



## 2024 Jacksonville Beach Candidate Written Questions

**Candidate Name:** Jennifer Ashley

**Phone Number:** (904) 227-8057

**Email Address:** [jennifer4jaxbeach@gmail.com](mailto:jennifer4jaxbeach@gmail.com)

**Campaign Website:** [www.jennifer4jaxbeach.org](http://www.jennifer4jaxbeach.org)

### 1. Qualifications and Motivation:

I have a Master of Master Administration, which is a degree that prepares individuals for leadership roles in the public sector and nonprofits. In my over 15 years of experience working in nonprofits, I have primarily inhabited roles that have put me at the intersection of local government and nonprofits. I have consistently worked with individuals and community groups to help them navigate the levers of government and achieve desired outcomes.

I have been in many a City Council Chamber over my career and was motivated to run based on the extent to which residents of Jacksonville Beach have been dismissed and consistently underinformed about their city.

### 2. Priorities:

#### \*Public Safety, with a broader view:

Before the recent shootings in Downtown Jacksonville Beach, residents have long expressed their challenges with enjoying local festivals and the beach in their own town.

Public safety impacts every part of our community and requires a broad approach:

- **A fully supported and funded Police Force:** This includes addressing staffing shortages as well as providing our officers with the level of technology that neighboring communities use to save time and manpower in the field.
- **Conduct a Tourism Impact Assessment:** How do the millions of visitors to Jacksonville Beach impact the area, in positive ways as well as the challenges? We can better address public safety when we have completed a comprehensive assessment.
- **The Built Environment:** What downtown Jacksonville Beach looks like, how it is designed, and the concentration of businesses in the area has a huge impact on public safety and how much opportunity is given to visitors with bad intentions.

We have already taken the first step in increasing the officer pay and adding four additional positions. The funds for downtown exist and this will be a long-term partnership between many stakeholders. We can take a fraction of the funds we're anticipating spending on the Urban Trail Initiative and use that to conduct a Tourism Impact Assessment.

### **\*Respecting Resident Voices:**

One of the most primary jobs of the City Council is to act as a bridge between the public and the local government.

There are so many ways to engage and ensure that City Council members are being responsive to the needs of the community they serve. This concept is low-cost and is primarily a shift of culture change and expectations of the City Council.

Here are just a few ideas:

- Town Halls/State of the City events.
- Regular coffees, drinks, or shopping 'drop-in's at local businesses.
- Tours and multiple info sessions on big projects: 'walking Penman road', 'walking the Urban Trail' section tours.

### **\*Smart Development:**

The balance between development and neighborhood preservation is delicate. While conservation and maintaining the character of our beaches are often discussed, the reality is that developers frequently have undue influence.

We can follow other cities in their focus on making it easier for residents, not developers, to improve and invest in their homes. We can work with developers on creating the kind of density that is right for our community instead of rubber stamping projects.

Some options for Smart Growth in Jacksonville Beach are:

- A Mixed-Use Downtown: Mixed-Use areas integrate commercial, residential and recreational spaces. This is a win-win for public safety, a more family-friendly downtown AND support of local business.
- Placemaking Initiatives: Let the residents do more than write on comment cards at meetings. Create an ongoing committee to help choose local art by local artists, pursue preservation projects and explore ways to maintain the unique character of Jacksonville Beach.
- Helping Homeowners: Work with residents and resident landlords to clear the red tape of regulation that prevents them from making simple improvements to their homes and investment properties.

The funding to improve downtown already exists, it is a matter of directing it correctly. All other aspects of adopting a Smart Growth mindset are low to no cost.

3. **Communication**: I have mentioned some ideas above. Some additional aspects of communication with the public are embracing that 'over-communication' is necessary as people are busy and need many different ways to source information from.

It's vital to create more opportunities for citizens to engage. Adding to the 'Citizens Information Academy' would be a great start. Adding committees for topics that provide easier access than standing up in front of an audience at City Council hearings are important. Having an arts and culture committee that vetted local artists and managed the choice of public art that we put in public spaces. Just a few examples.

4. **Land Development Code**: At this point I feel like we are still in the process of the LDC revisions. However, I liked the goals of reducing the need to seek variances by updating and standardizing some of the residential lot sizing. I think that the ADU allowances came from a place of wanting to keep single family homes intact but give homeowners an option if/when they needed more space. They also created some stop-gap measures to prevent abuse. However, I think all would agree we are not done with those revisions.

My main concern was the downtown parking reductions for businesses, which I feel is premature and does not take into account future growth.

5. **Penman Road**: As someone who lives on a street off of Penman, I have taken particular interest in this project. I feel that there are common themes with the handling of Penman Road that you will find throughout City Council initiatives. Residents felt underinformed. Businesses along this road were not engaged, even though it would have a tremendous impact on their livelihoods. Once local businesses and residents did begin to connect the dots, the meetings on the project began to be structured in such a way that they shut down public comment. The result of the mishandling of this project was that the 'No Medians' movement emerged, which to me is a sad indication of how far residents have to go to be heard on issues.

The revisions to this plan, drafted during the reelection cycle, have a ton of concessions including an 80% elimination of medians altogether. So it only took being challenged in an election to bring City Council to the table to compromise.

6. **Urban Trails Master Plan**: Urban Trails are popular nationally. Having a walkable and bikeable city is great. However, I do not think that Jacksonville Beach is ready for a project like this. We do not have the law enforcement presence to police paths being put behind homes. We have so many other issues that take priority, namely the redevelopment of downtown Jacksonville Beach. And I don't trust that the City Council can shepherd this project through in any equitable or respectful way.

7. **Other issues**: Thank you Beaches Watch for all you do to keep beach residents informed!