

Council Candidate Chris Bezaire

Thank you for allowing me to answer some of your questions in lieu of a debate. Please see my responses below.

- 1. Cape May is a combination of a vibrant tourist destination, within a town of declining demographics. The resident population is aging, families are finding it difficult to secure affordable housing and the identity of our small town is losing its traditional quality of life.**

What would like to see done to reverse this trend?

In order to reverse the trend of the declining number of families living here I think alternate ideas need to be looked at for housing and housing affordability. The Washington Street Mall is an area that comes to mind. There is ample space above a lot of the shops and restaurants that could be used for apartments and housing but is used currently for storage or just sits empty. The main reason for this is due to requirements for parking spaces for these units if a building is renovated for rentals. I believe the city could look into making exceptions for these properties based on criteria that would allow the rentals to be more affordable. By capping rents at a certain price point to guarantee affordability, the city could waive the parking requirement. Or the city could waive the requirement if these units were used for city employees and their families. That would allow the people to be able to afford to live in the City they are working for.

- 2. Our Property Tax has risen 44% in 10 years. 10 years ago, our property tax was 47% of all city revenue. This year it is 55% of that city revenue.**

What would like to see done to reverse this trend?

The way to reverse this trend could be accomplished by focusing on three areas:

- a. A new reinforced effort to secure grants for city projects on the state and national level. We simply are not applying for and receiving as many grants as we used to. This helps to offset the taxpayers cost on these projects keeping property taxes lower.*
- b. Finish these projects on time. When projects go past completion date they cost the taxpayers money. Lafayette Street park and Soldiers and Sailors park are just 2 examples of this. These projects were scheduled to cost the taxpayers \$0. Now they will cost the taxpayers \$4 Million due to extended time needed to complete.*
- c. Develop a realistic budget. Our current budget was approved this year, in the middle of the COVID crises, with a 7% projected revenue increase over 2019. We are now \$5.5 Million short in budgeted revenues. This a clear case of planning to fail due to a lack of failing to plan accordingly.*

- 3. City Council and our Administration have taken a wide variety of unique and unusual actions to accommodate our businesses as they struggle to survive what we all hope will be a short-term disaster. We view these measures as temporary expedients to address a crisis situation.**

Do you agree? How should the city return to our pre-Covid 19 Quality of Life.

I believe some of these measures are temporary while we should look at some of them as permanent. For example, the open container policy should continue to be utilized as a way to help restaurants and bars survive but only until they are back at the 100% occupancy level at which point it should end.

However, I believe the outdoor dining is a perfect example of a temporary solution that has proven to be a welcome feature to the town and businesses and that should be something that is permanently allowed with some possible guidelines and/or restrictions.

- 4. Despite the urgings of TPA, several months ago our City Council adopted the stand-pat 2020 Budget. Revenue projections and planned spending were not adjusted to anticipate the fiscal and operational damage from the Covid Lockdown that we all knew was about to arrive. That damage is here, and it is real. Revenues are running significant deficits, Municipal Services are being altered, and planned improvements are being delayed.**

What is your feeling on finding new revenue sources and/or reducing spending to address this issue?

I feel I already pointed out this issue in question 2 above. We are going to have to leave no stone unturned in addressing the shortfall. Some options could be selling or leasing out underutilized city properties or selling off the small parcels identified in a presentation previously given to council. All department expenditures should be carefully re-evaluated and prioritized in the immediate short-term to help curb spending

- 5. The Sewell Tract is 100+ acres of environmentally sensitive wetland that will have a significant fiscal impact on taxpayers.**

Two separate issues have emerged:

- 1. the preservation of this critical natural barrier**
- 2. the resolution of a 30 year litigation between the owners of the property, the State and Federal government and a private group of citizens who have joined the litigation.**

What is your position on each of these issues?

The answer to the first part of this question is simple, that tract must be preserved to the fullest extent we can.

The second part is between the owners, the state, and any private parties that wish to pursue litigation.

It is never in a municipalities best interest to get involved in private litigation. The city should, however, participate any way they can to help facilitate a resolution when the time comes.

I thank you again for allowing me to answer your questions on these issues and look forward to working with you once elected.