



2020 Jacksonville Beach COUNCIL Candidate Written Questions

Candidate Name: Fernando Meza

Phone Number: (904) 673-7203

Email Address: mezafernando84@yahoo.com

Campaign Website: www.votefernandomeza.com

- 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?

I graduated from the University of North Florida with a bachelor's degree in Political Science. My job in Navy was very fast paced and dangerous which required us to multi-task, think ahead and keep our head on a swivel. I have mentored for Take Stock in Children, became a Pulse board member for the American Heart Association, helped in certain beach clean-ups and currently serve on the Board of Library Trustees representing Beaches Branch Library. As a small business owner in this community, I have seen first-hand how local government can help or hinder our city. I bring a diverse personal and professional experience to this public office. In the almost two decades that I have lived in Jacksonville Beach, I have seen empty lots become new homes and businesses but I have also seen businesses close for good. This community has so much to offer and so many great qualities that make Jacksonville Beach unique. The residents and the locally owned businesses of this unique beach community have inspired me to run and preserve our way life without hindering economic growth for future generations to come.
- 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.

Addressing Public Safety will always be a priority in my tenure because we as a community cannot attract new businesses, tourists and residents if we cannot keep our community safe. This should be part of the vision plan.
- 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. **If I am on council during a budget shortfall, I will not vote for an increase in the millage rate before exhausting all options at the council's disposal. For example, I would vow to not receive my city council salary. While this would be a small gesture, I'd expect other city elected officials and possibly department heads to follow suit. Further, I would look into limiting certain non-emergency city services to reduce operating expenses. Our local government must do everything in its power to balance its budget before voting on a tax increase.**
- 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.
- c. **Amendment 3:** A voter referendum is required to eliminate Beaches Energy or Police Department.
- 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.

I would vote no on Amendments 1-2 because they are an attempt to chip away at the City Council's role to hold government officials accountable. The people, through the City Council, would lose more of their voice in their government. I support Amendment 3 because I believe the voters should have the final say regarding the future of the local services that support our community. Finally, I am against Amendment 4 because the intention of this amendment is to create a wall between the City Council and the City Manager's office to limit accountability. We need leaders throughout our City Government that are driven towards being as open and transparent as possible, not hide behind new amendments under the guise of trying to make City Government more efficient.

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

Jacksonville Beach needs to form a Resiliency committee that works hand and hand with the City of Jacksonville's resiliency committee. The citizens of our city experience first-hand the consequences of coastal flooding and sea rise and know better how to handle these negative effects. Secondly, I would ensure this newly formed committee creates a report outlining the changes from climate change we are expecting to see in our community and actionable plans to address those changes. Unfortunately, we see Politicians create plans with no intention to actually act on them. When it comes to flooding and sea level rise, there is no time to play politics.

- 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.

One specific change I would like to see is the addition of sidewalks, bicycle lanes and improving road conditions. Obejctive LU 1.7 states “Smart Growth. The

following principles of smart growth shall be considered in the review of Future Land Use Map amendments, rezoning, and development and redevelopment proposals.”

Policy LU 1.7.1 states “Expand transportation choices by ensuring an efficient network of roads, sidewalks, and bike paths that are safe for pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicular traffic. This section needs to add “identifying new potential sidewalk usage, restoration of sidewalks that are and or could be in dismay, proposing and or extending existing bike lanes as this could possibly improve transportation options and have an Emission Free Transportation (EFT) environment. Road improvements should consist of repairing potholes, extend and or minimize car lanes in certain areas, provide additional traffic lights if necessary. Every 2 to 5 years improvement should be made if deemed necessary.” I recommend these changes because it

would encourage residents to use Emission Free Transportation. Safer sidewalks, bike lanes and roads make a feasible walkable family friendly environment.

- 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.

One change I would like to see in the Land Development Code is *ARTICLE VIII. - SITE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS, DIVISION 1. - PARKING AND LOADING STANDARDS, Sec. 34-371. – Applicability and Sec. 34-372. - Interpretation of standards.* Every business should of course follow the guidelines that are set but amending this part to make exemptions due to unfortunate circumstance such as natural disasters, fire or anything beyond the control of the business should be looked at. For example, allowing a or some businesses to use or minimize parking to enhance the prosperity of the business for a short period is something to look at. Some cities allowed their establishments to expand their patio seating during the pandemic since inside capacity was decreased. This decision helps businesses tremendously and we can adjust this code to help businesses in the time of need if it merits the city to do so. If a Land Development Code is not working and not helping some sort of business growth in certain area then it should be looked and improved.

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.

There are multiple crime and public safety issues at the moment that range from pedestrian, bicycle, golf cart safety, petty crime around public parking to vehicle and home break ins. As it relates to petty crime around public parking or surrounding area's I think having a "lot cop" similar to what huge shopping centers have in there parking lots would help our CAPE officers. It would have cameras that monitor the area and would have a red and blue light at the top with a 911 push button in case of an emergency. Keeping pedestrians and bicyclist safe is paramount and identifying hazardous streets is the first step. Adding speed bumps to slow vehicles down, adding flashing yellow lights to school zones that may not have it, creating bike lanes on certain and adding sidewalks to certain streets is a good way to keep people safe. Golf carts should remain only on certain streets and stay off busy boulevards and roads. Vehicle and home break ins are another concern because Jax Beach has seen its fair share of them. I believe there are many ways

to minimize these criminal activities by reminding residents to bring their valuables and most importantly their guns inside the home. This could be done through a social media blitz and doing neighborhood walks informing residents to always keep their car doors and homes locked even when they are home. Having ring cameras or any type of surveillance should be encouraged if owner can afford to install them. Applying for federal grants could help upset the cost and some could be included in the operating budget of the police department or city's budget.

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?

Many buildings downtown do not have their own parking and use city owned lots. Currently, Chapter 34 in the Code of Ordinances for Jax Beach Article VIII, Division 1, Sec. 34-377 Off-street parking space requirements states *"Off-street parking spaces shall be provided in accordance with the following minimum standards. Except as provided herein, in no case shall any business or office use provide fewer than three (3) off-street parking spaces."* Requirements for Restaurants, Bars, Private Clubs, Night clubs, Taverns in the Central Business District are *One (1) space per one hundred (100) sq. ft. of floor area.* If and when the Jacksonville Beach vision plan is ready to be finalized, exemptions and variances could be allowed if the business fits the vision of Jax Beach especially in the CBD area. Tax incentives are good if the business can provide an actual plan how their business will benefit the community. For any local business that has remained in business in Jacksonville Beach and continues to do so should receive incentives if they want to expand their business. When a business opens a second location in the same community or expands their building to accommodate more guest it should be considered for the betterment of the community, the economy and tax revenue. Enhancing the relationship between the CAPE officers and the businesses in the CBD even more is a recipe for success as more trust is built rather than taken.

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

What I would like to see in the Central Business District is restaurants similar to beaches town center along with some boutique shops that will enlighten the Central Business District. The CBD is in dire need of a really good seafood restaurant that can provide good quality food and a fun safe environment for everyone. We have 2 major hotels in the area due to open within the next several months and 1 hotel yet to begin construction. Some improvements I would like to see are safer sidewalks for pedestrians, extend the bike lanes to the north and south if feasible, add some ambient lights to the palm trees and possibly bring back benches along the boardwalk when the time is right.

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 for the future of Jacksonville Beach is a vibrant community that has a successful Central Business District, JBPD is well manned and equipped, crime is at an all-time low, real estate is booming, tourist are visiting our beach, and our local economy is stronger than ever. Keeping traditions such as Opening of the Beaches event, Deck the Chairs and possibly tying in a Christmas/ Holiday parade to lift the spirits up is also what I envision.

- b. If you are elected, what would you do to achieve that vision?

In order to achieve my vision or any vision is combining the great minds of the elected officials, business owners, police department and any input from the residents. Its all about finding the right puzzle pieces to complete the final puzzle.

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

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 innuendo? What will you do if such literature (for instance by mass mailings) is distributed?

Yes, I will pledge to carry out a campaign based on facts and renounce any name calling or innuendo. First, I will not do any mass mailings with any name calling and second, if any mass mailings is distributed against me in a harmful way I would let my supporters know my stance but I will take the high road and continue to press on with a positive campaign.

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