

John Moss for Virginia Beach Mayor the Taxpayers Choice

1. If elected, during your term you will have to make a decision regarding how the Lynnhaven River will be dredged. As part of this project, do you support the use of the Lynnhaven Boat Ramp and Beach Facility as a PERMANENT INDUSTRIAL DREDGE TRANSFER STATION for dredging needs outside the immediate area of the Lynnhaven Inlet or do you support using several transfer stations located in the areas receiving the most benefit from each dredging project? Please explain?

No. The process of determining how the dredging issue for the eastern and western branches is to be addressed over the long run must be transparent and provide all stakeholders with meaningful opportunity to participate. The cost of meeting the needs and mitigating the effects to find a win-win could be so significant as to slow the pace of progress in light of current financial conditions. I offer this qualifier post debate, because of the major change in the state and city's shortfall.

2. One of the last remaining parcels of open space in the most densely populated section of Virginia Beach is a 69 acre property along Shore Drive known as Pleasure House Point (Indigo Dunes), what future for this property would you support and why?
 1. The Sandler's current "Indigo Dunes" project of 1,069 homes.
 2. Acquisition of the property for open space as recommended in the City's Outdoors Plan.
 3. Some other alternative.

I favor purchase in whole and as a backup in part the property for recreational purposes. The current financial situation may create a more favorable valuation for acquisition purposes. I am willing to push forward to re-order the priorities in the CIP where there is pay as you go funding and partnerships with nonprofits to raise the capital. As Mark Twain said, "God is not making anymore land."

3. Bayfront beaches both east and west of the Lynnhaven Inlet are in desperate need of sand replenishment. Sand from upcoming 2009/2010 Lynnhaven Inlet dredging can be used for this purpose. Will you support the necessary funding, litigation and policy changes required to make this replenishment happen?

As I said at the forum, the public consensus on sand replenishment has been established and I support the practice that has been established. Likewise, I support rescinding the special tax district in Sandbridge by which they are assessed the cost of the city's share for their sand replenishment. If the oceanfront and the bay front receive sand replenishment at public expense than Sandbridge's beach should be replenishment at general taxpayer expense as well. It is not right to have two different policies.

4. It is well documented that Shore Drive is one of the deadliest corridors in Virginia. Ninety lives have been lost over the past 30 years. In an effort to stop these unnecessary tragedies, the SDCC, BAC and City created a safety task force. Task force recommendations are being implemented as part of 4 Shore Drive improvement projects. 2 of these projects are fully funded. If elected, would you support fully funding the remaining 2 projects so they are completed in less than 4 years?

Money is going to be tight for more than a few years. My read is that the community would rather have the Indigo Dunes property acquired than the Shore Drive road improvement if given the choice. The city is composed of seven districts and like a family; we have to make investments in each district each year. Therefore, without a major change to the good in the city's revenue growth without raising taxes, I cannot assure you that the remaining two projects will be completed in the next four years.

5. The Bayfront area is the most densely (residents/acre) populated in the city. Much of this uncontrolled growth is a direct result of rezoning to increase densities. If elected, will you support or oppose rezoning requests in the Shore Drive area that allow densities greater than those currently allowed? Examples (R-10 to A-24, B-2 to B-4 Multi-family)

When I served on city council before (1986-1990 and 1992 to 1995), I had a reputation for not increasing development densities. Therefore, I can say without qualification that I will not support increasing densities greater than those currently allowed by existing property rights.

6. Given the facts that Shore Drive is one of 3 major East-West corridors and that the Hampton Roads Metropolitan Planning Organization has a long range transportation plan showing the need for a 6 lane Shore Drive from North Hampton to Great Neck Road, would you support and help implement any community effort to eliminate this possibility and keep Shore Drive 4 lanes?

If City Council has not already acted and if you along with your fellow voters grant the honor of serving you as your next Mayor, I will personally put forth the resolution requesting that the MPO's long-range transportation plan remove the requirement to make Shore Drive 6 lanes between North Hampton and Great Neck Road. I personally appear before the MPO, Vice Mayor Jones, is our MPO member, to secure their vote to bring the matter to closure.

7. Lynnhaven River NOW has been making heroic advances in cleaning up the Lynnhaven River. If elected, what would you do to keep this effort going?

Runoff from impervious service is the biggest contributor of pollutants to the Lynnhaven River. I would look at tax abatements to homeowners and businesses that reduce their existing impervious footprint. Regulations will help with new development; however, to make a real dent we must adopt financial incentives to undo where possible paved surfaces. For example, when parking lots are being repaved financial incentives to build parking lots that drain to the soil, I do not know the exact structure of those incentives, but I acknowledge we must think beyond regulations alone to get to our goal.

8. Another major problem experienced by the community is the City's lack of public involvement and public participation on all City and Private projects. The City seems to only do the bare minimum required by law regarding notices, meetings and public discussion. Do you feel public involvement and participation need to be improved and if so, what would you do to make this happen?

There is great room for improvement. There is a difference between a hearing at City Council and City Council listening. Sixty percent of the voters said they wanted a park not a hotel, and the Mayor gave us a hotel. Sixty-two percent of the voters said we did not want regional taxes and a regional road authority in a referendum, and the Mayor and most of Council voted to support one anyway. When citizens had to take the issue to the State Supreme Court to get the Court to say what we told the Mayor and City Council that it was unconstitutional, you and I did not get as much as an apology from the Mayor.

Channel 48 is not used to encourage political discourse on real issues where all sides get a chance to be heard. Instead, channel 48 is used as a propaganda device for the most part. As you Mayor, I would engage City Council to set new policies on a more robust use of channel 48 by community groups to improve the quality of the public debate on the critical choices facing our community. The free and open competition of ideas to forge a common ground is what is missing today. The Mayor as the focal point of leadership for city council has an obligation to be the advocate of residents against the inertia of the bureaucracy that is government.

It is when the instruments of government are used to suppress the free and open competition of ideas and to substitute the appearance of transparency for meaningful stakeholder participation that distrust of elected officials is given birth and flourishes unchecked.

Allowing citizens to participate in city council meetings by the web vice having to attend city council meetings in purpose is an idea I want to explore.

In addition, I support going to a district election system. Council members elected exclusively within their district will have a greater incentive to reach out and listen to the voters within their district.

9. The City has been recognized and won awards for its attention to open space and parks. With the Open Space Acquisition Fund drying up and no apparent planned replacement funding stream, should a new money stream be identified and if so, what would that be? If not, why?

In the early 1990's the city put in place a dedicated real estate rate of seven-tenths of a cent of the real estate tax rate for the acquisition of open space (distinct from purchasing development rights of farm property that remains in private hands and is not available for public use). The \$50 million in bonds issued for open space is down to about \$8 million, but the dedicated real estate tax rate still generates annual revenue for acquiring open space. The near term financial situation will require the City to leverage the existing revenue stream with resources of the non-profit sector to increase our capacity to acquire open space. The current financial situation may influence raw land prices such that are purchasing power in acre terms is increased. The other source of funding can come from a reallocation of remaining funds away from activities that we as community value less in the short run than the acquisition of open space.

10. How specifically are you going to address the local impact resulting from the coming drastic state/federal budget cutbacks?

I will not increase taxes on Beach families and businesses to solve the “multi-million-dollar hole in next year’s city budget.” City Council and the School Board must do what families have been doing all along; living within their means, being aggressive about cost reduction, doing without wants and sometimes needs to make ends meet.

The following initiatives are proposed to voters for their evaluation:

Give the city manager an explicit performance objective to achieve a five percent gain in process efficiencies (cost reductions excluding labor) and labor productivity (labor cost reductions). Savings in the current budget would be made permanent in next year’s budget.

Assess the school board a target of a two percent gain in process efficiencies and labor productivity in the current budget. Savings would be made permanent reductions in next year’s budget. The smaller target reflects the relatively fixed requirement of staffing classrooms.

Adopt a common methodology to assess risk in evaluating alternatives to balance program delivery with available funding. Community stakeholders would be included in the risk assessment process. Channel 48 and the Internet would be used to educate the public on the community’s choices and consequences.

Everything but police officers on the street, firefighters on the trucks, and teachers in the classroom would be on the table.

Ordinances and other policies establishing fenced allocation of revenues to the extent legally permissible would be modified, if not repealed, to create greater flexibility in the allocation of funds. FY 2007-2008 budget surpluses carried forward to this year’s budget, would be reserved for necessary one-time expenses in next year’s FY 2009-2010 budget. Voter-approved dedicated taxes in referendums would remain fenced, but expenses would be capped at revenues generated by the referendum approved tax rate.

With the exception of funding for schools, the City would not replace state or federal funding reductions with locally generated revenue. This does not mean all state or federal funding reductions, if any in education, would be replaced with local funds. It does mean the school funding formula will be set aside and schools will be protected from reductions directly affecting the classroom.

No expansion of existing tax increment financing (TIF) districts or creation of TIF districts, as they reduce growth in revenue flowing to the general fund and create general fund expenses for common services – especially police and fire.

Significantly reduce capital expenditures and eliminate all expenses for consultants, studies, and legal services. Conduct a zero-based review of capital improvement and consolidate pay-as-you-go funding into capital projects that permits either their full execution, or deferral to offset shortfalls in revenue collections.

Eliminate all vacant city positions except for public safety.

Eliminate all discretionary consumable expenses to include but not limited to –

- Car allowances paid to department head, council appointees, and constitutional officers.
- Attendances at professional conferences not held in the local area, and reduce participation in local conferences by fifty percent.
- Non-mission essential travel – minimum of fifty percent reduction.
- Vehicle purchases not explicitly approved by city council.

Auction or otherwise sell surplus city property to generate one-time cash in-flow.

Examine all leases to assess the conditions and timelines under which early termination could generate net savings.

There is no substitute for decisive leadership. After seven years of City spending increasing three times faster than families' incomes, the task facing City Council is far less difficult than what families and small businesses have addressed and continue to face. The key is to make the right decisions today to support revenue growth at lower tax rates when economic growth returns.

11. Like much of the City, the Shore Drive area is beginning to see the signs of gang activity in our neighborhoods. Could you please comment on the extent of the expanding gang problem in VB and what the city is/should be doing to diminish it?

City Council and the School Board engagement are necessary to tackle the Virginia Beach's gang problem, but government is not sufficient to eradicate our city's gang problems. City Council and the School Board working together can put in place policies and resource priorities to support providing alternatives to gang activity to our youth and sanctioning gang violence. Real success can only be realized when residents in the individual neighborhoods show a zero tolerance for gang activities and parents exercise their parental responsibilities.

Current City Council and School Board should be commended for what they have done so far. While we do not want to understate our city's gang problem, it is equally important not to overstate it either. What is important is that we step up our enforcement and at the same time set up our education out reach and community alternatives.

To address this and other problems I support the creation of satellite police precincts in targeted communities to make community policing more than a slogan. I want to study the data and the best practices of other communities to invest in what works based on buy-in by the affected neighborhoods.

12. Currently the City tax breakdown percentage is 87% Resident and 13% Business. It has always been the goal of the City and residents to shift this percentage to a 70/30 ratio and help lessen the burden on the residents. If elected, what would you do to make this happen?

Unfortunately, it is likely that the ratio will come down in favor of business because residential properties are likely to decline in value faster than business. Of course, this is not positive means of achieving a more favorable balance between homes and businesses. After we restructure the city's expenses to match revenues, we need to hold expense growth below revenue growth to enable us to phase out the Business Professional Occupational and License tax and the machine and tool tax to make Virginia Beach the tax haven in the region of new business start-ups and expansion. Leveling the playing field on taxes for businesses and holding the line on city spending that improves the margins of business and increases the disposal incomes of families is the only way we are going to change this balance. It will take time to make it happen. In 1986, the city's tax base was 78 percent residential and 22 percent commercial. Today it is 87 percent residential and 13 percent commercial. Twenty-two years of declining commercial property tax assessment values in percentage terms will not be erased over night. The first step is to arrest the decline and then shifting the peg meter in the right direction.

13. Do you support the extension of Light Rail along the abandoned Norfolk Southern right of way (ROW)? Please explain why or why not.

The business case that warrants supporting light rail has not been made and I doubt it can be made. When a fully transparent business case is made to include the full life cycle cost, explicit details as to who shall pay, how much each payer shall pay, how the revenue will be collected, and what the benefits are and who receives the benefits then I will support light rail to go forward to a voter referendum.

I will not support light rail until Virginia Beach voters approve it in a referendum.

What is certain is that current economic conditions make it a non-issue for the next two-years at a minimum. The next several years will give us an opportunity to assess the Norfolk's experience in terms of who pays for the benefits versus who reaps the financial reward and it impacts on reducing traffic congestion, as well as the real life cycle cost versus the promise.

14. Our city is rich with history; some examples include the First Landing, several colonial period houses and various other sites. If elected, what would be your commitment to historic preservation in the city?

In light of the City's current economic conditions and the significant financial and services pressures they present, I cannot commit to additional public resources. I do commit to remove barriers to non-profits in preserving these historical assets. I will work to secure private donations, but the private sector like the city in under major pressures.

15. Given the most recent U.S. Army Corp of Engineers Hurricane Evacuation Study (March 08), how would you provide for the timely evacuation of Shore Dr. and North Beach areas if residential building and population densities are further increased with Indigo Dunes and other proposed properties?

Early decision on evacuation is the only means to clear the area even with current development. I am not certain what modeling the City has done to support the one-way flow on the interstate in terms of one-way use of feeding city arterials. I would work with the MPO to model the variables of capacity, demand, and time to determine the art of the possible. Under what categories is best for people to remain in place and under what conditions when people wait too long to evacuate that stay in place is preferred to being caught on the highway.

The SDCC understands that one minute is not nearly enough time to discuss these topics to the degree necessary, so we have asked the candidates to take the questions home with them and asked that they provide written responses to them. All written responses will be posted on the SDCC's website (www.sdcc.info) sometime during the week of Oct 26th.