

Neighborhood Council of St Augustine  
City Commission Candidate Forum  
**NEWSLETTER**

# **VOTE**

**for your City Commissioners  
on November 3, 2020**

**7am - 7 pm**

Due to Covid-19, The Neighborhood Council of St. Augustine will NOT be holding a **City Commission Candidate Forum** this year. However, we still feel it is important that residents be informed of where the candidates stand on issues, so this year we are sending out this **ELECTION e-NEWSLETTER**. It features information on the candidates and their answers to questions. We want to thank the residents that submitted questions. The committee had to narrow them down to only three. Since St. Augustine has a City Manager style government, we felt that some issues might be handled better in the future by City Staff in Neighborhood Council or Association meetings. After Covid, we will be in a position to do more public meetings.

**City Commission Seat 1**

Roxanne Horvath vs Wade Ross

**City Commission Seat 2**

Leanna Freeman vs Barbara Blonder

Tracy Upchurch is automatically Mayor (Seat 3) since he was unopposed.

## **EARLY VOTING**

Registered voters may vote at any of the  
Early Voting Sites within St. Johns County.

Early Voting Dates are October 19 through 31

Early Voting Hours are 8 AM - 6 PM Daily including Sunday

When voting in person you are required to provide current and valid Photo and Signature ID.

**Further info at [www.votesjc.com](http://www.votesjc.com)**

## City Commission Seat 1



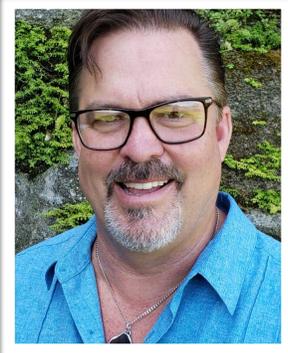
**Roxanne Horvath** - Incumbent

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**Wade Ross** - Challenger

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## City Commission Seat 2



**Leanna Freeman** - Incumbent

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**Barbara Blonder** - Challenger

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## QUESTION 1

Now that the Confederate war memorial has been removed from the Plaza, how would you vote on the removal of other historic memorials, monuments or structures in St. Augustine? Explain why or why not.

## ANSWERS for Seat 1

### **Roxanne Horvath- Incumbent :**

Being involved in Historic Preservation efforts for over 30 years within our City, I would not vote in the future to remove any historic memorials, monuments or structures in St. Augustine. History is our life blood, it is what makes our small city unique in our country and throughout the world. I was saddened by the removal of the confederate memorial. I recognize these are difficult times with little area for compromise, but I felt there was an opportunity for us to be inclusive. In 2020 we could have added the union soldier's names, from St. Augustine to the existing monument, making it a Civil War Memorial. Thereby keeping our 130 years of history in our downtown museum, the Plaza.

There are many equal justice projects that could have utilized the funds required for the moving of the memorial.

### **Wade Ross - Challenger :**

If the issue of removing any other historic memorials, monuments, or structures is brought before the City Commission again, I will vote against it. St. Augustine is a historic city that has a written timeline that spans over 455 years and moves through many different periods of our history, and we need to protect all of our heritage and historical sites. I will also attempt to persuade my fellow commissioners to do the same. Finally, during any type of public comment, I will make sure that the record reflects the constituents of St. Augustine, not the detractors from other counties and other states.

## QUESTION 1

Now that the Confederate war memorial has been removed from the Plaza, how would you vote on the removal of other historic memorials, monuments or structures in St. Augustine? Explain why or why not.

## ANSWERS for Seat 2

### Leanna Freeman - Incumbent :

At this time, I see no other monuments that warrant removal. The decision to relocate the Confederate war memorial from public to private property was given enormous consideration.

#### TIMELINE:

1865 - The Civil War Ended

1865 - Confederate memorials/monuments erected with construction spikes coinciding with civil rights events.

1866 - Founding of KKK.

1870 - Black men granted voting rights.

1871 - Memorial constructed on private property.

1865-1877 - Reconstruction (attempts to redress inequities of slavery).

July 1879 - Relocation request from private property to plaza granted.

1879 - Memorial reconstructed on public property and increased in size.

Aug. 1879 - Petition requesting a Union memorial in plaza - Denied.

2019 - Contextualization.

2020 - State and UF relocate Loring Monument to private property. City relocates the memorial.

I spoke with numerous residents who lived here during the Civil Rights Movement and attended marches to the Plaza, where they sought equality. I personally concluded that today, and particularly to people of color, the structure is a symbol of inequality. While others may not share this view, I voted based on what I believed would be in the long-term best interest of our community. Additionally, ongoing disagreements created an unsustainable threat to the structure, of public discord and caused extreme financial and physical demands on law enforcement.

### Barbara Blonder - Challenger :

That memorial was not originally located in the City's public Plaza and its relocation to this public, highly-visible taxpayer-financed space has been controversial for many years. Conversely, other historic structures in St. Augustine have not been the objects of such intense controversy. They represent a wide range of recognition and interpretation of historical events, ranging from Don Pedro Mendendez de Aviles in front of City Hall, Don Juan Ponce de Leon at the Plaza's Bayfront, Queen Isabella at the St. George/ Hypolita St. intersection, the Conquistadores statues at the City entrance on N. Ponce de Leon Drive and several others. One might imagine that any one of these historical figures could draw attention to interpretations of other contentious issues such as colonialism and its impacts on indigenous cultures.

Again, it is important to note that the level of controversy surrounding these other historic structures has been minimal – nowhere near the level of divisiveness that the Confederate memorial attracted in the most public of the city's public properties. I would consider any emerging proposal(s) for removal of any one of these other historic structures on an individual basis and in context. A fair and carefully reasoned deliberation simply does not lend itself to a one-size fits all decision.

## QUESTION 2

Please provide thoughts on how to foster a better working relationship with the county so that responses for emergencies, creeping growth, and density can be addressed to keep livability for our residents intact.

## ANSWERS for Seat 1

### **Roxanne Horvath - Incumbent :**

Over the last, almost eight years, I have worked with the Northeast Florida Regional Council on behalf of St. Johns County and St. Augustine. Two of our county commissioners also serve on that board. I believe good work comes from developing good relationships and friendships that allow us to speak freely on important issues concerning both of our boards. NEFRC has held a mock emergency drill with both of our agencies to address a fictitious chemical spill from a train derailment. We are trained to work together on this and other shocks to the system such as hurricanes.

A thousand people move to Florida a day, St. Johns County has the top rated school system in the state, making it an attractive destination for future residents. I believe keeping density along and adjacent to our corridors makes sense. This will allow for a mass transit system and other means of transportation to develop. We need to limit the sprawl and take over of our agricultural lands. These lands replenishing our aquifer, and water will become an even more important issue in the future. We need to work together in Smart Growth Planning. I attended a seminar on this issue along with one of our County Commissioners. We as "The Oldest City" will always be the draw for residents and tourists alike. We are working to manage our livability with future plans of additional parking facilities and tram services to aid in keeping the cars out of the city.

### **Wade Ross - Challenger :**

If the City of St. Augustine is going to be have a positive relationship with St. Johns County with regards to emergency responses, growth, and density, a joint planning agreement should be established. Representatives from both governments should sit on a committee that will expedite consideration of planning issues which affect both entities. It will be the role of this COSA/SJC committee to develop consensus between the City and County concerning planning issues for which coordinated decisions must be made to achieve the goals in which are established.

## QUESTION 2

Please provide thoughts on how to foster a better working relationship with the county so that responses for emergencies, creeping growth, and density can be addressed to keep livability for our residents intact.

## ANSWERS for Seat 2

### **Leanna Freeman - Incumbent :**

I maintain professional relationships with elected officials at all levels including the County Commission. Although we have taken different positions over the years, we have been able to work through challenges including hurricanes and the effort to bring sewage service to West Augustine. When our positions are divided the City needs effective leaders to find resolutions. For example, when the County refused to reopen the Galimore Center (including the pool), my efforts including personal negotiations, proved valuable to negotiate an over 400k payout used to rebuild the Center with an improved wellness center for residents.

My over 20 years as an attorney has given me valuable training to be able to make successful presentations to the Governor (e.g. Fish Island purchase, Legislation Committees (e.g. short-term rentals) and even in Washington DC where I have addressed multiple funding and flooding issues with both Senators and members of Congress. I believe that my experienced representation of the City is an asset. I will continue to work with all our elected leaders as I see it as our duty to work together and find solutions.

### **Barbara Blonder - Challenger :**

The City of St. Augustine may exist as its own entity, but it cannot thrive without working collaboratively with St. Johns County and the State. As a scientist and educator, I not only value but consistently practice the importance of working cooperatively to solve problems – that’s how the work of science gets done. We need to take the County’s LAMP plan off the shelf, dust it off, and get to work on implementing it. The City of St. Augustine is the economic engine of this County and we can work together better to synergistically address our problems of managing unbridled growth, providing affordable housing, addressing social and environmental justice, and reducing traffic congestion. Our infrastructure, County-wide and within the City is not meeting the challenges of our rates of growth nor the rate of sea level rise, and we need to work together to become a sustainable community. This happens through the election process and through improving relationships between elected officials and staff at both levels of government to combine and leverage our limited resources together – to address these challenges in a significantly more effective way. Together, we can build a better future for the City of St. Augustine.

## QUESTION 3

**As Incumbent**, what are your greatest achievements since being elected? Knowing what you know now, are there any issues you would have voted on differently ?

**As Challenger**, what are specific examples of how you would have voted or handled issues differently or the same as the incumbent?

## ANSWERS for Seat 1

### **Roxanne Horvath - Incumbent :**

I would consider the Vision 2014 and Beyond effort that I chaired an achievement. It was a community-based process that balanced the needs of all sectors of city life and launched a strategic approach to integrate the city's budget, capital improvements, and financing plans. The vision is now used to direct all the city's initiatives.

My involvement in the efforts on resiliency are on-going. We are doing major work here in the City, I am also involved with resiliency work at NEFRC, the Florida Regional Councils Association and as co-chair with Resiliency Florida.

I can not think of a decision that I have made during my tenure that I would reverse, but I will mention a difficult decision that was very divisive in the community.

My decision to support the Dow property development, now known as The Collector Luxury Inn and Garden was almost as controversial as the Confederate war memorial move. I have long been an advocate of private enterprise efforts in historic preservation, recognizing government cannot achieve success alone. This project was an investment of millions of dollars by a private owner, successfully preserving nine historic buildings and creating an outstanding garden which links the property. These buildings have added to our tax rolls and to our authenticity.

### **Wade Ross - Challenger :**

As a challenger for Seat 1 on the City Commission, I would have voted against the Coquina Park boondoggle. It appeared from the very beginning that this was a scheme to put up a park under the guise of flood mitigation. After the winds that we had last week, it is painfully clear that it did nothing for the residents of Davis Shores.

The City Commissioners have been made aware of the issue of the homeless using children's playgrounds as places to camp and as toilets. These parks have not been pressure washed and sanitized. Safety and sanitation is at the top of my priority list.

The camping problem could be solved by designating a city or county space for a camp with bathrooms and running water. We also need more true services for the homeless and the mentally ill living on our streets.

Also, I will be more responsive to the citizens during Commission meetings. It is not fair for the citizens to have 3 minutes of time to make a case in front of the Commission with no affirmation or response to the concerns that they want addressed. On the other hand, if a speaker speaks and becomes abusive and/or makes threats to the safety of our citizens, I will address that person and their actions, as well.

### QUESTION 3

**As Incumbent**, what are your greatest achievements since being elected? Knowing what you know now, are there any issues you would have voted on differently ?

**As Challenger**, what are specific examples of how you would have voted or handled issues differently or the same as the incumbent?

### ANSWERS for Seat 2

#### **Leanna Freeman - Incumbent :**

I am proud of my ability to lead on complex legal matters and resiliency projects. My experience on PZB and legal training have given me the expertise and personal strength to challenge institutional and commercial encroachment into neighborhoods including my multiple votes against developers, FSDB and Flagler College, which is anticipated to again expand its footprint in the City. I have also fought against 7-11's development plans as well as eminent domain legislation.

The acquisition of Fish Island and the conservation of Robert B. Hayling Park (formerly Riberia Point), Coquina Park (in Davis Shores), and the "Lighthouse Treed Lots" are also career highlights. The acquisition of Fish Island was somewhat of a miracle after my 12 years of consistent anti-development votes and personal actions to save the land from development. I believe this conservation project is one of the City's greatest accomplishments and one for which I am particularly proud to be associated.

We currently have over \$28 million in projects in the works which include a multiple flood mitigation efforts.

With each decision I have done my homework, listened to all views and all my votes reflect what I believe to be in the best interests of the community.

#### **Barbara Blonder - Challenger :**

The recent Nor'easter served to remind us that sea level rise and flooding have not gone into quarantine - flooding will become commonplace within 10 years as we stay the course. I will stop letting boondoggles, band-aids and giveaways stand in for the hard choices we should have made years ago. The City's Coastal Vulnerability Assessment and Strategic Adaptation Plans seem to have had a speed limit imposed that is far too low to meet the rate of sea level rise and flooding that we are already experiencing. I question why we have taken slow baby steps and chosen misdirection. I will raise the "speed limit" of that Plan to immediately and significantly re-focus the City's full attention on its urgent implementation.

Secondly, unanimous Commission votes to consistently increase zoning density of development proposals, including multi-family housing projects, increase burdens on our City's residents, who are facing a perfect storm of high taxes, traffic congestion, increased risks of flooding of homes and businesses and increasingly unaffordable housing. Our roads, freshwater resources, wastewater treatment and stormwater controls are overburdened, and our quality of life is decreasing as a result of this continued development with no concurrency. I will vote against such higher density zoning changes and restore concurrency so that developers pay their way for their impacts on residents.