



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?

I am a Fletcher High School alum (1981) and graduated from Jacksonville University in 1985 with a BS in Marketing, with minors in Computer Science/Computer Programming. Since 1986, I have a solid, consistent and progressively successful 38 year career at Florida Blue and its subsidiary company's advancing to my current role as Vice President, Group Sales. I have been in public service to our community since 2003 in roles on the Jacksonville Beach Code Enforcement Board (2 yrs), Jacksonville Beach Planning Commission (17 yrs, 8 as Chairman) and now on the Jacksonville Beach City Council as the Seat 3 representative since November 2022.

As a relatively new council member (Nov 2022), I still have much to contribute to this community and look forward to continuing leadership in focus areas like bolstered public safety, improved infrastructure, preserving our community schools, downtown redevelopment and more.

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.

While there are a number areas to focus on currently and will be more forthcoming, I believe the following three areas are critical:

- a. **Public Safety** – With the incidents in our downtown area this year on St Patricks Day and Memorial Day, we are unfortunately reminded how critically important feeling safe and protected is. Chief Smith and our police department do an outstanding job, with the resources they have, in keeping us safe, and in their everyday functions of patrol, detectives, services and administration. They demonstrate excellence on a daily basis and I'm so thankful for our first responders. It's a role that all of us need

and few of us would undertake. These most recent incidents, and most any high-profile crime we've had over the years, have been perpetrated by individuals who are not from the beach. Separating those that visit Jax Beach into the "good actors" versus "bad actors" is a very difficult endeavor, and, to be clear, my stance is that all are welcome to our great community, but you will act lawfully and respectfully while here or pay the consequences.

As I requested at our City Council meeting on March 18, we must craft and pass legislation that makes it illegal to have excessively large gatherings in our central business district or along the adjacent beachfront unless you have a City-issued special event permit. This will help our police proactively disperse these gatherings with the assurance they have the legal authority with which to do so. Chief Smith and his team have put into action increased patrol, focused cyber monitoring and renewed intra-local arrangements with our neighboring law enforcement agencies which have proven helpful over the summer months. But all of these steps are not enough.

To that end, I propose and support bolstering our public safety budget for the upcoming fiscal year through adding additional officers and additional technology to help further deter such activity and all crime. Our General Fund revenues for 2025 are increasing by over 8% which will more than offset the \$1.2M increase for Public Safety.

- b. Infrastructure – Jacksonville Beach has been a good steward of eliminating budget deficits in the past which is very commendable. Sometimes however, this can lead to unseen circumstances such as failing infrastructure through delayed or ignored maintenance or timely replacement.

A great recent example is the failed sanitary sewer line passing under the intersection of 22nd Street N and 9th Avenue N. This line was first laid in apx 1981 and was made of an inferior plastic material. The estimated life expectancy of such a line/material was apx 30-40 years which would reasonably therefore be replaced not later than 2021, preferably sooner. The work estimate to repair this acute failure, which Council approved on May 20 of this year, will now be between \$1.5 million and \$2 million. Not to mention the extreme inconvenience our residents have experienced in the immediate neighborhood, as the project is now expected to push into 9-10 months for completion.

I believe more proactive identification and reinforcement or replacement of such infrastructure is generally less expensive than having to address an acute failure. Our public works department does an outstanding job given that in many areas of

the City they are dealing with an infrastructure that has long outlived its life expectancy.

Proactive identification of impending issues should be a public works priority and we must spend the necessary funds to upgrade our older public works infrastructure.

I would propose funding these multi-year improvements out of our Water & Sewer Utility enterprise fund which currently has a very healthy balance of apx \$50M.

- c. Communication & Community Engagement – If I had to pick just one thing I’ve consistently heard from residents over the past 21 months it would be “I didn’t know anything about that” on the COJB topic or project of the day. Communication is so important and people want to feel not only that their input is heard and valued, but that they are kept up to date on issues affecting them.

It's easy to become complacent and assume that the method of communication one is using is sufficient or meets a minimum requirement. It's a goal of mine to improve the communication that comes out of City Hall in the way of both frequency and delivery method(s), and therefore overall effectiveness for our citizens.

This should be able to be accomplished with minimal expense with some investment in technology tools and possibly printing.

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?

As mentioned above, if there if one thing I’ve heard quite often in my brief 21 months on Council, it’s “Hey, I didn’t know that was happening” or “Hey, how do you find out about these things, no one notified me”. It’s become clear to me that the frequency and method of City communications to its citizens in Jax Beach must improve. One shouldn’t assume that just because an item or notice is posted somewhere online that our citizens have been made aware and given the opportunity to speak their support or opposition. The most obvious example I can draw upon since being on Council was when the City held a citizen informational and feedback session regarding the Urban Trail concept. Much feedback had been received that citizens had not been informed or made aware of the impact this project may have, especially to those with property directly adjacent to the preliminary design layout. The decision was made to produce and distribute the simplest concept, paper door hangers, informing directly impacted households of the meeting. The resulting turnout was exceptional.

This was such a simplistic approach of messaging, but it was incredibly effective. I believe the lesson here is that there is never too much communication and the City must do more

in terms of communication frequency to reach its citizens and make every effort to meet our citizens in their preferred communication method. Citizen input is key to successful projects and initiatives and I support increased efforts to solicit community participation. Development of a comprehensive communication plan is necessary.

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?

In my 17 years on the Planning Commission we continuously applied the Land Development Code (LDC) in considering applications for development, conditional uses and various other requests. The outdated LDC was a continual source of frustration for both residents, applicants and the Commission members in understanding and applying fair and consistent standards. The LDC instrument in general required updating and simplification. There are numerous areas that need to be addressed, but the ones that have provided the most frustration over the years, and that I support, are revised commercial parking standards, more liberal and flexible residential lot coverage standards to be consistent with neighboring municipalities, lot size definition revisions to help accommodate some of our older and unique non-conforming properties/structures, parking inclusion and standards for things like bikes and golf carts, recreational vehicle limitations for size and quantity and multi-family (specifically townhome) density revisions.

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 beach kid who started driving Penman Road in 1978, and crossing Penman Road on foot or bike years before that, I can appreciate the need to make some improvements to this critical north/south artery through Jacksonville and Neptune Beach. Back in my youth Penman Road was two lane with no middle turning lane. If someone wanted to turn left, traffic stopped, period. With the widening and addition of the middle turn lane in the 1980's Penman became much more traffic friendly with left turns not impeding traffic flow. That solution has seemingly worked reasonably well over the years. Now, as populations and car trips have increased the real deterrents are the stop lights (everyone has experienced the nightmare that Florida Blvd/Penman Rd backups can be), combined with pedestrian and bike safety in traveling and crossing Penman. Back in 2019 the collective Councils of Jacksonville Beach, Neptune Beach and Atlantic Beach passed resolutions asking the City of Jacksonville (as this is a County Road) to evaluate and consider improvements to Penman Road to make it a "Complete Street". The lighted/flashing pedestrian crosswalks we now have at 4th Avenue N and 15th Avenue N were a first, interim step in the safety improvements, as well as the COJ Council approving over \$20 million for a study, design work and subsequent construction. That's where we are today with now a

second draft of a suggested plan from COJ. I am in favor of improvements to Penman Road that will improve traffic flow and pedestrian/bike safety. Roundabouts may be one viable option in lieu of the traffic signals at Arden Way, Seagate Avenue and Florida Blvd so that traffic slows down yet continues to move through these areas. I do not believe that center medians preventing left hand turns provide much, if any, of an improved solution to the existing center turn lane, and backups on side streets to turn left onto Penman are generally minimal. Additionally, I remain concerned that eliminating a center turn lane will only impede important things like public safety vehicles, garbage collection and delivery services just to name a few, although the consultant study attempts to address this concern via eliminating ditches/swales and providing a stabilized shoulder that could be used for vehicles. Improvements are needed and welcomed from COJ but the plan needs more work.

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

Mobility and safety continue to be of some concern with residents, specifically pedestrian safety and biking safety. The ability to traverse Jacksonville Beach, whether it be north/south, east/west or some combination, is not the easiest or sometimes safest. Combine that with sidewalks that are both fairly narrow and needing repair/improvement calls for some improvements to be considered. An ambitious plan was kicked off back in September of 2021, by the Council at that time, that would effectively connect every neighborhood to a high-quality shared-use path network that would provide a safe, intuitive and more comfortable way to walk, run, bike or skate to the beach, parks, schools, shops, jobs, restaurants and other destinations. Thus was born the Urban Trails project. I know there are many opinions as it relates to this project. As I inherited this from the previous Council, I will say that I'm in favor of improving safety for pedestrians and bikes, no question. This project is quite ambitious and while I think it can have some great benefits, I believe it needs to be viewed and tackled in sections or chunks, which could one day result in an overall connected plan that improves safety and mobility for pedestrians and bikes. I believe this could include the modification of currently proposed corridors or the elimination of some corridors if they simply don't make sense. Also, the plan for trails must be flexible and adaptable to the specific neighborhood and area with which it passes through. For instance, surfaces should be able to be variable such as asphalt, concrete or some other more pervious solutions, widths should be able to vary based on the specific application from say 7' up to 10', and the same for other such design components.

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