

**Forever Tybee  
Issues Questionnaire for Candidates  
in the 2017 Tybee Island City Council Election**

**Introduction - Why create an Issues Questionnaire?**

The following issues were identified as most important to life on Tybee by Forever Tybee members in an anonymous survey conducted in May, 2017.

The number one area of concern was Short-term Vacation Rentals and related neighborhood issues. Second most important was Shore Protection, Beach Management and the Environment.

Five other related issues tied for third place. Rather than lump them together, we chose to list each of the five independently (and in random order), giving us a total of seven issues rather than our anticipated three.

This document is designed to:

- Summarize complicated issues that face us
- Educate those who care, but may not have the time to do research
- Facilitate ongoing discussion that leads to solutions
- Ask those who run for office to explain their position on each topic

We have provided a brief background of the subjects, with links to resource material or documents for those who want to learn more.

Raising issues is the first step in finding solutions. Solutions may be generated by citizens, but it requires the will and action of our elected officials to turn good ideas and solutions into reality. Hence, we raise the issues and ask candidates to respond so we know what they have the passion and will to address if they are elected to represent our island neighbors.

Forever Tybee welcomes your thoughts, questions, requests for additional information, and your ideas for solving the challenges we face.

Responses from all candidates will be posted on the Forever Tybee website at [www.forevertybee.org](http://www.forevertybee.org) in the candidate's own words (no edits) and in the order received.

For more information, send email to [forevertybee@gmail.com](mailto:forevertybee@gmail.com) or call 912-786-9781.

## **Issue #1 Short-term Rentals, Parking, Noise, and Disruption to Neighborhoods**

Background: Tybee's Master Plan calls for a diverse, stable, year-round population, preserving traditional neighborhoods, and encouraging transportation safety while developing alternative means of transportation.

The Carrying Capacity Study documents that of 3,366 total housing units in 2010, 1,473 were short-term rentals, a 117% increase from 2000, while resident housing occupancy had declined by 15% and long-term rentals by 10%\*.

The 2010 Tybee Island Census data documented a population decline of 11.9% from 2000 which the City studied and was unable to refute. The 2016 estimated resident population is 3,082 with a peak season day-time population of 30,000+.

The US Census Bureau found that the average household size for residents of Tybee Island is 2.1 people per unit. The Carrying Capacity Stakeholder group agreed to use an estimate of 5 people per unit when approximating short-term rental or vacation overnight population.

Tybee's 2005 Traffic and Parking Study concluded that "[future] visitor demand will be limited to the availability of parking spaces on the island," as opposed to access to the island. As of 2016, there are 2091 public and 234 private parking spaces, excluding on-site housing spaces.

The average number of day trips onto the island, as reported in the Carrying Capacity Study, was 6,726, and the maximum number recorded during the July 4th weekend in 2015 was 14,233. In short, many day-trippers come to Tybee and find no place to park, resulting in them circling the streets and neighborhoods seeking any place to leave their cars. The result is frustration and possible road rage on the part of the visitors, and outrage from residents aggravated by traffic and illegal parking.

\*2000 vs 2010 comparison, the last year of available data.

Ten Principles of Responsible Tourism

<https://urbanland.uli.org/economy-markets-trends/ten-principles-responsible-tourism/>

Traffic and Parking Study (PDF) January 2005

<http://www.cityoftybee.org/documentcenter/view/98>

Tybee Island Carrying Capacity Study (PDF) September 2016

<http://www.cityoftybee.org/documentcenter/view/709>

### **Candidate Questions:**

- 1. What changes would you propose in policy, ordinances, and plans to resolve this over-capacity issue?**

**It is important to recognize that Hwy 80 is a public road and the beach is a public beach. I believe that visitors who come to Tybee for the day have the greatest impact on "over capacity". Parking may limit the number of visitors who stay for the day but it has little impact on how many attempt to come for the day. One option that could have an impact on the number of daily visitors is to raise the parking rates; perhaps adopting a "high season" / "off season" rate structure. The City should also clarify where parking is allowed in**

residential areas. Visitors often assume they can park on any street along the City's right of way. Many residents do not think that is allowed, leading to conflict and confusion.

2. When the Tybee City Council approved the short-term rental ordinance, they committed to revisiting it when the property registrations were completed. Would you be in favor of an update to the ordinance and what specific changes would you propose?

The City should constantly be reviewing and updating all ordinances, as appropriate and the STVR ordinance is no exception. Most of the issues related to short term vacation rentals have to do with noise and parking. The City already has ordinances in place to deal with violators. Those ordinances should be more stringently enforced. The STVR registration requirement was established for several reasons, including providing the ability to gather factual information about the nuisance behavior. Once STVR registrations are complete, I would propose that the City publish the list of registered STVRs to include each property's address, rental agent and contact phone number. This would make it easier for residents to report problems. In addition, I would support some type of penalty for properties with a documented history of violations (actual TYPD citations).

## **Issue #2 Shore Protection, Beach Management, and Our Environment**

Background: Hurricane Matthew demonstrated the protective capacity of our dune system. Where the dunes held, the islands were protected from storm surge. As noted in Tybee's Sea Level Rise Adaptation Plan, a number of developed areas on Tybee Island are vulnerable to increased flooding risk associated with sea level rise as well as erosion from large storm events. (See Issue #3B).

Traditional approaches for stabilizing shorelines and holding back high water events include bulkheads and seawalls but, as noted by Mayor Buelterman, "*One of the major lessons of Hurricane Matthew, and Superstorm Sandy, was the massive amount of money that did not need to be spent in federal post-disaster and flood insurance costs, due to the existence of man-made dunes.*"

The beaches of Tybee Island are currently renourished on a 7-year schedule. Although the sand-sharing and erosion system along Tybee Island is influenced by many variables, sea level rise may result in the need for more frequent and/or higher volumes of sand renourishment. These programs are expensive and require coordination among many agencies.

Since Tybee has one of Georgia's most accessible beaches it is a favored destination for day trips, resulting in huge crowds during summer months. Vacationers in increasing numbers add to the daily beach comers and goers. Binge drinking at one of the "best US beaches where you can drink (legally)" leads to irresponsible and dangerous behaviors. Crowd control, litter, and safety policies and programs continue to be challenges in maintaining our beach. Unclear responsibilities, shifting priorities, and inconsistent enforcement among the Police, Ocean Rescue, Department of Public Works, and other groups frustrate visitors and residents alike.

Beach Management Plan (PDF) September 2005  
<http://www.cityoftybee.org/documentcenter/view/402>

Tybee Island mayor looking for federal funding for beach, dune development May 3, 2017  
<http://www.wtoc.com/story/35337040/tybee-island-mayor-looking-for-federal-funding-for-beach-dune-development>

**Candidate Questions:**

1. **What policies, ordinances, and resources would you advocate for to ensure that Tybee maintains its dune system, is able to adequately renourish its beaches, and creates a healthy, clean, and safe beach environment?**

The reality is that, other than cleaning and keeping the beach safe, the DNR has jurisdiction over the dunes and it must approve any actions related to the “sand”. The City should work with the DNR to restore, maintain and improve our dune system. The City also needs to explore options for becoming much more self-sufficient when it comes to beach renourishment. Local and State funds might continue to be available, but increasing pressures on the Federal budget will, at some point, put those funds at risk. Tybee must develop a funding plan for beach renourishment that is less reliant on federal dollars while working to maximize financial support from Chatham County and the State.

2. **What changes, if any, would you like to see in the roles of City Departments, the Beach Task Force, and others in support of beach management?**

As evidenced by the impact of our two most recent hurricanes (Matthew and Irma) the Beach Task Force should continue to work to improve and maintain our dune system. In addition, the City should continue its efforts to enforce the existing ordinances that pertain to the beach – especially littering and underage drinking. Ocean Rescue and DPW staff should make it a priority to report violations, especially littering, underage drinking and public intoxication, to the police. I would also look at revamping the “ambassador” program so that it is more open to part-time volunteers.

**Issue #3A Planning, Zoning, and Building**

Background: Tybee has a Planning and Zoning Department and a Planning Commission. Their efforts are largely focused on approving site plans and matters related to new construction, reviewing variance requests, and updating ordinances. Planning and zoning decisions are largely decided by City Council, based upon the advice of outside consultants.

The Master Plan, Carrying Capacity Study, Sea Level Rise Report, and other recent documents call for an implementation plan. The Mayor and Council have recognized the need and appointed a Master Plan Implementation Committee. Committee work started in 2017.

What is the Plan Commission and How Does it Work? (PDF)  
<https://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/id/id-235.pdf>

**Candidate Questions:**

**1. What should be roles and relationship by and between the Planning Commission and the Master Plan Implementation Committee.**

The Master Plan Implementation Committee is not empowered to take direct action. Its role is to provide recommendations to Council and City staff on strategies and priorities for implementing the Master Plan. This should include evaluating whether their recommendations can be implemented within existing ordinances and codes. If the Council agrees with a recommendation it should follow the normal process for actions requested by Council.

**2. What should be the role of the Planning and Zoning Department?**

The primary role of the Planning and Zoning Department should be code enforcement. In doing so, the Department should work cooperatively with citizens to accommodate requests when possible and not obstruct, if possible.

**Issue #3B Climate Change and Sea Level Rise**

Background: In 2016, Tybee council adopted the 2013 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Plan. Action steps include:

- 1) retrofitting a section of its stormwater drainage system with larger capacity pipes and tidal valve gates;
- 2) elevating critical City infrastructure such as well pumps;
- 3) policies to deal with Repetitive Loss Properties, i.e. those with multiple FEMA claims;
- 4) elevating those portions of Hwy. 80 that flood thus cutting off the island;
- 5) more frequent beach renourishment and ensuring projects are properly scaled, and;
- 6) stabilizing the shoreline to mitigate flooding risk. Some efforts have improved city infrastructure, and recently, GDOT determined that approximately 2.8 miles of U.S. 80 would need to be raised at least to the approximate elevation on the island (7.5 feet above mean sea level), which would be an increase of 12 to 18 inches in the lowest spots along the existing pavement.

The Master Plan calls for adapting to climate change.

Response to Sea Level Rise - Executive Summary of June, 2013 (PDF)  
<http://www.cityoftybee.org/documentcenter/view/398>

**Candidate Question:**

**1. What actions would you promote to move to full implementation of the Sea Level Rise Plan and adapting to climate change?**

Sea level rise and global climate change are global issues. Federal and State governments have primary responsibility for developing and implementing strategies to combat these issues. The City should focus its efforts and resources on those things that it has direct responsibility for and that it is empowered to address. Primarily, the City should focus on protecting its own infrastructure, including its buildings, roads, water/sewer/storm drainage systems, and the island's dune system. It should also be a priority for the City to develop guidelines for areas with concentrations of "repetitive loss" properties, while considering that many of those properties are historic. The City should also continue to work on intergovernmental partnerships at the

County, State and Federal levels for areas that are outside of the City's direct control.

2. How quickly do you think the City of Tybee should work to adapt to climate change?

Climate change issues should be prioritized along with all the other competing demands, remembering that the City's resources (personnel, monies, etc.) are not unlimited.

### **Issue #3C Drinking Water, Water Treatment, and the Well**

Background: Water continues to be an issue for Tybee. Subject to a 25% reduction in our draw from the Floridan aquifer, with the full reduction to be achieved by 2025, the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) contracted for the drilling of a Cretaceous well to allow for a second source of potable water. Unfortunately, the well casing collapsed during drilling, the project stopped and is now in litigation.

It is possible that, due to this failure, Tybee will not have its permit reduced, but will receive a new permit at the current level. If true, that will be good news, temporarily.

However, as documented in the Carrying Capacity Study, Tybee is exceeding its current draws during peak visitor days. The City is currently permitted to withdraw an annual average of 0.916 million gallons per day (MGD), with a monthly average limit of 1.6 MGD to allow for the peak usage associated with the summer tourism season. During summer months in four out of the last five years (2010-2014), the maximum daily withdrawal exceeded 1.6 MGD.

Since being designated a *Water First Community* in 2005, Tybee has fixed leaks in our pipes, installed new water lines, purchased new meters that allow online monitoring of water usage and has a dedicated staff person to alert property owners of leaks and help them assess the location. These are first steps in the wise management and protection of our water resources. There is much more to do. Review the seven major components here:

[http://www.dca.state.ga.us/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/Water%20First/WaterFirst\\_brochure\\_7-6-2016.pdf](http://www.dca.state.ga.us/development/PlanningQualityGrowth/Water%20First/WaterFirst_brochure_7-6-2016.pdf)

#### **Candidate Questions:**

1. What actions would you propose to ensure that Tybee has a safe and adequate supply of potable water?

Under the State's existing municipal water usage regulations, the issue is not whether Tybee will have a safe and adequate supply of potable water. The issue is whether Tybee will be faced with significant fines/fees for exceeding its allotment. The most effective way to control water usage is with aggressive pricing, establishing a reasonable household and business allocation and implementing increasingly higher pricing for those exceeding their allotment. In addition to discouraging excess water consumption, the City should encourage and reward good water management practices, including further exploration of the use of "shallow wells" for water needs that do not require that water be potable.



2. What steps can be taken to ensure that Tybee remains compliant with current or future water withdrawal permits during the peak tourist season? Because the Island is a vacation destination for a large number of people, the population is variable, especially during the peak tourist season. Reviewing and revising the acceptable withdrawal limits to better account for our peak season may be the best viable option.

### Issue #3D Sustainable Development, Tourism, and Growth

Background: The Carrying Capacity Study calls for a diverse year-round population, a sustainable tourism economy, and protecting our environment, historical and cultural resources. Communities have achieved these goals through implementation of a Growth Management Plan.

*“Growth management means specific regulatory policies aimed at influencing how growth occurs, mainly within a locality. These affect density, availability of land, mixtures of uses, and timing of development. Growth management seeks to accommodate growth rationally, not to prevent or limit it. That is growth control.” \**

Based on an analysis of the existing zoning standards for the R-2 District and projecting maximum use from one area within, the Carrying Capacity Study estimated that a build-out would increase overnight population from 14,468 to 19,327, resulting in a dramatic impact on peak demand issues related to water supply, wastewater discharge, and transportation. This is well beyond the peak capacity of both the current water supply and wastewater discharge systems, and would clearly increase congestion along US 80 and the internal road network.

While residents and business owners agree that Tybee needs more affordable housing, market forces have driven out Tybee’s workforce, young families, and retirees of limited means. The availability of long-term rentals/leases decreased by 10% from 2000 to 2010. Housing prices continue to rise and the price of long-term rentals, when available, increase each year.

The Carrying Capacity study recommends: 1) identifying ways to better manage future growth to limit stresses on infrastructure and environmental impacts from future development, and; 2) considering amending the R-2 district to a) increase the minimum lot size for duplexes and b) increase the minimum lot size necessary for subdivisions.

\* Growth Management, Smart Growth, And Affordable Housing  
<https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/growth-management-smart-growth-and-affordable-housing/>

Growth Management - Monroe County, FL - Official Website  
<http://www.monroecounty-fl.gov/QuickLinks.aspx?CID=9>

Tybee Island Master Plan 2016  
<http://www.cityoftybee.org/345/master-plan>

Tybee Island Carrying Capacity Study (PDF) September 2016  
<http://www.cityoftybee.org/documentcenter/view/709>

**Candidate Question:**

1. Do you support the development of a Growth Management Plan for Tybee?  
If not, what is your plan for better managing future growth?

The question assumes that Tybee has significant growth left to manage. Given the relatively small number of buildable lots that remain undeveloped (approx. 72 are currently available for sale, of which 23 are in Battery Row), I am not convinced that another “plan” is needed. Currently there are zoning ordinances, building guidelines, etc. in place to manage both new development and the re-development of existing properties. These ordinances and guidelines can be updated as future needs dictate but we must recognize and acknowledge that Tybee is a community comprised of competing and sometimes conflicting interests (private property rights, economic growth, environmental resource constraints, etc) and that Tybee is a community that is financially dependent on a healthy and robust tourism industry.

2. If yes, what are your top three (3) priorities to address? See above.

**Issue #3E     Transportation, Roads, Highway 80, Walking, and Bicycling**

Background: The Tybee Road (HWY80) persists as a burning issue for Tybee residents. Frequent head-on collisions on the bridges with 3-4 hour traffic delays frighten and infuriate full time residents. Recent upgrades by Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) appear to have little effect on accidents and congestion. More frequent flooding during spring tides, resulting in road closure, has exacerbated the problem.

According to Tybee’s Sea Level Rise Report, a scenario of low sea-level rise would be expected to result in almost 37 annual hours of flooding on US 80 by 2060, or approximately 6.7 times more hours of closure per year as compared to 2009–2012.

In 2011, the Chatham Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) studied the deficiencies of the road and concluded that while capacity was generally sufficient, it is exceeded during the tourist season. The study resulted in plans for new bridges with two (2) traffic lanes plus bicycle lanes and a center barrier. There are no plans to widen the road to four (4) lanes, but GDOT is to make improvements. McQueen’s Trail has been upgraded and the Marsh Hen Trail is under construction. The new bike lanes will allow for safer access across the bridges.

It is of note that Tybee citizens who participated in the MPC study preferred the Twin Bridge Plan (two bridges across both Lazaretto Creek and Bull River to allow for the diversion of traffic when there is an accident.) Although right-aways are available, the plan was deemed as too expensive.

GDOT is now funding the implementation project (US 80 Bridges and Road Improvements, GDOT’s Scoping and Preliminary Engineering Phase was expected to start by July 2017. This phase is expected to take 3 years with project completion unknown.



**Candidate Question:**

1. **Given the GDOT realities, during your term in office what specific actions would you propose to reduce congestion and make Tybee Road safer?**

First, I would challenge the current GDOT “realities”. While the City has been aggressive in dealing with the GDOT, it needs to be even more aggressive. I would immediately propose that the City develop and “market” a petition aimed at residents, property owners, business owners and visitors to keep up the push for four lane bridges and a four lane Tybee Road. If you believe the GDOT has Tybee’s best interests in mind, you need only look at the recent re-striping near Ft. Pulaski. Creating the dedicated turn lane for the Fort was a good thing, but the short (.3 miles) passing lane just before the Fort makes the drive to Tybee more dangerous than it was before whenever there is high traffic volume. The reality is that GDOT is an institution that reacts to well-targeted political pressure. The City should consider engaging a lobbyist to promote our highway infrastructure needs over those of competing jurisdictions. We should not accept second-class citizenship status from our state government or its agencies. If we cannot get a four lane road from Bull River to Lazaretto Creek (including both bridges), then the following items **MUST** be included in the GDOT plan:

- Raising the road bed so that seasonal flooding is not an issue
- Parking for the western McQueens Island trailhead should be eliminated
- A turn lane into Ft. Pulaski should be established for westbound traffic (leaving Tybee).

2. **What actions could business, residents, and tourists be asked to take to ensure safety?**

There are many other safety issues that do not involve Hwy 80. Here are some:

- Change the flashing crosswalk lights from amber to red so that they are more visible and actually indicate STOP.
- Modify the bike path through Memorial Park so that it can be used for golf carts and explore ways to get them off of Jones Ave.
- Publish monthly police statistics (reported crimes, arrests made, etc.) on the City’s web site. Better to share facts than fight rumors that will circulate on social media.
- Do away with some parking spaces on Butler Ave near cross streets. Some parking spaces extend all the way to the intersection, making it dangerous for residents and visitors to pull out due to the lack of a clear line of sight.