



## 2020 Atlantic Beach MAYOR 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.

I have a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from the U.S. Naval Academy and a Master of Science in Mechanical Engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. I am a retired Navy Surface Warfare Officer. My family has lived in Atlantic Beach since 1997. My wife, Joan, and I have been married for 42 years and have two adult children living in Jacksonville. My Navy tours included Commanding Officer of the Guided Missile Frigate USS Oliver Hazard Perry, homeported here in Mayport. I am a licensed Professional Engineer and I served as the Public Works Director / City Engineer for the City of Atlantic Beach from 2004 - 2014. My motivation to run for office is a result of attending and participating in many City Workshops on budget, parks and infrastructure projects over the last several years and seeing a significant lack of knowledge among both Elected Official and senior City Staff about how the City operates and about projects and policies the City had executed in the past.

**2. Priorities:** If you are elected Mayor, what are the three most important issues you would address during your term and how would you address them? In your response, please include how you would ensure adequate funding to address the issues.

Planning and funding maintenance and improvements to the existing City infrastructure. (e.g., stormwater, water and sewer treatment plants and collection & distribution systems, streets, parks, and buildings).

If elected, I will immediately focus my efforts on expediting all flood control projects included in the Stormwater Master Plan to protect area that have suffered repeated flooding in homes. I will ensure that infrastructure maintenance is a focus and that improvements that directly contribute to the quality of life of residents living in Atlantic Beach today receive top priority. This includes ensuring all the major systems have current Long-Range Master Plans and that improvements and maintenance recommended in these plans are funded (money and manpower) and executed.

Maintaining the quality of life and small town, residential feel of Atlantic Beach.

I will emphasize improvements to our wonderful park system, especially emphasizing connectivity between the parks and the beach using sidewalks and bike paths. I will work to restrict large scale development to maintain the City's residential character. And I will push to expand efforts to protect our existing tree canopy and increase plantings through tree adoptions and partnerships with organizations such as Greenscape.

Preparing for future Sea Level Rise.

This is a much longer-term issue than above. I would begin by using the Florida Department of Economic Development strategies (Protection, Accommodation, Strategic Relocation, Avoidance, and Procedural) to develop an Atlantic Beach specific effort to update our Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations. The City has already completed a Vulnerability Assessment, with the next required step being development of an Adaptation Plan. I will ensure Sea Level Rise is specifically addressed in all Infrastructure Master Plans.

**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 there is a budget shortfall, I would consider using the Millage Rolled-Back rate to provide the same level of Ad Valorem funding as the previous year (or years, if necessary), as was done following the 2008 – 2009 recession. If budget cuts are necessary, the first place to look for cuts would be capital projects that are not stormwater or water & sewer related. All equipment and vehicle purchases would be reviewed to evaluate whether they were necessary or could be put off to future years. Any vacant staff positions would be evaluated for need and the position left unfilled unless essential. Typically, in the past, the Public Works Department has absorbed the brunt of any fiscally driven cuts, but because the Public Safety Department consumes the largest portion of the City's budget, a complete review of their budget would be in order. Staff furloughs / layoffs and pension fund 'holidays' would not be under consideration. Strategies to raise additional funds would include increased grant funding efforts, consideration of fee or rate increases in the City's Enterprise Funds (Stormwater, Water & Sewer, Sanitation and Building).

**4. Charter Amendment:** The proposed Atlantic Beach Charter Amendment will extend the Mayor's term of office from two to four years, reduces the number of allowable consecutive terms for the Mayor from four to two terms, and limits any Mayor holding office as of November 2022, who has served two consecutive terms, to one additional consecutive four-year term. What is your position on the proposed Charter amendment? Please be specific.

I am against the proposed Charter Amendment which would change the Mayor's term of office from two to four years. As the Charter is currently written, the Mayor and two Commissioner seats are up for grabs every election. Atlantic Beach voters can elect a new majority (mayor & two commissioners) every two years if they feel things are not moving in the right direction. This, in fact, is what occurred in the 2017 election – the Mayor and two

Commissioners vying for re-election were defeated. A four-year term for the Mayor would do away with the voter's ability to make that choice every election.

**5. In-house Attorney:** Would you support hiring an in-house city attorney? Why or why not?

I am strongly in favor of hiring an in-house attorney. An in-house, salaried attorney would provide full time legal access for Commissioners and Staff, in addition to coverage of Commission and Board meetings. A staff attorney would also be available to attend meetings between staff and residents when deemed prudent, without concern for additional cost.

**6. Land Development Regulations:** Describe specifically any changes to the Atlantic Beach Land Development Regulations (LDR) you would support. What would you aim to accomplish by these changes?

I would re-visit the 2018 change to the LDR that removed the credit for existing on-site impervious area from the formula used to calculate the amount of on-site stormwater storage required when an existing parcel is redeveloped. The on-site storage requirement was developed to compensate for additional runoff generated from adding new impervious surfaces. As an example, for a typical Old Atlantic Beach parcel starting with an existing 25% impervious surface coverage being increased to the 45% maximum limit, this change increased the on-site stormwater storage requirement from about 500 cubic feet to over 1900 cubic feet, a nearly four-fold increase. Reversing this change would remove the penalty currently present for redevelopment of an existing residential lot.

**7. Parking:** Are the present parking arrangements in the Town Center and beach accesses adequate for residents and visitors? What changes (if any) do you favor?

The present 18 - 24 month Paid Parking Pilot Project in Town Center was poorly planned and poorly executed and should be allowed to die a natural death. Whether using the Flowbird App or the kiosks, it is confusing. The signage is inadequate. The stated intent of the program was to generate increased turnover to aid the Town Center merchants. As presently operating, it is a deterrent to people even coming to Town Center. In addition, the current program makes workers park at the K-Mart shopping center. This creates a significant hazard for late night workers traveling to their vehicles. For years before the paid parking was implemented, most of the spaces included in the Atlantic Beach portion of the project were marked as two-hour parking, but it was never enforced. If elected, I will urge the Commission to consider returning to time-limited parking with dedicated enforcement, probably with a three-hour limit based on the recent consensus for change to the paid parking standards for the Atlantic Beach portion of Town Center.

I am strongly opposed to expanding paid parking anywhere outside of Town Center. I believe putting a year-round paid parking program in place would be extreme overkill. The issue at 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Street accesses in a normal (non-COVID) year is limited primarily to summer and holiday weekends. I think the current method of using lifeguards and Police volunteers to supervise the parking areas has resulted in a significant improvement in safety and congestion. Distributing the required beach parking to other less crowded accesses is not

an option because there is no viable City owned land available to convert for parking and I do not support buying expensive near-beach property for use as parking. Another option we should investigate is reducing demand at the accesses by use of existing areas away from the beach, such as the City right of way around Johansen Park, combined with free shuttles, subsidized by the City and / or through sponsorships as the current Beach Buggy program operates.

**8. Parks:** What changes or improvements would you like to see made to Atlantic Beach parks?

I provided a number of comments to the City's Planning Staff regarding the new Parks Master Plan (under development). Projects include improved connectivity between parks (and the beach) using additional pedestrian paths (8' width minimum), shared use paths and sidewalks, refurbishing the Canoe / Kayak trail markers that extend from Tideviews Preserve to the Oak Harbor Boat Ramp. A proposed Splash Pad would be an immensely popular amenity, albeit with a significant construction and ongoing operations & maintenance costs. I would like to see the improvements proposed in the original Veterans Park Master Plan constructed (restrooms, outdoor kitchen, etc.) (Note: I am a member of the Beaches Veterans Memorial Park board). There should be more City events at the parks on the West side of Mayport Road. Improved maintenance of the grounds and equipment in the parks, more than mowing and picking up garbage, would benefit all the parks, but would require additional manpower in the Parks Division.

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

I asked Chief Gualillo what the major issues were with respect to crime – he said traffic control, property crimes like theft and burglary and person crimes such as assault and domestic events.

Traffic safety, including pedestrian and bicyclist safety are a frequent issue in Atlantic Beach. Speeding vehicles on residential streets can be addressed with increased enforcement. The addition of user activated flashing crosswalk signs for high traffic crosswalks should be spread to other areas of the city, starting with Main Street. Use of the flashing radar signs showing vehicle speed like currently installed in two places on Seminole Road do help slow traffic. Additional signs may be called for. Public safety also includes disaster preparedness / hurricane response – Atlantic Beach participates with COJ and the other Beach Cities in centralized emergency management planning and response. This system has worked well in the past and needs to be reviewed annually and exercised with the Staff. Current City security camera installations are not monitored in real time – consider use of volunteers to increase the time when eyes are on the screens.

I don't think additional funds are needed by the Public Safety Department at this time. New crosswalk and radar signs should be funded from the Capital Improvement Fund.

**10. Resilience:** What are the Atlantic Beach infrastructure needs when it comes to sea level rise and resiliency and what would you support to address these issues?

Atlantic Beach is essentially a flat island. As sea level rises, it will become harder to shed rainfall. For us, the major impact will be along the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) side. All new stormwater infrastructure must be designed to continue to work with the projected sea level rise factored in. Additionally, existing stormwater systems must be analyzed to determine if improvements can be made to ensure they will continue to perform adequately. The City has a substantial number of homes serviced by septic tanks concentrated in the low elevation neighborhoods along the ICW. I would continue the current efforts to extend our sanitary sewer lines to the western edges of the city to allow for most of the septic systems to be removed.

As stated in my response to Question #1, I will ensure Sea Level Rise is specifically addressed in all infrastructure Master Plans.

**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 have made a Fair Campaign pledge. It is posted on my website ([rickcarperformayor.com](http://rickcarperformayor.com)). If false information, or statements that have no bearing on the ability to serve are made, regardless of the candidate being attacked, I will denounce the mailings and ask that they be ignored.

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

Every candidate says they want to increase use of citizen involvement. I would do this by using my Charter authority to appoint Ad Hoc (temporary) committees to study issues that require public input but are not expected to be of long term concern.

Political polarization - because the Atlantic Beach elections are non-partisan, polarization is less of a factor for us to deal with than it is on a National or State level. However, ensuring that all residents are aware of ways to connect with their elected representatives and with City Staff and to feel that their voices are heard can make a difference. Two-way communications are essential.