



Enhancing Community Through Knowledge

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?

Greetings friends! A special thanks to Beaches Watch on their 20th anniversary of serving our community.

You may not know me, but if you have students here at the beach, your kids may know me as Mr. Bruce. I taught for eight years at Fletcher High School and I now teach part time at Beaches elementary schools. I am not a professional politician with a long list of resume fillers. My community service has been in the trenches with so many other excellent teachers in our schools. I helped raise thousands of dollars for the Humane Society and have been active in my church. Additionally, I was trained as an attorney and am quite capable of dealing with codes and various legal matters.

As a long time resident of Jax Beach, I am fully committed to this unique community. In the last five years or so I have noticed that our city council has increasingly ignored residents when they voice their concerns. Whether it be the Adventure Landing closure, the proposed Height Amendment, the Volunteer Life Saving Corps lock out, the Gonzales Park development, the Penman Road median, or the Urban Trails installation, it seems the council has proceeded without public concurrence. I want to be a voice for the residents.

I ask you good folks, do you prefer the bright lights of a Daytona Beach? Or the quiet charm of a Neptune Beach? Do you recognize this town as one you grew up in? Like me, do you avoid the Central Bar District at night? I believe we can do more to prevent unchecked development causing greater densities, increasing road congestion and rising crime.

Together, we can shape the future of Jax Beach and make it a family-friendly town that maintains its unique charm and sense of community. I believe that tomorrow can be better than today. I am asking your support to help make this a vision a reality.

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.

Let me address the later question first. Our revenues have increased approximately \$50 million dollars from 2022 to 2025. Our current projected revenues are approximately \$225 million. I don't believe we have a revenue problem. On the other hand, spending has increased 15% in just the last two years. So if we are short of funds, I would suggest we have a spending problem.

My Priorities:

- 1) A city council that serves the residents;
- 2) A Central Business District that is family-friendly and safe;
- 3) Slowing down the massive projects that are reshaping our city from a small beach town into an over-developed vacation destination with increased road congestion, Air BnBs on every block and deadly crime becoming more prevalent.

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?

I think the real issue is that once the residents are aware of what the council is considering and voice their concerns, those concerns should be heeded, not dismissed.

Gonzales Park Condominiums for example: I knocked on every door in that neighborhood and did not find one single person in support of the condos and the increased parking areas. I attended many of the meetings and only heard people against the project. Yet the project went ahead.

Regarding Urban Trails, I walked much of the trail and knocked on many doors. The first resident I spoke to was a man who was born and lived in that same house since 1950. He had never even heard of Urban Trails and was not happy to learn it might be going through his front yard. The council meeting have been full of people objecting, yet planning proceeds. I enjoy bike riding, but 11 East West trails seems excessive as well as the \$20 million dollar price tag. Not to mention, the safety and privacy concerns voiced by many residents who may have the trail 10-15 from their front doors and windows.

I have heard city officials say that door hangers were placed all around Sunshine Park, announcing the installation of 52 new parking spots, but when I knocked on doors in that neighborhood, I heard from many people that they never received any notice and heard residences express their thoughts in council meetings to be ignored.

Most people are too busy to keep up with the city website or attend countless meetings. For the first 20 or so years I lived here, you didn't need to monitor the council's plans, because

they didn't pursue such radical (and often unpopular) change. In sum, the council doesn't seem to be adequately transparent and open-minded regarding their projects. I suggest every resident affected by future projects be contacted directly and be offered the opportunity to voice their concerns before proceeding; not after decision have already been made.

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?

No one outside of the firm hired to do the rewrite of the LDC has access to it. The maps revealed at a recent council meeting show it will increase densities in some areas.

The Comprehensive Plan calls for the Downtown Vision Plan to be implemented by 2030. Despite all the efforts and millions of dollars of investment by the Community Redevelopment Agency, the Central Business District is still not a family-friendly place where people like to go, much less take their family at night.

The LDC set back provisions are often ignored by the Board of Adjustment in granting variances to developers. Back in 2019, a variance was sought by a developer in my neighborhood basically wanting to ignore set backs and build to nearly all four corners of a 50' x 125' lot. It was granted for no apparent reason but the financial interest of the developer. As a former attorney, and on behalf of my neighbors, I inquired for what hardship the variance was granted, and was told by the Board of Adjustment member "if I didn't like the decision, vote us out of office." I have witnessed many other similar BOA meetings. It seems that the Board views a loss of square footage as constituting a hardship.

Also, granted variances often leave insufficient room remains for a vehicle to park without blocking the sidewalk. On Second Street South, I have frequently seen elderly residents, moms with strollers, and folks in wheelchairs having to go over a curb into traffic lanes to get around vehicles that are blocking the sidewalk.

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?

The firm hired to create the Penman Road project, to their credit, has reduced the scope of the medians which serve little purpose and create a host of problems. Specifically small business owners have told me they fear a loss of business because customers would not be able to make a left into their parking lot and would not proceed to a roundabout some blocks down the road just to do so.

6. **Urban Trails Master Plan**: What is your opinion of the Urban Trails Master Plan? What, if anything, would you change? Like a lot of people, I love riding my bike. But I think 27.5 miles of bike trails is excessive for several reasons:

- a. The price tag of \$20 million dollars is money that might be better spent on things like fixing our roads, updating our existing bike paths (like the one on 1st Street), and hiring more police officers who are not tied to the redevelopment areas;
- b. The loss of significant green space and trees, and the increased threat to the safety and privacy of folks who may have the path just 10-15 from their front doors; and
- c. It will incur an increased maintenance burden on the city.

That said, I would favor a scaled-down version that is still rectangular in shape, but has fewer east-west connectors.

7. **Other issues**: Are there any other issues you would like to address if elected? Please explain. I was raised to believe that you should leave the world and your community better than you found it. When I look back at the current incumbents body of work, I don't think many of their actions do that. Examples include:

- a. Trying to raise the building height limit;
- b. Constantly rezoning areas to increase densities (PUDS), ;like at Adventure Landing, the Marina and Gonzales Park Condos;
- c. Disbanding the Volunteer Life Saving Corps;
- d. Reluctance to more aggressively combat the crime coming from our Central Bar District;
- e. Failing to address the inefficient and unsafe design of 1st Street;
- f. Only hand-picking board members who are aligned with their views; and
- g. Catering to developers while constantly ignoring residents' concerns.

For these reasons and more, I am asking for your support, your help and your vote! Please help me protect our beach life and keep our small town vibe!