



## 2024 Jacksonville Beach 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?

Coming from a military family, we have the unique opportunity to choose our hometown. My entire family chose Jacksonville Beach for that distinction and once I put my own roots down here, I sought opportunities to get involved and give back to my community. Running for a City Council seat was a natural combination of my love for my community, my desire to give back, and continuing the family tradition of service. After two terms on Council, I felt I had more to give, projects I wanted to see continue, and opportunities I wanted to see our City take and decided to run for Mayor.

I have been in leadership roles, both staff and volunteer, with various non-profits in Jacksonville Beach. I have been in executive positions with the American Cancer Society and the Beaches Museum and have served on the boards of BEAM, VLSC, JAX Chamber, Baptist Medical Center—Beaches, and the Rotary Club of Jacksonville—Oceanside. Understanding the institutions of our community has been important in knowing the challenges and opportunities here. I have a degree in political science and criminology from UF and an MBA from the University of North Florida. I have twelve years of serving as an elected official in Jacksonville Beach as well as on the General Employee Pension Fund Board. I have spent the past four years representing the City in the media, Chamber of Commerce, League of Mayors, American Flood Coalition, and more.

In my first term as Mayor, I have developed and strengthened relationships with neighboring Mayors and council members and am able to work smoothly with our city council. Additionally, I have earned the trust and support of our representatives in Jacksonville, Tallahassee, and Washington, DC. These relationships are important to the City and are not formed overnight.

And finally, one of the biggest responsibilities of the Mayor is representing the City in the news media. I am an adept and responsive spokesperson and have become a resource for both local and national media outlets on issues affecting the beaches.

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

**A Safe Community:** Public safety is always job one of a local government. Not only is it important to residents, businesses, and visitors, but it is a very large part of the city's annual budget. Supporting our Police Department, in particular, to make sure that they have the resources that they need to be successful is key. I've also created a Downtown Business Owner quarterly meeting that gives our business owners, public safety officials, and City staff the opportunity to work together to identify challenges, and create solutions. I support communication, use of technology, and prevention efforts that help identify and mitigate potential issues.

**A Vibrant Downtown:** A vibrant downtown is the heartbeat to any healthy city. We have dramatically turned the tide from the downtown that existed when I was growing up—bruised and battered after failed redevelopment attempts, including a boarded-up Casa Marina Hotel—to a re-emerging hub for restaurants, offices, and nightlife. Strategic use of the Community Redevelopment TIF funding to enhance public spaces, provide public art, and to improve infrastructure are all contributing to successful business growth in the area.

Working hand-in-hand with property owners, business owners, and other key stakeholders in the area to encourage the businesses and development that we want are critical to ensuring that downtown becomes a destination for residents and visitors at all times of day and year!

**A Sustainable City:** An overarching issue facing any city is meeting the needs of the community with the resources available. Determining priorities, budgeting and planning, and implementing those plans are challenges across all city services, particularly in a very challenging workforce, supply chain, and economic environment. Strategic planning, 5-year capital investment plans, and conservative spending are just a few ways to address this issue.

Environmental sustainability is also a critical issue. Supporting beach nourishment, conservation of our fragile wetlands, and storm hardening our critical infrastructure are all areas where we need to continue to put effort and focus. I was very happy to help make connections that resulted in the acquisition of over 250 acres known as the "Small Islands" by the North Florida Land Trust. Over 400 acres have been added to "Conservation Use" in the past four years and I think we should be very proud of the role that plays in protecting our community.

3. **Communication**: What, if anything, do you think should be done differently to inform citizens of upcoming issues and solicit their input on the issues?

Rapidly changing methods, technology, and access present a challenge in reaching citizens where they are. When I became a City Council member, the City barely had a Facebook page and had no dedicated communication staff. Press releases were few and far between and were normally generated by the Police Department.

I advocated strongly for the City and Police Department to better utilize social media for not only providing information to the citizens, but for sharing good news, and engaging visitors, residents and businesses. I was told by a prior Police Chief that they “did not have time” to deal with Facebook to which I responded they did not have time NOT to.

I pushed for many years for a dedicated communications staff which was finally realized with the hiring of our current City Manager. A more comprehensive use of social media, a monthly newsletter, and a point of contact for media requests have made a huge difference in the quality and frequency of communications.

The timing of the addition of this position was critical in the City being able to move meetings and City business to Zoom as we dealt with COVID-19.

The City has also begun doing QR codes for maintenance issues and surveys particularly in the Parks & Recreation realm and even go back to door hangers for particularly localized issues.

I’ve been very pleased with the inclusion of public workshops and forums for the Land Development Code, Urban Trails, etc. Our City Manager began his tenure here with “Community Visioning” meetings that fed directly in to the work City leaders did on the Strategic Plan.

The Council has requested a comprehensive Communication Plan from City staff and have been assured it is forthcoming. The plan will entail everything from items that trigger a “Code Red” alert to how residents and businesses are informed of projects that may impact their property. The content and methods of communication will also be defined. Clear-cut expectations between the Communications Manager and each Department as well as between the City and the resident will go a long way in ensuring information is communicated in an accurate, timely, and professional way.

And further, programs such as the Citizen Information Academy will familiarize citizens with their City, its departments, and how they can play a role as they see fit. The sessions are organized, interesting, and engaging. I have encouraged potential and current Board Members along with Council or prospective Council members to take part.

I also believe pro-active communications with specific groups or interest areas are an important method for communications and feedback. When I became Mayor, I

implemented a “Downtown Hospitality Business Owner” meeting. Far too often, the only times City officials and our downtown businesses came together was when there were issues or problems. By putting a regular meeting on the books, I was able to bring representatives of City administration, our Police Department including our CAPE Sergeant, our Community Redevelopment Agency, along with our business owners, in to a room to share updates, answer questions, and to discuss current or potential issues.

This group was gathered for the second time just days after news of Orange Crush broke. We were able to discuss it with them almost immediately and that proactive communication led to all of our bars and restaurants standing together and not booking private parties related to the event. If they had, we would have had a very difficult time staying ahead of the crowds and potential impacts on our downtown.

Additionally, discussions of CRA projects including façade grants, public art, and other initiatives have helped foster communication and interest. In fact, the current discussion of a “Safety Grant” by the CRA came as a direct result of an idea from a business owner.

This concept is not rocket science but required time, trust, and commitment to make it effective. The feedback from both City representatives and the business representatives have been supportive and positive.

4. **Land Development Code:** Jacksonville Beach has begun the process of updating the Land Development Code. Please explain what specific aspects of the Land Development Code you believe are not functioning and what changes you would support?

First and foremost, I’m very glad that we have, for the first time, done a comprehensive review of the Land Development Code. It was clear that it was becoming a hodge podge of periodic changes and cleanup with no big picture evaluation. Hiring a professional firm that engaged citizens, the boards, and the council at regular intervals through the process was the right thing to do and the right way to do it.

Several changes including right-sizing the lot sizes, adding definitions, and clarifying areas that are hard for the average citizen to interpret will go a long way to making the LDC more accessible and easily understood. I believe this clarity will lift some of the burden off of the Board of Adjustment as well.

The overall citizen-led direction of preserving the neighborhood feel I believe will be well served by the proposed language regarding Accessory Dwelling Units, lot coverage, and townhouse parking/driveway requirements.

5. **Penman Road:** What is your opinion of the proposed improvements to Penman Road? What, if anything, would you want to see changed or done differently?

As a City, we have been advocating for a comprehensive re-design of Penman Road for longer than I have been on Council. I’m very glad that through effective lobbying and key

relationships, the County is moving forward with funding for this project. My priorities on this project area a safe multi-use path, pedestrian crossings, speed controls, and overall road safety.

I have also made it abundantly clear that we need to have a comprehensive storm water plan as part of this redesign as well as a routine and long-term maintenance plan from the City of Jacksonville so that we can ensure the roadway, path, and crossings stay in good repair.

6. **Urban Trails Master Plan:** What is your opinion of the Urban Trails Master Plan? What, if anything, would you change?

Urban Trails are an example of a great idea in theory and on the drawing board that lost its way during implementation. I support the founding concept—that people should be able to safely navigate the city not in a car. Biking, running, walking, pushing a stroller, walking a dog--these are all important means of navigating the city.

My priority areas at this point are:

- Jacksonville Drive from South Beach Parkway to A1A
- The Federally grant funded area around San Pablo Elementary and Fletcher Middle School
- A comprehensive discussion of 1<sup>st</sup> Street in the downtown area
- And a multi-use path along Penman Road

We need to have proven segments that gain trust and understanding from the impacted residents before we proceed further. We also need to evaluate the net community benefit as we approach each segment.

This is a long-term-approach and not a short-term project.

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

There are many, but a few I will share here:

**Continue to enhance citizen engagement and civic pride:** There are very simple things that we can do to engage and re-engage our citizens. Last year I asked our Parks & Rec Department to allow council members to nominate judges for the Sand Castle Contest and Parade. Council members chose local art teachers, artists, and members of our Public Art Committee to participate to great success.

Leaning in on programs such as the Citizen Information Academy and Citizen Police Academy are important and very successful with engagement and we need to grow and expand upon those successes as well.

**Plan for State and Federal Appropriations requests:** In the course of our annual budgeting and updating of our capital improvement plan, we need to consider opportunities for State and Federal funding. In particular, areas that are focuses of the respective administrations usually come with funding opportunities attached. We need to be ready to seek alignment with our plan and these opportunities.

**Work with the City Council regularly to review the Strategic Plan and identify short and long-term projects related to it:** As much as there is work we need to do, we also need to periodically assess if we are taking on too much. We need to work effectively and efficiently and every project needs a plan for maintenance, replacement, whatever the case may be. I would also like to see a baseline assessment of public-facing assets such as signage, park equipment, etc. New and existing assets need to have designated responsibility so that they will not continue to fall through the cracks.