

City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate: Richard H. Gillmor

Email: 744 Kroegel Ave. Sebastian Fl. 32958

QUESTION:

The Property Tax Amendment and Water Infrastructure.

HJR 1F on the November 3 ballot would raise the non-school homestead exemption to \$150,000 in 2027 and \$250,000 in 2028, cutting the City's annual revenue.

- Do you support this amendment?

- If it passes, how do you expect the revenue reduction to affect the City's support for water utilities, Lagoon monitoring, and water quality projects? If you intend to protect those programs, tell us specifically where the money comes from instead (which services or staff positions you would reduce, or what revenue you would raise).

CANDIDATE'S ANSWER:

I do support the ammendment.

If it passes it will not have any affect on our city because we are not currently monitering our outfalls or the Lagoon. Sebastian citizens pay a stormwater fee currently close to three million dollars per year for stormwater needs. This fee will not be affected by the ammendment.

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QUESTION:

Sustaining Restoration Under Funding Pressure.

Much of our local restoration relies on layered, non-guaranteed outside funding: EPA National Estuary Program dollars, competitive NOAA grants, the state Indian River Lagoon Protection Program, and water management district contributions.

- If state and federal funding are severely cut, how will you keep research and restoration moving for the Indian River Lagoon?

- Would you support a dedicated, recurring City funding source to insulate these projects? If not, what is your alternative?

CANDIDATE'S ANSWER:

Research and restoration has to be on the front burner of every city and county along the Indian River Lagoon. If you ask ten different legislators along the lagoon what the biggest threat is to the lagoon, you will get 10 different answers. It's the fertilizer, no it's the stormwater, no it's septic tanks, no it's insecticides, no it's Lake Okeechobee, It's the army corps of engineers. You see my point? But without a clear ranking of culprits, and the percentage of degradation that they cause, there won't be clear vision of where to start.

I would not support a recurring fee, read tax, to insulate projects. What's my alternative? I would task the City Manager to reach out to State Universities to find graduate students in engineering and other scientific studies and propose research projects to them for water quality studies. There would be a cost associated with this, but shouldn't break the bank. Number two, I would hope to have the city create near shore areas of the lagoon that can be set aside for oyster farms. Small tracts of lagoon bottom that would be off limits for jet skis and fishing.

QUESTION:

Understanding Our Lagoon.

The St. Johns River Water Management District's 2025 monitoring showed a significant rebound in Lagoon seagrass coverage after years of decline.

- In your own words, what are the current water quality issues facing the Indian River Lagoon?
- Do you read the seagrass recovery as a reason to sustain current spending and effort, or to ease off?
- Beyond funding, name one or two concrete City-level measures you would champion to restore and maintain Lagoon health.

CANDIDATE'S ANSWER:

In my opinion the biggest threat to our Lagoon is septic effluent. Properties that have close proximity to the Lagoon need to be converted to sewer A.S.A.P., especially those that are east of our sand ridge. This feature creates head pressure that pumps ground water into the Lagoon and with it septic tank waste.

Seagrass recovery is not a reason to slack off funding. Demucking parts of the Lagoon is expensive and is critical for seagrass to come back.

The two City-level measures that I would support are septic to sewer conversions close to the Lagoon and oyster farms I have already written about.

QUESTION:

Future Water Supply and Utility Expansion.

- What is your assessment of the City's long-term potable water supply, and how do existing and expected utility operations (wastewater and potable, City and County) affect the City's overall water resources?
- What specific expansion of utilities is necessary to meet future demand and restore our water resources, including the planned connection of legacy septic systems to central sewer?

CANDIDATE'S ANSWER:

As long as it continues to rain in Florida our aquifer will supply our water needs for the foreseeable future. The county's wastewater treatment needs to be upgraded to tertiary treatment if we are serious about cleaning up the Lagoon. Future demand will do nothing but increase as new families move to Indian River County. The trick will be in how we incorporate new development and prevent urban sprawl.

QUESTION:

City-County Collaboration.

- Where do you see tangible opportunities for the City and County to work together on water and land use?

CANDIDATE'S ANSWER:

I could see the City and County coming up with stricter land use regulations for near Lagoon development. If land development was more uniform in regulation it would benefit every political subdivision ie. city.

QUESTION:

Annexation

The recent Sebastian Pines and Cresswind annexations approved roughly 1,512 homes on former agricultural land. Because Sebastian operates no water or wastewater utility of its own, both developments will rely entirely on the County's system under an interlocal agreement.

- How will you navigate a situation where the City approves major density increases that the County is ultimately responsible for serving?

- Do the current interlocal agreements give the County too much leverage? If so, what specific changes would you pursue?

- Are you in favor of future annexations? What makes an annexation attractive to you, and what would make you vote no?

CANDIDATE'S ANSWER:

Future annexations must, in my opinion, be structured so that they contribute to our small town D.N.A.. Our town is blessed with many pocket parks and green spaces interspersed with residential neighborhoods. We don't need cookie cutter houses 10 to an acre with little green space and limited access. Our open grid pattern allows myriad opportunities for traffic flow. Commercial development is sorely needed in Sebastian especially if proposition 3 goes through. Pockets of commercial can be designed into any large scale annexation as can parks and green spaces to complement our D.N.A.