our partners and we need to treat them as such.

What kinds of businesses, developments, and improvements would you like to see in the downtown Central Business District? Please be specific.

This question got answered in 1987 and 2007. Those vision plans were agreed upon by citizens and business leaders alike. They said we need a mix that includes more restaurants and shops. We need residences and offices where people can live and work. We need a walkable environment that is visually appealing to all. We need sufficient parking to accommodate the strategy of the plan. In the free marketplace you can not dictate exactly what businesses go where, but City Hall can be a much better player in the mix. They need to be responsible for developing the right development codes, that encourage the right developers to create the right businesses. They need to create the right visual environment that aligns with the agreed upon Vision plan. Various levers will need to be pulled at the same time to make things happen. There is no silver bullet for this transformation and it is going to require a massive partner-shiping effort that I intend to foster.

9. **Strategic Plan:** With input from citizens and businesses, the Jacksonville Beach City Council is developing a vision and strategic plan for Jacksonville Beach.

a. What is YOUR vision for the future of Jacksonville Beach?

My vision aligns with what I heard in most of the recent 2020 city vision meetings, and that is...30 years from now Jacksonville Beach will be the best of what we are now. When we come over the intercoastal bridges we feel safe, secure, and an immediate decompression from stress as we hit our beach paradise. We do not want to lose the identity of who we are. We enjoy being on this island that has great medical facilities, shopping, and small businesses. Jacksonville Beach is an unbelievably proud and diverse community and does not need a major overhaul. We can build on what we have by creating a vibrant resident friendly Downtown District. We should be able to get from one end of town to the other by either biking, or jogging, or using our car without sitting in a traffic jam on our main arteries. We should be able to safely cross 3rd Street to get to the beach. We can support our local business community, and be stewards of our beautiful beach.

b. If you are elected, what would you do to achieve that vision? What I bring to council is a corporate experience about delivering results. I believe in action, timelines, and accountability. I believe in partnerships and communication to get things done. I have no political aspirations, and don't need to have my ego elevated. I JUST WANT TO GET THINGS DONE.

10. **Vacation Rentals:** Would you change anything in the current Jax Beach vacation rental regulations? Please explain what you would change and why.

I would not change anything in the current regulations. However, there are two areas which need improvement. The leverage that the city CURRENTLY has with the new regulation, is to link code compliance with a rental certificate. There is a process that a certificate can be revoked should any short term rental (STR) owner not comply with code. In the June council meeting I asked how the process was going, and if they had an accounting of certificates issued. As of June, out of approximately 250 STRs, we only had 17 rental certificates issued and 15 in process. So first- we need to do a better job to make sure ALL STR owners apply for the required certificate. If we go through the process of legislation we must also make sure it is enforceable. Second- we can do better in getting the community to assist us in holding the STR owners accountable to code compliance. Currently the city is paying a 3rd party (HOST Compliance) to administer the STR process, including calls that respond to complaints. Many of our citizens are not aware of this, but should be.

11. **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?

I am committed to make this pledge against negative campaigning. Currently, my opponent and I are running individual campaigns on how we each feel we can add value to the council. Mud slinging and negative campaigning has not been an issue. I will not respond to any negative with a negative. When you run for a public office you put your actions out for public scrutiny. Regardless of the outcome of this race, I want my family, friends, and community to know I never compromised my integrity.

12. **Other issues:** Are there any other issues you would like to address if elected? Please explain.

I think you did a great job putting together questions of critical concern to the community, and thank you for giving all candidates this opportunity.