

Vero Beach City Council Candidate Questionnaire

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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:

As an elected public officer, I cannot use my public office to advocate for or against a statewide constitutional amendment. Regardless of my personal position on a law passed by the Legislature or an amendment placed before the voters, my responsibility as a City Councilmember is to work with City staff to adjust the City's budget and operations to comply with changes in state law.

I would also note that the question does not capture the amendment's full potential long-term impact. The \$250,000 exemption is adjusted annually for positive inflation beginning in 2029. At a 3% annual inflation rate, that could increase the exemption to approximately \$300,000 within eight years. The amendment also establishes a process for future increases to the exemption. Those subsequent increases would not require another voter-approved constitutional amendment or a 60% voter approval. This means the long-term fiscal impact could extend well beyond the initial exemption amounts presented in the question.

The impact would not be the same across all water-related programs. Most of the City's major water projects are funded through the Water & Sewer Enterprise Fund, property-owner contributions, and grants. These include the John's Island pipeline, other water-reuse projects, and the septic-to-sewer program. These projects are therefore not directly dependent on City General Fund ad valorem revenue to the same degree. The City's \$75 per ERU stormwater fee would also not be affected by the amendment.

The greater concern would be services supported by the City's General Fund. One potential impact would be the City's ability to maintain dedicated police presence and patrols on the Indian River Lagoon, as well as police services on the City's beaches. Those are important components of protecting the Lagoon and enforcing regulations such as the Anchor Limitation Area.

There would not be one simple answer to a reduction in General Fund revenue. We would need to balance expenditure reductions, existing fees, enterprise-fund transfers, and discretionary programs while protecting essential services and maintaining the City's financial stability. I will continue to work with City staff to identify those adjustments rather than prematurely identifying specific employees or services for reduction before the actual fiscal impact is known.

My priority would be to protect essential water and wastewater infrastructure, continue the septic-to-sewer and water-reuse programs, and maintain effective Lagoon enforcement and monitoring to the greatest extent possible.

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:

If state and federal funding is significantly reduced, the City will need to maintain the programs currently in place to the greatest extent possible within its available budget. We should prioritize projects that provide measurable improvements to water quality, reduce nutrient loading, and protect the Lagoon, while continuing to pursue available grants and partnerships.

I would not support creating a new dedicated recurring funding source at this time, as the projects currently being implemented already have a path forward. The City also has significant existing infrastructure and financial obligations, and we need to be disciplined about how we allocate limited resources.

I believe existing resources are appropriately prioritized toward projects with direct, measurable water-quality benefits, particularly septic-to-sewer conversions, expansion of water-reclamation projects to reduce demand on potable-water wells, and Lagoon-focused enforcement and policing. I would also encourage staff to continue pursuing state, federal, County, and water-management-district funding opportunities to leverage City dollars wherever possible.

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:

Question 1:

One of the primary water-quality issues facing the Lagoon is excess nutrient loading from sources such as septic systems, fertilizer use, and lawn trimmings entering stormwater systems. Excess nutrients can fuel unhealthy algae growth, increasing turbidity and reducing the sunlight needed by seagrass and other aquatic vegetation. The resulting loss of vegetation reduces essential habitat and negatively affects the Lagoon's overall ecosystem.

Addressing these nutrient sources, along with other pollutants and runoff, is essential to maintaining and improving the Lagoon's long-term health.

Question 2:

The recent seagrass recovery is encouraging, but I view it as a reason to sustain and increase our efforts, not ease off. We need to continue working toward a greater positive net effect year over year. Recovery can take years, and maintaining the progress we have made will require continued efforts to reduce nutrient loading, improve water quality, and protect the Lagoon. We need to stay ahead of the problem and build enough progress and resilience to withstand a bad year without losing the gains we have made.

Question 3:

I would continue to support septic-to-sewer conversions as one of the most important actions the City can take to reduce nutrient loading to the Lagoon.

I would also support continued Lagoon-focused efforts, including enforcement of the Anchor Limitation Area, increased coordination among FWC, the Sheriff's Office, and Vero Beach Police Department, and support for the County's pump-out boat program. These are practical steps that can reduce impacts on the Lagoon and help protect its long-term health.

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?
- The City provides potable water to Indian River Shores and reuse water to John's Island for irrigation, while the County develops an Integrated Water Master Plan. What specific City actions are necessary to meet future demand and restore the Lagoon, including connecting legacy septic systems to central sewer?

CANDIDATE'S ANSWER:

The City is continuing to invest in potable-water and wastewater infrastructure, including additional reverse-osmosis capacity and PFAS treatment, while maximizing the beneficial reuse of treated wastewater.

One opportunity is the expansion of the water-reuse projects that reduce demand on potable-water wells. Opportunities include using reclaimed water for irrigation at the high school ball fields, Leisure Square, and other appropriate public and private properties. Every gallon of reclaimed water used for irrigation is a gallon of potable water that does not need to be withdrawn from our wells.

A key component of restoring the Indian River Lagoon is transitioning legacy septic systems to central sewer where appropriate. Reducing nutrient loading from septic systems, combined with improved wastewater treatment, can help protect groundwater and reduce nutrients reaching the Lagoon.

Over the past year, from August 2025 through August 2026, 110 properties within the Cities service area transitioned from septic systems to the STEP system, with the help of the Clean Water Coalition. More than 600 properties remain to be converted. With the accelerated implementation plan requiring compliance by July 1, 2028, we should see many more properties make the transition over the next two years.

Our investments in potable water, wastewater treatment, PFAS mitigation, and water reuse are essential to maintaining a reliable water supply while protecting our groundwater and restoring the Indian River Lagoon.

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 enjoy working with our County Commissioners, and I believe there are several tangible opportunities for continued City–County collaboration.

One priority is to continue working together on implementing the Anchor Limitation Area and ensuring that it is effectively enforced. This should include increased coordination and presence among the various law enforcement agencies, including the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Indian River County Sheriff's Office, and Vero Beach Police Department.

Another opportunity is continued support for the County's pump-out boat program. Providing convenient access to pump-out services can help reduce the discharge of wastewater into the lagoon and support our shared responsibility to protect the Indian River Lagoon.

More broadly, I believe the City and County should continue working together on water quality, environmental protection, and land-use issues where our decisions affect the same community and natural resources. We are more effective when we work together rather than address these issues independently.

QUESTION:

Three Corners.

In mid-August, the City granted another 30-day extension for private-sector developers to negotiate a master agreement, including lease terms, for the Three Corners project.

- Would you facilitate the development of Three Corners? Explain why or why not.

- What would you propose to improve the project?

CANDIDATE'S ANSWER:

Yes. I will continue to support facilitating the Three Corners Project. The voters approved the overall vision for the property, and I believe we should make a good-faith effort to see that vision through, provided the City can reach an agreement that is in the best interests of Vero Beach residents.

The City should continue negotiating in good faith with the current developer. However, I also believe there needs to be increasing accountability as extensions continue. Negotiations cannot continue indefinitely without meaningful progress toward an agreement.

If the City and developer ultimately cannot reach acceptable terms, I believe Council should be prepared to move on rather than continue extending negotiations without a clear path forward.