

2010 CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Prepared by the Virginia Beach Roundtable

CANDIDATE: _____ John Uhrin _____

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- 1) What do you believe to be the top three most pressing concerns to the business community in Virginia Beach?
- Transportation is by far the most pressing, with impacts to the ports, tourism, business development and mobility
 - Economy – Shrinking revenues to companies and government have impact ability to invest and sustain growth in the short term. Access to capital an ongoing problem.
 - Energy – Future supplies of fossil fuels and development of alternative sources are a huge impact and opportunity on business.

- 2) For incumbents, do you think the votes you have taken during your service on Council have addressed or contributed to those concerns? Please give examples.

- Purchasing the Norfolk Southern Right of Way
- Supported the budget while protecting core services as much as could be done
- Supported the parking proposal at 31st street
- Creating the MEDAC Committee
- Supported Light Rail initiative as well as master planning for the areas of the City that touch this corridor
- Supports city's partnerships in green initiatives including serving on the Mayor's Alternative Energy Task Force

- 3) Do you support or oppose the use of public-private partnerships such as those created to develop Town Center, the Sandbridge Beach restoration, the 31st Street Hotel and as have been suggested for future projects in strategic growth areas? If yes, what public financing options do you feel appropriate for such projects? Financing tools might include: Tax Increment Financing, Special Service Districts, Enterprise Zones, Innovation Zones (technology) and BID's.?

Support public private partnerships and I support TIFs and ways to capture tax revenue to fund expansions. Each individual proposal needs to be looked at to see what, if any tools are appropriate for the development.

- 4) What do you believe should be the City's transportation priorities for the near term and assuming the General Assembly's continued unwillingness to provide sufficient funding resources for these projects, how do you suggest the City fund critical transportation needs?

The fact is that without the State, critical transportation needs can not be met. We can develop mass transit and alternatives to highways and roads, but we can not move forward without the Commonwealth stepping forward. However, absent participation from the State, we need to

continue to look at projects that we can fund and build by combining our “Local Match” money into single projects that can move forward and give us the most “Bang for the Buck”.

- 5) Should Virginia Beach continue to participate in the regional economic development alliance to increase our ability to reach out to national and international companies?

Yes

- 6) How important is regional cooperation to the future of Virginia Beach and do you support participation in such regional initiatives as workforce development (Opportunity, Inc.), military infrastructure (HR Military and Federal Facilities Alliance), regional policy development (Hampton Roads Partnership), and regional planning (Hampton Roads Planning District Commission/MPO)?

It's crucial. A regional voice is much louder than a local voice, and whether we approach Richmond or Washington, we need our partner cities to join with us in lobbying them. As the largest city, Virginia Beach must play a unifying regional role. The region must continue on the path of prioritizing projects and not just give Richmond and Washington a long list without direction.

- 7) What are the most important steps the City can take to enhance its relationship and communication with the military and ensure retention of military commands in Hampton Roads?

We need to keep our commitments against encroaching development, work for positive solutions when issues arise, and make sure our communication loop with the military is strong and open at all times. The MOU process we have established in the last few years is a great example of how to make this relationship work.

- 8) Is the extension of the light rail system from the planned terminus at Newtown Road east to the Beach District a priority and how should it be financed?

It is a priority and the current study will provide a great deal of data in determining how viable an option is can be. I supported and advocated the purpose of the right of way. Financing should include state and federal involvement , and should the study demonstrate light rail as a viable option, we should pursue it.

- 9) Do you believe the city's budget process ought to budget expenses to meet revenue goals or adjust revenues to meet budget and spending priorities?

The answer is yes to both. Our core responsibilities must be funded through revenues, as we do with education, from the very start of the budget building process. From there, it becomes a value decision for funding of less crucial priorities that are based on revenue remaining.

- 10) Should the General Assembly empower localities to: provide defined contribution plans in lieu of defined benefit plans, give flexibility to modify retirement service and age qualifications, and to require employee participation in benefit packages as may be deemed appropriate by the local governing body? Why or why not?

I always favor greater flexibility in decision making, and while I believe that existing employees stay true to what they have been promised, new plans and benefit structures for new employees can and must be explored to the extent that the state will allow.

- 11) Do you feel there is waste in the city budget? If so, please site specific areas where you would reduce funding.

Any government can make progress by eliminating duplication in services by consolidating those who provide it. Virginia Beach does a good job in this regard, and our City Auditor reports to Council. Outside of core services like public safety and education, we should consolidate through attrition and make sure the number of FTEs is an appropriate number for the department mission.

- 12) Do you concur with the recommendation of the City's Blue Ribbon Tax, Fee and Spending Task Force that a "City Budget Study Commission" should be established to assist in the development of the annual budget? If yes, what should be its composition and mission?

Yes, so long as it is citizen-friendly and in an advisory role, I think more input into the budget process makes for a smoother process and great public support in the end.

- 13) Do you believe business is fairly taxed in the City? If not, what specifically would you change?

I believe we are a pro-business city, and while no one is a proponent of taxes, local government relies on very few revenue streams, and changing those could severely impact its ability to function. Without adequate revenues to replace the oft-mentioned BPOL tax, it would be difficult building support for it and increase reliance on real estate tax revenue.

14) What is your opinion of the City Manager and the job he is doing?

I think we have one of the very best city managers in the country, and many cities, including many in Hampton Roads, would take him in a minute if they could.

15) Do you support City Council's outright ban on all LED signs for future consideration or use by private business, schools, churches, non-profits and others?

I voted against the ban, because I thought it was counterproductive to the efforts we are making in strategic growth areas to encourage business and economic development. I think that reasonable controls are necessary and could be crafted in an ordinance that would not be overly burdensome.