

## Allison Patton – City Council Candidate

### Business Climate / Regulations Issues

- 1. Rate the regulatory climate for business in the City of Pensacola. Is it Good/Fair/Bad? Explain your answer.**

I believe that the regulatory climate for business is “Good.” Based on feedback from residents, the City has made some effort to streamline certain processes within City Government. Although some progress has been made, there are still processes relating to permitting and other requirements that take too long and/or are very confusing to navigate. The approval process is critical to ensuring that builders/residents are complying with the City’s requirements, however, that does not mean that the City can’t be more consumer oriented in its delivery of services. More staffing to support the City in these business critical areas, as well as increased accountability and transparency throughout the process would be helpful.

- 2. Please provide any examples of how regulations have affected the life of city residents in a positive or negative way.**

There are a number of regulations that positively affect city residents. The City’s special review districts (North Hill District, Old East Hill District, Seville Historic District, South Palafox Business District) requiring an extra level of architectural review have created unique neighborhood identities and has led to appreciation in the value of homes in these areas. It also allows the older neighborhoods to retain their character under the pressure of new development. These neighborhoods tend to hold their value or depreciate less than other neighborhoods in unfavorable economic environments.

- 3. Name the top 3 specific city ordinances/regulations you would like to see eliminated. Explain why they should be eliminated.**

The City has well over 1000+ ordinances on the books and there aren’t any that are currently so onerous that they would materially change the business environment in Pensacola. However, as we seek to incentivize and create more affordable/workforce housing in our community, we should look at some of the zoning regulations to ensure that they are not impeding this effort. Ordinances that set minimum lot areas, minimum lot widths and parking requirements should be reviewed and updated as needed to align with the City’s vision and needs.

**4. Downtown Pensacola has grown and flourished over the past decade. What areas of the city would you like to see development focus next?**

Pensacola doesn't need more piecemeal development. What Pensacola needs is an overall strategic plan for its growth. As Tom Murphy, former Mayor of Pittsburg has said, building a city doesn't happen by accident. "Without a plan, you're doing piecemeal development. You're like a symphony without a conductor."

Great cities are not just about the downtown, although without a great downtown, few cities thrive. Great cities include unique neighborhood commercial centers that embody the culture of the area, bring people together and create a sense of place for residents. In District 6, neighborhoods that are ripe for this type of historic development are Belmont-Devilliers, the Tanyard, East Hill and Palafox, north of Cervantes. Intentional development of similar "neighborhood hubs" in the north part of Pensacola should also be considered. If successful, Baptist Healthcare's RFP for their E street campus also will create a neighborhood hub serving this area of Pensacola. Great cities also include vibrant entertainment options. We need to work with the county to determine the future of the civic center and envision a best-in-class entertainment center for our community. Great cities also include a variety of amenities and recreational activities that citizens can enjoy. Projects like the bluff line greenway that impacts several areas of our City and can lead to additional economic development in areas it touches are the types of city building ideas that we need to consider as we develop our overall plan for our community. Since much of Pensacola is already developed in some way, we should also be looking at ways to use existing parcels to further our development. Large parking lots that get little use but take up large swaths of land, can and should be targeted as possible areas for affordable housing and other development.

## **Operations / Infrastructure Issues**

**5. Do you see any overlap or duplication of services between the county and the city? If so, what services, and how could these services be consolidated?**

Improving coordination and cooperation between the City and the County will lead to more efficient and effective services for our community. Some areas where there is has been coordination in the past is on housing, environmental issues and emergency transportation. Other areas where we should better coordinate include our community's response to homelessness and flooding issues, which are both a City and County issue. I am open to exploring possibilities to reduce duplication between City and County as long as service levels are not diminished for City residents.

**6. Homelessness and panhandling continue to be a significant problem in the city of Pensacola. What are your solutions to this pressing problem that impacts the business community?**

After I retired in July 2020, I wanted to give back to our community. Homelessness has been an increasing issue in the community, so I decided to join the NW Florida Homeless Reduction Task force to make a difference. I currently serve as the Co-Chair of the Criminal Justice/Legal Services/Specialty Courts subcommittee of the Task Force. In that role, I've studied the causes and solutions to homelessness, spent time in the encampment under the I-110 bridge, learned from national experts effectively addressing these issues in their communities, worked with local providers and educated myself on the legal framework relating to homelessness. I know this issue seems overwhelming, but there is a way forward to assist both the individuals and our community. It is a multi-pronged approach that involves dedicated homeless outreach, a low barrier shelter, rapid re-housing with wrap around services, more mental health beds and a strong continuum of care, among other things. The City and County governments cannot and should not try to take this on themselves, but instead, should be the leaders who make this issue a priority for our community and help develop an overall plan. Through federal dollars, grant funding, non-profit organizations, business participation and caring community members, we can address these issues. Other cities have materially reduced homelessness in their communities and with a dedicated team, we can too. It's the right thing to do for the homeless and for the community.

**7. Do you believe the city allocates sufficient resources for infrastructure projects? How would you prioritize these projects and fund them?**

I think the city has tried to allocate adequate funding to infrastructure, but based on the current state of our infrastructure, the city has not allocated enough. The city needs to identify or create more funding for its infrastructure projects. Some possible ways to approach this include, negotiating better deals for the City with the State and County, reviewing allocation of revenue streams that can be allotted to infrastructure projects, working to strengthen partnerships with the County (particularly in the environmental area) and committing resources to fund grant applications for federal and state grants. We should also be developing overall plans for city infrastructure needs (sidewalk placement, pedestrian safety, traffic flow/calming, etc.) that will allow for better planning and prioritization. I would also use the results of the city's strategic plan to assist in prioritizing projects, based on their impact on the community served, with safety as a priority.

**8. What do you consider to be the number one infrastructure concern for the City of Pensacola going forward, and how do you propose to address that concern?**

Flooding and stormwater/water quality issues are the number one infrastructure concern for the City of Pensacola. Being the oldest city in the country has its benefits and its burdens. One of the burdens is an outdated stormwater system in some areas and the burden that large scale growth has put on the system. Although significant progress has been made, there are still millions of dollars of unfunded shovel ready stormwater projects that are critical to the safety of our homes and waterways. I have spent a great deal of time looking at these issues over the past several

months, including meeting with knowledgeable citizens and experts (Water Management, FDOT, City, County and third parties hired by the City) who have presented different ways of approaching this problem for our community. First, District 6 and the City need our upstream partners to focus on this issue to help make a real difference for us (their neighbors downstream). With that in mind, continuing to partner with the County to focus on stormwater management in the north part of Escambia County should be part of our overall strategic approach to the issue. We also need to continue to develop regional stormwater ponds that can add both beauty and safety to our neighborhoods. We should continue with some of the offshore projects that also contribute to protecting our coast and downtown neighborhoods in the event of a storm. We should be thinking about stormwater management with every FDOT project to incorporate stormwater features in roundabouts, bioswales and through other environmentally friendly methods of keeping water from creating torrential runoffs and flooding areas (FDOT is doing more of this, but we need to keep them focused). We also need to be more proactive in getting current stormwater projects funded. There are billions of dollars of federal grant money available for resilience (stormwater) and water quality as part of the Infrastructure bill. We have projects on the shelf, ready for funding, but we don't have dedicated grant writers (staff or contract) to go after that grant money. We should be actively pursuing this funding before its gone.

**9. What would you change about the relationship between the Mayor's Office and City Council (i.e. should the Mayor attend all city council meetings, etc.)?**

The Mayor should actively collaborate with City Council members, both in counsel meetings and on an individual basis. While I don't think that it is necessary for the Mayor to attend every meeting, participation by the Mayor will result in a more informed Council discussion and better decision making overall. If the Mayor and Council can identify priorities for the City and an overarching vision/plan, then this will assist both Mayor and Council in aligning on projects that all (or a majority) have agreed are important for our community. It is incumbent on the Mayor to share information with each council member in advance of a meeting so that differences in viewpoints can be identified and addressed. This doesn't mean that there won't be disagreements on matters that come before council, but hopefully questions will already be answered and the matter will be ready for discussion and resolution by a prepared and informed counsel.

**10. What would your Five Year Plan for the City of Pensacola look like?**

My five year plan would start with the identification of strategic goals and priorities for our community. Over the first year, these goals and priorities should become part of a longer-term plan to guide the city government's focus and decision making. Initially, the City should take steps to better support and improve public safety in our community. A close second should be a review of our current maintenance protocols, with an eye towards fixing what is broken and improving the maintenance of our downtown and neighborhoods, including parks, streetlights and sidewalks. Addressing homelessness as a community, with actionable steps as outlined in response to the questions regarding homelessness, should also be a top priority This is mission critical to economic development as safety and a well-maintained community are important factors in attracting businesses and jobs to Pensacola. At the same time, we need to put together

our plan for economic development, including sites, identifying target industries, incentives and a qualified engagement team. We need to ensure that we have the right educational programs for residents of Pensacola, regardless of income level to develop trained, employable workers. We need to create an overall plan for developing affordable housing in the community, starting with the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force. We need to develop a multi-modal transportation plan for Pensacola. A bike friendly city is something many in the community want and we need to listen and move forward to develop and implement this infrastructure. We also need to actively identify sources of contamination in our waterways, including in the Bruce Beach area. We should continue to push forward on plans to connect our downtown waterfront for public access and create adjacent amenities for all citizens to enjoy.

## **Economic Development Issues**

### **11. What role should city government take in attracting new businesses to the area?**

The government should be actively seeking out businesses that want to relocate and recruit them to Pensacola. Although Florida West has assumed responsibility for much of this work, the City has a role to play in this process. First, the City needs to have a plan to improve on the key metrics that a business considers when deciding whether to relocate to Pensacola: Safety, pollution, quality of life activities and education are some of the most important factors. The City should be actively involved with recruitment efforts and have a team of subject matter experts assembled that can assist with recruiting efforts. The Mayor must be business friendly and should play an important role in this process. The Council needs to be pro-business as well and support quality projects that bring jobs to the City. The City should also actively engage with our local businesses to assist them in identifying private funding sources for investment and otherwise support their growth needs.

### **12. Which industries should the City of Pensacola should concentrate its business development/growth efforts? Be specific.**

The City and County should concentrate their business development/growth efforts on jobs to benefit all of its citizens. Navy Federal and ST Engineering have been great additions to our community, but it's been too long since we've attracted an impactful new employer to our area. The Triumph funds are available for economic development in Northwest Florida and we need to take greater advantage of that pool of money to fund projects in Escambia County. We need to build out the Technology Park, which should be a major focus for the City. We are branded as the "Cyber Coast" but we need to do more to attract those businesses to our area. Trade jobs are critically important as well and we need to be focused on creating them. Employers that complement existing industries such as our strong healthcare industry, aviation, military or have synergies with employers like IHMC are good fits for our community. Some of our great new companies were started by young adults who were born and raised in Pensacola, moved away for education and careers, and are now ready to come home and bring their businesses with them. We should seek out these successful entrepreneurs and make it easy for them to return. Universities are also incubators and catalysts for business growth. We need to learn from the

great work done in other communities on how to effectively partner with them for the benefit of our educational system, job growth and the community overall.

**13. What should the city do with excess properties that it owns? Which properties should take priority? Do you believe certain city parks could be considered excess property?**

Excess City properties should be used to advance the priorities of the community. These priorities will be identified as part of the City's strategic plan but should include things like affordable housing, strategic development opportunities to enhance our community, desired amenities for the community/neighborhoods, sites to deliver public services, etc. Pensacola has numerous public parks, some of which are not used by residents or only partially used. Parks which fall into this category, and don't have solid public support should be reviewed for other uses to alleviate the maintenance burden and create more desired features for the community.

**14. Tourism is an integral part of Pensacola's economy. What are the top 3 ways that the city can add value for the Pensacola business community with respect to increasing tourism and nurturing a positive tourist experience while here in Pensacola?**

The top three ways the City can increase tourism and nurture a positive experience downtown is to focus on safety, beautification and convenient/improved parking access. Tourists will not come to Pensacola if it has a reputation for downtown bar shootings, violence, etc. We need to make sure we have a police presence in our downtown, including late at night, to stop these types of events from occurring. From a beautification standpoint, not only do we need to clean up and repair our City, we need to finish the long awaited waterfront connector projects and careful development of Maritime Park that will create public waterfront access with needed amenities. This also includes a meaningful plan to address homelessness, which can create perceived safety issues and an unclean environment for individuals visiting our community. Parking continues to be a frustration for residents and visitors alike, and the City needs to determine the appropriate parking model for our community and develop a plan to ensure that we are being strategic about addressing these needs. This should include improved alternative transportation options from the beach and other area of the community. In the meantime, where there is paid parking, we need to have payment options that are convenient and easy to use for all.

**15. What is your vision for Pensacola's waterfront from Three Mile Bridge to Joe Patti's? Feel free to incorporate the Port of Pensacola, Community Maritime Park, the Hashtag Project, and Bruce Beach.**

Pensacola's waterfront is our greatest asset. City government should be carefully planning for the development of this area for the benefit of all residents and visitors. The value of this area to the community can be enhanced through projects like the Hashtag connector and other initiatives to develop a connected walking/biking path along the water that can be enjoyed by all. This pathway/park development will be enhanced by private economic development on adjacent parcels (like Maritime Park) that will provide amenities for citizens and visitors and tax dollars for the city. The Port should be further developed to provide for some waterfront access by the public and mixed-use port industry as set forth in the Moffatt & Nichol's plan. In the future there

may be other opportunities to extend our connected waterfront and we should be proactively thinking about ways to do this.