

Vero Beach City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate: Davis Benedict

Email: davisforvero@davisbenedict.com

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 not support HJR 1F. I understand the desire for lower taxes, however, without a clear alternative to replace the lost funding, this ultimately can damage the things we value on the Treasure Coast. In addition, this tax cut should not be mandated by the state.

Should this amendment pass, the effect on the City budget will be significant. Cuts will have to be made or alternative sources of revenue will have to be found. Because there are many demands for the limited dollars in the City, difficult decisions will have to be made.

Our Lagoon is one of our crown jewels and the work to clean and protect it has been affective and significant. The above projects mentioned are strategic to the quality of life in Vero. I will work hard with the other council members to make sure the funds to help projects that work toward Lagoon restoration are supported. Projects relating to all aspects of water in our community will have to remain a priority for the Vero Beach City Council members.

The City runs a tight budget, with little excess. If this amendment passes, the City will have to rely more heavily on outside funding - private/public partnerships and seeking state and national grants where available. As far as staffing is concerned, this would have to be addressed collectively, looking at redundancies, efficiencies, and natural attrition of staff.

Questions Sponsored by:



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 elected, I would work to make Indian River Lagoon health one of the top priorities for our city. I would promote the efforts of organizations such as ORCA, the Indian River Land Trust, and Coastal Connections, as well as organizations such as yours. I would work together with the Council and City staff to seek funding for our lagoon and would promote more private and not-for-profit partnerships.

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:

The Lagoon faces many threats. Rising temperatures, algae blooms, and excessive nutrients from storm runoff are just a few issues that will have to be mitigated.

The work that is being done to reverse some of the damage is beginning to show signs of water quality improvement. While it's great that we are seeing progress, there is much more to do. Seagrass is slowly making a recovery, however, the progress could easily reverse if attention is taken away from this area.

I contend that stormwater runoff, especially with new development, and leaching septic systems remain issues that need attention. Two City-level measures I would champion are the continued conversion from septic to sewer and projects to filter stormwater for irrigation.

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:

With the new waste water treatment facility, the City has positioned itself well. We have an aquifer that is not limitless. We need to start managing our water resources. We have too much stormwater entering the lagoon and too much potable City water being used for irrigation. It is essential to use alternative methods such as wetland treatment parks or marshes to help filter storm water. Simultaneously, we need to encourage the use of reuse water as a way to decrease the demand on the aquifer.

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:

It is essential that the City of Vero Beach and Indian River County governments work together on water and land use issues. They could collaborate on wetland treatment parks and marshes or projects similar to the John's Island irrigation project. As the deadline for transferring from septic to sewer quickly approaches, they should work together to find funding and incentives for residents to complete this transition. They should also develop a comprehensive strategic plan for water and resource management.

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:

If elected, I will be involved in what transpires at Three Corners. I would propose a concise timeline for the developer to meet the criteria for this project. If an agreement can not be reached in a timely fashion, the City should move on to an alternative. It's time to move forward with a clear idea of when and how this area can be developed to meet the needs of all our residents.