

Jacksonville City Council Candidate Survey 2019 Lisa King, Candidate At Large, Group One



Threats to the St. Johns River's Health

The *State of the River Report for the Lower St. Johns River Basin* has scientifically tracked and assessed key health indicators for the St. Johns River over the last 11 years. Major findings in 2018 include:

- Wetlands continue to be lost to development, resulting in a loss of crucial ecosystem functions including the assimilation of pollutants, minimization of local flooding, and fish habitat;
- Salinity continues to increase, negatively impacting submerged grasses and the aquatic life that depends on it;
- Invasive species are on the rise, connected to port activity and impacts from storms.

The health of the St. Johns River also continues to be adversely impacted by:

- fecal coliform bacteria pollution from failing septic tanks, leaking sewage pipes, sanitary sewer overflows (SSO's), and animal waste;
- nutrient pollution from wastewater and industrial discharges, failing septic tanks, fertilizer runoff, and upstream impacts like biosolids that trigger algal blooms and fish kills;
- rising water levels from climate change that increase the likelihood of flooding;
- dredging that increases salinity, destroys wetlands, and causes river levels to increase;
- sedimentation from streets, storm drains and construction-site runoff.

1. ***What do you consider to be the most significant threats to the health of the St. Johns River? What do you specifically plan to do to address these problems, if elected?***

I am most concerned about potential salinity increases and stirred up toxicity due to dredging and the impacts it may pose to our marshes, and the nurseries these marshes provide for fish and shellfish. If the dredging goes forward there must be a full and adequate mitigation plan. Mr. Kahn is asking the city to pick up millions in environmental clean-up costs to encourage him to develop the Shipyards. Who will pay the environmental impact costs for the dredge if the mitigation is not well thought out ahead of time?

Rising Waters

As demonstrated by Hurricane Irma and the historic flooding that occurred, Jacksonville is more vulnerable than ever before. Decades of dredging the St. Johns and sea level rise have resulted in higher water levels and storm surge in our river and greater risk from flooding.

Locally, the Northeast Florida Regional Council has recommended that we plan for rising waters of 1' - 3' by 2060 and 3' - 6' by 2110. Scientists are also predicting slower, wetter, and more intense storms, further increasing the risk to low-lying communities like ours.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects that the current plan to deepen the river from 40' to 47' will increase water levels in the river by an additional 3 – 8 inches and by up to 12% during smaller, “high frequency” storms. This dredging project will cost nearly \$700 million with an uncertain return on investment for local taxpayers. During your term in office, you could be asked to appropriate as much as \$150 million to the project.

Many of Jacksonville’s competing cities are aggressively developing and implementing action plans to make their communities more resilient and better equipped to deal with a future of rising waters.

2. *Would you support the creation of a Chief Resiliency Officer position? What other measures do you think are necessary to create a more resilient Jacksonville?*

Yes. I look forward to the update of the North Florida Regional Council’s 2013 report on Sea Level Rise for other recommendations that the CRO could be tasked with riding point. Resiliency should also be focused on alternative energy, waste management, and water reuse.

3. *Do you support dredging the St. Johns River from 40-47ft. and contributing significant local tax dollars to the project? If so, would you also support adequate funding to mitigate the damage to the river and low-lying communities that may experience additional flooding?*

I support the dredging of the St. Johns River to Dames Point if a Phase 2 Storm Surge Study is completed and appropriate planning and funding for mitigation are provided. While this is largely, as are all port deepening projects, a “build it and they will come” deal – I feel we will surely be unable to compete for new business and even retain existing business without it. In my professional life I assist cities and counties in acquiring funding to prepare for, respond to and mitigate for natural disasters, primarily hurricanes. We cannot unsee the impacts Hurricane Matthew and Irma had on our community. Deepening the channel without mitigation will increase flooding in our City.

I also have concerns about the possible habitat changes to the river caused by increased salinity. The marshes of the Timucuan Preserve, which react poorly to increased salinity, act as a sponge during high water events related to extreme weather. Without them flooding would be markedly worse during extreme storms. Additionally, these marshes act as a nursery for fish and shellfish that are harvested both commercially and recreationally. I have been a resident of North Jacksonville for over 20 years and have had the privilege of living on the edge of the Preserve. It is a treasure and legacy for future generations that must be protected.

Dredging of the St. Johns does not and will not happen in a vacuum, and we should not treat the issue that way. It will have a cascading impact on numerous aspects of the economy, the environment and our quality of life, I’ve highlighted just a few here, and each needs to be considered and taken into account.

Wetlands Loss

One of the best ways to prevent flooding is to protect our wetlands and marshes. These areas act as natural sponges that trap and slowly release rain and flood waters, while serving as buffers during major

storm events. In addition, wetlands are the kidneys of our river, filtering pollutants from runoff in urban areas. They are also nurseries for fish spawning and a food source for almost every species, directly or indirectly, in our river. Wetlands are critical, yet we continue to allow wetlands and marshes to be destroyed or altered, resulting in a loss of critical biological services for our community and natural systems.

- 4. Some counties, such as Alachua, have adopted enhanced wetland protections. Would you support enhanced local wetland protections to reduce the loss of wetlands in Duval County, such as larger buffer and more stringent mitigation requirements?*

We need to approach resilience holistically, and wetlands policy is part of that response. As we build a sustainable Jacksonville, all approaches to building a resilient city should be on the table.

Treating Stormwater

Stormwater runoff is a major cause of water pollution in Jacksonville, carrying fertilizer, pesticides, hydrocarbons, and other pollutants into our waterways. Many communities across the country are turning to Low Impact Development (LID) practices and Green Infrastructure (GI) to protect our waterways, such as bioswales, rain gardens, urban trees, created wetlands, and green roofs. During your time in office, Jacksonville will be required to further reduce nutrient pollution in the St. Johns based on the Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) nutrient reduction requirements for its Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) permit from the FDEP. However, our community has not made adequate progress in reducing these pollutants since 2015, and may once again look to purchase trading credits to meet our its obligations, instead of investing in pollution reduction projects.

- 5. What, if anything, would you do to encourage or require Low Impact Development and Green Infrastructure to treat and manage stormwater in Jacksonville?*

I am interested in exploring the LID Manual and incorporating it into Jacksonville Land Development Regulations.

- 6. Would you support investing in projects that will allow us to further reduce nutrient loading into the St. Johns, or buying credits to meet the City's BMAP and permit requirements?*

I am interested in investing in projects that will allow actual reduction rather than just buying credits.

Tributary Restoration

Restoring the natural flow of the many tributaries of the St. Johns will remove toxic sediments, restore vegetation and habitat, and enable them to absorb floodwaters. In addition, restoration will make the tributaries more accessible to recreational boating and provide habitat for fisheries. Tributary restoration could also be a critical part of Jacksonville's resiliency strategy and offset some of the negative impacts of the Deep Dredge and sea level rise.

7. *Would you support a comprehensive plan to restore tributaries to the St. Johns River in Duval County?*

Yes. Some of the worst historical pollution, and recently, the worst flooding, has been experienced in our tributaries.

Septic Tanks

There are up to 90,000 septic tanks located throughout Duval County. Many of these systems are failing, contributing to high fecal coliform bacteria levels and nutrient pollution problems in our tributaries. The City of Jacksonville and its partners are required under two Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) to reduce fecal coliform counts in twenty-five of the most severely impaired tributaries in the Lower Basin of the St. Johns River. The BMAPs include obligations to phase out the failing septic tanks contributing to the impairment of these tributaries. However, the BMAPs do not include all of the septic tanks that are potentially failing throughout Jacksonville. Despite the significant problem posed by failing septic tanks, over 1,000 new systems have been permitted in Duval County in the last 5 years.

8. *What will you do to address this serious ongoing problem of failing septic tanks and to ensure that the City can fulfill its BMAP obligations for the tributaries?*

Failing septic tanks have impacted Jacksonville and our St. Johns River for decades. A great example of this failure of leadership is my own neighborhood. I live in a riverfront neighborhood that is almost entirely served by septic tanks. Our neighborhood is not in JEA's sewer service plan for the next 30 years. The City and the JEA need to aggressively work together to address failing septic tanks and new service in areas that could most impact the river and its tributaries.

9. *Do you think Duval County should allow permits for new septic tanks, or require the use of performance-based treatment systems?*

Other counties have mandated these systems with accommodations for low income, homesteaded property owners in areas where poor water quality has been linked to septic tanks or endangered the aquifer. We should weigh the cost-benefit of replacement of failing septic tanks outside the BMAP areas with performance-based treatment systems. I would want to know how many of these properties are in low income census tracts. Since PBTS are 4 times the cost of a traditional septic system, we also need to be sensitive to the affordable housing crisis in our County.